

Learning the Buddha's Great Compassion – The Meditation Sutra (6)

“Far & Near ”

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Then the World-Honored One said to Vaidehi, "Do you know that Amitayus is not far away? Fix your thoughts upon and contemplate that Buddha-land, then you will accomplish the pure acts. I shall describe it to you in detail with various illustrations, so that all ordinary people in the future who wish to practice the pure karma may also be born in that Western Land of Utmost Bliss.

(“Kanmuryoju-kyo” translated by Hisao Inagaki)

Where is Amida Buddha?

The Meditation Sutra says, “Amitayus (Amida) is not far away.” Yet other Pure Land sutras say Amida “is now dwelling in a western Buddha-land called ‘Peace and Bliss’, a hundred thousand kotis of lands away from here’ (Larger Sukhavativyuha Sutra), and also “If you travel westward from here, passing a hundred thousand kotis of Buddha-lands, you come to the land called ‘Utmost Bliss,’ where there is a Buddha named Amida” (Smaller Sukhavativyuha Sutra). Both these sutras tell us that Amida Buddha is far from here.

How do you understand those differences? In your own experience, is Amida close to you or far from you? This is a traditional question but it is an important question if we are to understand the nature of Amida Buddha. Amida is near but far, and far but near! Far because Amida Buddha is beyond our understanding and beyond the grasp of our dualistic thinking. Near because Amida’s Compassion reaches out to all the living beings. As a person opens his or her mindful heart to Amida, Amida and that person become inseparable--become one.

In our everyday life, we sometimes feel far even from people we have met many times, and on the contrary, we may have someone we feel close to even if we have only met a few times. A Buddhist is one who has somehow experienced closeness or connectedness with the Shakyamuni Buddha. The Buddha lived 2500 long years ago in India, far from here in time and space, but following and practicing the paths that the Buddha showed us, we can feel close to him. The Buddha said, “Those who merely see my body do not truly see me. Those who practice the Dharma truly see me.”

Yasunari Kawabata, a well-known novelist in Japan, once wrote about the beauty of Japan, saying “I who see the moon become the moon, and the moon that is seen by me becomes me. I enter nature, and become one with the nature.” The moon in the sky is far, and yet it is very near when a person realizes that the moon light is reaching all that distance to him or her.

From me an ordinary being to Amida of ultimate enlightenment, it is a long distance,
Almost impossible to reach to Amida with my ability.
Realizing that Amida is coming to me, I feel differently - it is a short distance.

Namo-Amidabu --when I say the Name, the
Enlightenment-world of the Buddha is realized within me
Although I may not be able to grasp it with my self-centered mind,
Rain of the Dharma falls on me. (by Kenjitsu)