

Learning the Buddha's Great Compassion—the Meditation Sutra (26)

Miscellaneous Visualization: In Accord With Amida's Intent

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“The Buddha said to Ananda and Vaidehi, “If you sincerely desire to be born in the Western Land, you should first picture a figure, sixteen feet tall, on the surface of a pond. The dimensions of Amida as previously described are boundless and beyond the mental scope of ordinary beings. But, by the power of the original vows of that Tathagata, those who contemplate him will certainly succeed. You can acquire immeasurable merit simply by visualizing an image of that Buddha. And so, how much more merit will you acquire by visualizing his complete physical characteristics!

“Amida, exercising supernatural powers at will, can freely manifest his various forms in the lands of the ten quarters. At times he may appear as a large figure, filling the whole sky; at other times as a small figure, only sixteen or eight feet high. The figures that he manifests are all of the color of pure gold. The transformed Buddhas and jeweled lotus-flowers in the aureole of each manifested form are like those described above.

“The Bodhisattvas Avalokiteshvara and Mahasthamaprapta have a similar appearance, wherever they are. Sentient beings can only tell one from the other by looking at the emblems on their heads. These two bodhisattvas assist Amida in saving all beings everywhere. This is the miscellaneous visualization, and is known as the thirteenth contemplation.” —(Translation by Hisao Inagaki)

This section of the Meditation Sutra is the last contemplation of meditative goods or meditative practices. This 13 visualization is for those who cannot visualize the true form of Amida Buddha, Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara or Mahasthamaprapta. Amida Buddha appears in various forms and sizes to benefit all beings using skillful means.

The phrase above, “exercising supernatural power at will” or “The Buddha’s transcendental powers work in accord with the intentions”(in other translation) is interpreted two ways according to Shan-tao in his commentary on the Meditation Sutra on the Pure Land. This phrase is also quoted by Shinran Shonin in his main book, Kyogyoshinsho (Volume of Shinjin).

“[The Buddha’s transcendent powers work] in accord with the intentions” has two meanings. First, it means “in accord with the intentions of sentient beings.” All shall be saved in accord with their thoughts and desires. Second, it means “in accord with the will of Amida Buddha.” With his five kinds of sight he perceives all beings perfectly, and with his six transcendent powers he works freely and without reservation. When he sees a being ready to be saved, in a single thought-moment – neither before nor after – he appears before that being in both body and mind, and with the three wheels of thoughts, words and deeds he brings him to the realization of enlightenment. Thus, the ways in which he benefits beings differ according to their natures.

The Buddha gives teachings according to the need of the people, though the teachings may not be the true intention of the Buddha. Then, with his skillful means, the Buddha can guide them and educate them to the Buddha’s true intention. It is the first definition of “in accord with the intention of sentient beings.” The Buddha gave the teaching of the true intent to those whose conditions are fulfilled to be ready to hear it. This is the second definition of “in accord with the will of Amida Buddha.” As the Buddha teaches thousands to guide us to Enlightenment, it is important to know what is the true intent of the Buddha and what are the skillful means the Buddha uses. In our tradition, the true intent of the Buddha’s appearances in this world is to teach the Primal Vow of Amida Buddha to liberate all beings through the Name (namo-amidabu).

In accord with our ability and potentiality,
 Not just for a particular people but for all the beings,
 The Buddha shares the teachings with kindness and wisdom.
 Entering the path of the Nembutsu through various teachings,
 Now I am able to live life with gratitude, and so
 “Thank you!” with palms together. (By Kenjitsu) 🙏