

Learning the Buddha's Great Compassion—the Forty-Eight Vows (3)

“No More Returning”

A Vow Not to Return to the Three Evil Realms

by Rev. T. Kenjitsu Nakagaki

This is my second vow, to be fulfilled when I become a Buddha; The beings in my Buddha Land will never return to the realms of suffering even after death. [freely translated by Rev. T. Kenjitsu Nakagaki]

If, when I attain Buddhahood, humans and devas in my land should after death fall again into the three evil realms, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment. [translated by Dr. Hisao Inagaki]

From the 2nd Vow to the 11th Vow, the Dharmakara Bodhisattva focuses on characteristics of all beings in the Buddha-Land. How is life in the Buddha-land different from life here in the world of transmigration? What does it mean to be born in the Buddha-land?

In our life, if we gain something once, it may not last forever. We always face the possibility of losing and falling down. Once we may have been a big star, but now nobody knows us. Once we were young and pretty, but now we have become aged and unattractive. Once we were active in the community, but now we are retired and nobody knows what we are doing. Once we had a nice job, but now we have no job.

Though we may have enjoyed life yesterday, today it may not be the same. Whatever the status we have, we never know what will happen next. It is the same for attainment of enlightenment. In the Fifty-two stages of the Bodhisattva path, practitioners have the possibility of falling down until they reach the “first ground,” which is the 41st stage, called “ground of joy.” Once one reaches this stage, without fail he/she will reach enlightenment. So Buddhist practitioners make great efforts to reach the first ground of non-retrogression.

The 2nd Vow tells us that once you attain Buddhahood, you don't return to the world of suffering and pain, filled with greed, anger and self-centeredness. The three evil realms are hell (associated with anger), hungry ghost (associated with greed), and domestic animals (associated with ignorance). This statement is really important for people who worry and fear returning to the world of suffering and pain created by the three evils.

In other words, the second Vow is saying to those who follow the Primal Vow, “You are OK now, even after death, and forever.” Then you have nothing to worry about. Encountering Amida's Primal Vow means gaining true security, stability and fearlessness in life.

This vow also tells us that human life is subject to change and impermanence. One needs to realize impermanence and cycle of suffering and then learn the Buddha-Dharma to be truly free from this cycle and attain the stage of non-retrogression. Instead of temporary happiness, we need to seek enlightenment, which brings true happiness and peace based upon universal truth and reality.

Never falling back to the evil realms!

Our world is impermanent and changing, like

Roller coasters, up and down, circling without escape.

Entering the ocean of the Dharma! The

Truth-oriented world is transformative and peaceful, like

Unlimited open sky embracing the world

Raining, snowing, even thundering, yet

Notice that beyond the upper the clouds, the blue sky spreads. (by Kenjitsu) ☸