

Learning the Buddha's Great Compassion

by Rev. T. Kenjitsu Nakagaki (Sensei)

"Sharing the Dharma"

I, wishing to live it and realize it, humbly declare my faith in the true teaching of the Pure Land, and, especially, I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to the unparalleled favor bestowed upon me by the Tathagata.

Accordingly, I hereby heartily express my joy over what I have heard, and deeply cherish all that I have gained.

(Preface of "Kyogyoshinsho" by Shinran Shonin, translated by D.T. Suzuki)

The way of the Bodhisattvas is the practice of giving and sharing. Others benefit first and my benefit comes after. This idea may be in opposition to the value of our society today. Many of people think only of their own happiness and success. We, at times, even feel defeated or miserable when others are successful and appear happier. In other words, we live in a selfish society, with selfish interest, selfish benefit, selfish rights, selfish justice, selfish value and even selfish religion. The very way of life of our society may create many problems and conflicts. But the way of the Bodhisattva can suggest other ways of thinking of others benefit first, caring for others happiness and well being, understanding others and practicing selflessness.

Let me share a simple story about hell and Buddha land. A person had a dream of going to hell and going to the Buddha's land. In hell, there is delicious looking food in the middle, but no one can reach it, because the food was of the middle amidst a deep valley. There were also long chopsticks which were of sufficient length to reach the food. All the people in hell tried to eat the food with the long chopsticks. They fought to get the chopsticks. Though one could get the chopsticks and was able to reach the food, it was almost impossible to eat the food, because the chopsticks were too long. Meanwhile, other people tried to catch the food from the chopsticks, but did not want to give the food to the other people. So, nobody could eat it and people fought each other for it. They all look furious and unhappy. Then the person visited the Buddha's land in his dream. The scene was the same. There is food in the middle with long chopsticks. This time, though, everyone looked happy and well. In the Buddha Land, one picks up chopsticks and gives them to the another. The person received them gratefully and uses the chopsticks to pick up food and give the food to another. In this way, they feed each other, so they can all enjoy the delicious food.

In hell, everyone is thinking for their own benefits, not for others. On the other hand, in the Buddha's land, everyone is thinking about others happiness and benefit first. The Bodhisattva way or Buddha way is to care for others without thinking of their own benefit, and the Bodhisattva's happiness comes from the joy to benefit others.

"Accordingly, I hereby heartily express my joy over what I have heard, and deeply cherish all that I have gained" is Shinran Shonin's essential attitude to share the teaching of the Nembutsu-Dharma. Master Shinran never forced people to follow the Nembutsu teaching, rather he shared his understanding and experience of the Nembutsu with them. I am most impressed by master Shinran's humble and sincere attitude to the Dharma. Sharing the Buddha-Dharma selflessly (or with awareness of our own selfish deeds), I believe, is a practice of the Bodhisattva ways. This spirit of sharing can be practiced in various forms in our lives.

Selfishness has been with us for many years.

Hated, desire and ignorance are

All based on the self-centered clinging.

Realizing this fact is the first step and the last step maybe.

I-my-me-mine spirit can be transformed into

No I-my-me-mine-ness through the Dharma

Guiding us to think about others' happiness and peace first. (by Shaku Kenjitsu)