

**45. The 17th and 18th vows made by Dharmakara**

The 17th vow represents the vow of true practice, where Amida's name is recommended throughout the universe, while the 18th vow states that if Amida's vows are not fulfilled, he will not become a Buddha. The discussion highlighted the relationship between these vows and their significance in Jodo Shinshu teachings, with participants exploring how Dharmakara's vows became incorporated into Amida Buddha's practice.

46. Karmic Defilements

Gary discussed the concept of karmic defilements and their impact on consciousness levels in Buddhism, explaining how these defilements affect one's realm of existence. He shared personal anecdotes about family relationships and how karmic influences can be passed down through generations. The discussion touched on how karma can be transformed over time, with Gary referencing a traditional Japanese perspective on karma as being like painting a black wall white, requiring continuous effort to maintain positive change.

47. Nembutsu Practices

Gary discussed the concept of Nembutsu in Jodo Shinshu Buddhism, emphasizing that while it provides temporary relief from karmic defilements, it is not a permanent solution. He warned against trivializing the Nembutsu and highlighted the importance of continued practice and training. The discussion also covered the distinction between the realm of form (Samsara) and the realm of non-form (Nirvana), with Gary explaining that Nirvana represents the highest state of bliss and freedom, achievable only after eliminating all defilements.

48. Suffering and Enlightenment

The group discussed Buddhist concepts of suffering and enlightenment, particularly focusing on the Buddha's teaching that life involves suffering and the distinction between Samsara (cyclic existence) and Nirvana (liberation). They explored how a Bodhisattva's universal aspiration begins when individual pursuit of ultimate goals ends, leading to a discovery of universal personality and interconnectedness with all living beings. The discussion concluded with Gary emphasizing that their 30-year practice isn't motivated by money or fame, but rather by a shift from trying to do good to avoiding harm, reflecting a deeper understanding gained through Buddhism.