

SHIN BUDDHIST

12

March 2020

IABC

Magazine of Shin Buddhists

SHIN BUDDHIST:

Magazine of Shin Buddhists

No. 12

March 2020

Editor: Esho Sasaki

Co-editors:

K. Asuka, A. Honda, Y. Inoue, H. Ishida, J. Kamuro,
N. Kashiwahara, M. Kikuchi, H. Kiyomoto, T. Kobata,
M. Moriwaki, E. Nasu, S. Ono, B. Langner-Teramoto,
T. Teramoto

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Poems, articles, translations and news should be sent to:

I A B C

302 Namba Royal Heights, 112 Nakaicho,
Shimogyo-ku, KYOTO 600-8219 JAPAN

Tel & Fax: +81 75 352 1839

e-mail to: iabc@office.email.ne.jp

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BUDDHIST CULTURE

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EDITORIAL

It is indeed pitiful to begin with the sad news of Reverend Daijo Fons Martens who passed away on September 21, 2018.

Back in August 2016, he organized the 18th European Shin Buddhist Conference in Antwerp, Belgium as a Chairperson. Prior to the conference, there had been terrorism in Brussels in March 2016, and he had not been feeling good. However, he managed to officiate and conduct the conference successfully.

Due to cancer, he was not able to attend the following 19th European Shin Buddhist Conference held in Southampton, United Kingdom. Following the conference, I visited Reverend Martens at the hospital in Hasselt, Belgium with Reverend Frank Kobs of Anjin-Do, Reverend Hironobu Shoju of EKO HAUS, and my wife. Twenty-five days later he passed away.

When we visited Reverend Martens at the hospital, he tried to behave cheerfully in the waiting room where we met. He then said, "I have never been out of my sickroom. This is for the first time." I imagined that he must have been staying in bed most of the time. Yet he was trying to show us that he was fine. As we were leaving, we did not say "Goodbye" to each other, but exchanged greetings of "See you again." Then about twenty days later, I was informed of the news of his passing, being filled with the impermanence of things. Here in this issue are put the condolences offered by many friends of his.

Some time later, our Dharma friend and poet, Marcus

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Cumberlege passed away on December 31, 2018. He was a regular participant of the European Shin Buddhist Conference presenting us many poems of Amida Buddha and the Pure Land. In this issue, some of his poems are cited. We would like to express our appreciation for his sharing the joy of nembutsu he felt with us.

Last but not least, we would like to express our deep respect to the late Reverend Shitoku Adriaan Peel, who passed away on September 20, 2009. This issue includes a special tribute to Reverend Peel along with the papers presented at the 18th European Shin Buddhist Conference held at Jikoji and the Syntra conference room in Antwerp, Belgium from August 23 through 26, 2016.

It is in the hope of establishing a place for discussion and exchange, a place for “turning the wheel” of Buddha–Dharma, of Mahāyāna Buddhism that *Shin Buddhist* has come into being. The editors welcome articles, translations, essays and poems on subjects relating to spirituality and the inner life of Mahāyāna Buddhism. The pages of this magazine are open to exchanges of opinion and information, and to any suggestions that you, our readers, may have to help *Shin Buddhist* serve your needs.

Namo Amida Butsu

E. SASAKI

Editor in Chief

如来大悲ノ恩徳ハ

身ヲ粉ニテモ報スヘシ

師主知識ノ恩徳モ

骨ヲクタクキテモ謝スヘシ

如来大悲ノ恩徳ハ

身ヲ粉ニシテモ報スヘシ

師主知識ノ恩徳モ

骨ヲクタクキテモ謝スヘシ

“Shōzōmatsu Wasan” 59

Shinran Shōnin Shinseki Shūsei vol. 3, p. 309

Calligraphy is said to be copied

by Kakunen-bō, a disciple of Shinran Shōnin.

*Nyorai-daihi no on-doku wa
Mi o ko ni shitemo hōzubeshi,
Shishu-chishiki no on-doku mo
Hone o kudakitemo shasubeshi.*

(Shōzōmatsu Wasan, 59)

如来大悲の恩徳は
身を粉にしても報ずべし
師主知識の恩徳も
骨をくだきても謝すべし

Such is the benevolence of Amida's great compassion,
That we must strive to return it,
even to the breaking of our bodies;
Such is the benevolence of the masters and true teachers,
That we must endeavor to repay it,
even to our bones becoming dust.

*"Hymns on the Right, Semblance, and Last Dharma-Ages" 59
The Collected Works of Shinran vol. 1, p. 412
Shin Buddhism Translation Series*

Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha, Kyoto, 1997

A Reflection on the Wasan

Aya HONDA

Such is the benevolence of Amida's great compassion,
That we must strive to return it,
 even to the breaking of the bodies;
Such is the benevolence of the masters and true teachers,
That we must endeavor to repay it,
 even to our bones becoming dust.

(CWS, 412)

Shinran Shōnin wrote this Wasan when he was between the ages of 85 and 86 years old. The above phrase is also known as the words to “*Ondokusan*,” a *gāthā* sung at Jōdo Shinshū services. Shinran Shōnin used firm and strong words to express his appreciation. Metaphorical explanations such as “breaking of the bodies” or “our bones becoming dust” are used in describing his appreciation. These explanations appear in the text written by Shan-Tao. In *Kannen Bōmon* (*Methods of Contemplation on Amida Buddha*), Shan-Tao used almost the same words to express his gratitude for Buddha's teaching and encouraged people to recite the Nembutsu from the bottom of their hearts.

Shinran Shōnin felt deep gratefulness for the great compassion of Amida Buddha and had a profound appreciation for the Masters who carried on the teachings. The teachings of Buddha started in India, and were then transmitted to China, Korea, Japan, America and Europe more recently.

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For me, I have always had an *obutsudan* (Buddhist altar) with me, whether at home, or in my office or regardless of where I live, in Japan or overseas. It has been a most important place for me since I was a little girl. There are two special memories with respect to *obutsudan* that I would like to share with you.

The first memory is from my childhood. I remember frequently sitting by myself in front of my family *obutsudan* at home during my kindergarten and elementary school years. When I had concerns/worries at home or school, or had queries such as “why am I here?” or “is this world for real?” I sat quietly and talked with Amida Buddha. Now that I think about it, I am so surprised that some of the questions were so philosophical!!

But sitting in front of the *obutsudan* always brought me calmness and sense of appreciation for Amida Buddha. In the sutra book I had used for many years, I always enjoyed reading the Dharma messages that appeared in this book. One of the messages said, “Buddha’s compassion is for all people equally, Buddha especially gives deep compassion to those who are in the midst of sadness or suffering or delusion. Amida Buddha and the great compassion are always with me.” This message always gave me heartfelt appreciation and encouragement to move forward in my life.

My second special “*obutsudan*” memory is about my current family *obutsudan* which was made in the United States. It was handmade by a second-generation Japanese American man who recently passed away. He, along with all other Japanese Americans residing on the West Coast was imprisoned in internment camps by the US Government during the WWII. After the war ended, he diligently worked to



obutsudan
(Buddhist altar mentioned here)

re-establish his life and he was a founding member of an American Shin Buddhist temple and for many years, he served as the “handyman” for the local temple. He was always available to make any needed repairs at the temple and was quite handy at making any kind of necessary items for the temple and members. He supported my family in many ways while we were living in the United States. He beautifully created our current *obutsudan* with the materials available in the US and when completed, he sent it to my family in Japan.

When I think back on the history of Jōdo Shinshū in the United States, the devout and earnest efforts of early members like him cannot be dismissed. It may not always be easy to carry on the Buddhist teachings in societies with other religious foundations and histories or under certain social/political circumstances. However, Shinran Shōnin’s teachings can be heard today in many parts of the world. I offer my humblest appreciation and gratitude to the people who are striving to keep the Nembutsu in their hearts and to share the teachings with others.

Shinran Shōnin expresses deep gratitude to Amida’s compassion

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and the Masters preceding him in this Wasan. We all feel deep gratitude (*okagesama*) to Shinran Shōnin, the Masters, past and present ministers and countless Nembutsu followers. If it had not been for them, we could not have encountered the Buddha Dharma.

Namo Amida Butsu.

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Aya Honda, Japan

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Jikoji, Antwerp, Belgium

August 23 -26, 2016

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Yanagi MATSUSHITA, Japan
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Section I

Memories for Peel & Fons



Memorials for
Rev. Ocho-in Shitoku Adriaan PEEL
(1927-2009)



2nd ESC, Scheibbs, Austria in 1982



Kitagawa, Peel and Yamasaki at Jikoji in 1985



Kosho Ohtani, Peel and Inagaki, Kyoto in 1983



Peel at EKŌ Haus in 1992



The then Shinmon Kojun Ohtani greets Peel at Jikoji in 2004



Peel with Parijs and Ducor at Jikoji in 2004

Biography

Rev. Shitoku (至徳) Dr. Adriaan Peel

(May 28, 1927 – September 20, 2009)

M.A. on Linguistics at Roman languages

Ph.D. on Theology at Fort Waldon University

Tokudo (1979)

Kyōshi (1987)

Born in Antwerp, Belgium, in 1927, Adriaan Peel developed an interest in Buddhism when he was about seventeen years old. He joined a Theravada Buddhist group and gradually cultivated learning in Mahayana Buddhism (such as Zen and *Avatamsaka* traditions) and in Chinese Thought. In 1952, he set up the Information Centre for Buddhist Studies and started to publish a quarterly journal *Magga* in 1956. Although the center was closed in 1957, he continued to deliver lectures on Mahayana Buddhism. In the meantime, he met a British Reverend Jack Austin, and consequently Peel set his mind to Shin Buddhism. In 1976, he established the Centre for Shin Buddhism. He also attended the *Kikyōshiki* ceremony performed by the *Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha Monshu* at that time, Kosho Ohtani, and received the Dharma name Shitoku (至徳) when Shin Buddhist Association was founded in August 1976. Peel launched the publication of Shin Buddhist journal, a Dutch quarterly *EKŌ*, in May 1978 (still in publication now taken over by his successors) and opened a Buddhist temple Jikoji in March 1979. After he received *tokudo* ordination in October

1979, Reverend Peel devoted himself to propagation activities around an extensive area from Northern France to Holland. He was engaged in establishing the Faculty for the Comparative Study of Religion in 1980 and presided at the first European Shin Buddhist Conference (ESC) held in Antwerp in August of the same year. In 1985, he founded the new Jikoji, carried out a ceremony for the celebration of the construction, and hosted the 4th ESC in 1986. Peel also published the Dutch translation of *Tannishō* and (abridged) *Kyōgyōshinshō*, and the Dutch chanting book, to name a few. Furthermore, he delivered a commemorative lecture at the inaugural meeting of the International Association of Shin Buddhist Studies held at Ryukoku University in 1983 and gave lectures throughout Japan. The record of the lectures was published under the title “*Namoamidabutsu ni Sukuwareta Watashi—Ichi Yōroppajin no Kiseki—* (Saved by Namo Amida Butsu—The Path of a European—)” and “*Jōdo Shinshū to Kirisutokyō* (Shin Buddhism and Christianity).” For reasons of old age and health problems, he took up residence in a care home in the spring of 2006, and yet he kept reading Buddhist books. Rev. Adriaan Peel passed away on September 20, 2009, at the age of 82.

Translation and Publication (Dutch):

Translation of *Daishinkai* (Great Ocean of Shinjin) by Zuiken, 1980-81.

Translation of *Tannishō*, 1989.

Translation of *Kyōgyōshinshō* by Shinran (abridged), 1993.

The Name is Namoamidabutsu (Myōgō wa Namoamidabutsu), 1994.

Introduction of Buddhist Philosophy (Bukkyōtetsugakugairon),
1994.

*Philosophy and Mystics of Shin Buddhism (Jōdo Shinshū no
Tetsugaku to Shimpisē)*, 1996.

My Personal Memories on Shaku Shitoku Adriaan PEEL

Akira KANEKO

I met Dr. Peel for the first time at the third European Shin Buddhist Conference in Geneva, Switzerland. I was immediately fascinated by him. He had an affable personality with his friendly smile and bright eyes through the depths of glasses, and his fluent English was easy to understand. I was surprised at his language ability. He spoke English with people from English-speaking countries, French with Swiss people, and German with German and Austrian people. When Reverend Shoken Yamasaki was the President of the International Association of Buddhist Culture (IABC), Dr. Peel set his mind on building a Buddhist temple in Antwerp, Belgium. He visited Jodo Shinshu temples in various places in Japan and gave lectures in order to raise funds. I was grateful that he lectured at my temple twice.

The first time was on July 31, 1987. His lecture was sponsored by the local community of Jodo Shinshu temples and called "The gathering of hearing the Dharma." Dr. Peel spoke passionately about the current situation of gradually spreading the Nembutsu teaching in Europe and the universality of Jodo Shinshu that has been accepted in the world. His lecture made a deep impression on the whole audience. During the question and answer session after his speech, I was impressed that he politely answered each question with a sense of humor. A lively, spontaneous discussion at the post-lecture social gathering of ministers focused on a problem concerning *gensō ekō*

(Amida's directing of virtue for our return to this world). At the end of the gathering, Dr. Peel said, "Today was the day of *gensō ekō*," and laughed. That became a fun memory for me.

The second lecture was held on January 14, 1997. One of our participants asked Dr. Peel about the relationship between Jodo Shinshu and existentialism. I was impressed again by how he politely answered the question.

Dr. Peel was a good conversationalist. We recognized it when he fully demonstrated his talents at the question and answer session. I still remember when he was asked a question, "What do you think about...?" He answered, "You should ask to Amida Buddha instead of me. Amida Buddha knows best." And he continued, "You will naturally resolve that problem when you receive the heart of Amida Buddha. Please listen to the Nembutsu teaching." This was Dr. Peel's response.

Dr. Peel respected and had every confidence in Reverend Shoken Yamasaki, who devoted all his energy to his work for the IABC during the latter half of his life. Reverend Yamasaki was as enthusiastic as Dr. Peel was.

One day I asked Dr. Peel, "Don't you study Japanese?" He answered, "There was a time when I wanted to study it, but I received advice from Reverend Yamasaki. He said to me, 'You had better stop studying Japanese, because it takes plenty of time and energy. You have a lot of things to do other than that.' That's why I stopped studying Japanese."

However, I try to imagine that if Dr. Peel could have mastered Japanese, he would have been able to share and propagate Jodo

Shinshu all over Japan in accordance with the virtue of *jishin kyōninshin* (“Secure one’s own entrusting heart to the Dharma, guiding others to the same path”).

Remembering Shitoku A. Peel

Rev. Yuho Bruno VAN PARIJS

It is now almost 10 years since Shitoku, or Ocho-in as he is now called, passed on to the Pure Land, yet hardly a day goes by where he's not remembered, sometimes with regret to his passing, but often, mostly I would say, with joy and gratitude.

As the founding priest of Jikoji he would proclaim the Dharma with a Lion's Roar, championing Shinran's tariki-nembutsu as foremost expression of the Mahayana. As a faculty professor and dean he would tirelessly explain the many facets of the Buddha's Teachings and Philosophy.

Shitoku had a profound knowledge of the Buddha-dharma, a knowledge he could eloquently share with his audience, whether it be university-students, temple-goers, or people in the street. Whoever approached him always got a listening ear, and "no question was ever wrong" as he used to say. His life-long career in studying and practicing Buddha-dharma had, however, also made him firmly believe that he was after all a bombu. He once said that although he had studied and admired the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* for its complex beauty it would never be attainable to him, as for himself, Shitoku, only Shinran's other-power nembutsu teaching would do. As such he lived his life in gratitude, joyfully entrusting in the nembutsu of Amida's Vow Power, sharing this life with others.

Namu Amida Butsu

His guidance was like that of Amida

Always deeply personal and compassionate

I miss the talks with my *zenchishiki*

Now he's there in Namu Amida Butsu.



**In Remembrances
of
Rev. Rensho-in Daijo Fons MARTENS**

(1950-2018)



at Jikoji



ESC presentation with Ducor in 2002



Organizing the next ESC site and theme in 2006

History of Rev. Daijo Fons Martens

Born in Hasselt on October 10th, 1950

Entered the College of Economics in Hasselt in 1968

Read and recorded books on cassettes himself, which would later be known as "Daisy Books"

Was called up for military service and acted as a reserve officer in 1972

Immediately afterwards started at the Ministry of Finance in Brussels

Taught Economics and Trade in Hasselt using the computer

Became a teacher in the Higher Trade School, had already written and delivered several courses

Set up a small company with a colleague to present the use and applications of the computer in schools throughout Flanders in 1989

Worked hard to ensure that every student had their own laptop at Hasselt University

Took on a part-time position as deputy director at the Evening School for Adult Education in 1979

Received the opportunity to travel to Japan with a group of teachers in 1996

Met Rev. Shitoku Adriaan Peel and participated regularly in the Jikoji sangha since September 1997

Became a member of the board of the association *Centre for Shin-Buddhism* in March 2001, and its chairperson in March 2003

Early retirement in 2005

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Visited Japan seven more times on his own initiative and through contacts in Japan

Moved to Berchem, and settled close to the Jikoji Temple. In 2007

Spent six weeks in Japan for intensive study and completed the *tokudo* ordination program in 2008

Became a patron of a young Indian man living in Japan, with whom he would visit Tibet in 2010

Diagnosed with metastatic cancer in 2017

From the day he was admitted to the palliative department in the hospital in Hasselt, he came to terms with and accepted this stage of his illness

Born in the Pure Land on Friday, September 21, 2018, just before his 68th birthday

Condolence

Rev. Kensho Jérôme DUCOR

The Jōdo-Shinshū Buddhist Society of Switzerland and the temple Shingyōji extend their condolences to the family of Reverend Fons Martens (Shaku Daijo 釋大乘) and the Jikoji temple community in Antwerpen.

Fons was born in the Pure Land on September 21, the day of the Autumn Higan Festival; and he received from Hongwanji the posthumous name of “Rensho in 蓮生院,” “born in the lotus.”

Over the years, he has invested all his energy to develop the activities of Jikoji, where he succeeded the late Reverend Adriaan Peel. Fons was particularly known for his strong organizational skills. We have seen this in particular when he organised the European Jōdo Shinshū Communities Conferences in Antwerpen in 2004 and 2016. In addition to his activities at the temple, he also regularly published the periodical *Ekō*. Fons also had a very characteristic sense of humour! We are very grateful to him for his action and example.

And to the members of the temple Jikoji, who must feel a little orphaned, we wish them all the best to continue on the path that has opened up for them.

Gasshō

Condolence

Rev. Jochi Marc NOTTELMANN-FEIL

What am I missing when I remember Rev. Fons Martens? I miss his smile, his open-mindedness, his practical skills and sometimes his advice. But if I think of him as my good friend in the Pure Land, then I feel I have his smile, his open-mindedness, his practical skills and his advice again.

Until We Meet Again

Rev. Chisho Frank KOBBS

I first met Fons Martens in the year 2007. If I remember rightly it must have been at the Hoonko Seminar at EKO House Düsseldorf. I recall that I was impressed by his ability to speak German very well and I learned that he was closely connected to EKO House for some years already. He was the chairperson of Jikoji Temple in Antwerp, for no priest was available there at the time. Next time I met Rev. Martens at the 15th ESC in Bad Reichenhall in August, 2008 just after his return from *tokudo* in Japan. He had spent many weeks at Hongwanji International Centre before *tokudo* ordination at Nishiyama Betsuin in order to become a priest and he liked sharing his experiences with us. It was in the year 2011, when we went on a pilgrimage to Japan and it was there, staying at Hongwanji International Centre that we got to know each other a little better and became Friends in Dharma. In 2012 our centre in Germany opened its doors and it was Rev. Martens who put in a lot of effort to support me and the new established Dharma Place in Germany. So due to the fact, that Jikoji Temple and our place are only a two hour drive apart, we made it a dear habit to visit each other on very regular terms. I remember Martens-san to be most concerned with matters of the European Shinshu Sangha as he worked endlessly to promote the union within the individual groups and places in this part of the world. At the same time, he kept in contact with Shinshu Dharma friends from all over the world and it is safe to say that he spent most of his time promoting the Buddha's teaching

and that of Jodo Shinshu to the people of Belgium and Europe. As mentioned before, Fons was my friend and I admired him for his courage when he became ill and nobody could actually say what was wrong with him. It took the doctors some time to find out that he was fatally ill and that his time was coming to an end. I never saw a person with so much strength and positivity before and I can still hear him saying; "Don't worry, it will be OK!" I went and saw Fons several times before his passing and we talked a lot about so many things, most of all about our mutual faith in the Vow and Name of Amida Buddha. That was the reason why I said to him the last time I saw him, "Until we meet again, my Friend!" He smiled and said, "Thank you," because he had no worries, for him it was - OK!

Namo Amida Butsu

Memories of Reverend Daijo Fons Martens

Rev. Kogyo Iona EVERS

During Fons' time as Temple Priest of Jikoji in Antwerp the Belgium Sangha grew and flourished. He was a good manager and also a dedicated Jōdo Shinshū priest and scholar. The Belgium Sangha was the role model for us German Jōdo Shinshū followers. Fons was nearly always present at International and German Shin Buddhist events. He was a good Dharma friend for the German Sangha. For me he was a supportive presence, a kind of cornerstone of Jōdo Shinshū in Europe. When he spoke about the Dharma I felt that his innermost being was in it.

I remember him once saying: "The teaching, the nembutsu, mostly begins to take shape in the head of a person. For a follower of Jōdo Shinshū it is necessary that the nembutsu also reaches the heart and the belly." He also said: "You don't have Shinjin, Shinjin has you." I was moved very much and touched by the way he said it.

Fons could be very funny, he could be very serious, and he could be angry about issues he perceived as harmful for Jōdo Shinshū.

The last time I saw him was in April 2018. Together with Frank Kobs I went to Antwerp to see him. I was impressed by the calm, even humorous way he talked about his illness. He knew he was dying and he wasn't frightened.

Dear Fons, I'll miss you. Until we see each other again,
in Gassho.

In Memoriam Fons Martens

Rev. Jōtoku Thomas MOSER

When we met for the first time, Bruno, with whom I received the tokudo in Kyoto in 1994, had “emigrated” to Alaska. Now it was said: “Fons Martens - this is the new one” in support of Shitoku Adriaan Peel. When Shitoku became ill and I had met Fons already several times, we came closer. Sometimes we tried to outdo each other with our hectic. We were both not “easy,” but that and Buddhism, especially the Jōdo Shinshū teachings united us.

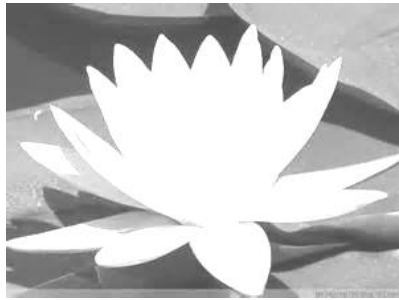
I knew I could always rely on Fons. If he took on a task, then he worked with all his heart and dedication. So e.g. at the ESC in Bad Reichenhall, where he supported me more than I could imagine mentally and with his digital technological knowledge. I remember a story when we were invited to Japan together with Jérôme Ducor for the 30th anniversary of the IABC. There was a moment that he grasped better than I did: “Stop,” he said suddenly, “What we’re going to experience now will never come back.” Someone might say, “That’s always the way it is!”

But that was a special moment. I will always remember it in connection with Fons. We were with Jérôme, who speaks perfect Japanese in a hidden place in the old city of Kyoto that he knew from his studies, which was spoiled by screaming and knife-wielding chefs. But there were also occasions where I could say to Fons, “Take it easy.” So, we complemented each other and became a truly sangha family. I

would not like missing our breakfast discussions in the hotel Arosa, when we would be attending events at the Ekō House of Japanese Culture in Düsseldorf. When I met him again at the ESC 2016 in Antwerp, his health was already declining and he had changed, in my perception. His openness and humor were as unshakable as always, but I also felt something like “mildness” or should I say “wisdom.”

I wish he'd had a few more years for himself.

Varwell tot binnenkort.



Section II

**The 18th European
Shin Buddhist Conference
&
The 13th European Block Conference
of the International Association
of Shin Buddhist Studies (IASBS)**



Jikoji, Antwerp, Belgium
August 23-26, 2016

Programme of the 18th Biennial European Shin Buddhist Conference

The Meaning of Nembutsu in My Daily Life

Antwerp, Belgium, Aug. 23-26, 2016

Tuesday, August 23, 2016

Part 1 – IASBS European Branch Conference

- 8:30 **Registration** at Syntra
- 9:30 **Opening Messages** at Syntra
 Rev. Daijo MARTENS, Fons (Jikoji)
 Rev. Prof. SASAKI, Esho (IABC)
 Zenmon-sama, OHTANI, Koshin
- 10:45 **Presentation** at Syntra
 1-1 DUCOR, Jérôme:
 “Translating T’an-luan’s Commentary”
- 12:30 **Lunch** at Syntra
- 14:00 **Presentations** at Syntra
 1-2 ROBINSON, Gary:
 “Avoiding the Trivialising of the Nembutsu”
 1-3 KOBAI, Eiken:
 “About the True Nembutsu in Jodo Shinshū”
 1-4 MARINESCU, Ioana:
 “For a Better Understanding of Images in
 Jodo-Shinshū”
- 17:30 **Evening Service** at Syntra: *Sambutusge*
- 18:30 **Dinner** at Tulip Inn

Wednesday, August 24, 2016

- 8:30 **Morning Service** at Jikoji: *Jūseige*
- 9:30 **Presentations** at Syntra
- 1-5 TORO, Keiko:
“The *Kyōgyōshinshō* in Everyday Life”
- 1-6 DINCA, Iulia:
“The Spread of Buddhism in the Modern Western World”
- 1-7 KASHIWAHARA, Nobuyuki:
“The Power of Nembutsu”
- 12:00 Lunch at Syntra
- 14:00 **Skype Session**
BHUTIA, Chewang Palden
- 15:00 **Information Stands — European Sanghas**
- 16:00 Kikyōshiki at Jikoji
- 18:00 **Presentation** at Syntra
- TATSUZAWA, Masatoshi:
MURAKAMI, Hibiki:
SHAKU, Satoshi:
“*Goe-nembutsu Sahō*”

Part 2 – European Shinshu Communities Conference

Thursday, August 25, 2016

8:30 **Morning Service** at Jikoji: *Jūnirai*

8:30 **Registration** at Syntra

9:30 **Welcoming Address** at Syntra
MARTENS, Fons

Presentations at Syntra

2-1 NOTTELMANN-FEIL, Marc:
“Our Personal Calling within the Shin Buddhist
Community or the Question: What I am doing?”

2-2 FUJII, Mieko:
“The Place without Wisdom does not have love”

2-3 GALVAN-ALVAREZ, Enrique:
“What Do I Mean When I Say Namu Amida Butsu?
A Conversation with Kyōshin”

12:00 **Lunch** at Syntra

14:00 **Guided Tour** in the city of Antwerp

Friday, August 26, 2016

8:30 **Morning Service** *Sambutsuge* at Jikoji

Presentations at Syntra

2-4 PETERS, Günter:
“Liberating Heart and Mind–My Nembutsu”

2-5 QUIRKE-THORNTON, David:
“Digital Dharma”

2-6 DUNN, Diane:
“Finding Amida / Finding Myself”

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- 2-7 DUSZA, Marta:
“The Meaning of Nembutsu in My Daily Life”
- 12:00 **Lunch** at Syntra
- 14:00 **Discussion Session** at Syntra
– European Shin Conference 19 –
- 15:00 **Presentations** at Syntra
- 2-8 CÎRLEA, Adrian:
“Some General Notions of Jōdo Shinshū Buddhism”
- 2-9 KOBS, Frank:
“Nembutsu in Everyday Life or Haunted by Com-
passion”
- 2-10 CUMBERLEGE, Marcus:
“Poetry of Nembutsu in My Daily Life”
- 17:00 **Closing Session** at Syntra

The Meaning of Nembutsu in My Daily Life

Marta DUSZA

The meaning of my existence, the purpose of it, and the way I would experience my life is entirely linked with Nembutsu. From a human perspective, Nembutsu is just a word. But this word represents the entire Pure Energy that has ever existed, and through this one word flows the change of the mind of every sentient being only if he or she would allow *tarik*i to make the change.

Although it might sound immodest of me to say so, I feel very lucky that I have met my teacher Myoshu Sensei who has taught me this practice of saying the Name or Nembutsu and listen to it. In this practice everyone can say the Nembutsu, freely, aloud or quietly in his or her mind, from dawn to dusk. I may even dream with or about Nembutsu.

Let me pay tribute to a great man, a great mind person who, fortunately for us, lived among us until recently, Reverend Professor Takamaro Shigaraki by quoting him:

One could say the Name throughout one's entire life, anytime and anywhere, without having to set off to a specific place or set aside a fixed period of time. On this path, when one continued to say the Nembutsu in the midst of one's everyday life - whether busily engaged in any kind of occupation, or whether awake or asleep in one's home - one would eventu-

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ally be able to experience awakening and encounter the Buddha in the same manner as a renunciant monk.

Is it not beautiful to have such an experience? By saying the Name, we are able to realize that the path we are on leads us to the true awakening. There are, therefore, people who claim, "It's an easy path." But please do not be deceived, as I myself have had an experience. This is the hardest path ever. It requires from us just one thing: surrender our ego.

D.T. Suzuki translated Nembutsu into English as a "true living." Whatever the conditions of our life are, whatever the mood we are in, whatever venture we are involved in, there is always Nembutsu with us.

In this fleeting world, in this burning house, all matters without exception are empty and false, totally without truth and sincerity. The Nembutsu alone is true and real.

Tannishō

Jōdo Shinshū is basically about Nembutsu or rather only about Nembutsu. It's a key element to everything. With Namo Amida Butsu we are able to gain the knowledge and to understand it correctly, which is wisdom (*prajñā* or *chie* 智慧). We are capable of making any progress both in an ordinary life (i.e. for some - to make our life less tough or even joyful) and in a spiritual aspect of it (a path to the final awakening). Finally, with Namo Amida Butsu we become capable, through becoming ready to be transformed into a being with a mind similar to the mind of Buddha.

Let us now evaluate the definition of Nembutsu according to

Free Chinese & Japanese Online Dictionary:

• NAMO, NAMU—南无—to submit oneself to, from to bend, bow to, make obeisance, pay homage to; an expression of submission to command, complete commitment, reverence, devotion, trust for salvation, etc. [*sic*]

<https://www.orientaloutpost.com/dictionary.php?q=commitment>

• AMIDA—阿彌陀—The Buddha of infinite qualities, known as *Amitābha* 無量光 (boundless or infinite light) and *Amitāyus* 無量壽 (boundless or infinite life).

• BUTSU - 佛 In Japanese, states for Buddha, an honorific title symbolizing the living mind and essence of awakening.

Thus, what does Namo Amida Butsu mean? Literally, it is the Japanese version of the original Sanskrit term *Namo Amitābha Buddhāya*, which means “I take refuge (entrust) in the Buddha of Immeasurable Light.”

The Nembutsu is the living embodiment of Amida, representing *sambhoga-kāya* to all sentient beings. Shinran Shōnin taught us, “though we speak of the Primal Vow 本願 and Nembutsu 念仏, these are not two different things. There is no Nembutsu separate from the Vow; there is no Vow separate from the Nembutsu.”

We ought to grasp the essence of these words from a short verse of *Shōshinge*,

一切善惡凡夫人
IS SAI ZEN MAKU BON BU NIN

All ordinary beings both good and evil

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聞 信 如 來 弘 誓 願
MON SHIN NYO RAI GU ZEI GAN

Can hear truly the Great Vow of Tathāgata

MON - to hear out

SHIN - it is communication with truth not much as faith but
rather as trust

Reverend Takamaro Shigaraki explains, “They can hear/learn teachings” and clarifies this as “they truly hear the Vow.” The Vow is nothing but Namo Amida Butsu. Namo Amida Butsu is, therefore, the essence or, simply speaking, some sort of shorthand version of this compound Vow. Namo Amida Butsu contains everything.

The definition of Nembutsu was precisely unraveled by Shantao in a form of GAN NI SHI KU DOKU. He defined what exactly Namo Amida Butsu is.

All will receive merits. I vow to share equally with all beings, whoever will want to accept it, in order to awaken the Bodhi mind, through the practice of Namo Amida Butsu.

Namo Amida Butsu allows us to know more, or to know better. In the aspect of MON 聞 and SHIN 信 there is an indispensable relationship of trust. Trust is part of the Truth. Therefore, SHIN ought to be understood as trust, rather than faith. Blind trust or simply faith does not bring about the truth. An aspect of enforcement does not exist here, neither an aspect of compulsion. It is our choice. Shinran described it as “Nembutsu of choice.”

A kind of trust as *jiriki* (self-power), superpower or blind passions, is far from any truth. An element of Truth, as the confidence in Truth, is

a key element. We shall not meaninglessly rely or depend on someone's opinion, only because someone said so.

Namo Amida Butsu is about experience, not one's contrivance as faith. While practicing Namu Amida Butsu, or while invoking the Name, we are "sending" a message about our readiness to encounter with the Truth directed to us in all directions. Trust alone helps us to understand the Truth.

This is my priority. I say the Name when I wake up, when I have to work in a hurry, patiently enduring my boss's reprimand; I say the Name to survive with dignity my new government doings (I'm very sorry for that). I say the Name when watching the news about terrorist attacks in Nice, Paris or Brussels. I say the name on my weekly training or when taking care of my cats at home. Simply, I'm with Namu Amida Butsu all the time. Moreover, the Nembutsu is the single treasure that we can bring along with us when we die. That is how I understand "living the Nembutsu" taught by Shinran.

With Namu Amida Butsu the whole spiritual process culminates in transforming "old me" into a new being, which has no bounds or self-limitation, but is rather entangled with the divine vibration of the whole cosmos. My foolish self becomes less and less important and gradually dissolves in the process of evoking the Name.

As if that was not enough, there is a catch. In Jōdo Shinshū the Nembutsu practice is a practice of non-ego. If not "I myself," who practices then? The solution is quite simple. Do not do "*hakarai*," and do not try to understand Namu Amida Butsu intellectually. It's beyond human comprehension, which is *fukashigi* 不思議 or incomprehensibility. Rather, it is a matter of trust when we encounter the Dharma.

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Evoking the Name—Namo Amida Butsu—and chanting Sutras can bring us closer to the Truth. Purely. Shinran Shōnin used to say: “Just say the Nembutsu and be liberated.”

I wish you a good experience.

With Namo Amida Butsu

Digital Dharma

David QUIRKE-THORNTON

Evoking the Name - Namo Amida Butsu and chanting Sutras can bring us closer to the truth. Purely Shinran Shōnin used to say: “Just say that Nembutsu and be liberated.”

This short paper will reflect on the transmission of Buddhism between peoples in times past, and in the current Digital Age from the perspective of the diffusion of innovations and what this could mean for us as a Jōdo Shinshū community going forward.

The transmission of Buddhism from Asia to the English-speaking world is a relatively recent, live and on-going process. In many ways it is similar to the transmission of Buddhism from India to East Asia around the turn of the first millennium, e.g. wide-ranging efforts by many people to translate and interpret Buddhist teachings from one society to another. Some significant differences in the current Age include the scale and ease of the movement of people; access to Buddhist literature and teachers; a significant increase in the use of the English language; and modes of communication and transmission, most notably the Internet.

Buddhism arrived in China from India along the Silk Road as commerce flourished between these two great civilizations, accompanied by a sharing of beliefs, ideas and arts. China was a highly literate society and there was great emphasis on preserving and passing down the written word. In seeking to understand Buddhism the Chinese turned to the Sutras and Commentaries for illumination and

guidance. The translation of Buddhist texts from Sanskrit and other Indian languages into Chinese was central to the development of Chinese Buddhism, with many translations being produced by cross-cultural teams of monks and scholars. The translation of Buddhist scriptures into Chinese made the Dharma accessible to millions of people throughout East Asia where Chinese served as the common language of religion and culture across ethnic and political boundaries.

This transmission took significant time and resources, often involving periods of study abroad for monks and scholars under the patronage of, for example, the Chinese Imperial Court, and then on return to China large-scale operations such as translation bureaus.

Post-translation, there was an iterative process of interpretation; a process of understanding the teachings in relation to indigenous spiritual and philosophical traditions. In the case of China at this time, Confucianism and Daoism were thriving. The transmission process then was, as is now, one of translation, interpretation and adaptation.

The translation of Buddhist texts into English was, and continues to be, central to the transmission of Buddhism from East Asia to the English-speaking world. The process of interpreting Buddhism and incorporating the Dharma into daily life in the English-speaking world takes place in a context of indigenous spiritual (mainly Christian) and philosophical (Western) traditions, and is, I suggest, still very much a work in progress.

We can consider this from the perspective of the diffusion of innovations, and through the prism of the work of the distinguished American academic Professor Everett Rogers. According to Rogers (2003) there are regularities in the diffusion of innovations, patterns

that have been found across cultures, innovations, and the people who adopt them. The diffusion of innovations explains social change, one of the most fundamental of human processes. An innovation presents an individual, organization or society with a new alternative or alternatives, as well as a means of solving problems.

Diffusion is the process in which an innovation is communicated over time among the members of a social system. It is a special type of communication, in that the messages are concerned with new ideas. Rather than *innovation-oriented* it needs to be *client-oriented*.

There are four main elements in the diffusion of innovation:

1. the innovation
2. communication channels
3. time
4. a social system

The characteristics of an innovation, as perceived by the members of a social system, determine its rate of adoption. Five attributes of innovation are: (1) relative advantage, (2) compatibility, (3) complexity, (4) trialability, and (5) observability. Re-invention is the degree to which an innovation is changed or modified by a user in the process of its adoption and implementation.

Diffusion fails when an innovation is perceived as culturally inappropriate. Compatibility is the degree to which an innovation is perceived as consistent with the existing values, past experiences, and current needs of potential adopters. An innovation's incompatibility with cultural values can block its adoption and rejection can be active or passive.

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The adoption, embedding, flourishing and indeed sustaining of an innovation depends on the consequences, the changes that occur to an individual or social system as a result of the adoption of the innovation.

We owe an immense debt of gratitude to those who have gone before us, who worked so hard to share the precious Dharma. As we look to the future, we can expect a significant growth, and at a faster rate, in the spread of Buddhism in the English-speaking world. The Internet has spread more rapidly than any other technological innovation in the history of humankind; it has greatly diminished spatial distance in communication, provides access to a vast body of resources and can greatly aid the spread of Buddhism in the English-speaking world. Fidelity to the Dharma is as critical today as in times past, if not more. We would do well to take great care in sharing this most precious of gifts. Namō Amida Butsu.

We have seen rapid and large-scale developments in digitalization in Europe, with a similar picture emerging across much of the world. Over the last decade, each year has seen high profile launches of digital services, geared to Internet based delivery and playing a significant part in the current media and communications landscape.

Average hours of Internet use have more than doubled from 9.9 hours per week to 20.5 hours per week and out of home use is more commonplace. Many of us now bank online, buy and sell goods, make calls and video calls, listen to music, watch movies and television and interact via social media such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and Instagram.

In Europe, of the 89% of adults (over 16 years old) who use a personal mobile phone, 82% own smart phones. 79% regularly use email and 58% instant messaging. 21% play games online. On our mobile phones, 90% regularly send text messages. The forecasts indicate an upward trend over a short period of time and levels being sustained at very high levels of almost universal reach.

Like them or loathe them, these digital services, or versions thereof, are here to stay. Whilst there are downsides and risks, it is interesting that these services have crossed cultures and socio-economic groups and quickly taken root in our lives. In the diffusion of innovation success is due to a *client-oriented* approach rather than an *innovation-oriented* approach and there are wider lessons for us to learn from this success.

So what does this mean for us as Shin Buddhists in Europe both in terms of Shin Buddhism being a relatively 'new' and little known 'spiritual innovation', and in terms of the impact of digitalization on our Sanghas? What might an e-Sangha look like? What opportunities are there for sharing the Dharma through digital participation and engagement? How might we maximize the opportunities of this age, whilst avoiding the pitfalls and mitigating the risks?

Digitalization is not just a matter for young people. Whilst they have been born into this age, adults, including older people, have adapted to live in it too and the implications are far reaching into all our lives. Despite the developments afoot, for example the Internet of Things, which is concerned with connecting the electronic devices in our homes, workplaces and communities into a 'live' inter-connected and inter-operable system, we may well see a plateau akin to the

Qwerty keyboard which could have been replaced with a much faster model but it wasn't and isn't likely to be anytime soon. When typists became very fast at typing they started to break typewriters as their fingers moved faster than the machine could cope with. A solution was needed and the base model for Latin-script alphabets that we still use to this day was created by Christopher Latham Sholes in the early 1870s. Designing in delay of movement, slowing down typing, is a very interesting innovation in a world that is often attracted to speeding-up processes.

Can we help the diffusion of an innovation? Yes, 'authority innovations decisions' are choices to adopt or reject an innovation made by relatively few individuals in a social system that possess power or status. Opinion leaders can influence others. Change agents can also actively work to influence clients' innovation decisions in a direction that is deemed desirable by the change agency. In a world of much suffering, Buddhism has so much to offer and we might consider skilful means in this modern age that awaken people to the Great Compassion of Amida Buddha.

In 2007, Steve Jobs re-launched Apple Inc with the advertising slogan "Think Different". How can we think differently in promulgating Shin Buddhism in Europe going forward? Rather than trying to create an 'app', might we create the 'iPhone'?

Could we create e-Sanghas? Communities based on participation and engagement rather than, or in addition to, traditional models of membership, with membership being easily accessible, client-oriented and creating space for people to contribute their social capital?

Who are our virtual Shin Buddhist opinion leaders of tomorrow? In the diffusion of spiritual innovation, the spread of Buddhism was, and is, essentially a social process in which the Dharma was communicated from person to person. At the heart of the Digital Age are people communicating with each other. We have a strong tradition of innovation that we can trace back to Rennyo Shōnin, Shinran Shōnin and the greatest innovator of all Dharmākara Bodhisattva.

Today, we see a growing number of people in Europe looking to Buddhism to provide a spiritual framework that many feel is missing from their lives. We might work where the ground is fertile, in the virtual landscape, and then dig deeper and wider, sharing this most precious gift; learning from the diffusion of innovations and exploiting the opportunities of the Digital Age for the benefit of all.

Namo Amida Butsu

Bibliography

Rogers, E. M. (2003), *Diffusion of Innovations* (fifth edition), New York: Free Press.

Liberating Heart and Mind—My Nembutsu

Günter PETERS

For many Westerners, Shinran Shonin's way of Buddhist practice seems to be somewhat not typically traditional. It is often described even as anti-Buddhist. For me personally, it is THE essence of Buddhism and the Nembutsu is THE essence of Jodo Shinshu – or better, of my trust and faith.

One may say the Jodo Shinshu path is not very typical. On the other hand, Shinran's teaching is now the most popular Buddhism in Japan. And indeed, as we all know, Shinran has got something valuable to say to a very many people. Everybody can or could highly benefit from it.

Buddhism, in general, is a very broad tradition. It has lots of different ways for very different people to move towards enlightenment.

Due to an intensive trip to Japan I got in touch with Jodo Shinshu and it hit me completely from the very first moment. I was so deeply touched by Amida's Primal Vow and his universal compassion that I stayed with it ever since.

We all know the biography of Shinran. He entered a monastery when he was quite young, a Tendai monastery on Mount Hiei. But after a substantial period of practicing he felt he was not getting anywhere. He felt that there where things in his ingrained egoism that kept him away from any progress. He needed something much more radical. A radical, a different approach to the Buddha dharma. An examination or reflection of his own self. He was looking around for a

teacher and became a disciple of Honen Shonin. Honen showed him this completely different, radical approach to the dharma, which was an absolute liberation for Shinran.

In 1207, when Shinran was 31, Honen and his major disciples were forbidden to continue their monastic status, they had to return to a worldly status, and they were exiled to very remote parts of Japan. Shinran was sent to a fishing village in Echigo in the far north of central Japan. He married, had children, but still centered his life around his Buddhist practice.

He claimed to be “neither monk, nor layman.” While in exile he was living with ordinary, poor people. Traditionally in these days, Buddhism was something for people with a higher status and for the better educated. Ordinary people lived under very hard living conditions with widely extended families. They could not afford to practice meditation they had neither space nor time for it. They could not study the dharma, because they could not read or there was no one teaching the dharma to them.

Shinran recognized his mission of teaching Buddhism. He could also liberate these ordinary people as well. And he based it on the radical different approach which he learned from Honen.

Some years later, he was pardoned and could travel in Japan, teaching his understanding of Buddhism, which became later known as Jodo Shinshu. What was so special about it?

Somehow, many of us want to get to the state of enlightenment. I once read, that there are basically three ways of walking the Buddhist path which I want to summarize here:

1) The first way is self-development.

It proposes to cultivate myself: the more I love with compassion, the more I meditate, the more I develop mindfulness, I will be more compassionate, and I will be wiser...gradually changing myself. I become more and more close to the state of mind of a Buddha. This way is today the mainstream in Buddhism.

2) There is a second way; that is self-surrender.

This means, giving ourselves up to something which is beyond ourselves. Leaving behind our ego and moving to something absolutely different. This is by far the least popular in the west.

3) The third way is self-discovery.

It depends on the idea, that we have Buddha-nature. It is in all of us. It is a question of allowing it to come out.

Self-development and self-discovery tend to be the most popular Buddhist ways in the west. Self-surrender is not popular. Why?

One reason could be that self-surrender reflects in a way some aspects of western religions that people want to leave behind.

For every one of these three ways there are benefits and disadvantages.

1') The benefit of self-development: it is very down to earth.

We need to change our habits. We have to put a personal effort into it. And it works, up to a certain point. One disadvantage could be, it makes us arrogant: I personally have made myself like this "I am better than other people, I have done it myself. I am really an ethical

person.” Every time our “ego” is speaking, and the “ego” does not want to give up.

2') The plus about self-surrender: it is that we open-up.

We open-up towards something which is completely different, completely beyond to where we are now, beyond all our personal experiences. We can't even imagine it. We open-up to unimaginable dimensions. It gets the ego out of the way. That is the advantage of self-surrender.

But what is the disadvantage? Is there any? Yes, it could make us lazy in a way. We might say “Save me, save me... and I don't do anything.” Some people, not only in the western world, would say “I go to church every Sunday and that will do for the rest of the week.”

3') The self-discovery-model is really optimistic.

I got Buddha-nature. It is only a question of uncovering it. The disadvantage again is that it could make us arrogant: “Hurray, I am already a Buddha.” People who misunderstand it could say: “I don't need to practice, I am already a Buddha.”

The mainstream model in Buddhism is, as we mentioned, self-development. But Shinran came to a point of radical self-surrender. I think that is what we need to do. And that needs absolute faith and total trust.

We all know the difference between head-knowledge and heart-knowledge. Self-surrender needs and trains our heart-knowledge. Because one of the effects of self-surrender is to

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respond with the highest in us to what is the highest in the universe. It is an echo...an intuitively felt knowledge of "Rightness." YES...this is it!!!

The Nembutsu is our bridge, our echo to and with Amida. It is a very simple practice or even non-practice to live our connection with the Other-Power, to become naturally more and more ethical, and to move naturally towards wisdom.

The Nembutsu puts us into communication with something which is quite beyond our conscious mind, quite beyond our little limited ego. It transforms us and has a profound effect.

Shinran's approach was to stop our life based on the "calculating mind", which thinks "that is good for me...that is bad for me...." Even though considering our evolution, that is natural, even somehow necessary for our survival.

Let us open our little calculating mind for Amida's calling, the great enlightened mind. Let us open-up for Amida's immeasurableness. When we are in communication with Amida, when we open our small mind, it is responding to the highest in us and in the universe. Shinran called this entrusting, deep mind, sincere mind, the real or true mind...yes, that is Amida.

It is a completely different level of wisdom in us.

What is important is our attitude of entrusting. If we really stop calculating what is best for me, then, miraculously, Amida would take care of the rest. The formal practice is chanting the Nembutsu. It is very, very simple: Namo Amida Butsu...chanting it in gratitude and joy.

The ideal attitude towards Amida's Vow we can find in people called myokonin, wondrously devout persons. An ideal of naturalness

is really joyful and carefree, at the same time, humble, simple, completely sincere, and naturally ethical. That was the effect of this complete entrusting, getting away from the ego calculation.

Following the Jodo Shinshu path, it can happen that I realize that I am a bombu—a foolish ordinary being—or in other words meaning that I am a complete idiot. What a shock! For Shinran recognizing that we are bombu is a really highly spiritual state. That means becoming aware that I am an idiot and accepting it, is much better than never realizing it. Our idiot ego, our calculating mind, is clinching to everything, wanting to control other people and even the universe.

Being aware of this and letting it go, is really liberating. Totally liberating. It's a big achievement, realizing on the way that each of us is bombu.

I have to admit, one of the best things I ever discovered for me is the fact that we don't have to take ourselves seriously any more...all those worries, all those anxieties, all those resentments.... Just don't listen to it, ask your bombu inside and listen to your heart-knowledge.

After all, I I am freed from my old self. I am laughing about myself and share a good laughter with my inner-bombu.

Simply surrender to Amida. There is no dogma at all. Opening up to the Other-Power is a matter of personal experience. When we reach up, something else is reaching down. Amida is shining and reflecting in our minds... something beyond us that we can access.

The idea of entrusting ourselves to Amida does not mean that we are praying to him to get practical help (e.g. find a job, a girlfriend or boyfriend or whatsoever). We do not refer to him to solve our worldly problems.

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He gives sincerity of mind, a deep mind, serenity, leading to a calm, joyful and balanced life. And of course, this has lots of positive effects in our everyday life. According to Shinran, the entrusting mind is equivalent to pure ego-lessness. And this is an equivalent to wisdom.

So, what can we get out of this?

One simple thing: remember that we all are bombu...it is so liberating, it is a real advancement in wisdom, all our anxieties, all worries – they are all bombu-thoughts. Let's listen to something more profound.

The other thing is: let us trust our heart-knowledge, take it seriously, cultivate it, act on it, live by it... live by what we really know from our heart that is true...not from our bombu-mind...let's value our heart-knowledge.

These are some of my personal thoughts and experiences. I am full of gratitude. Thank you for listening and sharing the dharma with me.

Namo Amida Butsu.

Accordingly, we now clearly know
that it is not the mind created by the followers
but the great entrusting heart of Other Power
given to us by Amida Tathagata.

Letters of Rennyo, p. 95,
Hongwanji International Center, Kyoto, 2000

The Spread of Buddhism In the Modern Western World:

Nembutsu as “the Act of True Settlement”
That Brings Inner Strength, Peace and Joy in Daily Life

Iulia DINCA

The spread of Buddhism in the modern Western world

The West’s positive reception of Buddhism from the late nineteenth century to the present, the remarkable spread of Buddhism in today’s globalized world can be explained only by the fact that the dissipation of information about Eastern religions has continuously been influenced by two factors depending exclusively on the media and that functioned as agents for Western familiarization with Buddhism: first, celebrity patronage and Buddhist celebrities, and second, pop culture.

The celebrity is a peculiarly modern phenomenon, largely dependent on the mass media. Celebrities who contributed to the familiarization of Buddhism in Europe in the end of nineteenth twentieth and early twentieth century are: Eugene Burnouf, Arthur Schopenhauer, Waldo Emerson, David Thoreau, Walt Whitman, Van Gogh, Manet, Malraux, Baudelaire, Proust, etc.

The media traditionally disseminated information of a political, economic and social nature, but, after 1910 when Los Angeles became the capital of the film industry, media also took over the functions of a vehicle for everything that is related to entertainment, spirituality and religion, and that reflects the social significance of celebrities in

the contemporary West. Hollywood celebrities are actors, models, rock musicians, and reality television 'stars', like Richard Gere, Harrison Ford, Keanu Reeves etc.

It can be said that celebrities have taken on certain functions and significances that traditionally belong to religious figures, and together with famous religions as Buddhist people of our time - Tibetan lamas like Thubten Yeshe, Thubten Zopa Rinpoche, HH Dalai Lama, or Japanese Zen Masters like Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki and Shunryū Suzuki, or the Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thích Nhất Hạnh, etc are an effective way to promote and normalize a religion such as Buddhism, that comes from the completely different Asian cultural environment, in the West.

In the 1990s, three significant films explicitly about Buddhism were made in Hollywood: Bertolucci's "Little Buddha" (1994) with Keanu Reeves in the role of Siddhartha Gautama, Jean Jacques Annaud's "Seven Years in Tibet" (1997) starring Brad Pitt, and Scorsese's "Kundun" (1997). In addition, Hollywood made films that employ Buddhist symbolism, many of them becoming blockbusters and entering in pop culture.

Any dictionary we use to translate the term "pop culture," we find the same interpretation: the entirety of ideas, perspectives, attitudes, images, and other phenomena transmitted via mass media, that permeates the everyday lives of the society and is enjoyed by younger and ordinary people, rather than experts or very educated people; "pop culture" is often viewed as being trivial, superficial, consumerist, sensationalist, or corrupt.

I mention here only two such films, which have created cinematic

history in this globalized interconnected world, which have been already part of pop culture, and which have led to cultural assimilation of Buddhist ideas by most fans:

1) “Star Wars” saga with Jedi warriors whose job is to keep the peace in the galaxy, resembling in appearance with Buddhist monks with their long flowing robes, using their weapons only for defense, practicing renunciation and celibacy, with names like Padme Amidala – ‘Padme’, is part of the famous Buddhist prayer, “Om Mani Padme Hum”, while ‘Amida’ is the name of Buddha Amida and with a concept of the “Force,” which in the words of a Jedi Master called “Obi-wan-Kenobi” is what gives a Jedi his power. It is an energy field created by all living things. It surrounds us and penetrates us. It binds the galaxy together,” the “Force” is extremely similar to the Buddhist idea of perception, where there is only absolute truth and no dichotomy between subject and object.

2) and “The Matrix” trilogy with the main character Neo called “The One” like Śākyamuni Buddha, who is portrayed wearing an unadorned single-breasted cassock while in the Matrix giving him the appearance of a religious figure and with the final explanatory soundtrack in Matrix Revolutions the songs “Neodämmerung” and “Navras” composed by Don Davis with lyrics in Sanskrit from Upanishad, section I. iii. 28, full of dialogues impregnated with Buddhist symbolism.

“Do not try and bend the spoon. That’s impossible. Instead...only try to realize the truth; What truth? There is no spoon;” “Have you ever had a dream, Neo, that you were so sure was real? What if you were unable to wake from that dream? How would you know the difference between the

dream world and the real world?;" "Like everyone else you were born into a bondage. Into a prison that you cannot taste or see or touch. A prison for your mind;" "You have to let it all go, Neo. Fear, doubt, and disbelief. Free your mind;" "You're empty/So are you," and so on.

Some say that Buddhism or at least the Buddhist outlook on man and the universe is rapidly becoming the universally accepted worldview; according to George Lucas, the director of Star Wars, a world which is slowly forgetting religion, is adopting a religion as part of its popular culture. Buddhist themes images and concepts abound, though not always in the right context.

The past millennia have not been a period of stagnation and decline for Buddhism. Unlike Christianity, over the years Buddhism has subtly changed in different directions and varied sects have developed in Japan and China. Until the late Victorian period, for the West, Buddhism was a part of the wild and bizarre enigma that was the Orient, it was sensual, mystical and completely superstitious. But Buddhist teachings stress the importance of understanding reality, so we should pay attention to what modern scientists have actually found through experiment and through measurement, to the things they have proved to be reality, so in the present times, the wave of sympathy that brings Buddhism to the West is based on the congruence of Buddhism with science and the modern world.

Shinjin and the law of karma

The teaching of the Pure Land is exclusively placed within the framework of Mahayana Buddhism and, on this account, ignores any

interpretation which would make of Amida Buddha a supreme sovereign (*Īśvara*). In this acceptance, the Buddhism of the Pure Land is therefore also athée (*aiśvarika*) like the rest of Buddhism.¹

In all branches of Buddhism, the faith is fundamental because the indispensable act to enter on the Buddhist way is the process known as “taking refuge in the Three Jewels” that are Buddha, its Law Dharma and its Community, Sangha. So, for Buddhists, it is evident that all the Buddhas from the ten directions exist and obvious, all the people who are on the Buddhist Way, meaning people who took the Three Refugees, believe in the existence of Buddha Amida. *Shinjin*, the faith in the teaching of Shinran, doesn't consist therefore in any way to “believe in Amida.”²

The central experience of Shin Buddhism called *shinjin* is frequently translated as “faith” or “salvation,” but these terms usually presupposes three elements: (1) the existence of a certain divine being who is the savior, (2) those to be saved, and (3) the act of saving in response to their needs and request. The English term “salvation” will mean that through the special favor or grace of the divine being the faithful are delivered from their conditions of suffering and enabled to enjoy a happier life here and hereafter. But in all the forms of authentic Buddhism there is no favor or grace to be given to special individuals. If one has gained what appears to be a special grace of Amida and attained *shinjin*, it is not because of the devotion which has been offered up to Amida, but in accordance with the *law of karma*,

¹ Jérôme Ducor, *Shinran - Un réformateur bouddhiste dans le Japon medieval*, my English translation from French, p. 25.

² *ibid.*, p. 113, 114.

which was explored to its depth and fully utilized by Dharmākara. At all levels of existence, from the lowest hell to the Buddha-lands, the *law of karma* reigns with irresistible force.³

The settlement by Amida of its Pure Land and the birth of human beings in this field of Buddha is unrolling exclusively as part of the *law of karma*, in other words of the chain of reaction of causes and effects of acts. As explained by the Chinese master T'an-luan, the Pure Land is pure because the vows and the practices of the future Amida, from the time when he was a Bodhisattva, were likewise pure.

No more than any other Buddhas, Amida is not able to change the *karma* determined by the human beings. On the contrary, in accordance with the ideal of benevolence and compassion of Mahayana Buddhism, Amida delivers a background and method of what enables them to realize awakening, even the incapable of them. The canonical texts describe Amida as an *instructor* in the Pure Land, but never as a *judge* or as a *savior*. Because, if human beings in delusion commit mistakes, it is always in the sense of the *law of karma*, and therefore, they would not be taken as the sins of human being because a sin supposes the disobedience of a divine will. That's why the notion of grace of forgiveness is not either applied at Amida, nor at his work.⁴

The concept of transfer of the merits (*ekō*), whose importance Shinran found from the work of T'an-luan, is actually capital for Mahayana Buddhism because it is at the heart of the ideal of compassion

³ Hisao Inagaki, *The Way of Nembutsu Faith – A Commentary on Shinran's Shoshinge*, p. 33.

⁴ Jérôme Ducor, *Shinran - Un réformateur bouddhiste dans le Japon médiéval*, my English translation from French, p. 26.

and kindness of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas who work for the salvation of all sentient beings: this concept means that they don't keep the merits obtained during their practices, in fact they devote or transfer these to all the beings in affinity with them. Practically, this dedication is done by the vows made by Bodhisattvas to orientate their practice during the path toward Buddhahood. According to the Buddhist traditional interpretation, the vows reveal an act of will (*cetanā*), the intention which shall preside over acts (*karma*). It is not that "intention result in action," but that the intention is the action. We're here in the heart of the most fundamental Buddhist doctrine about *karma*: Dharmākara's Vows having been fulfilled, he became a Buddha, named Amida, ten kalpas ago. In terms of cause and effect, his Forty-eight Vows and sustained practices of the Six Pāramitās for innumerable kalpas are the cause of his Buddhahood.⁵

What distinguishes Buddhism from other religions most of all is that it teaches us the way of becoming a Buddha.

T'an-luan was the first to use the term 'Other Power,' which became the central theme in Shinran's system of soteriology. In his interpretation of *nembutsu*, Shinran put a very particular accent on belief in the "Other Power" (*tariki*), that he defined as the efficiency of the vows of Amida by contrast with the own forces, or "personal power" (*jiriki*) of the person. This efficiency of vows of Amida are defined in opposition to the uselessness of the personal power of human beings.

The veritable revolution of Shinran was that of establishing, on one hand, that the faith in Other Power is the true and only reason of

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 112.

birth in the Pure Land (*shinjin shōin*), and, on the other hand, that this faith itself does not take place by the efforts of human beings.

To be more accurate, we are not any more dealing with a belief in the subjective sense of term, where the follower utter the name of Amida abandoning himself to his vow (*tanomu kokoro*, “trusting heart”), but definitely rather the follower has a belief in the objective sense of the sincerity (*makoto no kokoro*, “true, real, and sincere heart and mind”) what guides Amida Buddha in his great project of release the beings through his vows. In Shinran’s interpretation, sincere mind refers to the mind of Buddha, and not of practitioners, but since the Buddha-mind is great compassion, it fully realizes itself only becoming one with the foolish-mind of human being. These last having come into sight from the perfect wisdom of Amida, the one who follows him and who pronounces his name is himself situated in concordance with the wisdom of Buddha. Therefore, he represents the intention of Buddha Amida which is fulfilled paradoxically in the core of the followers, even if their own estimations are unable to make them to advance on the way. And it is definitely in this paradox seen that is situated the properly religious experience of Jōdo Shinshū.⁶

Jōdo Shinshū is characterized therefore by a full abandonment of the personal power of the follower to the Other Power of the vow of Buddha Amida. As a result, this method leads to a total cancellation of the illusion of the ego, what constitutes unquestionably the heart of the Buddhist way.⁷

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 115, 116.

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 117.

The practice of nembutsu as “the act of true settlement”

“The Stage of Non-retrogression,” the same as “The Stage of Assurance” or “The Stage of the truly settled” is the stage of Bodhisattvas from which they will never backslide in their advance to enlightenment because they have realized suchness no dichotomously – that is, have already reached the other shore of nirvana – even though they continue to live in a dichotomous world.

For all Mahayanists who have resolved to become Buddhas, their immediate concern is to attain the stage of non-retrogression. Until they reach this stage, they are liable to fall back to lower spiritual stages owing to their still imperfect wisdom and evil karmic influence.⁸ All the current of Shandao, what Honen included, interpreted birth in the Pure Land as the direct access to the “irreversibility” (*avaivartika*), which is the 8th of the ten degrees of the traditional stages of Bodhisattvas, according to the 11th vow of Amida. This stage is essential because the accomplishment of the awakening becomes at last unavoidable: hence forward, the Bodhisattva advances towards the awakening in an irreversible and spontaneous manner, according to the nature of things, and without having to supply any more the slightest effort.⁹ The person of shinjin has attained the stage of non-retrogression because, having been “grasped by Amida, never to be abandoned,” he or she entered the ocean of Amida’s Primal Vow.

Shinran calls the eleventh vow, the Vow of certain attainment of

⁸ Hisao Inagaki, *The Way of Nembutsu Faith – A Commentary on Shinran’s Shoshinge*, p. 72.

⁹ Jérôme Ducor, *Shinran - Un réformateur bouddhiste dans le Japon médiéval*, my English translation from French, p. 119.

nirvana and interprets it to mean that persons of shinjin (1) attain the stage of the truly settled while in their present life, and (2) realize enlightenment immediately on birth in the Pure Land.

One significant development is found in Shinran's interpretation of the Eleventh Vow. While accepting the sutra's statement that those born in the Pure Land dwell in the Definitely Assured State, he goes a step further and says that those to be born in the Pure Land, namely those who have attained the Other-Power Faith what is *shinjin*, already dwell in this state and can rest assured of the realization of Nirvana.¹⁰

In contrast to Western religions, in which acceptance of creed or dogma is fundamental, the Buddhist Path encourages the cultivation of true understanding that is dependent on true becoming. The gap between understanding and becoming is bridged by the spiritual discipline, training, and development termed "practice."

Thus, a common formula in Mahayana Buddhism has four stages: 1) pure faith in the validity of a teaching; 2) intellectual understanding of its contents; 3) religious practice that incorporates the teaching into one's being; 4) and ultimate, attainment of enlightenment.

Shin Buddhism is no different from other forms of Buddhism in stressing the centrality of practice: only by practice can the bonds of blind passions and attachment of the ignorant self be broken and one's karmic evil transformed into the virtues of enlightenment, like

¹⁰ Hisao Inagaki, *The Way of Nembutsu Faith – A Commentary on Shinran's Shoshinge*, p. 103.

Shinran said:¹¹

Single-heartedly practicing the saying of the Name of Amida alone – whether walking, standing, sitting or reclining – without regard to the length of time, and without abandoning it from moment to moment: this is called “the act of true settlement”, for it is in accord with the Buddha’s Vow.

“*Eshin*,” or “turning of the heart” is the radical conversion experience brought about by the working of Other Power and it occurs when persons who were previously unacquainted with or had the misconceptions about the Pure Land Way finally turn their hearts and minds to the Primal Vow and entrust themselves to it. But according to the interpretation actually unique of Shinran, the awakening of the faith constitutes a genuine revolution, a metanoia, which happens just once, now in this life.

This radical experience is irreversible, and therefore the access at the stage of non-retrogression does not take place when the person will be born in the Pure Land but just now in this life, exactly the moment when the simple thought to say the name of Amida comes into being because he has heard the vow. It is that the successors of Shinran named “the achievement of karma in the middle of this life” (*heizei gōjō*).¹²

Nembutsu brings inner strength, peace, and joy in daily life

We are all living yet in this mundane world of suffering and pain,

¹¹ *The Collected Works of Shinran*, Volume I, p. 483.

¹² Jérôme Ducor, *Shinran – Un réformateur bouddhiste dans le Japon médiéval*, my English translation from French, p. 120.

and even if we are able to escape from this world of *duḥkha*, of *saṃsāra*, it is only momentary. *Duḥkha* is inevitable to us all. Buddha-Dharma says the cause of *duḥkha* is our attachment or ignorance. We are attached to what is impermanent, but nothing is permanent, and everything is changing; therefore, *duḥkha* cannot be avoided.

We are also ignorant in terms of not being able to see things as they are. We are essentially self-centered and are fundamentally deluded and lost, in a deep sense. *Duḥkha* is thus inevitable and takes place at any time in one's life. Buddha-Dharma then talks about the cessation of *duḥkha*, which is *Nirvana*.¹³

The Pure Land outside the realm of our *sahā* world of *saṃsāra* may serve as a means of “escape” from reality of suffering and it may sometimes work well even in a religious sense, but we cannot evade the reality of what we have—the six realms. The six realms are our real world and is the place where we need to live beyond and within simultaneously all the time. We cannot change the world; the world that has been changed or revolutionized cannot be a perfect one, since it is still the world of six realms. Revolution or change is a matter of personal experience and we cannot force it upon others.¹⁴ If we let Buddha Amida reach our heart and mind, after some time we realize that many of our fears, of our reasons of anger and despair were removed, that everything is new all the time and our life became beau-

¹³ Hoyu Ishida, *The Encounter between “That Which Is Unsurpassed” and “That which is Empty and False” — “The Nembutsu Alone Is True and Real”* — Hoonko Seminar, Germany, 2013, p. 23.

¹⁴ Hoyu Ishida, *The Encounter between “That Which Is Unsurpassed” and “That which is Empty and False” — “The Nembutsu Alone Is True and Real”* — Hoonko Seminar, Germany, 2013, p. 26.

tiful, useful and meaningful.

We live this world which became much smaller, each continent, each nation now are heavily dependent, there are unfortunately certain conflicts that use the name of a religion, we live this samsaric world full of barbaric bloodshed and social injustice, but for 'the nembutsu people' who are aware of the ten benefits they have gained for this present life, joy and happiness are still possible.

No, the world is not any better, neither the life easier, only the Other Power changed us: each experience we have make us to feel more connected, more inspired and give us inner strength and peace. The Name of Amida Buddha brings harmony and freedom in our lives, the saying of *nembutsu* turned us, we don't worry anymore, we feel the light of compassion in our heart and joy around.

From the viewpoint of the ordinary people, evil passions as well as ego appear to exist, but enlightened sages see them as non-existent and empty. When our delusion is removed, we are enlightened as we stand. The Power of Amida's Vow reverses the course of our *karma*, and brings us to realize the *non-dichotomous wisdom*.¹⁵ Shinran clearly describes this Mahayana truth in Hymns on the Pure Land Masters, 32: (CWS Vol. I p. 369).

Knowing truly that the Primal Vow—

The perfect One Vehicle that brings about sudden attainment—

Grasps those who commit grave offenses and transgressions,

¹⁵ Hisao Inagaki, *The Way of Nembutsu Faith – A Commentary on Shinran's Shoshinge*, p. 107.

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We are quickly brought to realize that blind passions and enlightenment are not two in substance.

Kyōshin's Nembutsu: The Irregular Routine That Never Escapes the Mind

Enrique GALVAN-ALVAREZ

I never wanted to become Jōdo Shinshū. I became a Buddhist in my late teens and followed the Tibetan tradition for many years, partly because it was the most available form of Buddhism in the places where I lived, partly because I was fascinated by its complexity and many elaborate practices. In my mid-twenties I reached an impasse: I saw no point in carrying on performing the many practices prescribed by the tradition and I started realizing that, as engrossing as they were, they did not seem to be bringing about the effects that they were supposed to. I was in no way a gentler, more compassionate or insightful person, though I put a huge amount of effort at pretending I was, both in front of myself and others. A time came when the many retreats, teachings and practices I was expected to perform became more of a burden than a means to liberation. It was then that I had a little insight into my true nature: my quest for enlightenment was by no means my priority; instead starting my professional career, forming lasting relationships and travelling were the things that really occupied my mind. And yet I could not shed the quest for meaning that had started me on the Buddhist path.

Around that time, I travelled to Japan and I was greatly impressed by the pragmatic way in which many Japanese people practiced Buddhism, in the midst of very demanding jobs, family obligations and other commitments. The fact that one could do such a thing seemed

appealing but impossible, as I could not understand how to combine both pursuits. Nonetheless, even when absorbed in hard-working environments and with little time for formal practice, the faith of many Japanese people I met struck me as deep and genuine. I remember being moved by the warmth of two old ladies I met at Mount Kōya who did not treat me as a tourist but invited me to take part in their devotions by showing me how to offer oshōkō. Coming from a tradition that involved secrecy and that limited participation in rituals to the initiated I felt both touched and surprised by the old ladies' gesture. I also remember stumbling upon Higashi Hongwanji, as I walked out of Kyoto station, and reading its welcoming sign: "Right now life is living you." I found the phrasing peculiar, but the message stayed with me, as it seemed to point to something that felt true, but I could not really understand. Wandering through Kyoto I also discovered, by sheer chance, the Rokkakudō Temple. Completely unaware of its history, I was really taken in by the place and promised myself that I will return to it. Well, I guess I have revisited in a number of ways by now!

After returning to Europe, I thought about exploring Japanese Buddhism, since it seemed to offer an answer to my predicament of being a lay Buddhist immersed in daily life, who could neither shed away the quest for enlightenment nor the pursuit of worldly endeavors. The first obvious choice was Zen. Again, availability and familiarity were the deciding factors. As much as I enjoyed the simplicity and openness of *zazen* and the rhythmic chanting of the Heart Sutra, I often found long periods of sitting excruciatingly painful. As someone who suffers from EDS (joint hypermobility syndrome) sitting put in the lotus position for more than twenty minutes can be rather trying! The

emphasis on constant and earnest practice resonated with my experience of Tibetan Buddhism but it also had a distinctly monastic and world-renouncing flavor. I knew of Zen practitioners who would wake up many hours before going to work in order to sit in *zazen* and who would use all their holidays for attending *sesshin*. As inspiring as their example is I cannot say it entirely appealed to me.

I wondered then if there was a Buddhist practice that I could carry with me, that could always be with me, regardless of time, place or circumstance. What is the essence of the Buddhist teaching? Is it to be found only in the temples after long retreats and painful sittings? Of course, the temples and long retreats and painful sittings had their function, I could see that, but I also craved for something simpler, more direct, more to the point. I remember reading in Kōdō Sawaki's talks that *zazen* ought to be practiced like the *nembutsu*, in a spontaneous, uncontrived way. I wondered what this *nembutsu* was and how it could be practiced in such an uncontrived way. Perhaps I was missing something in my *zazen*, so I decided to find out about the *nembutsu*. Reading about the Pure Land traditions I sensed that perhaps the solution to my predicament could be found here: these seemed to be Buddhist traditions that did not emphasize the monastic lifestyle (or the lay imitation of monastic discipline) and that were open to all members of society, regardless of their abilities, professions or time to practice. The egalitarian message of Pure Land Buddhism spoke to me very much, but it all sounded too easy to be true. At first, I veered more towards the Jōdo Shū emphasis on practice as I found Jōdo Shinshū, in its English language translation, too similar to Chris-

tianity and, again, too easy to really have any meaningful impact in my life.

As there were no Jōdo Shū or Jōdo Shinshū temples where I lived. I looked online and stumbled upon Professor Alfred Bloom's website: ShinDharmaNet. I decided to do his online course to find out more about Shinran and the Jōdo Shinshū tradition, with a distinct sense that I would never join but I could perhaps learn something about the history of Pure Land Buddhism. Before I finished reading through the course materials, I had already joined! Not only did I find out that Jōdo Shinshū had nothing to do with Christianity, it also became evident to me that the story of Shinran was very relevant to my own life and that the way he dealt with his own predicament could offer a path for me. I started saying the *nembutsu* at that point. I also started corresponding with Bloom sensei, who kindly guided me to many resources, temples and people, who have since shaped my path as a Jōdo Shinshū person. Though gratitude is owed to many Dharma friends, without him I would not be here right now. Our long emails became the cornerstone of my newfound faith in the Dharma. On one hand it resonated with everything I have learned before from other Buddhist traditions but, on the other, it offered something very unique and new. I was greatly relieved to have found a Buddhist tradition which accepted that while I was deeply immersed in the pursuits and circumstances of ordinary life I could also aspire towards the enlightenment and feel its presence in every situation.

This did not mean, however, that I knew what the *nembutsu* was. The first time I said it was an expression of relief and joy. Nevertheless, that moment was followed by a sense of awkwardness at not really

understanding what the nembutsu did mean or what it did to me. My first attempts at saying the nembutsu involved trying to do it for a given period of time. It implied having to check the clock and ending up thinking about time more than about the nembutsu. By doing this, though, I discovered something. When the time came to stop saying of the nembutsu I would feel two conflicting desires: a part of me just wanted to carry on, disregarding the time constraints, and the other wanted to adjust to the time schedule, fearing that saying the nembutsu too much or for too long was a form of self-power calculation (*jiriki hakarai*). At one level all of this was *jiriki hakarai*, of course, however, I realized that the desire to control the *nembutsu* in any form whatsoever was a form of *jiriki*, and the impulse to just carry on, disregarding time, place or circumstance, was a form of *tariki*. My sense here was that the nembutsu just carries on, whether I recite it or not, whether I am awake or asleep, listening or not. A bit like my heartbeat or the natural coming and going of breathing.

One of the first Shinshu texts that I read was the *Mattōshō*. Among the letters compiled in this collection there is one that has always puzzled and spoken to me. It is the one in which Kyōshin expresses his understanding to Shinran. Kyōshin elaborates on a number of subjects but the passage that has always caught my attention is the one in which he speaks of the nembutsu in a more personal way, and not so much in the context of a specific doctrine or narrative. Let me reproduce the passage. After having expressed his joy at reading and listening to the teachings, Kyōshin writes:

Nevertheless, distracted by the business of everyday life I tend to be negligent for hours at a time. Still, whether night or

day it never slips from my mind, and there is only the act of rejoicing in Amida's compassion; there is solely the diamondlike shinjin whether walking, standing, sitting, or reclining, without any thought of the propriety of time or place; there is only the saying of the Name out of gratitude for the Buddha's profound benevolence and for the joy imparted by {the benevolence of the masters}¹. The nembutsu is not a daily routine for me. I wonder if this is wrong. (CWS 542)

Not unlike Yuienbō when he shares his concerns with Shinran in the 9th Chapter of *Tannishō*, in this letter Kyōshin seems unsure about his understanding of the nembutsu. Interestingly enough, the passage begins with the acknowledgment that he is negligent for many hours, which I interpret as meaning that he does not say the nembutsu when he is distracted by the concerns of everyday life. Then he makes a paradoxical statement, "whether night or day it never slips from my mind", followed by different expressions that refer to various dimensions of the nembutsu (e.g. shinjin, expression of gratitude, etc.). Finally he acknowledges again, perhaps with some anxiety, that the nembutsu is not a daily routine, that his practice of saying the name is at times joyful and meaningful and at times non-existent.

Although Shinran makes a few minor corrections to Kyōshin's phrasing, and explains at length the concept of the person of shinjin being close to the Buddha/equal to Maitreya and encourages Kyōshin to say Kimyō Jinjippō Mugekō Nyorai and Namu Fukashigikō Nyorai as well as Namu Amida Butsu, he says nothing about Kyōshin's irreg-

¹ Shinran has made slight corrections. Originally: "the virtue of my master."

ular nembutsu routine. I believe Shinran's silence is very significant. There is nothing wrong about Kyōshin's lack of routine and Shinran does not even feel the need to say so. However, the paradox in Kyōshin's statement remains: how can he be negligent for hours at a time and yet there be nothing but diamond-like shinjin and the grateful saying of the name? How can the nembutsu be forgotten and not be a routine and yet never slip from our minds? This is a question that has haunted me for a long time.

The great freedom that Jōdo Shinshū entertains when it comes to performing its central practice, entails a great relief but also a great responsibility and with it a big question: how do we say the nembutsu? Most teachers and texts encourage us to just say it, without thinking much about the number of times, how often, how loudly, in which frame of mind, when, where or indeed, to what end, we do say it. We know that Honen said the nembutsu 60,000 times a day, but the significance of the story and the figure is often lost on us. The reason why we do not consider all these specifics is because they, by and large, do not matter. "Just say the nembutsu and be saved by Amida", goes the heart-essence of the second chapter of *Tannishō*. That is enough. That means not only that we might say the nembutsu in different ways and circumstances, but also that there might be times in which we do not say the nembutsu. As much as I admire the practitioners of *fudan nembutsu* or feel touched by stories about Shinshu teachers who recited the nembutsu in their sleep, I have to admit that I do not say the nembutsu very often. I can probably count with the fingers of one hand the times it has come to me in my dreams and nobody has ever told me that I was saying it while asleep. Yet, every time the thought of how

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rarely I say it comes to mind, the nembutsu immediately comes back to my lips and it stays with me for a little.

When the nembutsu comes back I feel a bit like Kyōshin, though I would not use his same words. The return of the nembutsu feels natural, feels right, feels as if it had never gone away, feels as if it was always there. I must admit that I make no special efforts at saying the nembutsu and yet I am fortunate enough that not a day passes without the nembutsu returning to my mind and lips. If I observe my thoughts I can see certain patterns: I say it in the morning at some indeterminate point after waking up as I start getting ready for the day, but it does not stay for long; I say it when I am cycling but I often get distracted by the cars and the road; shocking news or unexpected happy events also bring it back briefly; I say it more extensively when sitting on planes or trains or when I experience insomnia; remembering friends and relatives who have died or who are undergoing difficult circumstances also brings it back. And yet for hours on end I do not say the nembutsu, being lost in conversations, thoughts, working routines or mindless chores. I have an awareness that I do not say the nembutsu a lot; I also often wonder whether I should try to say it more regularly, but I also feel that *trying* defeats the purpose of the nembutsu. The nembutsu that we deliberately keep in mind is not the nembutsu that never slips from the mind. The conscious and deliberate nembutsu eventually falls off the mind, as distraction is unavoidable. The nembutsu that we constantly need to keep in mind will at some point fail us, as it will be as unreliable as our conscious will.

However, if it feels good, and I feel often relieved and joyful by its appearance, why should I not apply myself to say it more regularly?

Although such thinking is logical the nembutsu does not conform to our ordinary logic: it is unexplainable, ineffable and, therefore, uncontrollable. Its logic lies in its illogicality, as Shinran constantly repeats in his writing. And yet it seems inevitable for the human intellect to try to control, make sense, rationalize or write and deliver presentations on the meaning of the nembutsu. I believe that being aware of this fact is as important as listening and saying the nembutsu, knowing that it is virtually impossible not to fall into the ways of *jiriki* or *hakarai*. That is why I would not state categorically that the nembutsu is always with me or try to elaborate on the nature of Amida or the Pure Land. All I can speak about is my personal and subjective feelings. I believe it is at that personal and emotional level where Kyōshin's paradox is resolved, because when the nembutsu comes to our lips, sometimes taking us by surprise, it feels like it has always been there, it feels like it is constantly embracing and guiding us. Whether we pay attention to it or not the nembutsu carries on. Of course, not paying attention, not listening, is no good for us, but it does not make the nembutsu, fundamentally, go away. I cannot say that the Primal Vow is ever present in my life, as my mindfulness of it comes and goes however I can experience the constancy of the Buddha's embrace through its constant returns.

In an unforgettable seminar in Dusseldorf two years ago Ishida sensei imprinted on us a number of Japanese Buddhist sayings. One of them was: meeting guarantees separation, separation does not guarantee meeting again. For me, this refrain perfectly instantiates the logic of impermanence that applies to all things in this world. If you think about it whoever or whatever you encounter will eventually go

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away and there is no certainty whether we will meet again. I feel, and I hope Ishida sensei will correct me if I am wrong, that the nembutsu goes against this basic logic. If we fully meet the nembutsu, even though we might temporarily part from it, we always return to it, whether dead or alive. This is because the nembutsu is not just a practice that we do but the expression of the Buddha's embrace, the compassionate and lucid quality that pervades our existences. Again, I could refer to this underlying reality using many poetic and technical terms, but the point is to experience it, to feel it. No matter how limited or clouded our consciousness might be, connecting with that gentle and clear foundation, even for a fraction of a second, is enough. If we are touched by this compassion, we cannot help but trust it and if we have heard the nembutsu we cannot help but say it.

Of course, our ordinary consciousness departs from this embrace time and time again. And yet our minds are also, deep down, always resting on the Buddha's Vow, the compassionate intent that wishes to deliver all beings from suffering. The Vow supports us all and is quietly present in our lives, even though we do not consciously acknowledge it most of the time. The nembutsu then becomes the tip of the iceberg that reveals that large and, for the most part, invisible reality. For a few seconds, when we call the name, we become aware of the deep bond that connects us to our most basic aspiration and the aspirations of all beings, which are all embraced and included in the Buddha's vow. The latent support of the vow suddenly comes to light and reveals its significance to me. For me this is the meaning of Namu Amida Butsu.

Finally, I would like to end by expressing my appreciation to Gary Robinson sensei, to who I owe much, but to who I am especially

grateful for having taught me how to chant the *Shōshinge*, and perform it as a practice that brings together body, speech and mind. I must admit that although I have made chanting Shinran's gāthā some form of irregular routine, I am often distracted while chanting and trying to keep the right posture. My mind often wanders away as I go through the many rows of kanjis and musical notations. However, there is one stanza that always brings back my attention to the Dharma and strikes me as the best description of the nembutsu that never slips from the mind. Let me finish by quoting it:

Goku jū aku nin yui shō butsu	The limited and wicked person needs only to say "Buddha."
Ga yaku zai hi ses shu chū	I, too, am in the Buddha's embrace.
Bon nō shō gen sui fu ken	Though my eyes, clouded by the dust of defilement, do not see,
Dai hi mu ken jō shō ga	The great compassion untiringly shines on me, always.

The Meaning of Nembutsu in My Daily Life

Marcus CUMBERLEGE

ABSOLUTE TRUST

Thinking of Amida can be done, but nembutsu is easier.

Namo Amida Butsu. Outside my window the pink roses bloom.

Twenty pink roses bloom of my wife in hospital. I've counted them.

Amida won't make your dinner, but He will help you when the time comes.

Even the smallest efforts to think of Amida pays dividends.

I see Him sit, sunk deep in meditation, under the garden tree.

Staring straight ahead of me, I utter Namu Amida Butsu.

I'm inclined to think that constant nembutsu is the only answer.

Pondering the mysteries of the Primal Vow I come up with no conclusive answers, but am wrapped in Amida's comforting light.

I recite nembutsu out of necessity and sheer conviction, not from the hope that everything will automatically go well.

I have absolute trust in the working of Amida's Primal Vow.

Namo Amida Butsu – It's so simple I almost want to cry.

It's easy to say nembutsu once. To keep saying it is the art.

Namo Amida Butsu guarantees peace of mind, if nothing else.

Cooking this meal has been fun, sensing that Amida is behind me.

As the sky turns from white to grey, her roses become even pinker.

All my energy goes into Namu Amida Butsu.

Difficult moments – how to deal with them? The cleaner comes tomorrow, and my concentration will vanish. I'll write something I can

turn to.

The wishful, selfish, egocentric me must be eliminated.

The simple saying of nembutsu cancels out my likes and dislikes.

More glory is found in one tough nembutsu than in anything else.

Imagine you feel like death warmed up: that's when to recite nembutsu.

Practice objective love and compassion towards this heavy smoker, who is only doing her job to the best of her ability.

Be grateful that you yourself do not have to get down and clean the floors.

In the ranks of holiness she is certainly much higher than you.

Welcome her with a big warm smile and make some friendly conversation.

Having done that, banish any trace of gloom that could ruin your day.

Watch out for self-pity. It's a real blood sucker. So is egoism.

If you're in any doubt about coping, reach for an inspiring book.

Namo Amida Butsu helps to counteract my downward mood-swings.

Say Namu Amida Butsu several times if you're feeling lonely.

Loneliness goes hand in hand with fear. Nembutsu puts paid to them both.

HŌNEN GIVES ADVICE

May I call on you, Master Hōnen, to say one nembutsu for me?

I have studied your letters in *Amida's Promise: The Path to Bliss* and believe I was the Second Nun in the Court of Kamakura.

You are now a fully rewarded Buddha in Amida's Pure Land

And I am certain this request of mine will not fall upon deaf ears.

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The effort required to recite a thousand nembutsu is minimal.
Guard against idle speculation – uninvited thoughts from nowhere.
Speculation is mental ballast. Just say nembutsu and be born
Start reciting nembutsu the moment your mind begins to wander.
Namo Amida Butsu will get you back on the right track at once.
Make this a habit. The Great Masters knew what they were talking
about.

We live in a declining age: nembutsu is tailored to our needs.
The so-called Holy Gates are beyond our limited comprehension.

Don't underestimate the downward swing: Mara wants you back in
hell.

Mindless negativity threatens you on all sides. Be resolute.
Get to grips with instability. Defeatism leads you nowhere.
Bear in mind that you have a boundless attitude for blaming others,
The best thing you can do in this world is to recite Amida's Name.
Nembutsu is the true personification of positive thought.

It's quite possible you were born to teach the practice of nembutsu.
Have you found any better reason for your life in this defiled world?
Discernment is called for in this matter. Think, act and write carefully.
There is no more room in your life for exaggerated ups and downs.
Sleep will have to be mastered. Night medication needs to be reduced.
Your whole manner of being during the day will come under review.
Cheerful acceptance of your role in life has become imperative.
I see a humble and grateful Shin Buddhist walking around the city.

Every nembutsu is heard and brings you closer to the Land of Bliss.

Remember this. You're not being asked to perform the impossible.

Thank you, Master Hōnen, your advice fills me with joy and gratitude.

It's good to be alive and to have heard the teaching of the Buddha.

I feel protected. Eighty-four thousand Bodhisattvas watch my steps and caring Kuan Yin comes to my bedside when I close my eyes in death.

In countless lives the Exalted One combated human suffering, while I am only asked to bear the easy burdens of one short day.

The streets are filled with laughter. Pain is hidden away behind facades.

Let me see this defiled world with the eyes of wisdom and compassion.

I AM NOT ALONE

"I am not alone in this room, saying Namo Amida Butsu."

"Feeling good consists primarily of knowing Amida is here this very moment, looking over my shoulder at the words I write."

Honen had to copy with enmity. We have to cope with ignorance.

Sometimes we are the only person in a city saying the Name.

The beloved parent holds my cup of tea and brings it to my lips.

"Could this be the night I harmonize completely with Amida?"

"For this at-one-moment I'll gladly dispense with all my superstitions."

O the relief of knowing Amida, the joy of being myself!

With both feet on the ground I travel in the world of Higher Power.

Namo Amida Butsu – I echo the thoughts of the Great Masters.

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What means “the darkness of our ignorance”? – Not hearing Amida’s call.

How deeply do I believe the power contained in the sacred Name?

Heavy rain is lashing the veranda. Sleepless brains begin to doubt.

Adherence to the Primal Vow is my top priority in life.

Amid has given me His Name. My task is only to repent it.

Namo Amida Butsu may not interfere with my normal life, but my preference will go to places where practice is possible.

“Take care, Marcus. Listen to your body. Obey the laws of nature.”

“You wrote these lines for self-encouragement. Why not share them with others?”

Happiness is an art, and its secret lies in sweet simplicity.

“You’ve made a few discoveries tonight. Act upon what you have learned.

“One nembutsu eliminates the bad karma of countless aeon.”

Thus wrote Master Shan-tao, whom Honen calls Amida’s incarnation.

Namo Amida Butsu. There go the weak spots of the last five months!

Tomorrow’s tiredness will seem like nothing in the light of this wisdom.

“Thinking of Amida” is one thing. Talking to Him is another.

“A healthy balanced attitude towards your daily life is needed.

Do what you can to fulfill your tasks, but don’t get upset if you fail.

Perfectionism is an ailment to be avoided at all costs.

Consider the humble woodlouse, slowly crawling across the terrace.

Let there be fun! Poetry with enjoyment is a waste of ink.

It is sure to rain. And heavily at that. Take this into account.”

Cumberlege: The Meaning of Nembutsu in My Daily Life

Thus much Amida's admonishment to this complicated bombu.
The blackbird starts singing, the sky lightens and the moon enters
Taurus.

It has been a night of wakeful solitude during my wife's absence.
Daytime now spills into the garden, making my Buddha visible.
I see the lips of the man in the window reciting nembutsu.
The desk lamp has now become unnecessary. The fig tree is there.
The roses are painted with pinkness again, the bricks of the wall are
red.

It's easier to say nembutsu at your desk than in your bed.
Aligning words on paper has an unmatched therapeutic effect.
I intend to lie down flat on the carpet now, give my heart a rest.

The cleaner has been. I played my cards well. There was no trace of a
dip.

He thought that I'd spent the whole night with nembutsu was far from
her mind.

Amida's with me again, walking home in the misty morning rain.

***Kyōgyōsinshō* in Everyday Life – My Experience with a *Myōkōnin* Woman –**

Keiko TORO

Kyōgyōshinshō is a collection of passages and the main work of Shinran Shōnin. He devoted his whole life for writing it in order to prove that the Nembutsu teachings are a universal truth for everyone here on earth. Have you ever read this text?

The text is full of quotations from sutras. Many people, including myself, have difficulty understanding the true meaning of it.

Therefore, I spent one month reading it aloud and recording it onto tapes, which lasts for 11 hours and 30 minutes. Then I had been listening to it for 3 months as an active approach to studying Jōdo Shinshū. Finally, I found out that *Kyōgyōshinshō* is not just a book, but it is a living energy of Namu-amida-butsu. The important thing is “approaching” it. How to approach this study is the big issue.

Firstly, I would like to share with you my experience of “hearing” *Kyōgyōshinshō*. To tell you the truth, “listening” to it was very difficult in the beginning because it was written in classical Chinese. After listening to the tapes for just an hour, the words seemed to be like a brick wall that I was running into. Shinran’s words were not entering my ears no matter how hard I tried. It was like being seasick or you could even call it word-drunkenness.

Therefore, I stopped to concentrate on listening to the words, for example, when I was doing daily chores, such as putting away the laundry or just cleaning, I began to listen to the recording as if it was

background music. When I listened in that way, gradually, very gradually, my body began to adjust for itself to the rhythm of the unique words.

Perhaps an analogy will be helpful here. Our muscles are tense and even stiff when we lie on a massage table. After being massaged, however, the tenseness is removed, and our muscles relax. Our bodies are very honest in that, at first, they resist anything foreign or what they are not used to.

Similarly, as time passed, and my ears became familiar with the words. The first thing I became aware of was their “musical nature” – a very rhythmic quality.

I could not relate to *Kyōgyōshinshō* at first because the wording is so different from the way we speak today. But as I continued to listen, I could feel the resonance and the words began to infiltrate my body in a very natural way, gradually the language seemed to become a part of me.

Rather than *Kyōgyōshinshō* adjusting to me, my body began conforming to its rhythm. The feeling is quite opposite. After listening to it for about three months, I felt the words no longer sounded “strange.” That was about the time I became faintly aware of something like a huge backbone thrust through *Kyōgyōshinshō*. What I mean is that the backbone of *Kyōgyōshinshō* is Shinran's expression: “Thus I have heard from the sutras.” Shinran “heard” Amida Buddha's Dharma Talks in the many sutras that he had read as if they had been spoken directly to him. That's when I realized *Kyōgyōshinshō* is a record of what Shinran had spent his entire life acquiring -- in his heart -- without the sort of modern recording devices we have today!

Thinking about this, I realized that the great monks of the past were those who could read the sutras as if they heard them with their own ears. I would not have realized this if I had not experienced it myself.

When we read with our own eyes, the approach to Amida Buddha is one to one. We want to grab something by ourselves. In contrast, when we “hear” with our own “ears,” it implies Amida Buddha is approaching us. We just receive it. The direction is completely reversed.

That’s why before thinking about the Dharma in our minds, we must first hear it in our bodies and hearts. Chanting is also one part of this hearing experience. *Shōshinge* is a summary of *Kyōgyōshinshō*, so chanting *Shōshinge* is a great way to hear it both in our bodies and hearts.

After hearing the Buddha’s teaching and after it has gone through a process of maturation within our entire being, then the activity of “thinking” about it will arise naturally.

Shinran called it “mon 聞 shi 思,” which means first hear it and then think about what it means.

In that way, Amida Buddha is always the pitcher of dharma-talk catch-ball. Shinran is always the great catcher and receiver. He expresses this at the end of the General Preface:

Here I rejoice in what I have heard and extol what I have attained. (CWS 1, p. 4)

Structure of Nembutsu

Next, I would like to present the structure of *Kyōgyōshinshō*, as I know it, using an illustration. In particular, I would like to make clear

the relationship between our illusions or attachments (blue) and Amida-Buddha (red), as Shinran, like an artist, used several visual metaphors to describe the structure of two sides of Nembutsu. So, I will also describe them with two colors.

Shinran said that we human beings are evil (aku 悪). This is a very difficult concept to understand. It is also quite different from “evil” in the Christian context.

The reality which exists is all times - neutral, neither good nor bad. It exists as it is. We exist as we are. Though we have attachments in our minds, the ‘have to— or should—’ mind-set, means we are wearing rose color glasses all the time. Each person wears their own rose color glasses.

From our attachments, we judge our reality. If the reality matches our attachments, we feel satisfied. But if the reality doesn’t match our attachments, we feel stress and suffering. Consequently, we create our own stress and suffering by ourselves. It doesn’t exist, only in our minds.

Also, from our attachments, we judge ourselves and others. From my side, I’m the right person, and he/she is wrong. From the other side, he/she is the right person, and I’m wrong. So, every conflict occurs between right persons. On a big scale - World War、 in a small scale - our family/personal conflict.

Shinran said this is human nature, not personal character. He called this human nature evil; we make our suffering and conflict by ourselves. Metaphorically he said that we make ice in our hearts, so between each person’s ice, there is conflict.

That’s why Amida Buddha became the Buddha of Namu-

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amida-butsu to help us. Whenever we feel stress in our hearts, it is a great time for us to hear the Dharma.

Shinran also uses the metaphor of a river and the ocean. Each one of us is like a river, separate from each other. In addition, we make ice which freezes the water of the river, so our water can't flow into the ocean. Amida's wisdom and compassion in the form of Namu-amida-butsu lets our ice melt into water and flow into the ocean of a one-taste interdependent world. In the ocean, everything is connected to each other. It is just like one taste, in which sorrow and joy/gratitude melt together.

In that melting and flowing, we feel sorrow (悲) realizing our nature of illusion and we feel joy and gratitude (喜) to know Amida's wisdom and compassion is all the time with us and for us. Shinran wrote the following Hymn which describes this condition.

Obstructions of karmic evil turn into virtues;

It is like the relation of ice and water:

The more the ice, the more the water;

The more the obstructions, the more the virtues.

(CWS 1, p. 371)

Nembutsu turns our evil into virtue. Let us live in the suchness world to accept us as we are. But in our daily routine, we forget everything easily and go back into the world of illusion. Then whenever we recite the Nembutsu, we can recall this suchness again.

Nembutsu is the transforming power. As long as we live in this saṃsāra world, we can't get rid of our attachments; therefore, we continue to hear the Dharma and recite the Nembutsu throughout our

lives.

The Meaning of Nembutsu in my Daily Life

Lastly, I would like to share with you my experience about ‘the Meaning of Nembutsu in my Daily Life.’ This is the theme of ESC18.

I discovered it through meeting one woman named Chie Aoki. She was not an educated woman, but she was not completely unknown either. She lived the Nembutsu teachings through her lifetime. For me, she is like a Myokonin who taught me a daily life of Nembutsu.

When I was a graduate student, I had a hard time understanding what Buddhism/Jōdo Shinshū meant in my life. I studied many difficult sutras, but there wasn’t much meaning for me. At that time, I sought for real live Buddhism, so I decided to attend a morning service at Nishi-Hongwanji. Have you ever been there?

For hundreds of years, on every single morning, service from 6 to 7 a.m. has been held without interruption. It took me 30 minutes by bicycle from my apartment after getting up at 5 a.m. There I met an old lady with a radiant and bright face. She was always smiling, helping others to enjoy the service. After several days of watching her, I dared to speak to her. She said that she had attended the morning service for 50 years! “Wow, half a century!” From age 35, when she had finished raising her three children, she began attending the service every day. When I met her, she was 85 years old. Her name was Aoki-san.

From that day on, I attended the service sitting just beside her. At that time, Aoki-san spoke to me about her understanding of the sutras, for example, about Shinran’s *Shōshinge*, *Wasan* etc. Because we chanted six new *Wasan* each day, she found new inspiration with

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them every morning. With a beaming face, she shared her understanding with me, it was like an overflowing of warmth from the bottom of her heart. Every day I could learn something new and receive her contagious inspiration. So, for me, Aoki-san seemed to live real live Buddhism.

I felt very comfortable and calm with her, so I continued to attend the services. At that time in winter, the service was held from 6:30 to 7:30 a.m. In Kyoto, it was so cold especially in the winter, it sometimes snowed. Moreover, there was no heater there because of fire hazard, so I really didn't want to go in the winter months. At that time Aoki-san wore a purple shawl every day and she folded it into four and put it down just beside her in order to save a place for me. Although I didn't ask her to do it, she waited for me every time with her purple shawl, so I felt I couldn't stop going and disappoint her.

But one day in late February, she caught a cold and didn't come to the service. Because of this I stopped going. Only with her encouragement had I been able to attend the morning service for the past six months; I couldn't go by myself at all. This led me to discover two things.

First, with a Dharma friend's sincere support, I was able to attend the morning service. All the time, she had encouraged and supported me.

Second, I found out that everyday practice was the way to live real live Buddhism in my life. When I chanted in front of Amida's statue, I felt Amida's perspective of interdependence with each other (suchness world). In my daily routine and especially after sleeping each night, I would forget everything. But every day at the morning service, I

would recall what I had learned. So, by living Buddhism through body practice of chanting and reciting Nembutsu, we experience the connection with the universe. I felt everyday practice was the key to living in the Nembutsu.

In 2007, I heard that Aoki-san had passed away, so I really wanted to know how she had lived out the last days of her life. So, I handed my name card to her morning service friend Fukada-san and asked her to contact Aoki-san's daughter. Her daughter wanted to meet me at Nishi-Hongwanji on Jan.15, 2007. The next day, Jan.16 was the anniversary of Shinran's arrival to the Pure Land, he passed away at the age of 90.

What I had heard about Aoki-san's last stage of life was as follows. Up until Jan.14, 2005, she had attended morning service every day. But on Jan.15, she couldn't go, because of her bad health. That's why her friend didn't ask her to go together on the 16th. On the evening of Jan 16, Aoki-san's daughter came back from work. Her mother looked like sleeping calmly in *futon*, but she had passed away without a trace of suffering. Aoki-san's heart had stopped already. Her daughter was very surprised and rushed to get the doctor to come. He said she had probably passed away around 7:30 that morning.

Interestingly, everything happened by chance. Aoki-san passed away on Jan 16, at the age of 90, which was the same as Shinran Shōnin – the same day, the same age. Moreover, when she breathed her last breath at 7:30 in the morning, it was also the ending time of morning service at Hongwanji, a 10-minute walk away. When I heard this story, I felt as if she had attended her last morning service, Shinran's memorial service, Hōonkō, in her futon.

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Then I promised her daughter to meet again the following year in order to attend the service on Jan 16. The next year came. When I met her, she presented something to me saying "You were the only young person in her company for the 55 years of attending the morning services. So, would you keep this with you?" Here it is she said...I have brought it with me today.

Eight years ago, Aoki-san sat next to me with this shawl on her lap. And now this shawl was on my lap, and I was sitting next to her daughter to join Aoki san's and Shinran Shōnin's memorial morning service. At that moment, I realized the true meaning of a certain hymn of the Pure Land. This one:

When we say "Namu-amida-butsu,"
The countless Buddhas throughout the ten quarters,
Surrounding us a hundredfold, a thousandfold,
Rejoice in and protect us (always). (CWS 1, p. 355)

Just as Shinran wrote this *Wasan*, thinking about his teacher Honen, I encountered my own inner experience. Honen had recited Nembutsu all the time just like breathing. Then he passed away and became the Buddha of Namu-amida-butsu. Shinran felt as if he was surrounded by Honen in the form of Namu-amida-butsu, meanwhile he had a dialogue with his teacher throughout his lifetime.

I think that the result of their collaboration together in Nembutsu is *Kyōgyōshinshō*. His text is not just a book; it is a real live energy of Namu-amida-butsu. I feel this energy when I recite and hear it with my own ears and heart.

For me, Aoki-san became Namu-amida-butsu and surrounded me a hundredfold, a thousand-fold, just like with this purple shawl. Until the time of death, I will be supported and surrounded by the Nembutsu, which Aoki-san melted into, and I will become Namu-amida-butsu in the same way when my body is gone. She enabled me as a connector to receive and pass on the Nembutsu, to pass on the Dharma. In that meaning, there is no boundary between life and death in Namu-amida-butsu.

Therefore, the spirit of the Nembutsu will continue to inspire and guide those who come after us through our living, just like we received the spirit from the person who came before us. Through person to person, the Nembutsu teachings work endlessly on this planet earth.

Finally, I would like to recite the last part of *Kyōgyōshinshō*, in English translation and in Shinran Shōnin's original text, 750 years ago. Please feel its energy and rhythm.

Those who have been born first guide those who come later, and those who are born later join those who were born before. This is so that the boundless ocean of birth-and-death is exhausted. (CWS 1, p. 291)

Saki ni umaren mono wa nochi o michibiki, nochi ni umaren hito wa saki o toburae. Renzoku mugū ni shite, negawaku wa kushi sezarashimen to hossu. Muhen no shōjikai o tsukusan ga tame no yue nari.

(*Chūshakuban Seiten*, p. 474)

Nembutsu in Everyday Life or Haunted by Compassion

Frank KOBBS

I often get asked, what are you doing as a Shin Buddhist or better, what is your practice? Now, that is not easily explained to people who know a lot about Buddhism or who are Buddhists, practicing in some of the many other schools of the Buddhas teaching. I am and the Questioners involved are always tempted to give some theoretical answer to what we are practicing and what we want to achieve by doing so. Regarding the Shinshu teaching and trying to explain it in simply phrasing, I gain this pitiful smile or a weird look from the eyes of the other, asking - do you really believe that? Taking into account that Buddhism is widely spread in Europe and many denominations are strongly established in this part of the world, I have learned that going into a theoretical debate is no use to anybody. So, in the following I want to read to you some of my daily experiences with the Nembutsu in my everyday life. They are just little notes or thoughts occurring out of everyday situations and I may add that those thoughts are purely subjective and may not always fit with doctrinal theory.

A Buddhist friend asked me; "What is your Buddhist practice?" My answer was, "I say Nembutsu!" He looked at me for a while and then said; "But that is not really a practice!" I had to smile and looked into his eyes; "My friend you are so right! It's someone else's working!"
Namu Amida Butsu

Being taken:

Saying Namu Amida Butsu in the morning and during my day. Whenever it occurs to me, whenever I like. Do I need a special reason? Not really, I just say it aloud or in my mind, depending on the place or situation. Namu Amida Butsu has become natural, maybe a habit; it is something I just got used to saying. Is it me or is it the Buddhas voice? To be honest, I don't care! Just say it, think it or whisper it. That's all! Why am I doing this? Because I do not have the time for anything else, sometimes I do not have the energy. I am simply too occupied and busy. When I reflect upon myself, I'm grateful, for I would never be able to perform all the practices some friends have the courage to perform. Sometimes I envy them for their courage and the opportunity to invest their spare time with a special practice. But really only sometimes! I can take Namu Amida Butsu with me wherever I go, wherever I am. Namu Amida Butsu is simply there and is just everywhere! Reminding me of the Buddhas teaching and that I have chosen to walk this way, even though I fail and fall again and again just being my usual self.

Only just seven o'clock in the morning and I'm still sleepy. Namu Amida Butsu is like saying good morning to a family member. And when you are living alone? It will remind you that you are never really alone. Oya-sama is always with you and we are all interconnected. Namu Amida Butsu.

Nothing special!:

Starting the day, it's nothing special – say Nembutsu! Going through the day, it's nothing special – say Nembutsu! Failing again on

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the way, it's nothing special – it's just the way you are! Saying Nembutsu is being in touch with your true self, you will become aware of, when Oya-sama moves into your heart and will alter it little by little without you even knowing. Say Nembutsu!

Some of the questions that are addressed to me: “Is it allowed to meditate while being a Shin Buddhist?” Or, “Do you know the teaching of such and such Master?” further “Can I pray to Avalokiteśvara or any other Bodhisattva for help?” “Can I mix Nembutsu with other practices?” My answers are always the same. “Of course, you can, if it is your wish, for it is your decision only!”

But, I for myself have decided to entrust into the teachings of Master Shinran, who himself entrusted into the teachings of Master Honen and both entrusted into the teachings of Śākya-muni Buddha, who has preached the single-minded way of Nembutsu and its liberating Power. I have tried so many ways and followed so many teachers and I'm sure all those teachings are very effective. Only I cannot follow them, for I am just me. Nembutsu chose me and the only thing I had to do is, giving up the spiritual shopping that seems so popular in our days. “Say the Nembutsu and be saved” that is all and enough, at least for me! Gasshō.

Jōdo Shinshū service or practice should be like teeth brushing. You do it twice a day and you would not dream of not brushing your teeth in the morning and in the evening. It does not take half the time you would spend on sitting Meditation, nor does it expect any special skills of you. You just light a candle, burn an incense stick, put your palms together and say the Nembutsu. You may recite a Gāthā in

Kobs: Nembutsu in Everyday Life or Haunted by Compassion

order to hear the teaching and then off you go, to wherever you are heading. During the day you may feel like saying Nembutsu, whenever it occurs to you and in the evening, you once again hold a small service in front of the image of Amida Buddha. None of this takes a lot of time, but if you give it the same importance as brushing your teeth, it will have the same effects. You will gain health, health of the heart and mind. Don't just believe me. Just try it and you will see for yourself!

I chose Nembutsu because Nembutsu chose me! Wow - I'm so fortunate, I never thought this could happen! Namandabu... Namandabu....

Just a few days by the seaside. Only took my Nenju with me. No books, no altar, nothing else.

Walking on the beach it is wondrous, just me, my Nenju in my hand and somehow Nembutsu seems to be all around me. Namu Amida Butsu is just about everywhere. I am filled with a feeling called Gratitude walking in a Temple without walls or a roof! Gasshō.

Is there a western land called Sukhāvātī, where the Buddha is dwelling and teaching the Dharma? Well, I really don't know! But what I do know is that there is Namu Amida Butsu on my lips and on my mind. Sometimes even in my heart, for the time being that is quite enough for me and all I need to know!! Namandabu....

What is the use of a wrist *nenju*?

Tuesday morning! Getting up at six and preparing for the day. I know it will be a long day with a few conferences, meeting dates and other appointments. Still tired and somehow brain-dead I can't man-

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age my morning gongyō and skip it for this time, for I'm already late and to be honest, I do not really feel like it. Too many other things are already on my mind. Just before I leave the house I grab my wrist nenju and dash off into the day. Rushing from one meeting to the next, I become aware of the nenju on my left wrist, always checking for it still being there, for one can lose it so easily. Each time checking, a silent Nembutsu arises in my mind, right between listening to people, answering questions or giving a talk. Returning home at night I'm totally worn out and once again I feel as if my brain had gone and I once more acknowledge that I'm not twenty anymore. Just before going to bed I find myself in front of Amida Buddha. Again, no energy left for evening service! Looking at Amida I feel gratitude, for he thought of me so many times today, each time I checked on my nenju and his calling Nembutsu reached my heart in the middle of today's rushing.

Perspectives on the Nembutsu: Explanations for a UK Audience

Kenneth MULLEN

Introduction

Possible converts to Buddhism in the UK often have preconceived ideas, one of which is that a central component of Buddhism consists of a set of practices. Further, Buddhists from other schools and traditions will often ask: what is your practice? By which they often mean what form of meditation do you engage in? When encountering Jōdo Shinshū people are therefore often puzzled by the Nembutsu, particularly by statements describing it as a non-practice and denial that it is a form of meditation. This paper explores these seeming contradictions. Drawing on how different Buddhist traditions have interpreted the 'Name of the Buddha' it presents possible ways by which the Nembutsu may be explained to those interested in following the Buddhist path.

Buddhist Landscape and the Spiritual Marketplace

A recent survey of religiosity in Europe shows a sharp decline in organized religion; a fact that may indicate a distrust of traditional religiosity. In a study carried out by St. Mary's University, London, Bullivant (2018) writes of the rise of a non-Christian Europe. The survey of 16- to 29-year-olds found that the Czech Republic is the least religious country in Europe, with 91% of that age group saying they had no religious affiliation. Between 70% and 80% of young adults in Estonia, Sweden and the Netherlands also categorize themselves as

non-religious. The most religious country is Poland, where 17% of young adults define themselves as non-religious, followed by Lithuania with 25%. In the UK, only 7% of young adults identify as Anglican, and fewer than 10% categorize themselves as Catholic. Young Muslims, at 6% are on the brink of overtaking those who consider themselves part of the country's established church.

Bullivant discovered that the youth are very much against the idea of organized religion. On the one hand, this can be seen as an opportunity for Jōdo Shinshū in that religions other than Christianity are now seen as acceptable. But also, as a challenge as the young may not wish to join what is seen as an established structured religion.

In a recent edition of Pure Land Notes, Steve Lane (2018) reviews the book 'Searching for Meaning inside Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism and Islam by Corinna Nicolaou (CUP: New York). Nicolaou states, this time of America, that: 'in 2012 nearly 1 in 5 adult Americans say they have no religious affiliations. What this points to is that organized religions are failing to meet the needs of Americans' (p14.) At the end of his book review Steve Lane highlights how these issues will impact on Shin Buddhism's success in taking root in the West. He believes it is important 'To not accept what you think you understand of a teaching but to commit yourselves to the community in trust that you will feel more comfortable with the teachings later.' This suggests the need for a strong, functioning and supportive sangha.

The Buddhist landscape in the U.K. has complexity. It is very much a marketplace, one segment of the religious supermarket. In some ways different Buddhist groups are often competing for an audience. We might wish to ask: what would attract people to Shin

Buddhism? Perhaps we need to go back to the functions of religion and what human needs it satisfies: reducing anxiety, providing sociability. What are the functions of the religious impulse? Some of these may relate to wellbeing. What aspects of religion or religiosity are likely to improve the well-being of the individual? As we can see from the above being part of a community is one of them, or in Buddhist terms the Sangha, being a part of the Sangha. And does chanting improve an individual's well-being? In the spiritual marketplace other schools of Buddhism are offering various means (skillful means if you like) of introducing individuals to the teachings, practices, that along the way often help with their wellbeing or improve their current situation in life (see Gyatso 2016; Vajragupta 2013). This focus has been found in research on Triratna UK (The Western Buddhist Order) and a study (Wilson and Dobbie 1998) of Soka Gakkai Buddhists in Britain found:

Inevitably, personal health is a prime target of chanting for many people... and a number of members testified to having recovered from illness through chanting. Nor were all such cases of a psychological nature. p. 202

We may ask the question as to how Shin fits into this landscape and how its position could be improved.

What is your Practice?

When people discover that you are a Buddhist one of the first questions they ask is: what is your practice? For most Buddhist groups this often breaks down to what forms of meditation you practice. And in the West the popularity remains with 'mindfulness'. However, a

close second may be some form of meditation using a mantra, particularly strong among the Tibetan schools.

Tibetan sects often use mantras associated with Amitābha in their meditational pujas. Although their form as a mantra, ‘Om Amideva Hrīḥ’ is different from that of a salutation incorporating ‘Namo’ (Hattori 1994), although one Tibetan sect headed by Tarthang Tulku, uses a mantra very similar form to the Nembutsu: ‘Om Namo Amitābha Buddhāya’.

In the early days of the introduction of Shin Buddhism to the UK the Reverend Jack Austin recommended ‘Namo Amida Buddha’ for Western Jōdo Shinshū. One UK Buddhist organization, Tariki Trust, which is closely aligned to Jōdo Shinshū, incorporates formal chanting, in the form of ‘Namandabu’, as part of their practice.

There is a strong emphasis in the West on meditation in its various forms. Indeed, in the West there may be a particular need for meditation and its fruits, and this may spread out with the confines of Buddhism to encompass yoga and other forms of eastern mysticism. The continuing popularity of mindfulness and various forms of yoga highlights this. Jōdo Shinshū does not really cater to this need. I suggest that we looking for meeting points, points of convergence. One such point relates to the meaning of the Nembutsu: mindfulness of the Buddha.

The Name of the Buddha: the Buddha’s Light

How do we explain the Nembutsu to Western Europeans? One starting point is to explain how Jōdo Shinshū is firmly placed in the Mahayana stream. Corless (2015) explains the Pure Land Position in

an intellectually rigorous fashion by going back to the Chinese patriarch T'an-luan. He does this in a succinct manner which will appeal to individuals who have experienced a time within other Buddhist traditions before encountering Jōdo Shinshū. He clearly demonstrates how the Nembutsu is firmly grounded in the Mahayana and its two major philosophical schools of Mādhyamika and Yogācāra. An individual will thus find it easier to commit themselves to the Jōdo Shinshū perspective:

In many...ways T'an-luan shows how a simple practice has powerful results. The practitioner need know nothing about the mechanism of this liberation, just as the operator of a complicated machine need know nothing about the inner workings of the machine.... But if we want to open the box, as it were, and inspect the mechanism, T'an-luan shows us how it works. When we do, we find that the mechanism underlying the simple practice is anything but simplistic. p.10

We can further explore this theme via the traditional approach of moving through the evolving sutras: *The Contemplation Sutra*; *the Smaller Sutra of Amida*; to *the Larger Sutra of Immeasurable Life*. Again, by way of the historical process of moving from the provisional teaching to the true teaching.

A key element in the Buddha's name is the light of the Buddha, the immeasurable light, 'kōmyō'. And this may also be another good meeting point between the various Buddhist schools, in particular between the Zen and the Shin schools:

The realm of the Buddha is boundless, immeasurable... The light of the Buddha has no end; it fills the cosmos, inconceivably. *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*

Self and Other Power: Dichotomy or Continuum

In Japan there is strict segregation and clear philosophical distinctions between the Buddhist schools. In Europe, the Buddhist landscape is different, and people often experience Buddhism in different forms as they try out and sample the various approaches on offer. There may be far greater syncretism and eclecticism in the approach of practitioners.

Buddhism has always been seen as a way to be trodden, the noble 8-fold path, a mārga. Should we see Self and Other power not as a rigid dichotomy but rather as different points on a continuum? I realize that this may be somewhat of a non-orthodox (heterodox) position. Our tasks may be starting off from where people already are on their spiritual journey: in the midst of the current religious marketplace, the pick and mix spiritual supermarket.

These seeming contradictions may rather be expressed as polar ends along different continua:

‘Multiple mantras – Single Nembutsu’

‘Multiple practices – Single/ no Practice.’

The simplicity of a single practice will appeal to some individuals.

Harvey (in Schmidt-Leukel 2008) has discussed the issue of Intra-Buddhist relationships:

While the approaches of self-Power and other-Power seem to be strongly in tension, classical Indian Mahayana taught one

to both act like a Bodhisattva and draw on help from heavenly Bodhisattvas and Buddhas, and both these elements can be seen in e.g. T'ien-t'ai and Hua-yen. Even the mostly self-power Theravada has some other-power aspects...in any case Pure Land schools other than Jodo-shin, especially in China, still retained some self-power aspects, and by the sixteenth century in China, Ch'an monastic practice included chanting the nien-fo (J. nembutsu) to Amitābha Buddha, as a way to arouse concentration and devotion, with a common kōan being reflection on 'who recites the name of the Buddha?' and Amitābha Buddha 'without' and the Buddha-nature 'within' sometimes being seen as two ways of talking about the same reality. p.134

An important point is made in the 'Heart of the Shin Buddhist Path' by Shigaraki (2013). In his section on the Objective Interpretation of Shinjin:

This objective interpretation of shinjin originated after Shinran's death with the assertions of his great-grandson, Kakunyo (1270-1351). p. 77

Again:

This can be clearly seen in the understanding of shinjin held by Rennyō (1415-1499), the eighth head priest of the Hongwanji. His approach was exclusively dualistic and objectifying. This view completely loses sight of the fact that the Primal Vow of the *Larger Sutra* of Immeasurable Life reveals

shinjin to be prasāda, which is nondualistic and subjective in nature. p. 78

Faith and Reason: Mutually Contradictory?

In the West at present we are also witnessing a debate about the clash between faith and reason. This is also reflected in terms of books about Islam, new attempts to formulate a way out of the impasse (De Bellaigue 2017). The potential dichotomy between faith and reason has taken on a particular urgency in our time. This also has reverberations in the way we think about Buddhism.

In a recent edition of *Pure Land Notes* the Rev. John Paraskevopoulos answers questions from the Rev. Daichi Gary Robinson about could or should there ever be a form of 'non-Japanese' Shin Buddhism (2018):

In my experience, I consider that it has a tendency to be more open, critical and universal in outlook. p. 8

Again, he states:

But the major challenge right now (which the Japanese aren't really confronting) is the surge in secular materialism in modern society and what this means for all faiths. Western Shin has a unique role to play here but I don't see many people addressing this much bigger problem. p. 8

I feel the points brought out in these two quotations are linked and solutions are needed to address both these issues.

Articles by Cîrlea (2016) and Arai (2016) argue for the True Teachings with no admixtures from other Buddhist schools or indeed other religions. If they are right, then in the West the current situation is

one of spiritual decadence. For as we have seen it has a strong tendency towards eclecticism and syncretism.

Conclusion

The above discussion has shown that the Buddhist impulse in the UK and Europe is fragmented with individuals often moving between Buddhist groups. I would argue that Jōdo Shinshū needs to take account of this situation in order to make its key ideas more widely known. Suggested possibilities for development could be:

a) A greater use of the current resources on the internet. Dr Al Bloom's (2016) course explaining Jōdo Shinshū 'Shin Buddhism in Modern Culture: A Self-Study Course', and the material on Horai Association's (2018) internet site are good starting places.

b) A greater emphasis could be placed on the Contemplation Sutra. As a form of preliminary or provisional practice.

In conclusion it is therefore important that we learn to dialogue with other Buddhist groups, and indeed even to expand this to include an Interfaith component. Schmidt-Leukel's edited text about the need for dialogue within Buddhism and indeed also demonstrating an Interfaith component between religions is important here. Heeding the recommendation of Seng-T'san: 'The Great Way is not difficult only avoid judgements.'

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Finding Amida / Finding Myself

Diane DUNN

It has been fifteen years since the temple name “Myoko-in” (Temple of Wondrous Light) was granted. I am happy to report that the small, rural sangha of Myoko-in Temple has finally found its permanent home in the great Pacific Northwest. It is now located in Deer Island, Oregon, a small unincorporated village that was once home to the Chinook Indian Tribe, a resting place for the expedition of Lewis and Clark in 1805 and base camp for over sixty logging crews that harvested timber over 100 years ago. As you may recall that over the years Myoko-in Temple has made its home throughout various temporary residences in Anchorage, Alaska. In 2009, I returned home to Oregon and in 2014 purchased a historic two room schoolhouse, the Deer Island School built in 1908. Renovations began right away to turn the school into a private residence as well as a bed and breakfast. The old school has a 2100 sq. foot gymnasium. It was within the renovated gymnasium that Myoko-in would find its new permanent home. This would be no easy task, but with a lot of hard work, donations, grants and time, we designed and built an altar that would serve as the center of Shin Buddhist activities on the Columbia River. Finding and making this new home for Myoko-in Temple has been the culmination of a long 15-year journey; finding Amida and finding myself along the way. I have come to discover a deeper understanding of the Nembutsu in my life and I strive to continue to share that experience with others.

It has always been my hope that Myoko-in temple would serve

not only as a place to hear the Dharma, but a place to cultivate a spiritual, Nembutsu-centered life. A visitor to our temple may ask, "What is the point of all of this?" For me, the point of all of this, the chanting of the sutras, the reading of the Dharma, and the gathering of the Sangha is a reflection of what we all are striving for; peace, understanding, friendship and community with those of like mind and heart. For me this Nembutsu-centered life is the very foundation of the path on which I walk upon each day. When I fall in my foolishness, I come eye to eye with Amida's compassion and wisdom. My foundation of Namu Amida Butsu is my unflinching touchstone that brings me from the darkness to the light.

There is much conflict, hatred, war and suffering in the world. There is just as much joy, happiness, and celebration in the world, too. Where do we direct our focus? Where do we direct our energy? Do we get caught up in the great delusion of divisiveness or do we actively contribute to creating a harmonious existence with those around us? If the Nembutsu is at the center of our lives, we must express our gratitude in the words we choose the actions we take and the thoughts we think. In finding Amida at the center of our lives, we find ourselves; imperfect, foolish and completely grasped by the Buddha's Vow.

How can I truly put into words what the Nembutsu means to me in everyday life? To put it simply, finding Amida saved my life. I don't know any other way to say it. I spent years searching for a path that would shed some light on the meaning of my life and what I should do with it. I cannot separate the Nembutsu from life itself. The Nembutsu is life. My life. As Shin Buddhists, we look for Amida Buddha's presence in our daily life. We seek the Compassion and Wisdom that is all

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embracing. This is the point that I try to stress to all of those that come to visit our little temple in Deer Island.

My Dharma talks reflect how I observe the Nembutsu in my everyday life. I find this is the best way to convey how I truly experience the Nembutsu in my daily life. I recently spoke about a car accident that I witnessed right outside of our temple. After I heard the crash of the vehicles, I rushed outside and down the sidewalk only to discover that one of the drivers is a friend of mine. The other driver and passengers were in shock, uninjured and out of their vehicles. I was talking to my friend as he was still sitting in the car in shock. As he turned to get out of the car, he was unaware that his leg was severely cut and that he was losing blood quickly. I immediately applied pressure to the wound and kept talking to him to keep him conscious. Even though the fault of the accident was not his, he was not concerned about his life, but was concerned about his passenger and the driver and passenger of the other car. He kept asking me, "Are the others ok?" I kept reassuring him that everyone else seemed to be fine. Once the paramedics arrived and took over his care, I sat down on the ground to collect my thoughts and catch my breath. There I sat, with my friend's blood on my hands and my shoes. I could only hope for the best for him. A day later, I get a phone call. It is my friend Larry from the accident. He is calling to ask how I am doing! I said, "The big question is how you are doing?" He proceeded to tell me that he spent all night at the hospital and received close to 100 stitches and is now at home resting. Several times during our conversation he repeated the same sentiment. He was glad that the young man that caused the accident wasn't hurt. He was glad that both cars' passengers weren't hurt. One inter-

esting thing he said was “I wish the stitches were in my arm instead of my leg because that way I could walk around and get some work done here on the farm.” Not once did he complain about being injured. He only wished that he could be mobile in order to get some work accomplished. I was greatly moved by the whole experience. My Dharma talk a few days later spoke about Larry's concern and compassion towards others. I felt that I had truly met a Bodhisattva face to face. His concern is for “the other” and not “the self”. It is experiences like this that shake me to the core and reawaken my gratitude for living a life in the Nembutsu. Compassion and Wisdom are not only found in the lovely day to day happenings in our lives but are found in the most stressful of moments as well. This is the message that I strive to convey to all I encounter in our little temple in Deer Island. This is a Nembutsu-centered life.

I would like to share another temple story. Last year, we had a family from California come and stay at our Bed and Breakfast. The mother (of Japanese heritage) is a professor at a university in California, the father (of Hispanic heritage) is a computer engineer at the same university and their 4-year-old son is curious and adventurous as most 4-year-old are. When we have guests on a day that I hold a temple service, I offer them the opportunity to join us. After the service, I was delighted to hear (from the Mom) that the little boy's grandmother was often heard saying “Namu Amida Butsu” when they would visit her. So when the little boy heard me saying “Namu Amida Butsu”, he whispered to his mother, “Just like Obāsan!” I gave the little boy the children's book I created a few years ago called “Amida's ABCs”. His mother wrote to me a few months later to say how much they enjoy

reading the book together and her son often says, "I want to be like Amida Buddha!" This is how I experience a Nembutsu-centered life.

This is my life in the Nembutsu. It is not special, yet at times it is extraordinary. There are many difficulties, yet at times it is the easiest path to walk upon. I think this sentiment is something we all have in common. We are often times foolish, and yet in the depths of our foolishness, with the help of Amida, we experience gratitude. Recognizing and experiencing gratitude in my daily life is a goal that I work towards each day. In keeping this goal of my own in mind, I created a Facebook group called "3 A Day: What are you grateful for?" I encouraged participants to log on and write down three things for which they are grateful. 286 people signed up to do this! I have read research that suggests that it takes twenty-one days to form a new habit. It was extraordinary to read the daily posts by people all over the world. On a day when I didn't feel very grateful, I would read the "gratitude" of others and immediately reflected on my own life. I could see the working of Amida through the words of others. Compassion and wisdom naturally give rise to gratitude. This experience led me to create a journal to use as a tool to encourage an **attitude of gratitude**. It is indeed a self-power effort. Opening the page of the journal, one is prompted to write down three things for which you are grateful. A pretty simple task. Sometimes we all need a bit of encouragement. I will make copies of this journal available at the end of today. This is a gift from the little temple of Myoko-in in Deer Island, Oregon. This is my simple effort to encourage others. An attitude of gratitude is what the world needs today, and it starts right here with me and with you. One moment of gratitude at a time.

In finding Amida in your daily life, you will discover the compassion, wisdom and gratitude in yourself. Amida's call will always shed light in the darkness we create through conflict, greed and delusion. Find Amida, find yourself. Know that you are directly standing in Amida's realm of compassion and wisdom that engulfs the very essence of your existence. This is Amida Buddha working on us just as we are. Say the Nembutsu. Hear the Nembutsu. Be the Nembutsu.

Thank you.



Naijin at Myokoin



Deer Island Manor
and Myokoin Temple

The Power of Nembutsu

Nobuyuki KASHIWAHARA

I would like to compare Nembutsu with some of Pāli canons and something in secular daily life.

Namo from Namō Amidabutsu is also namo in the Pāli language. 'Namō tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambudassa' is recited three times at the beginning of any kind of Buddhist rituals in Theravāda.

The verb form "namassati" is the denominative of 'namo' (homage). The root form 'nam' is 'to bend' or 'to bow.' This physical action means obedience. This action of obedience is used in the world in different ways. Añjali or gasshō is also the gesture of obedience. This is kāya-kamma or bodily action.

The word 'namo' is found in the national anthem of Sri Lanka, which begins with "Sri Lanka māthā, Apa Sri Lanka, Namō Namō Namō Namō Māthā!" (Mother, Sri Lanka! Our Sri Lanka, Homage to Mother!) And the daily greeting in Hindi is "Namas te" (Homage to you.)

Namō Amidabutsu can be a greeting. This is vacī-kamma or verbal action.

Uttering plays an important role for us. Singing helps to cure depression. One of my friends was a depressive and recovered by singing songs in a chorus group and playing a role in a musical. Players on the baseball teams yell to cheer themselves up when they practice. Saying "Don't mind!" or "It's OK" helps us to calm down.

Japanese say that words have their own spirits.

I say, “Good night!” and “Good morning!” to someone. “Namandabu” is not said to Amida Buddha but said to me by him. I am greeted by Amida Buddha.

On my way to work once, I was called out to by a strange old woman yelling, “Good morning!” I did not know her at all. She must have been too old to recognize me. I just bowed and smiled. I felt very happy for the rest of the day. Even now I remember her voice and smile and I feel happy. This is mano-kamma or mental action which is the most important among three kinds of actions.

One’s hearing is said to remain until the last moment of death. Hearing nembutsu makes one feel happy after one has no reaction to others’ voice. This means that mano-kamma remains after losing any kāya-kamma and vacī-kamma.

Shinran says,

“Saved by the inconceivable working of Amida’s Vow, I shall realize birth in the Pure Land”: the moment you entrust yourself thus to the Vow, so that the mind set upon saying the nembutsu arises within you, you are immediately brought to share in the benefit of being grasped by Amida, never to be abandoned.

Tannishō 1, CWS p. 661

This nembutsu is not vacī-kamma but mano-kamma.

Shinran also says about Amida Buddha,

Thus, appearing in the form of light called “Tathagata of un-

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hindered light filling the ten quarters,” it is without color and without form;

Yuishinshō-mon'i 4, CWS pp. 461-462

I do not have to think of the existence of Amida Buddha. I can receive Amida Buddha's greetings wherever I am when I utter nembutsu.

Shinran lost his mother when he was young and stayed in Enryakuji temple apart from his father. He must have missed his parents.

Shinran wrote:

Śākyamuni Tathagata is truly our compassionate father and mother. With a variety of compassionate means, he leads us to awaken the supreme shinjin.

Kyōgyōshinshō, CWS p. 92

Śākyamuni and Amida are our father and our mother,
Full of love and compassion for us:
Guiding us through various skillful means,
They bring us to awaken the supreme shinjin.

Kōsō-wasan 74 CWS p. 380

Great Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, the world-savior,
Who appeared as Prince Shōtoku,
Is like a father, never leaving us,
And like a mother, always watching over us.

Kōtaishi Shōtoku hōsan,

Shōzōmatsu Wasan No. 84, CWS p. 418

From the beginningless past down to the present,
Prince Shōtoku has compassionately
Watched over us, like a father,
And stayed close to us, like a mother.

ibid. 85, CWS p. 418

A TV program reported that youths imprisoned at the MacLaren Youth Correctional Facility in Woodburn, Oregon, US, learn to train the dogs, groom them, and find them new adoptive “forever homes.” The dogs leave the program ready to be great pets, while their trainers re-enter the community with a new job and personal skills and increased compassion and respect for all life.

One of the boys said to a poor barking dog which learned nothing, “It’s OK. You’ll be able to do it, Good Girl! Good Girl!”

I think that I am also comforted and encouraged like the dog when I utter nembutsu which is Amida’s voice.

Shinran says:

The Tathagata of Light that Surpasses the Sun and Moon
Taught me the nembutsu-samadhi.

The Tathagatas of the ten quarters compassionately regard
Each sentient being as their only child.

Hymns on Mahāsthāmaprāpta 114, CWS p. 356

When sentient beings think on Amida
Just as a child thinks of its mother,
They indeed see the Tathagata – who is never distant –
Both in the present and in the future.

ibid. 115, CWS p. 356

Ms. Wariko Kai wrote in her poem,

My voice to call the Buddha is that of the Buddha who calls me.

(Mihotoke o yobu waga koe wa Mihotoke no ware o yobimasu koe narikeri.)

Kusakago

I had an occasion to visit the cemetery near by the Chapel House of Colgate University in New York State, US. There were several types of tomb stones. I felt I was greeted by the deceased. I just uttered namandabu. I felt they understood it, though they may have different mother tongues. Nembutsu is not my word but Amida's.

Shinran says,

The nembutsu alone is true and real.

Tannishō, CWS p. 679

Nembutsu as the true and real word of Amida must be understood by everyone.

Some children said that they report something, while others said that they consult with them, when asked, "What do you say to the tombstones of your family members?" They just want to tell something to someone. The best way of counseling is just to hear.

In the *Larger Sukhāvativyūha Sūtra*, it is said about the Bhikṣu Dharmākara:

He spoke to others in consonance with their inner thoughts.

He listened to before someone ask (先意承問).

Amida always asks me, “How are you?” when I utter nembutsu.

Nembutsu was originally used for meditation. It was and is used as a spell or a charm later. It was uttered by those who tried to cross a flood or to try to drink bad water. It was thought to be a protection. Dhāraṇī and mantra are also used as protection.

The words of vow by Aṅgulimāla, who was a slayer and later a disciple of Gotama Buddha:

Since I was born in the noble birth, I do not recall intentionally killing a living being. Through this truth may there be wellbeing for you, wellbeing for your fetus.

Aṅgulimāla-sutta

This phrase is used as the protection for easy delivery in the Theravada countries. It means that the power of his vow is effective even now.

Khandha Sutta is recited in order to prevent poisonous serpents. This sutta teaches us to be kind to them. You will be safe when you are kind. This tells us mano-kamma is important.

Anumodanā, which is translated as ‘transference of merit’, originally means ‘to be glad together’ and to express ‘thanksgiving’ or ‘appreciation.’ Anumodanā is performed for the living being in the underground after all night chanting in order to transfer the merit accumulated by the chanting. They are glad together with those who are on the ground and thank them. And they make good mano-kamma.

I will look down at them and be arrogant in such a situation. I would make bad kamma.

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My nembutsu is the directed virtue by Amida Buddha. And I thank him.

Shinran wrote about the protection by Namo Amidabutsu in the *Hymns on Benefits in the Present* (CWS pp. 352-355.) Nembutsu is never a spell in these hymns. All the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and the gods of the heavens and earth protect me because of Nembutsu which I utter with thanks to Amida Buddha. I am never arrogant and do not make any bad kamma.

The nembutsu in my daily life is caused by the Power of Amida's Primal Vow. It is the gift from Amida Buddha to me. He speaks to me and comforts or encourages me whenever I utter nembutsu. I am protected thanks to nembutsu. I feel happy and peaceful.

Peace in the world will be realized someday when everyone feels at peace.

I would like to add another effect of nembutsu. It is said that if you feel any trouble with your tongue when you say, "Don't teach an old dog new tricks," you should call an ambulance immediately. Your brain might have infarct. This English phrase is not common among non-English-speaking nations. Uttering "Namo Amidabutsu" is much easier for me and promises me to give the same effect. Amida Buddha kindly notifies me to call an ambulance. He is always helpful indeed.

Avoiding the Trivialising of the Nembutsu

Gary ROBINSON

Since time immemorial, the human race has relied upon musicians, artists and poets to express our most complex and finer emotions for us. When you and I might say, "I'm all of a flutter." William Wordsworth might say, "I wandered lonely as a cloud that floats on high o'er vales and hills...." In this way the poet is able to furnish or decorate our feelings with beautiful words. And then there is music; and with mastery of this the most ethereal of mankind's creative arts, our emotions or 'feelings' may be expressed even without words.

In my earlier years, I had many occupations and, following a couple of years at Art School and then a couple more as a theatre stagehand and lighting technician, the first successful one was as a professional musician. Though that career reached a peak when I had become a kind of session musician I found this kind of work rather mechanical or 'sole-less' so I returned to my original interest of being a writer of original instrumental music. I earned money as a session musician and earned none as a writer of original music, but the latter brought me infinitely more satisfaction. I do hope this short paragraph quickly informs you that I was and perhaps still am one of those arty types who has always viewed 'everyday life' as a tedious distraction and not at all conducive to creativity!

Only two years ago, in 2014, the 17th ESC was held in my hometown of Southampton on the south coast of England and as a part of the entertainment we provided midway through the conference,

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a group of dharma brothers and sisters known back then as the ESC17 organizing committee arranged an excursion to nearby places of interest such as Stonehenge, King Arthur's Round Table and Winchester Cathedral. The excursion concluded at Winchester Town Hall where we all shared tea and jam scones with the Lord Mayor of the city.

To conclude what was a most memorable day, I performed an original instrumental piece which I composed entitled "Which Side Am I On?" I had done plenty of talking over the previous two days of the conference and so, just for those next few minutes I wanted to let my music do the talking for me, and I didn't bother to tell the audience that the tune was inspired by the Shin Buddhist parable of, "The River of Fire, River of Water and the White Path". And anyway, and for reasons that may become apparent, I prefer to not say what any of my tunes may be about.

Here now at ESC18 I would like to entertain you again with a recording of just one verse from another original piece that I wrote way back in the mid 1990's. This piece now goes under the title "Tonal Commitment," although I had originally given it the title "*Nembutsu for Guitar*" because it was an instrumental piece inspired by, or more precisely, based upon the structure (not so much the words) of a traditional Tendai Nembutsu chant, mentioned a little earlier. Later on within this presentation I will explain just why I changed the title of this piece and in so doing I will also comment in detail upon the theme of this conference, "*The Nembutsu in my Everyday Life*," but for now, please just rest your eyes and listen to the following 5 minute audio clip.

The first piece of music that we will hear is one of two verses of a Tendai tradition Nembutsu chant that was originally recorded in the late 1980's on a simple domestic cassette recorder. It features the solo voice of a gentleman named Venerable Enshin Saito. Venerable Enshin Saito was, at that time, the Tendai Master of a man named Rev Ganshin Rock; and in turn, Ganshin-san was my *zenjishiki*¹. My relationship with Ganshin-san is central to this presentation and I will speak more about him later.

The second piece is just one verse of a tune that I wrote in the mid 1990's that was inspired by, or more precisely, based upon the structure of the traditional Tendai Nembutsu chant. The unedited piece has two verses with a musical bridge between them.

The last audio that we will hear is of a line of each piece put side by side to highlight the similarities in the tonal structure of my tune which now goes under the title of "*Tonal Commitment*" and Venerable Enshin Saito's Nembutsu chant.

As mentioned earlier, when I first wrote my instrumental guitar piece, I gave it the title of "*Nembutsu for Guitar*." I did feel that I made a reasonable job of turning the Nembutsu chant into a 'song without words' by interpreting and extemporizing on the structure of the piece and I thought I played it quite well, but my little bubble of pride was soon burst when my good friend Ganshin Rock pointed out to me that as the Nembutsu – which is simply an abbreviation of "Namu Amida Butsu" means, "I take refuge" (Na Mu) "in Amida Butsu" (Amida Bud-

¹ *Zenjishiki* (善知識) also *zenchishiki*, 'good knowledge'; Sk, *kalyānamitra*, 'a good or virtuous friend'; a good friend or teacher who leads one to the Buddhist Way.

dha); the title of my tune would translate into “I take refuge” for or in “guitar” and therefore, I should re-think the title.

I argued this point for a while, suggesting to Ganshin-san that he was being unnecessarily pedantic, but he would not budge. I even resorted to the creative get-out of ‘poetic license’, saying that as creator of the piece I had the right to give whatever title I wished. Ganshin-san did at least concede this point, but all the same he went on to insist that as an artist I may have that right, but then also, as a follower of the teachings of Shinran Shōnin, Rennyo Shōnin and the Seven Pure Land Masters; and as a person who harbored ambitions to one day become a Jōdo Shinshū priest, I did have certain responsibilities which might be summarized as ‘transmitting the true and real Dharma’—as opposed to transmitting my own personal artistic interpretation of it, or postulating poetic guesses whenever it suited me.

Of all the good people I have known throughout my life so far, and I am pleased to say there has been a few; the wisest and kindest was Ganshin-san and I think it is fair to say that if it were not for him and the example he set I would not have started to hold weekly Buddhist meetings in my home, would not have attended the 10th biennial European Shin Buddhist Conference held in Oxford, England in 1998, would not have considered becoming an ordained Jōdo Shinshū priest, would not have been capable of hosting the 17th ESC that was held in my hometown of Southampton in 2014 and ultimately, would not be here with in Antwerp today. Thank you, Ganshin-san.

The number of participants at ESC17 was excellent and in fact went well beyond my expectations, but nevertheless, the one person I most hoped to see there could not attend, because, just a couple of

days before the conference began, Rev. Ganshin Emmanuel Rock was admitted into Southampton General Hospital, and then at 4:50 and just as day one of ESC17 came to an end, he passed away with the Nembutsu on his lips. Later, at his funeral to which I, as a Nishi Hongwanji Buddhist priest had been invited to officiate at, alongside Rev. Sato of Three Wheels; it was announced that Ganshin-san had been awarded the posthumous Buddhist name of Ten'ei Ganshin Emmanuel Rock Koji (天英巖真居士), meaning “First Tendai Priest in England.”²

Amida's Call to Us and Our Spontaneous Response = 'Oneness'

It is my belief that Amida exists beyond or outside of the constraints of time and space and therefore, when I get to walk and talk with Amida I am sure this event will take place in a time and space that is the antipathies of – or outside of – our everyday lives.

To support my belief, I refer to the definition of “Oneness” found in CWS volume II, Glossary of Shin Buddhist Terms, p197, where it says:

In the terms “one-calling” and “many-calling,” “calling” connotes not only the recitation but also, in Shinran's understanding, the source and contents of the nembutsu, which is a call from Amida and our response to it. When the “calling” involves our whole being, we experience shinjin, in which time and timelessness converge.

² An obituary to Reverend Ten'ei Ganshin Emmanuel Rock Koji (天英巖真居士) was published in Pure Land Notes issue # 23 in Jan 2015. PLN is the hard copy quarterly journal of the Shin Buddhist Fellowship UK (SBFUK). Online copy published at http://www.purelandnotes.com/ganshin_obit.htm.

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We do not have to look too far in this alphabetically ordered glossary to find further confirmation of transcendent nature of the nembutsu that I believe, places it in a timeless time and space-less place far removed from our everyday lives; because within the text under the next heading of “One Moment” it says:

...This moment is not just another moment in the conventional sense; it is the shortest possible instance in time, and thus is both time at its threshold and beyond time. It is such a time and point that the heart-water of sentient beings, whether good or bad, returns to and enters the ocean of the Vow (Buddha’s heart and mind) and becomes one in taste with it. Here, in other words, occurs the oneness of the mind of the foolish being and the mind of the Buddha. The oneness or single taste of time and the timeless that takes place here constitutes the essence of shinjin, and its arising is called “the one thought-moment of the awakening of shinjin” (ichinen-hokki). Thus, the moment of awakening shinjin and saying the nembutsu is a moment both in and out time. It is time that has become full and rich, having been permeated by timelessness.

Therefore, in my opinion, the nembutsu is a round peg and everyday life is a square hole or, put simply, the nembutsu is sacred and everyday life is secular. Namu Amida Buddha is taking refuge *away* from everyday life which is impermanent ... and full of delusion, into the all-encompassing embrace of Amida Buddha, which is full of light ... and infinite.

According to Webster's, the first known usage of the term 'everyday life' in the English language was in 1623. Till then I guess, a day was just a day! Dawn, midday, sunset.

According to Wikipedia: "Everyday life or Daily life or Routine life is a phrase used to refer to the ways in which people typically act, think, and feel on a daily basis. Everyday life may be described as considered mundane, routine, natural or habitual. Sometimes it is called normality." I do therefore feel that the term "nembutsu in everyday life" is contradictory as it renders "the nembutsu in everyday life" into "taking refuge" - "in the mundane"! Fundamental teaching says that our everyday life is suffering (in the delusion of permanence); therefore, to take refuge in everyday life is to take refuge in suffering and delusion.

'Everyday life' is our cultural norm. It's the way things are, from day to day. It is who we are and all the things we must do. It is mundane, it is getting things and it is losing things, and it is going around in circles. In Buddhism the word used to describe this endless cycle of birth, suffering and death is *saṃsāra*, and the place where this suffering is repeatedly endured is right here in a place called the *sahā* world.³

³ The concept of *saṃsāra* has roots in the Vedic literature (c. 1500 – 500 BCE). It appears in developed form, but without mechanistic details, in the early Upanishads (1st-millennium BCE through about 15th-century CE).

sahā: The saha world—World of Endurance. The secular world—this world that we live in. The corrupt world. The Sanskrit word *sahā* means *endurance*.

saṃsāra: transmigration; reincarnation; cycle existence; metempsychosis. The original meaning of *saṃsāra* is "flow together." This is the expression of the ancient Indian idea that all living things repeatedly pass through life and death. Like a continually spinning wheel, sentient beings are reincarnated and

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Furthermore, in the Preface of the *Tannishō* it is plainly said:

Let there be not the slightest distortion of the teaching of
Other Power with words of an understanding based only on
personal views.

The nembutsu is Amida's call to us and He stands there before us—on the white path of the nembutsu which runs between the rivers of fire and water which represents our deluded and greed ridden everyday lives...calling us; and in that momentous, timeless, precious moment—the onus is on us to go towards it and to take one step away from everyday life and one step closer to Amida's Infinite Light...and Infinite Life.

Our Personal Calling

within the Shin Buddhist Community

Marc NOTTELMANN-FEIL

What should we do as Shin Buddhists in our life? Most authoritative texts deal with the salvation of the ordinary beings by the Buddha Amida, but only a few of them talk directly about our concrete life praxis. Let's take as an example the *Ryōgemon* – a short declaration which the candidates for the priesthood recite as a kind of solemn promise during their ordination. Where else should we expect an instruction for a proper lifestyle? But only the last of the four sentences is directly related to life praxis:

“Kono ue wa sadameokaseraruru on'okite, ichigo o kagiri mamori mōsubeku sōrō.”

From now on, I will abide by the rules of conduct all my life.

This is really abstract. What does “rules of conduct” mean? Actually, the Japanese word on'okite is a quite equivocal term, and, to make the situation even more difficult, it cannot be traced back to the Buddhist sutras, or even, as far as I know, to Shinran Shonin. A dictionary of classical Japanese gives a couple of meanings which range from “rules,” “instructions,” “law” even to “mental attitude.” The same ambiguity of the word we find in the classical texts themselves. In the letters of Rennyō on'okite seems to refer to regulations which are established within a group (i.e. the Shin Buddhist tradition) to make

this group strong and vivid.¹ If we study the use of the word in the first collection of biographic anecdotes about Rennyo Shōnin's life, the *Goichidaiki kikigaki*;² we make a remarkable observation: On'okite appears only in the first quarter of the text and it refers here usually to an instruction, admonition or dharma talk given by Rennyo.³ Sometimes it refers to an instruction⁴ or an exemplary expression of gratitude⁵ by a high-ranking disciple. It seems that for the contemporaries of Rennyo—this strong and inspiring leader!—each of his words sounded like an instruction or a rule for life. However the last appearance of the word on'okite in the *Goichidaiki kikigaki* (in §75) deals with a much deeper meaning, because it refers to the Buddha Amida: “The school founded by Shinran Shōnin is based on Amida Tathāgata's direct exposition (on'okite).”⁶ In this context on'okite means finally the voice of the Buddha, which encourages us even in distressed situations.⁷

I would interpret the sentence of the *Ryōgemon* in the light of this ambiguity. There is “rules of conduct” and “regulations” within the Shin Buddhist community and, of course, especially priests have a special

¹ For example Rennyo's letter “On the reputation of our school,” II-13 in *RENNYO: The Second Founder of Shin Buddhism: With a Translation of his letters* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press: 1991) Rogers, Minor L. and Rogers, Ann T.; p.189. Here Rennyo speaks about regulations which should avoid confrontation with other Buddhist schools.

² English translation in: Inagaki, Zuio Hisao: Thus I have heard from Rennyo Shonin. (*Rennyo Shonin's Goichidaiki-kikigaki* (Craiova: Dharma publications, 2008).

³ In § 21, § 43, § 49, § 50, § 57, § 60.

⁴ In § 55 and § 59.

⁵ In § 2 and § 23.

⁶ Inagaki 2008, p. 57.

⁷ The Rennyo's letter IV-9 to which § 75 is related is about an epidemic.

relationship of loyalty to the Hongwanji head temple. However, in a deeper sense every Shin Buddhist has a “mental attitude.” The “calling” of Amida hits him in every personal situation. In this way it is a “personal calling” which allows him to overcome his hardships. This mental attitude is the heart, the inner life of Jōdo Shinshū as a community.

Let's reflect on more concrete terms! Being a member of a group is never without consequences. The Buddhist community is, indeed, even a very special, demanding group. Becoming a Buddhist—or Shin Buddhist in particular—is not like entering a worldly club or association, for instance, signing in the European Youth Hostel Association, where you receive a membership card and then you can wait and do nothing until you need a cheap accommodation overnight. Being a Buddhist is a calling for your whole life (*ichigo o kagiri*). As Buddhists we should be aware of the Buddha in any step of our life, we should look differently to anything which happens in our life. In a way, we don't live the “daily life” of common people anymore. This is the above-mentioned mindset. Even if our view of the world remains egocentric, at least we should try to see the world from a different angle. “What am I doing now? How can I make my life meaningful in this very moment? What does the Buddha, the Buddhist Teaching, and the Buddhist community expects me to do?” These are questions a Buddhist should always have in mind.

However, let us never be dreamers! If we really love Buddhism and want to do our best for the sake of the Buddhist community, we must not idealize the Buddhist community as it is today. We all know, how difficult the position of Buddhism in our contemporary world is –

not only here in the West, but also in Japan. Therefore, we must scrutinize the reasons for the weakness of Japanese and Western Buddhism: why are they under pressure and what are their shortcomings?

Japanese Buddhism is a “family religion,” or – to make the point of critics clearer – a “family duty religion.” Contemporary Japanese have a highly developed sense of the “rules within a group.” Rennyō’s term *on’okite* may sound in their ears as “duty” towards a group they belong to: “What does *my* family, *my* company or *my* neighbors expect from me?” From this viewpoint, the participation in e.g. a funeral or a commemoration service is so-to-say unavoidable for the individual because such services are custom and belong to a long tradition. The service is part of the group’s identity. Not to join would offend the relatives, or it would run contrary to the spirit of the company, the neighborly relationships etc.

In the suburb of Düsseldorf in Germany, where I live, I can observe many ethnic minorities. Being a Buddhist, it sometimes hurts me, when I compare the enthusiasm how e.g. African Christians or Turkish Muslims live their religion compared to what I see from Japanese people in Düsseldorf. The Japanese (and I am now referring to the common professional Japanese in my city) seem to have an enormous distance to their religion. They rarely come to the temple if they have no obligation, as for instance, a commemorative service for a passed family member. Beyond these ceremonies they seem to have difficulties to talk about Buddhism or concretely, the impacts of Buddhism on their “daily life.” Their relation to the Buddha seems to be not very emotional. Metaphorically speaking, it is not like the trustful and

warm relationship towards one's mother (what Shin Buddhists call the oya-sama), but more like a duty visit toward one's bedridden grandmother.

On the other hand, Western Buddhism (and I am talking here on Western Buddhism in general, not only Western Shin Buddhism!) is in a crisis, too, and the reason, in my opinion, is totally different from the Japanese case: Western Buddhism is practiced as an "individual religion," a kind of private mysticism. Individuals look for their spiritual fulfillment in Buddhism, and this spiritual search is widely unrelated to family life. Western Buddhism is anything else than a family religion, in a certain sense, it sometimes even looks like an anti-family religion. In Buddhist countries like Sri Lanka or Tibet most people are lay Buddhists and only a few, supported by their faithful families, find the way into a monastery. On the other hand, in the West lay practices suitable for being practiced in the family are often unknown, or they are regarded as a "simple" folk tradition. Western Buddhism sympathizes almost exclusively with the contemplative lifestyle of monks and nuns. Leaving home is regarded better than the life of a householder. Many Western Buddhists dream of being ordained and try to live at least as "semi-monks or semi-nuns." When they finally come to understand that they are not suited for the monastic lifestyle, it is often very late in life. As a result, there exist only a few Western Buddhist families and very few children stem from such families. Examine it yourself: how many Western Buddhists of the second generation do you know personally? A religion which is unable to pass its teachings and lifestyle from one generation to the next is a religion without future. As new

investigations show, German Buddhism has already now a disproportionately high percentage of old people. It is not a religion with a young face anymore. If this trend continues, Buddhism will remain only a footmark in the intellectual history of Germany.⁸

How can we bring back vitality to Buddhism in our time? Japanese and Western Buddhism suffer from differing illnesses and this could make their encounter important and productive. They are like the blind and the lame who can help each other. But how can we bring the two groups together? When Western and Japanese Buddhists meet, it is sometimes a confusing experience. I have a lot of opportunity to observe such direct contacts in the EKO temple in Düsseldorf. Because common Japanese know Buddhism only in form of ceremonies and traditional customs related to the family, they regard themselves more as “Japanese Buddhists,” and “Japanese Buddhism” as an ethnic religion, not a world religion. Sometimes Japanese would not even like to be addressed as “religious” (despite the fact that the old Roman term “religio” exactly refers to such ceremonies and family services that the Japanese are used to.) For many Japanese, it is incomprehensible that people without personal familiar roots (not even like the *nisei* or *sansei* in America) could be “Japanese Buddhists.” Therefore, they are leery if they see Western Buddhists: Westerners must have some “religious” ideas in their mind, Westerners talk too much, read too much, ask too many questions of religious content. On the other side, Westerners, who regard Bud-

⁸ Matsudo, Yukio: *Faszination Buddhismus. Gründe für die Hinwendung der Deutschen zum Buddhismus* (Norderstedt: BoD 2015).

dhism as the center of Japanese culture, are often astonished that most Japanese are quite unfamiliar with meditation and classical Buddhist literature.

For this reason, Buddhist activities in the EKO temple, which are intended to be for both groups, are in the long run of time often visited by only one group: either the Westerners join or the Japanese join. Usually, Westerners come to listen to explanations or to practice, for example, zazen, and Japanese come to ceremonies which are especially meant for them.⁹ It is a difficult situation, this must be frankly admitted.

Let's ask the other way around and consider the positive moments of Japanese and Western Buddhism! Is there not a middle way between the two extremes? The strength of Japanese Buddhism is that it is not only a private idea but rooted in the society, especially the family. The strength of Western Buddhism is that Buddhism is not reduced to a custom, it is a personal search which is reflected in the individual existence.

In the Caityagṛha of Karla, one of the oldest Buddhist temples in the world (1st Century CE), the main hall is surrounded by a colonnade, and on the capitols of the pillars we see couples, man and woman, riding on a big elephant. The elephant symbolizes the Mahāsattva, the Great Being i.e. (see Wikipedia 10.2019, there it is translated as Bodhisattva) the Buddha. The depiction seems to ex-

⁹ For example, in Düsseldorf the shosanshiki, a ceremony for children, is quite popular among the Japanese community, because there is no Shinto shrine offering a shichigosan ceremony for the three, five and seven year old children.

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press the consciousness of young Buddhism that families are the pillars of the temple community. How far away is this from our pre-conception of the ascetic ideals of early Buddhism! Actually, the earliest Buddhist art is the least ascetic! We could criticize this art as direct and naïve, but it demonstrates that Buddhism during this time was quite naturally rooted in the society of lay people, and these lay people were very self-aware: Our life is based on the Buddha, but we are the pillars of Buddhism! No Caityagrha of Karla, no Buddhist temple, and no Buddhism at all without us!



Caitya-grha of Karla, one of the oldest Buddhist temples in the world (1st Century CE)¹⁰

The most important homework Buddhists have to do in our time – this is my deep conviction – is to rediscover the Buddhist meaning of the institution “family.” Western Buddhism will never become an established religion if it fails to develop a convincing concept of the “family” and “social relationships”.–

¹⁰ Photo Copyright:

<https://kevinstandagephotography.wordpress.com/2015/04/05/karla-caves/>

On the other side, Japanese Buddhists must transcend and in a certain sense overcome the absorption of Neo-Confucian ideas into Buddhism, which is perhaps a mindset of the Edo period. For people influenced by Neo-Confucianism, Buddhism is seen as a religion which knows how to bury and worship the ancestors with propriety as it is demanded by filial piety. However, if Buddhist ceremonies are reduced to funeral and commemoration services which must be performed because it is our duty towards our parents and ancestors, Buddhist services are inclined to become a social “duty,” as I described above. This is actually very cold and heartless. But the Edo period is over and will never come again. Therefore, let not the Neo-Confucians explain why Buddhist services are necessary; vice versa, Buddhism should explain in which sense “filial piety” is meant!



Couples riding on an elephant adorn the capitals of the pillars.¹¹ The elephant symbolizes the Mahāsattva, the Great Being i.e. the Buddha. The depiction seems to express the consciousness of young Buddhism that families are the pillars of the temple community.

Buddhism tells us what the meaning of family is: it is building up

¹¹ Photo Copyright:
https://kevinstandagephotography.files.wordpress.com/2015/04/ksp_8726.jpg

the future. As we received our life, our education and almost everything else from the family in which we have grown up, we should give other sentient beings also the chance to receive birth into human existence. If they are born into our family they will come into contact with the teaching of Buddha, and hopefully, at the end of the life of our children, the Buddha will come with a lotus flower and take them to the Pure Land. But before they enter the wonderful lotus flower bestowed by the Buddha, they are born into another lotus flower which brings them into contact to the Buddha— and this lotus flower is the society, the family and finally we ourselves. This is the real meaning of our life, the real meaning of a family, of our life as a young man/woman, father/mother, and grandfather/grandmother.

Buddhists do not live the “daily life” of common people because they recognize in anything that they are following the calling of the Buddha. I am now exaggerating a little to make my point clear: common people do not know the real meaning of institutions like their family, nation, company and so on. If they support their family, nation or company it is often an ego trip: “My family, my nation or my company is more important than those of others!” But for Buddhists all these institutions have no egocentric goals: they are lotus flowers because they have the potential to bring living beings to Buddhahood.

It goes without saying, that people are different, and not everybody has the gift or karmic conditions for founding a family. But Buddhism is full of positive visions. Just read in the *Larger Sukhāvativyūha Sūtra* about the features of the Fulfilled Land and you will know, what you should do in this unfulfilled world! In the Pure Land, there is no

hunger, everybody has enough to eat and enough clothes (in accordance with the 38th Vow). Therefore, the Pure Land is called *annyō*, “the Land of Serene Sustenance.” Furthermore, the Pure Land is a land of equality *byōdō* in Japanese. In our time, the reestablishing of a strong and meaningful family idea could be a pillar of Buddhist life. Among the sentient beings in our world, however, inequality exists to a startling extent.

Let’s return to the beginning of this presentation! On’okite is, indeed, a word difficult to understand not only in its meaning, but also in its Buddhist origin. I can only presume that the author of the *Ryōgemon* had in mind the Sino-Japanese expression *chokumei* (command), well known from Shinran’s famous formulation “Thus, *kimyō* (i.e. taking refuge) is the *command of the Primal Vow calling to and summoning us (hongan shōkan no chokumei)*.”¹² Therefore, I propose to translate on’okite as “personal calling coming from the Buddha, dharma and sangha.”

In Rennyō’s time, people shed their sweat, for instance, in order to build a new Hongwanji temple. Herein, they found their personal calling and contribution. Apparently, Shin Buddhist life praxis is not driven by abstract or dogmatic ideas. It is motivated by more practical and pragmatic considerations. In our time, the reestablishing of a strong and meaningful family idea could be a pillar of a Buddhist life.

¹² See: *Ken jōdo shinjitsu kyōgyōshō monrui (Kyōgyōshinshō)* II, § 34. CWS p. 38, JJS p. 170.

Section III

The Goe-nembutsu



The *Goe-nembutsu Sahō* Service in Hongwanji

Hibiki MURAKAMI, Masatoshi TATSUZAWA & Satoshi SHAKU

Editors' note:

Three graduate students of Shin Buddhist Studies at Ryukoku University in Kyoto made a chanting presentation at the Syntra conference cite on August 24th, 2016 during the 18th European Shin Conference in Antwerp, Belgium. The audience enjoyed and appreciated their chanting of the *Goe-nembutsu sahō* service from the Hongwanji denomination. The service was derived from the Tendai sutra chanting tradition.

Introduction (presentation)

We performed the *Goe-nembutsu sahō* in the evening of August 24th, 2016. The service consisted of two parts: an introduction to the history of the ritual and its performance. This wasn't done in a formal way, as it is currently chanted at Hongwanji every year on a few special occasions, as explained below. We simplified it because it usually takes an hour. The order of the ritual was the following:

<i>Sambujō</i>	(Three Respectful Callings)	三奉請
<i>Nembutsu</i>	(Five-tone Nembutsu)	念仏
<i>Jusange</i>	(Gāthā of Praising)	誦讚偈
<i>Shōgonsan</i>	(Chanting of Adornment)	莊嚴讚
<i>Ekō</i>	(Merit-transference)	回向

Small sutra books were distributed to all participants in order for them to join the chanting. We started by ringing the bell, putting hands together, and bowing. Then we chanted *sambujō* with *sange* (letting flowers fall). We dropped paper flowers to pay homage to 1) Amida Buddha, 2) Śākyamuni Buddha, and 3) the Buddhas in ten directions. Then we chanted Amida's Name in the *Goe-nembutsu* melody, which is the most important part of the service. After *Goe-nembutsu*, we chanted *Jusange* and *Shōgonsan*. We ended the ritual with *Ekō*, putting hands together and bowing.

Goe-nembutsu

Goe-nembutsu is a melodic form of nembutsu recitation composed by Hosshō (Fa-cho in Chinese), one of the prominent Chinese Pure Land masters from the second half of the eighth century. Originally, *Goe-nembutsu* consists of five scales and five tempos. The chanting tempo gets faster from the first scale to the fifth. Ennin (794-864) brought *Goe-nembutsu* from China to Japan. While on the boat journey back to Japan, in order to not forget the tune, Ennin was meant to have played it over and over on a bamboo flute. Tendai priests and monks in Japan then started chanting *Goe-nembutsu* at the Jōgyōzammai-dō hall at Mt. Hiei. Over time the *Goe-nembutsu* stopped being practiced. The Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha denomination, however, currently performs a chanting version of *Goe-nembutsu sahō* as part of the Hōonko services and at the memorials for the four important Gomonshu/Shōnin: Kakunyo (3rd), Rennyo (8th), Kennyo (11th), and Shōnyo (23rd).

Hosshō is known as Go-Zendō (the successor of Zendō or

Shan-tao) who is the fifth master of the “seven masters of Jōdo Shinshū.” Hosshō contemplated on the land of Amida Buddha and created the five-scale intonation of the Nembutsu (*Goe-nembutsu*) inspired from a verse in the *Larger Sutra*. It is written in the *Larger Sutra*, that “At times refreshing breezes blow, producing the exquisite sounds of the five notes of the scale, in which *kung* and *shang* spontaneously harmonize with each other.”¹

Hosshō and *Goe-nembutsu*

Hosshō is said to have practiced *Hanju-nembutsu-zammai* (wisdom nembutsu samādhi) for ninety days every summer at Prajñā Terrace on Mt. Rozan from 766 on. During this nembutsu samādhi practice, Hosshō mastered contemplating the land of Amida Buddha and had a visionary experience in which he heard the nembutsu in five different melodies. From this experience, he composed and started practicing the five-scale intonation of reciting the Name of the Buddha (*Goe-nembutsu*). Hosshō also wrote several commentaries on the *Goe-nembutsu* such as the *Jōdo-goe-nembutsu-ryaku-hōjigisan* (Praise for the Abbreviated Service Manual of the Pure Land Five-Scale/Tempo Intonation of Nembutsu).

Jōdo-goe-nembutsu-ryaku-hōjigisan

The *Jōdo-goe-nembutsu-ryaku-hōjigisan* written by Hosshō is a Chinese ritual text, which tells us how to chant *Goe-nembutsu*. It can

¹ Hisao Inagaki, “The Sutra on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life” *The Three Pure Land Sutras Volume II: The Sutra on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life*, Jodo Shin Buddhism Hongwanji-ha Kyoto, Japan, 2009, p. 41.

be roughly divided into three parts. The first part is a preface that states that nembutsu fits the fundamental teaching of Buddhism and explains its meaning and how to practice it. The main part consists of about forty verses that express homage to one who attains birth in the Pure Land and to the Pure Land itself. Finally, the text encourages people to practice the nembutsu. This commentary is a chanting manual that introduces nembutsu practice with melody and tempo. In this sense, *Jōdo-goe-nembutsu-ryaku-hōjigisan* is significant in the history of Pure Land Buddhism.

Shinran and Goe-nembutsu

It is certain that Shinran read and copied *Jōdo-goe-nembutsu-ryaku-hōjigisan*. Seeing Shinran's works, there are several quotations from it. Especially, it is noticeable that Shinran quoted Hosshō in his main work, *Kyōgyōshinshō*. In the chapter of practice, where Shinran explains what great practice is, those passages from *Jōdo-goe-nembutsu-ryaku-hōjigisan* explain how nembutsu is a superior practice. For instance, one of the passage states that saying the name of Buddha is the supreme teaching, and another one recommends nembutsu for ordinary people living in the realm of the five defilements. In this way, Shinran uses it to reveal the superiority of nembutsu.

Actually, Hosshō's passages are not necessary to reveal the great practice in *Kyōgyōshinshō* because Shinran mainly uses Zendō's work in that chapter. However, Shinran adds some excerpts from Chinese monks other than the seven masters. One of them is a quotation from *Jōdo-goe-nembutsu-ryaku-hōjigisan*. Although it is difficult to guess the reason why Shinran cited Hosshō, it is well known

that Shinran was a chanting monk (dōsō) at Mt. Hiei. Most probably Shinran read and chanted *Goe-nembutsu* because it was one of the practices of Tendai monks. The nembutsu was chanted at the Jōgyōzammai-dō hall, which was constructed in 848 under Ennin's orders.

GOE-NEMBUTSU AND HONGWANJI

The twenty first Monshu, Myōnyo (1850–1903) sent some of the Hongwanji denomination priests to Ōhara to receive training in the Ōhara Gyozan Tendai style of chanting Buddhist hymns. This chanting style derives from Ennin, and, in modern times, was brought into the Hongwanji denomination by Kakushū (1816-1883). After his instruction at Ōhara, Monshu Myōnyo asked Kakushū to make a chanting book. This book was named *Ryūkoku-baisaku* (龍谷唄策 Chanting manual) and it was published in 1888. There is a text called *Goe-ryakuhōjigisan* in the *Ryūkoku-baisaku* which is most likely to be the foundation of the current *Goe-nembutsu sahō*. This *Goe-ryakuhōjigisan* was replaced by *Goe-nembutsu sahō* in the new *Ryūkoku-gongyōshū* in 1949.

At the present time, the Hongwanji denomination conducts *Goe-nembutsu sahō* at the memorial services of Shinran Shōnin and other important figures of the tradition, such as former Gomonshu.

CONCLUSION

There is a long history behind *Goe-nembutsu sahō* from the time of Hosshō. When he experienced the contemplation of Amida Buddha's Pure Land, he heard the sound of breeze blowing through the

trees. It is not too much to imagine that he reflected, or projected, this sound onto *Goe-nembutsu* with its rich melodies. Shinran Shōnin might have listened to the *Goe-nembutsu* brought to Japan by Ennin. Kakushū was strongly convinced that the melodic nembutsu he learned at Ōhara came from Hosshō's *Goe-nembutsu*. Unfortunately, it's impossible to know the original sound of *Goe-nembutsu*. All we have are some texts like the *Jōdo-goe-nembutsu-ryaku-hōjigisan* and *Ryūkoku-baisaku* that preserve this for us and the coming generations. Thanks to our predecessor, we can know some of the genealogy of Pure Land Buddhism. We hope this article will help to spread and maintain this tradition derived from Amida Buddha's compassion. The sounds of the Pure Land are still being heard now.



Presentation by
Revs. SHAKU,
TATSUZAWA, and
MURAKAMI

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Section IV

POEMS & ESSAY



Birthday in France

Marcus CUMBERLEGE

Seventeeners for Eunice,
Maria and Diane

“Receive Guidance”
and “let things happen”.
Amida knows what is needed.

Amida’s will for me
consists of saying Nembutsu
and feeling good.

If I must think at all,
please, Amida,
put the thoughts into my mind.

Thinking what you think
other people think
you should think
gets you nowhere.

“NO ME OR I.”
Only the earth and sky

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and the rivers in between.

“No-one is saved
unless all are saved.”
That is how Amida sees it.

Feelings of constant
love and gratitude
open the gates of wisdom.

Do only *that* today
which furthers
your true happiness.

The “Great Natural Way”
of Hozen Seki -
“Do what’s in front of you.”

From now on I'll pay
more attention to my Friends
and less to myself.

There's nothing clever
in saying Nembutsu.
Let it come *naturally*.

Enjoy the merriment

of those around you
and let it lift you up.
Namo Amida Butsu.
With love in our hearts
we can do no harm.

23 December '17.
Your birthday card,
Diane, was Amida saying
“Well done, Marcus.”

Time spent reciting
Namo Amida Butsu
is never wasted.

There must be many
Buddhalands, but Amida's
is the one for me.

Namo Amida Butsu!
I am of One Mind
with Tathagata.

I stand at the Pure Land Gate,
patiently waiting for it to open.
Kuan Yin arrives with the key.

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All is connected -
us four in Eunice's car
and the furthest star.

Specially for Diane:
We who hear the Call
above life's deafening roar
walk on entrusting.

I am here because
Amida needs me here,
and Amida knows best.

Admire the beauty
of winter, Saturn's work.
Wet black leaves underfoot.
Brown geese flap upstream, screeching
"Namo Amida Butsu."

Reduce everything
to a minimum,
until there is only love.

Shed peace wherever you go.
Be a lamp to the living and the dead.

Saint-Mammès, 21-27 December '17

From 17 to 18

Marcus CUMBERLEGE

puber to adult
in one *salto mortale*

Cling to nothing but Nembutsu.
Our world is pure imagination,
the dream of an Unborn child.

Sitting comfortably
in the corner
of our cosy veranda
I kiss another
year goodbye.

Next year I'll train my mind
to focus on the needs
of other people.
"Practice what you preach" says she,
familiar with my precepts.

L'INVISIBLE
Dear Lord, I pray for those
I seldom see,

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and the friends I'll never meet.

For my daughter & granddaughter:
I'm nearly eighty by the clock
but still feel young enough to ROCK.

What a lucky man!
Travelling this Path with Diane.
Doing what we can ...

"Namo Amida Butsu"
solves every imaginable
problem. It banishes
weariness, reduces
the need for sleep.

"Namo Amida Butsu"
means "listening to the Buddha"
with heart and soul,
calling from the Pure Land.

Where IS the Pure Land
but deep down within our souls,
Pamela and Marc?

"Tell me what to do next, Tathagata."
"Say to yourself: I AM FREE."

Detach with love and gratitude
from this illusory world of pain.

“Namo Amida Butsu”
guides this great year
towards a happy end.

From start to finish
his will for me was
*“Say Nembutsu
and feel good.”*

How happy I am -
free to practice my faith
without hurting a fly.

Fear is the enemy
of happiness. It murders
our peace of mind.

Our sangha is small.
Perhaps a hundred people
reciting daily
in the whole of Europe.

“Namo Amida Butsu”

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releases me
from all obligations.
I am truly mystified.
I simply cannot go wrong.

Bruges / Koksijde,
New Year '18



Marcus Cumberlege (1938-2018)

Join My Walking

Fons MARTENS



(1950-2018)

Please, can I ask you to sit down and join my walking through quite a few events I encountered during the last years? Thank you!

My curiosity for other cultures got a boost again through the trip to Yvo Nijsten in Central America, our study companion and good friend since university. In 1995, we were surprised to talk to so many people speaking perfectly Dutch on the island of Curaçao. During the

second part of the trip, we were able to stay with Indian aboriginals in Puerto Ayacucho (Venezuela), and to make a boat trip on the Orinoco river, we even passed the border into Columbia.

This travel experience truly stimulated me to join the trip to Japan with eighteen teachers in 1996, an initiative of YFU (Youth for Understanding), guided by Marieke Van Beylen. Thanks to the thorough briefing sessions preceding this twenty-six day trip, we were prepared to make the very best of our stay in Japan. A variety of activities (i.e. boat trip, tea plantation & tea ceremony, textile painting, newspaper editor, school visit with *ikebana* practice, *shakuhachi* demo, *noh* & *kabuki* performances, *hanamatsuri* festival with hundreds of kimono,

...) and of visits to cultural and historical places (cities, temples, castles) added so many colors to our travel experience. The visit to Hiroshima made us reflect on the Second World War and the victims of the terrible nuclear bomb. I was so moved that a few months later my personal web site was enhanced with some passages of their history (plus several pictures, i.e. the Peace Memorial Park) and with some paragraphs from the little book *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes*.

Next to these interesting group activities, I was also able to take half a day off and walk on my own for a small trip into a local community north of Tokyo city – even without understanding or speaking a single word of the Japanese language, I really felt *at home*! A few weeks later, during the trip to Miyajima in the Seto Inland Sea, at the famous Itsukushima Jinja, I got in contact with Koji Ito. He was a very helpful Japanese youngster whom I stayed in contact with for several years via the internet.

Marieke truly has been a stimulus for doing my utmost best in the courses of Japanese language right after that trip! And Koji proved to be “*the main source (minamoto) of my courage to study Japanese language and to develop this website,*” I wrote online... I even met his parents in Shizuoka during my next Japan trip. So, I was encouraged to study more about Japan’s history, its culture and especially its language. Therefore, I enrolled for the Japanese language course from Els Greunlinx at the PCMT (Provincial Centre for Modern Languages, Hasselt) during two academic years 1995-1997.

Let me illustrate some language items via a tip from one of my

students: my internet nickname, website and email-address all contained the Japanese kanji minamoto. During the explanation of that kanji in the class, he connected it to my first name itself: *the Latin word fons (genitive: fontis) means fountain, source* – synonyms for the interconnectedness, as we'll find in the Buddha's teachings later on! Also Ikebana & calligraphy illustrated: the room between the elements (flowers, strokes) proved to be as important as the elements themselves – practice empathy for other beings, one more component of the teachings! The struggle about the sequence of the letters in the Japanese alphabet came to an end in discovering a nice tip in one of my new books, so that I would be able to quickly find name plates during a next visit to a temple... Just learn the next sentence by heart, and you'll easily walk through a dictionary like never before:

"Ah, kana signs? Take note how many you read well, n!" - Indeed, A, K, S, T, ...: just try it out...

During the second year of the Japanese language study, my commitment took two roads.

First of all I would like to visit Japan again; therefore I contacted the Japanese embassy in Brussels and asked them if it could be possible to live with a Japanese family in their country for several weeks... This seemed impossible, but *"In Antwerp, there is a Japanese Buddhist temple, run by a Flemish priest,"* they said. So, I got in contact with Rev. Shitoku Adriaan Peel and participated regularly in the Jikoji sangha since September 1997. Soon, he engaged me more and more in the administration of the sangha and its activities and stimulated me to specifically use my knowledge of Japanese language – i.e. in the texts of the ceremonies. Naoki Eri, the son of the sculptor of the mar-

velous Amida statue in our temple, visited us and invited me over to Three Wheels temple in London. There, Rev. Kemmyo Taira Sato was so kind to help me by using the extended *Dai Kan-Wa jiten* (dictionary of kanji) to find a couple of kanji that were not yet included in my software tools.... This way, in 2001 Jikoji could be provided with a ceremony book containing the five texts with kanji, pronunciation and Dutch translations. Naoki and I kept in contact via e-mail. I even could visit his parents in Kyoto during my next Japan trip, and enjoy their works in the atelier! I learned to appreciate the works of Kokei Eri, his father, and the kirikane technique Sayoko Eri, his mother, re-introduced. Jikoji's statue is the result of both parents' abilities.... Rev. Shitoku also took the necessary steps so that I became a member of the board of the association *Centre for Shin-Buddhism* in March 2001, and its chairman in March 2003 – a task that became more and more intense during the years....

Secondly, the structure of my teaching job progressively changed from full-time teaching informatics in a graduate school into part-time teaching and part-time organizing multiple projects in several schools plus part-time assistant head in the evening school for adults (responsible for the hardware, software and network). This way, I was able to build a network of professional colleagues, so that we could cooperate and engage ourselves in (inter)national organizational informatics projects, supported by a couple of important software and hardware organizations.

In combining both roads, we set up an intranet: the tiny *PC4U* project for a couple of participants became the vast *NeT4US Corporation project* with several tools for student classes and schools, both

with my colleague Rudi Draye as companion. The inclusion of several *How-To-Setup*-elements formed valuable tools for people to help them setup ASP-internet-sites (Active-Server-Pages) on their own. This NeT4US project received strong support from Microsoft that offered our school an extended MS Office suite and even an MCSE-training bundle (Microsoft Certified Solutions Expert) after publication of the project. It even grew into a presentation at the 12th European Shin Conference in Lausanne in 2002 with the title *Propagation of multilingual Shinshu texts through the internet* – a nice combination of both roads indeed!

During the school holidays in April 2004, I could make my second trip to Japan. It first brought me to Fukuoka at Jōunji, the temple of the Shirayama family (I learned to know Rev. Yoshiaki Shirayama in Düsseldorf and built their first website in cooperation with them). Then to Shizuoka, where I met with Koji Ito and his family. Thereafter, I could join the group headed by Rev. Thomas Okano from Hawaii in the *BSC 2004 Spring Japan Tour – Shinran Shonin's Sacred Places*. This truly helped me in deepening my understanding of Shinran's teachings by discovering those places he has been living through. The trip also formed the basics for my presentation during ESC13 (the 13th European Shin Conference, organized by our sangha in Antwerp, in August 2004). I took the initiative to draw several documents that could serve as help tools in the organization of a next conference. Those tools indeed have been useful several times already, i.e. ESC14 in Düsseldorf (2006), ESC15 in Bad Reichenhall (2008), and ESC18 in Antwerp again (2016).

After a couple of years serving at the Ministry of Finances in

Brussels (1973-76), I started my teaching career for thirty years until 2006. It consisted of several component parts that kept me stimulated to deepen the matters and encourage the students and teachers, as you can read above. At this point words of thanks have to go to the head of the secondary school where my teaching career started in 1976: Mr. Leopold Cannaerts. In total, he agreed four times on my request to take some hours in another school. His words: *"It won't be easy to find a replacement for you. But, if you think this new job could be your future, just go for it. I'll fully support you!"* He even invited me recently to his home and to have a delicious meal in a nice restaurant, together with his wife....

From October 2006, my retirement as teacher/assistant head commenced, and I got engaged in Jikoji sangha kind of full-time. This event also triggered a couple of Hongwanji administration people to ask me (once more...) for a tokudo training in Kyoto, so that I could become sangha leader. Unfortunately, there was no English training course, so they enrolled me in the Japanese tokudo session of August 2008. They set up a pre-training study period of seven weeks (in English, in HIC Hongwanji International Centre) starting on June 11th (*yep, 10 years ago...*): a plethora of chanting sessions, study lessons, translations under the guidance of around eleven teachers. I guess they have been perspiring as much as I did myself – as I was so stubborn sometimes, but they kept on repeating the study elements, until I could succeed in the exams and receive the tokudo title! Thank you, Revs. Honda, Imai, Kiribayashi, Kobayashi, Kubo, Miyoshi, Sasaki, Sugimoto, Suzukawa, Tabitha and Tokunaga, for your help, your patience, friendliness and compassion all those moments!

The first day of that study period, I was surprised to recognize the nice lady who offered us tea during the BSC tour in 2004. She was still working at the HIC and took care of some students there: Rev. Masako Sugimoto. One of these students was Chewang Palden Bhutia; we have been studying together, chanting and translating course elements, not only during our time in HIC, but also since then: in writing, via e-mail and via Skype. Right after my tokudo training, at the celebration of my former school colleague Rudi Draye's retirement (in October 2008), Chewang was so kind to have a live Skype session, directly from HIC – surprising the celebrated and the participants; plus Rudi amazed Chewang in expressing a sincere "*Happy Birthday!*" Again, during ESC18 in Antwerp (August 2016) he came online, this time straight from the Jounji temple and with Rev. Yoshiaki Shirayama exchanging greetings with the ESC-participants!

I would like to express my sincere gratitude for the many moments I've been able to engage myself in Jikoji sangha and continue the work our founder Shitoku started about forty years ago, and for the extra minds-and-hands who have contributed to these tasks. Let's draw a list: the quarterly magazine Ekō, the monthly sangha newsletter, the weekly ceremonies on Tuesday with Dharma talks, the enlarged collection of books in our library, the different courses on Saturday, several interviews with visitors to the temple, the discussion moments with teachers and/or students in our temple and at their school, the initiatives together with other Shin sanghas and Buddhist groups, the contacts with official organizations (at national, regional or city level), editing the necessary documents for accountancy, taxes and official

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acknowledgement, biyearly Open Door events, maintenance works in cooperation with monument care, joint initiatives with neighbours, internet presence via websites,

Despite the fact that, around mid-February 2016, I was having a twenty kilogram weight loss and an eye sight damage, ESC18 could be organised correctly in August thanks to the energy and time spent by our sangha members: Heidi Verwimp (e-mails and correspondence with participants in different languages), Benny Sterckx (newsletter, courses and registration), Jeannine Vennekens (garden and temple rooms maintenance) and Nicolas De Geest (reception of and conversations with visitors and participants). We were so grateful to see Zenmon-sama and Zenurakata-sama participating, like the current Gomonshu-sama and Urakata-sama during previous ESC-editions, together with so many Shin friends: thank you! The sangha members kept on giving their assistance up until today – so that my illness didn't cause too much trouble in the continuation of Jikoji's activities! In order to help them, in November 2017 I gave the team twenty DVD's of around four gigabytes each, containing several documents that could serve as guides, and I resigned as chairman of the association at the most recent general meeting in February 2018.

Next to my sisters and brothers, with their family members, and the friends I already mentioned, several other Shin colleagues have been helpful during all these years in deepening the teachings, more specifically from Germany: Revs. Takao Aoyama, Joshin Kamuro, Frank Kobs, Jan Marc Nottelmann and Thomas Moser, and from Japan: Rev. Hisao Inagaki. They also deserve a true *Thank You* from the bottom of my heart! And I'm sorry if I have forgotten to mention others

who took me by the hand to stay on the right path....

Thank you very much for joining my walking! If possible, we'll meet again in the near future....



The International Association of Buddhist Culture

The International Association of Buddhist Culture (IABC) was founded in Kyoto in 1980 to promote Buddhism throughout the world. The association has sponsored conferences, lecture meetings, seminars, publishing etc., and has offered subsidies to Buddhist groups and scholarships to well-motivated students of Buddhist culture and philosophy.

On April 1, 2013, IABC was authorized to operate as a Public Interest Incorporated Foundation by the Japanese government, and is dedicated to achieving world peace through the spreading and propagation of “culture,” specifically the Buddha Dharma of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

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Shinryo TAKADA
Naohachi USAMI

Auditor: Ryu ICHIDA

Office: I A B C
302 Namba Royal Heights
112 Nakaicho, Shimogyo-ku,
Kyoto 600-8219 JAPAN
Tel & Fax: +81-75-352-1839
E-mail: iabc@office.email.ne.jp

IABC PUBLICATIONS

IABC Magazine:

SHIN BUDDHIST, *Magazine of Shin Buddhists*

- No. 1, March 1993
- No. 2, March 1994
- No. 3, December 1995
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