

# IASBS NEWSLETTER



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## INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SHIN BUDDHIST STUDIES

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### GREETING FROM THE PRESIDENT

*Professor Ken Tanaka*

Dear Members of IASBS

I send my best wishes to all of you with hopes that your health and studies are going well.

The past several months were, for me, filled with numerous overseas traveling that took me: 1) to California in June (our daughter's graduation); 2) to Beijing in July (to teach a two-week summer course at Renmin University); 3) to Hawaii (to give talks, including one to the IASBS Hawaii District) and; 4) to Düsseldorf in Germany to attend

the 14th IASBS European District conference in early September.

I will defer to the article by Rev. Tatsuo Muneto in this newsletter regarding my meeting with the Hawaii District members in order to focus on my impressions of the trip to Europe. The details of the papers at the European conference, however, will be covered by yet another article by Professor Louella Matsunaga.

I certainly appreciated the fact that, at the Düsseldorf conference, speakers were given

the 'luxury' of 50 minutes for each presentation, not the usual 20 minutes stipulated at the general conferences. Consequently, there was more time for discussion to delve deeper into some of the major topics.

One such topic had to do with the issue of symbolism with regard to Amida and the Pure Land. One speaker took a more literal understanding based on the sutras, while another person took a view that the Pure Land can be realized here in this Saha realm. The ensuing exchanges became quite heated. I personally think a bit of passion is good, for it can bring out differences more clearly and help us gain a fuller understanding of the issues involved.

I personally do not subscribe to the above two positions for, in my view, they do not represent Shinran's position. I believe that symbolism constitutes an appropriate way of talking about Amida and Pure Land in the contemporary context. However, we must have a clear understanding of what we mean by 'symbol'. Symbol, as I understand the term, is a way of talking about a reality (Amida or Pure Land) that is ineffable (i.e. unable to be expressed adequately in words).

With regard to Amida, Shinran refers to it as *ryō*, meaning "that which fulfills the purpose of making us know the significance of *jinen* (true reality)." However, that does not mean that the expression is false or fictitious. Rather, it points us to that true reality and assists us in experiencing its spiritual dimension in a deeply personal way.

It was precisely this issue to which we dedicated the IASBS Japan District workshop in March of 2009 at Ryukoku University (*for those interested, see <http://www.iasbs.net/pdf/NewsLetters/KT.pdf> for details of the proceedings*).

This is one of the many vital doctrines that need to be continuously discussed and re-assessed if the Shin teachings are to appeal to more people in today's world.

After the conference was over, I spent three memorable days with Mr. Frits Bot (an IASBS member) staying with him and his wife in a small town in southern Holland. During that stay, we visited Jikōji Temple in Antwerp, Belgium, where we joined Rev. Fons Marten (the resident priest and IASBS member who attended the conference) and ten of his Sangha members for discussions and a service.

Several days later, I visited Shingyōji Temple in Geneva, Switzerland, headed by Dr. Jérôme Ducor (IASBS Vice-President), whose sangha happened to be observing a memorial service for Rev. Jean Eracle, the founder of the temple.

All in all, my tour of Europe helped me to acquire a deeper understanding of the history of European Shin Buddhism and the contributions made by key persons and temples scattered throughout that continent. The next conference in 2014 will be held in Southampton in Great Britain, where I hope to see another lively discussion and the furtherance of Shin Buddhist studies.



## CONFERENCE REPORT

Louella Matsunaga

The 16<sup>th</sup> European Shin Conference was held at Eko Haus in Düsseldorf from August 31<sup>st</sup> to September 2<sup>nd</sup> 2012, in the presence of the Shinmon-sama, H. E. Kojun Otani. The theme of the conference was “the importance of Sangha”. There were two sections: the 13<sup>th</sup> European Branch conference of the International Association of Shin Buddhist Studies (IASBS), held on Friday the 31<sup>st</sup> of August, and the conference of the International Association of Buddhist Culture (IABC), which was held on Saturday the 1<sup>st</sup> of September. The conference concluded with a *kikyōshiki* ceremony on Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> September, at which 13 people received *kikyōshiki* from the Shinmon-sama. The IASBS portion of the conference was attended by 52 people from 11 countries. From Europe, there were participants from Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Romania, Poland, Spain, and the United Kingdom, and there were also a number of participants from the USA, Nepal and of course Japan.

The IASBS section of the conference comprised six papers. The first paper, “Assessing Shinjin From an Indian Mahayana Buddhist Perspective: With a Focus on Adhimukti in Tathagatagarbha thought”, presented by Professor Kenneth Tanaka, addressed the topic of *shinjin*, a term which, as Professor Tanaka pointed

out, has attracted a good deal of controversy, partly because it is often translated into English as ‘faith’. Professor Tanaka’s paper re-examined *shinjin* in the context of Tathagatagarbha thought, focusing on the Sanskrit terms that are translated by the Chinese word *hsin*, from which the Japanese term *shinjin* is derived. Professor Tanaka argued that an understanding of these concepts, in particular the concept of *adhimukti*, which involves the ideas of insight and spiritual realization, “provides the basis for a more complete understanding of Shinran’s *shinjin*.” With reference to *adhimukti*, the paper also referred to the writings of Shinran on ‘the wisdom of *shinjin*’, and the understanding of Amida’s vow as wisdom, and *shinjin* as the arising of wisdom. It is impossible in this brief space to do justice to the full complexity of the arguments presented by Professor Tanaka, but overall the paper presented a persuasive case for an understanding of *shinjin* as incorporating ideas going beyond devotional faith, to encompass also the idea of the awakening of wisdom through the workings of Amida’s vow.

The theme of *shinjin* was also picked up on by Professor Taira Sato in his paper “The Shin Buddhist Awakening of Faith, Encounter and Sangha”. Professor Sato underlined the central importance of

*shinjin*, saying that, “the living experience of *shinjin*, or true faith, should always be the beating heart of the Shin Buddhist Sangha”. Although the paper also noted that the sangha has pragmatic aspects such as the regulations that govern it, financial structure, and educational functions, it warned against preoccupation with any of these at the detriment of the sangha’s original purpose, that of the awakening of faith or *shinjin*. Professor Sato also contrasted this awakening of faith with intellectual knowledge, arguing that *shinjin* consists of three essential aspects: awakening, entrusting and leaping - a process that is, in some important ways, very different from understanding based on the intellect, which is inherently limited. This paper also explored the role of the teacher, dharma talks and talking about the dharma within the sangha, with detailed reference to Rennyo’s extensive writings on this subject.

The papers presented by Professor Kenneth Mullen and Caroline Brazier explored the relationship between key ideas of Shin Buddhism and psychotherapeutic practice. Professor Mullen examined the use of the concept of mindfulness and of meditation techniques within psychotherapy, and presented some examples of the application of these ideas in a secular therapeutic setting in the UK. Noting that there is already a dialogue between secular practitioners of clinical psychology and psychotherapy and some schools or individuals associated with Theravada, Zen and Tibetan Buddhism, Mullen asked “Does Shin Buddhism wish to be part of this dialogue?” and suggested that this could be approached through the *nembutsu*, understood in terms of the recollection of the Buddha in the aspects of wisdom and compassion. This suggestion seems to me to connect in some important

ways with both Professor Tanaka’s discussion of an expanded understanding of *shinjin*, and also Professor Sato’s comments on *shinjin* and awakening.

Caroline Brazier, who has herself worked in the field of psychotherapy for many years, picked up more specifically on contributions that Pure Land Buddhism has already made to psychotherapy, for example through Naikan. Seeking to develop this application of Pure Land Buddhism further in the therapeutic setting, Brazier emphasised the importance of faith, grounding and the notion of otherness, suggesting that “it is through meeting others that we are challenged to drop our self-focused perspectives” and that “Amida comes to us in our encounters with the unexpected wonder of life”. In an engaging presentation, Brazier suggested ways in which Pure Land teachings of other-power and faith can find expression in a range of encounters, with other people or with aspects of nature, for example, and showed that there can be alternative means of expressing Pure Land ideas that do not necessarily draw on more standard Buddhist imagery. As Brazier noted, this inevitably brings us up against an issue that has often been contentious, and has been the subject of much debate within the European Shin Buddhist sangha, that of the role of symbolism versus more literalist explanations. Brazier argued, persuasively to my mind, that the two approaches need not be at odds, as symbolism is simply another way of representing a truth that it is beyond the capacity of limited human beings to grasp. However, there continues to be a lively debate around these issues, and there were a number of animated exchanges among participants during the conference on this subject.

Continuing the theme of the engagement of the sangha with issues of general concern, Professor Shin Fujieda presented a fascinating paper on the position of various Buddhist organisations, including Shin Buddhist ones, on the issue of brain death and organ transplantation in Japan. This is a topic that has been hotly debated in Japan, with a number of participants in the debate arguing strongly that the concept of brain death is in contradiction with Japanese cultural beliefs surrounding the meaning of personhood. Of particular relevance here is the question of whether the mind/body divide commonly made in Europe and North America is (or should be) applied in Japan. In this context, it was very interesting to learn from Professor Fujieda about the differing standpoints of various Japanese Buddhist organisations in this debate, particularly as this is a subject on which little is available in English.

Finally, Professor Toshikazu Arai presented a paper on “Dilemmas of the Sangha”, in which he examined the strength and fragility of the Sangha, and the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha and Shinran on this topic. Professor Arai argued that the key role of the Sangha is to defend and propagate the Buddha Dharma; however, this is always potentially problematic because the Sangha in this world is always composed of human beings, who are subject to human weaknesses and fallibility. Therefore, the sangha is always at risk of decline. In this context, Professor Arai discussed both Shinran’s criticisms of the established Buddhist sanghas of his day and Shinran’s awareness that all human beings are fallible and limited – hence, the only path is reliance on Amida. In this path, both leader and followers are fellow-travellers and, in this context, Professor

Arai emphasised the basic equality of both ‘as seekers of truth’. This brings us back to the dharma and, in Arai’s words, “the importance of every member of the Sangha having the unfailing resolve to uphold the Dharma and live the Dharma” and, in this spirit, to engage in constant self-reflection. In this, Professor Arai’s paper echoed topics raised by other contributors which emphasised the importance of awakening and insight as aspects of *shinjin*, as well as discussion of the dharma among the sangha, and provided a thoughtful, and thought-provoking, conclusion to the IASBS section of the conference.

Overall, then, the theme of ‘the importance of sangha’ proved a fruitful one for the conference, and prompted the discussion of a number of issues at the heart of Shin Buddhism, as well as reflection on how perspectives and insights derived from Shin Buddhism can be applied in a range of areas of everyday life. Discussions begun in the formal frame of the conference hall continued more informally in conversations among participants over the course of the weekend, and there were also a number of fascinating papers in the IABC section of the conference, as well as additional papers supplied in written form by some of the participants which were not presented verbally owing to time constraints. These discussions are also perhaps an indication of the importance of the sangha. Rennyo’s words, cited in Professor Sato’s paper, seem appropriate here: “talk to one another” and “if you speak, then what you have on your mind becomes known to others and can be corrected. Just say something!” I look forward to further discussions at the next conference, scheduled to take place in Southampton in 2014.

## Meeting of the IASBS Hawaii District

The Hawaii District of the IASBS convened a meeting of its members on 19 August 2012 at the Buddhist Study Center. The guest speaker was Dr. Ken Tanaka and his topic was “Where is Shinshu within the Growth of Buddhism in the Western World?”. Nine members attended the meeting and listened to Dr. Tanaka’s informative talk.

Dr. Tanaka touched on the following trends in Buddhism in the western hemisphere:

- The number of those who practice Buddhism and those who say that they are influenced by Buddhism are rapidly growing.
- Traditional Asian-American Buddhists, including Jodo Shin followers, are regarded as ethnic Buddhists and their numbers are not growing.
- Meditation practice which indicates that ‘spirituality’ may affect the ability of Shin groups to identify their practice.

Those who attended the meeting represented the Jodo Shin tradition which came to Hawaii in 1889. This organization is challenged by declining membership and a shortage of ministers. However, the Honpa Hongwanji is coping with these changing circumstances through improvements in Buddhist education, strengthening of the school system and developing social concern programs.

Although members of the Honpa Hongwanji will maintain their group activities, the personal practice of hearing and saying of the Nembutsu will have to be clarified and become better known to the community of faith in Hawaii.

Tatsuo Muneto  
District Chair





# 16TH BIENNIAL CONFERENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SHIN BUDDHIST STUDIES

第十六回國際真宗学会學術大會



## THE PURE LAND IN BUDDHIST CULTURES: *HISTORY, IMAGE, PRAXIS, THOUGHT*

University of British Columbia | Friday, May 31 to Sunday, June 2, 2013

- Abstracts due: **February 1, 2013**
- Papers due: **May 23, 2013**
- For all information, abstract submission, and registration, visit our **conference website**:  
(<http://pureland2013.wordpress.com> – link may not be active until sometime in November)

Pure Land Buddhist traditions have been some of the largest and most influential in Buddhist history, and remain so to the present day. Moreover, the very idea of a purified, perfect land of a Buddha echoes throughout Buddhist text and praxis. Most often, this Buddha is “Immeasurable Light” or “Immeasurable Life,” who created a pure land far to the west of our own world. But there are many others. This conference aims to examine sectarian traditions of Pure Land Buddhism as well as the “Pure Land” within Buddhism generally. As this conference is jointly-sponsored by associations connected to Pure Land Buddhist traditions in two countries, it is a unique chance to approach pure land expansively, in terms of its long history, global reach, and diverse regional and trans-regional expressions—whether in or across what are today known as China, Korea, Vietnam, Japan, Canada, and so on. The hope is to increase knowledge and scholarly exchange about the multifaceted development of Pure Land in Buddhist cultures. Papers are welcome on any aspect of Pure Land Buddhism, any region or historical period, and from any methodological or disciplinary perspective.

### Papers might address questions such as:

- How did the praxis, thought, and social forms concerned with the Pure Land and its central Buddha emerge historically?
- How do we best describe and analyze Pure Land forms in visual culture, whether embedded in text, in art and architecture, or in spatial and meditative imaginaries?
- And, in an increasingly globalized world, how do we understand the connections between various kinds of Pure Land all over the world and the challenges that each faces?

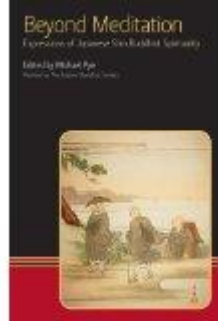
Please submit a 100-word abstract and short bio to [bcsprogram@gmail.com](mailto:bcsprogram@gmail.com) by February 1, 2013 for consideration. The jointly-sponsored, “**The Pure Land in Buddhist Cultures**,” will be the 3rd Annual Conference of the Buddhism and Contemporary Society Program (University of British Columbia, funded by The Tung Lin Kok Yuen Canada Foundation), and the 16th Annual Conference of the International Association of Buddhist Studies (hosted by the IASBS North American District).

## BOOK REVIEWS

### *Beyond Meditation: Expressions of Japanese Shin Buddhist Spirituality*

(Equinox Publishing: Sheffield, 2011)

Edited by Michael Pye



I did not know what I would make of this book when I first heard about it, but what an excellent book it turned out to be. It contains essays written for the journal, *The Eastern Buddhist* in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The journal was the organ of The Eastern Buddhist Society – an organisation founded in 1921 by, amongst others, D. T. Suzuki with the purpose of bringing Buddhism to the modern – and by that was meant the Western – world. Most of the contributors to journal in the early period were associated with Otani University and, therefore, with the Higashi Hongwanji branch of Shin Buddhism. The editor has brought together a consistently interesting collection of essays and has only very slightly modernised and regularised them, mainly by way of footnotes and not by textual alteration.

The essays open a window into another time and place. It is not surprising that there was such passionate and enthusiastic faith in the teachings of Shin Buddhism – the teachings still provoke these feelings today and will continue to do so into the future - but it was a revelation to me to find that there was a such an active group of Japanese scholars and Shin Buddhist believers writing in English at that time and place.

So, what of the actual contents of the book? After notes on the translations, there is a long introduction that outlines the contents of the book. The first series of essays are collected under the title 'Masters of the Nembutsu'. It includes a biography of Honen Shonin by Beatrice Lane Suzuki, then a really useful contribution authored by Sugihira Shizutoshi 'A Study in the Pure Land Doctrine as Interpreted by Shoku (1177–1247)' – a study of the thought and writings of the founder of the Seizan branch of the Jodo Sect. Next is a brief essay about the life and teachings of Ippen Shonin. There is also a very good long essay by Sugihira which goes into some detail about the essential teachings of Rennyo Shonin. My favourite essay in this section, however, is 'The Religion of Shinran Shonin (1173 – 1262)' by Sasaki Gessho. In this profound exposition of Shinran Shonin's teachings, the author teaches the reader how essential the fundamental Buddhist virtue of giving (*dana*) is to a deep understanding of Amida Buddha's virtue. Sasaki summarises his understanding:



The teaching of Shinran is founded upon this idea of absolute transference when Amida transfers or gives up his all to us and we, by giving up all that is to be given up of our selfhood, are enriched by becoming recipients of Amida's love. (p59)

The essays in Part II, in a sense, take a step back and consider a broader field. This part is called "Some Foundations in Mahayana Buddhism" and the first three pieces – "Mahayana Buddhism," "The Buddha as Preacher" and "The Triple Body of the Buddha" are quite general in their focus. I found "The Triple Body of the Buddha" which traces the evolution of the *trikaya* concept especially illuminating. The next essays proceed from the general to the particular and cover the historical and philosophical background to the development of Shin Buddhism. Of course, Japanese Buddhists have always had a sophisticated understanding of the teachings – the writings of Honen Shonin and Shinran Shonin alone bear witness to this – but it is impressive that, in the early part of the twentieth century, there were such a number of articulate and learned scholars fluent enough in English to write such direct, accessible and true exegeses of the foundations and background of the Shin Buddhist teachings.

The final section is called "Themes in Shin Buddhism" and expands on the topics introduced in the latter part of the second section of the book. The essay that I found most interesting in the final section was Yokogawa Kensho's "Shin Buddhism as the Religion of Hearing" in which the author contrasts Shin (the religion of hearing) with Zen (the religion of seeing). He strikes to the heart of the unique virtue of the Shin Buddhist teachings and why they are so suitable to the ordinary man or woman. Hearing the call of Amida Buddha is all that we need to do and it is by saying the Buddha's name – the Nembutsu – that we at once hear and respond, but, as the author makes clear, true hearing is 'true mind' and is therefore not our mind, but the mind of the Buddha freely given to us.

The book ends with the usual index and bibliographic material but, near the end, is a brief and poignant note from the editor pointing out that all the contributors to his book are long deceased and that we should take note of that and reflect on our own mortality.



*Rev. Dr. Mark Healsmith  
Hongwanji Buddhist Mission of Australia*

*Buddhist, Becoming Buddhas, Liberating All Beings*  
(Ryukoku University Translation Center: Kyoto, 2011)  
Gregory G. Gibbs



Rev. Greg Gibbs is a unique voice in Shin Buddhism today. This very interesting and stimulating collection of short, but diverse, essays represents the fruit of his mature reflections over a forty-year period and clearly demonstrates the distinguished contribution he has made, as a thinker and practitioner, to a better understanding of this important Buddhist tradition. As it would be difficult to do justice to the book by commenting on all 34 essays, this review will focus instead on four in particular insofar as they represent Gibbs' best thinking on the three central concepts of Shin Buddhism: Amida Buddha, the realisation of *shinjin* and the practice of *nembutsu*. It is hoped that a treatment of these subjects will pave the way to a better understanding of other topics canvassed in this work which, while certainly not uncontentious, clearly provide plenty of food for thought.

In 'Amida Buddha is Not a Symbol', Gibbs offers a valuable corrective to the glut of misconceptions that plague contemporary discussions of the ultimate reality in Buddhism. He makes the very important point that Shin Buddhists perceive this 'Fundamental Reality' through a host of forms such as Amida Buddha, the sound of the voiced nembutsu or the depiction of *Namu Amida Butsu* on scrolls. However, these are not symbols in the sense of representing or recalling 'something else by possessing analogous qualities or by association in fact or thought'. In other words, they are living and organic embodiments of the formless reality that pervades all things as 'non-substantially One' and through which it is expressed. For example, Gibbs rightly stresses that 'Amida Buddha is not a symbol that we have calculated to represent the deep Truth about Reality. Out of Life itself emerges the compassionate urge to liberate all suffering beings and this becomes Amida Buddha'. This is a critical point as it puts paid to the commonplace view that these are forms that are simply concocted by our benighted minds to deal with the ineffable mysteries of life. The fact is that all these forms that have inspired and saved millions of Buddhist faithful are liberating precisely because they do not have their origin in human contrivance and are efficacious because they are forms assumed by the Fundamental Reality itself for our spiritual benefit.

It is hard to underestimate the impact that such a distinction makes to our understanding of these matters. The former perspective commits us to an entirely this-worldly adaptation by human minds to something we can never fully comprehend whereas the latter offers a properly transcendent source of the forms we use to venerate it. This, indeed, is what allows us to feel fully embraced by the Vow of Amida Buddha and take profound joy in it. If we can

accept this, then it is difficult to maintain another common misconception; namely, that any talk of a real Vow is but an illusory fiction to which we simply ascribe our human needs and limitations in our quest for meaning. In light of this, perhaps we can reinvigorate terms such as 'symbol' to suggest – not a reductionist notion of a finger pointing at the moon – but true reality itself clothed in a form accommodated to our finite understanding. This is far from the lifeless view of symbol we often find today and is one that brings us closer to the traditional Mahayana notion of *upaya* as 'saving means'. It is, therefore, very refreshing to encounter passages such as this: 'The Mahayana Buddhist view of the Fundamental Reality is neither fixedly personal nor utterly impersonal. Therefore, we do not rely on metaphorical language when we say that the Fundamental Reality takes form as Amida Buddha to liberate all beings. That reality was not impersonal in the beginning and later personified via symbols and metaphors'. This is a fine statement which reminds us that, without the salvific initiative of Amida Buddha, our spiritual lives are rendered nugatory – they simply become the projection of subjective delusions without a foundation in that which is true and real. One is, indeed, grateful to Gibbs for reminding us of this fact.

The next essay under consideration is 'Shinjin is More Than Just Faith' in which Gibbs seeks 'for a return to balance in Buddhist theorizing' about the nature of personality and 'to a concrete, embodied, human approach to living our lives as Buddhists'. He commences by noting that the notion of faith features in all spiritual traditions and usually denotes 'something like trust in persons, practices, teachings and institutions found to be worthy of trust' while observing that how this manifests can vary greatly. Gibbs argues that shinjin, while certainly containing aspects of this understanding of faith, 'is illumined by applying a model of religious experience and a model of transformation in one's identity'. So what does this mean? He says: 'With the receipt of shinjin, our new centre of self, the true locus of our identity, becomes the activity of Amida Buddha to liberate all suffering beings. Thus we may say that our former self has become de-centred as its essence is found in the vast trans-personal project of universal liberation ... When we receive shinjin, we discover a vast surrounding Self within which our finite subjectivity finds its real home, its deepest meaning, its true identity.' This is a perspicacious insight and opens the door to some very important implications for our understanding of the self. One consequence is a renewed focus on the integrity and importance of the human personality in the fulfilment of our deepest realisation of the Dharma. The older Buddhist view which sees us as transient and impersonal *skandhas* or 'heaps' is considered limited and unsatisfactory – it simply fails to do justice to the inscrutable enigma of the human person and its spiritual potential. Indeed, Gibbs rightly acknowledges that 'the nature of individual identity remains a mystery' and traditional scholastic discussions of *anatta* are certainly a long way from exhausting this mystery.

One often sees shinjin translated as 'endowed trust' in certain Western circles as a way of making the notion more accessible. Gibbs shows us why this rendition is limited. It is so because it fails to address the transformative nature of the shinjin experience as the awakening of true wisdom (*prajna*) and the resolve to save sentient beings once we become fully enlightened Buddhas following our 'birth' in the Pure Land - the inconceivable realm of Nirvana. While Gibbs is right to stress that this consummation of our spiritual path is posthumous, the guarantee of its fulfilment occurs in our everyday lives even now, notwithstanding the myriad passions and delusions that afflict our human condition (from

which, also, we begin to develop an aversion thanks to the ‘medicine’ of Amida Buddha that is dispensed when we awaken to shinjin). As with his valuable insights into the nature of spiritual symbolism, Gibbs also provides a salutary redress to the rather barren discussions of this matter in much modern debate. He aims to remove the dynamic and powerful lived experience of shinjin from the clutches of scholarly dissection and endeavours to inject the vital element of liberating awakening and personal transformation into the very heart of what realising shinjin means in Shin Buddhism.

In ‘Awakening to the Nembutsu’, Gibbs continues his reflections on the nature and meaning of shinjin. He commences with a valid observation: ‘The aspiration of all Buddhists is awakening to Enlightenment. Since the time of the earliest recorded Buddhist teachings, we can see that adherents have also hoped for lesser, somewhat preliminary levels of awakening. In the Japanese streams of Pure Land tradition, it is shinjin which is the hoped-for awakening in this life’. He goes on to say that ‘the moment of religiously relevant experience occurs again and again after its first dawning upon us. That experience ... is awakening to the Nembutsu.’ How should we understand this central term of the Pure Land tradition? ‘The nembutsu is the mode in which Suchness, the True Reality of things undistorted by our prejudiced discrimination, penetrates our delusion and awakens us for a moment’ (as manifested in our invoking the name of Amida Buddha). But why only a moment? ‘The momentariness of our experience of shinjin is caused by the limited human capacity to have and hold onto experiences of deep religious import. Human ability to be faithful is imperfect and our concrete sense of being sure, of feeling confident in the teaching, varies from moment to moment’. Nevertheless, ‘shinjin is awakening to the nembutsu. Such an awakening puts us in touch with something true and reliable. That something, the compassion of Amida, is a source of confidence despite worries. Awakening to the beauty and trustworthiness of the nembutsu will bring hope into our lives’.

In this way, we come to see that shinjin and nembutsu are inseparable. Shinjin, as the arising of Amida’s mind within us, finds expression in our saying of the Buddha’s Name although, in fact, this saying is none other than the very voice of the Buddha infusing our heart and mind with its presence. Gibbs is keen to stress that this experience is conducive to our real happiness and well-being as ordinary human beings, despite the difficulties and sorrow in our lives, because awakening to the nembutsu is to receive the Buddha’s compassion which is ‘always present ... always surrounding us ... always accepting of us just as we are’. Once again, Gibbs reminds us that this fundamental realisation at the heart of the Shin Buddhist experience is not just a point of view, an intellectual perspective or an academic opinion. It is the breaking through of limitless Light and Life into our world of unsatisfactory transience which it transfigures through the tangible compassion that emerges as the nembutsu from our mouths – a joyful proclamation of spiritual emancipation and deep gratitude.

The final essay I would like to consider is ‘Meeting Our Needs without Fooling Ourselves’. What attracted the reviewer to this piece was Gibbs’ attempt to revive what he calls a ‘secondary naivety’ in our reflections on the Pure Land teachings in a post-modern age. In doing so, he revisits some of the themes he raised in the first essay we discussed. For example, he asks ‘If Amida Buddha is a symbol, we are left with the question, “What is being symbolized”?’ After demonstrating the conceptual error of thinking along these lines, Gibbs

makes a confession which will no doubt make many contemporary Buddhists cringe (wrongly in our view): 'I am willing to go so far as to say that Amida Buddha is a person ... The compassion we receive on the nembutsu path is not accidental ... if Amida Buddha is the subject of compassionate action, a significant part of the notion of personhood must be applicable'. A common response that is often encountered in the face of such an admission is: "Surely, people who say this are simply projecting their own need for care, security and comfort onto an imagined objective reality". Not necessarily and certainly not in this case. Gibbs again: 'This process of internalizing and then projecting kindness, comfort and protection may not be a way of fooling ourselves. Sometimes we may have to imagine something or someone in order to encounter a reality that lies behind our longing. Modern people often assume that the fact we are internalizing kindness and then projecting it means that it must not really be out there. Perhaps some realities, such as bodhisattvas and Buddhas, have to be imagined before they can be perceived.' We see here a crucial rehabilitation of the role the imagination can play in awakening us to higher non-discursive modes of spiritual apprehension, instead of dismissing it as the product of subjective fancy.

There is plenty to think about in what Gibbs is saying here – in fact, he holds the key to explaining why there is so much deep unhappiness in the lives of many modern people, including among those who profess to be spiritual in their outlook. We find ourselves constantly falling on our own meagre resources to attain true fulfilment which is clearly impossible to secure on such terms. Rather than seeing our profoundest needs as merely subjective projections, destined to remain unfulfilled, perhaps we might entertain the possibility that these needs are testament to the existence of a higher reality that meets them and without which our lives would remain forlorn and incomplete. But how can we know this to be true?

Gibbs' suggestion is that the proof of the pudding is in the eating: 'Whatever a Buddha, his Pure Realm and his attendant bodhisattvas may turn out to be exactly, they seem very real to me when I am saying the nembutsu. When I say *Namu Amida Butsu*, the Buddha seems to be present in, and as, his Name ... the nembutsu encountered in the vocalization of another or felt in my own voice is a permeating of my delusions by Reality-such-as-it-truly-is ... this is a point of contact with the realm of the sacred.' In a very human and rather moving conclusion to this essay, Gibbs addresses those who are apt to remain sceptical: 'All of these ways of speaking are my attempts to share the safe haven I have found in the nembutsu. If all I have said has not convinced you to rely on the nembutsu path, I hope you will find another way to have a secure base, a safe haven. We all need this'.

In a sense, this is the primary message to emerge from this valuable and thought-provoking collection of essays. As a sincere and committed wayfarer on the Shin Buddhist path for almost five decades, Gibbs has experienced the difficulties and joys in the quest for spiritual freedom and seeks to share with us the treasures he has found on his journey. His book is both an invitation and an exhortation to seek the 'pearl beyond price' in a world of specious and vapid substitutes.

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Editor