


Voice of Amida-shu, Amida-kai and The Amida Trust: Pureland Buddhism: Absolute Grace, Total Engagement: Issue 22, Autumn 2010
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RUNNING TIDE



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Running Tide

Offers a voice for faith and practice, as well as critical, existential and socially engaged enquiry within the broad framework of Pureland Buddhism.

We publish short articles, poetry, pictures, interviews, comment and Buddhist resource materials.

Opinions expressed are those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Amida Trust, Amida-shu or Amida-kai.

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A religious charity established in UK, registration number 1060589, for the furtherance of Buddhism. The Trust sponsors a wide range of Buddhist activities. The Amida Trust is a member of the Network of Buddhist Organisations in UK, the European Buddhist Union, as well as the World Buddhist University, and has mutual affiliation with the Buddhist Peace Fellowship.

Amida Order & School
The Amida Order and Amida School are a religious order and communion, respectively, following the Pureland tradition, established under the auspices of the Amida Trust. In this periodical the letters OAB after a name indicate membership of the Order of Amida Buddha and the letters MAS indicate membership of the Amida School. The Amida School is also referred to as Amida-shu. All Order members are also School members.

Amida-Kai
The Amida Association, an association for spirituality and its application. Amida-kai is the association for everybody interested in the Trust's work, for the application of spiritual principles to empirical world problems, and to the exploration of the meaning of spirituality irrespective of faith alignment.

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and Modgala
at Sukhavati
with a group
admiring their
Tsa Tsa
statues that
they made.



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CONFERENCES 2011

The 5th Living Buddhism Conference on Culturally Engaged Buddhism will take place **12 - 15 May 2011**. Book your place now! **p.12 - 13**.

The First International conference on Other Centered Approaches will take place **18 - 20 February 2011**. This ground-breaking conference, rooted in Buddhist psychology, will present other-centered approaches (OCA), which offer fresh new tools to address challenges in the fields of mental health, education, religion, human relations, chaplaincy, and more. **See back cover for more details.**



Dukkha happens. Life unfolds and we get caught up and swept away by our deluded tales. This is an over-simplistic description of the average human being full of bonnu – wayward passions that take us away from seeing reality as it is and that lead us to act on our whims as if our lives depended on them. Unflattering as it may be, we can ask ourselves if this is the case and if it is then what is our evidence? How many times do we do something while knowing that deep down what we are doing is unkind, unethical, unnecessary or just plain wrong? How many times have we done something because we just couldn't help it? Or made an innocent mistake due to an oversight and then tried to cover it up? How many times have we felt shoved to doing something even when we knew better?

In looking and examining the evidence of our lives can we really say that we are kind, ethical, important and good people? How many times did our feelings control and motivate us to get something for ourselves or for our loved ones? How often do we justify our irrational behaviour?

And can we go one step further and ask whether there a difference between the blissfully ignorant, seemingly rational, ordinary, earthly being who swings from one whim to another, and the seemingly religious, ordinary, earthly being who has faith in Amida but is still embroiled in inexorable karma?

And if there is a difference between these two types of beings then what is it and what are the consequences?

One notable difference is in the way that they see the world – the person with faith tends to turn things on its side, or more radically, upside down. This issue is full of articles written by ordinary deluded people who are looking at society (p.14), at nature (p.4&9), at spiritual practice (p.16–20) and at community (p.25) through faith tinted lens. It, hopefully, will cut through some of the cynical ways of thinking about life and give hope to those fearing changes in the environment. Like the photo of Quan Shi Yin on the front cover, whose face mysteriously remains clean and unstained, perhaps we, ordinary foolish beings, can trust that in searching for the dharma we too will be affected and transformed into something mysterious and radiant.

Susthama



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Web sites

www.amidatruster.com
<http://amidatruster.ning.com/>
www.amidatruster.com/runningtide.html
www.buddhistpsychology.info
<http://amidatruster.typepad.com/amidashu>
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Amida Centres/Groups

Newcastle: http://lotusinthemud.typepad.com/amida_newcastle/
Sheffield: <http://pureland.wordpress.com/>
London: <http://www.amidalondon.org.uk/>
Belgium: <http://www.namoamidabu.be/>



THE TIDE RUSHES IN



GREEN MEDITATION

by
CLARK STRAND



I first introduced the term "Green Meditation" at a talk I gave in Manhattan in the fall of 2009. Before that I'd said very little about it in public, even when people asked to have it explained. The reason was simple: Green Meditation overturns pretty much everything we know (or think we know) about our existing religious practices and beliefs. Or, rather, it reinterprets them so radically that they aren't recognizable any longer to most people.

For all that, the basic idea is extremely easy to understand: Green Meditation tells us that all theology (interpreted broadly to include any religious teaching or idea) is ecology. Where it isn't, theology has gone astray. Nature is never wrong. For instance, Green Meditation sees God as virtually identical with the planetary ecosystem that gave rise to life, currently sustains life in all its myriad forms, and into which all life returns at death. It sees the "body and blood of Christ" as ways of talking about the reality of "eating" and "being eaten" that underlies all biological existence and thus serves as the model for all true modes of salvation, since nothing can be excluded from that reality, and all is redeemed (literally, "reclaimed") by it.

Green Meditation tells us that when Shakyamuni Buddha was sitting under the Bodhi tree and Mara, the "tempter," came to challenge his right to sit upon the seat of enlightenment, the Buddha bore witness to the Earth, rather than the Earth to him, as the traditional story tells us. Green Meditation teaches us that our enlightenment lies in bearing witness to the Earth as beings whose origin, existence, and ultimate destiny are the Earth and nothing but the Earth.

Green Meditation sees doctrines like *heaven*, the

pure land, and *nirvana* as evidence of humanity's ongoing effort to think its way outside the box of Nature - as if there were any outside of that box. It sees natural selection as entirely wholesome, but regards the idea of humanity as an arrow pointing forward toward some evolutionary perfection as deluded to the core - and possibly even evil. It recognizes the belief that the world was created for human beings as the mother of all suffering, and the belief that human consciousness is the point of the universe as the father of every lie.

In short, Green Meditation teaches us that we have no future and no point apart from Nature. Nature is where we find the meaning and value of our lives.

The current imbalance between theology and ecology (which weighs the value of human culture more heavily than the Earth) is at the root of our 21st century ecological crisis. That crisis was at least 10,000-12,000 years in the making, so it won't be righted in a day. The re-balancing of a species that has lost its niche in nature is necessarily a lengthy process, just as it took a very long time for us to lose that niche in the first place. A certain kind of thinking got us into this problem, and it will take a very different kind to get us out of it again. But it won't happen in a small way. And it won't happen fast. That is mostly what I mean when I speak of Green Meditation. "Green" doesn't refer to the emphasis of our thinking, its focus, or to its "color." It indicates an altogether different scale of mind.

In one of his essays from the early 1990s, the late self-styled geo-logian Thomas Berry wrote about the meadow he discovered as a 12-year-old child when his family moved from the center of town to the edge of town. The meadow lay just the other side of a

A large, mature weeping willow tree with dense, cascading branches stands on a grassy bank next to a body of water. The sky is blue with scattered white clouds.

that problem wasn't limited to thinking; our theological thinking is the most domesticated kind of thought. In fact, these two areas of thought--ecology--are directly proportional to our understanding of one with our understanding of the other. God created us in his image, but we have created him in ours. And what if we aren't created in our image? What if God isn't created in our image? What if God is? Actually, if we read the book from a different point of view, it quickly becomes clear that the profound gap between the anthropocentric understanding of God--that God is like a meadow and the God of the wilderness--how to bridge it--is what the book of Job has "learned" Green Meditations on his anthropocentric view of God is thoroughly dismantled by God's response. At the end of the book, Job

that problem wasn't limited to the Bible; it was in our thinking; our theological thinking was the most domesticated kind of thinking. In fact, these two areas of knowledge--theology and ecology--are directly proportional to our understanding of one with respect to our understanding of the other. We've created us in his image, but he hasn't created him in ours. And what hasn't he created in our image? What hasn't he created in our image? Well, actually, if we read the book from the other point of view, it quickly becomes clear that there's a profound gap between the human understanding of God--that's the God of the meadow and the God of the mountain. And how to bridge it--is what the book is about. Job has "learned" Green Meditations. His anthropocentric view of the world has been thoroughly dismantled by God. At the end of the book, Job

At the end of the book, Job

Berry's meadow is a good metaphor for 20th century environmental thinking: In principle it was right on target, but its scale was much too small. The problem was, it lay too close to where human beings lived and worked and was thus too fully defined by human values and human needs. But



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only to our environmental thinking likewise offered us only of God.

understanding--theology and ionate. It's hard to have a deep out having an equally deep The Bible tells us that God the truth seems to be that we ay not? Who wants a God who o wants the God of Job?

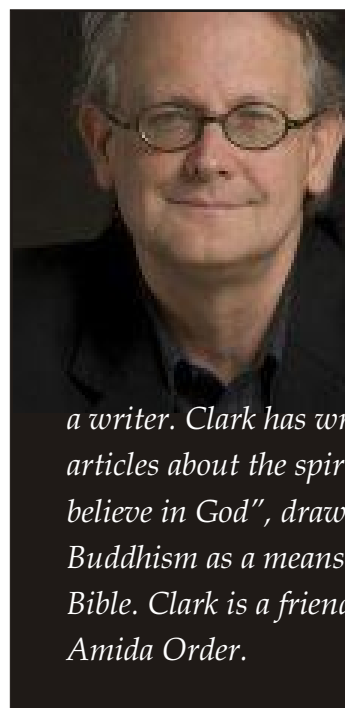
of Job from a Green Meditation comes obvious that there is a e theological and ecological is, between the God of the wild. At bottom, that gap--and book is about. By the end of it, ation, but not before he has had of the world around him d.

o is allowed to return to the

"meadow," or habitable margin, of the life he lived before, but he no longer takes his moral bearings off of it. How could he? The mere thought would be impossible, if not horrifying, after all that he has been through.

Don't get me wrong. I don't want to scare anyone away from Green Meditation by suggesting that in studying it we may be tempting Nature to offer us lessons we won't be able to survive (or won't want to). I only want to suggest that Job has lots of pressing questions about life and suffering, and why things are the way they are. Those questions eat away at him from within. The boils and sores he suffers externally are nothing compared to what is going on inside of him.

In this way Job is a kind of symbol for the unsustainability of modern life, because these same kinds of questions eat away at us as we live along the meadowlands on the very margins of nature. What Green Meditation teaches us is that it is because we live on the margins that we have such questions, and the fears and anxieties that inevitably accompany them. Green Meditation offers us the answers to those questions, just as God does to Job, but we don't get those answers by asking them in the meadow. Like Job, we find them in the wild.



Clark is a former Rinzai Zen monk, a writer and spiritual teacher based in Woodstock, New York. He left the monastic life in 1990 and became the first senior editor of Tricycle magazine remaining in that position until 1996 to pursue a full time career as a writer. Clark has written a number of books and many articles about the spiritual life, his most recent, "How to believe in God", drawing substantially on Pureland Buddhism as a means to reinterpret the Judeo-Christian Bible. Clark is a friend and supporter of the work of the Amida Order.

My Trip to Amida France

by
Shirley Manning

On the way from Calais to Amida France we stopped at Abbeville Bird Sanctuary for a picnic, lots of food but no knife, this is when I realised I would be learning a lot of useful tips on this trip. In place of a knife we used the car key to cut the cheese, brilliant.

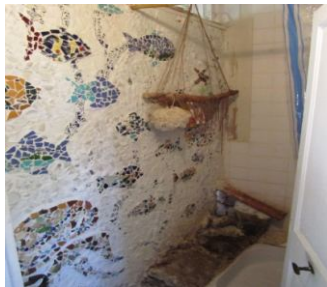


We arrived at the house at approximately 11.30pm, as we parked a little Owl flew up behind the chimney and peeked out at us, so sweet.



I woke the next morning to find a safe and peaceful place surrounded by woods just waiting to be explored, a flourishing vegetable garden, a picnic table for our

meals on sunny days, an outside washing up table much nicer doing the dishes in the open. Everything sorted even an outside bath although I must say I preferred the inside shower with its magnificent mural.



The wind chimes positioned here and there in the woods give off a magical feel and the bamboo walk is so peaceful.

We made good use of the sunny days, herbs were picked and put on trays and left on the car dashboard to dry out. If the washing was not quite dry that went into the car to dry as well.

In between making chutney and learning to use a saw and scythe (my husband says about time too) cutting back the bushes on the secret field and along the paths we spent time exploring. Sancoins on market day we had a delicious cup of coffee and bought some cheese and wool and yummy little cakes from the patisserie, the cakes were wrapped beautifully before we left the

shop, how nice. Another day after getting supplies at the supermarket Caroline and I walked around Ainay le Chateau had another great cup of coffee and went into the church, parts of which date back to Roman times. I understand that each village has their own church with something like 92 villages. On the way home we stopped along the way and collected walnuts, using Caroline's blue crocs as we did not have bowls.



I fulfilled a dream of feeding Lamas at Robert's farm up the road.



Susthama mentioned that we were going to have a look at the local church on the way home and was told to call in at the shop and they would give us the key to the church, which we did, how trusting.

The evening of the full moon we had a glorious bonfire we just had to do a bit of howling at the moon such fun.



What can I say about my experience at Amida France, the evening services were a good end to peaceful days, I have tasted Courgettes in many ways including in porridge, the best fresh fruit and vegetables, went on a forest walk that ended in the dark, howled at the moon and learnt how to make chutney, jam and soya milk.

I am thrilled to have been able to have the Amida France experience, which is something I have wanted to do for a couple of years. My thanks to Susthama, Caroline and Damian for a great experience. My only regret having too big a suitcase, sorry.

How can we be psychologically healthy if we are not spiritually alive and thriving?

How can we be spiritually growing if we are bogged down in mental conflicts and compulsions?

PSYCHOLOGY SPIRITUALITY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

by
Caroline Prasada Brazier OAB



To try to separate something which we call psychological from what we call spiritual is a false dichotomy for our whole being is founded on our spiritual nature. What we believe, what we trust, what we take refuge in, whether we live ethically, are all conditions which create our mental states of joy or suffering.

Buddhism is often represented as a psychological religion. The Buddha understood how much of our suffering is produced through our mental struggles, a result of our attempts to avoid things which we imagine to be unpleasant and which we'd rather not know. Such compulsive avoidance of the truth creates the dulled mental state referred to as *avidya*, often translated as delusion, but more accurately 'not seeing'. All good religious and spiritual practice, however, is concerned with aligning our lives with higher purposes and the ground of truth. It is just more overtly explained in Buddhism.

Psychologies also try to understand the ground of our minds, and in doing so to create firm foundations. They try to help us to be more open to experience as it arrives, to be in the flow of life rather than hiding from it in neuroses. They try to help us to work through the veil of projections, the transferences and obsessive preoccupations which cloud our view of others.

Thus both spiritual traditions and psychological ones are, in their various ways, concerned with helping us to live more at peace with the foundational truths of our lives: our mortality, our vulnerability, our failures in love and courage and our fears. They are about helping us to trust the ground of our being which is the ground of all beings, the ground of life itself.

So, in writing about working in the natural environment, I find myself treading ground which belongs both to psychology and to the spiritual. The two are inseparable. Exploring nature we are brought directly into contact with the most fundamental aspects of life, the joy of growth and regeneration, the omni-presence of death and decay. We see our lives in the context of a web of processes of which we are a tiny, and often problematic, part. We feel the impact of these facts upon us and we are affected by them. We are changed.

Many therapies are human-centric, giving virtually no attention to the larger ecological picture, but once we start to look at nature and involve it in our therapeutic work, we cannot help but be affected and concerned by knowledge of the way human activity impacts upon our planet. We are implicated in the unfolding troubles of the environment and this must impact upon our mental states. This book is not particularly about ecology or environmental change, at least in an overt way. Its focus is on our spiritual and psychological relationship with the natural world at a more day to day level and on ways of facilitating intimacy with our environment. But it is impossible to do this work without an awareness of the issues which face us at this point in time, or the voices of those within the deep ecology movement, and other spiritually based environmental groups, who connect the trauma of watching our planet struggling for breath with a spiritual sense of grief, compassion and contrition for the actions of the human race.

As we connect with the natural world, we find ourselves increasing our sensitivity to these issues naturally, and wanting to tread more lightly on the planet. As we grow and let go of compulsiveness we have less desire to consume and approach life more gently. We come to understand how greed and consumption are psychologically driven. In coming to love our local environments, we begin to live in ways which support them rather than undermining them. Ultimately, it may be more effective to involve people in this kind of work as a means of bringing about a planetary change of consciousness than giving them more direct messages, which may feel critical or proscriptive. A change of heart leads to a change in action. There is of course much need for discussion and debate around the issues too, but this often takes place among those already converted, working out the finer points in strategies. The sort of

environmental encounter described here takes another route and reaches other groups of people.

So our work is grounded in a deep understanding of our position as part of the eco-system. We are not as special as we think. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that everything, including ourselves, is far more special than we ever imagine in our day to day lives. We are recipients of the great privilege of life and of sharing this world with a truly amazing assemblage of beings. Once we understand this deeply, knowing it in our bodies and our perception, we discover that in fact we live in the arms of a wonderful process of nature, of life. We might call it love.

Refuge in the Environment

The act of becoming Buddhist is called taking refuge. Taking refuge means connecting with, or, more properly, allowing oneself to be held by the object in which we take refuge. We can take refuge in ordinary things, like the bottle of wine or a relationship or ideas, and most people do in times of stress. In Buddhism, however, we take refuge in the spiritual dimension of our lives. When we take refuge in a spiritual context, we move out of the ordinary, small orbit of day to day concerns and deliberately found our lives on the universal truths which underpin them.

As a person makes the commitment of taking refuge, in Buddhism they traditionally commit to three things: Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Other religious systems have similar acts of commitment and these often have similar elements. Although they are religious terms, the three refuges speak of fundamental truth which goes beyond particular religious systems.

Exploring the meaning of these refuges is a

lifelong project. It is often said that Buddhism starts and finishes with the refuges for, although one starts by making this commitment with sincere intention, it is said that only when one reaches the highest levels of insight does one start to really understand their meaning. So, here, I will attempt an interim discussion of their meaning. I think these concepts are useful to our exploration of working with the environment, whether you, as reader, are Buddhist or not.

In becoming Buddhist, the first refuge is in Buddha. The Buddha was the historic founder of the religion, the teacher and the source. Refuge in Buddha involves developing a deep appreciation of this foundation. It also involves taking refuge in the qualities of Buddha: enlightenment, clear seeing, infinite love and compassion. A Buddha is the one who can enlighten us. When we work with nature, as we start to see more clearly and move out of our habitual dullness, we move in the direction of clearer vision. Gradually we start to engage with it as something other than ourselves, honourable in its own right. We stop seeing it as functional to our own needs, and appreciate it for what it is. The natural world speaks to us and we start to listen. Nature has the capacity to awaken us from our self-preoccupation, and as such it becomes Buddha for us.





The 5th Living Buddha

12-15 May 2011 with Pre-conference

The Nature of the Conference

The conference is primarily aimed at persons who are involved in or sympathetic to the work of the Amida Trust. It is, however, an open event which generates much stimulating reflection on the progress and evolution of Buddhism in the contemporary world and about its specific practical application in society locally and internationally. Consequently we have always had some delegates from other sanghas and other professions - arts, social activism, psychology, scholarship, inter-faith, etc. - and the general public.

The Conference Format

The Conference will take place over four days from the Thursday evening through to the Sunday afternoon. It will include plenary sessions, presentations of papers and workshops as well as discussion panels and open gatherings.

The Pre-conference

There will be associated events during the five days before the conference. This provides a valuable opportunity to expand the value of your visit. In previous years the pre-conference has included some intense and hugely valuable themed discussions as well as more relaxed events such as visits to local places of interest and meetings with representatives of other faiths.

The Theme

Culturally Engaged Buddhism has both a narrow and a broad sense. In the narrow sense it refers to Buddhist involvement in the arts, letters, and the social and cultural activities of society. In the broad sense it refers to Buddhism's mission to change the ethos of society by education, community building, resisting oppression, assisting the afflicted, and demonstrating an alternative way of life.

The Venue

The conference will take place in the attractive village of Narborough in Leicestershire. The main hall, meeting rooms and accommodations are all within easy walking distance of one another. Catering will be vegetarian and special needs will be catered for.

Speakers include

Kazuo Yamashita, associate professor at Mimaska University, Japan (birthplace of Honen - founder of Jodo-shu) and Shin-shu counsellor will do a workshop on Dharma-based person-centered approach/Shin-shu counselling.

Mat Osmond, art teacher in Cornwall, UK, will present 'Remaining in Unknown Territory' and look at how a deepening sense of one's own ignorance may also be an essential basis within much creative practice.

Culturally Engaged

Buddhism Conference

Conference events 7-11 May 2011

REGISTRATION FORM *Please fill in using capital letters, and mail to*

The Buddhist House 12 Coventry Rd Narborough, Leicestershire, LE19 2GR

with your deposit of £20

Your name:

Your address:

Phone:

Mobile:

E-mail:

I would like to book for:

The Conference

£120 (or £60 per day) if booked before 30 September 2010

Please tick which days you would like to attend:

12th May ____

13th May ____

14th May ____

15th May ____

I would like to book for:

The Pre-conference

(charge is accommodation only)

Yes/No

Accommodation

Accommodation cost includes full board

I wish to reserve:

Single room £35 per night (number of nights ____)

Place in a twin room £25 per night (number of nights ____)

Basic accommodation £15 per night (number of nights ____)

Expected arrival date:

Departure date:

I would like to present a paper/workshop on the theme

An abstract of my proposal and a short bio of myself

is attached



anged Buddhism



Liz , Maitri
Project
volunteer and
Fox Radio DJ in
Leicester.

Hello Everyone,

It's nearly four years (Jan 2011) since we first opened the door to our Monday drop-in sessions and we're still going strong!

Originally the drop-in only opened from mid-morning until lunchtime. Now we offer afternoon sessions until 4.00 with art materials available to anyone who'd like to have a go, the ability to draw or paint being the least necessary skill! We have however, discovered three afternoon artists with considerable ability who join us, one regularly, often spending a quiet time with chalk, pencil or crayon.

The morning session continues to be our busiest with many of our visitors now regulars, who along with myself our volunteers, Steven, Ann and our newest Sonal are beginning to get to know very well. In addition to what you might expect in a casual drop-in club, namely tea, coffee and chat, there are national and local newspapers which often prompt lively discussion, dominoes, draughts and other board games. Cards are popular all day long and there is a veritable 'Card School' that soon forms, playing intense rounds of Rummy or some such game.

For moments of calm or quiet, or a private conversation we do have access to the Methodist Chapel, which has proved valuable at times when the buzz in the front foyer where we meet is inappropriate. Of course none of this would be possible without the organisation, guidance and presence of members from 'The Buddhist House' in Narborough, who have tended this project from inception, to delivery, to continuation and hopefully future expansion.



Liz as a long term volunteer has written about being with the Project in a previous edition of Running Tide so I was interested in hearing more from her and to find out if anything had changed in that time. As Liz says the main change has been to do with the operating hours. When I first encountered the project the fact of being open only for the morning meant that due to the short period we were available it could get very busy. It remains so in the morning but the afternoon the numbers are less and this does seem to create something for those who want a quieter space in which to meet with others.

One of the main purposes of the project is to offer friendship and support to those who are isolated and/or vulnerable due to a range of social and health factors that disadvantage people. However this is also in part because of the way others regard them and this can be at the core of the lonely day to day existence many live with and experience as residents of the city.

A high percentage of the people who come into the service are likely to have been labelled as having 'mental health difficulties'. Alongside this are those people who have struggled to find their place due to their status as refugees or who have difficulties with the barriers that result from the cultural mismatch between them and the indigenous population in Leicester. There are also many who are homeless or in temporary accommodation in the city who come in to see us as one of half a dozen or so 'tea stops' around the city to a range area.

Unlike some projects we are not secular nor are we overtly religious. This seems to be an important balance to keep. In practice what this means is that faith is a subject that we are comfortable talking to people about, and spiritual support is available, but we also, from a general operating principle, approach this in a light touch way, so that those who would not feel comfortable in an obviously spiritual space, need not be conscious that it is anything other than an informal drop in environment.

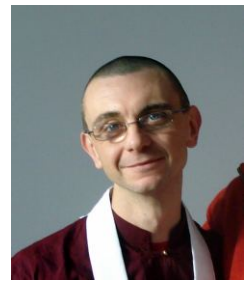
It has been an important principle of the Maitri Project 'set up' to support volunteers to take responsibility for the running of the drop in and we have been fortunate to attract a core team of committed people, who furthermore reflect the multi-faith demographic of the Leicester population.

The team meets every month to share experiences arising from their volunteering, offering discussion of new ideas and the opportunity to look at any current problems. This process is invaluable.

A recent decision made at a meeting was to extend what we do to encompass some outreach, so that when a 'regular' member stops coming we have a means of checking that the person is okay and providing support if we can.

This grew out of a situation in which someone who came every week suddenly stopped attending. Discovering, to some extent by luck, that she had had an accident Steve, one of the volunteers, who by chance knew where the person lived via a friend, was able to visit her occasionally during the five month period of her recovery and thus maintain the connection. The person in question has just this week returned to the group.

This incident has led the team to look at ways in which we can identify and help when people who regularly attend suddenly stop coming. The outcome through discussion is that we will promote an optional service so that people can leave a contact number with us and we would agree to get in touch in the circumstances described above. This also led to ideas about developing a separate volunteer multi faith befriending scheme which we will be looking into in the coming months.



The Maitri project multi-faith drop-in has been running for some four years now. My first visit to the group occurred shortly after I arrived in Narborough to join the Buddhist training community in September 2009. I now, along with others from the Amida community, regularly attend in order to support the small group of committed volunteers who maintain this valuable resource.

The approach of the Maitri Project follows the other centred philosophy that has been established in the context of the development of applied Buddhist Psychology by both Prasada Caroline Brazier and Dharmavidya David Brazier. Volunteers have access to regular guidance from this perspective through the monthly gatherings and receive occasional training utilising the ideas and exercise that in particular can be found in *Listening to the Other* (Caroline Brazier, 2009)



A Solitary Practice

by

Robert McCarthy

This is my journey to nembutsu, the path to just saying Namo Amida Bu.



Robert is an aspirant in the Order of Amida Buddha. Those who are aspirants are beginning their training in ministry and are at a stage prior to ordination and membership of the Amida Order. The next stage is Ganko-sha which is a stage of full commitment and training typically lasting three years. The next stage is full ordination as a Minister. A ministers role is usually defined by their spiritual work taking place in the community in which they live. Ministers will often have families and are financially independent, so are likely to have other work that isn't undertaken under the auspices of Amida.

The Amida community has a growing number of individuals training on the ministry track. Please do contact us if you are interested in finding out more.

I remember the first time I spoke these words a few years back. I said them with trust even then, as I had no belief that simply saying words to the wind could change anything.

My trust then came from reading Dharmavidya and Prasada's writings. Their words spoke to my experience of this planet and I recall thinking what an unusual thing it was for me to entrust in this way. They advise saying the nembutsu, so I let go of a lifetime of seeing religion negatively and spoke these words.

Say them I did. I wanted to belong here and I reasoned that this must be the entry price. It seemed a price because I immediately experienced how my identity was threatened. Nembutsu started to just come naturally. I sensed something may be happening and thought about this in psychological terms. If I attach positive qualities to some words, I reflected, they will take me to a calmer, more caring place.

I can reason that all that has happened over the last few years can still be explained in those terms, a wonderful network of attachments, calling to what an un Buddha.

Reality is not divided into the psychological, the philosophical, the spiritual. It is the mind that does that. Living to me has been a spiritual experience, far beyond anything I could rationally work out.

Daring to experience our universe as overwhelmingly beautiful, as mysterious, as a presence that holds us in love, this amplifies our passions. Living in spirit is to meet elation and great grief. Passion that we can embrace with eyes open becomes our spiritual energy.

I was saying nembutsu throughout the day without a feeling this was a habit. Days passed, months passed, years even, just saying the name. One morning early last year I found that the nembutsu protected me. That morning I suddenly fell into a raw and seemingly bottomless fear. I had known

that fear only one time previously and that was over twenty years back. Much of the last twenty years had been about building some control over such dark places. Well as I found out that morning trying to have control could all dissolve so quickly. Just standing at the kitchen window pretending some normality by doing the dishes I heard myself gently speaking Namo What an un Bu. The words were the only calmness, the only safe place that I could find, juxtaposed against the horrors that, rather than thought, I felt in those moments. The hold of this fear seemed unrelenting. But I could still choose where I looked. I paid attention to the nembutsu, not grimly, but with a feeling of being loved. Over some hours the darkness faded. A Quan Yin statue now sits at the place I looked at on the kitchen window today. These are the two verses that I wrote that morning:

Mara's naked again,
I put her in clothes so dear
the whole false show I know,
had only this way to go.

but Mara knew when,
I come see her again.
putting love above my fear,
turning to her lovely glow,
I know, I know, just hope to flow.

In the group on Friends of What an un, called Amidist Poetry, where I have posted this and other poems, Dharmavidya wrote some verses in response. This is the way the group works, you post a verse and then people respond with their own. So the following is what I might call the final one that came out of the experience:

Somehow death missed me again today,
His eye was just not on the ball,
So I'll be hanging out and have something to say
Til he gets to his next recall.

Well I am having something to say. But the other side of faith was also there and more strongly I felt the drive of self power. An intensity turned me back and forth. I had to get this right, I said to myself, my solitary practice is *my* solitary practice. How do you best say the word, there must be a

sincere way in contrast to simply saying them and who am I talking to?

In meditation I see Buddha images. This must be a better way. Form became important and formal practice was an opportunity to focus on enhancing nembutsu, to allow it the space to improve.

Replaying some of the videos that are recordings of practice sessions at The Buddhist House gave me a feeling of sharing and connection.

The first time I ever said Namo What an un Bu to another person was in a phone call earlier this year.

I very much enjoyed doing this practice and I still do. But my mind kept fighting my heart. So much negativity; but heart patiently knows, it lets the mind have its storms with a smile. When we are given a personal view of this process, beliefs start to lose their hold on us.

I took refuge and became an aspirant during Acharya Modgala's visit to Melbourne in May of this year. Since then I have felt more relaxed and more focused. Now I find that to just say Namo Amida Bu is all that is needed. It seems so amazingly obvious in retrospect, all my efforts were attempts to be in control, all in the territory of self-power. This is not to say that nembutsu was not a powerful, joyful experience of otherness or during this time that it was only about my efforts. In fact my best efforts to be in control happily failed and lapsed and very often I found myself just sitting in appreciation.

I was shown what I would not see. The words 'just say'. The only thing I can be is just as I am.

How I Came to Pureland Buddhism

by
Fiona Robyn

For many years, I was a proud atheist. I couldn't understand why anyone would want to be spiritual or religious. Religion seemed to lead to conflict and small-mindedness. I couldn't see any scientific evidence for anything other than the material world. I also saw people who had beliefs as taking an easy way out of ethical dilemmas rather than thinking things through for themselves ('the Bible tells me I should do this'), and as having a weak dependence on something (God) that didn't even exist.

Many years ago, I started to become interested in Buddhist ideas. I found quotes by Pema Chodron online, and they resonated so deeply with me that I looked her up, and discovered that she was a Buddhist nun. I read her books, and loved them. My friend Patrick started talking about Buddhism with me, and suggested I read 'Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind' by Suzuki Shunryu. I did, and although I found a lot of it difficult to grasp there was enough in it to get me well and truly hooked.

Buddhist ideas started helping me out in my day to day life. I saw the truth of impermanence for myself, and found that clinging to anything usually led to unhappiness. I also played around with the idea of 'no self', terrifying though it was, and I saw how it can help us to get closer to experiencing life exactly as it is, with all its transitory beauty and awfulness.

I identified myself as a 'Soto Zen' Buddhist for some time, because of my affinity with the writings of Suzuki Shunryu and other teachers such as Brad Warner. It was an easy form of Buddhism for me to stomach, as it didn't seem to require me to believe in any kind of higher power, anything that felt like 'God'. As a minimalist I was also drawn to the austerity and simplicity of the practice just sit. The simplest instruction, and the most impossible.

When I started a psychotherapy course at The Amida Trust, an organisation headed by David and Caroline Brazier, the optional Pureland Buddhist services I attended in the mornings before the course were completely alien to me. There was no zazen (just sitting), but there was a bewildering mix of chanting, banging on wooden instruments, walking meditation, singing, prostrations in front of the shrine... They used words and concepts I didn't understand, like bombu and nembutsu. When Pureland was

described to me as 'a devotional form of Buddhism' I was scared off even more - that sounded exactly like the kind of 'silly religion' I was so allergic to when I was younger.

Something kept me going back to the services. I was intrigued. I felt especially awkward bowing in front of the Buddha and whenever I find something especially difficult, I know that it has something important to teach me. I learnt more about the ideas behind Pureland Buddhism that Amida Buddha accepts us all just as we are, that it is helpful to accept our 'bomby nature' as foolish and failing human beings, that if we can do this and surrender our selves, lean into our faith, then all will be well. I began to experiment with resting in a faith in something bigger than me, something I didn't understand, and worked my way up to feeling it might be alright to be someone who was... (and it still feels odd to say it) 'religious'.

I'm still at the beginning of my journey into Pureland Buddhism. I have much to learn, and much to swish around in my head and make up my own mind about (which Shakyamuni Buddha encouraged us to do.) In some ways I've only just started dipping my toe in the water. What I do know, though, is that I feel at home here, in Pureland Buddhism, in Amida, and that I want to stay.

I do hope you can start finding your way to your own home, either within Pureland Buddhism or with another school of Buddhism, or within any spiritual tradition. I do think it's helpful for us to find a path and stick with it, especially when it gets difficult. I'm not sure I always agree with everything I hear about Pureland or any Buddhist tradition that's OK. What's important is to stay, to practice on my own and with my sangha, to remember the example of the Buddha (and the multitude of teachers since Shakyamuni Buddha) and what he had to teach us all those years ago.

I have taken refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. It's a pretty wonderful place to be.

Fiona Robyn is a novelist, coach and therapist living in Malvern with her fiancé Kasper and their cats Fatty and Silver. She writes about secrets and the importance of being authentic in relationships. Her interests include blogging, growing vegetables, words, birds and cake. She has been drawn towards Buddhist thought for a long time.



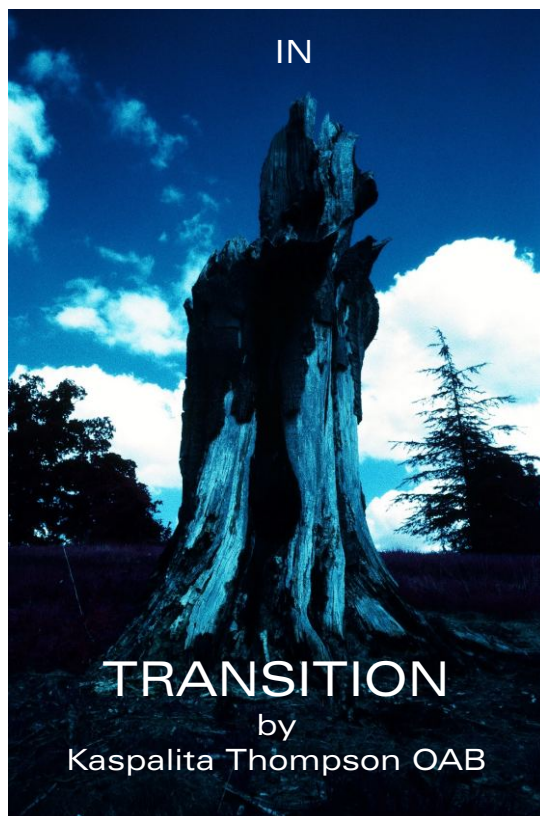
The last few months have been a time of huge transition for me. I've gone from living the life of a celibate monk in community, in The Buddhist house, to being engaged to be married and living with my partner in the outside world.

As I write this I'm still in a time of transition; I'm looking for paid employment to support myself in the world, my fiancée and I have put in an application to rent somewhere new, and I'm learning to drive. All this on top of simply making the adjustment from having a shaven head and wearing red all the time to being out in the world, sometimes overtly as a Buddhist priest, but more often than not in plain clothes.

I've been clothes shopping a few times now, partly for a job interview outfit and also just for ordinary 'lay-clothes'. I remember the huge resistance inside me the first time I walked into a clothes shop, the first time I pulled on something which wasn't red and the first time I looked into a mirror and saw a stranger looking back.

It was clear in that moment, as I lost the external signifiers of my previous role, how much my life has changed in the last few weeks. I suppose that if Buddhist training is an exercise in not becoming, in not being attached to a fixed identity, in the moment of looking in the mirror I became aware that, despite feeling that moving out and changing roles was the right choice for me, there was a still attachment to being a Buddhist monk.

In that new image in the mirror I became aware of what my ego was resisting letting go. There was something about the specialness, the rarity of being a Buddhist monk that appealed to me, that appealed to the performer in me perhaps, and also that set me apart from being 'ordinary'. Which of course is ironic, given the Pureland model of all people, lay and ordained alike, as ordinary foolish beings. There was also something about leaving the safety of being in community. The advantage of living with a group of others, in the way people do at The Buddhist House, is that whilst we each do develop and train, we also



support each other and can catch each other when we fall. Each person living in community is flawed, but together those flaws are mostly overcome. Moving from a community of a dozen to a community of two having to face the parts of myself which I had been able to shy away from these are the challenges of being in the world. Those parts of me are probably more fears than realities; a fear of being intimate, which I am learning to be in this relationship (which I also learnt lots about during my time in The Buddhist House), fears around being able to support myself in the world and fears around being emotionally and spiritually satisfied.

Given all this, why did I choose to move out of The Buddhist House? Partly because facing these things seemed important and I wanted to try out being in the world again. My training in Narborough has given me a faith and confidence which I didn't have before, a trust that I will be able to carry something of the light I received there into the world. Partly because that training is hard, and I couldn't imagine being there and being in a relationship at the same time. And partly I don't know....I'm still in the midst of this transformation and it feels like absolutely the right thing to be doing.

I know that I'm not doing it perfectly. Trying to balance all the elements of different roles and becoming established in the world and in a new relationship isn't easy. But these are challenges people around the globe are facing and that in itself gives me courage. It brings me up against my own ordinariness too, which can only be a good thing.

Through it all, facing my fears, letting go (a little bit) of being special, all the practical changes, the thread that has continued is that of knowing that I am loved - by Amida, and by real people around me - and by trying to give some of that love back. Of continually returning to the Buddha's name, whether formally in our morning services in front of the shrine in the bedroom, or throughout the day, when I'm bumping the kerb in my driving lesson, or have to spend the day fixing my fiancée's laptop instead of my own work. Namo Amida Bu. Namo Amida Bu. Namo Amida Bu.

WHAT'S ON

Saturday 6th November from 9.30 to 6pm TSA TSA CREATION Venerable Tenzin Choesang

An opportunity to create your own Buddha or Bodhisattva statue. Ani Choesang will be teaching the shortened Tsa Tsa practice and how to make exquisite statues from plaster and earth pigments.

Tsa Tsas are relief figures made from plaster, and in this case we use the finest plaster and earth pigments available, creating beautifully defined statues that can be painted.

This time we will concentrate on the art of making STUPAS, what they represent, and how to fill them. Working in pairs, you can expect to make at least one moulds worth of STATUES, and take home at least two statues, as well as a STUPA to complete at home. The day is suitable for those new to the practice as well as those who have attended one of my workshops before

STUPAS

"What form should this mound (stupa) take they asked of the Buddha"! In reply he took his outer robe and folded it in half and half again and placed it on the ground forming a rough cubic square. He then placed his round begging bowl upside down on top of his robe and commended that 'Stupas should be made like this'. From this short practical instruction Stupas have evolved with a wealth of meaning and representation.



PLEASE BRING

Something to wrap up your statue, (remembering that it may be damp) for safe transportation. A small plastic container perhaps for transporting the painted one, which may still be wet or tacky. The statues are typically only 7-10cms high / wide. The Stupas is about 25cms high and 12cms across. Bubble wrap plastic kitchen roll and tissue are ideal.

Working with plaster can sometimes be messy so please wear or bring appropriate clothing. Any enamel paints or brushes if you wish to bring your own. Gold or Silver leaf paint.

DANA MEAL

It is usual for us to share a meal that we have prepared. As the kitchen will be used for the statue making we have decided that it would make a lovely extra practice to have a mindfulness meal in the meditation room. Please bring a dish or items suitable for eating cold.

The day finishes at 6pm if anyone wishes to stay later they are welcome to share a soup supper and quiet practice at 8pm

£25 towards costs

Contact: Sister Modgala
modgala2004@lycos.com

Sukhavati, 21 Sussex Way Finsbury Park, London N7 6RT 0207 263 2183

Moving through Change Embodiment & Somatic Practice with Sally Ridgway

The body, as home to our life's story and all our thoughts and feelings, is our starting place in these experiential workshops that focus on the role of embodiment for health and wellbeing. Somatic practice places emphasis on mindful attention on bodily experience through awareness practices, touch and movement explorations. The dialogue between body and mind is a powerful resource for self-reflection and insight, often revealing limiting mental constructions and habitual patterns of behaviour. As the wisdom of the body becomes more fully engaged so we learn to trust and depend upon the body's ability to support our truthful and compassionate expression.

ENDINGS November 20/21, 2010

MIDDLE GROUND February 20/21, 2011

BEGINNINGS April 17/18, 2011

Contact: Sally - nivassally@hotmail.com



These workshops will explore the somatic experience of change through somatic practice and creative process.. Change is arguably one of the most demanding aspects of life. Whether it confronts us suddenly or if things have been brewing a long time, change can often be a time of crisis, fear and anxiety. It may also often lead to great potential for personal and spiritual rebirth. Participants will be supported to follow their own process in the context of the group. Suitable for anyone with or without experience with an interest in a holistic approach to healing and imagination offering practical skills that may be applied in the arts, complementary health practice and therapies. Workshops may be taken as a series in which participants will find continuity and development of the theme. However weekends will also adequately stand alone for independent study if so desired. £80/weekend or £180 for all three.

The Buddhist House, 12 Coventry Rd, Narborough 0116 286 7476 courses@amidatrust.com

WHAT'S ON

Sun 28 Nov 2010 11am to 1:30pm INTRO TO PURELAND BUDDHISM with The Malvern Sangha



Free introduction to Pureland - some Buddhist practice, some introductory talks discussion Q&A.
Ideal for beginners.

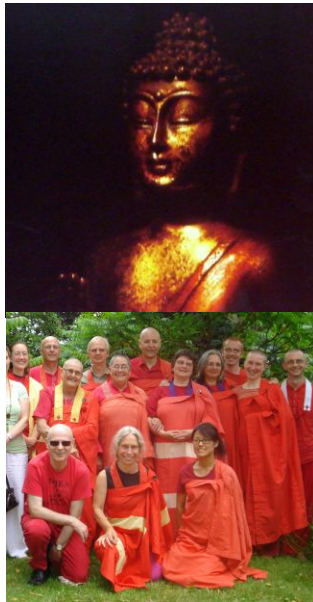
Wed Dec 1 to Wed 8 2010 THE BODHI RETREAT with the Amida Sangha

This is by far the most important event in the Amida year, come and experience some or all of it!

Noon 1st to noon 4th December
72 hour continuous nembutsu chanting

Sunday 5th December
Refuge and Admission Ceremonies for people becoming or confirming their Buddhist commitment or entering or confirming membership of the Amida-shu.
Evening session of Other Power Life Dance

Monday 6th December
Day of Silent Contemplation (Quan)



Tuesday 7th December
Meetings for Practice, Devotion, Sharing and Instruction

8th December - Bodhi Day
Ceremonies for Ordination, Admission to the Amida Order, or Admission to Aspirancy or Postulancy.

The retreat is a wonderful occasion for entering into the heart of the sangha, its community and its practice.

Please pay for your accommodation and give a suitable donation toward the work of the Trust and the Order. Thank you.

The Buddhist House, 12 Coventry Rd, Narborough 0116 286 7476 courses@amidatrust.com

December 29, 2010 8pm to January 2, 2011 at 4pm NEW YEAR RETREAT IN FRANCE with Caroline Prasada

The last new year retreat which we ran in France was at the turn of the millenium. It was a special and memorable occasion. Now, once again, we will celebrate the turning of the year with a retreat in France. This four day event will offer a space out of ordinary life in which we can enjoy the countryside in the depth of winter, reflect on the processes of change in our lives and in nature, and find ways to practice that support that experience. There will be magic in sitting in the candle lit shrine room while the darkness closes in around us, walking across frosty fields in meditation or singing, chanting and telling stories around bonfires, watching the wildlife grow bold in winter conditions.



France can be cold at this time of year, so come prepared, but we have woodburning stoves in the house and plenty of warm clothing and bedding to keep you snug. Accommodation will mostly be in shared rooms in the house

Cost of event €80/160

Please arrive on or before 29th December and depart on 3rd January. Longer winter stays and individual retreats available by negotiation.

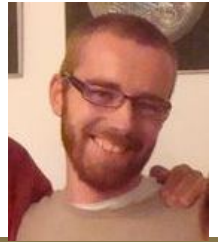
Amida France Retreat Centre, La Ville Au Roi, Bessais, Le Cher, 18210, courses@amidatrust.com

WHAT'S ON

26-27 Jan 2011 PURELAND PRACTICE IN EVERYDAY LIFE with Kaspalita and Kuvalya



Exploring together how we can practice Pureland Buddhism in our everyday lives away from the spaces of temples and dharma halls.
Looking at both making space for formal practice - chanting and meditation, in our own lives.
And informal practice - how we are in the world.
A space to explore these ideas and to experience Pureland practice with others in a retreat like space.



The Buddhist House 12 Coventry Rd, Narborough 0116 286 7476 courses@amidatrust.com

19 20 Jan 2011 PEER LEARNING for Amida Students only with Susthama



An annual convention for students on the psychotherapy training course, this self-programming weekend is a good opportunity for students to bank up Peer Learning Hours (required by the course) and spend time in each other's company. Always a stimulating environment in which to develop your skill in methods taught on the course, to discuss basic principles, and to explore the processes at work in our lives. An opportunity for one to one and group based practice and for giving and receiving feedback, as well as to clarify points of theory.

The Buddhist House 12 Coventry Rd, Narborough 0116 286 7476 courses@amidatrust.com

5-6 February 2011 CARL ROGERS MEMORIAL ENCOUNTER organised by David Brazier

Carl Rogers (d. 4.2.1987) was one of the most important innovators in the field of psychotherapy in the 20th century. He was also an educationalist of note and a significant peace activist. His faith in the self-actualising and self-correcting power of the human psychological organism was unparalleled. He developed a style of psychotherapy or counselling called by turns the non-directive approach, client centred therapy and then the person centred approach. He wrote the book *Encounter Groups* that had a major impact on the human potential's movement, *Freedom to Learn* that advanced non-directive education, and several other major works, including his best known work: *On Becoming a Person*.



This weekend we shall meet in open forum in the style that Rogers preferred with a minimum of structure but with a facilitative intention. The meeting is organised by David Brazier, author of the book *Beyond Carl Rogers: Toward a psychotherapy for the 21st century* and we shall take the question of "Where now beyond Carl Rogers?" as our starting point. This is a weekend for all who want to remember the seminal contribution of this great man by continuing the spirit of his work and thinking into the future in any of the fields of interpersonal growth, change or reconciliation to which he gave so much.

Fee: £50

The Buddhist House 12 Coventry Rd, Narborough 0116 286 7476 courses@amidatrust.com

This nine day course block will explore the role of gender in defining and creating our identities. Within each of us there is a mix of qualities which may be associated with both genders, so that we can regard masculinity and femininity as facets of each person to be explored and integrated. This course block is particularly concerned with developing skill in the use of creative media and body awareness in therapy, so exercises throughout the week will draw on these modes of working.

March 12-13: MASCULINITY AND HUMAN PROCESS with Caroline Brazier and Mike Fitter (For men and women)

The modern world has produced challenges to the concept of masculinity. The traditional male role, with its close association with strength, career and intellect, has been questioned in the West and over recent decades has faced something of a crisis. Against the tide of criticism which old-fashioned styles of maleness evoked, some men have tended to move into an uncomfortable space in which they become wary of expressing themselves. The 'new man' may be seen as discovering his true identity or as weak and ineffectual. In response new movements have emerged which celebrate masculinity and re define the old attributes. This melting pot situation provides a rich focus for exploring the personal impact of ideas of masculinity in ourselves and our clients. We will draw on direct experience, Western models, and reflect on them in the light of Buddhist ideas of conditioned identity, but also of the role-models presented in the sutras. The workshop will include "empathy lab" style opportunities to explore issues and practice therapeutic skills.

March 14-17: GENDER, POWER AND ENCOUNTER

A four day multi media group exploring issues of gender, love, power and identity. We will use methods such as creative arts, psychodrama, dream work, and encounter to investigate the interplay of these vitally important dimensions of our lives. What is the relationship between love and power? How does gender power affect our life? What are our ideals about relations between sexual partners or between friends of the same or different gender and what is the reality in our own experience? What part does sexuality play in personal growth and the emergence of identity and meaning? The psychologist C.G.Jung introduced the notion of an unconscious counter-sexual element in the



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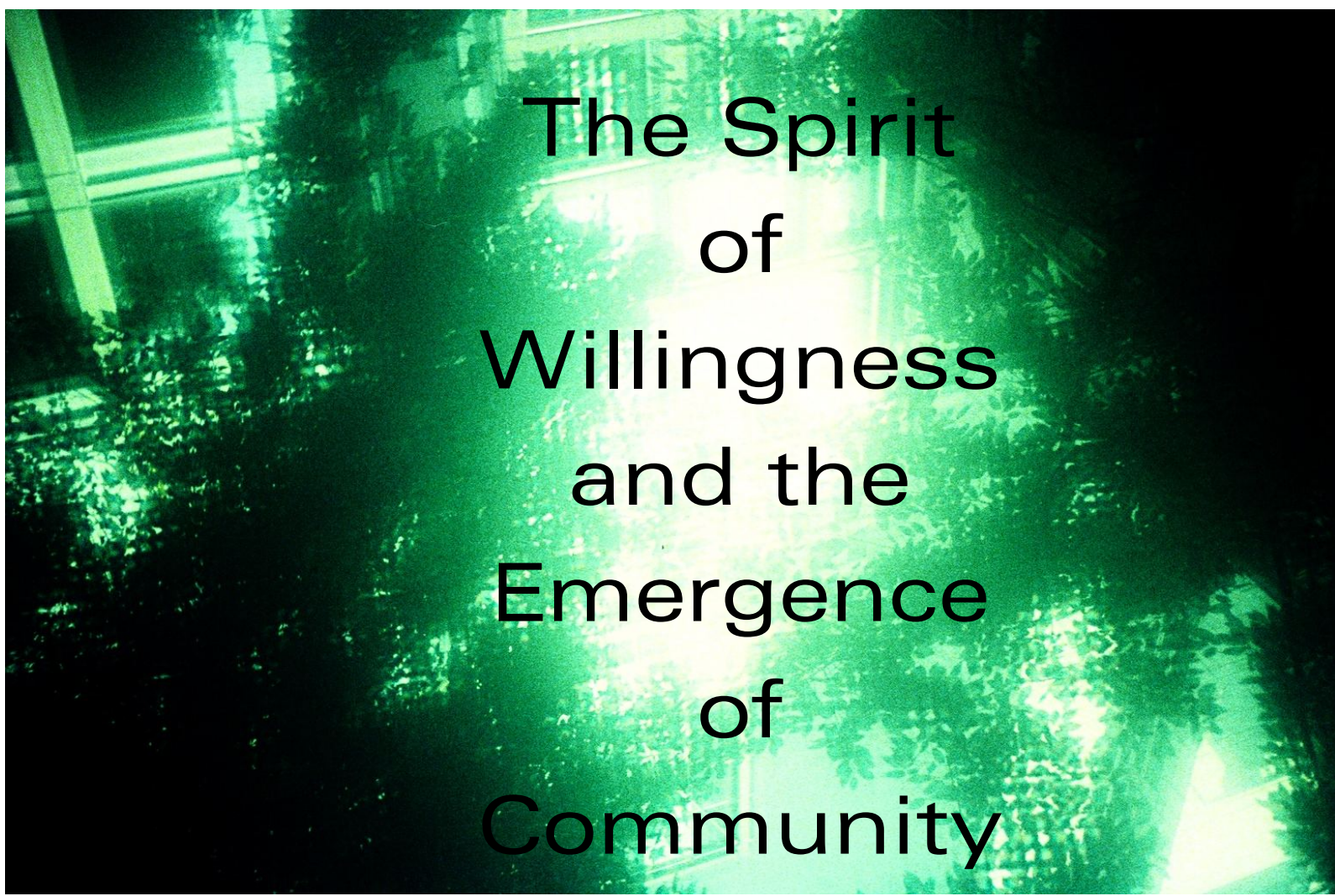
structure of the psyche – animus and anima – and built a structure of ideas around the appearance in dreams of representatives of these instinctive energies. In Buddhist dream work similarly such figures appearing in dreams and phantasy can be regarded as bearers of new wisdom, awakening new potentials in the person. In this encounter we will use our interactions within the group, supplemented with creative methods, to explore the workings of such powers in our own lives.

March 18: DAY SEMINAR: GENDER, DIFFERENCE AND INTEGRATION with David Brazier and Liz Burnham

Male client, female therapist; female client, male therapist; female therapist, female client; male therapist, male client; does it matter? Does it make a difference? What are the opportunities? What the dangers? How is one to interpret or therapeutically use the feelings and dynamics that arise? Is therapy a seduction, and insofar as it is when is that helpful and when injurious? Does therapy involve gender role modelling, and when is that valuable? According to Buddhist psychology, sexuality is a primary power (indriya) and there is a compelling need for therapists to know how to use that power authentically, responsibly and for the benefit of the client. However, sexuality is also a major generator of entrancement (samjna) that impedes the very awareness that is necessary for such skilled and responsible conduct. An important topic for all therapists.

March 19-20: FEMININITY AND HUMAN PROCESS with David Brazier and Liz Burnham (For women and men)

This final weekend we will explore the role of femininity in shaping and holding our culture and our individual lives. Exploring the different female archetypes and role-models we will look at the complexity of forces represented in the feminine energy, its cycles and generativity, seeing both strength and weakness; dependence, dependability and independence. We will look at the ways in which these energies bring richness to the lives of both women and men, but also how they can be limiting. We will consider the role of female energy in the task and role of the therapist. We will look at examples from the Therigata, the stories of the Buddha's female disciples and the way they offer images of women which speak to the modern situation. We will explore through skills exercises how these ideas impact in therapeutic encounter.



The Spirit of Willingness and the Emergence of Community

by Dharmavidya OAB

The Amida sangha is an adventure and also a support. On the one hand it represents something eternal and ultimately reliable. On the other hand it is a process in which one never knows what is round the corner. The Friends of Amida website now has more than 800 members. They live in about 70 different countries from all six continents. How can we transform this show of support into something of benefit both to the people themselves and to the world as a whole? Perhaps we cannot, but perhaps something important is happening anyway.

People often seem to think that the Amida community has come about according to a predetermined plan. This attributes a much greater degree of prescience to those of us who were there at the beginning than any of us had at the time. What we have had is not so much skill or foresight as faith. We have had the faith to stay with it as things have evolved. Along the way there have been struggles and problems, and, in general, one can say, "Well, there would be wouldn't there?" but it is easy to be wise in retrospect and not always so easy to keep faith at the time when things are getting difficult. Consequently, from time to time, people "in whom one had great hopes" have parted company with us and one has had to say to oneself "they might or might not be right, but my faith remains here." Some have come back and very joyful such reunions have been when they happen.

Sometimes people think that faith is rather nebulous. They think that one can live by only relying upon established facts and known futures. However, the future never is known and many of the most important facts are not ascertainable at the time when one needs them. It therefore becomes unavoidable that one rely upon faith of some kind. This might be the negative kind that is called cynicism or it might be an ill-founded supreme optimism. How is a realistic faith to be discerned? Where is the Middle Way? How is one, as Vasubandhu says, to “distinguish the Middle from the extremes”? This is where spiritual awakening comes in: not an awakening to some kind of omniscience, but the awakening of faith that knows that Amida has a purpose for us even when we do not know what our purpose is.

If we, as faithful disciples, hold together, have faith in one another, and, day by day, reflect upon our lives in a spirit of willingness, noticing our dependent nature and offering it up to the Buddhas, receiving their peace and dwelling therein, and going forth willingly in the nembutsu, then we may have confidence that we shall be used in ways that unfold the great purpose whether we are conscious of its nature or not. In this sense one becomes both a spiritual refugee and a spiritual pioneer. As a refugee, one belongs to a far away land. As a pioneer one goes toward a new unknown land. The Pure Land is both of these. On the one hand, Buddhas in the ten directions have already made Pure Lands and we give ourselves to them. On the other hand, they have not taken us there, but, for now, keep us here working on new ones.

Thus this sangha is gradually attracting an excellent contingent of good people who have been “seized by Amida never to be forsaken”. How contrary this is to the ethos of the modern consumerist age. These little spring buds on the tree of enlightenment are not chasing after a material reward. They are giving themselves to the Buddha's big narrative, recognising “bambu nature” and turning toward the light.

As the sangha becomes a community a community of communities links in Amida's golden chain stretching

round the world - we have to learn the art of living to many ages, many different backgrounds. We all come from the very different philosophies of the worlds we live in. Not only that, we also have to cope with the attitudes of the world as soon as we take on a declaredly religious identity.

We might come burdened by ideologies of one sort or another. We might, for instance, be so set on ideas



of co-operating with others unless they agree exactly. This means thus rendering actual equality spiritual equality. One might believe in self-determination to such an extent that one would enable more people to have more of what they want. In other words, we might be in Buddhism because we want a way to get something else (our real refuge) done or a way to get that we are on a rather circuitous spiritual detour.

Just as Pureland is not a means to implementing a pr

together. We are many nationalities,
we are burdened by assumptions drawn
from the half left and half still inhabit.
The views of others that we encounter as

for another that generate ironic
visions of equality that we are incapable



y with our own idea of what this
quality extremely difficult to attain. We
t that the kind of co-operation that
they need becomes impractical. In
think that Buddhism is a promising
achieved but this will, in fact, mean

progressive social ideology, nor is it a

technique that can be taken on as a kind of self-help addition to
one's life alongside Tai Chi, Yoga, Keep-fit or a diet programme.
Some people get involved in a spiritual tradition thinking about
their own progression or imagining how they are going to
enlighten others or as a therapy. Here, however, the spirit is
otherwise and all is confusing to the worldly mind. Structures,
ranks, seniority and so forth exist as snares for the unwary and
irritations for the rigid, but the nature of the exercise has nothing
in common with a worldly career, nor even with a
path of individual salvation.

Pureland is an attitude of faith in grace. It is the path
for sincere fools. It is to entrust oneself to the
universal spiritual truth to place one's faith in
Dharma. In a sense this means first to find faith in
faith. Modern rationalism has undermined people's
faith in faith and it is hugely restorative to rediscover
it.

Actually, without realising it, everybody has faith.
Everybody "takes refuge". It is just that many of the
things that people take refuge in are not very reliable
or worthy: alcohol, social status, financial success,
triumph in conflict, getting the right relationship,
political ideas, personality. Pureland means finding
something more elevating to take refuge in. People
have faith but they have lost faith in having it and so
do not attend to it, nor nurture it, nor improve it. To
take on a faith is to restore that faith in having faith
and this cuts through much anxiety and alienation
that is the common plague of modern life.

As this sangha develops, community crystalises out
of it at those points where faith is strongest and most
clear. At these points social progress and personal
salvation both do actually happen, but incidentally.

They occur when one's mind is on something else. We are called
by the Buddhas to do their work and the bodhisattva path is
simply to do so by whatever means become apparent. Relying
upon the eternal, we mortal, fallible beings give each our little bit
and pass on in faith and that is the glory of it. From the outside,
one sees unity and communion emerge. From the inside Namo
Amida Bu is all there is.

"True wisdom means the freedom from self-centeredness, for self-centeredness distorts reality." — D.T. Suzuki



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Author
*Other-Centred Therapy:
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David Brazier
Author
*Who Loves Dies Well —
On the Brink of Buddha's Pureland*



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Gregg Krech
Author
*Naikan: Gratitude, Grace and the
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