

## Learning the Buddha's Great Compassion – The Amida Sutra (16)

### "True and Real Benefit"

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**"Shariputra, if good men or women who hear of Amida Buddha hold fast to Amida Buddha's Name even for one day, two days, three, four, five, six or seven days with a concentrated and undistracted [i.e. single] mind, then, at the hour of death, Amida Buddha will appear before them with a host of holy ones. Consequently, when their life comes to an end, the aspirants' minds will not fall into confusion and so they will be born immediately in the Land of Utmost Bliss of Amida Buddha. Shariputra, perceiving these benefits, I say: All sentient beings who hear this teaching should aspire to birth in that land."**

Amida Sutra, translated by Hisao Inagaki (brackets added)

What do we accomplish through learning the Buddha-Dharma? What kind of benefit do we receive by practicing the Dharma?

Many people ask this question as we learn the path of Buddhism. This is especially so in the United States, where practicality is highly valued. But when we talk of benefit, we may be looking for benefits of different kinds. Some may be closely related to human selfish desires. "I wish to be successful and make money in my business;" "I wish to be healthy and live a long life" - these are temporary benefits and do not give us true satisfaction. They are not the benefits that Buddhism refers to. When we drop such selfish desires, we will find the primal benefit, which is the way in Buddhism.

There are many benefits to living the Buddha-Dharma. In our tradition of the Pure Land Nembutsu teaching, Master Shinran talks about ten benefits in this world that come from following the Nembutsu and saying Amida Buddha's name: being protected and sustained by unseen power, being possessed of supreme virtues, transforming evil into good, being protected and cared for by all the Buddhas, being praised by all the Buddhas, being constantly protected by the light of the Buddha's Heart, having a great joy in our hearts, being aware of Amida's benevolence and responding in gratitude, constantly practicing great compassion, and entering the stage of the truly settled to attain Enlightenment. (CWS page 112) But the primal benefit is to gain true freedom or liberation from delusion and selfish desire, the liberation called Enlightenment.

In the Larger Sukhavativyuha Sutra, the Buddha says, "The reason the Tathagatas appear in the world is their desire to save the multitudes of beings and to bless them with the true and real benefit." And Shinran Shonin explains that the true and real benefit comes from the Nembutsu, or calling Amida's name, "namo-amida-bu." He says, "*The true and real benefit* is Amida's Vow. Thus, the reason that the Buddhas appear in the world age after age is that they desire to bless and save all sentient beings by teaching the power of Amida's Vow." (Notes on Once-calling and Many Calling, CWS page 485) "

Buddha's statement in the Amida-sutra, "**Shariputra, perceiving these benefits, I say: All sentient beings who hear this teaching should aspire to birth in that land,**" is based on the nature of the Nembutsu, which transcends worldly benefits and brings true and real benefits to living beings.

*Be aware of what is fundamental and essential for life!  
Emancipated from long dreaming in this world of Samsara  
Not sinking into this world of desire,  
Entering the ocean of the Universal Vow of Amida Buddha.  
Flowers bloom, birds sing and gently the wind blows.  
It happens when the time is right.  
Till then, be patient with your eyes open.*

*(by Shaku Kenjitsu)*