A particular practice developed during the Buddha’s time was called *Buddhanusmrti*, which means “to keep the Buddha in mind, to reflect upon the Buddha.” We also call it Buddha-Remembrance. An old story says that when one of the Buddha’s early disciples was suffering a very painful illness, the Buddha instructed him to first establish an indestructible faith in the Three Treasures, then to reflect upon the Buddha’s own meritorious virtues. The practice of taking refuge in the Buddha himself may also be seen as a practice of faith. So from the very beginnings of Buddhism there was a practice that stressed keeping the Buddha and his attributes firmly in the forefront of the mind. This was soon linked with meditative practice so that people could continue to keep the Buddha at the forefront of their minds.

In the 1st century of the Common Era, two significant events occurred. One was the emergence of a Mahayana teaching called the *Pratyutpanna Samadhi Sutra*. This Sutra advances a practice called Pratyutpanna Samadhi, in which one is enabled to see the Buddhas of the Ten Directions. These Ten Buddhas were a way of representing Buddhahood as well as being actual Buddhas. One of these ten Buddhas, who was assigned to the western quarter of the Mahayana model of the universe, is called Amitabha, which means “Boundless Light,” and who dominates the western quarter in the Ten Buddhas model. The Pratyutpanna Sutra said that concentrating on these Ten Buddhas, seeing them in the mind, remembering them, particularly the Buddha Amitabha, leads one to the realization that there is no difference between one’s self and these Ten Buddhas; this is called the *Samadhi of Emptiness*, the direct realization that all things are interdependent, interrelated, and have no abiding, permanent, separate existence apart from all other things.

The second significant event of the 1st century is the emergence of the Pure Land path. This path was grounded in several principles:

- First, the fact that other Buddhas exist and they work for the enlightenment of all beings.
- Secondly, that Buddhas teach in myriad world-systems.
- Third, that accumulated Merit can be transferred, and
- Fourth, that we exist in a cycle of birth, death and rebirth.
The famous Indian Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna was the first person to mention a Buddha named “Amita,” or “Boundless,” who was one of the Ten Celestial Buddhas. Nagarjuna’s writings contained the first recorded call to remember all the various Buddhas and to call their names as a form of praise. In Nagarjuna’s treatise on the Dashabhumika Sutra which describes the stages of the Bodhisattva path, he says that there are two kinds of paths, the difficult path and the easy path. The difficult path is the path of energetic effort while the easy path is the path of faith in the Buddhas; Nagarjuna says that both of these paths are valid ways to attain what is called non-retrogression, or the stage of no-returning, which is the seventh stage of the Bodhisattva path.

The first recorded Pure Land devotees lived in the mid-third century CE in China. Both the Larger and Smaller Pure Land Sutras, which were written in India, were around 200 years old by this time, and this helped the Pure Land movement to begin gaining momentum in China. The Sutras described a realm of rebirth which was created by the 48 vows of the Bodhisattva Dharmakara. This realm was created by a massive transfer of Dharmakara’s merit through the 48 vows. It is characterized as having all sorts of beautiful, pleasing physical features, and is presided over by Amita Buddha, the former Bodhisattva Dharmakara. When the suffix “-yus” was added to the name Amita it produced Amitayus, or “Infinite Life-Span” which also referred to Universal Wisdom; when the suffix “-bha” was added, the name became Amitabha, or “Infinite Light,” referring to infinite Compassion. Both names refer to the same Buddha.

The two Pure Land Sutras indicated that setting one’s sights on rebirth in that realm and remembering that Buddha’s name with great singleness of mind over time would guarantee one’s rebirth there. When sentient beings get there they may cultivate without hindrance until all defilements are purified. The next stage is Nirvana, or one may return to Samsara to help suffering beings. Vowing to return to Samsara is also known as the “Vow of Samantabhadra,” the Bodhisattva known as “Universal Worthy.” The basic principle is known as Prasada, which means “Serene Trust.” One can trust in the compassion of the Buddhas because Buddhas, being who they are, embrace all sentient beings with this compassion. We may also think of this as “faith.”

For people who think that this is a bit too savior-like for Buddhism, and a lot of them do, let’s consider a couple of questions:

1. If you could help someone to overcome their suffering, would you do it? Of course you
would. If you were a full-blown Buddha, you wouldn’t just sit in some heavenly realm saying, “Being a Buddha is great!”

2. Being a good Buddhist, would you use skillful means to make sure that your help didn’t make the people you were trying to help too dependent upon you? Yes again!

This is how compassion combines with wisdom to create skillful means, and this is how traditional Pure Land Buddhism sees this dynamic: from the standpoint of Buddhas and sentient beings, it’s a cooperative practice. Beings who need help need only ask, but you have to cultivate the relationship, so to speak. And as we’ll see later, Pure Land practice is more than just the relationship between Buddhas and sentient beings.

The turning point for Chinese Pure Land Buddhism came in the year 402 CE, when the historical records tell the story of the monk Lu-Shan Hui-Yuan. He joined 123 of his lay and monastic disciples, known as the White Lotus Society, in making a collective vow to be reborn in the Pure Land. The collective vow took place at a large ceremony conducted in Northern China. After Lu-Shan’s death, his students began spreading the Pure Land teachings throughout southern China. At around that same time the Visualization Sutra, the third of the major Pure Land Sutras, was written in India and subsequently translated into Chinese. It outlined a way for one to visualize the Pure Land and keep that image in the forefront of the mind at all times. At that time, many Chinese were pursuing so-called “immortality” through the Taoist tradition, so the “Amita” movement appealed to them quite a bit.

At around this same time the Indian philosopher Vasubandhu, who founded the Yogacara school of Buddhism, wrote The Treatise on Rebirth. It included a detailed description of the adornments of the Pure Land, instructions on visualization, and an endorsement of the method of reciting the Buddha’s name. Vasubandhu talked about what he called the Five Gates of Mindfulness: veneration (karma of body), oral praise (karma of speech), aspiration for rebirth, visualization, and the transference of merit to others (karma of mind). These eventually became known as the Five Right Practices.

In the late fifth and early sixth centuries, the Chinese monk Tan-Luan wrote a commentary on Vasubandhu's Rebirth Treatise and was the first person to apply the easy-path and hard-path teachings of Nagarjuna to Pure Land teachings. Tan-Luan’s writings inspired another Chinese monk, Tao-Ch’o, who stressed the recitation method as being well-suited to common people. Tao-Ch’o was the teacher of Shan-Tao, one of the most important figures in Pure Land history.
At about the same time as Tao-Ch’o, another monk named Hui-Yuan wrote a major commentary on the Visualization Sutra that helped set up the doctrinal framework for Pure Land Buddhism. His writings established Pure Land as a distinct kind of Buddhism. He emphasized Buddha Visualization Samadhi (C. Nien-Fo San-Mei) as the main thrust of the Visualization Sutra.

In the seventh century, the great teacher Shan-Tao would bring Pure Land Buddhism to the peak of its development in China. One of his major teachings was called the “Two Gates” of Pure Land practice: “meditation” and “non-meditative action,” which refers to ethical conduct. Shan-Tao said that the only hope for rebirth into the Pure Land is when faith and ethical conduct are cultivated together. Another major point he made was that in order to attain single-minded attentiveness, Pure Land practice must be approached with what he called the Threefold Mind: sincerity of practice, deep faith and a vow for rebirth. These were to become known as the Pure Land Tripod of faith, aspiration and practice.

Shan-Tao also analyzed the Five Right Practices of Vasubandhu and their relationship to the three major Pure Land sutras. But his major emphasis was that of the Five Right Practices, the recollection of Amitabha Buddha is the superior practice. Shan-Tao said that visualization, hearing and calling the Buddha’s name and meditating on the Buddha and the Pure Land are all aspects of Buddha-remembrance. It’s interesting to note that Shan-Tao’s influence was making itself felt at about the same time the Ch’an tradition was beginning.

**Syncretism: Chinese Culture**

Now that we’ve looked at the Pure Land tradition up to the 7th century, I’d like to talk a little bit about syncretism. The nature of Chinese religious and philosophical culture lent itself to the practice of syncretism. Sometimes we here in the fairly sectarian west have difficulty reconciling syncretism in religion and spirituality, due to the fact that we tend to have an exclusivist view of religious and philosophical systems. But in China, taking the best characteristics of religion and philosophy and blending them into systems people could use to their advantage was second nature.

There’s a term in Chinese called, “ko-yi,” which can be translated as “acculturative syncretism.” An example of ko-yi was the fact that when Buddhist teachings came to China, the translators of the major texts matched many Sanskrit Buddhist terms with native terms that
came from the Taoist tradition. One of the most notable of these was using the Taoist term “Wu,” which meant “emptiness,” with the Sanskrit term “sunyata,” which also meant “emptiness,” but in a slightly different context. Ko-yi made it a lot easier for the Chinese to reconcile Buddhism to their culture. Over time, the Chinese lost their impression that Buddhism was a strange foreign religion because they could relate to it fairly easily in terms that were familiar to them.

A major effect of ko-yi on Chinese Buddhism was that it took the many complex metaphysical ideas of Indian Mahayana Buddhism and brought them down to earth with typical Chinese pragmatism. Various teachings and practices were harmonized so there were few if any contradictions among them. A Buddhist teaching which was to inform the development of Pure Land in China was “The Interpenetration of Principle and Phenomena,” which the Chinese called “li” and “shih” respectively. According to this teaching, not only did Principle and Phenomena interpenetrate, but Phenomena and Phenomena as well. This gave doctrinal validity to the blending of Buddhist systems.

Unlike the way Buddhism unfolded in some other cultures, in China the various Buddhist and non-Buddhist teachings weren’t seen as rivals; rivalries among traditions in later years were more of a sociopolitical phenomenon (although there were certainly doctrinal rivalries as well). Buddhism and Taoism got along just fine, as did Ch’an and Pure Land Buddhism. Monasteries and temples that were specific to particular Buddhist sects weren’t common until centuries after the Buddhist tradition had established itself in China. Various Buddhist sects often utilized the same temple or monastery, and this encouraged both monks and lay practitioners to enjoy and respect each others’ viewpoints.

**Syncretism: Ch’an Buddhism**

The fact that the practice of meditation was implicit in all Chinese Buddhist practice made it simpler for Ch’an and Pure Land Buddhists to borrow from each other. The Fourth Ancestor of the Ch’an tradition, Tao-Hsin, was an advocate of the Pure Land Path as an expedient means to liberation. The Fifth Ancestor, Hung-Ren, not only advocated Buddha-recitation but he also thought highly of the practice of Visualizing the Buddha Amitabha and the Pure Land, since visualization practice is a meditative form that is very strenuous and produces a high level of concentration.
Many of Hung-Ren’s disciples were Pure Land advocates as well. One of those disciples, Hui-Neng (who many consider the greatest Ch’an master of all time) spoke highly of Pure Land practice as being not only a means of heavenly rebirth but also as a means to realize Buddha-Mind. In the Altar Sutra he said, “If we can realize the Essence of mind at all times and behave in a straightforward manner on all occasions, in the twinkling of an eye we may reach the Pure Land and there see Amitabha……so far as the mind is pure, it is the ‘Western Pure Land’ of one’s own Essence of Mind.” This is a great example of Ch’an and Pure Land practices becoming intertwined in China, and of the Pure Land being regarded as Mind itself.

Ch’an master Pai-Chang, who wrote what was to become the blueprint for Ch’an monastic practice, included Pure Land practice in the Pure Rules for Monasteries, including the chanting of Amitabha Buddha’s name at a monk’s funeral.

**Syncretism: the Persecutions**

Another factor which brought Ch’an and Pure Land closer together was persecution. In the 9th and 10th centuries, the Chinese imperial court decided it was going to crack down on Buddhism, so it closed down most of the monasteries and temples, confiscated bronze and gold statues and melted them down to make money, stripped many monks of their rank and returned them to lay life. We’ve seen things like this happening in Burma recently. These policies nearly destroyed the academically oriented Buddhist schools like the Tien-T’ai and Hua-yen, but they had little effect on Ch’an or Pure Land. For one thing, Ch’an and Pure Land placed more emphasis on practice and direct experience than study, and their practices could be done anywhere. Also, Pure Land followers were mostly laypeople and Ch’an monasteries were all self-supporting, so neither of these schools were seen as draining resources from society, like the other schools which were mostly dependent on patronage from the Imperial court, local governments or the wealthy.

**Syncretism: Pure Land Buddhism**

Going back to the Pure Land side of things, history tells us that Pure Land Buddhism in China went through three general phases. The first phase had to do with the consolidation of Pure Land as a new form of Chinese Buddhism. We return to the 4th century and Lu-Shan Hui-Yuan and his White Lotus Society’s collective vow for rebirth in the Pure Land. The aim of Lu-Shan’s Pure Land practice was to both attain and maintain a vision of the Buddha Amitabha
in this life and to have the direct realization of Sunyata, or Emptiness. The emphasis was on both the general practice of meditation and the specialized practice of visualization. This meant that early Pure Land practice was more oriented toward experienced meditators or those who wished to become more deeply grounded in meditative awareness. The practices were, of necessity, difficult and emphasized what would be called in later centuries, “self-power.

The second major phase came some 300 years later with the emergence of Shan-Tao, whose teachings owed a lot to the monk Hui-Yuan and to Shan-Tao’s teacher, Tao-Ch’o. Shan-Tao advocated Buddha-recitation practice supported by ritual. Although he was not averse to visualization or other meditative practices, he said that one should see one’s mind as Amitabha Buddha; and although he championed the combination of meditation and non-meditative action, Shan-Tao advocated recitation and ritual as an easier practice for those who didn’t have the wherewithal to be great meditators. The emphasis on “other-power,” the 48 vows of Amitabha Buddha and the resulting transference of merit, caused Shan-Tao’s branch of Pure Land Buddhism to be thought of as the “other-power” or “invocational” school. This had a great influence on Japanese Pure Land Buddhism which emphasizes Buddha-recitation practice, or “Nembutsu,” which is the Japanese translation of the Chinese “Nien-Fo.”

The third major phase, which we may call Syncretic Pure Land Buddhism, was the end product of an extraordinary Chinese monk by the name of Yung-Ming Yen-Shou, who lived in the 10th century CE and who built upon the works of the eminent monk Tz’u-Min. Yung-Ming said that self-power and other-power work together in Pure Land Buddhism. He wrote this description: “Other-power means that if one believes that the power of the compassionate vow of Buddha Amitabha takes to himself all sentient beings who are mindful of him, then one is able to generate the mind of Bodhi, practice nien-fo samadhi [Skt. Buddh anusmrti, C. Nien-Fo San-Mei], detest the body that is within the three worlds, and practice giving, morality and merit. And if within each of these various practices, the merit is transferred to others, and if one vows to be born in the Pure Land of Amitabha by relying on the power of the Buddha’s vows, one’s nature and the Buddha’s response will be in mutual accord, and one will be born in the Pure Land.” This indicates that Pure Land is not just other-power, but is a cooperative practice of compassion and wisdom.

Yung-Ming also taught that the Pure Land is also the Pure Mind: The practice of Nien-Fo is taught for those who do not believe that one’s Mind is the Buddha and thus seek for the Buddha outside of the Mind. Those of medium and lesser faculties are expediently taught to
concentrate their scattered thoughts on the physical features of the Buddha. Relying on the external in order to manifest the internal, one will be able to gradually awaken to One-mind. but those of superior faculties are taught to contemplate the true form of the body of the Buddha. Yung-Ming advocated what is called “Mind-Only Pure Land,” which utilized the abandoning of all thoughts, much as Ch’an does.

Yung-Ming taught that all Buddhist systems were valid, which underscored the Chinese bent toward harmony among traditions. This was at a time in which Ch’an and Pure Land practitioners weren’t getting along quite so well. More than a few Ch’an practitioners in those days were of the mistaken impression that since everything is emptiness and no one really exists, we can do whatever we like since it’s all an illusion. Yung-Ming hoped to help calm things down by advocating a practice that appealed to those who were looking for the true nature of Mind but which also had elements of faith and devotionalism. It was also a time of great political turmoil in China, so many people were looking for a more accessible form of practice.

What was beginning to become evident in Yung-Ming’s time was that Ch’an and Pure Land practice were compatible to a high degree because of what they emphasized. Ch’an, of course, emphasizes Prajna, or Wisdom, by teaching one how to look directly at one’s True Nature. Pure Land, however, emphasizes Karuna, or Compassion, since it is based on the compassionate vows of a celestial Buddha who helps us to see our True Nature, and the recognition of that Buddha’s compassionate help.

The famous Japanese scholar D.T. Suzuki was convinced that the synthesis of Zen and Pure Land practice would be the next phase of the Mahayana. In his book, “The Zen Koan As a Means of Attaining Enlightenment,” he notes that the concentration of those who practice Buddha-recitation is no different than the samadhi of a Zen practitioner.

Yung-Ming himself was credited, perhaps a bit inaccurately, with the famous “Four-Fold Summary, which goes:

- **With Ch’an but no Pure Land, nine out of ten people will go astray; when death comes suddenly, they must accept it in an instant.**
- **With Pure Land but no Ch’an, ten thousand out of ten thousand people will achieve birth in the Pure Land; if one can see Amitabha fact to face, why worry about not attaining enlightenment?**
• With both Ch’an and Pure Land, it is like a tiger who has grown horns; one will be a teacher for humanity in this life and a Buddhist Ancestor in the next.
• With neither Ch’an nor Pure Land, it is like falling on an iron bed with bronze posters [one of the hells]; for endless kalpas one will find nothing to rely on.

The combined practice of Ch’an and Pure Land was seen as a powerful combination of compassion and wisdom practices by Yung-Ming and many others. It was also seen as bringing a little more humanity to Ch’an practice and as bringing more discipline to Pure Land practice.

I’d like to end this section with a few more quotes which I think speak directly and eloquently to the dynamic of the combined practice and the faith we have in it. One is from the Ch’an monk Yung-Chueh Yun-Hsien regarding the interpenetration of principle and phenomenon as it relates to the Pure Land teaching of faith:

There are two aspects to faith in the Buddha’s words. One is faith in the Principle, the other is the faith in the Phenomenal. Faith in the Principle means to believe that one’s mind is the Pure Land and one’s Nature is Buddha Amitabha. Faith in the Phenomenal means to believe that the Pure Land is in the Western Region, and Buddha Amitabha exists there. From the aspect of Principle, the aspect of the Phenomenal is manifested; it is like the Ocean-seal’s being able to manifest myriad phenomena. From the aspect of the “phenomenal,” the aspect of the Principle is manifested, for the myriad phenomena are inseparable from the Ocean-seal. These two aspects of faith are both one and two, yet neither one nor two. To have faith in this manner is called true faith.

Centuries later, the great Japanese Zen teacher Dogen spoke about faith:

The virtue of faith is engendered neither by the self nor by others. Because it is generated neither by forcing oneself nor by one’s contrivance, neither by being coerced by others nor by fitting in a self-made norm, faith has been imparted intimately through ancestors in India and China. Faith is so called when the entire body becomes faith itself. Faith is one with the fruit of enlightenment; the fruit of enlightenment is one with faith. If it is not the fruit of enlightenment, faith is not realized. On account of this, it is said that faith is the entrance to the ocean of Dharma. Indeed where faith is attained, there is the realization of Buddhas and ancestors.
And finally, many centuries after Dogen, we have this statement from Master Hsu-Tung, the Abbot of Hsiangchi Temple in Sian, China. It was made in 1989 and was quoted by Bill Porter (aka Red Pine) in his book, “Road to Heaven:”

In Zen we keep asking who’s chanting the name of the Buddha. All we think about is where the name of the Buddha is coming from. We keep asking, until we find out who we were before we were born. This is Zen. We sit with one mind. And if the mind runs off somewhere, we follow it wherever it goes, until the mind finally becomes quiet, until there’s no Zen to Zen, no question to question, until we reach the stage where we question without questioning and without questioning we keep questioning. We keep questioning, until we finally find an answer, until delusions come to an end, until we can swallow the world, all its rivers and mountains, everything, but the world can’t swallow us until we can ride the tiger; but the tiger can’t ride us, until we find out who we really are. This is Zen.

In Pure Land practice, we just chant the name of the Buddha, nothing more. We chant with the mind. We chant without making a sound, and yet the sound is perfectly clear. And when we hear the sound, the chant begins again. It goes around and around. The chant doesn’t stop, and the mind doesn’t move. And when our mind doesn’t move, delusions disappear. And once they’re gone, the one mind chants. The result is the same as Zen. Zen means no distinctions. Actually, Pure Land practice includes Zen, and Zen practice includes Pure Land practice. If you don’t practice both, you become one-sided.

**Combined Practice Today**

These days, the combined practice of Ch’an and Pure Land (as well as that of Zen and Pure Land) goes by many names: combined practice, integrated practice, the practice of joint cultivation, and even syncretic practice. Whether it’s Ch’an and Traditional Pure Land or Zen and Shin Buddhism, the emphasis is on the complimentary nature of the two practices. Combined practice encourages one to realize True Mind while opening the heart of compassion itself.

Whenever we compare our Buddhist tradition to another faith tradition, or our particular kind of Buddhism to another kind of Buddhism, we tend to look for commonalities (or at least we should!). I think it’s more constructive to do that instead of dwelling on the differences; the differences make themselves known fast enough, and if we concentrate too much on them we
can miss those points of convergence that can produce great things.

If you look at Ch’an and Pure Land side by side (and I include our Zen friends in the Ch’an category), you find a number of similarities. I was fortunate enough to have been taught Zen by my root teacher who’s been a Shin Buddhist priest for over 40 years, so I had a first-hand look at how these two traditions have more in common than one might think.

As I mentioned before, Ch’an emphasizes wisdom while Pure Land emphasizes compassion. The methods employed in Ch’an are designed to produce the Great Doubt, while the methods employed in Pure land are aimed at Serene Trust; both of these involve letting one’s ego fall by the wayside. Ch’an practices include T’so-Ch’an (or Zazen in Japanese), and Silent Illumination which is sometimes known in Zen as “just sitting.” We can call these Yin techniques, a little more yielding and soft, although they do require effort. On the Pure Land side, chanting Amitabha’s name, venerating that Buddha and reading the Sutras are Yin practices. The Ch’an side has its share of Yang practices too; strong, dynamic practices such as Kung-An or Koan in Japanese, as well as Hua-T’ou which is the core of a Kung-An. Pure Land Yang-style practices include meditation and visualization.

Most people in the west see Pure Land as a faith-based Buddhism because they are more familiar with the Japanese Shin style of Pure Land. And indeed, Pure Land does have elements of faith, namely the serene trust and faith in Buddha Amitabha and the 48 Vows. Ch’an and Zen have faith elements too: practitioners declare their faith and trust in the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and Ancestors (or “Patriarchs,” if you will), as well as their faith in Mind itself. One of the most famous Ch’an poems was written by the Third Ancestor Seng-Ts’an and was called “Having Faith in the Mind.”

There are also Vow elements practiced by both traditions. In Pure Land, one vows to be reborn into the Pure Land, to assist all sentient beings to liberation and to follow the Buddhist Precepts. In Ch’an we vow to end our delusions, to master the teachings, to see our true nature, to follow the Way, to follow the Precepts and to help all sentient beings. Where the object of concentration in Ch’an is our True Nature, the object of concentration in Pure Land is Amitabha Buddha, which is also our True Nature. And so Ch’an, just like Shin, has its own tripod of Faith, Vow and Practice.

One of the earliest of the combined practices was the Nien-Fo Kung-An, or in Japanese, the
“Nembutsu Koan.” After Yung-Ming died back in the 10th century CE, the Nien-Fo Kung-An began to be widely practiced in China. It is said to have originated with Master Chih-Ch’e who was also known as Chih-I, the founder of the Tien-T’ai school of Buddhism. In describing the Nien-Fo Kung-An, Chih-Ch’e said: Call on the Buddha’s name one, three, five or seven times. Every time you do so, ask yourself silently where this sound of invocation comes from. Also ask yourself who is this person who is doing the Buddha invocation. If you are seized by doubt, then just go ahead and doubt.

The modern form of this kind of questioning is the classic Nien-Fo Kung-An, “Who is reciting the Buddha’s name?” where the question in it’s entirety is the Kung-An and the questioning word, “Who” is the Hua-T’ou. Many Ch’an masters have taught this Kung-An. The eminent Master Xu-Yun, who was considered the greatest 20th century Ch’an master, taught it until his death in 1959 at the age of 120. So where Ch’an practitioners are holding on to the Kung-An “Wu” and Zen practitioners are holding on to the Koan “Mu” (they’re both from the same story), the Nien-Fo Ch’an practitioner holds on to “Who?” It’s the question that, when penetrated, creates the Great Doubt, which in turn creates a tremendous energy of meditative inquiry. Having Amitabha’s name running in the background certainly creates even more of that energy.

Another combined practice is called Self-Nature Buddha Recitation, in which the recitation of the Buddha’s name is used as an object of meditation, much as a Kung-An or Hua-T’ou. Some people argue that you can’t see true Mind by using the Pure Land as an expedient since this creates a mind of attachment. Tripitaka Master Hsuan Hua, who founded the Sagely City of 10,000 Buddhas in California addressed that argument. He said:

As we recite “Namo Amitabha Buddha” we each create and adorn our own Land of Ultimate Bliss. We each accomplish our own Land of Ultimate Bliss which is certainly not hundreds of thousands of millions of Buddhalands from here. Although it is far away it doesn’t go beyond one thought. It’s not hundreds of thousands of millions of Buddhalands from here; it’s right in our hearts. The Land of Ultimate Bliss is the original true heart, the true mind, of every one of us. If you obtain this heart, you will be born in the Land of Ultimate Bliss. If you don’t understand your own original true heart, you will not. The Land of Ultimate Bliss is within our hearts, not outside. Amitabha Buddha and living beings do not discriminate between this and that, for the Land of Ultimate Bliss is not so far away. In one thought, turn the light within. Know that you are the Buddha, and your original Buddhahood is just the Land of
In other words, the realm which is revealed by the mind of practice is the Pure Land. As far as attachment is concerned, there’s an analogy that has been traditionally used to demonstrate the attainment of the non-attached mind through a seemingly attached practice. It’s called “Starting a fire on top of ice.” The analogy says that when one starts a fire on top of ice, the fire eventually melts the ice and then the resulting water puts the fire out. In the same way, when the so-called mind of “attached” practice leads one to true understanding, the practice itself falls away and one is left with nothing other than the direct realization of Mind itself.

And so, we find ourselves blessed with a wonderful opportunity: the chance to do a practice which combines the deep penetration of the Universal Wisdom Mind with the opening of the heart of Universal Compassion so that both Wisdom and Compassion are flawlessly realized.