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JUST AS YOU ARE

**Blossoms of
Amida Buddhism**

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The Amida Order is a religious society centred upon the practical application of Amidist spirituality in the world. Adherents of this approach form the Amida-shu (or Amida School), a religious communion under the sponsorship of the Amida Trust, a religious charity registered in England. The Amida-shu engages in teaching and works of compassion in several parts of the world.

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PATIENCE & GRATITUDE

Amida's Light enables us to see the bigger picture, at least in glimpses. This is the secret of patience. Sometimes others seem to be full of faults and sometimes it is ourselves that we disparage. Neither self nor other seem apt vessels for the great work of bringing eternal love to every hamlet and home, yet it is precisely we weak, vulnerable and foolish beings that are, as it were, chosen.

If you have read this little volume to this point, then is it not because there is some urge in your breast that tugs at you - that is at least intrigued by the possibility of a more spiritual life? That we are caught up in such an intrigue, hooked by Amida's fishing line, is something for which our gratitude should know no bounds.

How remarkable it is! You and I, of all people. We have been netted by Ametros whose great net stretches left and right without limit. He is slowly hauling us in, now pulling on this side, now on that. We do not need to do anything - though it helps not to struggle!

I have produced this little book of blossoms after repeated urging by my Dharma friends who see a need for the basic points to be clearly put for the benefit of all who would wish to live a truly spiritual life.

The purpose of this little booklet, then, is to introduce you to a very special approach to religion and spirituality. This approach, that I would like you to know about, is called Amida Buddhism or Amidism for short. Sometimes it is also called Pureland, though the term Pureland is also used somewhat more broadly. Perhaps we can say that Amidism is a form of Pureland, and Pureland a form of Buddhism. From Pureland, Amidism draws an artistic sensitivity and a concern for the common person, a sophisticated view of spirit and a practical view of worldly life.

Amidism is the distillation of 2500 years of Buddhist wisdom and experience. Buddhism has been one of the most peaceful of the great religions of the world and Amidism incorporates this love of peace, combining both contemplative and socially engaged (or apostolic) dimensions of the religious life.

Amidism is also, however, a spirituality that transcends particular religious boundaries. In this contemporary age of intercultural dialogue, Amidism is a form of generic spirituality that may be acceptable to people from many backgrounds. It is a spirituality that serves equally well in the cloister and in the streets, in the modern world and in the tranquility of nature.

I hope you enjoy this introduction.

MANY FORMS OF FAITH

Human beings have foolish nature. This does not prevent us from allowing Spirit to touch our lives, faith to grow, and a noble life be lived. We should never, however, forget that we and all our works, our religions not excepted, are necessarily marked with our own folly and ignorance.

The Spirit may have entered the world through this or that prophet and each religion may regard its revelation as definitive for itself, but all religions are foolish religions as well as being the pinnacle of human culture and aspiration. We should avoid swinging to either extreme. Religion is foolish and sublime. Both. If you think it only foolish you lose the most precious thing in life. If you think your own immune from human weakness, you lose the perspective that enables all to live in sympathy one with another. Diverse creeds can live in peace together if they discover humility. Otherwise, each offends its own gods by its pretension. The final day when all shall be made clear has not yet come and none should presume upon it. For the faith of all, love one another and learn together.

12.

FOR ALL SENTIENT BEINGS

The life of the Spirit is not limited to people of one race, one creed, one gender, one level of intelligence, or any other category. It is its nature not to be limited to one species. It is a love that embraces all.

Animals show kindness and all forms of life are illumined by Amida, each in their own way. It is just as the rain falling from the sky nourishes all plants whether they are big or small, great trees or tiny weeds. The life of the Spirit is natural big heartedness toward all. It is a mistake to treat any form of life as if it were a commodity or a mere utility.

We should especially have a care for all sentient beings and endeavour to minimise all loss and destruction of life. Otherwise, if we abrogate to ourselves the power of life and death over others and count our own convenience more important than the very lives of others, we are foolishly thinking ourselves to be gods and in the inexorable irony of unfolding time, we will bring about great calamity and lose sight of what is all important, which is love.

1.

JUST AS YOU ARE

Those who are spiritually awakened accept and love others just as they are. Unconditionality is the mark of enlightenment. Ordinary people do not love in this way. Our attitude to one another is always coloured by conditions of many kinds. Some of these conditions are current and some only exist in memory. Even those skilled in understanding these conditions can never exhaust them nor free themselves of them completely.

This difference between the awakened and the ordinary is the basis of our understanding of spirituality. The first thing to understand about Amidism, therefore is that the Awakened love each of us just as we are.

This love is a grace or gift. It is not dependent upon our being male or female, rich or poor, old or young, or even good or bad. The Awakened loves the wicked in exactly the same way as the virtuous. He or She does not demand anything in return or as precondition. For this reason we say that Amidism is a religion of absolute grace.

CALLING THE PRECIOUS NAMES

Amidism is a religion of Spirit. Spirit is the undying principle of Awakening. For this reason it is sometimes called the Deathless, which is Athanatos in Greek and Amara in Sanskrit. It is also called Measureless for which the Greek is Ametros (pronounced a-mee-tros) and the Sanskrit Amita (a-mee-ta). It is from this last term that the word Amida derives, the “t” having softened with use over the centuries into a “d” sound. Hence we say “Namo Amida Bu” - “I call to Amida the Awakened”.

There are many names for Spirit. It is good to reflect on the names. These names have deep meaning. Their meaning penetrates our heart, driving away dross and scattering all that is trivial and petty. Think on the names. The spiritual practice of an Amidist is to call the Name or Names. In this way the Name is impressed upon us, accompanies us in all our doings, and stands by us in times of spiritual danger. The Name goes with us. In life there are many difficult passes, not least that called death. Amidists feel secure in all such passes for the Name is always with us.

ANTICIPATING

In the assurance of what lies ahead, the Amidist naturally occupies him or herself with this and that in the manner of his true home. His or her wont is to make miniatures of that Athanatia that is the true home of his heart. Whether it is a garden of flowers, or the garden of true friendship or the garden of good works, he or she is always at work, cultivating.

Sometimes there are rites to perform, for the celebration of the Spirit; sometimes there are meals to prepare for the nourishment of the body; sometimes but there are letters to send for the encouragement of the heart; but all are done in the same simple spirit of love, each act being a symbol for the calling of the Name. Nothing is done in one’s own power, right or sovereignty, for there is That which surpasses our personal power and it is in That Name that the spiritual life is lived.

From spiritual friendship grows an Athanatia in the midst of this world, a Refuge, a haven for the needy, a community of love. Thus That Land enters this and spreads secretly to the corners of the Earth.

10.

DEATHLESS DYING

Thanatos, Death, stalks us all our days. There is not a cell in our body nor a thought in our mind that can elude him. Sooner or later he will take us and all that we have built or stored in this world. Those who have nothing else will then be lost and swept in pell mell. Their deeds will reemerge in some form or other like a wheel that continues to spin.

Those who have no deeds of their own are invisible to Thanatos. Those who have given their lives to the Spirit accumulate not for themselves, but all the things that pass through their touch are in trust for others. Thus the faithful become invisible and are prepared to partake of the invisible world.

Amida knows them and when the time of death comes it is no different from any other time for although they still have the form, clothes and voice of foolish beings, they no longer belong to the world of ephemera; they already live in Athanatia. For those ones, death is just a homecoming or another clearing in the forest. With the Name upon their lips or in their heart they slip away in complete repose, happy to be going on at last.

3.

FOOLISH BEINGS

When we speak of spiritual awakening, we mean that the meaning contained in the Names has truly penetrated to the core and become the essence of a being. Such a being would themselves then be completely transformed into an Awakened One. A metanoia would have occurred such that the essence of that person partook of the realm of the Deathless.

One cannot make this happen in one's own case, because to try to do so would inevitably encompass an element of personal ambition and that would be alien to the meaning of the Name. Awakened beings are rare.

Nonetheless, we can understand this in principle, even though in practice we remain foolish beings full of wayward passions and confused unconscious actions of body, thought and will. All this mass of confusion is inherited from the past. We cannot throw it off, but in the ecstasy of the Name it falls away. Nonetheless, even mystics cannot remain in ecstasy all the time.

4.

THE AWAKENED HAVE THREE THINGS

All the Names of the Spirit may be thought of as indicating a single unspeakable name, a name that is infinite and ultimate. Actual spiritual life, however, does not take place at the ultimate level.

Those awakened by Spirit have three things. They have access to the ultimate; to the spirit; and to transformations. To have access to the ultimate means to have the eye that sees where all things tend. The things of this Earth pass away. The love remains. The sins of the world are done in a day. The hate lingers, but ultimately good prevails. The Awakened are therefore grounded in the ultimate.

The Spirit is what awakens, appearing in dreams, in visions and in the principles of daily life, in the song of a bird and the setting of the sun. Above all it appears in the actions of those who have been touched and who place their faith in it. They exhibit wisdom unconsciously. They endlessly transform for, having faith in Spirit, they have no attachment to particular forms. The actions of the Awakened in the world are thus all skilful means, ever evolving.

9.

THE COMMUNITY OF ULTIMATE BLISS

Ametros wills a world where ultimate love already prevails. Ametros already inhabits such a world. Faith in Ametros is citizenship of that more perfect Land. Though the trappings of our greed, aggravation and confusion do not instantly fall away, we already partake of a sense of belonging to That Land, Athanatia, not just this one. We become citizens of the community of love of all beings and this begins to take priority over other allegiance.

That Land is Harmony. All who live there enjoy peace and endless grace. Truth reveals itself to them ceaselessly. Every plant, every animal, every inanimate thing, shines with the Light of ultimacy. Nothing there is dross. All is as if made from an amalgam of all the precious substances known. One naturally treats everything with profound respect.

From That Land issues a Light. That Light reaches into every corner of every other world and can be experienced by those who have been touched with faith. The Light is the Light of unconditional love for that is the one unimpedable Light that dies not.

8.

GOING FORTH

With whatever little faith we may have, we are all thereby impelled to go forth into the pell mell to use whatever has been given to us, in the trust that we will be used in the great purpose if we give ourselves with a good heart.

There are three kinds of going forth. There is that going forth that resists oppression, that which assists the afflicted, and that which demonstrates an alternative and thereby spreads faith far and wide, enabling those who have but little dust in their eyes to rise up.

In resisting harm, the essential is to remember that whatever outrage one may personally feel, Amida loves all, good or bad, with the same intensity and would sooth all who can find even the most feeble impulse to turn to the Light. In assisting the afflicted, it is to simply deal with what reality presents before us knowing that the true depths and distribution of affliction are hidden from us. In living the alternative, it is to make faith the centre of all things so that practical life catches the Light of Spirit at every turn.

5.

TRUST

We are foolish beings in the presence of Spirit. We glimpse ultimacy only most imperfectly. Still Ametros inspires us. It is not the clear perception of the end of time, but the everyday presence of Its spirit, of Amida-Amara interpenetrating all the transient unrepeatable flickerings of this Earthly life, that puts firm ground beneath our feet and gives us courage to trust even when all the things of the transient world have revealed their fickle nature.

Where ultimacy seems remote and abstract, Amida comforts and holds us like a mother holds a child. We bathe in His smile. Sometimes Ametros is female, sometimes male, sometimes neither. He is the animos of all things. As sunlight plays on water, so does Athanatos play upon the world. Like waves upon the ocean are all its passing phenomena and each, momentarily, in its one true moment, can catch the sparkle of the Deathless and so be an angel to us of things beyond. We ourselves, unknowingly gleam in that Light and, in our faith, are little lights reflecting a Greater.

6.

CONTRITION

Whatever one does, it should contribute to the greatest good. One should have a long term perspective and persevere in goodness irrespective of whatever obstacles stand in the way. Furthermore, the immediate means used should also be honourable and true and the example they provide should be both consistent with the ends, proximate and ultimate, that are intended, and should inspire faith and goodness in others.

As Amidists, we should be particularly adept since we have awakened at least a little and we hear the Name and know that we have a strength that transcends ordinary comprehension always beside us. And, furthermore, we have the irreproachable precepts of all the Awakened Ones of all the religions of the world to guide us.

Alas! We have received much, given little and done much harm along the way, often ignorantly. Surveying all this, let our hearts soften toward all those caught up in misdeeds. Let us resolve to live our lives in peace and tenderness together.

7.

NO JUDGEMENT SAVE OUR OWN

Good and evil are not independent forces roaming the world. They are judgements we pass in our own heart. We cause pain and pleasure, harmony and strife, beauty and spoliation. In the existential world, there are no acts that are not two-sided. Even the good act does some harm. The person who feeds the sick harms the plant. This world is full of natural irony. Thus the Awakened have half a smile.

Though we cannot see the ultimate end of things, we can have the faith that enables the Spirit to work in us. We can call upon Ametros when we are lost and there draw the strength to act in an innocent way, doing whatever seems kind or good to the best of our ability, while yet not knowing.

Whether we create heaven or hell or other realms is not always a matter of personal choice. We are the taught, not the teachers. The knives of hell are made by one's own mind for those who see the ultimate see that therein no judgement is to be found, but only boundless love.