

Learning the Buddha's Great Compassion – The Meditation Sutra (15)**Meditation on Pavilions**

by T. Kenjitsu Nakagaki, Sensei

... The Buddha said to Ananda and Vaidehi, "In each region of this jewelled land, there are five hundred kotis of jewelled pavilions, in which innumerable devas play heavenly music. There are also musical instruments suspended in the sky, which, like those on the heavenly-jewelled banners, spontaneously produce tones even without a player [...sounds without striking]. Each tone proclaims the virtue of mindfulness of the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. When this contemplation has been accomplished, it is called the general perception of the jewelled trees, jewelled ground and jewelled ponds of the Land of Utmost Bliss. This is a composite visualization and is called the sixth contemplation.

"Those who have perceived these objects will be rid of extremely heavy evil karma which they have committed during innumerable kalpas and will certainly, after death, be born in that land. To practice in this way is called the correct contemplation, and to practice otherwise is incorrect ...

(“Kanmuryoju-kyo’ translated by Hisao Inagaki, [] added by Rev. Nakagaki)

The sixth meditation is the visualization of jeweled pavilions in the Buddha land. When one concentrates on the pavilions, formal jeweled trees, ground, and ponds appear. Therefore, this meditation is considered a composite visualization.

In the description of the sixth meditation, there is a phrase that has drawn my attention for decades: “spontaneously produce sounds without striking.” Nobody strikes drums, but spontaneously sounds are produced. And these sounds teach all beings to take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. How can one make sounds without playing? Is it possible? I wonder how you understand this?

For me this is the sound of non-attachment. When one is free from selfish desire, music can be played without a player. When the Buddha gave teachings to all beings, it was like sounds without a player, since the Buddha was free from self-centered attachment. Experiencing the oneness in Enlightenment means letting the subject go and floating into the vast universe. Once non-attachment is realized, all sounds become the Dharma, the teachings, revealing the universal truth.

Do we experience this in our daily life? I think when we practice anything many, many times, we may understand this. When we first start practicing, we need to make a conscious effort, but soon or later our actions become effortless. Then we do even not think, “I am (we are) doing this” any more. This is seen in Japanese traditional culture, where the Buddhist principle was developed in the tea ceremony, flower arrangement, calligraphy, dance, etc. When I am chanting, especially without a chanting book, I sometimes feel that sounds are simply coming out of my mouth, and I don’t feel “I am chanting” anymore. In that case, the sounds float naturally and make me relax. Saying the Nembutsu – namo amidabu - is the same. Though I am the one who says the Buddha’s Name, the act of saying the Name does not belong to me. Rather, I am experiencing the stream of the boundless compassion of Amida Buddha, with joy and gratitude.

Pianists play pianos without making an effort, so no one is playing;

Artists draw pictures without making an effort, so no one is drawing;

Voices are heard, but no one is talking.

It is a voice that is free from self-centered desire.

Living in the world of no-attachment

I am doing, yet from my point view, I am not doing.

Out of selfless Zero, all sounds appear and bring the universal dharma.

No one is saying the Nembutsu, yet spontaneously the Nembutsu is recited and heard.

(by Kenjitsu)