

Learning the Buddha's Great Compassion – The Meditation Sutra (14)

Meditation on the Ponds

by T. Kenjitsu Nakagaki, Sensei

... The Buddha said to Ananda and Vaidehi, "When you have accomplished visualization of the trees, next contemplate the ponds. This is how to do so. In the Land of Utmost Bliss, there are ponds of water possessing eight excellent qualities, each made of seven jewels which are soft and pliable. The water, springing from a wish-fulfilling king-mani-gem, forms fourteen streams. Each stream is the color of the seven jewels. Its banks are made of gold and its bed strewn with diamond sand of many colors. In each stream there are sixty kotis of lotus-flowers of seven jewels, which are round and symmetrical, measuring twelve yojanas in diameter. The water from the mani-gem flows among the flowers and meanders between the trees. As it ripples, it produces exquisite sounds, which proclaim the truths of suffering, emptiness, impermanence, no-self and of the Paramitas. Its sound also praises the physical characteristics and marks of the Buddhas. The king of the wish-fulfilling mani-gem emits a splendid golden light, which transforms itself into birds with the colors of a hundred jewels. Their songs are melodious and elegant, constantly praising the virtue of mindfulness of the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. This is the visualizing of the water possessing eight excellent qualities, and is known as the fifth contemplation. To practice in this way is called the correct contemplation, and to practice otherwise is incorrect."... ("Kanmuryoju-kyo" translated by Hisao Inagaki)

The fifth meditation is the visualization of water ponds in the Buddha Land. The water in the Buddha Land has eight excellent qualities. According to Chinese Pure Land Buddhist Master Shan-tao, the water is 1) pure 2) odorless 3) light 4) cool 5) soft 6) sweet-tasting 7) thirst-quenching 8) nourishing. The water is great and virtuous to all the senses, such as eyes, nose, and tongue. Shinran Shonin describes it in the Pure Land Wasan Hymn: *"The jewel-ponds, formed of seven precious materials, are limpid And brimming with waters of eight excellent qualities; The undefiled adornments of the land surpass conceptual understanding, So take refuge in Amida, the treasury of virtues."* As we meditate on the water, we also receive water-like teachings, which bring us purity, odorlessness and lightness from blind passions and sufferings; make us cool and gentle and relaxed in mind and body; and enable us to live with joy, comfort and growth.

When the water is moving and flowing, it creates sounds. Winds then appear and the branches of the trees start to make sounds. The birds are created from light and sing beautifully. All sounds are heard as the teachings of the Buddha. They all produce the sound of Dharma. Here, I see that the new element of sound is added to visualization, making the Buddha Land richer. Until this point in the fifth meditation, all the visualizations are without sounds - It is as if I watched a beautiful scene on TV without any sound. Now I feel as if the dimension of sound gives life to the screen.

Shinran Shonin says in another Wasan, *"The delicate, wondrous sounds of jewel-trees in the jewel-forests Are a naturally pure and harmonious music, Unexcelled in subtlety and elegance, So take refuge in Amida, the music of purity."* Also he says, *"Pure winds blow in the jewel-trees, Producing the five tones of the scale. As those sounds are harmonious and spontaneous, Pay homage to Amida, the one imbued with purity."* Sounds can effect people's minds as they go about their lives. Some sounds are violent and exciting, while some sounds make us calm and relaxed. In the Pure Land, where there is freedom from attachment to greed, anger and ignorance, even disharmonized tones become harmonized. This means that if we have a mind of enlightenment, we can hear the teachings of the Buddha from everything around us. Then, harmony and peace open up naturally in our lives, like a lotus flower blooming in a pond.

Pure water streams are naturally making peaceful sounds of the Dharma

Out of Amida's Wisdom and Compassion

No sounds bring discomfort or disharmony in the Buddha Land

Do la mi fa sodharma dharma dharma dharma dharma.....

So, what do you hear?

(by Kenjitsu)