

# Another Look at the *Kanmuryojukyo* (“The Meditation on the Buddha of Infinite Life Sutra”)

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The *Kanmuryojukyo* (“The Meditation on the Buddha of Infinite Life Sutra”) is among the three principle canons of Pure Land Buddhism (Jpn. *Jodo Shu* and *Jodo Shinshu*) along with *Amitayus Sutra* and the *Amitabha Sutra*. Although the original Sanskrit text was never found, it was translated into Chinese by a monk named Kalayasa in the 5th century and became an influential text in Mahayana Buddhism in East Asia with the help of commentaries written by notable Chinese scholars, such as Shandao in the 7th century. The sutra contains the story of Queen Vaidehi who is imprisoned by her murderous son Ajatasattu and visited by Shakyamuni Buddha in response to her prayer to be born in Amitabha’s pure land. Though in prison, the Buddha tells her how to be liberated and reborn in the pure land by meditating sixteen visualizations.

*Keywords:* Contemplation Sutra, Amitayus, Pure Land Buddhism, Sukhavati, Dharmakara

## Introduction

The *Kanmuryojukyo* sutra tells of Shakyamuni Buddha’s appearance to the imprisoned Queen Vaidehi, who requested rebirth in a Pure Land without suffering. The Buddha instructs her in thirteen preliminary and three additional forms of meditation, with the promise that even the worst sinner can attain birth in Amida Buddha’s Pure Land if he recites his name even ten times with *shinjin* (“sincere mind entrusting”; cf. ‘faith’; Primal (18th) Vow of Bodhisattva Dharmakara). This sole reliance on Amida as “savior” differs from the visualization of Amida as an aid to meditation, such as is described in the *Hanjusammaikkyo* and advocated by the Tendai sect. The *Kanmuryojukyo* accordingly was selected by Honen as one of the Three Pure Land (*Jodoshu* and *Jodo Shinshu*) sutras and has inspired several important commentaries, among them the *Jodoron* (T. 1524) of Vasubandhu (Seshin, ca. 350).

The setting for the *Kanmuryojukyo*, as also for the *Lotus Sutra*, is Eagle Mountain (*Gridhrakuta*; cf. ‘Vulture Peak’) in *Rajagriha* (cf. ‘King’s Castle’) where Shakyamuni Buddha is addressing a large assembly. He describes how the Amitabha Buddha (Jpn. Amida or ‘Buddha of Infinite Life’) many aeons ago, as the Bodhisattva Dharmakara, made forty-eight Original Vows (Jpn. *hongan*) which he would fulfill before attaining enlightenment. For Pure Land devotees the most important are vows 18-20, which promise birth (Jpn. *ojo*) in

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Amida’s Pure Land, his Western Paradise, to those who have “faith” (Jpn. *shinjin*) in Amida and call upon Amida’s name (*nembutsu*).

The *Kanmuryojukyo* is considered one of the three major canons in Pure Land Buddhism; the other two major canons are *Muryojukyo* and *Amidakyo*. As the chief text, the *Muryojukyo* or “The Teaching of Infinite Life”, which is attributed to the monk Sanghavarman, is also available in the Chinese translation. Attributed to the famous Kumarajiva, the *Amidakyo*, which is also available in Chinese, stresses the practice of recitation of the name of Amida Buddha of Pure Land Buddhism. Finally, the *Kanmuryojukyo* is centered on the forty-eight Vows made by Amida Buddha, which is the basis for the doctrinal development of Pure Land Buddhism. Although it is widely known that this sutra was translated into Chinese by the Indian monk Kalayasa—Kyoryoyasha is his Japanese name and he is also known as Chingliangyeh Sh áá of the Liusung (Ryuso) Dynasty, there have been some speculations that it was actually written by either a Central Asian or Chinese and that it did not originate in India; apparently, there existed another translation that was lost in 730. In any case, this sutra is widely recognized as an authoritative text particularly because it introduces the concept of Sixteen Visualizations which assist the aspirants to attain birth in the Western Land of Extreme Bliss.

### **Background of Pure Land Buddhism**

Although Pure Land Buddhism gained much followers in Japan, its roots are actually traced back to China. The Chinese monk, Huiuan, in 402 with 123 members founded the Pure Land sect, otherwise known as the “Lotus Society” at the time. However, Pure Land teachings can be traced back to India through Nagarjuna who is generally regarded as the father of all major schools of Mahayana Buddhism; it is believed that Nagarjuna received the teaching directly from the Buddha. Vashubandhu, the second patriarch, wrote a treatise on the *Muryojukyo* in his *Jodoron*, which is used as a basis of the formulation of Pure Land thought, and ultimately the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha.

Composed of the laity and monks, Huiuan’s Lotus Society did not gain too many followers and it remained as a small “spinoff” sect of Buddhism and never developed strongly enough to survive through the volatile and unsteady times of persecutions, competing native religious traditions, and other popular sects of Buddhism in China at that time. The Pure Land teachings were preserved by T’anluan (476-542), Taoch’o (562-645), and Shantao (613-681) who wrote commentaries on the major texts and taught Pure Land doctrine in China. In Japan, Shantao’s writings of the Pure Land Buddhism became a great influence. Genshin (942-1017), the abbot of Eshinin on Mount Hiei, is considered the first Japanese Pure Land Patriarch who introduced Shantao’s teachings in Japan. Upon reading Shantao’s *Sanzengi*, Honen discovered the Pure Land teaching and eventually founded the independent school of Pure Land Buddhism in 1175. Honen, who was considered to be the seventh and last patriarch of the Pure Land tradition, played a major role in the development of the Pure Land school in Japan through his assertion that the recitation of the name was the practice established by Amida’s Vow that was given to ordinary beings to enable them to be saved during the degenerate age of the Dharma or Mappo. Finally, the Pure Land teachings reached its zenith through Honen’s disciple Shinran who further popularized Pure Land teachings, especially to the laity and common folks, through his formulation of attaining birth in the Western Land of Extreme Bliss through *shinjin* or faith in the power of the Amida Buddha’s Vow.

### **Background of *Kanmuryojukyo***

The importance of the *Kanmuryojukyo* is that it records the teaching of the Sakyamuni Buddha himself who shows the aspirants the way to attain birth in the Western Land of Extreme Bliss through the Sixteen Visualizations. Before the practice of attaining birth in the pure land was gradually simplified in the concept of nembutsu and shinjin by later patriarchs, in this text, the practice of attaining birth in the pure land involved a more detailed and systematic method of meditation. Although it may have been difficult for practitioners to follow these stepbystep instructions of visualizations that were given to Queen Vaidehi by the incarnate Sakyamuni Buddha, if a practitioner did follow these steps of meditation, it is said that even the worst of all sinners who has committed the five sins (killing one’s father, mother, or an arhat, injuring the body of the Buddha, or causing disunity in the community of monks) or the ten sins (killing, stealing, committing adultery, lying, using immoral language, slandering, equivocating, coveting, becoming angry, holding false views), could attain birth in the Western Land of Extreme Bliss if he earnestly recites the Amida’s name ten times on his deathbed. Instead of being condemned to eighty million kalpas in hell, the sinner will be born in the Western Land of Extreme Bliss in a closed lotus flower and released after six kalpas of purification of his evil karma. The nine gradations of birth in the Western Land of Extreme Bliss was a very effective way to reward those who have accumulated good merit while guaranteeing the promise of salvation to all practitioners. The *Kanmuryojukyo*, told in a narrative style by Ananda, one of Buddha’s disciples, tells the story of Crown Prince Ajatasatru of Magadha, incited by the wicked monk Devadatta. His Japanese name is Chobadatta and he is Buddha’s cousin who attempted to kill him and take over the leadership of the Buddhist order. Apparently, he is the only one who made the Buddha bleed, who imprisons his father, King Bimbisara in the castle in attempt to starve him to death while he usurped the throne. His mother, Queen Vaidehi tries to secretly smuggle some food to her husband by rubbing her body with honey and dried rice powder and concealing grape nectar in her hairpiece. Meanwhile, watching from Vulture’s Peack, Sakyamuni Buddha comforts the imprisoned king by sending his disciples Maudgalyayana and Purna to preach the dharma to the king. When Ajatasatru visits the prison and inquires whether or not his father has died, he becomes furious and almost kills his mother when he discovers from the guards that she had been smuggling food to the king. When he retainers warn him not to commit the shameful crime of killing one’s mother, he imprisons his mother as well. Then, along with Maudgalyayana, Sakyamuni sends his disciple Ananda to preach the dharma to comfort the Queen. Through the explication of the dharma, Queen Vaidehi’s prison is miraculously transformed into the Western Land of Extreme Bliss and she worships Sakyamuni Buddha. Then Queen Vaidehi asks Sakyamuni Buddha how one could attain birth in the Western Land of Extreme Bliss to which Sakyamuni responds by explicating the Sixteen Visualizations.

For this article, I will limit my translations on the Sixteen Visualizations for this is the main focus of the text. In regards to my method of translation, I have relied mostly on my limited background in Classical and Modern Japanese with the extensive use of contemporary Japanese English Character Dictionaries such as the one compiled by Nelson, Spahn and Hadamitzky, and the use of Inouye’s Comprehensive Japanese English Dictionary. An especially useful reference book was Hisao Inagaki’s *A Dictionary of Japanese Buddhist Terms*. When I could not find the information that I wanted in the English versions, I turned to Japanese dictionaries such as Mizuno’s *Butten Kaidai Jiten* and Ono’s *Bussho Kaisetsu Daijiten*, but I usually found them to be too difficult

to understand with my limited Japanese. In trying to grasp certain phrases or ideas of Buddhism, I relied on my own training from books and lectures on Buddhism.

### **First Thirteen Visualizations**

Here, I am summarizing each of the first thirteen visualizations by extracting key phrases from the text and adding my own paraphrasing to capture the main essence of the visualizations:

#### **First Visualization: Sun Visualization**

“Look at the sunset... meditate and think, sitting properly facing westward, clearly see the sun. With full intention, firmly concentrate on thinking singlemindedly, see the sun which is about to set, look at the form which will become like a hanging drum. Having seen the sun, whether you shut or open your eyes, visualize the image manifesting itself vividly.”

#### **Second Visualization: Water Visualization**

“Look at the water becoming clear and pure... look at the ice that is made solid and frozen and do the visualization of the blue jewel or lapis surface with golden ropes which are adorned with various seven treasures, each one reflecting many bright beams resembling flowers that are adorned with millions of towers and countless musical instruments which are played by the eight pristine winds coming out from the luster.”

#### **Third Visualization: Land Visualization**

“Manifest clearly the image of the beautiful lapis land, which supports the seven jeweled towers... if there is a being who is capable of seeing that land, he will eradicate the sins of eighty million kalpas of rebirth and unfailingly attain birth in the pure realms.”

#### **Fourth Visualization: Jeweled Tree Visualization**

“Meditate on the seven layers line of the jeweled tree. Each one of the petals has a different color emitting bright beams of various colors. Above the tree lies a net of pearls with fifty million beautiful palaces, each having heavenly young children residing within them. In between each leaf forms various fruits, making the color of gold, like a rope of fire going around with its illumination that forms a jeweled canopy which projects Buddha’s activities in ten directions.”

#### **Fifth Visualization: Pond Visualization**

“Meditate on the surface of the land of extreme bliss where there is a pond made of seven jewels that becomes fourteen streams, each one of the streams is the color of seven treasures with various colors of diamonds which make up the sand at the bottom.... With six billion lotus flowers, each made of seven jewels flowing as the stream echoes the subtle sound of the Dharma.”

#### **Sixth Visualization: Jeweled Tower Visualization**

“Above the fruit of each one of the surface of the land of various jewels, there are fifty billion tall jeweled towers with countless heavenly beings playing music that explicates the meditation of the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha”.

#### **Seventh Visualization: Jeweled Lotus Seat Visualization**

“Place the seven jewels above the ground and meditate on each one of the lotus flower having the color of hundred jewels with 84,000 veins that project the images of heaven... millions of precious gems emitting thousands of beams like a canopy with redness covering the top of the land... there is a lotus flower tower with four jeweled pillars with cylinders with each one is like millions of Mount Sumeru and adorned with millions of beautiful pearls on the top.”

### **Eighth Visualization: AmidaKanzeonDaiseishi Visualization**

“See the Honored One sitting on top of the lotus through the mind’s eye, lining up the majestic jewels of the land, pond, and trees of seven jewels, with various heavenly beings laying down on top of the jeweled curtain and a jewel net covering the sky... put another lotus seat on the left side of the Buddha and meditate on the feature of bodhisattva Kanzeon. Otherwise known as Avalokitesvara or Kannon who represents compassion. Literally means ‘One who observes the sound of the world’. and another on the right side and meditate on the bodhisattva Daiseishi. Otherwise known as Mahasthamaprapta who represents wisdom.”

### **Ninth Visualization: Amida’s Body Visualization**

“Meditate on the illumined body of the Buddha of Infinite Bliss which is like the color of nembuddagon of the millions of god Yama. The Buddha’s height is six billion nayuta yojonas. The white taft between the eyes circles around the right and illuminating and is like five Mount Sumerus. The Buddha’s eye is like the four big waters of the ocean and is blue, white, and clear... From the halo comes the manifestation of Buddhas with countless bodhisattvas serving... From each one of the features, there are 84,000 auspicious marks which are each endowed with secondary 84,000 auspicious signs...”

### **Tenth Visualization: Kanzeon Visualization**

“The height of the body is eight billion nayuta yojonas... the body is purplish gold in color and there is a mound of hair on the head with a perfect halo behind the neck having hundreds of manifestations of the Buddha, bodhisattvas, and countless heavenly beings as worshipers... On the edge of the ten fingers, there are 84,000 drawings that resemble the auspicious marks emitting bright beams... When the feet are raised, there is a feature of a thousandspoked wheel emitting bright beams... When the feet are lowered, flowers of diamondpreciousgems scatter everywhere...”

### **Eleventh Visualization: Daiseishi Visualization**

“The size of the body is like that of Kanzeon... When you see the light of one pore of the skin of this bodhisattva, you will immediately see the bright beams of the pure and beautiful of the various countless buddhas of ten directions... On the heavenly crown of this bodhisattva, there are 500 jeweled lotuses... the mound of hair on top of his head is like a red lotus emitting bright beams of Buddha’s activities everywhere...”

### **Twelfth Visualization: Meditation of Being Born in a Lotus Visualization**

“You will be born on the western land of extreme bliss inside the lotus, sitting in a lotus posture in the middle of the lotus... Meditate on the closing and opening of the lotus. When the lotus opens, there are 500 colors of lights coming close... Meditate on the lightening up of the body, the opening of the eyes...”

### **Thirteenth Visualization: Meditation of Great and Small Body Visualization**

“Just visualize the surface of the pond of the image of Amida Buddha who is six feet tall... The Amitayus has a boundless physical presence and cannot be reached by the mental power of meditation by ordinary people... The supernatural power of the Amida Buddha, appearing differently is done freely, some appear as a great body that fills up the empty space and others appear as a small body which is six feet eight inches tall...”

### **My Translations of the Nine Gradations of Birth in the Last Three Visualizations**

...Then the Buddha said to Ananda and Vaidehi, “As for the practitioner of ‘the highest birth of the highest class’, if there are sentient beings who would want to be born in that land, he has to develop the three kinds of thoughts, and immediately, he will attain birth in the pure land.” What are the three thoughts? First, sincere heart, second, the deep believing thought, third, aspiring to be born in Amida’s Pure Land by turning one’s merit of

practice toward it. The practitioner who is endowed with the three thoughts will surely be born in this land. Also, there are three kinds of sentient beings who will attain birth in the pure land. What are the three kinds? First, being merciful and not killing, being endowed with discipline of the practitioner. Second, read and recite the Mahayanan Sutas. Third, practice the six rememberances. Sk. Anusmrti refers to the six things to keep in mind: The Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha, morality (sila), generosity (tyaga), and deities (devata).

By aspiring to be born in Amida’s Pure Land, wanting to be born in this land. By being endowed with this merit, when you spend one to seven days, he will attain birth in the pure land immediately. When you are born in that land, because of the diligence and heroic effort, the countless manifestations of the Buddha, Amida Tathagata, Kanzeon and Daiseishi, Sravaka practitioners, countless heavenly beings, and the palace of seven jewels will come before the practitioner. The bodhisattva Kanzeon with the bodhisattva Daiseishi will offer the diamond plateau, thereupon the Amida Buddha, emitting big bright beams, lighting up the body of the practitioner, with various bodhisattvas extending their hands will welcome him. With the bodhisattvas Kanzeon and Daiseishi, praising the practitioner, giving encouragement to that thought, rejoicing and dancing after seeing the practitioner, when looking at the that body himself, riding the diamond plateau and following after the Buddha. Just like the duration of 20 twinklings of an eye, ‘tanji’ or snapping fingers at a Buddhist service. It is a unit of time; 20 thoughtmoments are equal to one twinkling of an eye; 20 twinklings of an eye are equal to one tanji. he will be born in this land. After he is born in this land, having seen the complete physical body of the Buddha, he will be made able to see the complete appearance of various bodhisattvas. Explicating the beautiful dharma of jeweled bright beams, after listening, he will realize the ‘endurance (i.e. clear cognition) regarding the unproduced nature of all existence’. Sk. anutpatikadharmaksanti A higher spiritual state in which one recognizes the immutable reality of all existences. At an instant moment, serving one Buddha after another, permeating the world of ten directions, placed in front of various Buddhas, one by one receiving premonition of attaining birth in the pure land, returning and coming to the original land of Amida, he will attain the countless Dharinis. mystical phrase, a spell. This is called the practitioner of the highest birth of the highest class.

As for the practitioner of the highest birth of the highest class, he must not necessarily receive the Hodo Sutra, This refers to the Fiveperiod teaching of the Buddha according to the Tendai classification system: (1) the first three weeks after the Buddha’s enlightenment in he expounded the esoteric teachings, known as the Kego period; (2) the next 12 years in which he preached Hinayana sutras, known as the Rokuon period; (3) the following 8 years in which he explicated various Mahayana sutras, known as the Hodo period; (4) the next 22 years known as the Hannya period; and (5) the final 8 years known as the Hokke and the last day of his mission known as the Nehan period, read and recite it, nor understand it well, but first from devotion, he places it in the heart without being a burden and deeply believes in causes and effects, without criticizing the Mahayana doctrine. Holding to this merit and following the teachings of the Buddha, have the hope of being born in the land of bliss. The practitioner who practices this practice, when he is at the brink of death, the Amida Buddha, Kanzeon, Daiseishi, along with countless sentient beings, being surrounded by retainers, taking the purple and gold plateau, will come in front of the practitioner, saying words of praise, “You, child of Dharma, who practice the Great Vehicle and understand the ultimate truth, because of that, I now will come and greet you.” With the 1,000 manifestations of the Buddha, they will extend their hands at once. When the practitioner sees by himself, he will sit on the purple and gold plateau, put his hands together and praise the various Buddhas.

Just like the duration of one moment of thought, immediately, he will be born in the middle of the seven jeweled pond of this land. As for the purple and gold plateau, it is like the big jeweled lotus, after a short while, opening accordingly, the body of the practitioner will become purplish gold in color. Below the feet, there is also a lotus of seven treasures. The Buddha and bodhisattva, simultaneously will emit bright beams, lighting up the body of the practitioner. The eyes will immediately open clearly. Because of the previous karma, he hears various voices everywhere, but he singularly explicates the profound ultimate truth. Immediately, descending from the gold plateau, honoring the Buddha, putting hands together and praising the Honored One. When seven days have passed, one by one, he will attain the ‘highest perfect enlightenment’ Sk. Anuttarasamyakasambodhi. The state of nonretrogression at the ultimate enlightenment without going back to the lower spiritual stages. At that time, immediately, he will be able to fly around well, going to the ten directions everywhere, serving one by one the various Buddhas and at place of various Buddhas, practicing the various meditations (samadhi), after one small kalpa, he will attain the mind of nonarising nature of all existence, and immediately receive the premonition of his attainment of enlightenment in front of all the Buddhas. This is called the practitioner of the lowest birth of the highest class.

As for the practitioner of the lowest birth of the highest class, again, he believes in the causes and effects and without denouncing the Mahayana doctrine, only to develop the mind of the highest path. Holding on to this merit, following the teachings of the Buddha, he will aspire to be born in the land of extreme bliss. When the practitioner is at the brink of death, the Amida Buddha, Kanzeon, and Daiseishi, accompanied by all retainers, taking the gold lotus, producing 500 manifestations of the Buddha, sitting, will welcome this person. Five hundred manifestations of the Buddha at once will extend their hands, praising, and saying, “‘You, child of a Dharma, now, you cleanse and purify, develop the mind of the highest path, we, sitting, welcome you’. When you see this thing, immediately, when you see yourself as sitting on the gold lotus, having sat, the lotus will close, you will follow behind the Honored One, immediately attain the death inside the seven jeweled pond, in one day and one night, the lotus will immediately open. In the middle of seven days, immediately attain the seeing of the Buddha. Even though you will see the body of the Buddha, you will not clearly understand the mind placed in various similar aspects. After 21 days have passed, immediately, you will clearly see the Buddha. You will hear all the voices singing the beautiful dharma, going around in ten directions, honoring the various Buddhas, placed in front of the various Buddhas, hearing the very deep dharma, after three small kalpas, attaining the entrance into 100 dharma realms, arriving at the land of bliss. This is called the practitioner of the lowest birth of the highest class. This is called the meditation of being born amongst highest companions, and is called the fourteenth visualization.”

Then the Buddha said to Ananda and Vaidehi, “As for the practitioner of the highest birth of the middle class, if there is a sentient being, receiving five precepts, ‘The five precepts’: (1) not to kill; (2) not to steal; (3) not to commit adultery; (4) not to tell lies; and (5) not to drink intoxicants. holding to the eight precepts of abstinence, ‘The eight precepts of abstinence’ are: (1) killing living beings; (2) stealing; (3) sexual intercourse; (4) telling lies; (5) drinking intoxicants; (6) such acts as wearing bodily decoration, using perfume, singing and dancing, and going to see dances or plays; (7) sleeping in a raised bed; and (8) eating after noon. practicing the various precepts, without doing the five rebellious sins, ‘The five rebellious sins’: (1) killing father; (2) killing mother; (3) killing an arhat; (4) causing the Buddha’s body to bleed; and (5) causing disunity in Buddhist order. he will be free from

all kinds of suffering and misfortune. With this virtue, aspiring to be born in the land, he will hope to be born in the western land of extreme bliss. At the brink of death, the Amida Buddha with various attendants, surrounded by retainers, emitting goldcolored beams, will come to the place of that person, explicating the suffering emptiness impermanence selflessness, praising his action of leaving household life and suffering. Having seen that, the practitioner will be a greatly rejoicing there. When he sees the physical body by himself sitting on the lotus plateau, kneeling and praying, giving honor to the Buddha, when he has not raised his head just yet, immediately, he will attain the birth into the land of extreme bliss. The lotus will open immediately. When the lotus opens, listening to the praising of the four noble truths of various voices, meanwhile, immediately, attain the way of the arhat, i.e., killing enemy or evil passions. having three knowledge. Sk. tisro vidyah, the three transcendental knowledges attained by a buddha, bodhisattva or arhat: (1) shukumyomyo knowledge of former lives of oneself and other; (2) tengenmyo ability to know the future destiny of oneself and others; and (3) rojinmyo ability to know all about the miseries of the present life and to remove their rootcause and the six transcendental faculties of a buddha, Sk. sad abhij á-áh. The ‘six transcendental faculties’ of a Buddha, bodhisattva, or arhat: (1) the ability to go anywhere at will and to transform oneself and objects at will; (2) the heavenly eyes capable of seeing anything at any distance; (3) the heavenly ears capable of hearing any sound at any distance; (4) the ability to know others’ thoughts; (5) the ability to know the former lives of oneself and others; and (6) the ability to destroy all evil passions. endowed with eight liberations. Sk. vimoksa. The eight liberations: (1) seeing of form by one who has form; (2) seeing of external form by one with the concept of internal formlessness; (3) physical realization of pleasant liberation and its successful consolidation; (4) full entrance to the infinity of space through transcending all conceptions of matter, and the subsequent decline of conceptions of resistance and discredit of conceptions of diversity; (5) full entrance into the infinity of consciousness, having transcended the infinity of space; (6) full entrance into the sphere of nothingness, having transcended the sphere of the infinity of consciousness; (7) full entrance into the sphere of neither consciousness nor unconsciousness, having transcended the sphere of nothingness; and (8) perfect cessation of suffering, having transcended the sphere of neither consciousness nor unconsciousness. The first three liberations form specific links to the ordinary perceptual world. The fourth to seventh are equivalent to the four absorptions. The eighth represents the highest attainment. (Glossary in Thurman’s *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakirti*) This is called the practitioner of the highest birth of the middle class.

As for the practitioners of the middle birth of the middle class, if there is a sentient being, if he receives the eight precepts of abstinence in one day and one night, if he holds on to the Shramanera, a novice holding on to perfect precepts in one day and one night, he will not be lacking in the knowledge of appropriate decorum. With this merit, aspiring to be born in the pure land, hoping to be born in the land of extreme bliss. When the fragrance of precepts completely perfumes his practice, when the practitioner is at the brink of death, he will see the Amida Buddha with various retainers, emitting goldcolored beams, holding the seven jeweled lotus, who will come in front of the practitioner. When the practitioner alone hears, in the midst of emptiness, there will be a voice praising and saying, ‘A good man like you, because a good person has followed the teachings of the various Buddhas of the three worlds, I will come and greet you.’ When the practitioner sees himself, he will be sitting on top of the lotus. The lotus will immediately close, he will be born in the western world of extreme bliss, and stay in the middle of the jewel pond, after seven days pass, the lotus will immediately bloom. When the flower has



completely bloomed, his will open the eyes, pray and prostrate before the Honored One, listen to the dharma, praise and attain the Srotapanna, cf. yoruka ‘the fruit of entering the stream’ of the sacred law, attained by destroying various wrong views. after halfkalpa have passed, he will become an arhat. This is called the practitioner of the middle birth of the middle class.

As for the practitioners of the lower birth of the middle class, if there is a good man or a good woman, who respects father and mother, and shows mercy and kindness to others, when this person is about to die, for the sake of that good knowledge, he will broadly explicate the blissful activity of the land of Amida Buddha, and hear the explication of the 48th Vow of the Dharmakara Bhiksu, The bodhisattva who later became Amida Buddha after listening to it, he will immediately attain birth in the pure land. If we compare this to something, just like the time it takes a strong man to make a muscle by bending the elbow, immediately, he will be born in the western world of the land of extreme bliss. As one is born and seven days pass, he will meet Kanzeon and Daiseishi, listen to the dharma, and rejoice. After one small kalpa has passed, he will become an arhat. This is called the practitioner of the lower birth of the middle class. This is called the meditation of being born among companions, and is called the fifteenth visualization.

Then the Buddha said to Ananda and Vaidehi, “As for the practitioner of the highest birth of the lowest class, if there is some sentient being, who does ordinary evil acts, even though he does not unjustly or unfairly criticize the Mahayana sutra, such a foolish being will do many evil acts without having any regrets. When he is at the brink of death, because of the presence of the good-knowledged person, he will run into the good-knowledged person who is giving praise to the name of titles of the Mahayana 12 different genres of sutra. Like that, because, with the hearing of the name of the various sutras as such, he will get rid of very serious evil karma of 1,000 kalpas. The wise person will also lead and put hands together and be made to recite the NamuAmidaButsu. Because he recites the Buddha’s name, he will remove the sins of samsara of 50 million kalpas. At that time, the Amitayus will immediately send forth the manifestations of the Buddha, Kanzeon, and Daiseishi, coming before the practitioner, praising and saying, ‘You are a good man and because you recited the Buddha’s name, various sins will be purified and cleansed, I will come and greet you.’ After the Buddha says those words, the practitioner will immediately see the prevailing vision in that room of bright beams of the manifestation of the Buddha. After seeing, praising, he will die immediately. He will ride on the jeweled lotus, follow behind the manifestation of the Buddha, and be born in the middle of the jeweled pond. After 49 days have passed, the lotus will immediately bloom, when the flower blooms, the great compassionate Kanzeon and Daiseishi, emitting big bright beams, will stay in front of that person, and explicate the 12 genres of the sutra of the profound teachings of Mahayana. After listening, believing and understanding, developing the mind of the highest path, after ten small kalpas have passed, endowed with the brightgate 100 dharmas, he will attain the first stage. He will attain the first stage of the ten stages through which a bodhisattva ascends on his way to Buddhahood: the Joyous (pramudita), the Immaculate (vimala), the Brilliant (prabhakari), the Radiant (arcismati), the Invincible (sudurjaya), the Confronting (abhimukhi), the Far-reaching (duramgama), the Immovable (acala), the Positively Intelligent (sadhumati), and the Cloud of Dharma (dharmamegha)”.

“This is called the practitioner of the highest birth of the lowest class. Attain the thing of hearing the Buddha’s name, the dharma’s name, and the Sangha’s name, hearing the name of the three jewels, immediately attain birth.” Then the Buddha said to Ananda and Vaidehi, “As for the practitioner of the middle birth of the

lowest class, there are some sentient beings who have broken the five precepts, eight precepts, and perfect precepts. Just like a fool, he steals the things which belong to the Sangha and priestly things before one’s eyes, explicating the dharma of impurity without having shame, with many evil karma, he adorns himself. Just like a sinner with evil karma, he will certainly go down to hell. When he is at the brink of death, he will visit the fires of hell in one moment, with the great compassion and mercy of a goodknnowledged person, explicating the virtue and influence of the ten powers, The ten powers: (1) distinguishing right and wrong; (2) knowing karmas of all sentient beings of past, present, future; (3) knowledge of all meditation; (4) knowing the superior and inferior capacities of sentient beings; (5) knowing what they desire and think; (6) knowing their different levels of existence; (7) knowing various methods of practice; (8) knowing transmigatory states of all sentient beings; (9) knowing past lives of all beings; and (10) knowing how to destroy evil passions.

“Widely explicating this powerful bright beams of the Buddha, he will meet with those people who are praising the salvation and the observance of the Vinaya, samadhi, wisdom, moksa, and the recognition of moksa. This person, after listening, will remove the sins of samsara of 80 million kalpas. The raging flames of hell producing will change into the wind of purity, which will blow into heavenly lotuses. On top of the lotus, there will be the manifestations of the Buddha and bodhisattvas who will greet this person. Just as the duration of one meditation, he will immediately attain birth in the pure land. In the middle of the seven jeweled pond and being inside the lotus, after six kalpas pass, the lotus will immediately open. When the lotus opens, Kanzeon and Daiseishi with pure sound will comfort this person and explicate the Mahayana sutra. After this person listens to the dharma, then he will be praising and develop the mind of the highest path. This is called the practitioner of the middle birth of the lowest class.”

Then the Buddha said to Ananda and Vaidehi, “As for the practitioner of the lowest birth of the lowest class, there are some sentient beings who has evil karma, having done the five rebellious sins and ten evil acts, he will be endowed with various evils. Because he is like the fool with evil karma, he will just go down to the evil path, spending many kalpas, and receiving suffering in abundance. Like that, when this fool is at the brink of death, he will meet with the goodknnowledged teacher and various goodknnowledged people will comfort him, explicating the beautiful dharma for his sake, teaching him the methods of meditation upon the Buddha. This person is hardpressed by suffering to the extent that he cannot afford the time to meditate, and a good friend will say, ‘If you can’t do meditation, just call out the name of the Amitayus’. Like that, he will hear the voice with a single mindedness, without being interrupted, endowed with the ten meditations, calling out the name of NamuAmidaButsu. Because he calls out the name of the Buddha, placed in the continuing thought of that, he will remove the sins of birth death of 8 million kalpas. After he dies, he will see the gold lotus flower manifesting in front of himself like a sun dial. Just as the duration of one thought, he will immediately attain the birth in the land of extreme bliss. Placed in the middle of the lotus, after 12 big kalpas have passed, the lotus will just open. With the voice of the great compassion of Kanzeon and Daiseishi, for his sake, they will widely explicate the dharma about the real nature of things and the dharma of the removal of all sins, and after listening and praising, then responding, he will immediately develop the mind of enlightenment. This is called the lowest birth of the lowest class. This is called the being born below companion meditation and is called the sixteenth visualization.”

### **Final Comments**

An interesting point to reflect on is the length of time it takes for practitioners of the different classes to attain enlightenment. Although all are guaranteed birth in the pure land with the sincere recitation of the Amida Buddha’s name, they must go through a process of cleansing of their evil karma inside the lotus flower before they actualize the attainment of enlightenment. This concept seems to echo the concept of Purgatory in Catholicism where the believer expiates for his sins by suffering.

Compared to the time of attaining enlightenment for the practitioner of the highest birth of the highest class which occurs in an instant moment or “at the snap of a finger”, the time of attaining enlightenment for the practitioner of the lowest birth of the lowest class occurs after 12 kalpas have passed. The lowest stage of birth of the lowest class is especially important for the development of Pure Land Buddhism because it emphasizes the concept of grace and reliance on the power of the Amida’s Vow. Shinran developed this point in his concept of the realization of shinjin and popularized his teaching to the masses during the time of Mappo, making it possible for all, even the worst of sinners, to attain birth in the western land of extreme bliss.

### **References**

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