

Learning the Buddha's Great Compassion – The Meditation Sutra (13)

Meditation on the Trees

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...The Buddha said to Ananda and Vaidehi, "When you have accomplished visualization of the ground, next contemplate the jewelled trees. This is how to do so. Visualize each one and then form an image of seven rows of trees, each being eight thousand yojanas high and adorned with seven-jewelled blossoms and leaves. Each blossom and leaf has the colors of various jewels. From the beryl-colored blossoms and leaves issues forth a golden light. From the crystal-colored issues forth a crimson light. From the agate-colored issues forth a sapphire light. From the sapphire-colored issues forth a green pearl light. Coral, amber and all the other jewels serve as illuminating ornaments. Splendid nets of pearls cover the trees. Between these seven rows of nets covering each tree there are five hundred kotis of palaces adorned with exquisite flowers, like the palace of King Brahma, where celestial children naturally dwell. Each of these children wears ornaments made of five hundred kotis of Shakra-abhilagna-mani-gems, which light up a hundred yojanas in all directions, like a hundred kotis of suns and moons shining together, and so it is impossible to describe them in detail. Manifold jewels intermingle, producing the most beautiful colors. "Rows of these jewelled trees are evenly arranged, and their leaves are equally spaced. From among the leaves appear wonderful blossoms which spontaneously bear fruits of seven jewels. Each leaf is twenty-five yojanas in both length and breadth. Like the celestial ornaments, the leaves are of a thousand colors and a hundred patterns. These trees have marvelous blossoms which are the color of gold from the Jambu River and spin like fire-wheels among the leaves. From these blossoms appear various fruits, as from Shakra's vase, and from the fruits issue forth great floods of light, which transform themselves into banners and innumerable jewelled canopies. Inside the jewelled canopies can be seen reflections of all the activities of the Buddha throughout the universe of a thousand million worlds. The Buddha-lands in the ten quarters are also reflected in them.

"After you have seen these trees, visualize each detail in order: the trunks, branches, leaves, blossoms and fruits, and let your vision of all of them be clear and distinct. This is the visualizing of the trees, and is called the fourth contemplation. To practice in this way is called the correct contemplation, and to practice otherwise is incorrect." ("Kanmuryoju-kyo" translated by Hisao Inagaki)

Following the three meditations on the sun, water, and ground, the fourth meditation is the visualization of the decorative trees in the Pure Land. The above description suggests that it is like seeing a great work of art, on a universal scale, made with drawing, laser beams, and poetry. The description seems for me to go beyond ordinary human creations. In fact, these trees grow from the ground of non-attachment to blind passions. Therefore, they too are manifestations of the wisdom of non-attachment. Because the trees are free from blind passions such as greed, anger, and ignorance, they are beyond our understanding, which is rooted in blind passions.

Shinran Shonin described these trees in his hymn, "*Trees of seven precious materials fill the land, Mutually reflecting each other's brilliance; The flowers, fruits, branches, and leaves all shine thus, So take refuge in Amida, the store of virtues fulfilled through the Primal Vow.*" Shinran Shonin sees the trees in the Pure Land as manifestation of the great virtues of Amida's Vow.

How can we experience this meditation? Instead of trying to understand it, we can let the words of the Buddha come to us and open our eyes. Simply follow the description of the sutra without any judgment or calculation, and then the words can guide us to the broader world of enlightenment. When we lose our direction, simply follow the signs that lead us to the place, or listen to persons who know the way, and let their words give us guidance.

Thoughts and words cannot describe the
 Realm of the True Enlightenment of Amida Buddha.
 Endless activities of colorful lights
 Entertain us as we experience the dynamic energy of the Pure Land.
 Selfless activities are truly free! (by Kenjitsu)