

Learning the Buddha's Great Compassion—the Meditation Sutra (36)

“A Good Teacher” Low Birth of Middle Grade by Rev. T. Kenjitsu Nakagaki

Those who attain birth on the lowest level of the middle grade are good men and women who are dutiful to and care for their parents and do benevolent deeds for others. When such a person is about to die, he may meet a good teacher, who fully explains to him the bliss of the land of Amitayus[Amida] and the Forty-eight Great Vows of the Bhiksu Dharmakara. Having heard this, he dies and in the short time it takes a strong man to bend and straighten his arm, he attains birth in the Western Land of Utmost Bliss. Seven days after his birth there, he meets Avalokiteshvara and Mahasthamaprapta, rejoices at hearing the Dharma from them and so reaches the Stage of a Stream-Winner. After one smaller kalpa, he becomes an Arhat. Such a person is called one who attains birth on the lowest level of the middle grade. These three together are known as the contemplation of the middle grade of aspirants and the fifteenth contemplation. To practice in this way is called the correct contemplation, and to practice otherwise is incorrect."

...(translation by Hisao Inagaki [annotation by TK Nakagaki])

Low Birth of Middle Grade may be attained by those who do good. Such people are not practitioners of Buddha's path, but they are so-called good people who live in accordance with human morality, such as taking care of your parents, doing good for others.

For those who are not seeking for the path of enlightenment, encountering a zenchishiki, or good teacher, is important to enter the Dharma-world. Those who may attain Low Birth of Middle Grade or any Birth of Low Grade have nothing to do with the Dharma until they meet a zenchishiki when they are on their death-bed. For them, a zenchishiki is a key to the attainment of Birth in the Buddha-Land of Amida.

Zenjishiki is originally “kalyana-mitra” in Sanskrit, which means a good friend, a true friend, or a person who can lead you to the true teaching of the Buddha and bring a true benefit of Enlightenment. One of the famous sutras for looking for a kalyana-mitra is the chapter on Entering the Dharma-world of the Avatamsaka Sutra. Sudhana, a boy who raised the Bodhi-Mind, travels to look for kalyana-mitra. When he meets Vimaktaghosa, he describes ten qualities of the kalyana-mitra.

A good teacher opens the gate of wisdom, shows the true path, settles others to the ground of wisdom, and lights the flame of treasure-like wisdom. A good teacher is like a storage of unlimited wisdom, like a torch which illuminates all the stages, like a bridge which cross over the world of birth-and-death, like a cover which embraces all beings with loving-kindness, like light in vain which illumines the truth of the Dharma, and like an ocean which is filled with great compassion.

Encountering a good teacher, or good friend, can change your life and guide you to the true dharma. For many Buddhist traditions, meeting kalyana-mitra is essential to live the path of enlightenment. How can we meet such a good teacher? Unfortunately, we cannot plan ahead, but when the good teacher comes, you know it.

Great to meet the kalyana-mitra!

Opening my eyes to the

Ocean-like Dharma.

“Do not spend your life in vain!

Transform your life!”

Ending the value on the self-constructed life,

Access the self-less world of the Dharma.

“Calculation is no use!

Hear your own mind and hear the Dharma!”

Each of us has carried different karma.

Rare is it indeed to encounter the kalyana-mitra. (by Kenjitsu) 🌀