

## Learning the Buddha's Great Compassion – The Amida Sutra (13)

### "Quality of the Nembutsu"

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**"Shariputra, those sentient beings who hear of that land should aspire to be born there. Why? Because they will be able to meet such sages of supreme virtue [meeting together at one place]. Shariputra, one cannot attain birth in that land with few roots of goodness or a small stock of merit."** Amida Sutra, translated by Hisao Inagaki (brackets added)

Quality and quantity are two dimensions of things that we usually pay attention to. These two dimensions are important concerns in our lives. People want to live a life with meaning and value, thinking of the quality of life, and they want to have a long life or even live for eternity, thinking of the quantity of life. People want to eat delicious food with a nutritious balance, showing concern for the quality of the food, and they want to satisfy their stomach with enough food, showing concern for the quantity of food. Both are important, yet in Buddhism quality is more important than quantity.

The Buddha (Dhammapada) says, "Better than reciting a hundred verses that have no meaning is reciting one verse of the Dharma which, when heard, produces peace." And "A life of only a single day spent in virtuous meditation is better than living a hundred years unbalanced and immoral." Here the Buddha emphasizes the importance of quality over quantity.

The Amida Sutra, quoted above, emphasizes quantity of the quality, saying, "one cannot attain birth in that land with few roots of goodness or small merit." This means that in order to attain birth in the Buddha Land, one needs to have many roots of goodness and great stock of merit. Here the quantity becomes the quality of great virtue and merit of the Buddha Land. The practice needs to be qualified for one to reach the Land of Amida Buddha.

Since we ordinary beings can only achieve small merit and goodness, how can we possibly attain birth in the Buddha Land? It is the Nembutsu practice which fulfills the requirement. The Nembutsu is selected by the Buddha Amida with profound wisdom and boundless compassion. It is the great practice, deeply rooted in the Buddha ground of Complete Enlightenment. It is totally free from our self-centered greed, anger and ignorance.

Shinran Shonin, the founder of Jodoshinshu Buddhism, said, "The great practice is to say the Name of the Tathagata of unhindered light (Amida). This practice, embodying all good acts and possessing all roots of virtue, is perfect and most rapid in bringing them to fullness. It is the treasure-ocean of virtues that is suchness or true reality. For this reason, it is called great practice." On the surface, saying the Nembutsu (namo-amidabu) appears too simple, but the "simple" practice means that it is accessible to many more people, and it contains the essence of the Buddha's Enlightenment. After Amida Buddha spent an extremely long five kalpas of profound contemplation, the Buddha selected the simple practice of the Nembutsu for ordinary people.

Though the Nembutsu comes out of our mouth, the quality of the Nembutsu belongs to the Buddha. The Nembutsu is a realization of the Benefiting-Others Power (Other Power) of Amida Buddha, which directs true virtue and merit to all sentient beings through the Nembutsu practice. As we say the Nembutsu, the Name of Amida Buddha, we recognize the Buddha's wisdom that gives us awareness of what we truly are and of the Dharma-world, and we realize the Buddha's compassion, which continually embraces us all wherever we are and whomever we are.

*Quietly hearing the Nembutsu out of my mouth  
Unlimited wisdom and compassion of the Buddha  
Appears as the Name.  
Let me learn the Buddha's Light of wisdom and compassion  
Illuminating and embracing me always  
Though I am limited and incapable of true enlightenment.  
You see, I am fine as what I am in the Nembutsu-Dharma. (by Kenjitsu)*