

Learning the Buddha's Great Compassion—the Meditation Sutra (42)
Lotus Flower among the Humankind
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... Then Ananda rose from his seat, stepped forward, and said to the Buddha, "World-Honored One, what should we call this sutra and how should we receive and retain the essentials of its teaching?" The Buddha answered, "Ananda, this sutra is called the Visualization of the Land of Utmost Bliss, of the Buddha Amitayus, and of the Bodhisattvas Avalokiteshvara and Mahasthamaprapta. It is also called the Purification and Elimination of Karmic Hindrances for Attaining Birth in the Presence of All the Buddhas. Hold fast to this sutra and do not forget it. Those who practice this samadhi will be able to see, during their lifetime, the Buddha Amitayus and the two Mahasattvas. If good men or women simply hear the Name of this Buddha or the names of those two bodhisattvas, the evil karma which they have committed during innumerable kalpas of Samsara will be extinguished. And so, how much more merit will they acquire if they concentrate on them! You should know that all who are mindful of that Buddha are like white lotus-flowers among humankind; the Bodhisattvas Avalokiteshvara and Mahasthamaprapta become their good friends. They will sit in the place of Enlightenment and be born into the family of the Buddhas." ... (translation by Hisao Inagaki [annotation by TK Nakagaki])

The Venerable Ananda, one of the ten disciples of the Buddha, had been listening to the Buddha's discourse together with Queen Vaidehi. Here he finally opened his mouth. "What shall we call this teachings?" "What is the essence of this dharma?" "How can we receive and practice it?"

The Buddha responded, naming this sutra, "The Meditating on the Pure Land of Ultimate Joy, the Buddha of Immeasurable Life (Amida), Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, and Mahasthamaprapta Bodhisattva Sutra," and "The purifying and removing karmic hindrances, and being born in front of various Buddhas Sutra." These names tell us that the Meditation Sutra is talking about meditation and visualization of the Buddha lands, Buddha, and Bodhisattvas. Through meditative practices, one can purify and remove karmic hindrances, and achieve birth in the Buddha land and see various Buddhas.

Then, the Buddha suddenly encouraged them to do Nembutsu practice, saying that the person who practices the Nembutsu, mindful of the Buddha, is praised as a white lotus flower (Pundarika) among humankind. Pundarika is in fact a symbolic expression of the highest praising. Master Shan-tao explained the meaning of pundarika, saying,

The white lotus is called "the excellent flower among people," or "the rare flower," or "the best among the best," or "the wondrous excellent flower." What has traditionally been called the "blossom bearing the white tortoise" is none other than this flower. The person of the Nembutsu is the excellent person among people, the wondrous, excellent person, the best among the best, the rare person, the very finest person.

The lotus is a unique flower that blossoms in the midst of the muddy pond instead in nicely cultivated ground, and yet is not defiled by the mud. The flower transforms the mud of self-centered blind passions into the virtue of Enlightenment. In Master Shinran's words,

All foolish beings, whether good or evil,
 When they hear and entrust to Amida's universal Vow,
 Are praised by the Buddha as people of vast and excellent understanding;
 Such a person is called a pure white lotus.

When we say the Nembutsu, we are praised by the Buddha as white lotuses because of the virtue of the Nembutsu. We are fortunate to encounter the excellent Nembutsu Dharma.

Learning to know that

One who practices the Nembutsu is praised highly by the Buddha,

To me, it gives me great comfort and encouragement.

Unhindered light of Amida helps me transform

Suffering and pain into joy and peace. (by Kenjitsu) 