

Learning the Buddha's Great Compassion—the Meditation Sutra (34)
High Grade: Middle Birth & Low Birth of High Grade
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“Those who attain birth on the middle level[birth] of the high grade, do not necessarily uphold and chant the sutras of greater scope, but comprehend the teachings of the Buddha so well that when they hear the supreme truths, they are not dismayed. They have deep faith in the law of karmic causes and effects and do not speak slightingly of the Mahayana. They transfer the merit acquired to the Land of Utmost Bliss, aspiring to be born there. When such an aspirant is about to die, Amitayus[Amida] appears before him, surrounded by Avalokiteshvara, Mahasthamaprapta and innumerable sages and attendants, carrying a purple-gold lotus-seat. The Buddha praises him, saying, “Son of the Dharma, because you have practiced the Mahayana and appreciate the supreme truths, I have come to welcome you.” So saying, he and a thousand transformed Buddhas extend their hands all at once towards the aspirant, who, seeing himself sitting on the purple-gold seat, joins his palms and praises the Buddhas. In an instant, he is born in a seven-jewelled pond of that land. The purple-gold seat has become like a great jewelled flower, which opens after one night. The body of the aspirant has become the color of purple-gold, and beneath his feet are seven-jewelled lotus-flowers. The Buddha and bodhisattvas together release a flood of light which illuminates the aspirant's body. His eyes open, and because of the store of merit from his previous life, he hears voices everywhere expounding only the most profound and supreme truths. Descending from his golden seat, he bows with joined palms and praises the Buddha, the World-Honored One. After seven days, he immediately reaches the Stage of Non-retrogression for realizing the highest, perfect Enlightenment. He is also able to fly in the ten quarters, as he wishes, to revere all the Buddhas and learn various samadhis from them. After the lapse of a smaller kalpa, he attains the insight into the non-arising of all dharmas and receives from each Buddha the prediction of his future Buddhahood. Such a person is called one who attains birth on the middle level of the high grade.” (translation by Hisao Inagaki [annotation by Rev. Nakagaki])

The ordinary people of the High Birth of the High Grade are Mahayana Buddhist practitioners who keep a compassionate heart, learn the Mahayana Buddhist scriptures, and practice mindfulness. Though it may not be the ideal life-style, the ordinary people of the Middle Birth of High Grade try to understand the Buddhist teachings and live their life according to the teachings. They are sincere practitioners who strive to attain the truth of the Dharma.

“Those who attain birth on the low level[birth] of the high grade likewise accept the law of karmic causes and effects, do not speak slightingly of the Mahayana and awaken aspiration for the highest Enlightenment. They transfer the merit acquired to the Land of Utmost Bliss, aspiring to be born there. When such an aspirant is about to die, Amitayus[Amida], together with Avalokiteshvara, Mahasthamaprapta and a host of attendants, come to welcome him, bringing a golden lotus-flower and manifesting five hundred transformed Buddhas. Those transformed Buddhas extend their hands all at once and praise the aspirant, saying, “Son of the Dharma, since you have awakened pure aspiration for the highest Enlightenment, we have come to welcome you.” When he has viewed all this, the aspirant finds himself seated upon a golden lotus-flower, which then closes. Following the World-Honored One, he immediately attains birth on a seven-jewelled pond. After a day and night, the lotus-flower opens and, within seven days, the aspirant beholds the Buddha. Although he sees the Buddha's body, he is still unable to discern his physical characteristics and marks clearly. But after three weeks he sees them distinctly, and also hears all the sounds and voices proclaiming the wonderful Dharma. Then he can travel in all the ten quarters to make offerings to the Buddhas and hear their profound teachings. After three smaller kalpas he acquires clear understanding of the one hundred dharmas and dwells in the Stage of Joy. Such a person is called one who attains birth on the low level[birth] of the high grade.” (translation by Hisao Inagaki [annotation by TK Nakagaki])

Unlike those who attain birth on the High Birth and Middle Birth of the High Grade, these ordinary people of the Low Birth of the High Grade do not talk about practice, but just about raising the mind of the Bodhi, or mind to seek the Enlightenment. The Buddha reaches out to those who are incapable of practicing the path.

“...These three together are known as the contemplation of the high grade of aspirants, and the fourteenth contemplation. To practice in this way is called the correct contemplation, and to practice otherwise is incorrect.” (translation by Hisao Inagaki [annotation by Rev. Nakagaki])

Three kinds of High Grade aspirants are all Mahayana Buddhist practitioners. It is essential to live for the benefit of others as well as your own benefit, with understanding of the Sunyata or Emptiness of all existence. Therefore, the fourteenth meditation is to be mindful of ordinary beings who encounter the teachings of Mahayana Buddhism.

Here I am learning the Dharma
 In the midst of busy and rather chaotic life, it is
 Great to have guidance.
 “How am I doing in life?” (by Kenjitsu)