

Learning the Buddha's Great Compassion – Meditation Sutra (4)
“Wishing to be born in Amida’s Pure Land ”
 by T. Kenjitsu Nakagaki, Sensei

"I beseech you, World-Honored One, to reveal to me a land of no sorrow and no affliction where I can be reborn. I do not wish to live in this defiled and evil world of Jambudvīpa where there are hells, realms of hungry spirits, animals and many vile beings. I wish that in the future I shall not hear evil words or see wicked people. World-Honored One, I now kneel down to repent and beg you to take pity on me. I entreat you, O Sun-like Buddha, to teach me how to visualize a land of pure karmic perfection."

Then the World-Honored One sent forth from between his eyebrows a flood of light, which was the color of gold and illuminated the innumerable worlds in the ten quarters. Returning to the Buddha, the light settled on his head and transformed itself into a golden platform resembling Mount Sumeru. On the platform appeared the pure and resplendent lands of all the Buddhas in the ten quarters. Some of these lands were made of seven jewels, some solely of lotus-flowers; some resembled the palace in the Heaven of Free Enjoyment of Manifestation by Others, while some were like a crystal mirror in which all the lands in the ten quarters were reflected. Innumerable Buddha-lands like these, glorious and beautiful, were displayed to her.

Vaidehi then said to the Buddha, "O World-Honored One, these Buddha-lands are pure and free of defilement, and all of them are resplendent. But I wish to be born in the Land of Utmost Bliss of Amitayus. I beseech you, World-Honored One, to teach [341c] me how to contemplate that land and attain samadhi." (‘Kanmuryōju-kyō’ translated by Hisao Inagaki)

In a chaotic situation, when the mind is churning up and down like rough water in the ocean, with various forces pushing, pulling and shaking us, it is hard to keep our balance. We need to calm down and see what is really going on. In Buddhist practice, we try to accept and face difficulties with patience, courage and serenity, see them as they are, and learn lessons of life from them. Then we may be able to make the right decision. As told in the Meditation Sutra, after the outrageous confusion of her life (see April Kokoro) the presence of the Buddha gave Queen Vaidehi's calmness and courage to accept the real situation. With her mind clear, Queen Vaidehi asked Shakyamuni Buddha to give her guidance to help her achieve true liberation from the suffering and pain of this world.

When the Buddha heard Vaidehi's sincere request, he showed her the various Buddha lands. Among them, Vaidehi chose the Pure land of Amida Buddha as the land she wished to go to. Why? She must have sensed that this was the teaching she could rely on and even risk her life for. Perhaps she thought she might find that the quality of the Amida's teaching made it the true vehicle for ordinary (lay) people like her to overcome desire, anger and self-centered ignorance.

Another way of looking at it is to suppose that Shakyamuni Buddha guided her to the Pure Land of Amida Buddha and let her choose that land for all sentient beings. To me, it seems that Vaidehi was asking questions of the Buddha on my behalf. Vaidehi's liberation, therefore, is also my liberation, as well as that of many others. Shinran Shonin said, "When the opportunity arose for explaining the pure act by which birth is settled, Sakyamuni led Vaidehi to select the land of peace." (Collected Works of Shinran page 3)

Now the question is, how can she attain the Pure Land of Amida Buddha?

Where is it that I can find true peace?

I don't know if such a place even exists.

Sakyamuni kindly opened the gate to the Land of Peace through Queen Vaidehi.

Here I see the gate to peace was opened to me, you, and everyone (by Kenjitsu)