

Learning the Buddha's Great Compassion –the Meditation Sutra (28)**The Meditation Sutra's Three Minds**

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**The Buddha said to Ananda and Vaidehi, "Those born in the Western Land are of nine grades. Those who attain birth on the highest level of the highest grade are sentient beings who resolve to be born in that land, awaken the three kinds of faith[mind] and so are born there. What are the three? They are, first, the sincere faith [mind]; second, the deep faith[mind]; and third, the faith[mind] that seeks birth there by transferring one's merit. Those who have these three kinds of faith[mind] will certainly be born there....."** *(translation by Hisao Inagaki [added by Rev. Nakagaki])*

Here Sakyamuni Buddha starts to discuss the highest level of the highest grade. In this section, the important Three Minds in the Meditation Sutra are discussed. They are sincere mind, deep mind and mind of aspiration. Although the Meditation Sutra does not spend much time explaining them, Shan-tao, the Chinese Pure Land Buddhist Master, emphasized the importance of these Three Minds. According to Shan-tao, the essence of the teachings of the Meditation Sutra is condensed in the Three Minds. Although they only appear in the section on the highest level of the highest birth, Shan-tao understands that the Three Minds apply to all the nine kinds of meritorious practices, and even to the thirteen meditative practices.

Shan-tao expressed that each section of the nine grades should be divided into eleven sections. Although the fourth section, which talks about Three minds, appeared only in the first grade, they are omitted to avoid repetition in the other eight grades. So the Three Minds exist in all the grades. The Three Minds are related to the Nembutsu practice; therefore, the Nembutsu is a common practice for all the nine grades.

When the Three Minds are understood in relation to the Nembutsu of Amida's Primal Vow, they are three Minds of Other Power (Amida's power of benefiting others). When the Three Minds are understood in relation to the Non-meditative practices of the nine grades and the Meditative goods of the thirteen methods of meditation, they are Three Minds of Self-Power (power of self-benefit) to transform them into Pure Land Practices of attaining the Birth. Based upon Shan-tao's understanding, Shinran Shonin sees the Three minds of the Meditation Sutra in two ways, self-benefiting power and benefiting-others power.

In any forms of Buddhism, both mind/thinking and body/practice are very much emphasized and deeply related. In our life, we think and we act. It is better that the two work together. It is a problem when they do not correspond. Thinking one way but acting another way is not great. Some people have great ideas but never put them into action. The four noble truths are thinking and the eightfold path are their practice. The Bodhisattava Vows are mind, and the six Paramitas are practice. Wisdom is mind, compassion is acting according to wisdom. Shinjin is the mind to trust the primal vow of Amida Buddha, and the Nembutsu is the action and practice of the Primal Vow.

Since the Three Minds are crucial for the Meditation Sutra as well as Shin Buddhist tradition, I would like to discuss each Mind in detail starting next month.

Though the same expressions are used,  
Huge differences in meaning may be found.  
Rooted in different foundations,  
Eyes of the Buddha see the world of enlightenment;  
Eyes of human beings see the world of delusion.

Mountains, ocean, and sky are vast and settled.  
I, me, and mine are limited and floating.  
Not depending on MY world of delusion,  
Do open your heart to the Buddha, and find  
Settlement on the vast world of the Nembutsu-Dharma.

(by Kenjitsu) 