

Learning the Buddha's Great Compassion—the Meditation Sutra (43)
The Center of Mediation Sutra
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....The Buddha further said to Ananda, "Bear these words well in mind. To bear these words in mind means to hold fast to the Name of the Buddha Amitayus [Amida]." When the Buddha had spoken thus, the Venerable Mahamaudgalyayana, Venerable Ananda, Vaidehi and all the others greatly rejoiced to hear the Buddha's discourse.(translation by Hisao Inagaki [annotation by TK Nakagaki])

Here, Shakyamuni Buddha answered the Venerable Ananda's second question "how should we receive and retain the essentials of its teaching?" This is the question of the most important part of the discourse. Though the Buddha has been talking about meditative practices and non-meditative good acts, the Buddha concluded by advising listeners, "to hold fast to the name of Amida Buddha," the practice that appeared in the section of the Lowest Birth of the Lowest Grade. It must be surprising for Venerable Ananda and others to hear the Buddha's conclusion. I also explained it in the June issue (#39) related to the explicit understanding and implicit understanding.

According to the Buddha, saying the Nembutsu -"Namo-amidabu"- is the essential and central focus in the Meditation Sutra on the Pure Land. Why? Because the Nembutsu is the practice which was selected by Amida Buddha with the Wisdom and Compassion of Enlightenment, not selected by the deluded human beings with greed, anger and self-centeredness. Our founder Shinran Shonin describes saying the Nembutsu as the "Great" Practice, which means that this practice belongs to the Buddha, and is not just a regular practice. He says, "The Great Practice is to say the Name of Tathagata of unhindered light."

Meditative practices and non-meditative good acts are the skillful means of the Buddha to guide people to the Nembutsu practice. In a way, all the teachings of the Buddha are skillful means to have us encounter the Nembutsu, and encourage us to say the Nembutsu.

If the Nembutsu is the center of our practice, we should live our life in ways that help us practice the Nembutsu. In Honen's words, "Blind passions occur always, yet if you treat them as visitors, and make the Nembutsu as the leader or master, they will not stop you attaining the birth-enlightenment. You should avoid making blind passion your leader, and making the Nembutsu a visitor, which are considered the false and poisonous acts."

Let the Nembutsu be at the center of your mind whenever and wherever you are, and whatever you do! Simply, be mindful of making the Nembutsu first, and all the other matters next.

Come and sit!

Experience various forms of practices.

Nothing surpasses the Nembutsu practice selected by the Buddha.

Try it and see!

Explore the various teachings of the Buddha

Rare is it indeed to encounter the Amida's power of benefiting others. (by Kenjitsu) 