

Learning the Buddha's Great Compassion – The Amida Sutra (14)
"Becoming Natural"

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"Shariputra, if a good man or woman who hears of Amida Buddha holds fast to his Name even for one day, two days, three, four, five, six or seven days with a concentrated [single] and undistracted mind, then, at the hour of death, Amida Buddha will appear before them with a host of holy ones."

Amida Sutra, translated by Hisao Inagaki (brackets added)

"Instead of learning it (by intellect), get used to it!" is a Japanese saying. A closer translation might be "Learn by doing it" or "Practice makes perfect." What is meant is learning with our whole body or whole existence, instead of learning by our head or brain. The Japanese have a word for it, "Taige," which literally means body understanding, using one's whole existence to understand the Buddha-Dharma. Saying the Nembutsu, 'namo-amidabu,' I believe, comes first for Pure Land Buddhism. For me, that is what the above quote from the Amida Sutra is saying. Therefore, I advise you to start reciting the Name for a day, a week, and a month with a single focused mind, and see what happens and what you learn! Saying the Nembutsu creates Dharma conditions in a secular life, making the connection to the world of the Buddha-Dharma instantly.

Saying the Nembutsu does not seem natural at first, but as we say the Name many times, it becomes natural. It is in a way like learning anything for the first time. For example, holding the brush in Japanese calligraphy (shodo) is uncomfortable and awkward at first, yet as we practice it many times, it becomes quite natural and comfortable. The brush becomes a part of your body and mind. The tea ceremony is also a good example. Learning the procedure is complicated and very unnatural, but as you practice it, the motions become more and more natural and flowing. Maybe a more down to earth example is learning how to use chopsticks. Continuous practice finally allows you to eat easily with two sticks.

The point is to "make acquaintance with saying the Nembutsu" and "get used to doing it." In the end, we are able to transform our self-conscious efforts into effortless action. Amida Buddha's benefiting-others power (Other Power) is realized when we say the Nembutsu simultaneously beyond our self-effort. Saying the Nembutsu will cultivate our mind and open us to the world of Amida's Benefiting Other's Power, which vows to liberate all sentient beings from suffering and pain and to allow their birth into the Pure Land of Enlightenment with Amida's boundless wisdom and compassion. Thus, we become a part of Great Ocean of Amida-Dharma.

Master Shinran said in his Wasan,

"No less than people of Shinjin (true entrusting to Amida's Vow)

Practicers of doubt who cling to self-power should

Awaken to the benevolence of Amida's great compassion

And endeavor to say the Nembutsu."

It is the nature of the Nembutsu to transform those who say it so that they awaken to true awareness of Amida's Vow. Don't worry about why we need to say the Nembutsu. "Just doing it" is one way of learning the Nembutsu teaching.

Namo-amidabu, namo-amidabu, namo-amidabu...

A simple phrase recited, the Name of Amida Buddha

Takes us to the Dharma-grounded world.

Unspeakable, inconceivable Amida's Vow

Realizes for us the true meaning of liberation and transformation from

A muddy pond of self-centered illusion where we live.

Learning by practicing is the key to open the Amida-Dharma! (by Kenjitsu)