

## Learning the Buddha's Great Compassion—the Meditation Sutra (23) “Avalokitesvara -Bodhisattva of Compassion”

By Rev. T. Kenjitsu Nakagaki

*The Buddha said to Ananda and Vaidehi, “After you have seen Amitayus (Amida) clearly and distinctly, next visualize the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara. His height is eighty kotis of nayutas of yojanas multiplied by the number of the sands of the Ganges. His body is the color of purple-gold, and on the top of his head is a mound surrounded by an aureole with a radius of a hundred thousand yojanas, in which there are five hundred transformed Buddhas. Each transformed Buddha resembles Sakyamuni, and is attended by five hundred transformed bodhisattvas and innumerable devas. In the light emanating from his entire body are seen the sentient beings of the five realms of Samsara in all their distinct physical forms. On his head he wears a heavenly crown made of Shakra-abhilagna-mani-gems, on which stands a transformed Buddha (Amida) measuring twenty-five yojanas in height.*

*“The face of the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara is the color of gold from the Jambu River, while the tuft of hair between his eyebrows has the colors of the seven jewels, and from it issue forth eighty-four thousand different rays of light. In each of these rays dwell innumerable and uncountable hundreds of thousands of transformed Buddhas, each attended by countless transformed bodhisattvas, all of whom manifest in various forms at will, filling completely the worlds of the ten quarters. Avalokitesvara's arms are the color of red lotus-flowers. They emit eighty kotis of exquisite rays of light in the shape of ornaments, in which are reflected all the glorious objects of that land. The palms of his hands are the color of five hundred kotis of various lotus-flowers. Each of his ten fingertips bears eighty-four thousand signs like impressed patterns, each with eighty-four thousand colors. Each color in turn emits eighty-four thousand delicate rays of light, illuminating all beings. With his jeweled hands he welcomes and guides sentient beings.*

*“When he lifts one of his feet, the mark of a thousand-spoked wheel on its sole spontaneously changes into a pedestal, which emits five hundred kotis of light rays. When he puts his foot down, flowers made of diamond and mani-gems are scattered everywhere. All the other physical characteristics and marks which he fully possesses are the same as the Buddha's, except for the mound on his head and the uppermost, invisible part, which are not equal to those of the World-Honored One. This is the visualization of the true physical features of the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara and is known as the tenth contemplation.*

*Then the Buddha said to Ananda, “Those who wish to see the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara should follow the method of contemplation just mentioned. Those who practice this contemplation will not encounter any misfortune, but will be freed from karmic hindrances and rid of the evil karma that they have committed during innumerable kalpas of Samsara. If you only hear the name of this bodhisattva, you will obtain immeasurable merit. And so, how much more merit will you acquire if you clearly visualize him! Those who wish to see the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara should first envision the mound on his head and, next, his heavenly crown. Then they should visualize the other physical characteristics in order, as clearly as if they were looking at something in the palm of the hand. To practice in this way is called the correct contemplation, and to practice otherwise is incorrect.” (Translation by Hisao Inagaki)*

After visualizing the Amida Buddha, the Buddha Shakyamuni instructs us to visualize two Bodhisattvas—Avalokitesvara and Mahasthamaprapta. The above is the meditation on Avalokitesvara, or Kannon in Japanese, who is a well-known Bodhisattva representing Amida's Boundless Compassion.

For Shinran Shonin (1173-1262), the founder of Jodoshinshu Buddhism, Avalokitesvara is not an abstract figure, but an actual person, Prince Shotoku, who planted the seed of Buddhism in Japan in the seventh century. When Master Shinran was struggling to find a path in his life even after 20 years of serious practice and learning on Mt. Hiei, the center of Buddhism in Japan at that time, he had a dream about Prince Shotoku in which he led Shinran to master Honen. It is Master Honen who changed Shinran, and made him a Nembutsu practitioner of Amida's Benefiting-Others Power. Therefore, it is through a work of Compassion by Prince Shotoku, the incarnated Avalokitesvara, that Shinran entered the ocean of the Amida-Dharma. In fact, Shinran Shonin wrote over one hundred poems on Prince Shotoku.

Eshin-ni, Shinran's wife, wrote in a letter that she considered Shinran Shonin to be the incarnation of the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara. Among Tibetan Buddhists, His Holiness the Dalai Lama is considered the incarnated Avalokitesvara. It is the nature of a Bodhisattva to take various forms.

Have you met Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara in your life?

**K**indness and compassion out of the Deep Wisdom of Enlightenment

Appears various in forms around me.

Namoamdabu, Namu-Amida-Buddha.

Networks of the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara

**O**pen my heart to the vast ocean of the

Nembutsu-Dharma with joy and gratitude. (By Kenjitsu) 