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In Memoriam

Reverend Dr Taitetsu Unno

(1929-2014)



Rev. Dr. Taitetsu Unno completed his life journey on Saturday, Dec 13, 2014. To the very end, he was fully aware and at peace, saying, "Thank you for everything, Namu Amida Butsu," and when he could no longer speak, simply putting his palms together in *gassho*. His family and close friends who came to visit in his last days and hours experienced the deep joy of being with him and chanting together, immersed in the rhythms of boundless compassion. He received the remarkably good fortune, the great gift of the Dharma, of the life of Namu Amida Butsu, which he was able to share with so many.

He was born in Shojoji temple in Kokura, in the city of Kita-Kyushu, February 5, 1929, the son of Rev. Enryo Unno and Mrs. Hana Unno, the first of five siblings. He arrived in the U.S. in 1935 at the age of six, went through the turbulent years of the Pacific War when he and his family were put into internment camps, first at Rohwer, Arkansas, then at Tule Lake, California. After the war, his family settled in California, where he eventually graduated from the University of California, Berkeley, with a bachelor's degree in English literature. Well into his eighties, he could recite Chaucer in the original Middle English. It was at the end of his career at Berkeley that he met D. T. Suzuki who encouraged him to study Buddhism in Japan, and Taitetsu Unno went on to receive his M.A. and Ph.D. in Buddhist Studies at Tokyo University in 1968.

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PURE LAND JOURNAL

The IASBS annually publishes *The Pure Land: Journal of Pure Land Buddhism* (ISSN 0911-7660), an academic journal in English that contains research articles, essays, translations, and book reviews. Subscriptions to the Journal are available through [membership in the IASBS](#). All the past volumes of the Journal are currently hosted online by the American Theological Association Series. Members, please login to the [IASBS homepage](#) to view and download copies of the *Pure Land*.

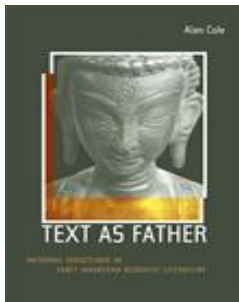
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SUGGESTED READING

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***Text As Father -
Paternal Seductions in Early
Mahayana Buddhist Literature***
By Alan Cole



Although published a decade ago, there is no doubt that Cole's fascinating work remains a breakthrough study and litmus test in close textual reading. Cole's underlying concern is with the exercise of power or authority within Buddhist textual traditions. Whether one agrees with his starting point or conclusions detracts nothing from what he unveils in the course of his study. Cole offers a close readings of four well-known texts — *The Lotus Sutra*, *Diamond Sutra*, *Tathagatagarbha Sutra*, and *Vimalakirtinirdes*, however his approach is to treat these texts as literary texts, and not merely philosophical or doctrine treatises. Cole's sixth chapter: 'Vimalakirti, or Why Bad Boys Finish First', is perhaps one of the finest – if provocative – readings of this famous sutra, if not for its conclusions, but for the questions it poses.

For the next forty years, he taught in the field of Buddhist studies, first at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, then for the next thirty-seven years at Smith College, where he served as Department Chair, and was Jill Ker Conway Professor of World Religions. He was also a Visiting Professor at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa, and a Japanese Ministry of Education Fellow in Kyoto, Japan. He was the author, translator, and editor of numerous academic volumes and articles, but he is perhaps best known for his two works introducing Shin Buddhism to English-language audiences, *River of Fire, River of Water: An Introduction to the Pure Land Tradition of Shin Buddhism* (1998), and *Shin Buddhism: Bits of Rubble Turned into Gold* (2002), as well as his translation, *Tannisho: A Shin Buddhist Classic* (1996).

He was the recipient of the Ernest Pon Award of the National Association for Ethnic Studies, for his efforts to increase and retain Asian American faculty among the Five Colleges (1998), the Cultural Award for the Promotion of Buddhism, of the Society for the Promotion of Buddhism (Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai)(2006), and the inaugural President's Award of the Institute for Buddhist Studies (2014). In addition, he was also a fourth-degree black belt in Aikido, and was the translator and author of the "Foreword" for *The Spirit of Aikido* by Kisshomaru Ueshiba (1984).

Although prolific as a scholar, his passion was always in teaching and working with his students, many whose lives he helped to transform. Although passionate as a college professor, his calling was as a Buddhist minister, ordained in the tradition of Shin Buddhism at Nishi Honganji, as the thirteenth-generation Shin priest in his family. He devoted his career to working with Shin temples, Buddhist centers, and Buddhist groups in North America and elsewhere, as much as he did to make contributions in academia. After retiring from Smith College, he and his wife Alice founded the Northampton Shin Buddhist Sangha in Northampton, Massachusetts, which they led until 2007.

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For the last seven years of his life, he, his wife, and their beloved dog Metta, a Lhasa Apso, spent their lives with their son Mark and his wife Megumi in Eugene, Oregon, where they continued the work of the Buddha Dharma as a family, leading events in Hawaii, California, and Eugene. His last public appearance was at the Pacific Seminar, held at the Berkeley Buddhist Temple and the Jodo Shinshu Center in Berkeley, California, in July 2014.

With a twinkle in his eye, sharp sense of humor, gentle spirit, and compassionate presence, he left an indelible impression on those who came to know him through his work in all arenas. He is survived by his wife Alice, a retired schoolteacher and Buddhist teacher in her own right; son Mark, the fourteenth-generation Shin minister in his family and also a scholar of Buddhism; daughter-in-law Megumi, a teacher of the Japanese Way of Tea in the Urasenke School; and of course, dog Metta, who truly embodies her Buddhist name, "Loving Kindness."

Nembutsu In The Amazon Jungle

By Rev. Shogyo Gustavo Pinto

(The views expressed below express the personal perspective of Rev Pinto and are not necessarily representative of any particular Shin institution or organization - Editor)

Last year eight Mehinako Indians from the Indian Reserve of Xingu came to a small historical village called Catuçaba, in the mountains near São Paulo to build an Oca, a traditional house in which the inhabitants of Pindorama (the territory we now call Brazil) have been living for the last 10.000 years. Nothing changed in the architecture of these houses and the Mehinako, like many other tribes, still live in their large thatched buildings. The one in São Paulo was built as a meeting place for the Hotel Catuçaba. The hotel's owners, Emmanuel and Filipa Rengade, asked Rev. Shogyo Gustavo Pinto to perform a Buddhist ceremony at the Oca. For the very first time in their lives, the Mehinako Indians were to meet a Buddhist Obosan. Only the leader of the Indians, Yutá Mehinako, was able to speak Portuguese.

At the huge Oca a small Buddhist altar was assembled. The bell rang and when the Namanda was heard, unexpectedly the Indians put their hands in Gassho, the same way they saw Shogyo doing. Infinite Light needs no translation. Understanding of the spoken word is not a requirement for being embraced by Infinite Light.

"In the Nembutsu, non-discrimination is the essence, because it is above praise, inexplicable, and inconceivable" (Tanissho, Shinshu Seiten, Buddhist Churches of America, 1978, p. 254.)

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During the ceremony, a powerful bond united the Mehinako Indians and the Caucasian Shinshu minister.

In the afternoon, on top of a mountain nearby, Yutá spoke to Shogyo about a dramatic event that was tormenting the Mehinako community, the sudden death of his 19 years old nephew. The girl's father, Yutá's brother, is the Cacique, the Chief of the Mehinako. While the story was being told, Yutá and Shogyo were no longer a Caucasian and an Indian. They were two human beings facing the suffering of death. At the end, in a low voice, Shogyo said: "Let me tell you where she was born after her departure..."

The sun was setting behind the distant mountains when Yutá and Shogyo were taken by the narrative and went soaring high towards the west. Friends nearby did not notice their disappearance, because they could still see the two conversing figures. When the voyage ended, after a brief silence, Yutá said: "When back in Xingú I will call the tribe together and tell them".

The three syllable Nembutsu* sounded natural to the Mehinako Indians. Their little children, just like ours, when they were attempting to utter their first sounds, also pronounce na, na, na, man, man, man, da, da, da.

On the following day, Yutá addressed Shogyo as a Pajé - the Indian's spiritual guide - and said he should come to the Xingú reserve to be greeted as Pajé. "Yes, someday I will visit you."

Later Shogyo heard that the health of Yutá's mother was deteriorating due to a cancer. On Yutá's occasional visits to São Paulo, the two friends always met and talked about the grief of a son facing his mother's suffering. Yutá's nephew, Yatapi, speaks a little Portuguese. When he goes to the village outside the Indian reserve, he often calls Shogyo on the phone, or writes him messages.

This year in August the Mehinako will host the Kuarup ceremony, the only occasion when all the different tribes in Xingú reserve get together. They insisted that Shogyo should come for the Pajé's greeting ritual. Shogyo accepted and said that he also would like to do a Buddhist ritual for them.

It will be the first time the Pajé's ceremony will be held for a non-Indian. Yutá explained the ceremony to Shogyo. The Mehinako will paint their bodies and dance in a circle around the Cacique, the Chief, and the Pajé. Shogyo then told Yutá that in the Buddhist ritual he will use his robes, will ring the bell, sing the Tisaranan, and the Juseigê. Yutá did not ask what these chants meant. Understanding the ritual did not seem important to him. In fact, after the meeting at Catuçaba, on the occasions when Shogyo spoke about the Dharma, Yutá never asked for any explanation.

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He always listened very attentively and remained silent at the end. Yutá's command of the Portuguese language is limited. In normal everyday subjects, he frequently asked Shogyo to explain precisely the meaning of a phrase or word. He would check his understanding, explaining back to Shogyo what he comprehended and asking for confirmation. Only when the subject was the Dharma, Yutá remained silent, no matter what he heard. Shogyo did not have to tell him that the Dharma is inconceivable.

Shinshu first came to Brazil with the Japanese immigrants and it took decades until their first Caucasian minister was ordained. Now, a few decades later, Shinshu is reaching the last frontier in this country of continental dimensions. In the wilderness of the Amazonian jungle, a few Mehinako Indians will smile from now on recognizing the three syllables Nembutsu - the Namanda - when their little children start stammering those first few sounds. In challenging moments as when the wind of impermanence strikes cold and fierce, with hands in Gassho as they did in Catuçaba, the Namanda will embrace them with a Confident Mind.

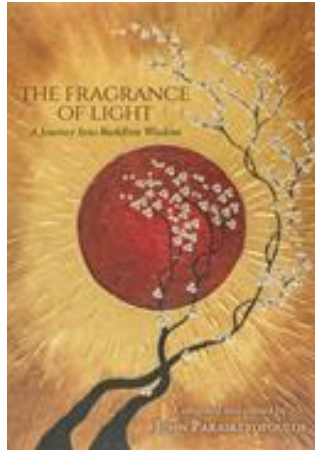
"Some people say that those who do not read or study Sutras and commentaries are not assured of Birth. Such a view is beneath criticism". (Tannisho, Chapter XII, Shinshu Seiten, Buddhist Churches of America, 1978, p. 256.)

Most of the Mehinako Indians are unable to speak Portuguese. How did they recognize Shogyo, a Shinshu priest, as a Pajé? Why did they put their hands in Gassho when Shogyo started repeating the Namanda? Why did they want to hold a ceremony to receive Shogyo as a Pajé? The author of this article cannot avoid asking these questions and does not know how to answer them. Facing these astonishing, and inexplicable facts, he can only put his hands in Gassho and repeat the Namanda with deep gratitude for being a witness of how unfathomable the Dharma is.

*On the three syllable Nembutsu, see "The Deaf and Dumb's Nembutsu", in Vimeo.

Shogyo Gustavo Pinto

BOOK REVIEW



The Fragrance of Light is the latest offering from Shin Buddhist author, Rev. John Paraskevopoulos. In this anthology of Buddhist Wisdom, he has drawn together a wide range of textual sources - ranging from Asanga to Zonkaku - under the following themes:

- Where We Find Ourselves: *Impermanence, Suffering and the Human Condition*
- Ultimate Reality: *Source and Destination*
- Living the Way: *Signposts to Emancipation*
- Immeasurable Life: *Amida Buddha and the Pure Land*

Each section is accompanied by a short introductory essay. The author is clear that this compilation is not an exercise in philological hair-splitting or theoretical abstraction; rather, he suggests that each passage constitutes a meditation, a gleam, a window, into the living wisdom that pervades Buddhism but which can be obscured when it is treated merely as an object of study and not as a living tradition. This compilation also aims at emphasising the 'positive' and mysterious dimension of Buddhism which quietly and subtly suffuses beauty into the lives of those who awaken to such a presence. *The Fragrance of Light* will be available from mid-July.

Alex Minchinton