***Amida's Fourteenth Vow.***

***Oh Blessed One, may I not come to the complete awakening if, when I have done so, the number of Shravakas in my Pure Land were not so numerous as to be beyond the fathoming of ordinary beings even were they all to become Pratyekabuddhas.***

**Susthama Kim December 2023**There are many different ways that an ordinary person can become a *Buddha*, but there is only one way to become a *Pratyekabuddha*. You could say that a *Pratyekabuddha* is extra-extraordinary because they become a *Buddha* solely through their own efforts. They have had no teacher. They are self-made, and they do not teach others.

The temptation to want to go it alone, to push ourselves to follow an ascetic lifestyle is understandable because the world isn’t a safe space and people aren’t reliable. But the reality is that it is near impossible to attain enlightenment without the *Buddha’s* help.

*Amida Buddha* understands this.

We are born alone and die alone but our lives exist in relationships, and although we wish we could love unconditionally, we spend most of our lives setting up conditions.

In contrast, Amida’s love is the ultimate unconditional love that a parent aspires to have towards their child.

Like Amida, parents want the best for their children, but all too often, we end up judging ourselves that we have ‘got it all wrong’. Our desire for our children to be successful, or the fear that they will suffer, often sets up conditions that get in the way of loving them just as they are, just as it is.

For those of us who never felt unconditionally loved, it is not that surprising that we grow up not liking ourselves. We push ourselves harder and set higher goals, hoping to accomplish them faster, pushing ourselves to the limit. If we have enough will power, self determination, and discipline then perhaps, one day we will achieve perfection. If we get there, then we’ll be okay, if not then we fear the worst.

This, however, is not a path to becoming enlightened.

There are three problems with this method. Firstly, this method leads to an illusion that a perfect, fixed self is possible. Secondly, all conditioned things are *Dukkha*. Lastly, and more importantly, all things are *impermanent.*

*Amida* wants us to feel okay with all of our imperfections intact.

The other problem with relying solely on ourselves is that we overlook and dismiss all the *Dharmas* that have come into our lives to make it what it is - good enough.

*Amida Buddha* wants us to be *Shravakas.*

A *Shravaka* is someone who becomes a disciple of the *Buddha* because of hearing the *Dharma* or the *Buddha’s* teachings.

The merit of hearing sutras is written about in the *Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtram,* more commonly known as the *Lotus Sutra* in English. Many Buddhists hold the *Lotus Sutra* in very high esteem; it is revered and regarded as the *Buddha’s* final and most important teaching on salvation for the masses.

The *Lotus Sutra* is about skilful means. The *Buddha* uses stories and parables to illustrate the importance of his *Dharma* and how wishing everyone to be liberated is not too dissimilar to a parents' wish for their children to be free from harm and suffering.

The *Buddha* talks about the ten benefits, and one of them reads as follows:

*“Good men, the fourth inconceivable benefit and power of this sutra is this: If living beings are able to hear this sutra, though they hear only one recitation, one verse, or just one line, they will be filled with brave and stalwart thoughts. Though they have not yet saved themselves, they will be able to save others.*

We have an email forum called the *Wide Road West* which is where I saw this passage more recently. *Carol,* who sent it around, also wrote:

*“You don't have to be perfect to be on the team. In fact, maybe our very imperfections can be used as fuel for kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity. I think the tone of the Lotus Sutra throughout is one of inclusiveness and reassurance. These passages, to me, suggest everyone is invited to be on the team. You don't have to be perfect. Just have some reverence for these teachings and try to play your part. And that is, in fact, how the Dharma lives.”*

*Shravakas* are also ordinary beings, but instead of relying on themselves, they listen and rely on the *Dharma*. They are appreciative of all the things that have come into their lives, like the food, the clothes, the air, the warmth, and the light.

In this vow, *Amida Buddha* is making a comparison between the *Pratyekabuddhas* and *Shravakas*. *Pratyekabuddhas* may be enlightened and live in solitary *Buddha fields* but if they were to outnumber *Shravakas* in the *Pure Land* then he would forsake enlightenment.

*Pratyekabuddhas* have no need to enter the *Pure Land*, as they are already enlightened. A *Pure Land* filled only with *Pratyekabuddhas* is a fertile field where nothing else grows.

*Amida* wants even more *Shravakas* than *Pratyekabuddhas* because they have a better chance of saving even more people. It is our flaws and limitations that help us relate and connect compassionately to other foolish beings.

When ordinary beings hear that *Amida* has promised to save those who call out his name, they in turn call out to the *Buddha*, making it more likely for others to hear and take refuge in *Amida’s Pure Land*. In the Pure Land, the more the merrier!

Love and blessings,

Susthama