

# IASBS NEWSLETTER



国際真宗学会

**INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SHIN BUDDHIST STUDIES**

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Greetings from the President

It seems that we met “just the other day” in Calgary, Canada, for the last conference but the next biennial conference is only a little over a year away. The 14<sup>th</sup> IASBS Biennial Conference will be held June 12-14, 2009 at Ryukoku University in the ancient capital of Kyoto.

Ryukoku University was the site of the first conference in 1983 but no conference has been held there for these past 25 years. Since we are returning to the inaugural location of IASBS, I would like to see the conference demonstrate its growth in terms of the quality of papers and the quantity of participants.

I realize that the expenses of attending the conference can be costly, especially if you are coming from outside Japan. So I hope that you begin planning early to facilitate your attendance.

One of the major objectives is to have more young scholars participate in the activities of our association. I was encouraged by the surprisingly much larger number of younger

participants at the last Calgary conference. We would like to build on that momentum for the next conference.

And toward that objective, we are preparing to offer some financial assistance to encourage younger scholars to attend. Details are currently being worked out about these grants. We hope that many young scholars will apply when the details become available by this Fall.

On a different but related topic, we are witnessing changes in the breadth and quality in scholarship related to Shin and Pure Land Buddhism. One such example is a recent book by Prof. Dennis Hirota of Ryukoku University entitled *Asura's Harp: Engagement with Language as Buddhist Path* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag 2006).

Prof. Hirota sets out to clarify the nature and significance of language, particularly the Name ("Namu Amida Butsu") in Shinran's thought with the intention of contributing to a broader discussion of religious language across religious and cultural boundaries. This book represents Prof. Hirota's many years of work on this vital topic. In more recent years, he has taken his findings to gatherings outside Japan, particularly to Europe. This book is, in large part, an outcome of the talks he delivered several years ago in the Fürst Franz-Josef and Fürstin Gina Memorial Philosophy Lecture Series at the Internationale Akademie für Philosophie in Liechtenstein.

It's exciting to see this kind of a book published, for it serves to challenge and stimulate our activities at IASBS. This work takes the study of Shin and Pure Land Buddhism onto a wider stage with far more kinds of people in the audience, watching and listening to how scholars of Shin and Pure Land Buddhism "perform."

I believe the IASBS can meet this kind of a challenge by planning for - and executing - a thoughtful and provocative conference in Kyoto in June of 2009. May you all begin the preparation now, both logistically and academically!

All the best,

Kenneth K. Tanaka

## Message from Professor Takami Inoue, Treasurer of IASBS

*Please Send Your Annual Membership Fees To Your District Office*

At the General Assembly in Calgary last September (2007), new By-Laws of the IASBS and the 2008 Budget were approved. Article 6 of these new By-Laws states:

Membership fees shall be for a period of one year (*previously*: two), and shall be paid at the beginning of each fiscal period. Below are the new subscription rates (figures in parenthesis are the old amounts):

(1) Regular membership: Japan district 3,000 yen for 1 yr (*previously*: 5,000 yen/2 yrs) or Overseas districts \$20 USD for 1 yr (*previously*: \$30/2yrs)

(2) Student membership: Japan district 2,000 yen for 1 yr (*previously*: 3,000 yen/2 yrs) or Overseas districts \$15 USD for 1 yr (*previously*: \$15/2 yrs)

(New student membership: no charge for the first year)

(3) Supporting membership: 10,000 yen or more per year or \$60 USD or more per year

(4) Life membership: 100,000 yen or \$600 USD

Members, residing in Japan, shall pay their fees in Japanese yen to their District Treasurer (*previously*: the Association Headquarters). Other members shall pay theirs to their appropriate district office. Each district is normally required to remit 90% of the fees of its regular members and 100% of those of its student members to the Association Headquarters.

The 2008 fiscal year commenced on January 1, hence please send this year's remittance to your district office. If you are not sure whether or not you have paid up to the end of 2007, please contact your particular office. An e-mail list of these districts are printed below.

1) Japan District

Tomomasa Teramoto: [tomomasa@mbox.kyoto-inet.or.jp](mailto:tomomasa@mbox.kyoto-inet.or.jp)

2) Hawaii District

Tatsuo Muneto: [bscdir@hawaii.rr.com](mailto:bscdir@hawaii.rr.com)

3) North American District

Eisho Nasu: [eishonasu@earthlink.net](mailto:eishonasu@earthlink.net)

4) South American District

Angela Andrade: [angelaandrade@br.inter.net](mailto:angelaandrade@br.inter.net)

5) European District

Kenneth Mullin: [k.mullen@clinmed.gla.ac.uk](mailto:k.mullen@clinmed.gla.ac.uk)

6) Oceania and East Asia District

Mark Healsmith: [kmheal@bigpond.net.au](mailto:kmheal@bigpond.net.au)

## The Pure Land journal Joins the ATLA Religion Database

We are pleased to announce that the *Pure Land Journal* has been accepted into the ATLA Religion Database®. Established in 1946, ATLA (American Theological Library Association: [www.atla.com](http://www.atla.com)) is a professional association of more than 1,000 individual and institutional members providing services in support of theological and religious studies libraries. The editorial committee of the *Pure Land Journal* is very excited that the IASBS and Jōdo Shinshū tradition have become a part of ATLA's ecumenical membership, which includes many of the world's religious traditions. ATLA is currently in the process of indexing all back issues of the *Pure Land Journal*. We are also invited to participate in the full-text *ATLASerials*® (*ATLAS*®) collection through which the *Pure Land Journal* will be made available to subscribers in GIF images and searchable PDFs.

国際真宗学会発行の『ピュアランド』誌がアメリカ神学図書館協会（ATLA）の「宗教学関係雑誌論文データベース」に掲載される学術誌として認定されました。将来的には、ATLAを通して『ピュアランド』誌の全てのバックナンバー掲載の論文を、全文検索のできるPDFファイルとして閲覧出来るようにする計画です。

## The Pure Land journal: Progress Report

The next issue of *The Pure Land journal* (New Series, vol. 23), featuring the essays presented at the European Shin Conference held at Eko Haus in Düsseldorf, Germany, and other essays and translations is currently in the final stage of production. The journal will be ready to be published in summer 2008. The editorial committee thanks all the contributors to the journal and appreciates their patience. We are also in the process of finalizing the essays for vol. 24 with a special section on the IASBS conference in Calgary, Canada, in 2007. Although the deadline to submit essays has passed, we will still consider contributions on an exceptional basis. For those interested in submitting essays and translations related to *Pure Land* and Jōdo Shinshū studies, please contact Eisho Nasu ([eishonasu@earthlink.net](mailto:eishonasu@earthlink.net)), or write to the IASBS North American District Office, 2140 Durant Avenue, Berkeley, CA 94704, USA.

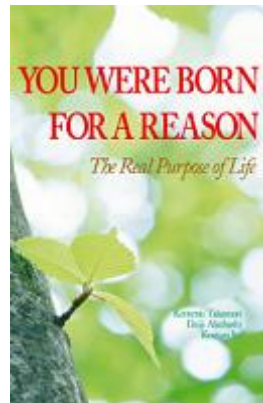
Editorial Committee  
*The Pure Land journal*

# YOU WERE BORN FOR A REASON: THE REAL PURPOSE OF LIFE

Kentetsu Takamori, Daiji Akehashi and Kentaro Ito

Translated and adapted by June Winters Carpenter

(Ichimannendo Publishing Inc., 2006)



This book is said to have been a best seller in Japan. I do not know what that really means as Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time* was a best seller throughout the English speaking world, and I am sure that most people who bought it did not finish reading it! You would not buy this book though to follow intellectual fashion, so I hope it has been widely read. In English translation, it is easily read as far as style and intellectual content goes. However, much of the content of the book is quite confronting and even disturbing.

The first chapter is entitled 'The Fragility of Happiness' and it sets the theme for the first part of the book. That suffering is inevitable in life is, of course, the first Noble Truth and is a fundamental Buddhist insight, but it is also the conclusion of any mature consideration of the human condition. That happiness is fragile does not devalue happiness, but the first few chapters are so uniformly pessimistic that one could begin to think so. There is a purpose and structure to the book though and the point of the title of the book is being made here: money, fame, power and other pleasures are in the end empty and the purpose of life lies beyond them all. In these early chapters a central concept of the book is introduced – 'dark mind' - which is defined as the mind of ignorance about what will happen after death and, therefore, the ultimate source of suffering.

Next, having shown us the foolishness of our secular goals in life, the authors show us how useless and hypocritical are any pretensions of virtue that we might harbour. This is deeply in accord with Shinran Shonin's insight and teaching and is leading the reader to

Amida's Primal Vow. In the *Tannisho*, Shinran Shonin is quoted as saying. "I am incapable of doing any good at all, and so Hell is my eternal dwelling place."

Like the *Tannisho*, this book is uncompromising. It is pushing the reader to the deep and truly honest reflection that scours away intellectual and spiritual falsity, and which will take one beyond the naivety of 'spiritual materialism' to an insight that leaves one able to hear Amida's calling voice. It is precisely because of our false and irredeemable nature that Amida will save us but, as long as we cling to illusions as to our own moral and spiritual virtue, we cannot hear His call.

The last third of this book is most particularly concerned with Shinran Shonin's shinjin and how we are to arrive at the same state of mind. The authors emphasise that for them shinjin is attained as an 'all-or-nothing' state in a single moment that should be able to be recalled. This is an interpretation particular to the Shinrankai sect of Jodo Shinshu. This sect apparently makes this an essential part of their understanding and has cut itself off from the mainstream of Jodo Shinshu. This is a great pity as most of the teachings in this book are entirely orthodox and helpful.

What is the real purpose in life that this book seeks to reveal? It is to live our lives secure in diamond-like shinjin, to live our lives free of fear of death, to live our lives secure in the knowledge that we are saved right here and now by the infinite virtue of Amida Buddha.

Rev. Dr. Mark Healsmith

President

Hongwanji Buddhist Mission of Australia

The 14th Biennial IASBS Conference  
At Ryukoku University, Kyoto, Japan

第14回国際真宗学会  
(於) 龍谷大学

12-14 June, 2009

2009年6月12(Fri.)~14日(Sun.)

The details of the Conference will be announced soon.

会議のテーマとプログラムについては、間もなくお知らせします。

\* Please check date again ! The date indicated in the previous  
Newsletter was incorrect !

前回のニュースレターに掲載された開催日程は誤りでした。どうか、もう  
一度予定をチェックしてください。

Let's Meet in Kyoto!  
京都でお会いしましょう!

## THE SAVANNA'S NEMBUTSU – by Shogyo Gustavo Pinto

In 2005, a sangha was born near the geodesic center of South America, in the Land of Peace. For the last two years, dozens of pilgrims came, many from Brazil, others from distant places such as Mexico, Portugal, UK and Japan, to hear the Nembutsu while circumvolving the Hill of Japan. One of them, Claudio Santiago, was called to the Rite of 108 laps. Acupuncturist and physiotherapist, he completed the one hundred and eighth consecutive lap on 10 December 2007.

But in what does hearing the Nembutsu, while walking for hours around the Hill of Japan, consist?



The circumambulation rite starts at night, on a trail in the middle of the wild savanna. Each pilgrim brings only a flashlight, a bottle of water and the Nembutsu he recites. But it is not this Nembutsu that he came to hear. It is another; it is that one from which his is the echo. Pilgrims in the Land of Peace try to hear a Nembutsu that sounds all around us, everywhere, ever since. A Nembutsu voiced in the sky and the earth, in water, fire, air, and in the vast void where the illusory forms of this world flicker.

The pilgrimage starts by probing into the dark night. Jaguars, poisonous snakes, dangers abound all around. From within the silence, the frightened heart hears: "I am always with you. I made the Vow to save you in the afterlife and accomplished it. Just trust. There is nothing in this saha world to be feared!" Actually, one does not hear

words. Meanings irrupt as lightning. But after hearing, one is fated to think. The verbal formulation is done *a posteriori* in an effort of the intellect trying to build up a description that resembles what was heard.





Next, the pilgrim hears the Nembutsu in sounds that emanate from the somberness. Once it was the noise of the ear's cartilage of a hungry jaguar following me. The beast's unequivocal smell impregnated the jungle. When stalking a prey, the jaguar moves its ears and one can hear the delicate clicking of its cartilage. Life crossed over the instant in swift memories, and in a flash I heard the subtle Nembutsu recited by the jaguar's ear: "Your life is in my hands, not in the jaguar's jaw. When causes and conditions are ripe, you will be born in the ineffable glory of the Pure Land. So smile, trust!"

The sunrise reveals the beauty of the world in color and forms, while the drought unveils gestures of despair in bare branches. This time what clicks are dead leaves under our feet. On earth, thirst scourges. Suffering is universal. The Nembutsu then blows with the wind bringing clouds from afar. Impermanence and Great Compassion are one. Relief is promised in gray tones and accomplished in thunders while the soaked pilgrim smiles with hands in Gassho. Rocks, plants, insects, all beings in the large sangha of nature rejoice in the Namanda.

The rite comes to an end at the source of a stream. While driving the water unmistakably from the center of the continent all the way to the ocean, the slope recites a silent Namanda. Water responds audibly in its confident flow. Sweet as it is here, there it will become salty. So, all beings will be transformed into Buddhas by the liberating (Sho) practice (Gyo) of the Other Power acting everywhere. Infinite Life-Light recites the Nembutsu through the universe aiming to save all beings. While hearing, gratitude emerges with the same three sounds that early in childhood, we first unintentionally voiced, Na Man Da!

