

Learning the Buddha's Great Compassion – The Meditation Sutra (16)**“Amida Tathagata”****-Amida's Standing in the Air, Levitating above the Ground-**

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... The Buddha said to Ananda and Vaidehi, "Listen carefully, listen carefully and ponder deeply. I will expound for you the method of removing suffering. Bear my words in mind and explain them to the multitude of beings."

When these words were spoken, Amitayus [Amida] appeared [standing] in the air above, attended on his left and right by the two Mahasattvas, Avalokiteshvara and Mahasthamaprapta. So brilliant was their radiance that it was impossible to see them in detail. They could not be compared even with a hundred thousand nuggets of gold from the Jambu River.

After she had this vision of Amitayus, Vaidehi knelt down in worship at Shakyamuni's feet and said to him, "World-Honored One, through your power I have been able to see Amitayus and the two Bodhisattvas, but how can sentient beings of the future see them?" ...

(“Kanmuryoju-kyo’ translated by Hisao Inagaki)

This is the dramatic peak of the Meditation Sutra on the Pure Land. As Shakyamuni Buddha continued his discourse of the seventh meditation on the Lotus-Seat, following the sixth meditation of the visualization of jeweled pavilions in the Buddha land, he paused and said to Queen Vaidehi and Ananda, “listen carefully, listen carefully, and ponder deeply!” The Buddha was now about to speak about the key teaching that would enable Vaidehi to be released from suffering and pain. Then, all of the sudden, Amida Buddha appeared standing in the air, levitating above the ground together with Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara (Kannon) and Bodhisattva Mahasthamaprapta (Seishi). Amida’s presence, though no words were said, opened the mindful heart of Vaidehi to take refuge in the Amida-Dharma. She must have been overwhelmed by Amida’s appearance in brilliant light, saying to herself, “Wow!”

This appearance of Amida standing in the air before Queen Vaidehi is considered the source of the standing figure of Amida Buddha in the Butsudan (the Buddhist home altar) or in Buddhist temples. Often, we imagine a Buddha sitting in a position that expresses wisdom, but Amida Buddha is standing. Amida is coming from the world of enlightenment (Tathagata) to HERE where we experience suffering and pain, in order to liberate all beings, instead of calling from a distance while comfortably seated. The standing Buddha represents the great compassion of one who knows people’s needs with Amida’s deep wisdom. Statues of the standing Amida often show him leaning forward, to emphasize the coming aspect.

The standing Amida, therefore, expresses the Buddha’s force of benefiting others, or simply Other Power. Amida, in this sense, is always Tathagata, one coming (agata) out of the suchness (tatha), to embrace all beings. In fact, Shinran Shonin often speaks of Amida Tathagata, instead of Amida Buddha:

“...There are two kinds of dharma-body with regard to the Buddha. The first is called dharma-body as suchness and the second, dharma-body as compassionate means. Dharma-body as suchness has neither color nor form; thus, the mind cannot grasp it nor words describe it. From this oneness was manifested form, called dharma-body as compassionate means. Taking this form, the Buddha announced the name Bhiksu Dharmakara and established the Forty-eight great Vows that surpass conceptual understanding. Among these Vows are the Primal Vow of immeasurable light and the universal Vow of immeasurable life, and to the form manifesting these two Vows Bodhisattva Vasubandhu gave the title, ‘**Tathagata** of unhindered light filling the ten quarters.’ This **Tathagata** has fulfilled the Vows, which are the cause of that Buddhahood, and thus is called ‘**Tathagata** of the fulfilled body.’ This is none other than **Amida Tathagata**...” (Notes on the ‘Essentials of Faith Alone’)

Tasting the compassion of Amida’s Vow

That comes out of the world of suchness

Garbage-like life can be transformed, and one can

Take refuge in the tathagata of unhindered light filling the ten quarters. (by Kenjitsu)