



Three Wheels NEWS



London Shogyoji Trust

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Memorial Tributes to Masao Hirakubo

Editor's note: Mr. Hirakubo's passing away was a great loss for Three Wheels where he had been a frequent attendant of the London Eza, or Buddhist meetings. His was a constant presence at the annual service for Peace and Reconciliation, held at this centre, and at the service of Commemoration celebrated at Canterbury Cathedral. Mr Hirakubo was the founder of the Burma Campaign Society, an organisation conceived to promote reconciliation between British and Japanese war veterans who had fought against one another during the Burma Campaign of World War Two. His unmistakable personality and charisma will be sadly missed by all who knew him.

A Memorial Address By Ven. Chimyo Takehara translated by Kemmyo Taira Sato

On this special occasion, a formal memorial service for a great man, our colleague the late Mr Masao Hirakubo, I would like to pay humble tribute to Mr Hirakubo's spirituality and nobleness of mind

Mr Hirakubo, the prayer for reconciliation that you continued to cherish throughout your long life and that you sought to realise through noble actions way beyond the realms of love and hate, is a prayer for all mankind to grasp and to hold for ever. Your extraordinary accomplishment is also of great credit to us as fellow members of the human race.

When we first learned of Mr Hirakubo's remarkable initiative, promoting the spirit of reconciliation in the midst of the routine of everyday life, his noble prayer for peace came as quite a surprise. It was an opportunity for us to become more aware of the vital importance of this kind of prayer.

Even from before the Second World War, the true teaching of Venerable Daigyoin Reion Takehara, former Head Priest of Shogyoji Temple, had been guiding us not to respond with hatred towards the advanced nations or their peoples, from whom we had received so much kindness and goodwill. Considerably encouraged, not only by Venerable Takehara's own radically different approach during his life-time, but also by the power of his prayer beyond words still working within us even after his death, we have been walking this path to the Pure Land.

After deep contemplation on how best to hold our prayer for peace, Venerable Takehara at the height of the Second World War (1944), set about collecting a set of Gagaku musical instruments as a way to capture the eternal sound of peaceful, harmonious life.

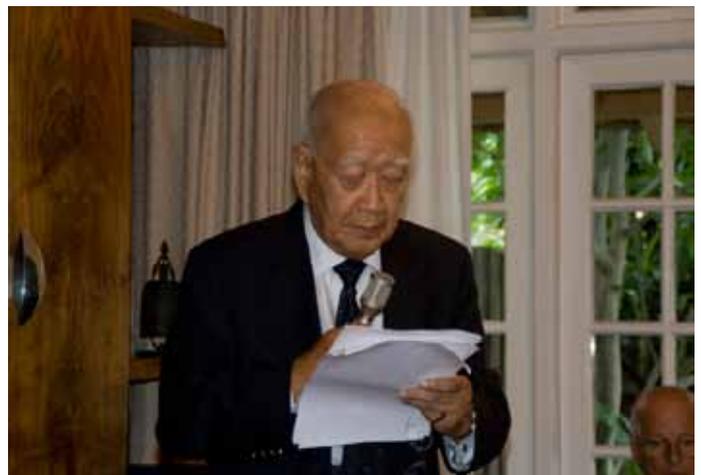
In August 1993, forty three years after our former Head Priest had passed away, the Chikushigakuso Gagaku Music Ensemble was invited by University College London to stage a Gagaku performance at the unveiling ceremony of the monument for the Japanese students who had studied at the university some one hundred and forty-five years ago. At the time, many of us

Shogyoji followers came over to London especially.

Soon after this we encountered Mr Masao Hirakubo, Chairman of the Japanese Residents Association. As our relationship became closer, we were given the opportunity to visit the graves of the four Japanese students who had died in this country one hundred and forty years ago.

A year later, in 1994, on the occasion of the forty-ninth anniversary of the ending of the Second World War, we held a Gagaku performance to pray for world peace at the Gagaku Hall of Shogyoji Temple.

Up until 1994 the regular memorial service we held each year had been solely for Japanese soldiers who had died during the War, but the memorial service for the fallen we held that year was in the form of a ceremony to pray sincerely for world peace beyond the distinction of friend and foe.



Mr. Masao Hirakubo at the Peace and Reconciliation Meeting in 2007

The moment we held this special ceremony for world peace, those who had experienced the war and had regularly been taking part in annual memorial services for the victims of war experienced quite suddenly a sense of liberation from the

complexity of dark feelings they had so long been attached to in the deep recesses of their minds. Each and every participant at that Dharma meeting talked about the profound sense of inner peace and purity they felt in the very core of their being whilst taking part in that ceremony.

Mr Hirakubo's enormous achievement has been to bring about a qualitative change in this "Peace Movement" not only as regards ourselves, members of Shogyoji Temple, but also as regards those of any nationality, including British and Japanese, who were involved in the war.

The incredible sight of British and Japanese war veterans, men who had once fought one another in appalling conditions, now coming together in a single place, confronting and gazing at one another, shaking hands and embracing one another, is little short of a miracle, something inconceivable, far removed from the ordinary norms of human behaviour.

Settled in the United Kingdom, Mr Hirakubo's untiring, life-long endeavours to bring about reconciliation through the BCFG (Burma Campaign Friendship Group) and the BCS (Burma Campaign Society) have been, in Buddhist terms, those of a true Bodhisattva. The strong impression he made at our encounter and the admiration we felt for him only deepened with time.

Now his brave figure is no longer visible to us, but his spirituality, the shining outline he left us, will continue to give us spiritual

inspiration for ever.

Whatever hardships and difficulties may befall us in the years to come, the great achievement Mr. Hirakubo and his British friends have shown the world will never perish. Ensnared in our human karma though we may be, his merciful eye will always be watching over us with loving kindness from the other shore. He and his friends will be awaiting our ultimate encounter in the future.

Mr Hirakubo, on this special occasion I would like to pronounce the nembutsu with deepest sincerity in order to express our enormous debt of gratitude to you for the very substantial and valiant efforts you made, both openly and secretly, to improve Anglo-Japanese friendship, and, more than that even, for taking on your shoulders, it could be said, the full weight of man's karmic condition.

I would also like to express my gratitude to you for always affording Three Wheels the protection of your deep sympathy and loving kindness ever since it was first established. It is with these words of deepest gratitude to you that I would like to end my memorial address.

With palms together.

16th August 2008

Chimyo Takehara and all my Dharma friends
Head Priest of Shogyoji Temple (Jodo Shinshu)

A Speech of Thanks to the late Mr Masao Hirakubo

Satoru Yanagi

16th August 2008

Namu-Amida-Butsu

My dear friends in the U.K.,

Many congratulations on once again welcoming this special day when we pray for Anglo Japanese reconciliation.

Thanks to the effort and devotion of the late Mr Masao Hirakubo this August meeting has continued to grow and develop since it first began in 1997.

On a visit to Shogyoji in the autumn of 1997, Mr Hirakubo was introduced to me for the first time by the Head Priest of the Temple. We spent a long time talking about our war experiences and found that we had both fought in the same desperate battle in Kohima, though we had not known one another at the time.

Before that encounter with Mr. Hirakubo, there had lain hidden a hard knot of suffering deep in my heart. Superficial measures provided no solution. I would think of the Emperor declaring at the end of the war that he accepted the defeat of Japan "by forgiving the unforgivable and enduring the unendurable." Remembering those unspeakably awful days when I lost so many of my friends on the battlefield, my heart was far from showing tolerance.

At the urging of the Head Priest of Shogyoji, however, I came over to London for the first time in December 1997 to attend the Three Wheels ceremony for reconciliation between British and Japanese war veterans.

Thanks to Mr Hirakubo's enormous endeavours, I met a number of veterans who had fought in the war, including in Kohima, my own battleground. One after another Mr Hirakubo introduced me to them.

I learned that one of them, Mr Maurice Franses, had been among the soldiers I had fought against at the time on that very same battlefield.

As this became apparent to us when we were being introduced, our feelings went beyond words. With tears in our eyes, we simply shook hands and embraced. It was the moment of happiness when the knot of suffering that had burdened each of us for so long started melting away.

I had no time to reflect on how this had come about. I simply felt that this man too had been suffering. At that moment the nembutsu welled up from the depths of my being. There was nothing but Namu-Amida-Butsu .

From that first moment of encounter, every time I came to London, I experienced some very happy times with Mr and Mrs Masao Hirakubo and Mr and Mrs Maurice Franses, the closest of close friends with whom I shared an understanding that went far beyond considerations of nationality or religion.

Mr Hirakubo travelled to Japan every year and continued to enjoy visiting Shogyoji Temple and staying with us there. He very much liked attending the Eitaikyo ceremony here in April.

Although advancing infirmity means I am no longer able to visit

London (I am now 87 years old), I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to all my Dharma friends at Shogyoji and Three Wheels for their untiring efforts on a day to day basis to promote reconciliation with British people, for it is as a result of such efforts that I, a woefully ignorant person, was guided to this wonderful encounter with Mr Hirakubo and his prayer for World Peace.

Mother Teresa was once asked, "What should we do to promote peace?" and gave this answer, "First of all love those closest to you!" Mr Hirakubo opened up the way to peace with the love he showed to those around him.

The Head Priest of Shogyoji always tells us, "First of all, attain inner peace yourself!"

Echoing the late Mr Philip Daniel, who departed this life a few years before Mr Hirakubo, I would like to close these words of thanks with the Hebrew term of greeting and farewell: "Shalom!" Peace!

Hirakubo san! I thank you with all my heart for what you have done for me.

With Gassho

Satoru Yanagi

The Peace and Reconciliation Meeting at Three Wheels 2008

On the 16th August 2008 Three Wheels held the annual ceremony to pray for world peace and reconciliation. This year the service for the soldiers who fought in Burma and died in and after the Second World War included a formal memorial to the late Mr Masao Hirakubo OBE, who died earlier this year. Mr Hirakubo's lifetime, since emerging from the horrors of the Second World War in Burma, had been dedicated to bringing about reconciliation between Japanese and British war veterans and promoting the ideal of world peace for all generations to come. At this very well attended London Eza, many people gathered to express their gratitude and dedicate their thoughts to a truly great man.

Before the traditional service of chanting sutras to the Buddha, Mr Koji Tomita, Minister of the Japanese Embassy in London, made an opening address in which he remembered Mr Hirakubo as one of the most remarkable people he had ever met and the huge void he had felt since his departure. With the current extremely worrying situation in the Russian Caucasus and the generally uncertain international situation that is bringing the world calamitously close to another war, Minister Tomita stressed that we should all, following in the footsteps of Mr Hisao Hirakubo, continue in our own way to walk towards peace and reconciliation. Representatives from the Japanese Embassy, the Burma Campaign Society, the Japanese Residents Association and Three Wheels then offered incense during the Memorial Service whilst Reverend Kemmyo Taira Sato led the chanting of sutras.

Reverend Sato opened the next part of the Eza by reading out a memorial address by Venerable Chimyo Takehara, the Head Priest of Shogyoji Temple, which paid tribute to the deep spirituality and noble mind of "A great man, our colleague the late Mr Masao Hirakubo to whom I would like to pay humble tribute". Recalling Mr Hirakubo's untiring efforts to improve Anglo-Japanese relationships and his prayer for peace and reconciliation that he cherished throughout his long life, Venerable Takehara compared his endeavours to those of a Bodhisattva who will continue to give us spiritual inspiration forever. Venerable Takehara concluded by expressing his deepest gratitude to Mr Hirakubo for always affording Three Wheels the protection of his deep sympathy and loving kindness ever since it was first established.

Unfortunately due to his age and infirmity Mr Satoru Yanagi, a Japanese war veteran who had fought in Burma, has been unable

to travel to London to participate in this annual ceremony. However we were delighted that he had once again sent a speech of thanks to be read out which he dedicated this year to the late Mr Masao Hirakubo. Mr Yanagi recollected how it through his encounter with Mr Hirakubo that he was able to find a tremendous peace of mind through achieving reconciliation with British war veterans. When he first met Mr Maurice Franses, one of the soldiers he had fought against during the long and brutal battle of Kohima, they simply shook hands and embraced with tears in their eyes. It was at this very moment of happiness that Mr Yanagi felt the knot of suffering, which had been burdening each of the former enemies for so long, melting away. Mr Yanagi's greeting ended with the words: "Hirakubo-san! I thank you with all my heart for what you have done for me".



Mr Koji Tomita, Minister of the Japanese Embassy

Now in his 90th Year, Mr Philip Malins, a British war veteran who fought in Burma, together with Mr Thomas Bruin, 93 years old Burma campaign veteran, paid tribute to the life and work of Mr Hirakubo. When Mr Hirakubo had first attempted to organise a reconciliation movement between British and Japanese servicemen he met with a great deal of hostility in the U.K. to the point of being hated and insulted. But through his

great courage and compassion Mr Hirakubo was able to bring his wish to fruition. Mr Malins spoke with deep emotion of how not only his life, but those of many others had been enriched by Mr Hirakubo and movingly told us that whenever his mind became clouded with problems it was because of his dear friend Masao Hirakubo that he could look back over his life, recall the wonderful people he has known, and immediately become full of happiness. Mr Thomas Bruin looked to the many lives Mr Hirakubo had touched and wondered if he could ever have been aware of the great influence he had on others. Mr Bruin thanked Reverend Sato for reading the memorial speeches of Venerable Chimyo Takehara and Mr Saturo Yanagi and expressed how very impressed he had been of their tributes to Mr Hirakubo.



The Memorial Service at Three Wheels

Mrs Akiko MacDonald, current chairperson of the Burma Campaign Society, looked to the future generations to continue Mr Hirakubo's work by continuing to talk about the legacy of the war veterans. It was through reading an article Mr Hirakubo had written at the time when Emperor Akihito of Japan visited the U.K. that she was inspired to help with the reconciliation movement he founded. There had been a lot of hostility at the time to the Emperor's visit from war veterans but Mr Hirakubo showed through his writing such deep thought and consideration towards those involved. Professor Matsugi was reminded of how proud he is to be a member of the Burma Campaign Society and paid tribute to Mr Hirakubo by describing him as someone who will go down in history for the great work he has done. Professor Matsugi remembered how Mr Hirakubo had said on one occasion that whatever different opinions we may have; we should talk to each other continuously. It was through such sincerity of purpose that Mr Hirakubo always gained the trust of those he spoke to. Mrs Momoko Williams spoke on behalf of the Japanese Residents Association, an organisation Mr Hirakubo had chaired since its founding in 1996, expressing how much Mr Hirakubo's passing had been a great loss to them and how deeply he will be missed. That he was always able to admit he was wrong was, Mrs Williams said, so impressive from someone of his generation. Professor John White continued the formal tributes by discussing the importance of understanding the past. What happens at a grass-roots level is of great importance and no one did more than Mr Hirakubo in this regard. Professor White concluded by reading a Waka (Japanese verse) he had written in memory of Mr Hirakubo. Mr Philip Malins responded by saying how much Mr Hirakubo valued Three Wheels which over the years became a great part of his life and work for peace and reconciliation. Professor Sato concluded the formal tributes by stating how, since Mr Hirakubo's death, what he has done for us has become much clearer and would reveal itself more and

more as the succeeding generations continue the great work he has started.

We next heard from several special visitors to Three Wheels. Reverend Ganshin Roc introduced a new initiative by the British government to introduce a Buddhist Chaplaincy to the armed forces. Reverend Ganshin, a priest from the Tendai tradition is a member of the official committee set up to put the Chaplaincy in place. The first chaplain has now been appointed and a support group to the 3,000 Buddhists who belong to the British army, and the many soldiers who have an interest in Buddhism, has been founded. Three monks from Amaravati Monastery chanted the traditional Pali Metta Sutra which contains the Buddha's teaching on love and compassion to all beings. Ajahn Nyanarato, a Japanese born monk, said how very pleased he was to be at Three Wheels together with the veterans who fought during the Second World War. Such encounters as this can stay within us and not only support us during our lives but outwardly influence others. Professor Toshikazu Arai, an ordained Jodo Shinshu priest and professor of Soai University in Osaka, Japan was visiting Three Wheels for the first time today have been invited to attend this Eza by Reverend Sato. Before accepting Reverend Sato's invitation, Professor Arai had wondered what was the use in praying for peace. However, he told us, he came along today as he felt it was a once in a life time opportunity and a good chance to get to know Reverend Sato better. Professor Arai described how it was on listening to the talks given this afternoon that his question had been answered. Everyone had come together today, Professor Arai said, with the same mind and wish to achieve peace and reconciliation. It is this aspiration that will change our minds and have an influence for the better on others in the future. To achieve such peace it is first necessary to recognise the existence of anger within ourselves. Only with this awareness, Professor Arai emphasised, can we solve our own problems and achieve inner peace.

Mrs Kaori Punwani read a message from Mrs Etsuko Crellin about the next Open Garden day which is to held on the weekend of the 13th - 14th September from 2 - 6pm. Volunteers for the running of the event were requested to contact Kaori with the dates and times they can help out. Proceeds from the admission fee will be going to charities supported by the National Garden Society which runs the event such as the Save the Children fund.

Finally we said goodbye, at least only until the next Eza, to the Punwani family who will soon be moving out of the Three Wheels *taya* after 11 years. On behalf of the Punwani family, - Kaori and the three children Rina, Ryo and Kai, Dr Shonit Punwani gave a short speech of thanks for all that they have received during their residency at the Tenrin *Taya*. Dr Punwani looked back with happiness over the years he had lived there with his family which he summed up as having been a great opportunity for himself and his children to develop. His eldest daughter Rina, being nearly 9 years old has spent all her life being brought up within the temple community. Seeing how this has made her into the child she is today, Dr Punwani expressed his gratitude at how worthwhile their time living at Three Wheels *taya* had been and looked forward to this great relationship continuing on into the future.

Andrew Webb

The End of Year Meeting 2007

The 77th London Eza, whilst attended by slightly fewer members than usual, was the most memorable of all those that I can recall in my years of attending Three Wheels meeting. This was of course because of the return of Reverend Kemmyo Sato, Mrs Hiroko Sato, and many Dharma friends from Japan; where they had been participating in the annual Hoonko ceremonies at Shogyoji. And, of course, the profound quality of this particular Samgha meeting was also deeply related to the recent visit of Venerable Chimyo Takehara and the inauguration of the Stupa of Namu-Amida-Butsu at Brookwood cemetery.

As is traditional the Eza opened with a service (Jp: Gongyo) and it was notable that on this occasion the presence and involvement of the youngest members of the Samgha – the children of the Ishii and Punwani families – added great enthusiasm, naturalness and vigour to the chanting.

Then the meeting (Eza) itself commenced with Reverend Kemmyo Sato reading out Mr Kenji Toda's recent speech at the British Embassy in Tokyo, and his own talk about his impressions of the visit of his master Ven. Takehara. Rev Sato said that Ven. Takehara's visit completely transformed his appreciation of the significance of the relationship between the pioneering Japanese students – the 'Choshu Five' – and their hosts Professor and Mrs Williamson. Through Ven. Takehara's eyes, Rev. Sato recognised the activity of great compassion working behind these peoples' lives, and saw his own relationship to his British Dharma friends in a new light. In particular he realised that Professor White's protection of himself, and the Samgha, was a manifestation of that same fundamental spirit of love and compassion. Later in the meeting, Prof. White humbly disavowed any such virtues, but as a witness this only served to confirm to me the way in which Amida's great compassion works through beings regardless of their own self-consciousness.

Both these talks made me very grateful that, despite having returned to Japan, both Mr Toda and Rev. Takehara are still working so hard for both the social and spiritual well-being of the British people and the bond between our countries. In relation to this point, Rev. Sato spoke about an English Dharma friend who had said to him recently that they felt so fortunate to have witnessed this great Dharma movement and that it must surely be due to their past conditions (shukuzen); including their parents' nurturing and the religious heritage of the United Kingdom. This, Rev. Sato said joyfully, demonstrates that the Buddha-dharma has truly begun to take root in this country. Or rather, as he added, it was always here in the Universal Great Compassion but has now manifested itself in a lively way within the samgha.

The meeting continued with talks given by various Dharma friends who have recently visited Shogyoji. First of all Mrs Etsuko Crellin spoke of how Shogyoji has become her 'true home' where she is able to encounter and re-discover her Oya-sama (Great Parent), as one might call the Great Compassion at the heart of existence. Like all the speakers, she also thanked Ven. Takehara and Bomori-sama for their guidance and support.

Mrs Hazel W. thanked the Samgha for the hospitality that she and her husband Peter were shown during their stay at Shogyoji; with visits to marvellous restaurants and a fascinating exhibition

of artefacts from the Honganji Temples. Most of all though, she spoke of the fact that, despite the cultural and physical differences between Three Wheels and its parent temple, she felt so much to be very familiar. This she realised was because of the shared mind of facing and listening to the Buddha which goes beyond differences and united her with the Shogyoji congregation.

Miss Mary Hall read out an extremely sincere and frank letter that she had written to Ven. Takehara and his wife Bomori-sama after her own recent visit to our head temple. In it she very naturally demonstrated the meaning of introspection in our tradition when she recounted how, through the kindness of her Dharma friends she came to the dual realisation of her own personal karma and at the same time the experience of the great compassion of the Buddha embracing her just as she is. However such a summary hardly does justice to the profound content of her talk. What moved me most was how the words of Mr Shinpei Hashimoto, one of my friends and former residents of the Three Wheels taya, provided the spur which deepened Mary's introspection to such a significant level. Mr Hashimoto asked Mary to send his best wishes to his friends in London, and in doing so created in her a realisation of the same truth that Rev. Sato mentioned in his own talk the reality of the working of the Great Love which is unhindered by oceans or geographical distance and connects all beings.



Mr. Andy Barritt at the meeting

Mrs Hiroko Sato spoke of how the recent creation of the stupa at Brookwood transformed her most recent visit to Shogyoji temple. Through Ven. Takehara's talk at the stupa inauguration, and also his suggestion that she visit Choshu on her arrival back in Japan, she came to a deeper appreciation of the complexity of time-and-space with respect to human relationships. On the coach to the Brookwood Cemetery she noticed a deep peacefulness amongst the many people travelling to the inauguration ceremony and sensed a movement not only through the landscape, but also towards the Pure Land. Equally back at Shogyoji temple, soon afterwards, she experienced everything in the present – trees, stones, people's discussions

and so on – as illuminated by a light which flowed from beyond time. In the present moment, she said, she found not only a new appreciation of the past, but also her path into the future.

Moved by the preceding talks Ms Hannah Bensley spoke briefly of her own visit to Japan last year, and said that she has been feeling increasingly close to Shogyoji in recent months.

Mr Andrew Webb, the last of the recent visitors to Shogyoji to speak, gave a free-form talk in which he spoke of how the powerful atmosphere of the Hoonko ceremonies caused him to encounter the Jodo Shinshu tradition afresh, and hear clearly the admonition of Rennyō Shōnin to use the short time that we have in this life to deeply hear the Dharma. He also suggested that what unified the experience of all the preceding speakers was precisely the receipt of that ‘one mind’; the mind of deep hearing.

To conclude the meeting, Rev. Sato asked me to say a few words and I read out a letter that I had just written to the Shogyoji samgha following a conversation with two Dharma friends. As this letter has been circulated separately, I will not go into it in detail. However the essence of my letter, and I believe of all the Dharma talks given at this Eza, was the way in which Ven. Takehara’s recent efforts have made us all aware of the sutra teachings as so much more than poetic expressions of human yearning in the face of suffering. When I re-encountered Ven. Takehara at Brookwood this year, I realised he was a person who, by deeply encountering his personal and communal histories in the present moment, is able to move beyond time into the realm of Infinite Light and Life. That realm embraces us always, but it can be so hard to see, and I am grateful that there are such real Bodhisattvas who, through the nembutsu of sincerity and joyful gratitude, carry into this world of darkness the fragrance of Light. Namuamidabutsu.

Andy (Kyōshin)

Shokai Retreats

Editors Note: This is a letter sent from a participant of the first Shokai Retreat to be held at Three Wheels to the Head Priest and Samgha of Shogyoji Temple, the parent body of Three Wheels.

Dear Dharma friends,

As you know, last year culminated in the completion of the ‘Stūpa of Namuamidabutsu’ at Brookwood Cemetery and the visit of Venerable Chimyo Takehara from our parent temple in Japan. Subsequently, through the impact of these twin events, various wonderful things happened. Most important of these though was the fact that many members of the Three Wheels Samgha came to a deeper appreciation of the Jodo Shinshu teaching, and became of one-mind-in-faith with their Japanese Dharma friends.

Reflecting on these developments Reverend Kemmyo Sato felt that the time might be ripe to begin a series of biannual training sessions at Three Wheels along the lines of those held at Shogyoji, our head temple. He proposed to call these ‘Shokai’ after a special type of spiritual training originally developed by the late Head Priest Dharma-Master Reion Takehara during and after World War II. This suggestion was duly accepted by Venerable Chimyo Takehara, and the board of trustees, who placed great faith in us by allowing the event to proceed in accordance with our sincere wishes.

Before describing the retreat I need to explain a little more about the meaning of ‘Shokai’. During the war, as in this country, it was common for Japanese people to be evacuated from the cities to the countryside to avoid the danger from bombing. In Japan this type of evacuation was known as ‘Sokai’. However during this time of fiery destruction Dharma Master Reion Takehara courageously invited people to come and study the Dharma, the Way of Peace, at the temple. To this end he altered the term ‘Sokai’ to ‘Shokai’, where ‘Sho’ means ‘letting [water] flow’ and ‘kai’ means ‘opening’. What this meant was that ‘Shokai’ would be a time in which we can confront the problems of life rather than flee from them, as outlined in Rennyō Shōnin’s famous instruction; “Constantly dredge out the Channel of Faith and let the water of Amida’s Dharma flow freely”.

After much planning the first Shokai took place from 23rd to 25th May 2008 with around twelve

participants over the duration, not counting Reverend Sato and Reverend Ishii who guided and instructed us.

The corner stone of the retreat was a lesson on the first evening in Jodo Shinshu rituals and sūtra chanting. During this period we were taught how to behave in the Buddharam, the significance and importance of the various forms used in our daily services, and most importantly we began the life-long process of learning how to chant Master Shinran’s great hymn of nembutsu-faith known as the ‘Shoshinge’. When I say that this lesson formed the ‘corner-stone’ of the retreat I do so because of something Reverend Ishii told us which was; “If we show true respect to the Buddha then the Other-power will appear naturally.” Indeed as we went forwards into the weekend, facing the Buddha with respect, I witnessed my own and other peoples’ hearts naturally being brought into a state of sincerity and truth, which allowed many personal and inter-personal problems to be solved, and new insights gained, under the light of the Dharma.

The other core element of Shokai, aside from the aforementioned lesson, was a Dharma talk by Reverend Sato on ‘The Meaning of Taya’. Perhaps some of you, like me, have heard it before. Despite its familiarity, however, in the reflective atmosphere of the retreat many of us heard Kemmyo-Sensei’s words as if for the first time and came to a fuller awareness of the way that Other-power works in and through the activities of the Samgha.

Other sessions that took place during the retreat included a meditation period, gardening at the Tenrin Taya, and a number of faith meetings. All of these were deeply enriched by the individual contributions of the various participants. We were also very much supported by the ladies of the Samgha; Mrs Hiroko Sato, Mrs Kaori Punwani, Mrs Sanae Ishii, Miss Sahoko Murata and Miss Megumi Kamachi who cooked us huge quantities of delicious and invigorating food.

Finally I would like to say thank you to everyone at Shogyoji Temple for trusting us to hold these Shokai retreats, and, to conclude by sharing with you an extract from a letter

written to the Samgha by Venerable Chimyo Takehara:

“I was very pleased to receive such wonderful reports from a number of participants of the First Shokai Retreat [...] in praise of life as a gift from the Buddha. As I read through them I felt moved to be witnessing the actual founding moment of a nembutsu Samgha in the U.K. The first Shokai retreat was indeed a tremendous success, far outweighing all our expectations.

Your request to begin the second Shokai retreat with a visit to the Stūpa of Namu-Amida-Butsu in Brookwood, and your wish to clean the grave site there, is a wonderful idea of eternal significance. It is with both reverence and admiration that I offer you many congratulations on your Shokai retreat.”

With gassho in Dharma,

Andy (Kyōshin)

Spring School Impressions

The 9th Annual Spring School was held this year between 21st March 2008 and 3rd April 2008. A total of 10 Japanese students between the ages of 12 and 21 attended together with three helpers namely Reverend Emmyo Sato, his wife Toshiko Sato and Kenyu Hinotani. All of the participants enjoyed a wide range of activities including staying for three days at the Golden Buddha Centre in Devon, visiting University College London, sight-seeing at various attractions in London such as Tower Bridge and the Greenwich Royal Observatory and informal English lessons back at Three Wheels. As this was the first time many of the students had spent any length of time or distance away from home, Spring School provided a unique opportunity for them to reflect on their relationships with their parents, one another and other significant people in their lives. Each day the students attended morning and evening services together and over the course of the session studied an important Buddhist text entitled ‘The Sutra on the Gravity of What Has Been Done for Us by Our Parents’. Through shared experiences such as these the students came to understand their lives in an entirely new light. Below are the impressions of three of the participants which express some of the profound experiences they had during this year’s Spring School.

Taiji Matsuda (12 year old junior high school boy)

Namu-Amida-butsu

I attended Spring School because I wanted to change the way I was and stop being such a selfish person always relying on my parents. On the second or third day of Spring School, I had an argument with a friend and didn’t see how I could manage to stay on for two weeks in such an awful mood. Later that evening I talked the matter over with some of the people looking after us at Spring School. The advice they gave me allowed me to see things in an important new light. Finally, I decided that what really mattered was to continue doing my best to solve my problem.

On a lighter note, we did lots of interesting and fun things during the session. In London, for example, I had the chance to visit Big Ben, Tower Bridge, the British Museum and so on. This may be the only chance I’ll ever get in life to visit those places! Being given a special poem by Professor White was fantastic. I really enjoyed staying at the Golden Buddha Centre, too, and other fun things like buying the English football team strip, as well as a jacket and a mug, when we went sightseeing as a group, shopping in the supermarket and taking the tube - rather peculiar, I thought, compared to the Japanese underground. For me there have been all sorts of new experiences.

I feel that something has changed inside me somehow. First of all, through reading the Sutra on the Gravity of What Has

Been Done for Us by Our Parents, I have learned the importance of my parents and the love they have shown me. At home I have never ever done any housework as my mother always does it, but at Spring School I managed my own chores after getting up, after breakfast and after supper. On my return I plan to make life easier for my parents by helping them in the house. Another great thing has been learning to appreciate all that has been done for me by my parents, in particular, the ten immeasurable kindnesses as written in the Sutra book. I am really happy to have been brought up surrounded by their loving kindness. I have received innumerable things from my parents, both on a spiritual and a practical level, ever since being born.



Taiji Matsuda

When I return to Japan, I really want to tell my parents ‘I am so sorry that I have never said thank you to you for twelve years ‘ and ‘Thank you very much indeed for taking care of me. Although even now I’m afraid I shall go on troubling you, I will do my best to live gratefully.’

Gassho

Taiji Matsuda

Takahisa Nishimura (16 year old high school pupil)

Namu-Amida-butsu

My goal in life is to become a teacher but I have had difficulty deciding what to study at university in two years time. At the beginning of the year I remembered how Rev. Zensho Yoshihara had recommended I take part in the U.K. Spring School. I wondered if experiencing an unknown culture might change my way of thinking, so along I came! Before leaving Japan, I set myself the task of coming to a definite decision whilst in the UK as to what direction my life should take. Visiting Greenwich, Tower Bridge and other famous sites in London has been a tremendous experience. English culture

really is impressive, I found the streets of London particularly beautiful and definitely my horizons have expanded. On the other hand, I was shocked to find that my English was completely useless even though I had studied it for four years. I have to admit that I could not at all join in the audience's laughter when we went to see a musical. I want to learn useful English and have made up my mind to start reading English newspapers. The theme for the Spring School this year was "Thinking outside the box". It is quite true that there is a whole other world out



Takahisa Nishimura

there beyond my imagination. I felt something crack inside of me when I stepped into this new world, something resembling a hard shell that had been building up around me unconsciously over the years. This was actually my very first step "outside the box." The world for me now is a much bigger place than it was a few months ago, I can see so many different possibilities and choices for the future. On the other hand, at the same time, I have come to realise what a small existence I am in the world. I never imagined that the Spring School would help me to such an important realisation actually, but by far the greatest gain for me has been the change in my attitude towards my parents, following our reading of the Sutra on the Gravity of What Has Been Done for Us by Our Parents.

Up until recently I had always taken everything my parents did for me for granted, never showing them any gratitude. Being awakened to this fact, however, has made me realize how selfish I have been. Through my encounter with a different culture and history, in particular through my visit to UCL, I have finally been able to determine my future course in life, namely to study archaeology. But even this discovery pales into insignificance compared to the marvellous experience of knowing how much I am loved by my parents. I will try to talk to my parents about my future and come to a mutual understanding on how to proceed. My new challenge, on returning to Japan, will be to apologise to my parents and express my deepest gratitude to them, both on behalf of "the person I once was" as well as "the person I now am," for all they have done for me.

Gassho

Takahisa Nishimura

Kenyu Hinotani (21 year old university student.)

Namu-Amida-butsu,
During my seven week stay at Three Wheels as a member of staff of the Spring School, I received a lot of instructions and good advice concerning my way of doing things. Some of

these suggestions I had heard before in the course of my day to day life at the Kansai-dojo or when I was participating in the Training Assemblies of Shogyoji Temple. Receiving good advice about my problems again now from Kenshin-san and Emmyo-san, I came to realise how ignorant I was of my own true nature.

During preparations for the Spring School I was involved in a large number of different tasks. Unable to complete them properly, however, I often found myself leaving them for others to finish. Those around me kindly pointed out that the real problem lay in my failure to start on anything until the very last minute. In retrospect I could see that this had been the crux of the problems I had both at university and in daily life. This was the first time I had received such guidance. It made me feel very sorry towards my Dharma friends for all the worry I must have caused them, and at the same time very grateful to them for having had the patience to continue teaching me right up till the present.

When I spoke to Kenshin-san about sensing a certain distance between Spring School students and myself, I was awakened to the reality of my own existence. When Kenshin-san said to me, "No need to overstretch yourself. Please, just be true to yourself and do as much as you feel you can," I felt as if all the burdens I had been shouldering were suddenly lifted. I found myself in the embrace of the great compassion of the Buddha. During Spring School, having read twice the Sutra on the Gravity of What Has Been Done for Us by Our Parents, I was given the opportunity to think again about the love my parents had shown me. As Kemmyo-sama said, in his talks on the



Kenyu Hinotani

relationship between Three Wheels and UCL and Three Wheels and the Stupa of Namu-Amida-butsu at Brookwood Cemetery, the love and compassion with which Doctor Williamson in his day not only accepted Japanese students but also helped provide a grave for Kosaburo Yamazaki, a student who died over here, was a manifestation of the Buddha's unconditional love. Seven years ago, when first I participated in Spring School, I also read the Sutra on the Gravity of What Has Been Done for Us by Our Parents. At that time I wanted to respond to what had been done for me by my parents by becoming a priest in accordance with their wishes. But I was seriously deluding myself. It is not for my parents' sake that I shall become a priest, but for my own. In this respect I have no obligation towards my parents. Awakened to the fact that my parents were only thinking of me when they wanted me to become a priest, I felt indeed "How much deeper are the hearts of my parents than my own heart thinking of them." (part of a final poem written by Shoin Yoshida just before his execution).

Before my forthcoming formal ordination I would like to be permitted an introspection session at Shogyoji Temple so that I can really think about the meaning of my ordination with

utmost sincerity.

Many, many thanks to all of you at Three Wheels for putting up with me for fifty whole days!

With Gassho

Kenyu Hinotani

Pure Land Class at the Buddhist Society

At this the last Shoshinge Study meeting at the London Buddhist Society in Victoria, Kemmyo-sensei gave a talk on the concluding four lines of the Shoshinge in which Shinran Shonin exhorts us to attain pure faith through entrusting ourselves to the words of the 'Great Ones and Patriarchs' who clarified the truth of salvation through Amida Buddha's Original Vow.

Rev Kemmyo Sato discussed the formlessness of Amida Buddha's unconditional love and of the faith in which we entrust ourselves to Amida. This "pure faith" has no form. Apart from this we can easily become selfishly attached to all the various mental, verbal or physical forms we encounter. It is the formless working of Other power that frees us from these tenacious attachments to form.

Conversely this formlessness is to be realised through form. In this regard Sensei gave the example of the 'Three kinds of love' elucidated by the 4th Patriarch Tao-Ch'o.

Firstly there is the love between sentient beings including familial love; secondly love that is built on truth or conditioned by Dharma such as that between dharma-friends; and thirdly the Buddhas' unconditional love. Thinking of the third type of love, the Buddha's compassion, it is easy to belittle the first two; however it is through the love between sentient beings and the love conditioned by dharma that we can come to realise the unconditional love of Amida Buddha. The formlessness of Amida Buddha's love manifests itself through the form of the first two types of love.

Rev. Sato said in conclusion regarding this:

The one true thing the Great Sage and the Pure Land patriarchs have been encouraging us to attain is this pure faith, the faith of entrusting ourselves to the unconditional love of Amida Buddha, a love that is formless way beyond the confines of all form, a love that, being formless, it can take any form. Formlessness realises itself through form. It is through our encounter with various forms of human love that we meet formless, unconditional love of Amida Buddha."

It has been approximately three years that Kemmyo-sensei has been holding these meetings to discuss the Shoshinge. It has been a heartfelt and painstaking endeavour for him to produce the collection of twenty talks that form his translation and commentary on these verses which contain the doctrinal and devotional heart of Shin Buddhism. We are all very grateful to Kemmyo-sensei for everything he has done for us in this work which he has conducted out of the profound concern that the true meaning of Shinran's words can be communicated to the English speaking world.

Now that the series of Shoshinge talks have reached an end, Kemmyo-sensei will be continuing his Pure Land class with monthly talks on Fascicle 5 of 'The Letters' by Rennyō Shonin. Full details can be found on the Three Wheels Website.

Namuamidabutsu

Andrew

Note on the Pure Land

The Pure Land tradition is, I believe, the most misunderstood form of Buddhism. Although it remains the most commonly practised tradition in Japan and China, it has been less well received in the West than other forms of Buddhism. This, I think, is due to its seeming similarities with Christianity, which rather than being an attraction for Westerners is a "turn off" for those of us who feel an antipathy towards our Christian roots.

The devotional and faith aspect emphasised by Pure Land Buddhist teachings, having faith that our salvation lies in the hands of Amida Buddha sounds, on the surface, suspiciously like a theistic religion. The usual questions and criticisms directed towards Pure Land are, "Is this really Buddhism? Is this not just a distorted or watered down version of Buddhism? Is this not a theistic religion with one foot in the Buddhist camp and another in the Christian camp?"

It is true that the traditional presentation of Pure Land Buddhism - the story of Dharmakara and his vow to save all beings and the description of the Pure Land in the Smaller and Larger Sukhavati Sutras, taken at face value, seem full of superstition, myth and

fantasy, the very thing that intelligent Westerners, tired of stories of Adam and Eve, images of heaven and hell, wish to reject.

Had it not been for an experience that I had some years ago, I think I too would not have given the Pure Land more than a fleeting look. Experiences such as this are not easy to describe, but I can only say that it seemed like a true faith experience which welled up quite suddenly and spontaneously. It occurred whilst walking one day, gently reciting the mantra of Buddha Shakyamuni. I was filled with an overwhelming sense of joy, peace and gratitude for the Buddha. I felt a complete surety and knowledge that the Buddha was my salvation and that all things were manifesting in complete perfection.

Some years later I received teachings from the Reverend Taira Sato, on the Shin Pure Land tradition. Reverend Sato's teachings of reliance on Amida were presented in a way which made sense of the experience I describe above. He talks of Amida Buddha representing the Dharmakaya, a formless quality, which in my current mind of ignorance I cannot experience, but which I have faith in. By calling out to that "being", by reciting the Nembutsu,

Namu Amida Butsu, I am assured of moving closer to that Other Power and relinquishing my own false self.

For me Shinran's words lead us simply and directly to an experience of the Buddha's First Noble Truth. If we can recognise our foolish nature we stop trying to control and manipulate our external environment in an effort to find happiness and we turn for our Refuge to the internal cause of happiness, which is Other Power. Acknowledging our ignorant and tainted nature throws

into relief that which is NOT TRUTH, so allowing the light of Amida to penetrate the darkness of our hearts and minds. Each time I hear Reverend Sato, giving commentary on the Tannisho and Shoshinge, my faith and gratitude in Amida grows. I am so grateful to Reverend Sato for his continued effort in making the journey to Golden Buddha Centre in Devon.

Thank you
Namu Amida Butsu

Ros Palmer

Three Wheels Activities

Service Book

Thanks to the enormous efforts of Dr Lucien Chocron and the patient proof-reading of Reverend Kenshin Ishii and other members of the Three Wheels Samgha, a service or 'Sutra Book' containing all of the main parts of the Jodo Shinshu liturgy commonly used at Three Wheels has been published. The Sutra Book contains a romanised transliteration of the chanting along side the traditional script, that non-Japanese readers can easily follow. Work began on drafting the sutra book back in 2004. Four years later, after much careful revision overseen by

Dr Chocron who spent a great deal of time to find the correct Chinese characters used in the liturgy, many of them now no longer in common usage, copies have now been published and are available for a donation of £10 to the London Shogyoji Trust. Since the publication of the Sutra Book it has been great to see so many people being able to join in with the services, including one first time visitor. Many thanks to Three Wheels and Dr Chocron for this invaluable addition to the practice of Jodo Shin Buddhism here in the U.K.

Garden Open Days 2008/09

This year's Stone Garden Opening Days at Three Wheels were successfully concluded on Sunday 14th September 2008.

During May the Garden was open on the weekend of the 17th and 18th. Despite the weather being wet and cold we received 135 visitors to the garden during the two days. The tea-ceremony was also very popular and 65 visitors took part in the ceremony and enjoyed the traditional green tea prepared and served by our two kimono-attired tea-masters, Kumiko-san and Chizuru-san. In September the garden was once again open on 13th and 14th. A sudden break in the miserable weather brought two days of mild, sunny and bright weather and helped to make the occasion even more enjoyable. The number of visitors was smaller than in May mainly due to the closure that weekend of the Acton Town underground station; however over the two days we saw 56 visitors about 20 of whom took part in the tea-ceremony. Including the numerous people who volunteered their time to assist with the event more than one hundred people came to Three Wheels that weekend.

On all of the open days there was an army of helpers who greeted

all the visitors with friendly smiles and took time to answer all their questions. Most of the visitors stayed for a considerable length of time and appreciated the interesting talks about the garden given by Professor John White.

I hope that the helpers also enjoyed themselves on the day meeting and chatting with one another as well as greeting the visitors. Through the comments made to me by some of the visitors, I believe that many left with a better understanding of Three Wheels and its aims.

I also wish to mention all the hard work, quietly and proficiently carried out behind the scenes on every occasion by Hiroko-san,



Prof. John White explaining the Garden

Sanae-san and Kaori-san. They have been at all times unflinching in their efforts for the Temple.

Three Wheels is once again host two Open Garden Days on behalf of the National Garden Society and raise funds for British Charities, in 2009. The dates have been arranged for Saturday 16th and Sunday 17th May 2009, from 2pm until 5.30pm.



Two helpers for the Tea-ceremony, Chizuru and Kumiko

Please do come along to support the event and don't forget that we are always looking for volunteers to assist in its smooth running. It is our hope that you can enjoy welcoming new visitors to Three Wheels as well as meeting old friends. For

further details please do not hesitate to contact Three Wheels or visit our website (www.threewheels.org)

Etsuko Crellin

The Thatching of the Viewing Shelter and Construction of a Gate.

At first sight, the bright yellow straw of the new capping for the Viewing Shelter of the Zen Garden is rather startling. However, it will soon tone down and blend in with the rest. The work was carried out during the summer by Rodger Evans, a Master Thatcher and Thatching Instructor, together with his assistant, Minoru Shiozawa, a thatcher from Japan who had come over to learn about British methods.

It was unfortunate that the remedial work had to be done after only a decade, which was much sooner than had been expected. Rodger Evans explained that this was because the Norfolk reed in the year in which the original thatching had been done was less durable than was normally the case.



The new thatching

This also means that the whole roof will probably have to be redone in the next few years. As it is, in spite of a number of generous donations, not enough money had been accumulated in the Long Term Maintenance Fund to cover the whole of the cost of the new capping, and Shogyoji had to be called on yet again for a subsidy to cover the shortfall.

The Website, which, by the way, as a result of the efforts of Ken-shin Ishii, now has Japanese versions of a considerable part of its content, has an excellent view of the work in progress. After it had been completed and the extensive scaffolding removed, it was possible for Gary Jones, who had done such a remarkable job when the Shelter was first built, to come back and do some reinforcement of the external plastering of the Shelter where it had begun to come away at the base of the wall.

After consultation with the Director, he then agreed to submit a design and costings for a gate, which was much needed to provide direct access between Three Wheels and the garden next door. After his plans had been accepted, an expert carpenter came to move the existing gate further into the passage alongside the Viewing Shelter and to create the new gate into the garden of No. 57.

Particularly when there are large gatherings, this will make life much easier. It will also mean that children can move directly from one house to the other without having to go out into the street with an adult to accompany them. Traffic from the house and through the gate will, however, undoubtedly mean that thought will have to be given to the provision of stepping stones or of some other means of preventing the creation of a rough and unsightly worn track across the lawn of No. 57.

With the completion of these works the turning of No. 57 into a true Taya House can now be said to be substantially completed, although it may be that further internal modifications may be needed in the future if there is an increase in the activities of Three Wheels.

This would, however, like the work which has just been done, put yet more strain on limited financial resources.

John White

Shin Buddhism: Faith and Nembutsu

The practice of saying the nembutsu, or of the pronouncing of the Buddha-name, is not separate from the faith-experience of entrusting oneself absolutely to Amida Buddha. In their source faith and practice are one and the same in Shin Buddhism, both originating in the great compassion of Amida Buddha. Both are gifts to us from Amida. On encountering the Name of Amida Buddha pronounced by all the Buddhas, a manifestation in itself of Amida's great compassion, we come to entrust ourselves absolutely to Amida Buddha. In Shin Buddhist teaching the nembutsu of our teacher or Dharma friends is referred to as "all Buddhas' pronouncing the Name of Amida Buddha." In other words, on becoming aware of the working of Amida's great compassion that manifests itself as the nembutsu of our good teacher or Dharma friends, we attain the pure faith of entrusting ourselves to Amida Buddha. We are impelled to do so by Other-power, is-

suing from the depths of our being. Our own nembutsu practice, or pronouncing of the Name, wells up spontaneously from our faith experience. It is an expression of the greatest joy and the deepest gratitude we feel at the moment of attaining faith and finding ourselves in the embrace of the unconditional love of Amida Buddha. Our nembutsu practice springs from our faith experience, not vice versa. Regarding this point Shinran Shonin states in the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, "True faith is unfailingly accompanied by [pronouncing] the Name. [Pronouncing] the Name is, however, not necessarily accompanied by the faith that is grounded on the Vow-power [of Amida Buddha]."

Our own individual one thought-moment practice of pronouncing the Name with joy and gratitude emerges at the very moment we attain the one thought-moment of faith. In essence the

one thought-moment of practice and the one thought-moment of faith are one and the same, both having its original source in Amida Buddha.

Kemmyo Taira Sato

Editor's note: If you want to know more about Pure Land Buddhism or if you have a question about Shin Buddhism, please visit our website: www.threewheels.co.uk or contact Rev. Kemmyo Sato at Three Wheels.

The growth of a garden

The Zen Garden at Three Wheels is not a static thing, It needs to be visited time and again because it is constantly growing and, as it matures, becoming more beautiful year by year.

It is not just that the surrounding trees that were most of them four or five feet tall when they were bought, and therefore completely hidden behind the enclosing cob wall, are now some twenty or thirty feet high and form a varied framework of green.

The Garden itself is changing and is, like all that exists, in a state of flux. As the left-hand Illustration shows, the rock on the right, which is nearest to the foreground, was entirely bare when it was first put in place in 1996. We all thought that because it

was formed out of such hard stone it would always remain like that. But how wrong we were. As can be seen in the right-hand Photograph, taken in October 2008, it has been colonised by the local moss that makes its home in Acton. Now, at the foot of the cliffs, there is a green forest beside the vertical, white streak of the waterfall, and clumps of trees now grow high up in the crags above.

The Garden is an example for us all.

If only we too, as we age and mature, could also steadily grow more beautiful, and do as the Garden does.

John White



The bare stone taken in 1997



The stone with growing moss taken in October 2008

Poet's corner: An homage to Mr. Masao Hirakubo by John White

He fought
all his life

beyond
the call of duty

become
a great man

leaving bitterness
behind

out of enemies
made friends

Editors' Note.

For comments, criticisms, and questions concerning the Newsletter or if you want to include material for inclusion, please contact Dr. Lucien Chocron, 31 Sherlock Court, Dorman Way, London, NW8 0RU, Tel/Fax 020 7722 1693, Email: lucienchocron@msn.com.

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