

## Learning the Buddha's Great Compassion—The Forty-Eight Vows (5)

### Beyond Appearances

#### A Vow to Overcome Another Social Discrimination

by Rev. T. Kenjitsu Nakagaki

This is my fourth vow, to be fulfilled when I become a Buddha: all beings in my Buddha Land will shine brightly regardless of their appearance. [freely translated by Rev. T. Kenjitsu Nakagaki]

(If, when I attain Buddhahood, humans and devas in my land should not all be of one appearance, and should there be any difference in beauty, may I not attain perfect Enlightenment. [translated by Dr. Hisao Inagaki] )

The fourth vow of Amida Buddha deals with another discrimination of physical appearance, that is, physically handicap people. This follows the third vow, which deals with discrimination on the basis of skin color. These two vows reflect how much we are influenced by appearance. These vows deal with the social problem of discrimination based on race and handicapped. In other words, physical appearance has been creating discrimination in the human society.

How many of you have ever felt “I wish I would be taller, prettier, more good-looking,” etcetera? It is easy to see appearance. We tend to compare ourselves to other people. Why do we see ourselves in the mirror? Why do we care how we dress or how we look? Consciously or unconsciously, we care how we look. Appearance is important for our lives.

In many countries, handicapped people are treated with bias because of their appearance. They look different from so called “normal” people. The people who were born or become disabled have tremendous suffering and pain in their lives.

At the beginning of May, this year, many survivors from Hiroshima/Nagasaki came to New York for the NPT Conference at the United Nations. They tried to reach out people in community, and visited various schools and institutions to share their experiences so that such tragedies should not happen to anyone. In their talks, many survivors suffered because of their appearance, because of severe burns or loss of some parts of their body from the atomic bombs. Some had been afraid of seeing people, and being seen by the people, especially when they were young.

Instead of seeing the surface or appearance, the important teaching of the Buddha is to see and realize the preciousness of each life and all the lives. Once one really sees what is within, the difference of appearance will disappear, and one will treat all life equally without prejudice and discrimination.

We should also know the source of discrimination is in our mind that perceives the differences on surface, and label them according to our own categories without recognizing the sacredness of lives. May the fourth Vow of Amida Buddha make us aware of discrimination based on different appearance and bring the eye of equality of all lives to go beyond appearances.

Amida-consciousness is telling me  
Problems of our lives are rooted on our own mind.  
Planting the seeds of bias and discrimination,  
Each of us may feel superior and/or inferior

Amida-consciousness is telling me  
Real value of our lives is grounded on the Buddha's mind.  
Awakening to the seeds of enlightenment.  
No one sees the difference of looks – good and/or bad.  
Come to hear the Vow!  
Every being is truly equal and respected!  
(by Kenjitsu)