

Three Wheels NEWS

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The 45th London Eza Prayers for Peace and Memorial Service at Three Wheels

A blazing hot summers day was the setting for the 45th London Eza at Three Wheels on Saturday 17th August 2002. As over the past five years, the meeting incorporated prayers for world peace, reconciliation between Japanese and British war veterans who fought in Burma during the second world war and a memorial service for all the soldiers who died during that campaign. This years guest speaker was the Rev David Brazier the organiser and director of the Amida Trust, an active international network of people engaged in Buddhist psychotherapy, Arts and Humanitarian action.



Hirakubo-san giving a speech

After the chanting of sutras during the memorial service in which representatives from the Burma Campaign Society (BCS) engaged in the ceremonial burning of incense in front of the Buddha Shrine, everyone then shook hands together in the spirit of peace and reconciliation. This was also done in the sincere wish that the sufferings of past conflicts should no more be repeated. The presence of many young people at the service gave great encouragement to this desire. The Three Wheels Temple, with its abiding message to all generations of Harmony within Diversity, was as always, a living demonstration of how this ideal can become a reality.

David Brazier's talk: "Buddhism and Peace", developed this theme still further. Taking examples from Buddhist sutras, past wars and modern conflicts, Rev Brazier showed both how conflict

arises and how we can work towards its cessation. To make this possible he demonstrated how we can learn from the example of the Buddha and develop faith through entrusting ourselves to His teachings in the sure knowledge that "If we believe in peace we can make peace".



Reverend Sato and Reverend Brazier

Reverend Kemmyo Taira Sato then introduced the next section of the meeting speaking of the need to engage in deep self reflection and go forward step by step in love for others guided by the compassion of the Buddha. Members of the Burma Campaign Society then spoke movingly on their personal experiences of war, peace and finding reconciliation through encounter with others many of whom they fought against during the Burma campaign. This was begun by Satoru Yanagi with his talk entitled "A Greeting of Thanks" translated into English by Reverend Sato. Although speaking from different religious and cultural viewpoints, their words went beyond these concerns speaking directly of that which is essential to all of our lives - the need to find peace in ones life and in ones world. Many of the participants at the eza then added their reflections in a lively and emotive period of discussion, which followed by a report by Reverend Sato on his visit to America, concluded the eza.

Andrew Webb



A letter from Andy

Dear Taira sensei, Hiroko-san and all of my dear friends of Three Wheels,

I am writing to offer my deep gratitude for your hospitality this weekend and also for your continued friendship.

My visit was especially wonderful in that I had the opportunity to spend time getting to know many of you better on an individual basis. In particular, it was very enjoyable speaking with Shinpei-san and Noriyuki-san. I am very grateful to them for helping me with chanting practice and other such matters. Actually the kindness I received from all of you was very overwhelming. This morning I chanted Shonshinge, whilst holding the beautiful Onenju which Sensei so generously gave me, and had tears in my eyes because of how little I deserve such blessings.

Today, back at home, I feel a little strange with so many thoughts and emotions going through my mind. The future fills me with much confusion. Nonetheless one lesson I took away from my latest encounter with you all was that the future will resolve itself according to Amida's Original Prayer.

It seems to me that Professor White did not consciously seek to benefit so many people in the way he has. Actually his attitude of naturalness led to it coming about in a very inconceivable way. Similarly I was very much filled with awe at the marriage between Shinpei-san and Sonoko-san which is also based on a kind of faith and entrusting.

On the surface of my mind are many clouds of passion and I feel myself split between opposing desires. Deep in my heart though I stay still and calm and wait for Amida's work to unfold.

It is very cold here today and I keep looking to see if it is snowing. Perhaps it will tonight. I know Noriyuki-san is keen to see the snow so I hope that it does.

Speaking of snow, I read the book, 'Coffinman' which Sensei kindly gave me, on the train. There is that wonderful part about Kenji Miyazawa's poem for his sister. Actually I already knew the poem but Aoki Sensei made me see it in a very new way which also brought tears to my eyes.

In fact I found the book to be quite astounding as sometimes it felt as if Aoki sensei knew of my own experiences. In particular, he writes that people who are only exposed to Amida's light partially may become very lost and confused. This reminded me of my own childhood as, even before I heard of Buddhism, I had some idea of a 'light' penetrating my consciousness.

As I did not understand it, however, I sought the source of the light via sensory pleasures such as art, alcohol and drugs. Fortunately I soon discovered the falsehood of that path but if I had not encountered the Nembutsu way I feel that I may have become somehow damaged. Life is so fragile, radiant and beautiful because it is also death. That is something that I know but which makes my heart fill to bursting. Only saying Namanda ... Namanda ... allows me to feel release. I am too little to hold all of life and death in my head. Actually I can only say Arigato - thank you for this indescribable feeling.

I am sorry that my letter to thank you for your having me to visit has become very rambling. Ultimately I suppose I am simply hoping to express my happiness and gratitude that each of you has, and is, helping to bring the Jodo Shinshu to people such as myself.

How inconceivable!
Each encountering our individual shadow
We find ourselves
One Family
In the embrace of One Light

Namu Amida Butsu
Love and Best Wishes
Gassho,
Andy



The visit of Geshe Tashi at the 44th London Eza

On the occasion of the 44th London Eza the Three Wheels Samgha was honoured to welcome Geshe Tashi from the London Jamyang Buddhist Centre as a guest speaker. The Jamyang Centre represents the Gelugpa school of Vajrayana Buddhism and Geshe Tashi spoke on the subject of 'Buddha-nature' which is also very relevant to our own Jodo Shinshu tradition.



Geshe Tashi is an expert speaker, and scholar, and his talk was very clear and well-structured. First of all he discussed Buddhist philosophy and described the various stages, known as 'turnings of the Wheel of the Dharma', which have characterised the development of Buddhist thought. In doing so Geshe Tashi gave us a sense of the position of Vajrayana Buddhism in relation to certain philosophical concepts. Of these concepts the most important is perhaps the 'Tathagata-garbha' theory from which the doctrine of 'Buddha-nature' is derived.

Buddha-nature is the doctrine that the nature of Ultimate Reality is such that all beings have an equal potential to achieve Buddhahood. Geshe Tashi said that this notion is specifically discussed

in an important Tibetan Buddhist scripture known as the ‘rGyud bla ma’, or ‘Uttaratantra’. This text, he told us, uses various analogies and metaphors to give us some intimation of the Reality which is expediently designated Buddha-nature. Of these descriptions of Buddha-nature Geshe Tashi indicated that one of the most favoured is that it is like a Clear Light or Primordial Illumination. This Clear Light is, however, obscured from our sight by our myriad delusions about the nature of reality.

At this point, in Geshe Tashi’s fascinating talk, certain similarities between his tradition and are own became apparent. After all Jodo Shinshu too speaks of a Primal Light. As it says in the ‘Shoshinge’ which we had chanted earlier in the day:

“This all-embracing Vow enables me to become a Buddha!

Its light in all its many facets
Stronger than the light of the moon
Stronger still than the light of the sun
Illuminates even the least particle of dust
In the countless worlds of the universe
Shining equally on all.”

This verse from the ‘Shoshinge’ also suggests something of the divergence between our traditions which emerged as Geshe



Reverend Sato and Reverend Geshe Tashi

Tashi continued. For, at this point, Geshe Tashi moved on to speak of the various practices which Vajrayana practitioners employ to move from delusion into the Clear Light. He compared this process to setting down a glass of muddy water and allowing the dirt settle in order to reveal the purity of the water. This illustrates the significance of meditation in Geshe Tashi’s tradition and at the same time gives a sense of Buddha-nature as something still, and silently present, like the blue of the sky.

In contrast the ‘Shoshinge’ indicates the dynamism of the Primal Light which is always acting to break through our deep spiritual blindness:

“My cloudy mists of anger, hatred and desire
Continue to obscure Shinjin’s bright sky
Though Shinjin,
In the same way as sunlight filtered through mists and clouds,
Continues to cast light into the darkness below.”

However, despite these differences in how people of the Vajrayana school and our own Jodo Shinshu tradition encounter the Tathagata, the way in which Geshe Tashi spoke of the

universality of the Buddha-nature made me feel as if his faith was not so different from my own and that both ultimately meet in the Great Ocean-Seal of True Reality. As Shinran-sama says so beautifully in the Kyogyoshinsho:

“Buddha-nature is none other than Tathagata. This Tathagata pervades the countless worlds; it fills the hearts and minds of the ocean of all beings. Thus plants, trees, and land all attain Buddhahood.

Since it is with this heart and mind of all sentient beings that they entrust themselves to the Vow of the dharmabody as compassionate means, this shinjin is none other than Buddha-nature.”

Andy



On Rennyō and his legacy to us today

(42) If, after I am dead,
Someone still remembers me,
May he awaken the mind
Of trusting Amida.

This poem written by Rennyō Shonin succinctly expresses his overwhelming desire that all who follow the teachings of the Shinshu tradition awaken to the “*decisive settling of Nembutsu faith and attainment of birth...*” (letters I-8). This above all else was Rennyō’s concern, directed both to his immediate followers during his lifetime and, as this poem states, those of successive generations beyond his death.

Shinran Shonin makes the following quotation in the Kyogyoshinshu from “Passages on the Pure Land Way”:

My wish is that those who have attained Birth may lead those who come after them, and those who aspire for Birth may follow their predecessors, thus following one after another endlessly and uninterruptedly until the boundless sea of birth and death is exhausted. (KGS VI 119).

Both Rennyō’s poem and the above passage have at their heart the same intention; that the Vow of Amida be transmitted to future generations. Through its authentic transmission those that follow can awaken the mind of faith, entrusting themselves to the Light of Amida through hearing the dharma.

Yet, as in many of his recorded words, Rennyō writes in a very personal way to convey his meaning. This is a major reason for his popularity over the last five hundred years. Sometimes his words are very strict: “...each of you is particularly lax in your thinking in regard to birth. As long as you live, you should be as I have described. I am altogether dissatisfied with what each of you has understood” like the tone a severe schoolmaster may take with ill disciplined pupils. At other times he shares his

joy in the attainment of faith (awakening) in others as in this episode” *I hear that during the past seven days of thanksgiving services, wives of the priests in charge of lodgings and others as well have, for the most part, undergone a decisive settling of faith. This is wonderful, and no one could hope for anything more.*” (Letters II-1). But whichever way he expresses himself, his words are always used with the utmost compassion for the welfare of others. They are always personal because written to specific persons or groups of people he was immediately concerned with. Through these means of admonishment or encouragement, Rennyo’s deep concern is always that Shinshu followers entrust themselves to Amida and settle the matter of birth in the Pure Land.

The poem also shows Rennyo’s desire that after his death his memory would live on to encourage believers to follow the Shinshu teachings, even if it be only one person. This would be indeed a fitting epitaph to his life. Which it was, as his memory is an inspiration and his letters, poems and sayings are an indispensable guide, to Shin Buddhists ever since they were written. As Saichi, one of the most famous *myokonin* wrote:

*Hey you Saichi
who’d you hear
Namu-Amida-Butsu from? Well I
heard it from Master Rennyo.
Oh come now, you,
There’s four of five hundred years between us and Master
Rennyo
That’s telling a lie Saichi.
It isn’t a lie
It’s in The Letters
Those letters are Master Rennyo.
Well then what sort of person
is Master Rennyo
You Saichi won’t you tell me? Yes Namu-Amida-Butsu
is Master Rennyo.
Namu-Amida-Butsu couldn’t be Master Rennyo.
Well when Namu-Amida-Butsu lives and works
That’s Master Rennyo.*

As the above poem illustrates, Rennyo Shonin embodied the Nembutsu, Namu-Amida-Butsu, which he transmitted beyond his life into the lives of us all. He is present with us always when we turn to Amida and recite the Name, or read his letters which make known the truth of Amida’s Vow. For that is his legacy and our great benefit.

Andrew Webb



MONTHLY MEETINGS TO DISCUSS THE TANNISHO AT THE BUDDHIST SOCIETY

Arguably one of the most widely read and influential works of Shinran Shonin, the popularity of the Tannisho has spread to the west from Japan, enjoying an increasingly wider audience attracted by the timeless simplicity and profundity of its words. Thanks to the generosity of the Buddhist Society, Reverend Sato has begun a series of twenty four monthly public talks on each

of its chapters, at their London centre. It has provided a valuable opportunity for people of all different denominations, some of whom not having known about Shin Buddhism before, to come in contact with a detailed commentary and partake in lively discussion on the essence of Shin Buddhist teaching.

The Tannisho (A Record of Lamentations over Deviations) is a compilation of the sayings and religious observations of Shinran Shonin, as recorded by one of his closest disciples Yuien. Contained within its two prefaces and eighteen chapters is one of the clearest expositions of the essentials of Other Power faith in the Nembutsu recorded. Reverend Sato said in relation to this “*The core of Shinran Shonin’s teaching is simply pure faith in the Nembutsu, which, according to Amida’s Eighteenth Prayer, enables all beings to attain Birth in his Pure Land*”. It is also a personal account of the religious encounter between Shinran and Yuien, which inspired Yuien to put into words Shinran’s teachings in order to “*set down in small part words of the late master that still speak deeply to me, solely out of the desire to disperse the doubts of practicers with whom I share the same aspiration*”.

All of Reverend Sato’s talks are based on his own translations of the Tannisho. This has proved to be a valuable learning experience for everyone as he has brought out extremely important points which have often been lost in mistranslations, or not translated at all, in previous english versions of the text. For me this is most clearly shown in his rendering of Chapter One in which he translates the beginning words as “*At the very moment when the thought that moves you to pronounce the Nembutsu is awakened within you.....*” This brings out clearly the nature of the Other Power (Tariki) working of the Nembutsu within the heart of the devotee. Other versions I have read do not fully bring out the meaning presented by Reverend Sato here.

Each of Reverend Sato’s talks on the Tannisho shows yet more layers of meaning in the text. One example is the personal struggles that Shin Buddhist followers faced in settling their faith in Amida Buddha. “*Each of you has come to see me, crossing the borders of more than ten provinces at the risk of your lives. Your purpose is solely to hear from me how to be born in the Pure Land*”. Another striking feature Reverend Sato has shown is how each of the chapters, which on the surface can appear disconnected, all interconnect with each other, sharing there common ground in faith in Amida’s Universal Prayer.

In conclusion it has been wonderful to share and participate in the meetings to read the Tannisho at the Buddhist Society, with both old friends from Three Wheels and new friends from without, who have attended from seeing the talks advertised by the Society. Reverend Sato’s new translation and detailed commentary on the Tannisho have provided a whole new way to encounter and appreciate the depth of Shinran’s religious thought. This will serve well in broadening its message of true faith in Amida Buddha which provides the “*solution to the deepest problem of human existence.*”

Andrew Webb



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