

## Learning the Buddha's Great Compassion—The Forty-Eight Vows (4)

### “Skin Color”

#### A Vow to Overcome Discrimination

by Rev. T. Kenjitsu Nakagaki

This is my third vow, to be fulfilled when I become a Buddha; All beings in my Buddha Land will gain virtuous golden form, free from discrimination by their skin color. *[freely translated by Rev. T. Kenjitsu Nakagaki]*

If, when I attain Buddhahood, humans and devas in my land should not all be the color of pure gold, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment. *[translated by Dr. Hisao Inagaki]*

The third vow of Dharmakara Bodhisattva (causal stage of Amida Buddha) is appealing in the United States, where many immigrants of various races live. When I came to the United States for the first time, it was so interesting to see people who have different skin, eye, and hair color. Needless to say, when I lived in Japan, the people whom I saw were 99% Japanese.

After I came to the United States, I learned the history of discrimination in this country. I took a course in the history of Americans when I was in Seattle. It was eye-opening for me to see the history of the United States from a minority perspective. Columbus may be praised for finding the American continent from the European viewpoint; however, Columbus invaded, killed many Native Americans, took away their land and oppressed them. Black people were brought here as slaves and were not regarded as human beings; for a long time, they did not have the right to vote and could not even attend some public schools. Japanese and Japanese Americans were sent to concentration camps during the World War II, though Italians and Germans were not. Many different immigrant groups have been oppressed and discriminated against in the history of the US.

Even now, there is some bias toward certain races and ethnicities. For example, police brutality towards African Americans is often reported in the news. So as I learn more and more about the US, I feel that this third vow of Dharmakara Bodhisattva becomes meaningful for those of varied ethnicity who are living in this society.

Now please ask to yourself, do you see differences of skin color, such as black, white, yellow brown, red? Do certain colors bring you discomfort or comfort? If you have a child, do you want them to marry someone of the same ethnicity, within a certain group, but not others, or do you not care at all?

We tend to judge people from the outside, and to label them with pre-conceptions. For me this vow is saying that all people have their precious life and great potentiality to become enlightened (gain Buddha-nature), shining with golden color. From the human viewpoint, we may only see the differences in skin color; however from the viewpoint of enlightenment, all life shines equally with precious golden color.

Because of this vow, Amida Buddha's statue is gold in our shrine, representing that the world of Enlightenment has no discrimination by skin color.

Stop judging by the outside!  
 Know that we all have Buddha-nature.  
 -Immeasurable potentiality within limited body  
 Not easy to see this, though...

Carefully look deep inside!  
 Open your heart and make your mind clear,  
 Learn to see things with the Buddha's eye.  
 Overcoming the differences,  
 Real golden Buddhas appear in all beings.

(by Kenjitsu) ●