

Three Wheels NEWS

London Shogyoji Trust

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New Years Ceremony 2004

The traditional New Years service, meeting and meal was held once again at Three Wheels on the 1st of January 2004. All of the participants greatly enjoyed celebrating the arrival of the coming year together and were able to look back with gratitude for all the wonderful events and encounters that took place at Three Wheels over the past twelve months.

At the centre of events was the *Otoso* ceremony. This involved each person drinking a few drops of *sake*



Otoso Ceremony

poured by Reverend Sato in front of the Buddha-shrine, taken as an expression of gratitude for the life and teachings of Shinran Shonin the founder of Jodo Shinshu.

During each Shin Buddhist daily service, a letter from the *O'fumi* (the five fascicle collection of the letters of Rennyō Shonin) and *wasans* (hymns by Shinran Shonin) are recited. These normally change each day in rotation through the entire collection of letters and *wasans*. At the New Years ceremony they are begun again from the start of the collections.

At this Years meeting Reverend Sato delivered a talk on the first letter of fascicle one by Rennyō Shonin. As mentioned above this letter is recited at every New Years service. For the first time Reverend Sato gave his own translation of this letter which was very well received for its clarity. A key point of this letter, arising from the question which begins it, is the relationship between master and disciple in Shin Buddhism. In this context Reverend Sato said in regards to the relationship between

Shinran and his followers:

“His followers were basically good friends of his. Usually friendship implies equality of relationship between people. Shinran’s friendship was more than that. He respected his followers as being protectors of the same true way, just as he revered his wife as a bodhisattva who would lead him to the Pure Land.”

This relationship is crucial in awakening faith in Amida Buddha. Reverend Sato continues:

“How does one feel the workings of Amida? It is through one’s relationship with others..... One who is awakened to faith knows how to thank Amida, how to thank one’s Master and consequently how to thank others”

In the letter Rennyō Shonin writes to his followers concisely on the nature of interpersonal relationships in Shin Buddhism:

“Thus we are all fellow followers. Therefore, Shinran Shonin addressed his followers very respectfully as ‘honourable’ Dharma friends and ‘honorable’ fellow followers.”

The New Years ceremony provides a valuable opportunity each year to look both back with gratitude for everything that has been given to us by the Buddha, his teaching and our fellow followers on the Pure Land way, together with the assurance of the future filled with the Light of Amida Buddha. As Rennyō Shonin says at the conclusion of his letter on the joy of appreciating this priceless gift:

*“Previously,
joy
was wrapped in my sleeves
but, tonight,
I am overflowing with happiness”*

Andrew Webb

‘On the Introspection Session’

The 54th London Eza was a special meeting which focused our attention on the Shin Buddhist system of spiritual development known as *Chomon* or ‘Introspection’. In particular the Samgha was very fortunate to receive an account of this important aspect of Shin Buddhist life from both a priest – Reverend Kemmyo Sato - and also a lay-person – Kaori Punwani - that have each undergone such ‘introspection sessions’.

To begin with Kemmyo-sensei explained the essence of *Chomon* as being a time of introspection “during which an individual follower is awakened to what has been done for him or her; by friends, parents or the Buddha. As a follower undergoing introspection, one comes to experience a deep feeling of gratitude to everyone for everything, becoming aware of one’s own karmic existence embraced in the unconditional love of Amida Buddha. Thus one makes a fresh start pronouncing the Buddha’s name with heartfelt gratitude.”



Sensei also attributed the current spiritual health of the Shogyoji Samgha to the revival of the *Chomon* system by Venerable Daigyoin Reion Takehara. He said that Venerable Daigyoin-sama had felt that “Rather than teaching people who still clung to worldly concerns, he wanted those around him to become aware of their own problems and to solve them themselves through the attainment of faith.”

Following Sensei’s introduction to the significance of the ‘introspection session’; Kaori Punwani – who has recently undertaken *chomon* – gave her personal impressions why she undertook introspection and what it meant for her. She explained that last year her friend Keimei-san, the son of the head priest, had suddenly pointed out to her a particular action that she had made several years ago, saying that it was caused by her ‘strong worldly mind’. As she said; “This was such an unexpected thing to be told and I had never ever even

thought about it before. I purely felt that Keimei-san sees a world that I do not see. He also added “if you listen now you can see what you could not see before”. I just believed his words simply because he said so. I wanted to come closer to Keimei-san and wanted to see the world he sees. So I asked for introspection at that time.”

Kaori-san then explained how she had been given a private room to stay in, and a special sutra to read called ‘The Sutra of Heavy Indebtedness to One’s Parents’. She told us how, whilst reading this sutra, she had vividly remembered many episodes from her past and was able to understand them in a new way.

“For the first time I felt the suffering that my father and my mother individually carry on their shoulders. I had never seen their suffering at all because they brought me up in such a way I do not have to receive it or even feel that my parents ever suffered in their life. I felt so sorry for not even having thought about it before. I now know that my suffering was a precious gift given to me so that I can feel other peoples’ suffering which is beyond their self-power. It needed to come to me who am so attached to my self-power. When I could receive it as a gift, my dark suffering was no longer dark but light.”

Secondly, reflecting on her own difficulties, Kaori-san came to realize her deep inability to solve certain problems which lie completely beyond the sphere of her own self-power. However, despite the grief she felt in facing these problems she also spoke of a great transformation which took place as she accepted her limitations for the first time. This feeling of joy and compassion was so profound and intense that she felt that she must share it with everyone.

“When I went through more text of the sutra, there was a phrase “when you are wrecked to the end, you find the absolute love. You then receive a solution with a great satisfaction, contentment and absolute peacefulness in the ultimate living”. I have felt this absolute love. The feeling that my hard lump [of selfish inner darkness] has been removed is absolute happiness and everyone deserves to have this happiness because even I was saved. It was indeed the truth that I have been taught time and again; that “this love embraces all forsaking none”.

Following Kaori-san’s talk there was much discussion amongst members of the Samgha. The following is a sample of that dialogue.

Samgha Discussion:

A lady guest: “How long does *chomon* last?”

Reverend Sato: “About one week. If the consciousness of the person having *chomon* is matured then it takes only one instance. It is enough. Usually to look at myself including all the past is very hard, so the introspection session is a sort of intensive meditation, contemplation. When we go through this introspection session everything is clarified and purified.”

Ken: “The sutra, that Kaori mentioned, says that we can find the Buddha’s compassion through our parents’ love for us; but how does Buddha’s compassion reach those whose parents did not love them? ... At the prison where I work there are people whose parents were very violent to them, but I like to feel that there is some hope for them. How does it work?”

Reverend Sato: “Good dharma friends can also be your ‘parents’. Through such relationships we can find pure love and compassion and eventually we can find that the source of our life stems especially from our birth parents. Each person has their own serious problems but to understand the problems just as they are is very difficult. Our friends can also help us understand Buddha’s love and to look into our selves.”

Andy: “I heard of a Shin Buddhist gentleman in America whose father was a violent alcoholic. However the son had an experience like Kaori in which he took responsibility for his own problems, instead of feeling like the victim of his karma. Once he confronted his own personal problems in this way; he was able to have compassion for his father’s faults, and even to see his father as a Bodhisattva. He felt that his father had suffered in order to teach him about the consequences of failing to solve one’s problems.”

Reverend Sato: “The person who harms others can be saved by compassion. We can become friends of those who have suffering and share the experience and then eventually we will all be awakened to love.”

A lady guest: “I have read many different teachings and I am a bit mixed up somewhere. Is it true that we chose our parents? Is this what is entailed by reincarnation?”

Reverend Sato: “We cannot simply say yes or no. Our life did not come about suddenly. I have my parents and they have their parents and in this way we have previous lives.”

Andy: “This question relates to Kaori-san’s talk. There are actually two teachings, ‘Reincarnation’ and ‘Rebirth’. The non-Buddhist teaching of ‘Reincarnation’ is where an individual has an eternal soul which is reincarnated in different bodies but remains one ‘person’. The Buddhist teaching of ‘Rebirth’ is where there is no eternal soul but only a set of temporary conditions – provisionally termed a ‘person’ - that are always changing from moment to moment. A consequence of the latter Buddhist understanding is that, if we take responsibility in our lives for how we live, then we are not just saving ourselves but we are saving everybody. For instance there are so many conditions within this room between each of us and they are intertwined in many dimensions. If we solve our own problems then we are also solving each other’s problems.”

The Eza concluded with a farewell message from Eshin Shinohara, who is shortly returning to Japan, and introductions from two young men from Shogyoji who are visiting for Spring School; Takayuki and Shujo.

Andy (Kyoshin)

Spring School 2004

The 5th annual Spring School was held at Three Wheels from the 25th March until the 2nd April 2004. A group of 10 people from Japan, including 6 teenagers, attended. This year the activities of the Spring School comprised of:

- ◆ Exploring London,
- ◆ A day trip to the New Forest in which the students enjoyed horse-riding,

- ◆ Attending the monthly Children’ meeting at Three Wheels at which was held the Flower Festival in celebration of the birth of Sakyamuni Buddha,
- ◆ Visiting Leeds Castle,
- ◆ Attending Evensong at Canterbury Cathedral by invitation of the Dean,
- ◆ See the musical ‘The Lion King’,

- ◆ A visit to UCL with Professor Treleaven in which the students saw the monument to the Japanese Students who studied there over a century ago,
- ◆ A visit to Brookwood cemetery to pay respect to the monument to the Japanese students who died before finishing their studies in London,
- ◆ Enjoying afternoon tea with Mr. and Mrs. Crellin at their London home.

The Spring School commenced with a talk given by Reverend Sato on the history and formation of Three Wheels in London. Through this explanation the students were able to realise that the place in which they were staying was the fruit of the international friendship, cooperation and encounter between people from Japan and Great Britain.

For the Spring School students, it was their first time to go abroad and also the first time they had experienced living apart from their parents. In this way, attending Spring School provided them the opportunity to see just how much their world is based on the numerous things that have been done for them by others, especially their parents. The students were able to gain a thorough appreciation of this through seeing all the efforts made by the Spring School helpers and leaders in order to provide them with all the enjoyable activities and meals that were given to them during their stay. Things that would normally be given to them by their parents. For example, two ladies from Shogyoji arrived in London two weeks before the commencement of the Spring School to assist in its preparation. They prepared meals each day for them and gave invaluable support to the Spring School staff.

At a talk he gave to the students, Reverend Sato pointed out that the cause of a world in which one takes others and their efforts for granted is based on the individual's self-centred way of thinking. On hearing these words one of the students was moved to tears having realised how much this was true for her in her life. The students learnt from this that being given the chance to attend the Spring School was a precious gift from their parents and Shogyoji Temple. After this the students became enthusiastic in remembering all that has been done for them by others. I was very much moved to see this positive feeling of gratitude in their eyes.

The main theme of this years Spring School was 'Inner Peace'. The students came to understand how being able to say 'thank you' is not achieved solely through their own efforts but is the result of the benefits they receive from others and how by giving thanks they are able to express their gratitude. Giving her impression on this theme, one of the students said that Inner Peace is born through simply saying 'thank you to others', because through doing so one can realise true peace of mind. Also the students learnt how 'Inner Peace' is built on the recognition of the 'interdependent relationships' between people.

Looking back at this years Spring School, it is my hope that the first thing the students' did on returning to their homes in Japan was to say "thank you" to their parents.

Shimpei Hashimoto

Thoughts by Students of the Spring School

A selection of thoughts written by the Spring School students as part of essays written at Three Wheels.

Sho Oguchi

I was quite worried if I could manage life in the temple, as this is my first visit. However, all the members of staff were kind and caring. I was very happy. Reverend Yoshihara recommended me to join this Spring School and in addition he even accompanied me. I would really like to say thank you.

Aki Nakazono

When I was in trouble I always tried to sort out things by myself, but when we had a meeting I was so pleased to express myself and listen to my friends reply to me. I learned that I could not sort out anything by just my own thought.

I had an opportunity to meet Dean Willis Robert of Canterbury Cathedral. I joined Evensong at the Cathedral.

What I found was that although Buddhism and Christianity are different religions, everyone was still praying together. I was given this wonderful experience because Reverend Sato and everybody supported me. Thank you very much.

Miki Hotta

What I was impressed by the most was the time I went to see the painting "Sunflower" by Van Gough at the National Gallery, also the stained glass at Canterbury Cathedral. I felt my inner self at these times because I experienced the long history that exists even today, maintained by the efforts and thoughts of many people.

I came to England and spent some time within a different environment and meeting different people. This made

me feel very fresh, unlike when I was in Japan. In this fresh environment I was able to think about my parents differently, and really appreciate and thank them. They have been supporting me throughout my life for all my 17 years.

Akiko Hashimoto

When I first heard about this Spring School theme “Inner Peace”, I thought that I was supposed to make an effort by myself to find this. However, now I feel it is impossible to do so all by myself, as this leads to my own self centred world.

Aya Kataoka

Reverend Sato once said to us “place your parents as other strangers”. From this I thought how I was with my own parents in Japan. I was very rude to them. Reverend Sato asked why I behaved in this way. I replied “parents have to bring me up” and I did not have any specific

reason. He replied to me “Because you take your parents for granted!”. I was in tears with these words and I was so happy.

Sakie Kawahara

When I first saw the stone garden, I found that there were just twelve stones, nothing more. When Reverend Yoshihara gave a talk I learnt that the stones were chosen from hundreds of stones and the layout had been very carefully designed. I also heard that 7-8 year old refugee children when asked for their impression of the garden had replied with the answers : love, peace and eternal life. I was so surprised and also felt sad for their background.

When I was riding the horse through the New Forest, I felt the warmth of the horse unlike a car or train, also not as controllable. It is very much a normal thing, but I felt that the horse is living.

Children’s Meeting

The Children’s Meeting has been held at Three Wheels every month since the 14th September 2003. The number of participants are on average twenty, including adults and children. The session consists of a short service where the children and their parents pray together. This is followed by a story and then an activity such as cleaning, singing, drawing etc. The biggest gathering so far was for Hanamatsuri, the Flower Festival. Held on the 28th March 2004 in conjunction with the Spring School, a total of fifty individuals were in attendance. For this occasion a flower shrine was hand crafted by the fathers of the children. Hundreds of donated flowers were carefully placed on and around the shrine by the children’s mothers. The occasion was enjoyed by all present.



Children’s Meetings at Three Wheels. Please contact us for further information and future meeting dates.

All parents and children are welcome to attend the

Kaori Punwani

55th London Eza

About 30 people attended the London Eza on 25th April. Before a brief explanation of the order of the talks, Rev. Sato began by saying how moved he had been by the sound of young voices chanting during the service. He had felt as though he were on a new journey to the Pure Land.

Andy began his talk on ‘The Teaching of no Superstition’ by describing how he had been inspired to give it after hearing the account of Kaori Punwani’s Chomon at the last Eza. He went on to explain how he could no longer believe in the dualistic teachings of his family’s religion as they conflicted with his own experiences.



Having thus rejected his childhood belief, he had encountered mental and spiritual difficulties before at last discovering Pure Land Buddhism, which had attracted him by its lack of dogma. However, he still had doubts regarding its teaching of ‘defilement consciousness’ until, by a process of intense introspection he had at last been able to resolve these and as a result had been given faith.

He went on to give an inspiring interpretation of verses from Shinran Shonin’s ‘Genze-riyaku Wasan’, comparing Shinran’s

teaching of reliance on Amida and the Nembutsu with the bigoted, delusory superstitious beliefs that Shinran had criticised. The difference lay in the fact that Nembutsu is not something which we encounter by belief but a truth or reality free from conceptual thought which erupts from deep within and awakens us as we shed our self-oriented beliefs. Conversely, superstition means becoming 'enslaved by fear of, or attachment to, something to which we wrongly attribute power and truth', such as the idea of a permanent self. Such beliefs tend to lead to selfishness, anger and even violence, whereas true faith in the Nembutsu fills our hearts with joy, gratitude and love.

Continuing the theme of Introspection, Andrew Webb then gave a talk on his 12 day visit to Shogyoji in Fukuoka in order to undertake his own Chomon. During the week he received valuable assistance from Rev. Sato and Rev. Keimei Takehara, whilst receiving the support and enthusiasm of the temple sangha. In expressing his gratitude, he said he was particularly grateful for the support of his parents, without which such an undertaking would not have been possible.

On his arrival he was made welcome and told that the temple would be a home to him. Nevertheless he admitted to feeling nervous and anxious at finally having to confront the problems from which he generally shied away. However, the opportunity to study the sutras and talk about his life experiences with his mentors enabled him finally to understand the cause of his problems and he felt moved to pronounce the Nembutsu. It was then explained by Rev. Sato that a Chomon session does not really finish there but is ongoing. Having found a way to return to the Buddha, the task is never to forget it.

Shinpei Hashimoto and Kaori Punwani both gave their reports on the 5th Spring School which took place at Three Wheels from 25th March to 2nd April, this year on the theme of 'Inner Peace'. Six teenagers from Japan took part in a full programme of daily services, sightseeing and leisure activities, aided by students, priests and helpers from both the Japanese and English Sanghas. In all, 25 people were involved in this project.

During the week they visited the Japanese monuments at Brookwood Cemetery and University College, London and on another day had a tour of Canterbury Cathedral, later meeting the Dean of Canterbury and attending the Evensong service. Less formal activities included horse riding in the New Forest, a trip to a London theatre, and a quiz.. The Hanamatsuri Festival was celebrated at Three Wheels on the 28th in company with junior members of the temple sangha who attend the children's meeting there. Shrines were made with camellias and daffodils and there were performances by the children

and students. A more permanent shrine has also been constructed by Andy Norton.



The teenagers both enjoyed and benefited from the week's activities. They wrote essays expressing their appreciation of all that had been done for them, especially by their parents, and their realisation of the value of mutual caring and support. A more detailed report on the school with photographs and extracts from the essays can be viewed on the Three Wheels website.

Commenting on the Spring School, in 'a view from the kitchen sink', Etsuko Crellin and Michiko Haga expressed their admiration for the two ladies Yasuko Okumura and Seiko Mori 'full of energy and goodwill' who came in advance to help out in the kitchen, bearing food and gifts which they had themselves contributed.

In Hiroko Sato's absence, Etsuko-san, Michiko-san and Hannah Bensley have been invaluable in carrying out daily chores at the temple. Hiroko-san's support in all temple activities had been much missed and they realised how much she had contributed before her illness. Rev. Sato thanked the three ladies for their work (and complimented Etsuko-san on her delicious sweets!) but they said that they had been given far more than they were able to give.

With regard to Hiroko-san, everyone was very relieved to hear that she is recovering well in Japan.

An 8th Children's Meeting had been held at Three Wheels for which Ken Dance had painted a lovely picture of the Buddha seated on a lotus. After a little service, the children had spent a while describing what they could see in it. Even baby Tamako had become interested.

Shonit Punwani spoke on the new layout which he is currently preparing for the Three Wheels website, which will display information in a more accessible format. New features are to include a printable newsletter, calendar of events and the chants used at the daily service. It is hoped that this will be ready to go on line in June. In addition mention was made of his new monthly e-mail newsletter, 'The Wheel of Light', enabling friends of Three Wheels to keep in contact with the temple and each other.

Finally four visitors introduced themselves, two of whom had come to the temple on the day of the children's meeting and liked it so much that they had decided to attend the Eza.

Hazel Waghorn

Departure of Eshin Shigenobu Shinohara

Eshin Shigenobu Shinohara, a priest of Shogyoji Temple, who has for some time been assisting Rev. Sato in the running of Three Wheels, returned to Japan on the 7th of March 2004. He is now resident in Tokyo where he will be responsible for the day-to-day activities of the Taya House and Dojo there.

During his stay in the United Kingdom Eshin-san made a vast contribution to the Three Wheels Samgha and it will not be possible to thank him adequately in these few words. However Eshin-san's natural way of living, which combines great effort with warm humour and a gentle sensitivity to the needs of others, will remain an inspiration to all the friends he has made in this country.

In addition, Eshin-san leaves behind a wonderful and concrete legacy in the form of the Sutra Chanting Class, which he started, and the Romanised Sutra Book which he helped to develop. Chanting the sutras together as a

samgha we will always be in touch with his devotion to the Buddha and energetic Dharma-sharing.



Thank you Eshin-san! Namuamidabutsu!

Andy

Report on the Fifteenth Meeting to Read the Letters of Rennyō Shōnin

At this meeting we received a talk on and discussed the 15th letter of fascicle 1 of the Ofumi. It was a most fitting way in which to end our study of the 1st fascicle as it includes concise definition of the meaning of the naming of our tradition as Jodo Shinshu, how we are awakened to faith and how we are to say the nembutsu. It was wonderful to discover how the letter flowed from the meaning of the Shin Buddhist Sangha, as covered in the topic of the naming of the tradition, to the way we are to live our lives as Shin Buddhists. Importantly we were able to examine in depth passages from the Larger Sutra of Eternal Life and Honen Shonin's Senjaku Hongan Nembutsu Shu, as quoted by Shinran Shonin in the Kyogyoshinshu. This was invaluable in showing the transmission of the Pure Land teachings, as originally given which Shinran Shonin and later Rennyō Shonin were able use to explain the essential meaning of the Shin Buddhist Sangha and which still remain alive today.

The first main point Professor Sato set out, was the

meaning of the name Jodo Shinshu, which is in English the "True Teaching [or Doctrine] of the Pure Land". Contained within this appellation is the faith Shinran Shonin was awakened to through his encounter with Honen Shonin in which he abandoned all sundry practices and entrusted himself to the nembutsu alone for birth in the Pure Land. From the perspective of this historical encounter it is evident that Shinran Shonin had no intention of founding a new Buddhist tradition but simply wished to preserve and pass on what he had been given by Honen Shonin - the "True Teaching of the Pure Land". Shinran Shonin met Amida Buddha through the nembutsu of his master Honen Shonin. Thus Shinran Shonin was able to call it the true teaching. Rennyō Shonin was deeply aware therefore of the importance of the naming of our tradition as Jodo Shinshu and wished to teach his followers that it was the correct name to use. At the time people outside the Shin Buddhist Sangha referred to it as the Ikkoshu or Steadfast School. Rennyō Shonin was sympathetic to this description of "steadfastness" in that it means that "we steadfastly (ikko) entrust ourselves

to Amida Buddha”, but he was insistent that the correct name of Jodo Shinshu be used as it was the title used by Shinran Shonin to express how one should, through the faith given by Amida Buddha, abandon all sundry practices and rely solely on Amida Buddha for birth in the True Land of Recompense.

Reverend Sato’s translation of the letter clearly brought out this fundamental meaning of Jodo Shinshu and how we can understand its meaning in our lives as it embodies how “we absolutely rely on the Nembutsu as the act that enables us to attain birth in the Pure Land, because it is entirely based on the Original Prayer of Amida Buddha”. Again, as in all the other talks on the Ofumi, it was striking how much profound content there is in each letter of Rennyō Shonin. But as always we realise the need of having a good teacher in order to explain it and show its relevance to our lives.

Next Reverend Sato highlighted the second important point contained in the letter, that Faith is the “true mind” that we receive from Amida Buddha. We do not attain faith through our own contrivance but through Amida Tathagata’s merit transference (Eko). The significance of this point should not be underestimated. Jodo Shinshu is the true teaching of the Pure Land Way, because through the Nembutsu we hear from a good teacher, we can receive the Pure Mind of Amida Buddha. Reverend Sato stated that “Faith is the ‘true mind’ because it is the pure mind of the Buddha, the mind that the Buddha has already given us”. It is through the teaching of Jodo Shinshu that we can come to be awakened to this.

The third part of Reverend Sato’s talk was an in depth discussion of Rennyō Shonin’s clarification of “the fundamental reality of the Shin Buddhist faith” in this letter. Reverend Sato quoted from passages from the Larger Sutra of Eternal Life to teach us the dynamic of how faith is attained through hearing Amida’s Name. This is brought about through the interrelationship between the 17th and 18th Original Prayers of Amida Buddha. Through the 18th Original Prayer we are born in the Pure Land. Through the 17th Original Prayer we hear the Name of Amida Buddha as pronounced by “all Buddha’s” and come to awaken faith in the 18th.

Reverend Sato explained that when Rennyō Shonin states that the Larger Sutra “teaches that we ‘hear that Name and rejoice in the awakening of faith’” he is referring to the phrase “Mongō myōgō shinjin kangī” from the passage of the fulfillment of the 18th Original Prayer in the Larger Sutra. Reverend Sato showed how the word “that” is of crucial importance in understanding the meaning of this phrase, as “that” refers to Amida Name’s as

pronounced by all Buddhas. Often it is translated as “his name” but that translation fails to convey that it is Amida’s Name as pronounced by all Buddha’s. He said that “But the phrase ‘that Name’ actually implies something more, not simply Amida’s Name but Amida’s Name as pronounced by all the Buddhas. The phrase ‘that Name’ refers to the Name that all Buddhas pronounce in praise.

We went on to learn that when the Larger Sutra says “all Buddhas” it means a good teacher. Without such a good teacher we would not be able to hear the nembutsu. Rennyō Shonin wrote in this letter that “Hearing the Name actually means that when we meet a good teacher, receive his teaching and entrust ourselves to the Name he recites, then Amida Buddha saves us without fail”. Therefore we are assured, through hearing the nembutsu recited by our teachers and dharma friends, of Amida’s Original Prayer. Without what Reverend Sato described as this “living relationship between master and disciple” and the “spiritual encounter between individuals” we could not move forward on our journey to the Pure Land. This letter by Rennyō Shonin, we found, expresses this truth in a way that is as true and real for our lives now as it was for those it was addressed to at the time it was written.

Andrew Webb

Poems

Here are some poems I have written following my stay at Shogyōji Temple in Japan.

Far away dreams-
Forgetful of the season
Leaves begin to fall

Woken by thunder -
The other side of this world
Are blossoms falling?

Watching the moon rise -
Never a moment apart
In a timeless world

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