

Learning the Buddha's Great Compassion –the Meditation Sutra (29)

The True and Sincere Mind

Rev. T. Kenjitsu Nakagaki

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])

The three minds are essential for understanding the foundation of Shin Buddhism in terms of "Shinjin" entrusting mind. The first mind is called "shi jo shin" translated as 'true mind' or 'sincere mind'. This means that those who wish to attain birth in the Pure Land of Amida need to have a 'sincere mind.' This mind is also related to the "shi shin" translated as 'sincere mind' of the Three Minds of the 18th Vow that Amida Buddha established to free all beings from sufferings and pain.

Shinran Shonin quotes Master Shan-tao's commentary on *shi jo shin* with his unique way of interpreting:

"The sutra states, The first is sincere (*shijo*) mind. *Shi* means true, *jo* means real. This shows that the understanding and practice of all sentient beings, cultivated through their bodily, verbal, and mental acts, unfailingly take as essential what was performed [by Amida Buddha] with a true and real mind. We should not express outwardly signs of wisdom, goodness, or diligence, for inwardly we are possessed of falsity. We are filled with all manner of greed, anger, perversity, deceit, wickedness, and cunning, and it is difficult to put an end to our evil nature. In this we are like poisonous snakes or scorpions. Although we perform practices in the three modes of action, they must be called poisoned good acts or false practices. They cannot be called true, real and sincere action. Firmly setting our minds and undertaking practice in this way- even if we strive to the utmost with body and mind through the twelve periods of the day and night, urgently seeking and urgently acting as though sweeping fire from our heads –our acts must all be called poisoned good acts. To seek birth in the Buddha's Pure Land by directing the merit of such poisoned practice is completely wrong. Why? Because when, in his causal stage, Amida Buddha was performing practices as a bodhisattva, in every single moment – every single instant – he performed his practices in the three modes of action with a true and real mind. They are all true and real. The true and real (mind and practices) has two aspects -True and real self-benefiting and true and real benefiting-others."

As the Dharmakara Bodhisattva practiced the path and established the Forty-eight Vows, he had only a pure and true mind without greed, anger or a self-centered mind in each moment of thinking, expression and actions based on self-benefit and benefiting-others. Can we have such true and real mind? Shinran's conclusion from various practices was that we, all the sentient beings who are webbed by blind passions such as greed, anger and ignorance, do not have true and pure minds. Therefore Amida Buddha established the Forty-eight Vows to free all beings by directing virtues through the Nembutsu.

Originally, Shan-tao says that "We should not express outwardly signs of wisdom, goodness or diligence, and should not possess falsity inwardly." Yet, Shinran reads this passage as "We should not express outwardly signs of wisdom, goodness, or diligence, for inwardly we are possessed of falsity." Why does Shinran read the phrase differently from Shan-tao? In his other writing (Gutoku Note), Shinran Shonin also described his mind as the mind of a fool. "Hearing the wise person's mind, I reveal the mind of a fool. The wise person is wise inwardly, and foolish outwardly; the fool is foolish inwardly, and wise outwardly." Knowing deeply the true and sincere mind of self-benefiting (of Amida Buddha) means realizing how great is our lack of such a true and pure mind, and realizing that the true and pure mind of benefiting-others (of Amida Buddha) is always reaching us and nurturing us.

Though my actions are mixed with poison-like blind passions,
Really I am fine, and rather grateful,
Understanding Amida's truthful heart which
Embraces me and reaches me as I am.

My mind may not be enough for enlightenment, but
I am truly OK, and rather thankful,
Namo-amidabu, namo-amidabu ...
Do I need anything else in my life?

(by Kenjitsu) 