

Learning the Buddha's Great Compassion –the Meditation Sutra (31)

Mind of Aspiration

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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])

The third of the three minds in the Meditation Sutra is called "eko hotsugan-shin," which literally means "Turning (e), Directing (ko), Raising (hotsu) Wish/Vow(gan) Mind(shin)," and generally translated as "mind of desire for birth by accumulating merit" or "mind of aspiration for birth through directing merit." Master Shan-tao offers two definitions:

- 1) To aspire, with a mind of genuine deep trust, to attain birth in that land through directing all roots of good performed by oneself and others from the past down to the present life.
- 2) Those who seek to be born with the mind of aspiration and directing of virtue aspire for attainment of birth by unflinchingly and decidedly taking as essential the Vow directed to them from the true and real mind, thereby becoming sure of the attainment of birth.

For Shinran Shonin, the former definition of "eko hotsugan-shin" is understood as self-benefiting power (Self Power) practice focusing on Amida Buddha, since one gathers all the merit and virtues that he/she has accumulated to attain the birth-enlightenment in the Buddha-Land. The latter definition is understood as benefiting-others power (Other Power), because the mind of aspiration is based upon following Amida's Vow to make all beings attain the birth-enlightenment. In other words, turning the mind of self-calculations into the mind of opening the words of the Buddha (eko), one aspires to attain birth without fail (hotsugan).

Aspiring toward birth in Amida's Buddha-Land is a natural act based on the second mind of true deeply entrusting. Once our mind is settled in the ground of the Amida's Vow, we are guaranteed to attain enlightenment in the Buddha-Land. Therefore, Namo-amidabu from the aspect of the third mind means to aspire the birth in the Buddha-Land of Amida as definite course, directed by Amida's Vow.

Now, you see that all three minds—true mind, deep mind, and mind of aspiring the birth through directing merit—are all derived from Amida Tathagata. True mind refers to the truth and reality of Amida's Vow, which makes the deep mind arise, and the mind of aspiration comes from the deep mind following the Amida's Vow. Therefore three minds are equal to one mind of "deep mind."

Always the sun goes up in the morning, and
Settles down in the evening.
People expect it happens everyday without doubt.
It is a rather natural phenomenon in our life, and we can
Relax and enjoy days coming and going with secure feelings.
Always the Buddha's Vow is reaching us,
Today, tomorrow and in the future.
It, in fact, brings peace, happiness and security to our life.
Our past, present and future are secured, when we can
Naturally say the Nembutsu, awakening to the Vow.

(by Kenjitsu) 