

Learning the Buddha's Great Compassion – The Amida Sutra (21)

"Hard to Accept"

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"Shariputra, you must realize that I have accomplished this difficult task during the period of the five defilements. That is to say, having attained the highest, perfect Enlightenment, I have, for the sake of all the world, delivered this teaching, which is so hard for them to accept. This is indeed an extremely difficult task." When the Buddha delivered this sutra, Shariputra and all the monks, together with beings of th[1]e whole world, including devas, humans and asuras, rejoiced at what they had heard and reverently accepted it. Having worshipped him, they departed."

Amida Sutra, translated by Hisao Inagaki

Inconceivable things or things beyond our understanding are 'hard to accept.' When we are confronted by such things, we tend to doubt and reject them. It is perhaps the mechanism by which human beings protect themselves from unknown danger. In other words, one way human beings realize security is through knowledge and understanding.

On the other hand, there are some who try to challenge what is before them and become curious about unknown things. Challenging or being curious may be dangerous but may also allow us to learn and experience something different and awaken us to something new. This is the way human beings have developed modern technology based on new discovery. Risk is always present in new discovery. Needless to say, curiosity and risk-taking have also created many problems for our modern world such as nuclear weapons, pollution, environmental problems.

The Buddha's enlightenment experience belongs in the category of 'hard to accept,' especially in Pure Land Buddhism. In Pure Land Buddhism the central figure of Amida Buddha is by its definition 'im (A-) measurable (mida)' or 'in (A-) conceivable (mida).' It is to be expected that most people will have a hard time accepting this idea. They will find it even harder to believe that by just saying 'namo-amida-bu' people are liberated from delusion and can attain enlightenment.

Shinran Shonin describes the Pure Land path as 'crosswise leap' Buddhism. One undertakes common construction step-by-step, like climbing up steps and finally reaching to the top. On the Pure Land path, you instantly leap from one place to the other as if you have received wings to fly. By the virtue of Amida's Vow, the people who open their mindful heart to the Vow and accept it without any calculation are transformed and become connected to Amida's Vow through the Nembutsu - 'namoamidabu.' Thus, we join Amida's assembly as we live our daily lives. "Hard to accept" is a characteristics of the Pure Land Nembutsu teaching.

Whether you stop where you are or go forward is up to you. If it is too hard or too risky for you, then come back some other day. If you feel that you are ready to risk your life, you may go forward to enter the inconceivable Dharma-ocean, learn it, experience it, and live it!

How can I join in the Amida's assembly?

Access to the Amida's Pure Land through the Nembutsu practice

Recognize the inconceivable world of Enlightenment

Dharma will fill our mind and body instantly!

(by Kenjitsu)