

Learning the Buddha's Great Compassion – The Meditation Sutra (11)

Meditating on the Ground

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"...After you have visualized the water, envision it becoming frozen. After you have visualized the ice as transparent to its depth, see it turning into beryl. When you have attained this vision, next imagine that the beryl ground shines brilliantly, inside and out, and that this ground is supported from below by columns, which are made of diamond and the seven jewels and hung with golden banners. These columns have eight sides and eight corners, each side being adorned with a hundred jewels. Each jewel emits a thousand rays of light, each ray in turn having eighty-four thousand colors. As they are reflected on the beryl ground, they look like a thousand kotis of suns, so dazzling that it is impossible to see them in detail.

"On this beryl ground, golden paths intercross like a net of cords. The land is divided into areas made of one or the other of the seven jewels, so the partitions are quite distinct. Each jewel emits a flood of light in five hundred colors. The light appears in the shape of a flower or a star or the moon; suspended in the sky, it turns into a platform of light, on which there are ten million pavilions made of a hundred jewels. Both sides of this platform are adorned with a hundred kotis of flowered banners and innumerable musical instruments. As eight pure breezes arise from the light and play the musical instruments, they proclaim the truth of suffering, emptiness, impermanence and no-self. This is the visualizing of water and is known as the second contemplation.

When you have attained this contemplation, visualize each object quite clearly without losing the image, whether your eyes are closed or open. Except when sleeping, always keep it in mind. To practice in this way is called the correct contemplation, and to practice otherwise is incorrect."

The Buddha said to Ananda and Vaidehi, "When the visualization of the water has been accomplished, it is called the general perception of the ground of the Land of Utmost Bliss. If you attain a state of samadhi, you will see this ground so clearly and distinctly that it will be impossible to describe it in detail. This is the visualizing of the ground and is known as the third contemplation."

(“Kanmuryoju-kyo’ translated by Hisao Inagaki)

Both the first meditation on the sun and the second meditation on water are considered to be provisional contemplations that lead ones to meditate on crystal, the ground of the Buddha of the third contemplation. As the sutra tells us, in the second contemplation of water one sees that the water transforms into ice and forms the crystal (beryl) ground. The third contemplation is considered a right contemplation because it directly meditates on the ground of the Buddha -world of Enlightenment.

I was drawn to the fact that the ground is described in terms of light. The ground of the Enlightenment is radiant with thousands of reflections of light and there is no darkness. This light, needless to say, represents the clear wisdom of the Buddha, free from darkness of blind passions. Wisdom is the ground where one should stand. It reminds me of the words of master Shinran Shonin, “Let my mind be planted on the Buddha-Ground of the Primal Vow of Amida, and let my feelings float in the Dharma Ocean of Inconceivability.”

One important question here is; How is it possible for ordinary people who do not attain the state of Samadhi (pure meditative state of non-dualism) to gain the right contemplation? How about Queen Vaidehi? Is she capable to achieve the right contemplation? Why does the Buddha talk about it if it is impossible to attain? As you may try to meditate according to the Meditation Sutra, you may think about such questions.

Gazing at the sunset,
 Remaining calm and meditating on water and iced land,
 Over and over again, you may
 Understand that it is not so easy to achieve contemplation.
 No progress may be found, but
 Dear my friends, it's OK, because the Nembutsu is here for you. (by Kenjitsu)