

Learning the Buddha's Great Compassion – The Amida Sutra (18)

"Hearing the Name"

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"Shariputra, what do you think? Why is this teaching called 'the Sutra of Protection by All Buddhas'? Shariputra, all good men and women who hear the Name of Amida Buddha expounded by all the Buddhas and the name of this sutra, are protected by all the Buddhas and dwell in the Stage of Non-retrogression for realizing the highest, perfect Enlightenment. This is why, Shariputra, you should accept my words and the teachings of all the Buddhas." -Amida Sutra

In the Amida Sutra, there are two sections where Shakyamuni Buddha, addressing Shariputra, adds the phrase "What do you think?" Adding "What do you think?" emphasizes the importance of these sections. It is similar to saying, "I really want you to think deeply about this question." These two sections become crucial points in the Amida Sutra. (Needless to say, Shariputra still did not answer the Buddha's question.)

The first section appears earlier in the sutra, when Shakyamuni Buddha asks about the meaning of Amida: "Shariputra, what do you think? Why is that Buddha called Amida?" In the section quoted above, Shakyamuni Buddha asks about the name of the sutra.

Hearing the name of the Buddha and of this sutra, which talks about the working of the Buddha, is essential. Hearing is very much related to one's attainment of Shinjin – the entrusting mind to/from Amida Buddha's Vow. When we hear sounds, the sounds are here within us. When we hear Amida, Amida is here within us. When we hear the sutra of protection by all the Buddhas, the sutra is here within us, which means that all of the Buddhas are protecting us.

Hearing describes the state of the mind that is open to the working of the boundless compassion and wisdom of Amida through the Name of Amida Buddha (namo-amidabu). We may wear ear-plugs not to hear the sound of the Dharma or universal truth, because we are too busy taking care of our self-centered business; all we hear are the sounds of selfishly produced illusion by ourselves. However, the sound of compassion and wisdom is all around us, and constantly working. It is a matter of unplugging our ears to the sound of the Dharma.

Once we hear the sound, we realize three benefits, according to the Pure Land Buddhist masters Genshin and Honen, basing their conclusion on the above quotation. The first benefit is protection. The person who hears the name of the Buddha and of this sutra is protected by various Buddhas at the present moment. The second benefit is attainment of the stage of non-retrogression. It is settlement that enlightenment is assured at the present moment. The third benefit is that attainment of Buddhahood without fail in the future. Master Shinran explains that these benefits are possible because of the work of Amida grasping all beings without abandoning anyone.

I hope you can hear me!?

Hello, hello, hello!!!

Eyes open? Ears open?

Amida is constantly calling, but

Rare is it to recognize the call.

I am too busy with my self-centered business of delusion.

Nevertheless, once I answer the call without self-calculation,

Gaining the true freedom of Enlightenment is assured. (by Kenjitsu)