

IASBS NEWSLETTER



国 際 真 宗 学 会

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SHIN BUDDHIST STUDIES

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GREETINGS FROM THE PRESIDENT

Kenneth K. Tanaka

Here in the Tokyo area, the cherry blossoms have scattered and we are well into the start of a new academic year. On the other hand, the school year is winding down in North America and other places. I trust that your work and studies are going well.

We in the Japan District have begun to prepare for the next biennial conference, to be held again in Kyoto, this time at Otani University (please see below for information). The decision to hold the conference consecutively in Japan was made, in part, to enable our conference to coincide with many of the activities related to the 750th Memorial Observances of Shinran that will be taking place in Kyoto in 2011.

We hope that the conference serves as another occasion for sharing our research with other

IASBS members. Speaking of sharing, I hope that more of you take advantage of the 'communication system' that the IASBS has established, for it looks like only about 20 people have signed up for the 'IASBS Communication Board' on Facebook (see the November 2009 issue of the IASBS Newsletter and also below for more on this).

I am happy to report that the Japan District will hold a workshop again this year, this time in conjunction with the Institute of Buddhist Culture at Musashino University (Tokyo) on Saturday, September 25, 2010 (please see below for details).

The workshop will be followed in the afternoon with a symposium on Shinran, with Professor Fumihiko Sueki (formerly of Tokyo University and currently of Kokusai Nihon Bunka Kenkyu

Center) and two Chinese scholars (one from Taiwan and another from Nagoya) as speakers (please see below for details). Those of you in the Tokyo area are strongly encouraged to attend a full day of stimulating discussion on Shinran and Shin issues.

The IASBS Workshop will be entitled ‘Project Shin Theology’. Some may raise their eyebrows and question the use of the term *theology* since no ‘God’ is affirmed in Buddhism. However, there exists a broader meaning to this term, namely “to discourse (*logia*) about the divine (*theo*)”. And I believe that *divine* can refer to what, in Shin Buddhism, is considered ‘true and real’, i.e. Amida Buddha, the Pure Land, shinjin etc.

Another reason for adopting the term is motivated by the fact that there does not seem to be a satisfactory English term for what would correspond to the Japanese word ‘kyōgaku’. We have, in the past, toyed with ‘Dharmalogy’, ‘Buddhalogy’ and even ‘Shinshuology’ but none of them seems to hit the mark. Also, we

are attempting to be somewhat provocative in hopes of being bolder in exploring uncharted methodologies and territories, unshackled by traditional limitations of ‘kyōgaku’.

In recent years, some Buddhist scholars, particularly in the U.S., have begun to adopt the term ‘theology’ as can be seen in a publication of a book entitled *Buddhist Theology* (edited by Roger Jackson and John McKransky, Curzon, 2000). The contributors of this volume now make up the core of a new group at the American Academy of Religion (AAR) called ‘Buddhist Critical and Constructive Reflection Group’. The ever-increasing number of delegates who attend the sessions sponsored by this group at its annual AAR meetings is a real testament to the growing interest in Buddhist theology.

Encouraged by these turn of events, it is my hope that the IASBS can make ever greater efforts to probe and push the boundaries in developing new ways of thinking about Shin and Pure Land Buddhism.

会長の挨拶の要約：

1. 日本地区は第15回国際真宗学術大会の準備を開始し、大谷大学を会場とし、2011年8月5日（金）～6日（土）という日程が決まった。この大会は、真宗系のいくつかの大学の共同主催となる。
2. また、学会員には、下記の「会員間の連絡方法」をもっと活用して頂きたい。（下記の報告を参照）
3. 日本地区は今年もワークショップを、武蔵野大学仏教文化研究所の行事に参加する形として、同大学で、9月25日の午前中に行う。午後には、武蔵野大学仏教文化研究所主催の親鸞に関するシンポジウムが行われる。
（詳細は下記を参照）
4. 日本地区のワークショップのテーマは、「プロジェクトShinTheology」であり、「Theology」（神学）という仏教には問題でもある用語を採用しているが、それにはいつかの理由と根拠がある。1）英語では、Dharmalogy、Buddhalogy、または“Shinshuologyを試したが、日本語の「教学」に値する適切な用語がない。2）Theologyを使用することで先入観にとらわれないことを促す。3）特にアメリカの仏教学者の中でTheologyが使用されるようになり始めた。4）Theologyには、「God」という狭い意味以外には、「聖なることについて論述する」という広い意味もある。何しろ、学会としては、真宗と浄土教に関しての考察と論述をより活発にすることが求められている。

15th Biennial Conference of the IASBS
第15回国際真宗学会学術大会
at Otani University, Kyoto
Jointly-sponsored by several Shin Buddhist universities
August 5 (Friday) and 6 (Saturday), 2011
2011年8月5日(金)～6日(土)
大谷大学
真宗系大学によって共催

NOTICE

Membership Directory to be uploaded on website

At the General Meeting in June 2009, it was decided to upload the IASBS Membership Directory in the 'Members Only' section of the IASBS Website. It will include: 1) Name; 2) Email address; 3) if no Email address, telephone and Fax numbers; and 4) affiliation and position (if any). We hope to do this by the summer. If you object, please notify the Headquarters by June 30, 2010. Please continue to notify us of any incorrect information and changes. Again, the Directory can be seen only by IASBS members in the 'Members Only' section.

お知らせ
学会HPに会員名簿を掲載

去年の総会で、会員名簿を学会HPの「会員のみ」のコーナーに掲載することが決定されました。その名簿には、1) 名前、2) 電子メール、3) 電子メールをもっていない方は、電話とFAX番号、及び4) 所属と職名（頂いている情報）。住所は記載しません。HPに掲載をご希望されない方は、2010年6月30日迄に、本部にご連絡して頂くことをお願い致します。また、名簿に関する誤り及び変更を随時ご連絡ください。繰り返しますが、学会員のみが閲覧できるもので、公開されるものではありません。

Japan District Workshop

(Invitation to join a workshop sponsored by the
the Institute of Buddhist Culture at Musashino University)

To be conducted in Japanese

Time and Date: 10am-12pm, September 25th, 2010

Place: Musashino University, Tokyo

Theme: *Project Shin Theology*

Speakers: Kenneth Tanaka, Professor, Musashino University
“Our hope and scope for *Project Shin Theology*” (15minutes)

Uji Kazutaka, Researcher, Institute of Buddhist Culture, Musashino University
“Shinran’s religious and social perspective” (30 minutes)

Norio Watanabe, Researcher, Institute of Buddhist Culture, Musashino University
“Shinran’s theories on Amida’s Pure Land and aspiration for Birth” (30 minutes)

Discussion: Involving presenters and the audience

Everyone is welcome to attend and there is no charge.

日本地区ワークショップ
(日本語で行われる)
参加費無料

日時： 9月25日、10.00am – 12.00pm

会場： 武蔵野大学、東京

テーマ： プロジェクトShin Theology

発表者： ケネス田中、武蔵野大学教授

「Shin Theology プロジェクトの目的と範囲」
(15分発表)

宇治和貴、武蔵野大学仏教文化研究所研究員

「親鸞の宗教的・社会的立場」 (30分発表)

渡邊了生、武蔵野大学仏教文化研究所研究員

「親鸞の弥陀身土論と願生往生の主体」

(30分発表)

ディスカッション： 発表者と聴衆

Afternoon Program
Sponsored by the Institute of Buddhist Culture at Musashino University
Symposium
To be conducted in Japanese

Time and Date: 1:30pm-5:00pm, September 25th, 2010

Place: Musashino University, Tokyo

Theme: *What do we seek in Shinran: Contemporary and Universal Perspectives*

Speakers: Fumihiko Sueki, Professor, Kokusai Nihon Bunka Kenkyu Center
“How is the ‘human’ Shinran related to us in the contemporary world?”

Lai Shenchon, Professor, Taipei University, Taiwan
“Significance of Shinran within Mahayana Buddhism”

Zhang Wei, Associate Professor, Dobo University, Nagoya
“The ethics of Shinran’s *Jinen Honi* and evil”

Everyone is welcome to attend and there is no charge.

午後の部
武蔵野大学仏教文化研究所主催
シンポジウムテーマ
(日本語で行われる)
参加費無料

日時： 9月25日、1.30pm – 5.00pm

会場： 武蔵野大学、東京

テーマ： 「親鸞に何を求めるのか—現代と普遍の視点から」

発表者： 末木文美士、国際日本文化研究センター教授
「人間親鸞はどのように現代のわれわれと関連しているのか」
頼 賢宗、台湾台北大学教授
「大乘における親鸞の意義とは」
張 偉、同朋大学准教授
「親鸞の「自然法爾」と悪の倫理(仮)」

司会者： 陳 継東、武蔵野大学准教授

Promoting communication among IASBS members

As President Kenneth Tanaka mentioned in his greeting, IASBS has established a Communication Board on FaceBook to promote communication among its members. FaceBook is one of the most popular SNSs (Social Networking Systems) and an effective way to expand connections among people sharing the same interests. To become a member of the IASBS Communication Board, you need to:

- 1) Join FaceBook (no charge)
 - go to: <http://www.facebook.com/>
- 2) Find the IASBS Communication Board
 - enter 'IASBS' in the space for searching at the top of the screen.
- 3) Request membership
 - if you are a member of IASBS, you will be approved to join soon.

Of course, there are many other ways to communicate on the Web such as mailing lists, bulletin boards, Google groups, blogs etc. I am sure many of us are taking advantage of these convenient tools, although we may sometimes feel that there is too much! I know that some of you are receiving literally hundreds of emails a day so why should we bother with FaceBook?

One of the reasons is that we can find potential new IASBS members and vice-versa. FaceBook members often include their names, photos, affiliations, educational background etc. Thanks to this, you can not only be reunited with many old friends via FaceBook but also come to discover many other groups related to Shin Buddhism.

Another reason is that we can share photos and videos on FaceBook, being thus able to view public lectures and dharma talks as well as photographs relating to Shin Buddhism. It is true that there are many individual homepages where we are able to find videos and photos but most of them are not regularly renewed, so that we may forget to visit them after a while. FaceBook is, on the other hand, a public space that we create together and, therefore, can be renewed every day if we have sufficient members.

Seeing is believing. Why don't you try the IASBS Communication Board on FaceBook?

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR: In the previous edition of the IASBS Newsletter, we carried an article by Dr Jeff Wilson which, mistakenly, referred to him as 'Jim Wilson'. We deeply regret this error and extend our apologies to Dr Wilson.

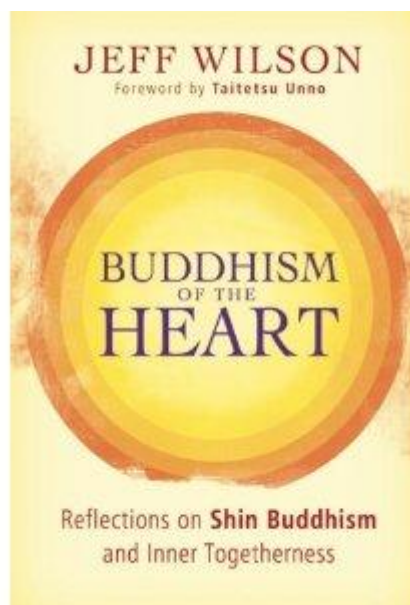
BOOK REVIEWS

The following are reviews of books published on Shin Buddhism during 2009

BUDDHISM OF THE HEART: REFLECTIONS ON SHIN BUDDHISM AND INNER TOGETHERNESS

Jeff Wilson

(Wisdom Publications 2009)



Any book that has a recommendation by Alfred Bloom ('clear, insightful, candid and direct') and Stephen Batchelor, as well as a foreword by Taitetsu and Mark Unno, promises a lot. And, reading this book, I was not disappointed.

For me, this is a book that continues in the tradition of Hozen Seki's *The Great Natural Way* and Tai Unno's own book, *River of Fire, River of Water* in that it shows the Jodoshinshu tradition of Buddhism to be truly universal. So many presentations seem to point towards Japan, and say that we can only understand it by emulating the Japanese. Although I am profoundly grateful to the founders of Shin, and the many great compassionate Japanese teachers who have helped me immensely, I am not Japanese. The question for me is always, "Is

Shin Buddhism valid for me as I am here and now?"

We in the West have our own problems, and I do believe that Shin Buddhism is actually able to help us cope with them. However, we need to find the language that will help us understand Shin as being an integral part of the Mahayana tradition, and to show its particular relevance to the problems that lay Buddhists encounter.

In fact, of course, the Shin Sangha consists both of priests and lay people (a fact highlighted in the chapter 'Reconstituting the Sangha') and both often have the same problems. And our understanding of the solutions is often found in stories.

Jeff Wilson is a master storyteller. As the quotation from Leslie Silko's *Ceremony* at the beginning of the book tells us, "You don't have anything if you don't have the stories". And Jeff certainly has the stories. In fact, almost every one of his 78 chapters is, or contains, a story. And, as with the Buddha and Jesus (and almost all of the world's really great teachers), the most profound truths are found in the simplest stories.

As you may have gathered from the number of chapters, each one is short – often little more than a page or two – and addresses an aspect of Jeff's personal journey. I do not have the space to list all of them, but I will try to give you the flavour: 'Amida's Nembutsu'; 'Strawberries'; 'Offering Incense'; "Hitler's Buddha-nature"; 'Meat and eating disorders'; 'Gratitude for food' and 'Rebirth v no-self' are among the more intriguing titles.

I have been delighted to find this book. It is a record of a life journey in which Shin Buddhism has been a priceless help; it is a testimony to the ways in which the Other-power is a reality even in the midst of a typical busy Western life, and it is a profound presentation of a Buddhist Way that has been greatly misunderstood by Western commentators.

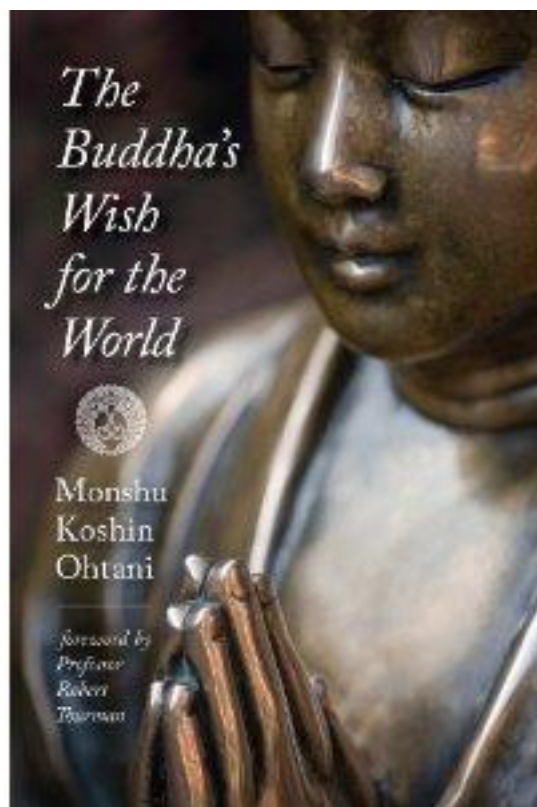
It will have a definite place on my shelf of Buddhist books that I have personally found special. That is, after I have read it again – and possibly again.

Jim Pym

*Pure Land Buddhist Fellowship of Great Britain
Edinburgh, Scotland*

[This review first appeared in *Pure Land Notes No.4* (Summer 2009) and is reproduced courtesy of the editor]

THE BUDDHA'S WISH FOR THE WORLD
His Eminence Monshu Ohtani Koshin
(American Buddhist Study Center Press 2009)



This is a lovely book that I can happily recommend to anyone interested in the 'big questions' of life and death. In addressing these questions', this book, as one would expect, opens up to become an elegant introduction to the Jodo Shinshu way.

The book is structured in short chapters, each broken up into brief sections. Each section gives a teaching. The whole book could be read in one sitting, but it is best read a section or chapter at a time, so that one can consider what one has read. Many of the sections are structured as anecdotes or musings. In the early part of the book, the conclusions from the anecdotes seem fairly general. Subtly though, crucial Jodo Shinshu concepts are introduced. The idea expressed in the chapter title 'We all like to put ourselves first' seems fairly obvious to anyone who has at all considered their

motivations, but careful consideration of the content of this chapter will lead the reader into deep contemplation of his or her fundamental imperfection (burden of karmic evil).

'If you never question what you are doing, the process of spiritual rebirth cannot begin.' (p.33)

The Monshu does not, however, leave the reader to realise their moral and spiritual inadequacies and then despair, since the fundamental teaching of Shin Buddhism has already been introduced.

'.....Amida does not set any conditions for our liberation.' (p.24)

Further chapters consider the consequences of an unreflective or over-calculating life. Unskilful actions lead to unhappiness for the

individual and society. The Monshu leads the reader to the concept of deep listening, and of a faith that does not rely on supplication or obligation.

‘The Buddha does not work to make the wishes of man come true. The Vow of Other Power works, rather, to let us hear the wish the Buddha places in us.’ (pp.80–81)

This is a beautiful way of re-stating the title of the book.

Next there is a detailed consideration of mortality, and of the importance of considering the great issue of life and death. This should be fairly self-evident to anyone inclined to read this book, but denial of ageing and death is a feature of modern society. The Monshu broadens the discussion into a condemnation of the taking of life, in general, and of aggression and war in particular.

The last part of the book is about the Nembutsu and shinjin. I like the Monshu’s response to

someone who finds it hard to say the Nembutsu.

‘When you first start out, it is better not to get bogged down in questions of why you are doing this or where it will all lead.’ (p.117)

Just say the Nembutsu. Amida will take care of everything. It is tempting to over-intellectualise and hesitate but the way through this is to listen to Amida’s calling voice and just say the Nembutsu. The final words of this review are the final words of the book.

‘There is no life that is meaningless. All life is linked together. All of us share in the light that Amida shines upon us- this is what Buddhism teaches.’ (p.127)

Rev. Dr Mark Healsmith

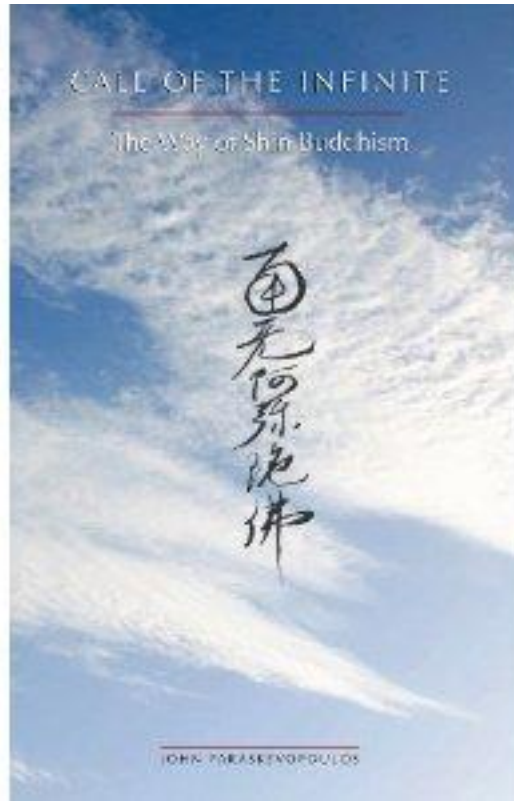
President

*Hongwanji Buddhist Mission of Australia
Canberra*

CALL OF THE INFINITE: THE WAY OF SHIN BUDDHISM

John Paraskevopoulos

(Sophia Perennis 2009)



In the words of a well-known British advertisement for paint, which claims “It does what it says on the tin”, this book lives up to its title. I know – and I am sure the author does even more so – that Amida Buddha does not need any words to be added to what has already been accomplished an infinite time ago. However, this book helps us to hear his call and puts the eternal truths of the Buddha’s Pure Land teaching into language that the contemporary reader can understand. And this is a great blessing.

There are so many gems in this book that it is difficult to pick ones to highlight. A glance at the recommendations, followed by the chapter headings, starts us on our journey. I will not comment on the former, except to say that their range and content shows that this is no ordinary

book. The chapters begin with the ‘pain and longing’ of our everyday lives, and move to the glories of ‘Infinite Light’ and Its perfect compassion for our suffering (whether this Compassion should have the pronoun ‘He’ ‘She’ or ‘It’ is covered implicitly later in the book, in considering both the personal and impersonal aspects of the Buddha).

The author is concerned, not with fact – except the fact of experience – but with the true meaning of ‘myth’. However, he is reluctant to use the term:

In talking about the story of Dharmakara [who became Amida Buddha] one is very reluctant to use the word ‘myth’ because modern people associate it with something that is false, when myths the world over are imbued with deep truths about the human condition and its

relationship to the transcendent. They do not have to be historical in order to be true.

Echoing D. T. Suzuki in his book, *Buddha of Infinite Light*, he goes on to point out that the beauty of myth and symbolism is that they speak directly to the human heart, by-passing the rational mind with its critical faculty.

Yet this is not just another way of hanging on to Western notions of God and Heaven. In order to finally say that these are not the same or that they are different (which is, in itself, not the same), one would have to have trodden the path to the final goal in both Buddhism and Christianity, and how many can claim to have done this? The author does not fall into this trap, but points out the unique descriptions of the Pure Land from the teaching of the Buddha, Shinran and the patriarchs.

The next chapter, ‘Awakening to the Real’, opens with a discussion on the role of meditation within Buddhism – particularly, within the Pure Land tradition. The author comes to the same conclusion as I reached in my book, *You Don't have to Sit on the Floor*, that the majority of Buddhists in the world do not meditate (in the usually accepted sense of the word):

We need to accept that the scope of Buddhist practice is very broad, encompassing numerous approaches to the goal of spiritual realisation and reflecting the immense variety that we find in the aptitude and disposition of people.

The book goes on to point out a further problem, which is that many Buddhists in the West think of meditation as a form of relaxation or stress relief, rather than a way of realising the highest principle of existence (however envisaged). Therefore, though it might sound heretical to suggest that meditation is not necessary for the practice of Buddhism, this is the case wherever you find lay Buddhist communities in the East, in whatever tradition. Meditation is important but we must firmly

reject the idea that those who do not – or cannot – practise it are ‘second-class Buddhists’.

Of course, there are Pure Land meditation practices. Indeed, one of our three major scriptures is the *Sutra on the Visualisation of the Buddha of Infinite Life*, but this practice is difficult to follow and was probably meant for monastic followers. This leads to a discussion of *shinjin*, surely one of the most misunderstood terms in Shin Buddhism. Pointing out this misunderstanding has often arisen due to the translation of the word as ‘faith’ but the author suggests other possibilities. Going back to the Sanskrit – something he does quite often – he comes up with one I had not read before and which I particularly like: ‘clarity of mind’.

He goes on to highlight ‘Shinran’s great insight’ which is that we [that is most of us] cannot overcome the self by the self. We need some kind of external help to see the ego as it is and to open ourselves to the Infinite Light of the Buddha’s enlightenment. The ego will not willingly sign its own death warrant. Fortunately for us, an answer is found in Amida’s Primal Vow. The rest of this chapter is devoted to consideration of this Vow and our relationship to it. In order to see this, we are led to a consideration of the self, a look at its ignorance and the unique understanding of ‘evil’ within Shin Buddhism.

The final chapter – though not the last word – looks at ‘the practical dimensions of Shin Buddhism in everyday life’ such as “morality, our emotional life and the experience of beauty’. The author shows that – contrary to the belief of some Buddhists – Shin followers are not indifferent to the moral code taught by the Buddha. They are, however, honest enough to acknowledge that they often fall short, and recognise that there is often a difference between what the world calls ‘good’ and the inner motives which inspire our actions.

The complexity of human emotions was recognised by the Buddha and, likewise, by

Shinran. It is an integral part of Shin Buddhism's approach to helping us understand ourselves – which we need until we have fully grasped the teaching of *anatta* (not-self) or, in other words, the reality of the Infinite Light which is Amida Buddha.

As I said earlier, there is so much that I could quote as the book takes us on our journey though life along the Pure Land Way. Personally, I wish the book had an index but this is its only major fault. It does, however, have an excellent list of further reading and good references.

My final quote, which sums up the spirit of the book, is from the Epilogue:

It is time we discarded the tired view of Buddhism as a dry and forensic rationalism, lacking in warmth and devotion; the flawed belief that its aim is simply to promote the 'development' of the individual through practices designed to strip us of everything that makes us real people. This is a travesty of its teachings, and fails to do justice to the rich and baffling complexity of human experience.

The Buddhist path seeks to immerse us in a tremendous mystery marked by an abiding peace and stillness; a quietude that is not of this world. It also leads us to discover our true identity which demands that we relinquish all that we are to the realm of the spirit, which is beyond our

immediate grasp, beyond our small-minded schemes for personal gain, and beyond the self-deception that enslaves itself to empty dreams.

We must not fear plunging into the unknown; treasures are to be found at the bottom of the ocean, not scattered on its surface. The real conquest of the self cannot be sought in its incessant cultivation but in its joyful abandonment, through the unerring knowledge of that which is timeless and which beguiles us, ineluctably, to transcend ourselves.

In a sense, that could be the whole review, even the whole book. But this book is truly the 'bottom of the ocean' and contains many more treasures.

Jim Pym
Pure Land Buddhist Fellowship of Great Britain
Edinburgh, Scotland

[This review first appeared in *Pure Land Notes No.7* (Spring 2010) and is reproduced courtesy of the editor]