

Learning the Buddha's Great Compassion – Meditation Sutra (3)

“Seeking the Path”

by T. Kenjitsu Nakagaki, Sensei

(Sutra text continued from February.) *Vaidehi, thus confined, grew emaciated with grief and despair. Facing Vulture Peak, she worshipped the Buddha from afar and said, "O Tathagata, World-Honored One, you used to send Ananda to comfort me. Now I am in deep sorrow and distress. Since there is no way of my coming to look upon your august countenance, World-Honored One, I pray you send Venerable Mahamaudgalyayana and Venerable Ananda here to see me."*

When she had said these words, tears of sorrow streamed down her cheeks like rain. Then she bowed towards the Buddha in the distance. Even before she raised her head, the World-Honored One, who was then staying on Vulture Peak, knew Vaidehi's thoughts and immediately ordered Mahamaudgalyayana and Ananda to go to her through the air; he himself disappeared from the mountain and reappeared in the inner chamber of the royal palace.

After worshipping him, Vaidehi raised her head and saw Shakyamuni Buddha, the World-Honored One. He was the color of purple gold and was seated upon a lotus-flower of a hundred jewels. He was attended by Mahamaudgalyayana on his left and Ananda on his right. Shakra, Brahma, the guardian gods of the world and other devas were in the air about him. Scattering heavenly blossoms like rain, they paid homage to the Buddha.

When she saw the World-Honored One, Vaidehi tore off her ornaments and prostrated herself on the ground. Weeping bitterly, she said to the Buddha, "O World-Honored One, what bad karma did I commit in former lives that I have borne such an evil son? I wonder, World-Honored One, what karmic relations could have made you a relative of Devadatta?"

(“Kanmuryoju-kyo” translated by Hisao Inagaki)

Raising the mind to seek Enlightenment is important when we are to learn and practice the Buddha-Dharma not merely as intellectual knowledge but as a path that we entrust our lives to. For Queen Vaidehi, it was confinement by her son Prince Ajatasatru that led her to seek a path to overcome her suffering and pain. She used to hear the Buddha’s teachings with King Bimbisara; now she needed to see the Buddha because she was in the middle of tragedy at Rajagriha. Although the situation does not have to be this dramatic, people tend to come to learn the Buddha-Dharma when they experience their own limitations or feel things are out of their hands.

The willingness to hear the Buddha-Dharma needs to be developed, nurtured, and ripened within the mind. Maturity is necessary. Timing is very important. Shakyamuni Buddha, sensing that it was time to go to see Vaidehi, stopped preaching at Vulture Peak and appeared before her. His action shows the nature of Buddha’s “compassion,” which goes toward the one who suffers and faces difficulties. This compassion is a true foundation of Pure Land teaching.

At first, when Vaidehi saw Shakyamuni Buddha, she expressed her difficulties. Basically what she said was “Why has this happened to me? What did I do wrong?” She even complained of Shakyamuni’s relationship with Devadatta, who caused the tragedy. The Buddha listened to her without a word. I believe that Shakyamuni’s presence made her mind open up, because the Buddha gave her a safe space to share her personal situation and open herself to his wisdom and compassion. This way, Vaidehi began to seek the path of Enlightenment.

Suddenly, my life is shaken,

Everything seems falling apart.

Efforts don't help me to go anywhere.

Knock, knock, knock, ...shall I open the door of my mind? (by Kenjitsu)