

# Three Wheels NEWS

London Shogyoji Trust

August 2003

Number 5

## A Report on the Ceremony of Kikyoshiki held on 15<sup>th</sup> June 2003

This summer, through the compassionate auspices of the Tokyo Higashi Honganji and Shogyoji Temple, twenty-one members of the Samgha were honoured with the precious opportunity to receive Kikyoshiki (Affirmation) in the Shin Buddhist tradition. What this meant to each individual is something inexpressible and beyond my ability to comprehend. However I will attempt to recount the external events of the ceremony, and my own personal reflections, in order to give some sense of the great gratitude felt by all who participated.

Before describing the Kikyoshiki ceremony though, I should also like to mention how happy I felt to witness the Tokudoshiki (Ordination) of our teacher Kemmyo-sensei and a young priest of Shogyoji Temple; Shomyo Hatae-san. In many ways it was as if witnessing two aspects of the Buddha. In Kemmyo-sensei I saw an experienced and wise teacher becoming a beginner again, affirming himself as student and child of Amida Nyorai. From the other aspect I saw Shomyo-san, a young person, accepting his karma as a gift from the Buddha and truly becoming an adult in preparing to help other people with their own karmic circumstances. Thank you to both of them for going to the Buddha and returning to us with the gift of the Dharma.

As the Tokudoshiki ceremony took place the candidates for Kikyoshiki gathered quietly outside in the temple garden. When the previous ceremony ended we were called into the Buddha-room where we sat in rows. Wonderfully the ceremony of our 'affirmation', or 'confirmation', in the Shin tradition was to be performed by the Supreme Primate of Tokyo Higashi Honganji, Otani Koken, a direct descendant of Shinran Shonin and therefore a living symbol of the Jodo Shinshu teachings. In such potentially overwhelming circumstances we were all relieved when a representative of the Primate proceeded to give us an outline of the ceremony and instruct us in what to do. Many thanks to him for his low-profile but important role!

Once the Kikyoshiki ceremony began we sat in formal seiza (kneeling) before the Butsudan. Then a priest went around and laid a white cloth brushed with the characters for 'Taking Refuge in the Buddha' around each of our shoulders. This completed, the Supreme Primate Otani Koken then entered the room and we put our hands in gassho. When he was seated at the front of the Buddha-hall we chanted Rennyō Shonin's 'Kaige-mon' through which we describe our gratitude for the gift of Entrusting Faith as expressed in the saying of the Nembutsu.

The Primate and an attendant then proceeded along the lines of followers and symbolically performed the act of tonsure (shaving of the head) with three strokes of the blunt edge of a razor.

As the hand of the Primate touched my head, and I felt the blade touching my hair, I felt a deep sense of peace at submitting to such an action and I thought that it must be the feeling of trusting Amida Buddha to cut through my blind passions with power of the Original Prayer (Hongān).

Once finished, in what was I felt a typically 'Shin' gesture, the Primate offered a formal speech of gratitude to the people present for their act of taking refuge in the Buddha. Listening to him I reflected that this action, on the part of such an important Shin leader, truly exemplified the importance of 'mutual benefit' which is at the heart of Mahayana Buddhism.

The Primate then left the room and the son of the Head Priest of Shogyoji presented each person with their Dharma-name (homyō), brushed on a strip of paper and wrapped in thin rice paper, and a Sutra book from Tokyo Higashi Honganji. Since the ceremony I have had much time to consider these gifts of the cloth, the name and the sutras and have found them rich with symbolic meaning. Regarding the painted cloth placed on our shoulders I was reminded of the robes given to monks on leaving home and a poem which goes:

*Wherever it goes,  
The snail is at home when it dies.  
There is no world outside the kesa\*.* (\*a Buddhist robe)

I feel that in the same way the cloth placed around our shoulders was confirmation of the embrace of Amida which never leaves us, monk or lay, and which reminds us of the constancy of Nirvana upon which still-point the world of change turns.

The new Dharma-names we received make me think of that most precious of names; *Namuamidabutsu*. It is as if our own name is a reminder of one aspect of the infinite virtues of the Great Name (OMyogo). Therefore growing into our new name is to grow into our true nature as one with the Buddha of Infinite Life and Light.

The Sutra book represents the teachings as given to us through the efforts of all our teachers of the endless past. To chant the sutras and listen to and embody the teachings is all that our Dharma-parents ask in gratitude.

After the presentation of these gifts the Primate then re-entered the Shrine-room and gave a Dharma talk. In particular His Eminence used the background of his scientific study at University to illustrate various aspects of Buddhism. One phrase particularly caught in my mind in which His

Eminence said that Buddhism "allows us to live our daily lives whilst at the same time enjoying the happiness, serenity and peace of Nirvana." This seemed to me to be such a simple expression of the truth for which my heart has yearned since my birth and I was very moved to hear the Dharma expressed in this way.

Subsequent to the ceremony we had a celebration party and unexpectedly the Supreme Primate, and his honourable mother and brother, kindly decided to join us.



Due to this many of us were fortunate to have the opportunity to speak with the Supreme Primate and his family and to thank them personally for their kindnesses to us. We were of course unable, however, to thank our great teacher Reverend Chimyo Takehara for his own part in making the ceremonies possible.

I do not know if anyone can truly appreciate what a significant day it was for the Jodo Shinshu Samgha in the United Kingdom. It is truly beyond words that people of all nationalities, races and cultures were able to come together as one in the act of taking refuge in the Buddha. Kimyo jinjippo mugeko nyorai!

Thinking of all the people who played a part in making this magnificent occasion possible I am reminded of the words of Shinran Shonin:

*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. (Kyogyoshinsho VI-119)*

With gassho in the Dharma, Kyoshin – 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2003

Andy (Kyoshin)

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## Some Letters of Thanks from Those who attended the Confirmation Ceremony

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Dear Kemmyo-san,

Please forgive my intrusion into your time, I am well aware of your exceedingly busy schedule at the moment. My family and I would also like to extend our formal congratulations to you on your ordination by the Supreme Primate. It is an event that will greatly enrich the spiritual life of the samgha.

I would just like to share with you my feelings on and after receiving Kikyoshiki. Firstly though I would again like to express my gratitude formally to Higashi-Hongwanji, Shogyoji Temple and Three Wheels for making this precious event possible. When I think of the tireless effort, love and faith that went into the organisation and running it is a tremendous reminder of the meaning of samgha, of all that has been done for us.

For the two weeks prior to Kikyoshiki, I started to feel increasingly nervous about the event. I had no doubts about receiving Kikyoshiki but began to feel anxious about anything happening that would have prevented my participation. This I realise now was my overactive imagination. In reality there was nothing at all to worry about as everything was being taken care of by you all. Namu Amida Butsu.

During the immediate preparations prior to the service I felt completely taken care of surrounded by my peerless teachers and friends. The Kikyoshiki itself was a simple ceremony but altogether fathomless in its meaning. It took several days for my heart to begin to take in what I had experienced. A friend said to me yesterday 'doesn't making such a commitment worry you?' My answer is that it doesn't. I feel a life affirming sense of relief washing over me. That I have come home and I need no longer worry about where I come from and where I belong.

The Supreme Primate's Dharma Talk expresses so much about the immeasurable compassion of the Buddha, the profundity of the Dharma and the spiritual life of the Samgha. As a guide to how one should live one's life in this world it is invaluable. I take special consideration of these words "We have no need to broadcast our way of life, because we can find joy simply by living the truth which is ours to internalize. It is not that we do not seek splendour, rather that with this way of living we have no need of it."

I feel joy in reading this because it calms my attitude of always seeking, always being dissatisfied with my life. It is at each precious moment of my life that I am surrounded by the all embracing Light of the Buddha and that each moment should be lived "positively and with gratitude".

I am indebted to you for choosing my homyo. It is a constant reminder to me of your translation and talk on chapter 4 of the Tannisho. Although when I look within myself I find nothing resembling a heart of compassion through the pronouncing of the nembutsu the Buddha manifests His compassion towards me. It also reminds me of how much I owe to the compassion of those around me.

Again thank you.

With all my love

In Gassho

Andrew Webb (Jishin)

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Namuamidabutsu

Dear Kemmyo Taira Sato-sensei,

Words are not enough to express my gratitude to His Eminence the Primate Koken Otani, the Reverend Chimyo Takehara and you, for the ceremony of confirmation on the 15<sup>th</sup> June 2003. After the ceremony, I have the true feeling of belonging to the Shin Buddhist Family. It is the achievement of a dream which began 30 years ago when I was for the first time in contact with Buddhism through a lecture given in Paris. I kept the desire to be a Buddhist inside myself until one day I had an encounter with Kemmyo Taira Sato-sensei, during a visit to Three Wheels. I was overwhelmed by the atmosphere of peace and serenity in Three Wheels. I came to the Tannisho meetings to know a little more about Shin Buddhism and I felt that it was the right thing for me. As much as possible, I try to

learn more, assist the lectures in Three Wheels and help with my all my abilities Three Wheels.

When Kemmyo Taira Sato-sensei spoke about the confirmation ceremony, without any doubt or hesitation I asked him to be part of it. The ceremony was like crossing a river and reaching the other side, which seemed impossible a few months ago, the other side was so far away but the confirmation has transformed me, in my way of life I had always tried to practice love and compassion but detachment was so far away and so impossible to reach. But something happened to me after the ceremony, detachment and serenity.

Now the Nembutsu comes naturally to my lips in thanks for all the encounters, the friends I met in Three Wheels and happiness that Amida Buddha has given to me.

With Gassho

Lucien Chocron (Jikishin)

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Dear Kemmyo Taira Sato,

I write to you sending my deepest thank-you to His Eminence, yourself and friends at Three Wheels. I was a little nervous arriving on the 15<sup>th</sup> of June but you all made me feel very welcome. I am very happy to be

confirmed into Shin Buddhism by His Eminence. The day was very ceremonial and I thank you again for the gifts and warm reception I received. I continue listening also to Dharma.

Wish you all well

With Gassho

Matthew Backhouse (Junshin)

Dear Professor Sato,

I am writing to convey to you, and to His Eminence Koken Monnyo Otani Hossu, and to your Master in Japan, my thanks for being able to receive the Buddhist confirmation. I feel so grateful to have been able to come into contact with the Shin Buddhist Dharma. I thank all those who have made Three Wheels possible. It has come to be a source of hope in my life. I have never committed myself to a religion before so receiving this confirmation has been a turning point. The ceremony so beautiful and simple but profound in meaning. To become aware of the Buddha's compassion and to live within it must be something wonderful. Through

your kindness and the kindness of those who I have met at Three Wheels the possibility of a spiritual life seems nearer. In his Eminence's talk he conveyed how it is important to live with the absolute Buddha in the "here and now". I am so glad to become a part of a community where I can see such a goal of transformation realized. This letter is short as it is difficult to convey how important the Dharma is to me as a source of hope in my life. Thank you, thank you all.

Yours

Ken Dance Matsutani(Kenshin)

Dear Professor Sato-san,

I am writing to express my appreciation of the Confirmation ceremony held at Three Wheels on 15th June 2003. It was a special day for me, the very beginning of formally becoming a Buddhist. I was touched by the beauty of the ceremony, the meticulous arrangements, the gifts, the

my thanks for everything provided on the day to everyone involved. Apologies for taking some time to send this message to you, it has been a very busy time for me

Namu Amida Butsu

Sue Grantham

Dear Sato san,

I am writing to you to thank you for inviting me to be confirmed at Three Wheels, and also to thank your master, the Venerable Chimyo Takehara, for making this possible. I would have written sooner. I have been in hospital with my family helping my father die as comfortably as possible. He was able to hear of the day at Three Wheels and it made him very happy. It also helped me know that we are all assured of birth in the Pure Land.

I was very happy to listen to the words of the Primate on the day and it gave me great comfort when I read it again.

I feel immense gratitude to my father for what he had done for me. I also feel the same gratitude to all my friends, teachers that I meet especially at Southampton Samgha and Three Wheels Samgha. In fact all these people have Buddha nature.

Namu Amida Butsu

With Gassho

Gordon Backhouse(Joshin)

Dear Reverend Professor Sato-san,

I am writing this letter to thank all of those at Three Wheels and Shogyoji for arranging and facilitating the Confirmation Ceremony on 15<sup>th</sup> of June 2003. It brought me great joy to take part in this ceremony with my closest friends and as one Samgha family - all disciples of the Buddha.

This ceremony was for me a re-confirmation, just as it was for you a re-ordination. There is a harmony in this that resonates through our relationship.

The first time that I was confirmed I was amongst strangers and the only person that I knew there at the European Shin Conference in Oxford was Jim Pym. You were there as well Sato-san, and your first words to me were "Pick up please" as you properly corrected me for putting the confirmation documents that I had received on the floor! We next spoke when I sought you out (despite your earlier admonishment it was obvious that you were a kind and helpful person) to ask you translate and tell me what my name was! I speak of course of my Buddhist name (Dai Chi) that was given me at the 'come as you are' ceremony in the lecture theatre the day before. It therefore seems absolutely fitting that in brotherly celebration

of 'new beginnings' one of your first duties following re-ordination was to give me a new name of Shoshin.

Aside from the fact that the ceremonies at Three Wheels were far more formal than those in Oxford, the other great difference was that this time I was surrounded by all of my closest friends! Of all the people present that day there were only three that I have known for longer I have known you Sato-san. Those other three are Sue, Gordon and Matthew. These three were confirmed for the first time on that day and received the Buddha names Myoki, Jushin and Joshin respectively.

As you know, I meet with these three regularly here in Southampton. Each in our own way, the four of us known collectively as the Southampton Shin Sangha, have practised the nembutsu way in our daily lives for several years now, and in so doing we have never felt 'alone'. Nevertheless, all four of us do now feel a heightened sense of belonging and togetherness that has come to us through Amida's Great Vow and the ever-present offer of Refuge with the Buddha Family.

Sincerely yours,

Gary Robinson(Shoshin)

Dear Professor Sato

I am writing to express my gratitude to His Eminence the Primate Koken Otani, the Reverend Chimyo Takehara and yourself for allowing me the rare opportunity of taking part in the Kikyoshiki on 15th June.

As I knelt there in the shrine room during the ceremony, surrounded by the friends I have met at the temple, I felt very much at ease with all that was happening despite the unfamiliarity of the occasion. Part of this was due to a feeling of great happiness as I experienced a sense of embracing, and at the same time being embraced by, Shin Buddhism. It felt very protective.

I would also like to offer my thanks for the lovely homyo calligraphy and Sutra book given to me during the ceremony and for the food and drink provided later by Three Wheels Temple.

Finally, please accept my sincere apologies in not having written to you sooner.

Very best wishes

With gassho

Hazel Waghorn(Myoku)





Due to an outbreak of flu, the 48th London Eza was attended by fewer people than usual and those absent were deeply missed. Nonetheless the smaller size of the meeting allowed us to focus more easily on what was widely agreed to be one of Kemmyo-sensei's best Dharma talks to date.

Sensei's talk was entitled *'The Buddha Appears through the Individual'* and was given in response to a comment of his master, Venerable Chimyo Takehara, and also in anticipation of their approaching meeting with His Holiness the Dalai Lama in India.

Accordingly Sensei sought to demonstrate that the practical goal of all the Mahayana Buddhist schools, including the Vajrayana and Jodo Shinshu, is the ending of existential suffering, and that the possibility of attaining this goal appears to us in the doctrine of 'Emptiness' (Shunyata). In his words:

*"Emptiness stands for the way things are or for the truth known as tathata, which is usually translated as True Suchness, thusness or As-it-is-ness. This is the spiritual world of infinite light ... Usually we ordinary beings live our lives beset by illusion far removed from this fundamental truth ... [At] the core of our illusions is our tenacious attachment to the self or to our self-centred view of the world ... All that we can understand about an object is just one tiny part of the object, because of the limitations of our cognitive abilities, our five sense organs and our intellect, but we think and indeed insist that our understanding is not illusory but true and that what we understand exists quite definitely with its own intrinsic substance."*

Sensei continued to explain that this awakening to *emptiness* is not simply a static, impractical realisation but can have profound consequences in our lives because:

*"This world of illusion has its being inside the world of Emptiness and the latter is the foundation of the former, because Emptiness is the principle by which to explain our*

Focusing next on our own Jodo Shinshu tradition; Kemmyo-sensei described this dynamic relationship between emptiness and form as the working of Amida Buddha which "emerges from the spiritual world to save us from our suffering." When we awaken to this activity of Emptiness, he explained, and have the thought of entrusting ourselves to it, "the wall of our self-consciousness collapses and Amida's light comes pouring in and pierces our consciousness."

Concluding his wonderful exposition of the Buddhist idea of Emptiness, Sensei returned to the title of the talk; the comment made by his master that; *"The Buddha Appears through the Individual"*. For, as he pointed out, nowhere is the emptiness of our self-oriented world more apparent than in our encounters with others. Through these meetings we discover a great emptiness behind our preconceptions; out of which shines the light of the infinite spiritual world. In this way other people, whilst remaining themselves, become Buddhas and Bodhisattvas to us.

Afterwards various people spoke about their impressions of the talk and praised Sensei for his clarity and increasingly natural use of English. A young lady visitor from Japan used the example of the stones in the Zen garden to demonstrate that what we cannot see is as important as what we can. Another guest spoke of the changes that he had witnessed in certain Samgha members since his previous visits. He described one person's radiant new appearance as like the blossoming of a flower which then perfumes a whole forest. He compared this with the subject of Sensei's talk and described how the awakening of one individual to the Buddha can lead innumerable others to awaken also. Finally a lady asked about the scriptures in which the various doctrines mentioned in the talk are described. Sensei replied with a description of the various sutras and their main subjects such as how the Prajna-paramita Sutras deal with *Emptiness*, the Avatamsaka Sutra with the *Interdependence and Interpenetration* of things, and most importantly for our school, the Pure Land Sutras which describe the dynamic activity of true reality known as *Amida's Original Prayer*.

The Eza concluded with a meal during which we were fortunate to meet several new visitors to the temple.

Andy (Kyoshin)

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## My Journey to India

### On Our Audience with His Holiness the Dalai Lama

Basing myself on and supported by my master's great prayer for world peace and spiritual exchange within diversity, I left for India on the 25<sup>th</sup> February and returned to London on 15<sup>th</sup> March. During my three-week stay I visited first a Tibetan settlement at Mundgod in Southern India and then travelled round visiting a number of Buddhist landmarks such as Buddha-gaya, Sarnath, Rajgir and Nalanda. Finally I took part in a truly wonderful audience with His Holiness the Dalai Lama at Dharamsala, in the foothills of the Himalayas. Needless to say, meeting with the Dalai Lama was the highlight of our journey to India, suffusing the whole venture with the warmth of His Holiness' loving kindness.

On the 27<sup>th</sup> February Rev. K. Takehara and Rev. S. Hatae and I visited one of the Tibetan settlements in Southern India. We were warmly welcomed by two Tibetan monks, Jampa Rinpoche and Gala Rinpoche, and accompanied to several huge monasteries in the settlement, all modeled on Nalanda University, an ancient Buddhist monastic university. About 6,000 Tibetan monks are studying Buddhism in these monasteries in Mungot. According to the Dalai Lama when we met him later, the monks' way of studying Buddhism there is very similar to the ancient ways used in the old days at Nalanda University. For instance the monks still commit whole texts to memory in the traditional way.

Returning to Delhi we met Ling Rinpoche, a young Tibetan monk whose task it will one day be to educate the next Dalai Lama and who is studying for now at the Drepung Monastery, one of those monasteries we visited in

Mundgod. Watching the lively and relaxed conversation between this Tibetan monk and my young friends from Japan gave me the feeling that something really special was taking place between our two traditions, Tibetan Buddhism and Japanese Shin Buddhism. I believe that this spiritual exchange will lead not only to a deeper dimension of mutual understanding between us but also to further cooperation between our two traditions, each tradition helping the other on its own way to self-development.

A second group of Dharma friends from the temple in Japan joined the three of us in the first group in Delhi in the late evening of 4<sup>th</sup> March and we all went on a pilgrimage by air and bus to several Buddhist holy places. On this pilgrimage the most impressive sacred place was Buddhagaya, where Prince Gautama Siddhartha attained Enlightenment whilst seated under a Bodhi tree and where he enjoyed contemplating the interdependent relationship between himself and those around him, especially his parents. Doing service to the Buddha in the company of Dharma friends from Japan before the very spot where Shakyamuni Buddha is said to have been enlightened some 2500 years before, I felt very grateful to him for founding Buddhism, such a happy and peaceful way of living. In my heart I thanked everyone and everything that had led me to such a religion, one that truly deserves the description of a religion of peace. Buddhism teaches us how to attain inner peace, the only possible source of peace for the world we live in. When we did service on the summit of the hill known as "Vulture Peak" near Rajagriha, where the Buddha himself had once given his talks, I felt as if the leading voice of the young priest, together with the sound of our prayer for world peace, were echoing out across the world, way beyond the distant mountains. Although I have so many beautiful memories of the Buddhist holy places, I would like to omit them all now and move on to the subject of our audience with His Holiness, the Dalai Lama.

The last group from Japan including my master, Venerable Chimyo Takehara, joined us in Delhi on 9<sup>th</sup> of March. Early the next morning we headed to Dharamsala in Himarachal Pradesh in order to meet His Holiness. To say the least, our twelve hour trip to Dharamsala by train and then bus wasn't easy or comfortable. Especially the eight hour bus journey up the steep and winding road towards the Himalayan foothills struck us as really quite dangerous! Sitting next to my master during this bus trip, I thought of the two letters he had addressed to the Dalai Lama and especially of two important points he had brought up.

At the very beginning of his first letter my master had stated that in Shin Buddhism it was difficult to accept the idea of the individual's rebirth in another life as the same individual. I had been worrying about how the Dalai Lama understood the rebirth of the individual self or the continuity of consciousness, until I came across his book, *An Open Heart*. I was very much relieved to see His Holiness was not attached to the idea of reincarnation or rebirth of the individual self in another life as the same individual. Although the actual physical road to Dharamsala was hardly smooth, I felt extremely happy, secure in the knowledge that His Holiness was absolutely free of any kind of preconception.

The only worry from which I could not free myself was whether I would be able to interpret properly between my master and His Holiness. I was somewhat dismayed, therefore, when we were informed that our audience with His Holiness was to take place the following day, one day earlier than had originally been planned, and that besides myself there would be no other interpreter.

The other important subject my master had mentioned in his second letter to His Holiness was the account of the dragon's head cut from our temple bell. Venerable C. Takehara had wanted His Holiness to be acquainted in advance of our visit with this story that is symbolising as it does Shogyoji's prayer for peace. On arriving at the office at Dharamsala, I asked Mr Tenzin Tethong, Secretary to His Holiness, whether they had received my master's letter. Immediately Mr Tethong, the Secretary, and Mr Taklha, the Deputy Secretary, replied in chorus, saying, "Ah yes, that story of the dragon's head cut from the temple bell."

On entering the audience room with a radiant smile, His Holiness said to us, "Please sit down, sit down." After an exchange of greetings the audience started in a very open and informal atmosphere, the warmth of our reception completely dispelling all my worries. Whilst interpreting between His Holiness and my master the words of His Holiness quite moved me to tears. He said to us, "It warms me very much to see you all in such a wonderful atmosphere. We are all students of one teacher, Shakyamuni Buddha. I am very happy to welcome such an excellent spiritual leader and his followers. What is important is for all of us from our various traditions to cooperate and send the Buddha's message of Wisdom and Compassion to the world. The ultimate solution of the present serious problem is for Compassion to come about in such countries as Iraq and North Korea. All we can do is just pray for it." This is a summarized version but as he spoke these final words, His Holiness the Dalai Lama really appeared to me as an embodiment of the Great Compassion. I will never forget that wonderful moment when I actually saw a living Buddha. The day we had the audience was the first day of the seven days'

prayer for world peace by His Holiness and his Tibetan monks at Dharamsala.

My master said, "I feel very happy to be able to see Your Holiness in such difficult times. My late masters who also prayed for world peace throughout their lives, Venerable Daigyoin and Dharma-nun Ekai, must be very pleased to see our meeting with Your Holiness." His Holiness bowed his head low in agreement.

Venerable Takehara also said to His Holiness, "Listening to you talking about peace I find myself recalling your words, 'Each individual's attainment of inner peace leads to world peace'."

Of all the great spiritual contributions His Holiness has made to the world, this, I think, is one of the two greatest. Inner peace is the source of world peace. Without attaining inner peace our peace movement will only be accompanied by further fighting. It is absurd in Buddhism for us to speak about world peace without first attaining inner peace in our relationship with those around us. His Holiness has always been emphasising this point. Incidentally his other major spiritual contribution is, I believe, the way he has clarified the fundamental principle that every human being desires happiness - a great proposition usually hidden behind the truth that life is suffering. Without insight into the nature of true happiness, we will never really feel life is suffering. In Buddhism the essence of happiness lies in the extinction of selfish attachment.

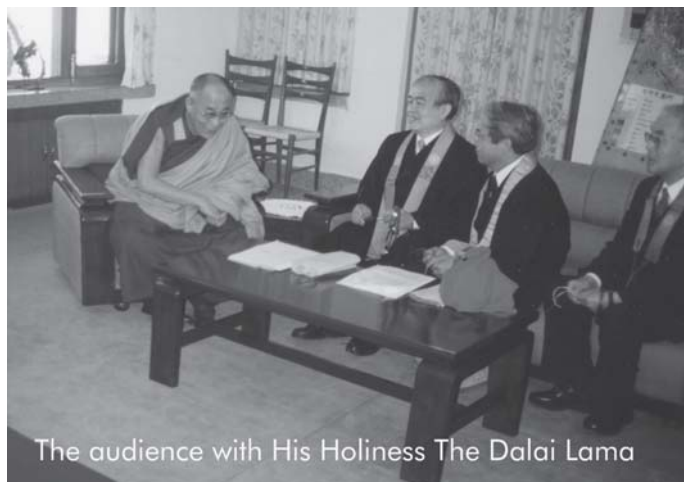
When Venerable C. Takehara handed a donation from his followers to His Holiness, His Holiness suggested that it might be used to help his young monks study modern science, saying, "I have been making a number of young monks study science. The program started three years ago. Whilst the monks have become extremely interested in science, their teachers, whom we invited over from America, have also been very surprised to see how excellent is the monks' grasp of the subject. Scientists and monks have had a very good influence on one another."

Towards the end of the audience a beautiful image of Shakyamuni Buddha was handed to my master by His Holiness and smaller images of the same Buddha were given to all the other participants.

My master was also delighted to receive two photographs, both signed by His Holiness, one of His Holiness himself and the other of the dragon-head cut from our temple bell. As symbols of world peace my master said the temple would treasure them for ever.

As you can see, despite the difficult times we are living in, the journey to India undertaken by my master, Ven. Chimyo Takehara, and myself together with twenty-one Dharma friends has been a deeply spiritual and uplifting experience, a fitting conclusion to the long months of planning and at the same time a new beginning. I am full of hope that our two traditions will benefit and enrich one another and as an indication of this I am deeply honoured to say that I have received permission from the Tibetan office to translate His Holiness' work *An Open Heart* into Japanese.

K. T. Sato



## Report on the 49<sup>th</sup> London Eza

On the 27<sup>th</sup> April the Three Wheels Samgha gathered for the 49<sup>th</sup> London Eza at which Reverend Sato was to give a talk about the meeting that he, and his master, had with the Dalai Lama earlier this year. With spring now arrived the majority of people seemed to have recovered from their winter ailments and there was an unexpectedly large number of friends in attendance. Expressing his delight at such a lively meeting Reverend Sato

welcomed old friends and new faces equally, and said that he had a very special feeling of happiness on this occasion. After a short service, which was notable for the heartfelt chanting of those present, Sato-sensei outlined the two main subjects about which he intended to speak. The first being his recent encounter with His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the latter the forthcoming Tokudoshiki (Ordination) and Kikyoshiki (Confirmation) Ceremonies in June.

Beginning with his account of the Shogyoji visit to India, Sensei spoke movingly of his search in New Delhi for an old friend, Advaita, who once stayed at Three Wheels and worked on the Zen garden; as well as creating the unique granite sculpture in the front garden. Due to circumstance Sensei and his friend had lost touch but happily they were reunited in India. "You can't escape from me" Sensei told his friend happily. During their reunion Advaita revealed that he is currently working on a vast sculpture in memory of Mahatma Gandhi; a project that was of great interest to many of the assembled Samgha members.

After this reunion Sensei reported that he met up with some other priests from Shogyoji and they travelled to South India where they visited a number of Tibetan Buddhist monasteries that have been modelled on the ancient training methods of the historic Nalanda University. During this time Sensei admitted he had increasing doubts about his ability to translate at the forthcoming meeting with the Dalai Lama, and also that he was concerned about certain differences between our tradition and Tibetan Buddhism. However, reading the correspondence of his master to the Dalai Lama, he discovered that both leaders share a common prayer for world peace born out of their communities' experiences of war and difficulty.

Of greatest significance in this matter; Sensei retold 'The Story of the Shogyoji Bell' that his master had himself related to the Dalai Lama. Many people had of course heard this story previously but as tears ran down the face of Reverend Sato, and of some other people too, I myself felt for the first time the true significance of Peace. Although both the Shogyoji Samgha and the Tibetan Buddhist community have at different times experienced the problems of violence; they have only grown stronger as a consequence. The reason for this miracle I feel could be seen in Sensei's tears. Living in a true Samgha one is constantly reminded of the interdependence of reality. Such an awareness is really to discover that we are all part of the Buddha's body; the Dharmakaya. As such if one part of the body is wounded, whether it is a person or a bell, we feel this wound as our own. In such a way empathy and compassion are born in our hearts.

Perhaps for this reason a major subject of discussion between His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Reverend Master Chimyo Takehara concentrated on the importance of the religious community. Sato-sensei himself wondered whether the Shogyoji Taya system may prove to be a valuable blue-print for other Buddhist communities which have generally maintained some distance between monks and lay-people.

Sensei reported that the whole meeting was a happy audience, full of light and laughter. He then kindly recounted a story the Dalai Lama had told, which was reminiscent of the Shinshu teaching on 'meeting every person as Buddha', and he showed us some photos from the visit to India. Subsequently members of the Samgha asked questions about the trip and showed particular concern for the conditions in which Tibetan refugees are living. Sensei was sorry to report that the situation is still not good, but said that some Tibetans feel optimism for the future.

Next Reverend Sato gave an explanation of the Tokudoshiki (Ordination) and Kikyoshiki (Confirmation) ceremonies to be held here in June. He described how, in Shin Buddhist tradition, priests are preferably ordained by a descendent of Shinran Shonin. As Rev. Sato-san and Shomyo Hatae-san have not previously received this special ordination they will do so in the summer.

As well as the Ordination ceremony there is also to be a Confirmation ceremony for those who wish to take part. Both the ceremonies come as a great honour to the members of Three Wheels as they will be presided over by the Primate of the Higashi Honganji; an event without precedent in the history of Three Wheels. In addition those who are to be confirmed will be receiving an opportunity that is usually reserved for elder members of the Samgha. Sato-sensei said that not only the participants but also everyone are welcome to attend this great opportunity for celebration.

This idea of unconditional welcome was, he said, at the heart of the Buddhist teaching. He elaborated by telling the story of an elderly monk who was asked by Shakyamuni Buddha to talk about taking the precepts. The monk said that when he first came to the Buddha, the Buddha simply said 'Welcome'. The happiness the monk received from this loving acceptance made him live his whole life with happiness. In the same way, Sensei said, the meaning of the Kikyoshiki ceremony lies in receiving the Buddha's whole-hearted welcome. Professor White added that in Jodo Shinshu such ceremonies do not give us 'merit' but are meaningful only in what we ourselves give to them.

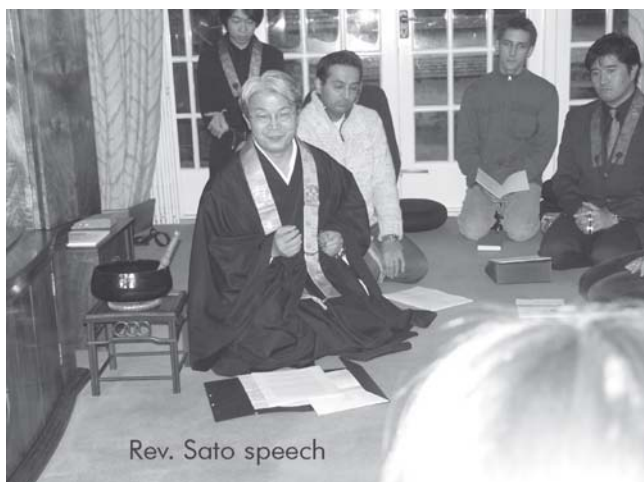
The meeting concluded with the introductions of new members of the Samgha and some visitors. A young lady from Shogyoji, Naoko Oga-san, described how a previous stay at Three Wheels had inspired her to return for one year in order to consider her relationship to Shogyoji Temple, to study English and to learn how to respect other people. A lady called Michelle spoke of her visit as part of her prayer for better interfaith relationships. Chris, from the Tibet Society, continued this idea of inter-Samgha communication by asking further about the idea of 'Taya' which Sensei had spoken of with the Dalai Lama. Reverend Sato replied that it was a form of accommodation based upon a principle of 'no discrimination between lay people and priests'. Andy added that, because of interdependence, when we meet other people in the Taya they act as mirrors to ourselves creating a powerful dynamic of awakening. Chris and Michelle responded by saying that this would certainly include an appreciation of the uniqueness of different individuals and organisations, and help create harmony in diversity.

Duncan Kennedy and Sam Kelly both introduced themselves and spoke of their personal experiences of encountering the Jodo Shinshu path. Duncan said he felt disturbed and challenged by his study of the 'Tannisho' and had been pleased to learn of Sensei's talks on that text at the Buddhist Society. Sam Kelly recalled his twenty years of Buddhist practice and of reaching a time when the Shin teaching of Tariki (Other Power) suddenly became very important and alive for him.

Also introducing themselves to the Samgha were two students of Ryuoko Endo-sensei who teaches a form of Shiatsu which draws in particular on both Jodo Shinshu and Christian traditions. Sarah said she had come to London to set up a Tao Shiatsu Samgha and Michael explained that he was her student. He explained that the teachings of their tradition emphasise the empathy and connection with a person which arise when you work with faith and reliance on another force. "You can't do it unless you take on spiritual dimension," he said.

Bringing a very successful Eza to a conclusion Reverend Sato described his pleasure at the presence of Stephen and Ann Montgomery and thanked everyone for attending.

Andy (Kyoshin)



Dear Reverend Takehara Sama

I have just returned from spending 3 days at Three Wheels. I was overjoyed to hear the report you sent regarding your visit to the Dalai Lama. Your visit initiated a spiritual encounter of great importance that will en-

sure a long lasting spiritual understanding and between your two traditions. The Great Working of the Buddha has brought about this encounter between Shogyoji Temple and the Dalai Lama in order, I think, to shine His Light ever more strongly in this world at a time when there is much suffering being felt by people.



Please pass on my thanks to Shodo-san for his letter. I am sorry that I was not able to meet him and the other students at the Spring school because of current events. However I am confident the time will come in the near future when we will all be able to meet together face to face, hopefully that time will not be too far away. Already though, I feel the presence of him and the Shogyoji samgha in my life through our ongoing dialogue brought about through the Light of the Buddha. I am very curious to see what everyone looks like though, as I have heard so much about you all! I saw Eshin-san just before he left on Friday to fly back to Japan. I am sure he is having a wonderful time and look forward to seeing him on his return. I missed him during my stay at Three Wheels. He has been a wonderful friend and teacher to myself and Andy.

Concerning the Shogyoji website, I enjoy visiting it each time I am online. Its contents are so valuable in sharing the spiritual life of Shogyoji. My favourite parts are the Fragrant Light words, the pictures of the visitors shoes, the Dharma words and the Goichidaiki kikigaki talks. On discussing the Fragrant Light words with Kemmyo-san I was very surprised to learn of their origin. I had no idea that they had been spoken by members of Shogyoji. I thought that they had been taken from traditional Shin Buddhist writings and commentaries on the sutras. It made me feel happy and grateful to know that they are words spoken by people in daily life at the

temple and that we can all share them through the website. I wonder if I could respectfully request to you, that the archives of Fragrant Light and the archives of the Goichidaiki kikigaki talks, could be posted on the Three Wheels website in order to share them ever more widely. I think this would be of great benefit. I also looked through the captions of the pictures of recent events with Shimpei-san and made a few small suggestions as to the English phrasing. I hope this is of some small help. My thanks to everyone for their efforts in producing the website in English, without which we would not be able to appreciate the depth of the spiritual life at Shogyoji which is powerfully expressed in all the writings.

As I mentioned at the beginning of my letter, I returned yesterday from spending days at Three Wheels. As always I return refreshed and with a strong feeling in my heart of close friendship to and gratitude for everyone there. I feel that they are now a part of my family and that I am a part of theirs. This feeling awakens me to pronounce the Nembutsu in thanks to the Buddha for all that He has given to me and the wish to return my gratitude in any way I can.

With Palms Together

Andrew Webb

13<sup>th</sup> April, 2003

Dear Andrew,

I have received your kind e-mail of 8th April, 2003. When I received Andy's lovely e-mail previously, I was unfortunately too busy to respond appropriately and have been feeling very bad about it until today. Concerning your letter I received a few days ago, however, very fortunately all the young priests of the temple have just taken off to the mountainside to collect material for flower arrangements to be offered to the Buddha on the special occasion known as "Eitaikyo", so I am now able to have a short free time.

I am very happy to be writing to you for the first time.

I have learned from you that you are a frequent visitor to our website to view *Fragrant Light*, *Dharma Words* and *Goichidaiki-kikigaki*. Although the website is open to the general public, that is to an unspecified number of unknown people, your response to it is particularly important and special. I am not only pleased but really rather excited to get such a wonderful response.

As you know, the essence of all classical sacred documents lies in their 'dialogues'. It is the same with the Bible, the Buddhist Sutras and the Confucian documents.

Amongst all the Shin Buddhist documents *the Tannisho* and *the Rennyō-Shonin-Goichidaiki-kikigaki* are firmly based on dialogues between Shin Buddhist followers from those far off days.

If Shin Buddhism is alive today, it is perhaps through dialogues that the tradition can be handed down to us.

Living as I do in an active Samgha, I have long been dreaming that this dream of transmission through dialogue might be realized in our Samgha. 800 years have passed since the foundation of Shin Buddhism in Japan. With the passage of time even we, Shin Buddhist followers living in Japan, tend to depend solely on written documents by the founder and other eminent priests of our tradition when we seek to understand and transmit traditional teaching.

It is said that the Shin Buddhist tradition is well preserved in the Hokuriku District, which faces the Sea of Japan. It is, however, only in the

words and language of the old people living there that you can find profound Shin Buddhist spirituality rooted in daily life.

Although one cannot actually say that Japanese Buddhist temples have been completely spoiled, one also cannot claim that they maintain an appropriate relationship between spiritual tradition and daily life. To be quite blunt about it Japanese Buddhism hasn't been brought back to life yet in modern times.

I have long been looking forward to a possible modern revival of "*The Rennyō Shonin Goichidaiki-kikigaki*," around our community at least.

Well, my English friends, thanks to your concern and to your appreciation of the website that we recently set up, these dreams are coming true. Young priests here at the temple, who are the editorial staff of our website, have started to collect and edit into brief sentences the spiritual utterances they came across at Dharma meetings and in everyday life at the temple. I see the inconceivable working of the Buddha in their editorial work.

The effect of these short sentences of *Fragrant Light* is new and very different from that of the rather lengthy transcriptions of Dharma meetings or Dharma talks.

This is because the words of *Fragrant Light* are expressions of the Dharma by those who have listened to and realized the Dharma on their own.

To put it briefly, unless it be brought to life through "words" the Dharma can never become "true and real."

I cannot tell you how encouraged I feel by you, Westerners who are in contact with Three Wheels and have grasped the meaning of *Fragrant Light* with such refined sensibility. When we see *Fragrant Light* again through your interpretation, we can receive it with even greater joy and happiness.

I am looking forward to further development of *Fragrant Light*.

I am also looking forward to the big event to be held at Three Wheels in June and to meeting you at Shogyoji Temple in the not so distant future.

With palms together.

Chimyo Takehara

(Translated by K. T. Sato)

## Report on the Eleventh Meeting to Read the Documents of Rennyō Shonin

The letter studied at this meeting in February 2003, was the 10th letter of fascicle 1 from *The Letters* by Rennyō Shonin, entitled *On the Wives of the Priests in Charge of Taya Houses at Yoshizaki*. It was written by Rennyō Shonin on the 11th September 1473 two years after his arrival at Yoshizaki, where he founded a large and influential temple. A community of followers was soon established who lived in and around the temple in *taya* houses (accommodation for Shin Buddhist's located in or near a temple).

Several major themes emerged from Reverend Sato's talk, which sparked a thoughtful debate on the complex issues and questions raised by the contents of the letter. However, by the conclusion of the talk, a number of insightful answers emerged that provided a satisfying resolution to the difficulties shared in understanding the meaning of this letter.

The background of this letter was that it was addressed to the wives of the priests in charge of the *taya* houses constructed around the temple at Yoshizaki. It was Rennyō Shonin's description of the position of women in society at that time, the nature of their lives and their spiritual situation, that provided a fertile source of discussion at this meeting - "*To begin with*

*you should understand that, because you are women and therefore wretched beings of deeply evil karma, burdened with the five obstacles and the three hindrances, you have already been abandoned by the Tathagatas of the ten directions and also by all the Buddhas of the three periods.”* Were Rennyō Shōnin’s words explicitly supporting or upholding the culture of subordination of women through this portrayal of their existence in secular and religious worlds or do they contain another meaning?

Successively throughout their lives women had to depend on and obey firstly their parents when young, their husbands on marrying and their children in old age. Classically these bonds were termed the three hindrances. The five obstacles include the denial that a woman could become a Buddha. To be “*wretched beings of deeply evil karma*” however, is applicable to both sexes. This was the situation women were born into and this was the situation Rennyō described.

By bringing this situation, this deep seated problem, into the readers’ awareness, Rennyō clearly presents the solution, the way in which women could find freedom from what Reverend Sato described as “mental dependency on others” for “The problem is their selfish attachment to those they are dependant on. This underlying attachment will lead them to harm not only themselves but also people around them.”

Rennyō Shōnin’s prayer was that the wives should awaken faith in Amida Buddha and thereafter live their lives with pure faith, in thankfulness for the Buddha’s saving Vow, “*And so, pronouncing the nembutsu with an outpouring of feelings of thankfulness, you should respond in gratitude to Amida Tathagata for all the work he has done in order to save you. This is the way that the taya priests’ wives who have attained faith should be*”. Through this profound awakening, they could, through experiencing the “two essential aspects” of faith or encounter, overcome their deep seated karmic

hindrances in the Light of the Buddha. These two aspects of faith being: awakening to one’s self-centered world which is the reality of the individual and simultaneously awakening to the Dharma- that -saves or the Great Compassion of Amida Buddha. Reverend Sato described this attainment of faith and new way of living as “When the stronghold of their selfish consciousness collapses by entrusting themselves to Amida Buddha, their whole existence will be purified through true faith of Other-power and they will come to realise how much they have been receiving from others. This experience of faith or awakening is followed by feelings of gratitude endlessly.”

Through this talk it became apparent that there were some difficulties arising from reading this letter from an objective contemporary viewpoint, ie in seeing women as bound by the three hindrances and five obstacles. However, through becoming aware of this problem ourselves, we were encouraged by Reverend Sato to understand the compassionate heart that Rennyō Shōnin revealed towards women, that he was specially concerned with the matter of their faith in Amida Buddha and attainment of birth in the Pure Land. On one level Rennyō was describing how women were looked upon by society at that time. On another he illustrates the universal timeless working of Amida’s compassion through which the three hindrances and five obstacles are transformed by Amida into the causes of birth into the Pure Land.

Reverend Sato finished his talk by concluding that “such mental conditions are prevailing among men in modern times” and that “the three hindrances are not only the problem of women but also that of men”. Therefore these three hindrances arising from “blind dependency and selfish attachment” can now be applied universally, broadening the scope of Rennyō Shōnin’s letter, addressed originally to women, towards men as well.

Andrew Webb

## **To my Dharma friends who were unable to come to Spring School this year,**

I was sad to hear that Shodō-san and the young people of Shōgyōji will not be coming to see us this Spring. However I understand the reasons why and hope that I will meet you all in the near future.

In the meantime I wanted to say thank you for the lovely English-language web site which you have created for us to look at. It gives my friends and I great happiness to see the photographs of all your activities. Also the new section entitled ‘Fragrant Light’ is very inspiring and we learn a great deal from reading the precious words displayed there.

Witnessing the joyful activity of Shōgyōji Temple from afar I feel a great hope that one day the small but strong seedling of Three Wheels will develop into a great Bodhi Tree akin to its parent. Often as I lead my life I wonder how, and if, the Taya system can become a part of our culture in the United Kingdom. Sometimes it feels as if such a thing will be very difficult thing to achieve. One day, however, in front of the Buddha shrine in my home I suddenly had a brief glimpse of the fulfillment of that dream and I now feel that somehow it can come true.

Honoured Gōngē-sama has kindly invited me to come and visit you all. It is an invitation for which I am very grateful and which I will certainly take up as soon as I am able to do so. For now, however, I wish to thank

each of you from the eldest person down to the smallest child for living your lives under the light of the Buddha.

When I was a child I went to boarding school from the age of ten years old until I was eighteen, and then university until I was twenty-one. I hardly lived with my parents at all! Having lived always amongst such a great number of people I recall that often it can feel as if your self, as an individual, is very insignificant and that you never get to truly be something unique. I would like to assure you however that each of you, just by being yourselves as you are, are helping me on the way to the Buddha. Just by being sincere in relation to the Saṃgha and to the Buddha, and in leading your daily lives, the great activity of the Shōgyōji Taya reaches out across the world and touches my life here in England! That’s quite a surprising thought isn’t it?

I feel the Buddha’s activity is always like this. We walk along like people in a cloud; sometimes doubting whether this path is worth leading. Meanwhile, however, in the cloud of light, our actions are woven into the Buddha’s Great Vow to lead everyone to perfection.

As such, although I could not meet you this Spring, your lives at Shōgyōji Temple have already taught me so much for which I am truly grateful.

Namuamidabutsu

Andy



**All donations are welcome**

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