

Learning of the Buddha's Great Compassion – The Amida Sutra

“Beauty” - the Ultimate Bliss

by Rev. T. Kenjitsu Nakagaki, Sensei

“Again, Shariputra, in that Land of Utmost Bliss there are seven rows of balustrades, seven rows of decorative nets, and seven rows of trees. They are all made of four kinds of jewels and extend over the whole land, encompassing everything. For this reason, that land is called ‘Utmost Bliss.’ Again, Shariputra, in the Land of Utmost Bliss there are seven-jeweled ponds, filled with water of the eight excellent qualities. The beds of the ponds are covered solely with gold sand, and from the four sides of each pond rise stairs of gold, silver, beryl and crystal. Above these stand pavilions adorned with gold, silver, beryl, crystal, sapphire, rosy pearls, and carnelian. In the ponds are lotuses as large as chariot-wheels -- the blue ones radiating a blue light, the yellow a yellow light, the red a red light and the white ones a white light. They are marvelous and beautiful, fragrant and pure. Shariputra, the Land of Utmost Bliss is filled with such splendid adornments.

“Again, Shariputra, in that Buddha-land heavenly music is played continually. The ground is made of gold. Six times during the day and night mandarava flowers rain down from the sky. Every day, in the serenity of the early morning, the people of that land fill the hems of their robes with exquisite flowers and go to make offerings to a hundred thousand kotis of Buddhas dwelling in the worlds of other quarters. Then they return for their morning meal. After the meal they enjoy a stroll. Shariputra, the Land of Utmost Bliss is filled with such splendid adornments.

“Again, Shariputra, in that land there are always many kinds of rare and beautiful birds of various colors, such as swans, peacocks, parrots, sharis, kalavinkas and jivamjivakas. Six times during the day and night birds sing with melodious and delicate sounds, which proclaim such teachings as the Five Roots of Goodness, the Five Powers, the Seven Practices Leading to Enlightenment, and the Eightfold Noble Path. On hearing them, the people of that land become mindful of the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. But, Shariputra, you should not assume that these birds are born as retribution of their evil karma. The reason is that none of the three evil realms exists in that Buddha-land. Shariputra, even the names of the three evil realms do not exist there; how much less the realms themselves? These birds are manifested by Amida Buddha so that their singing can proclaim and spread the Dharma.

“In that Buddha-land, Shariputra, when soft breezes waft through the rows of jeweled trees and jeweled nets, they produce subtle, wonderful sounds. It is as if a hundred thousand musical instruments were playing together. Everyone who hears the sounds spontaneously becomes mindful of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Shariputra, that Buddha-land is filled with such splendid adornments! (Amida Sutra trans. by Hisao Inagaki)

This description of the Pure Land is very creative and artistic, yet when we meditate on it we can hear the teachings through it. It is traditionally considered to be the skillful means that uses the Buddha's Wisdom and Compassion to guide all beings to the Buddha Land of Enlightenment.

Instead of explaining all the symbols and meanings in the quotation, I would like to suggest that each of us meditate on it and see what we find. You can visualize the Pure Land according to the above description and find the meaning by yourself in relation to your own experience. For me, symbols are like icons on the computer screen that take me to a different place and open up more things when I double-click them. When we realize their depth, we better appreciate these symbols where we see the compassion and wisdom of Amida.

Let us take our time to enjoy the beauty of the Pure Land as well as find out the depth of the Pure Land.

Breathing in and breathing out,

Enter into the garden of Buddha-land.

All the adornments become alive and

Unite us in respect for the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.

This is the place where we meet face to face, truthfully and respectfully.

Yes, it is the place where we meet each other in peace and harmony!

by Shaku Kenjitsu