

Learning the Buddha's Great Compassion_– The Meditation Sutra (8)

“Teachings for ordinary people”

by T. Kenjitsu Nakagaki, Sensei

The Buddha said to Ananda and Vaidehi, "Listen carefully, listen carefully and ponder deeply. I, the Tathagata, shall discourse on pure karma for the sake of all sentient beings of the future who are afflicted by the enemy, evil passions. It is very good, Vaidehi, that you have willingly asked me about this. Ananda, you must receive and keep the Buddha's words and widely proclaim them to the multitude of beings. I, the Tathagata, shall now teach you, Vaidehi, and all sentient beings of the future how to visualize the Western Land of Utmost Bliss. By the power of the Buddha all will be able to see the Pure Land as clearly as if they were looking at their own reflections in a bright mirror. Seeing the utmost beauty and bliss of that land, they will rejoice and immediately attain the insight into the non-arising of all dharmas."

The Buddha said to Vaidehi, "You are an unenlightened, and so your spiritual powers are weak and obscured. Since you have not yet attained the divine eye, you cannot see that which is distant. But the Buddhas, Tathagatas, have special ways to enable you to see afar."

Vaidehi said to the Buddha, "World-Honored One, through the Buddha's power, even I have now been able to see that land. But after the Buddha's passing, sentient beings will become defiled and evil, and be oppressed by the five kinds of suffering. How then will those beings be able to see the Land of Utmost Bliss of Amitayus?" (“Kanmuryoju-kyo’ translated by Hisao Inagaki)

The Buddha is now about to reveal the dharma-gate to the Pure Land of Amida Buddha to all of us. So, the Buddha spoke to not only Queen Vaidehi whom the Buddha had been primarily talking to, but also Ananda, the disciple of the Buddha, known as the excellent listener of many teachings. Now all the conditions for the Buddha to discourse the Pure Land path were fulfilled. To me, it is like waiting for the flower --of the Dharma-- to bloom.

One of the unique traits of Pure Land Buddhism is that its focus is on teaching ordinary lay people to achieve enlightenment, and not just for the monastic orders. The Pure Land is the path of hope for those who have no hope of attaining Enlightenment, or more precisely the path of those who realize their own hopelessness. Here, Shakyamuni Buddha said specifically to Vaidehi who is an ordinary lay person, “You are an unenlightened, and so your spiritual powers are weak and obscured.” The Buddha is ready to teach the ultimate path to true enlightenment through Amida’s power of benefiting others. Why does Pure Land Buddhism try to reach out to foolish beings? Because it is the nature of the Buddha, which is compassion to liberate all beings from suffering in life.

In Buddhism, it is essential to see ourselves in the teachings like a mirror. Here, we may see ourselves in the position of Queen Vaidehi. She is representing all ordinary lay people who are suffering from the attachments of greed, anger and ignorance, and fail to find a path of true liberation from delusion. Therefore, although Shakyamuni Buddha is talking to Queen Vaidehi in the Sutra, he is actually talking to each of us.

Let us see how the Buddha skillfully guides us (or Vaidehi) to the path of the Buddha Land. You will see thirteen stages of meditative practices and nine types of births by non-meditative practices, which are the main body of the Meditation Sutra on the Pure Land from next time.

Over a rage of the mountains
Rainbow may suddenly appear.
Diving into the oceans
I may find a wondrous treasure.
Normally it is impossible to happen.
All conditions matured, then, it is possible to happen.
Rare and almost impossible to attain Enlightenment,
Yet Enlightenment comes to me at an unexpected moment.

(by Kenjitsu)