

Learning the Buddha's Great Compassion –Meditation Sutra (2)

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“Tragedy at Rajagriha”-2

(Continuing from last month’s issue)

In sum, Prince Ajatasatru, having been tempted by Devadatta who regarded Shakyamuni Buddha with hostility, imprisoned his father King Bimbisara of Rajagriha without any food and drink. He also confined his mother Queen Vaidehi, because her actions in keeping the King alive as she visited him everyday. Queen Vaidehi, in her state of confusion, asked the Buddha for help and guidance, which led to the discourse of the Meditation Sutra.

Though the Meditation Sutra on the Pure Land does not explain why Ajatasatru tried to kill his father, Shan-tao, the Chinese Pure Land master explained the background of the tragedy based on other sutras. King Bimbisara was childless for a long time and wishing to have a child. A hermit told the king that he will have a child within three years, after a hermit in the mountain dies he will be born as your child. The king could not wait for three years, and ordered the death of the hermit in the mountain. The hermit left a dying message saying that he will take revenge on the king after his birth. Soon after the hermit died, Queen Vaidehi became pregnant, but now the king did not want the child. So, it was ruled that a new born baby will die immediately after birth. The newborn baby was dropped from a 100 feet tall building but the baby only broke his little finger. As they looked at the baby’s face and heard his crying, they felt love for the baby and raised him. The prince grew up without any problems; this secret of his birth was disclosed by Devadatta to win the prince to be on his side, and thus opposed the Shakyamuni Buddha. Then Devadatta convinced Ajatasatru to kill the king and queen who were the supporters of the Buddha.

Selfish desire, anger and ignorance of these people created this tragedy in the city of Rajagriha, By and large, this tragedy is happening within our own lives in various forms. We have learned and witnessed countless tragedy in community, society, and the world because of one’s selfish greed and hatred. Each character in the story may even be found within ourselves. Ajatasatru, Devadatta, Bimbisara, and Vaidehi are nothing but who we are, who you are, and who I am.

Shinran Shonin considered all four characters as great teachers to illustrate the true natures of unenlightened foolish beings. They are the ones who lead us to the true wisdom and compassion of Amida Buddha, by the skillful means of the Buddha. Shinran Shonin said, “Amida and Shakyamuni, employing compassionate means, And Ananda, Maudgalyayana, Purna, Vaidehi, Devadatta, King Ajatasatru, Bimbisara, Jivaka, Candraprabha, Varsakara, and others All of them great sages By the various means, brought the most foolish and lowest Of evil people to enter the Vow That does not neglect people of grave offenses and transgressions.”(*The Collected Works of Shinran*, page 346)

“Turning disasters into virtues”

Rarity of the Buddha-Dharma is this!

Amida’s Vow can liberate us all beings,

-Greed, anger and ignorance are constantly curling and snaking-

Entering us into the space of the Dharma.

Devadatta, Vaideshi, Ajatasatru and Bimbisara are true me,

Yet, I am also within the light of the unhindered compassion. (by Kenjitsu)