

Learning the Buddha's Great Compassion –the Meditation Sutra (21)- “Embracement by Amida's Light”

Rev. T. Kenjitsu Nakagaki

The Buddha Amitayus (Amida) possesses eighty-four thousand physical characteristics, each having eighty-four thousand secondary marks of excellence. Each secondary mark emits eighty-four thousand rays of light; each light shining universally upon the lands of the ten quarters, embracing, and not forsaking, those who are mindful of the Buddha. It is impossible to describe in detail these rays of light, physical characteristics and marks, transformed Buddhas, and so forth. But you can see them clearly with your mind's eye through contemplation. (Translation by Hisao Inagaki)

The above phrase, “Each light shining universally upon the lands of the ten quarters, embracing, and not forsaking, those who are mindful of the Buddha” (Nembutsu practitioners), has empowered Nembutsu Pure Land followers and given them settlement of their enlightenment. Many Pure Land teachers such as Tan-luan, Tao-cho, Shantao, Genshin, Honen as well as Shinran, deeply appreciated this phrase in the Meditation Sutra, and shared their insight into it. Let us stop a moment and meditate on this phrase.

In his commentary on the Meditation Sutra, Chinese Pure Land Master Shan-tao explained Amida's embracement in terms of three karmic relations.

1) Intimate karmic relations: “When sentient beings arouse themselves to practice and to always recite with their lips the name of Amida Buddha, the Buddha will hear them. When they constantly and reverently prostrate themselves before the Buddha with their body, the Buddha will see them. When they constantly meditate on the Buddha in their hearts, the Buddha will know them. When sentient beings think of the Buddha, the Buddha will also think of them. In these three kinds of karmic acts, Amida Buddha and sentient beings are not separate from each other. Hence, they are called intimate karmic relations.” “Intimate karmic relations” refers to correspondences of three actions of body (worshipping-seeing), mouth (reciting-hearing) and mind (meditating-knowing). It means that the boundless compassion of the Buddha and entrusting mind of Nembutsu practitioners become one. Thus, it says, “when sentient beings think of the Buddha, the Buddha also thinks of the sentient beings.” Nembutsu is the path for me to be awakened to the compassion of Amida Buddha, who is thinking of me before I think of the Buddha. And as I think of the Buddha, I become more grateful as I realize that the Buddha is thinking of me with boundless wisdom and compassion. As we say the Nembutsu, namo-amidabu, we establish communication between “me” and the Buddha.

2) Close karmic relations: “When sentient beings desire to see Amida Buddha, the Buddha, in response to their desire, will appear before their very eyes. Hence, this is called close karmic relations.” “Close karmic relations” refers to the physical relationship of closeness. When we say the Nembutsu, we experience the presence of Amida embracing us here and now.

3) Superior karmic relations: “Sentient beings who recite the Nembutsu are rid of the accumulated karmic evils of many kalpas. When they are at the point of death, Amida Buddha together with the holy assembly will come in person to welcome them. Their evil karma cannot obstruct his coming. That is why this is called superior karmic relations.” Amida' embraces Nembutsu practitioners and transforms all the karmic evils of blind passion into the virtue of enlightenment with profound wisdom (Amida's Unhindered Light).

Enlightenment is not far, and it is a

Matter of opening up our mindful heart to Amida

Buddha's Primal Vow, which always reaches us.

Relations between the Buddha and me can be established through my

Awakening to the Buddha's boundless compassion of

Caring for all beings to attain true happiness and peace.

Everyone, an entrance is open, and your key word is “namo-amidabu” (by Kenjitsu) ☸

How Is an O'Bon Odori Dancer Like a 'Puffed-Up Chicken'?

By Rev. Masao Kodani, Senshin Buddhist Temple, Los Angeles

Even though you are happy, you should dance.

Even though you are sad, you should dance.

Even though you are excited with living, you should dance.

Even though you are bored with living, you should dance.

Even though you are embarrassed to put on Yukata and Geta and dance, you should dance.

Even though you put on Yukata and Geta and swagger like a puffed-up chicken, you should dance.

When old friends come to visit, you smile and laugh and act the fool.

Why then so timid and somber when remembering your ancestors?

As a leaf falls from a tree and flutters to the ground, showing all sides of itself, front and back, so should you dance.

Even though you are a congealed mass of greed, anger, stupidity, you should dance.

Even though you are an enlightened saint, you should dance.

Dance not for form, dance not for show, dance not for grace, dance not awkwardly to conceal your awkwardness, dance not for identity, dance not for Japanese-ness.

Dance to dance; your ancestors and relatives are your ancestors and relatives because they are your ancestors and relatives; dance to dance because you dance...

— From Rev. Kodani's book, “Dharma Chapter.” Excerpt edited by Rev. Kakei Nakagawa, White River Buddhist Temple. ☸