

Learning the Buddha's Great Compassion

by Rev. T. Kenjitsu Nakagaki (Sensei)

"Buddha-Dharma FOR ME, _____"

How fortunate it is that I, Shaku no Shinran, but an old, simple-hearted ignorance, should come across the sacred texts from India and Central Asia and their commentaries by the teachers of China and Japan! It is so difficult to have access to them, and I now have them. It is rare to listen to this message, and I now have heard it! (Preface of "Kyogyoshinsho" by Shinran Shonin, translated by D.T. Suzuki)

When Shinran Shonin talks about the very important teaching of the Nembutsu-Dharma, he uses his own name as in the beginning of the quotation above. For me, it is more powerful than just using the first person singular "I." It may sound selfish, but it is a humble expression of Shinran Shonin's own experience of the teaching of the Nembutsu. It creates the feeling of a very personal and sacred relationship with the Buddha-Dharma.

In fact, "to know yourself" is a key to the Buddha's teachings. So, rather than objectively understanding and looking at things, the Buddha encourages us to understand things subjectively and farther beyond object and subject. As an example, you can try to see the difference among the following sentences.

The compassion of the Buddha embraces all beings.

The compassion of the Buddha embraces everyone.

The compassion of the Buddha embraces us.

The compassion of the Buddha embraces me.

The compassion of the Buddha embraces me, Kenjitsu (place your name).

"How fortunate it is that I, Shaku no Shinran,..." expresses his deep gratitude of encountering the teaching of the Nembutsu through various teachers. In another section of the "Kyogyoshinsho" (Volume of Shinjin), Master Shinran says, "How grievous it is that I, Gutoku Shinran, am sinking in an immense ocean of desires and attachments and am lost in vast mountains of fame and advantage,..." This is the statement of realization of our own karmic self with greed, anger and selfishness, illuminated by the Buddha's Light. The more we hear the Buddha-Dharma, the more we become aware of the darkness, and the darkness is transformed into virtue by the Light of the Buddha.

In the conclusion, let me share the episode of Shoma (1799-1871, Kagawa-ken, Japan) who was not able to read nor write, but he lived the life filled with Buddha-Dharma. One time, knowing that Shoma cannot read, a student priest asked him to read the latter part of the Larger Sutra which is hard to read for even ordinary priests. Then Shoma received the sutra book upside down with gratitude and said, "Here it says that the Buddha embraces Shoma, the Buddha embraces Shoma!"

Following the path of the Nembutsu

Opens my eyes and ears to the

Reality and truth of myself.

Make-up drops and

Entering the world of as-I-truly-am with gratitude.

(by Shaku Kenjitsu)