

## Learning the Buddha's Great Compassion – The Amida Sutra (19) "Beyond Time"

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**"Shariputra, those who have already aspired, now aspire or in the future will aspire to be born in Amida Buddha's land, all dwell in the Stage of Non-retrogression for realizing the highest, perfect Enlightenment. They have already been born, are now being born, or will be born in that land. Hence, Shariputra, good men and women of faith should aspire to birth there."**

-Amida Sutra (translated by Hisao Inagaki)

I see many flowers in the parks in New York. Some flowers are now blooming, but others are not. All flowers do not bloom at the same time. Some flowers bloom in spring, and some flowers bloom in fall. If the season is not right, the flowers do not open. When the conditions are right, the flower matures to open up naturally. The maturity date may be different according to each flowers' potentiality and existing conditions. Meanwhile, plants need to be kept watered, and given appropriate light to subsist and flourish.

Learning the Dharma, in a way, is like taking care of plants. Sometimes, you do not see any results. You give water every day, and nothing comes up. But all of a sudden, you see a little green shoot coming out of the ground. Learning and practicing the teachings may be tiresome, but when the conditions are fulfilled, then transformation will take place. Each of us has a different capacity and conditions to work with, so one cannot know when the "maturity date" will come.

When a person experiences the transformation by the Buddha-Dharma, he/she experiences liberation from past, present and future. All the past experiences become necessary causes to encounter the Dharma. Even bad experiences that we had in the past become sources of appreciation. When the flowers open up, all our effort and endurance in taking care of the plants pay off. In the Shin Buddhist tradition, it is the Vow of Amida Buddha that makes us realize true freedom. In other words, the Nembutsu-Dharma makes it possible for us to embrace our past, present, and future.

Whatever future awaits us, we have a Dharma that will continue to support our lives. Knowing that the boundless compassion of Amida Buddha is always with our lives makes me feel much more settled and calm. It also brings us courage to face various challenges that we may encounter in life.

The above quotation from the Amida sutra reminds me of the different timings in attaining Shinjin, entrusting mind to the Amida's Vows, and of the Dharma which is always available in the past, present and future. There is no such thing as "too late," and there is no such thing as "too early." Any moment in "now" is the very time to explore the Buddha's teachings and explore ourselves with the Dharma. Whenever we need it, whatever the moment, the Dharma is right here to support us.

Breathing in and breathing out with Nembutsu  
 Every moment is precious, and complete.  
 Yet transforming experience is essential to realize the Dharma.  
 Otherwise, it is only the extension of our self-centered mind.  
 No deadline for attainment of Shinjin - mind being open to the Amida's Vow.  
 Dharma is available in the past, present and future, so  
 Take your time, but hurry!  
 Inconceivable Wisdom and Compassion of the Buddha  
 Makes us realize that Dharma is now.  
 Eyes open? Ears open? Mind open? (by Kenjitsu)