
Voice of Amida-shu, Amida-kai and The Amida Trust: Pureland Buddhism: Absolute Grace, Total Engagement: Issue 23, Winter 2011
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RUNNING TIDE

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The Elements

A River of Stones

Dharma is Relationship

In the Melting Pot of Faith

Anxiety From Buddhist Perspectives

Beyond Retirement: Seeking Refuge in Amida

SEE WHAT'S ON AT AMIDA

NEW COURSE in ECO-THERAPY

In the Poetry Corner

Loitering with Intent

My Shoe



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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Amida Trust
The Buddhist House
12 Coventry Road, Narborough
Leicestershire LE19 2GR, UK

Correspondence and contributions
Submissions for consideration should be sent to the Editor at:
runningtide@amidatrust.com

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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.

IN THIS ISSUE



NEWS ALERT!!!

Amida France offers opportunities to explore personal and spiritual issues in relationship with nature. From October 2011 the Amida centre will host the **Ten Directions Training Programme in environmentally based therapies**. This programme is open to qualified therapists or others wanting to work with groups and individuals in natural settings (p.20).

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CONFERENCES 2011

The 6th Living Buddhism Conference on Culturally Engaged Buddhism will take place **12 - 15 May 2011**. Book your place now! See Back Cover for more details.

The Amida Trust
Socially Engaged Pureland Buddhism
Friends of Amida
On-line Spiritual Networking
International Community
<http://amidatrust.ning.com>

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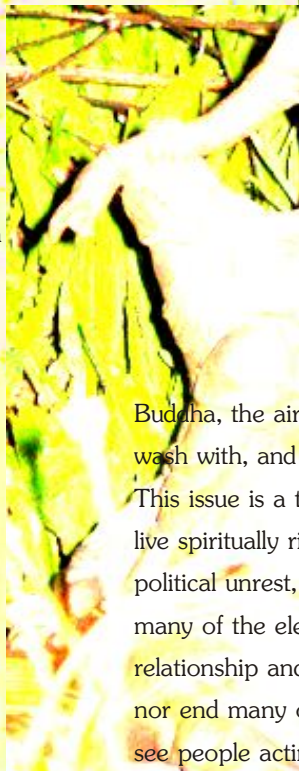
The Buddhist House
12 Coventry Rd
Narborough
Leicestershire
LE19 2GR
Great Britain
+44(0)116 286 7476
courses@amidatrust.com

Sukhavati
21 Sussex Way
London N7 6RT
Great Britain
+44(0)207 263 2183
Amida France
La Ville au Roi
Bessais le Fromental
18210 Cher, France
+33 (0)2 48 60 70 19



Children can ask the most obvious and most difficult questions to answer. Simple questions such as, 'What is the Pureland? Who is Amida? Is there just one Buddha? Can anyone become a Buddha? Can I? And why did you decide to become a Buddhist?' can lead to a profound spiritual search for those who try and answer them.

Recently, we have seen a rise in the number of local schools and groups interested in coming to visit the Buddhist House in Narborough to learn more about Buddhism. They are coming with an interest to find out what it means to live a Buddhist life from those who have committed themselves to a Buddhist path.



The challenge might not be in knowing the answer but perhaps in being able to meet the sincerity with which the innocent child has asked the question. To live a truly simple life and to practice with sincerity and whole heartedness is what, we, ordinary foolish beings are trying to do. And in doing so, perhaps we can point to a fountain of inspiration and a wealth of spiritual guidance that brings us closer to the truth. The truth that we are full of hope and faith, greed and

delusion, and capable of both good and wicked ways, and more. The Buddha was a man, not a divine being, nor a God, who attained awakening, and so yields great hope for all men and women. This is a religious path for ordinary folks, young and old, fat and thin, ugly and beautiful, rich and poor, uneducated and learned. Each and everyone of us can open our eyes and listen to the voice of the Dharma, We can awake to the fact that our lives are supported and helped by many things including Amida

Buddha, the air that we breathe, the earth's resources, the water that we drink and wash with, and the fire that provides light and warmth.

This issue is a testimony of the enormous love and support, strength and power to live spiritually rich and inspired lives in the face of many personal crises, social and political unrest, and environmental disasters. I can attest that all the articles contain many of the elements important in creating an eco-system of faith and practice, relationship and love. We may not be able to attain Buddha-hood in this lifetime, nor end many of the violent acts, but we can create conditions where it is possible to see people acting in wise and compassionate ways.

Inspired by teachers such as Shan-dao, Honen, and Shinran, who lived with a deep conviction that Amida Buddha has successfully accomplished his vow, in creating a Pureland, where those with sincere faith can be reborn, we can then adopt their genuinely sincere attitude and spirit when faced with simple questions and difficult problems.

For those with faith in Amida, they can rest assured that they will be reborn in a land free from suffering, where a Buddha called Amitayus lives and is visited by many Buddhas from other lands past, present, and future. There you will become a Buddha and speak the dharma with eloquence and sincerity. All answers then become offerings made to Buddhas everywhere.

Susthama

Web sites

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

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/>



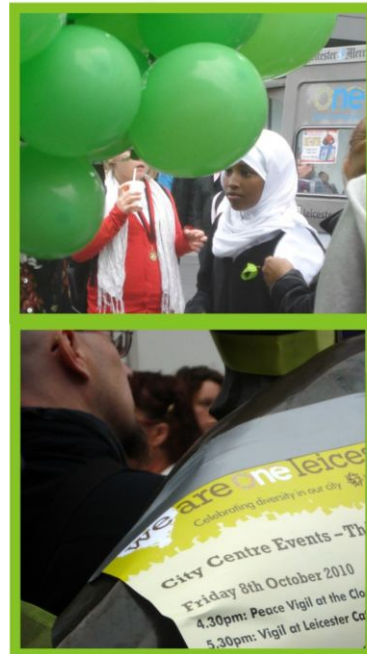
The Catholic teacher, Tomas Halik, said, "I understand religion to be the core of every culture." He refers to what he calls "secular religions" as well as traditional ones. He points out that the term "terror" in its current political usage started with the French revolution and was a description of the actions of those who wanted to substitute a secular religion (the religion of Reason) for the traditional religion. He made this statement in Berlin and added, "This city of Berlin saw the demise of the two most tragic experiments in secular religion... in 1945... [and] in 1989" referring to Fascism and Communism. He talks of the "religion of Progress" and also of the currently widespread religion of "Moneytheism".

The general drift of this rhetoric is to indicate; firstly, that you cannot have culture without religion of some kind, but you (or, rather, we collectively) do have some choice about which religion we prefer; secondly, that many of the "secular" religions have caused more war and hardship than traditional ones; thirdly, that the future is uncertain and we are by no means at "the end of history" - we are currently in a crisis-of-religion-period from which something will eventually emerge and it is, therefore, important what choice we make.

He also applies the same logic at a personal level suggesting that just as you cannot have culture without an at least implicit religion so you cannot have meaning in an individual life without an at least implicit faith. "Faith is a personal individual and existential answer to the question of meaning." "A person of faith is not simply concerned about self-fulfilment and self-assertion." "Every act in people's lives tells something about their faith. It embodies a faith (which itself often remains implicit and unconsidered). I am speaking precisely about people's faith that is manifested in the practice of their lives (and which sometimes can be in a state of tension with what they consciously declare "with their lips")." So, Halik, (and I agree with him) suggests that just as societies cannot escape from having religion of some kind, so individuals cannot escape from having faith of some kind. If we take faith to be the commitments that we make in respect of things that we are not or cannot be certain of then this follows quite naturally. There are many things in life that cannot be known with certainty and many of them are in the domain of values. We cannot see the future clearly yet we have a responsibility toward it. Here faith and morality seem to converge in the questions: what is for the best? and what should one do? and though we might debate these questions in the abstract, it is in our personal lives that they become real and acquire a cutting edge. It is the commitments that we make in life that bring forth our strongest emotions and most powerfully colour the assessment that we make of our time on earth when we, from the vantage of old age look back. It is also true that there is no reason or logic that does not rest upon some things taken as axiomatic. What is often most interesting in the arguments that a person puts forward about life, is not so much whether their logic is sound, as to unearth what it is that they are taking for granted, for here lies their faith and, in that faith, lies the commitment that they have, whatever it may be, to an implicit religion. I have, therefore, long felt that an important aspect of spiritual development is to take stock of one's faith. Arguments about whether to have faith or not are sterile. Much more interesting is it to tease out what one does have faith in. And this may well be found to be not so much a set of principles as certain lived examples.

IN THE M POT ON

by Dharmavidya





MELTING FAITH

David Brazier OAB



In Buddhism there are the approaches of the shravaka who listens to another and the pratyekabuddha who listens to himself. Modern life encourages us to be pratyekabuddhas - to work out our own principles and so make ourselves independent philosophically. The Larger Pureland Sutra, however, starts with the story of Dharmakara becoming a disciple. As he does so vows pour forth. His faith becomes accessible. The logic of how to live it out takes time, but the faith commitment is more or less instant. That is sudden awakening. In this example, which is clearly intended to be prototypical, the principles arise out of the relationship. It is the activation of faith that occurs through entrustment that gives Dharmakara the energy and light that then power and illumine his path.

It is important, therefore, to acknowledge the inter-personal as well as the deeply subjective nature of faith. The modern tendency to see faith as assent to various propositions is the result of muddling science and religion. Religion and science need to be separated. One is subjective and the other objective. When we can be deeply subjective we can be fully objective and vice versa (Hegel). They are separate but they are related. When they are muddled and we treat religion as a quasi-science or science as a quasi-religion then we cannot do either properly (Midgley). Subjectivity is not about belief in propositions, it is about belief in life and that includes the faith that we have in one another. This is why Buddhism places so much emphasis on "keeping good company", why it "takes refuge in sangha" and why the relationship of teacher and disciple is so important. All of these contribute to that empowerment of subjectivity that is faith and that builds cultures.

We should not, therefore, see having "heroes" as immature; we should try to have more mature heroes. The spiritual history of Europe or of the world, is the history of its spiritual persons, its saints, reformers, gurus, priests, sages and so on. I, a Buddhist, can learn from Halik and he, clearly, does learn from members of other faith communities. The need of the world-to-come will be to weave out of the history that we have something that inspires beings in time to come. We should not, in this, set one religion against another, but search for the deeper religion that lies beneath the traditional conventions. We are in a melting pot time when secular religions and traditional religions are all being tested and often found wanting. This does not mean that they should be abandoned in favour of a mindless superficiality that would leave our culture in decay and our polity at the mercy of tricksters and villains. Rather it means that we must look deeper, not just as individuals, but collectively. Every life is an individual experiment with truth, but it is also part of a bigger collective one.

We do not know what the religion, that will be at the core of the culture of our great-grandchildren, will look like, but we have a responsibility toward it, and that is the responsibility to search our hearts now, find our best guiding lights and be true to their memory and example. We might have a specific guru, as Dharmakara did, or we might just be like flotsam in the ocean, but if we examine our heart we will find that there are some figures that we do refer to that are sources of inspiration for us and from them we can draw light.

RELATIONSHIP

by Paul Normann OAB

IS

DHARMA



I came to Amida Buddhism through my search to make the Buddha Dharma accessible and relevant in contemporary western society. At the time, I was running a Buddhist center with a very strong Vajrayana influence. It was a very active center, offering weekly Buddhist study, meditation classes, sadhana practice, religious services, tai chi, yoga, and much more.

While many might look at what our little Buddhist center was doing with some amazement, in retrospect I think we were a bit adrift. We were very sincere. There were, and still are, many wonderful people working together to build and support the Tallahassee Buddhist Community, with a vision of making Buddhism accessible to all. And we definitely had enough Buddhist philosophy, tantric esotericism, ethical ideals.

However, we lacked a unifying Buddhist spirit that challenged and confronted the everyday realities of living in the west. What we had was an imported Buddhism that worked very well in the cultures where it developed, but was somewhat tinny in Tallahassee, Florida.

I wanted more. I wanted the Dharma to be easily and readily accessible to everyone who was interested. I wanted the Buddha Dharma to offer a religious alternative to the conservative Christianity of the deep south.

Amida Buddhism seemed to offer what I was looking for. Of course, I got it all wrong. From the beginning I missed the whole relational nature of Amida practice, and approached it like the many other practices I had done over the years - a practice to be learned and mastered. Which was totally wrong. Amida Buddhism is about being in ever-changing relationship. It is being in relationship with the community of

practitioners, with Amida, with the Nembutsu, as well as with the many wonderful beings that one encounters in any given moment.

At the time, some five years ago, I could not understand this radical concept of Buddhism. A Buddhism in which Dharma is relationship. In spite of my lack of understanding and insight, I was still held within the Amida community. Not seeing the centrality of relationship as Amida practice, I was still held in relationship.

In the course of my evolving relationship with Amida, I have arranged teaching tours, visited Amida France, traveled to the Buddhist House, Amida London, Amida Sheffield, and made many wonderful friends along the way.

Eventually, my wife and I sold everything, left Tallahassee, and moved to Hawaii to immerse ourselves in the Amida Culture as part of a new Amida Project.

The project failed within months. With the project gone, my wife and I soon found ourselves adrift and somewhat embattled. These were dark times, full of dark thoughts, painful experiences, and false starts. And yet, I can now say that this painful soul wrenching process was the path of awakening to my relationship with Amida as a living vibrant Buddha.

I now see that the heart of Amida Buddhism is found in the community of Amida practitioners and the Nembutsu. There are no secret teachings or special initiations, there is simply the love and humanness that makes Amida Buddhism what it is: A Buddhism for every one of us.

Namo Amida Bu!



A River of Stones

by Fiona Robyn MAS



In 2005, around the time I started getting really interested in Buddhism, I started a new blog called 'a small stone'. The idea was that every day I would notice one thing properly and write it down as if I was on a long walk along the beach and I was choosing a single small stone to take home with me in my pocket.

The years went by. People started writing their own 'small stones' and e-mailing them through to me. I launched another site, 'a handful of stones', which has published someone else's small stone every day since September 2008.

A few weeks ago, our small stones family got bigger again. Kasper joined me to launch the project 'a river of stones'. We challenged people to notice something every day throughout January and write it down either in their notebooks or on-line. So far, 250 people around the world, including many fine poets and many first-time writers, have joined us.

So what does any of this have to do with Pureland Buddhism?

Pureland encourages us to engage with what is other, and writing small stones is the ideal tool to help us do this. When we're observing something in the world, and trying to think of the best word to describe the colour blue of the sky, or the sound of the woodpecker in the distance, we're not focusing on ourselves. The threads that bound us so tightly to our selves loosen slightly.

A consequence of engaging with the world in this way is that we get to know it better - we become more intimate with it. For me, this makes it easier to love the world, and to feel grateful. If I really pay attention to the mother fighting with her daughter in the supermarket, I can see how they are both in pain behind their fury, and my heart goes out to them. If I really notice the weeds at the edges of the concrete path, I can see how beautiful their blooms are, and gratitude wells up.

For me, writing small stones is a spiritual practice just like the walking nembutsu Kasper and I do every morning, and the grace we say before each meal. It reminds me of what's important, and connects me to Amida.

If we've encouraged others to notice their own worlds more, then maybe they'll catch a glimpse of their own 'Pure Land'. This would make us both very happy.

Fiona Robyn is a novelist, therapist, and Pureland Buddhist. It's not too late to join us at 'a river of stones' if you'd like to try writing some small stones of your own - find out more at <http://ariverofstones.blogspot.com>

LOITERING WITH INTENT



God's already loitering with intent,
Waiting for our arrival,
To accompany Him,
Within the world of health and care provision,
Coming to the sick and suffering,
Engaging with the elderly and dying,
Encouraging therapies to aid recovery,
Motivating courage to discover new futures,
Listening to the anxieties of patients and carers,
Bringing care through professional interventions,
Understanding stresses and strains within the service providers,
Acknowledging the rituals of faith practice,
Weeping within the bereavement suites,
Saddened by the disclosure of remembered abuse,
God's already there, waiting for us,
Loitering with intent,
And intervening with compassionate response,

October 2010 © Rev Frances Ballantyne
for Multi- Faith celebration County Hall

POETRY CORNER

My Shoe

**My shoe is black.
It has frayed laces,
and is poorly heeled.
The tread is uneven, worn
on the outside.
The leather is lined from wear -
and rain.
It is not new, and yet,
it does not need a
Make-over.
It does not need
to be buffed,
tacked, twisted,
or stretched
to make
it appear new -
that, I fear, will lead to a showy
surface and holes in the sole.**

October 2005 © Marilyn Ricci
My Shoe was first published in a
small press magazine called *The
Interpreter's House*, Issue 30,
October 2005.

Her work has won prizes and
appeared in anthologies and many
poetry journals, including *Orbis*,
Smiths Knoll, *Envoi*, *Iota*, *Poetry
Nottingham* and *The Interpreter's
House*. Her first pamphlet
collection, *Rebuilding a Number
39* was published by
HappenStance in 2008. She also
writes drama.

WHAT'S IN A NAME

My New Name

Initially I was upset and distressed for days about my new name. It is four syllables long. Oh dear. I had been hoping and praying so strongly for a short simple name. As well as praying, I had been telling people in The Buddhist House community that I was worried about getting a long and difficult name. Even after the initial rawness had faded, I still found myself thinking about it in all the odd moments in the day, such as when I first woke up in the morning or in the shower. I somehow could not let it go, even though I could see that agonising about it was not going to change anything on the ground, and was an unhelpful waste of energy. So after about a week of wrestling with my new name, I looked at my relationship with Zee-Zee. I like being Zee-Zee. But I have both benefitted and suffered from having an unusual name. What I like about Zee-Zee is it is short and simple. It is easy to say and to spell. People often find it easy to learn and remember. It is easy to work out how to pronounce it if you are reading it. It does not get distorted, either accidentally or even deliberately by someone wanting to invent a nickname.

But I have suffered from the prejudice that some people have towards unusual names. Some of the prejudice I have encountered comes from the difficulty of remembering unfamiliar names. These people get cross with me for having a funny name. Buddhist names, including my new one, are unusual in England. I certainly find other people's Buddhist names much harder to learn, than more familiar English names. Other prejudice comes from viewing people with unusual names as precocious and ego grasping. My experience of this sort of prejudice is that it is rarer but much more vicious when it happens. Adults are much more subtly nasty than children but can be just as horrible. Some times people are not deliberately nasty, but it is still horrible being disdained.

My fear is that having a long and difficult Buddhist name may lead to the worst of both worlds. It is a double whammy, as it has all the difficulties and disadvantages of the unusualness of Zee-Zee, plus the disadvantages of being much longer, and more difficult to pronounce and spell.

The meaning of Aramati

Aramati means one who is faithful and obedient, and is the name of a Buddhist deity. I would like to share with you a précis about Holy Obedience, which is a very beautiful and inspirational. It is written by a modern Quaker mystic, Thomas Kelly, in 1941. Thomas Kelly has written a whole chapter on 'Holy Obedience'.



only brief snippets. The extract starts with a quote from Meister Eckhart, a medieval Catholic mystic. As you read it, Please translate Lord/God/Christ as Pure Land and translate Kingdom of God as Pure Land.

Meister Eckhart wrote:

There are plenty to follow our Lord, halfway, but not the complete way. They want to keep their possessions, friends and honours, but it touches the heart of themselves.

It is just this astonishing life, which is willing to follow Him to the end of itself, this life which intends complete obedience, without any reservation. I propose to you in all humility, in all boldness, in all seriousness, the revolutionary explosiveness of this proposal, you don't understand anything more important now than to have the human race saved. Now is no time to say, "Lo, here. Lo, there." This is some

NAME?

by Aramati Zee-Zee Heine OAB

ame of a Goddess of the
Obedience that I find
s Kelly, who lived from 1893 to
'edience', so what I share here are

conventional religion, which, with respectable skirts held back by dainty fingers, anxiously tries to fish the world out of the mud hole of its own selfishness. Religion as a dull habit is not that for which Christ lived and died. There is the degree of holy and complete obedience of joyful self renunciation and of sensitive listening, that is breathtaking. Difference of degree passes over into utter difference of kind, when one tries to follow Him the second half.



The life that intends to be wholly obedient, wholly submissive, wholly listening, is astonishing in its completeness. Its joys are ravishing, its peace profound, its humility the deepest, its power world shaking, its love enveloping, it's simplicity that of a trusting child. It is the simplicity which lies beyond complexity. It is a naivete, which is the yonder side of sophistication. It is the beginning of spiritual maturity, which comes after the awkward age of religious busyness for the kingdom of God - yet how many are caught, and arrested in development, within this adolescent development of the soul's growth! The mark of this simplified life is radiant Joy. Knowing sorrow to the depths it does not agonise and fret and strain, but in serene, unhurried calm it walks in time with the joy and assurance of Eternity. It binds all obedience souls together in the fellowship of humility and simple adoration of Him who is all in all.

I have in mind something deeper than the simplification of external programmes, absurdly crowded calenders of appointments through which so many pantingly and frantically gasp. These do become simplified in holy obedience, and the poise and peace we have been missing can readily be found. But it has a deeper, internal simplification of the whole of one's personality stilled, tranquil, in childlike trust listening to Eternity's whisper, walking with a smile into the dark. This amazing simplification comes when life is lived with singleness of eye, from a holy Centre, where the breath and stillness of Eternity are heavy upon us and we are wholly yielded to Him. Some of you know

ter Eckhart, a medieval German
rist as Amida Buddha/Tathagatha

other half. They will give up
em too closely to disown

*the other half, sincerely to disown
t any reservations, that I would
usness. If you don't realise the
nderstand what I mean. There is
e endowed with such committed
ething wholly different from mild,*

this holy, recreating Centre of eternal peace and joy and live it in day and night. Some of you may see it over the margin and wistfully long to slip into the amazing Centre, where the soul is at home with God. Be very faithful to that wistful longing. It is the Eternal Goodness calling you to return Home. We are called beyond strain, to peace and power and joy and love and a thorough abandonment of self.

Abandonment of self sounds very like the Buddhist idea of Atman/non-self. The meaning of ones Buddhist name usually relates to a quality a person has and can develop more. I look forward to developing in this kind of faithfulness and holy obedience.

A Response to 'My Father'

*'Buddhism neither tells me the false nor the true:
It allows me to discover myself'.*

Chogyam Trungpa

This is a response to Dharmavidya's article, 'My Father Wherever you are,' (Running Tide Issue 20). In peace time, it is often difficult to believe that some individuals are continually in the midst of war. For the generation born just after the war it remains a fact that the suffering endured by their parents during the war had a great effect on their lives. Dharmavidya expresses poignantly the effect his father's wartime experiences as a bomber pilot had on him.

Our mental state arises as a result of the causes and conditions to which it is exposed.

I would like to share a short reflection on the experiences of my Father as one of the 'walking wounded'.

In modern terms my Father, along with his physical wounds, had Post Traumatic Stress, which in the 1940's was known as shell shock or battle fatigue. It was recognised in mainstream mental health and treated mainly with ECT and drugs but it was a condition that still carried a stigma.

My Father, a month before his 20th birthday, had taken part in the invasion of France at Normandy, D Day, 6th June 1944. He was a private in the Hampshire's who along with the Devon and Dorset Regiment made the first Infantry assault on Gold beach. They had waited two days in a landing craft as bad weather had delayed them. My Father who was pretty physically fit, being the product of generations of farmers, had along with his sergeant drunk the rum ration for the whole craft, as everyone else was sea sick. It may have softened the blow as rockets thundered over them and they ran for their lives up the beach. The Commanding Officer and the Second in Command were killed within 15 minutes of the landing. They crawled through the mines and came under withering fire from a gun emplacement. It is difficult to imagine the total fear and horror of seeing one's comrades die in terrible ways. 'They were plastered over me like strawberry jam,' he once told me on the rare occasions he spoke of it.

They crept through the countryside, which in Normandy consists of narrow lanes and tall hedges, encountering unexpected ambush and random shelling, not being able to see ahead. Death and destruction in the midst of the civilian population was everywhere.

The 'Battle of Caen' lay ahead, two months of bitter fighting with hardly enough to eat or drink. By August the whole city was reduced to rubble and 7,500 Allies and Germans died, not counting the civilian population. He survived that.

The constant fear at night of not being able to sleep. 'A German officer came through the bushes towards me pistol in hand. I dropped my gun, but he was surrendering'. The fanaticism of the Hitler Youth, 15 year olds who had been sent to France. Pulling French women from the Germans soldiers with whom they had been living.

In the end my Dad was found under a tree, which had been uprooted by a bomb blast, with his back full of shrapnel and for him the war was over, and a lifetime of suffering began.

After his time in hospital, where only his physical wounds were treated, my Mother went from Yorkshire to London to pick him up. 'I barely recognised him, he was not the man I married', she often said and I think that carried on throughout their life. They had been married only a few days before D Day when he had 3 days leave. She had intended to marry in 1940 when her fiancé returned from his ship. He was an Artificer in the Navy and had joined as a boy of 14, they had been to school together, as had my parents. His ship struck a mine in the Mediterranean and sank. Many survived the blast but not Joe, he was in the engine room. He must have died a terrible death she told us many times.

As for my part I knew my Dad as someone who rarely got angry, he was a 'gentle' man, played the piano, complacent, never complained, never stood up to people, only in a vague way, walked away from conflict, never raised his voice. He disliked bright lights, so we often sat by firelight, noise of any kind, we spoke quietly, we never

Wherever you are'

by Alison Forster

banged doors, always put things down carefully, a bang would make him jump out of his skin. He could not sit on a beach for very long. If my children ran and jumped in the sea, which they did all the time, he would become quite terrified and after a while we would have to take him home. But he was fun, he played with my sister and I. Everyone liked him, on the surface he was jolly and congenial, would do things for people. He mixed rarely with his old friends, preferred to be alone. He went to parent's evenings (not held often in those days) only to put a 6d in my desk, never to talk to the teachers. He never went to Remembrance Sunday would say it glorified war too much. He seemed afraid of authority figures never went to church but would sometimes sing in the choir. As I look back he carried a burden of unhappiness and guilt.

As he got older, we saw him taken to hospital several times. He would come in the door with a strange look on his face, 'the Germans are digging in over the wall', a feeling of fear would come over us. His face and hands were cold and sweaty, I remember holding his hand as it shook. He was not with us.

It all frightened my mother. She never mentioned the war but would say it was caused by him falling off his bicycle as a child and hitting his head. Or because his older brother had died when my Dad was 12. It seemed to cause her shame. There was no clear understanding of his condition. Eventually there was one doctor who took an interest and explained so much to us.

How has my Dad's suffering become a source of suffering for myself? My sister and I seemed to take on my mother's critical attitude towards him, I never saw him for what he really was until I was much older, yet I took on his attitude towards many things. It was my Dad that made me aware of suffering in the world and what war does to people. It made me question.

For as we travel along the Buddhist Path we begin to investigate our assumptions of the world.

Our view becomes clearer we see things more for what they are.

We see our Father as a suffering being and our Mother as a suffering being, we stop making so many judgements.

A light begins to shine in the direction of reality. We begin to understand our place in it all, that everyone including ourselves and our parents are products of causes and conditions that we do not initially understand. We realise that we are trapped in that view and as children in the views imposed upon us.

As the years progressed the treatment improved and his condition was more understood, but at 68, my Dad died from a stroke. He avoided doctors if he could help it. Once when he talked about the war, he said, 'I never wanted to kill anyone, you know, they said we had to kill as many Germans as we could, but many times I didn't.'

So Dad, I hope the world you are in now is kinder to you and you can see the possibility of joy and peace. And thank you for everything I gained from your suffering and the suffering of your generation.



The Return

Generally one tends to see the spiritual or religious quest as a very serious business. It is supposed to be, after all, about whether one is saved or not, maybe even from some terrible eternal fate. Therefore one must tread carefully, study assiduously, and be very devoted (for a long time).

Except for me none of that has worked. The priests, gurus, and masters I've known usually insisted that there's only one path that it is straight and, like when you fall off a horse, if you take a tumble you must get straight back on again, no matter what. Beside you is a vast black hole which, without strict guidance and discipline, you might easily tumble into. And be swallowed up forever.

Looking back over some decades of trying all this out, I give up. I have to smile. How many times have I fallen off the edge, deviated from the 'true way', done what was in my heart to do, and followed the call of the wild - and am I down in that terrible void? Am I suffering in Hell? I don't go to Mass as I was taught as a child, I don't meditate in the way I was so fixed for twenty years. I have been averse to any religious practice whatsoever for several years until this summer, and now, I usually forget to say the Nembutsu. But I am happy. I've finally discovered the joy of bumbling along, a happy fool. Entrusting myself to that which is almost nameless but which we call Amida, and feeling better than ever.

And yet I will contradict myself and say this has been a long hard road! Is it just a little bit tough to find ease? There is more than a touch of gall in learning humility and having to admit that you don't know, after you have learned so much and invested everything you have in your salvation. There is an especial amount of humbling to do whenever one makes a direct decision and then has to do a U-turn.



Sitting here trying to write something for Running Tide which conveys my gratitude for recently being welcomed again into the Amida Trust after an absence of ten years, I am reminded of the October evening just a few weeks ago of writing this article when I was invited into the Gathering at The Buddhist House. I had arrived only a few hours earlier, excited but fairly anxious about how I would be received. Joining in 1997, I had worked closely with Dharmavidya, Prasada and others to try to bring a little of the Amida Trust to Lancashire, but due to an avalanche of adverse personal circumstances, had been obliged to quit, rather suddenly, just three years later. I sold my house, dramatically went to live alone on a mountainside in a remote corner of Ireland, and had not been in touch since.

Would I be forgiven? Could I handle my self-recrimination? Supposing someone I knew then turned their back on me now for having deserted? What was I doing anyway, as I had vowed throughout the intervening years (back in England) to never join a group or religious organisation again - simply because, I had come to believe, all teachers, texts, and organizations only obstructed the direct experience of the Divine which was naturally innate in everyone. Nothing should stand between. Decades of experience with lots of churches, meditation organizations, groups and retreats had taught me what I needed and what I didn't need.

At first I couldn't remember what the Gathering was and nobody offered an explanation. But as we sat and individuals spoke whatever was on his or her mind, sharing and being listened to, I got the hang of it and began to mentally compile a long list of possible things I could say, while I waited for the courage to pick up the stone. It's like that now as I write, figuring out what my return means. Struggling to find the right words.

By Soshin Sally Haden

But in just the same way as that Sunday when I finally took a turn to speak, my heart drops open here. I am lost for words, moved by the immediacy, unconditionality and profound warmth of the welcome I was given after such a long time. The long saga of my spiritual journey ever since childhood, which I had begun to write about, now falls away as uninteresting, repetitive and just too much hard work to draw conclusions from. What counts, and what I want to thank readers for, is the love and compassion I have been offered since re-joining and being accepted back - just as I am. How wonderfully joyful.

Devoid of reasons, the need for self-justification, any requirement to explain what happened or even any promise for the future, what can I offer in gratitude? A smile, love and thanks. Perhaps you will laugh with me too, just for the joy of celebration at ease and comfort! But I would also offer two of my poems.

The first was written when I knew that my time in Donegal was over. Amida had called me away to the wild places, to the edge of the land beyond which lies his Pure Land in the West. Celtic mythology agrees, that there is a Paradise one can view, perhaps even visit, far off the shores of Ireland. But in obeying Amida's call to remote mountains I'd left loved ones behind. How I could face them after my apparently selfish pursuit of what I loved? I wrote *Return* for them, and for all the times I had ever changed my mind.

It is a celebration of that which is singular, perhaps austere but also beautiful, and which needs to be attended to from time to time, even though it may mean standing alone for a while and even being misunderstood by some. However, never let it be said that crows don't dance!

The second poem was written, heartfelt, within hours of leaving The Buddhist House this October. Perhaps it explains itself.



Return

Had I no love
of the wild black crow
on his wet, wind-whipped wire,
I would have been with you
long ago.

Stolen

I cannot say
that the mist in the hills
will never steal me away again
but at least today
Namo Amida Bu,
Namo Amida Bu.

Anxiety

From Buddhist Perspectives

by Jeff Harrison

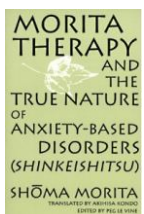
Each student on the Advanced Certificate course in Buddhist psychology at Amida Trust is required to do a project on a subject of their choice. I and a couple of other students decided to look at anxiety and how it might be approached from Buddhist perspectives.

Anxiety is difficult to define and yet is the most common symptom of psychological distress. We have all felt it and most of us could offer rough synonyms for it; but it remains hard to pin down. How, for example, does it differ from fear -if at all?

In our training at Amida, excessive anxiety would be seen as one symptom (amongst many possible) of 'unskillful' living, a way of being in which self-material has come to dominate.

There are many approaches that seek to minimize troubling anxiety and the list below is not exhaustive. Some are drawn more directly from Buddhist teaching than others, but all can be said to fit broadly within a Buddhist understanding of life and mind. The self in Buddhism is seen as an elaborate defensive structure, intended to protect us against pain but often leading to greater suffering.

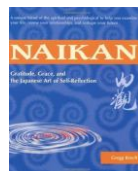
Morita Therapy:



Morita therapy was developed by a Japanese psychiatrist, Shoma Morita, in the early twentieth century. Zen is a crucial influence. Morita is a kind of 'active outwardness'

designed to counter the ruminative introspection and self-scanning that often accompany and feed anxiety states. Morita therapists rarely seek the deep-seated causes of anxiety. Instead, they devise programmes to shift the client's attention away from himself and his inner world, often onto something very mundane. Unpleasant feelings are accepted as unavoidable but transitory.

Naikan Therapy:



Developed by a Jodo Shinshu Buddhist, Naikan fosters an attitude of gratitude. Formal Naikan reflection is based on three questions:

What have I received from _____?

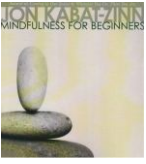
What have I given to _____?

What troubles and difficulties have I caused _____?

One becomes increasingly aware of the interconnections at the heart of reality and of the gifts we all receive (from each other and the world itself). Our habitual narrowness of focus is broadened. In spiritual terms, we feel in greater contact with something bigger than ourselves. Recent research has shown that people who cultivate gratitude are happier and psychologically healthier than average.

It is ironic that 'naikan' literally means introspection; but that is only the starting point. It emphasizes mutuality and relationship. Such awareness has also been shown to reduce symptoms of anxiety. Anxiety feeds on feelings of deficiency ('I can't cope') and isolation.

Mindfulness:

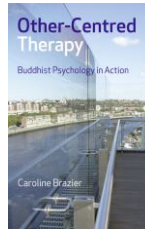


Thanks in part to the work of Jon Kabat-Zinn (and more recently Eckhart Tolle), mindfulness - certainly as an idea - is very prominent in the cultural consciousness of the West at present. Drawn with various degrees of skill and subtlety from Buddhist meditation practices, mindfulness seeks to inculcate a non-judgmental present awareness. One becomes more sensitive to the emergence and progress of thoughts and feelings but in a spirit of watchful exploration rather than desire for control. With particular regard to anxiety, both the present-focus and the acceptance are key elements of a mindful attitude. Anxiety is always future-focused - about what might happen. We can only worry about the future, which only exists in our minds. Bringing someone back to the here and now can itself be therapeutic. Like all such things, it is much easier to say than do. Anxiety is also the quintessential emotion of non-acceptance. If clients can be trained to become aware of how anxious thinking arises and progresses, and of how further thinking is often an automatic reaction to bodily feelings that are themselves caused by it, the vicious circle can be broken.

For the person in the grip of anxiety, this shift in attitude can be a long process requiring dedication and courage. Zen students talk of 'holding their seat' in the face of distressing mental and emotional phenomena, and the Buddha's Sutra on *Fear and Dread* shows the struggles that he himself had. Fear, anxiety and dread may often be predicated on mental imaginings but the feelings evoked are all too real.

One of the dangers of mindfulness - when inexpertly practiced or insufficiently understood - is that it might promote what it seeks to undermine: namely, unproductive self-absorption. But, of course, any model or approach can be misapplied. One is called to be mindful of that danger.

Other-centred Therapy:



This is the therapeutic model we use at Amida. The cultural tradition of the West values self-sufficiency. We might say that Buddhism - and other-centred therapy - are based on the principle of self-insufficiency.

Other-centred therapy therefore seeks to minimize the dangers of self-absorption. If a *rupa* is an object - physical or mental - coloured by self-material (selective, distorted, biased), the other-centred therapist might explore that *rupa* quality and seek to move beyond it. Anxiety can be mapped onto the *skandha* model of mind we use in other-centred therapy. This is a vicious circle of reaction, association and habit formation, a psychology of addiction and conditioning based on what we want and what we want to avoid. It can explain the basic aversion that characterizes anxiety.

Our *bombu* nature urges us to try to avoid pain. But when we do this unskillfully we actually add to our suffering. The second Noble Truth talks of *samudaya* or arising. When we encounter pain (or the threat of pain), we are afraid. We seek to avoid such feelings. We may indulge in sensory distraction, and when this fails we may seek total oblivion. Such a response reflects the suffering that the prison of selfhood can create. But we need not destroy body and mind to escape such torture.

Much of our suffering (including much anxiety) results from our unwillingness to accept the pain that is part of our condition as human beings. In our waywardness we suspect that distraction and attempts at mastery will be fruitful. Buddhism teaches that that fruit we will be bitter indeed. With faith in our self-actualising tendency, the client moves towards the objectivity of *dharma* and away from the subjectivity of *rupa*. We recall that *rupa* is reality invested by self: the various projections and evasions which we hope will free us from suffering but which ultimately add to it. *Dharma* includes the pain that we are heir to, but not the suffering we add to it. Caroline Brazier writes:

Faith plays a crucial role in the relinquishment of self-attachment. Because a person is always embedded in a programmed self-world, even the investigation of reality is an act of faith. It takes faith to let go of protective layers of conditioning and face our existential vulnerability and our grief.

In conclusion, the uttering of *Namo Amida Bu* is a way of calling to mind the presence of infinite love. Not only with regard to anxiety, such a practice is surely a skilful place to start. And end.

The Elements

A day with the elements. In the Buddhist tradition, meditating on the elements is a practice which goes right back to the time of the Buddha. It was probably particularly associated with the women disciples. In meditating on the elements, one reflects on each element in turn: earth, air, fire, water and space, recognising it in the world and in the body.

Amida France is a pretty good place for meditating on the elements. Indeed sometimes they make themselves a bit too friendly. The water element in particular seems determined not only to exist within and without my body, but to bridge the gap in between as far as possible. Having found my bed distinctly damp last night due to a rather leaky hot water bottle, I temporarily moved back to sleep in the house. The house itself is enjoying its own invasions of wetness – a moment of mindlessness and the washing machine overflowed on the bathroom floor. All mopped up, my clothes hang above the kitchen stove to dry whilst outside rain continues on and off. The pond has over flowed, and the garden is awash. The septic tank gurgles a bit with each addition – a sure sign that it isn't soaking away as well as it might. Even the meditation hall is not immune. A puddle is growing at the top end as water from the yard seeps in. Still, I am warm and dry in the house, adding to my internal liquid from the coffee pot.

The earth meanwhile is waterlogged, and full of moles which are coming up for air, leaving their muddy hills all over the place. Even the yard is populated with a goodly number of brown heaps which are easily trodden on as I go down to the barn to get wood. Keeping the earth element outside the house (and not in it) is a constant challenge of boot changing. I am very glad we switched the position of the kitchen door some years ago. The new location gives a small cordon of concrete between outside and in, a space for wellies to be shed, without either standing in puddles outdoors, or creating puddles indoors. In the afternoon, I go out for a walk. The garden is pretty muddy with the spaces between beds now full of standing water. I am grateful that Massimo and Johan made raised beds - for the soil which the plants are in is above the water level. Unfortunately, it is well within rabbit reach and most plants have been reduced to ground level anyway. I don't begrudge them though. I suspect

animals and birds are in for a tough time this winter. There are no berries left on the hawthorn or rose bushes or the hedges. So much for finding Christmas holly to decorate. I do find a lichen covered branch hanging from one of the damson trees though, which I bring back to the house to make my homespun Christmas tree.

Looking for a pot for my 'tree' in the barn, I am reminded by the woodpile of another project that I have had in mind for a while. As the meditation hall is open to the elements, especially the air element, I have been thinking it might be nice to make sure it is a bit warmer in winter. I have been musing in idle moments for a while on whether I could achieve this without adding too much smoke element. Only one way to find out. Pulling back the green groundsheet which underlies the carpets in the meditation hall, I expose the earth floor (yes, the earth element is never far away) in the entrance. I collect a few sticks and build a small experimental fire. Will it immediately fill the space with smoke, or will it work? My hunch is that, being like a medieval great hall in construction, the meditation hall will be fine with an open fire in it. As in those great halls, the smoke will find its own way out.

The first small fire seems to prove me right, so, gaining confidence, I create a stone surround to my fireplace and enlarge the fire to suit. Soon I have a wonderful blaze going in the fireplace. The smoke does indeed seem to sort itself out. Sometimes it blows in but mostly it goes upwards and out of the open doorway. I realise that for regular use the best strategy will be to create a good blaze prior to services and then put a bigger log on so that when we sit we can enjoy the embers and a more steady warmth. As it is, I enjoy sitting, chanting, stoking my fire, and contemplating its progress. The afternoon wears on.

There is something sacred about an open fire. Feeling like a vestal virgin (no, they were religious, not kinky) I tend the Buddha's fire and sit in the space between it and the altar, on which the candles flicker an echoing flame. I feel myself connecting to the earth in the solidity of the old stone building with its years of history, its limestone walls, its earth floor. I feel myself connecting to the water element in the rain outside, the puddles creeping in at the top corner of the hall, the grey heavy clouds that promise further precipitation. I feel myself connecting to the fire, the flaming

by CarolinePrasada Brazier OAB

wood, the glowing embers, the candles. I feel myself connecting to the air, now warmed by the fire, but chilly on my back (for I am sitting close to the fire pit now).

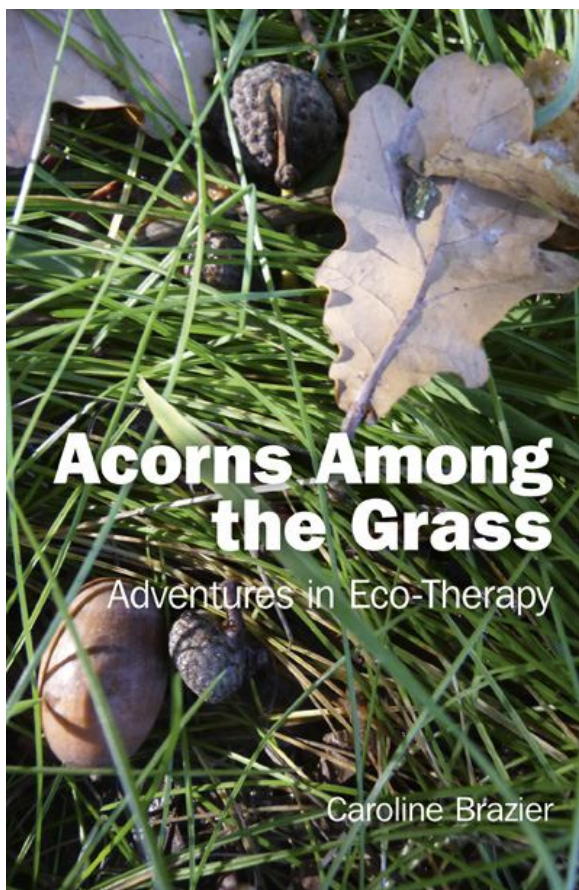
Night is coming down. The light is fading, and the candles throw out a golden light. I feel deeply at home in the Buddha's presence, here in this special place. I feel held by the sacred space, the timelessness of the practice of watching a fire.

How I would love to see this space used more as a place for long term winter retreats. It is the perfect place to settle in for a long immersion in the sacred. I imagine the ten day nembutsu chanting here one Bodhi retreat, for example: sitting around the fire chanting, walking the paths chanting, circumambulating the hall chanting; sleeping in warm sleeping bags in the Quan Yin shrine or for those in need of beds in the house, rocked by the nembutsu.

The elemental connection which this place brings feels like an amplifier to the practice. Amida's presence holding our voices with the sounds of the natural world. Perhaps we will - How about it folks?



COMING SOON!!! CAROLINE BRAZIER'S NEW BOOK ON ECOTHERAPY



ECO-THERAPY RETREAT: The Elements April 21, 2011 to April 25, 2011

Five days with Caroline Brazier and Sundari Clayton

Spring in France, the countryside is at its most beautiful. New growth is everywhere. Our bodies long to throw off winter lethargy and reconnect with the source of life. This five day group, a combination of therapy and retreat, will focus on our most basic connections to nature and to life through the traditional meditation and reflection on the elements. We will enjoy immersion in nature, exploring the 30acre site here at Amida France. We will use activities and contemplative practices to deepen our sense of engagement. We will celebrate our experience in group sharing. This workshop is scheduled shortly before the publication of Caroline's latest book: *Acorns Among the Grass: Adventures in Ecotherapy*.

Cost of event: €100 plus accommodation
E-mail courses@amidatrust.com to book your place.

What's on



For bookings and for more information
Courses@amidatrust.com

Eco-Therapy Training Programme Ten Directions

Certificate in Other-Centred
Environmentally Based Therapies

- Three 7-day training blocks held in rural France
- Five practice-based Distance Learning units
- An optional second year involving a mentored practicum and one further training block

Learning on this programme takes the form of a ten point wheel. In the work we will visit and revisit the ten dimensions of the therapeutic process.



Amida France

Set in 30 acres of beautiful French countryside. It is in the heart of France in an area which you have probably never heard of because it is off the main tourist routes.

Beautiful and undiscovered.

Amida France will be open most of the time from late March 2011 and throughout the summer. When there are no programmes, visitors are welcome through much of the spring as working volunteers or for individual retreats or eco-therapy intensives.

+33 (0)2 48 60 70 19

(phone only at times when centre is open)

April 21-25 ECO-THERAPY RETREAT

July 4-8 SESSHIN: Entering the Silence

July 11-15 CONNECTING WITH OTHERS: Alive through words and movement

July 18-22 SUMMER TEACHINGS: Mindfulness and Pureland Buddhism

July 25-29 Women Together (dutch/english)

Aug 1-5 Arts and Family Week (languages Dutch/English/Francais)

Aug 8-12 Buddhist Psychology Summer School

Aug 15-19 EARTH TO EARTH: Facing grief and finding healing in nature

Aug 22-25 VOLUNTEER WEEK: eco-building, working on buildings & land

Aug 29-Sept 2 RIVERS AND FORESTS: walking retreat (languages French/English)

Sept 5-9 WOMEN, FOOD AND BODIES WEEK

<http://amidatrust.typepad.com/france/2-autumn-winter-2010-2011.html>

What's on

Mar 23-27 Ojo Retreat: San-ge Sesshin with Dharmavidya

The event is open to all. It includes intensive practice, especially of nei-quan, a form of reflection upon one's dependent nature. During this reflection one writes an extensive personal confession (san-ge). The purpose of this retreat is to accept past karma and establish the practitioner in recognition of bombu nature. By deeply enquiring into what one has received, how one's life has depended upon others and what one is called upon to do in return, practitioners find that they recover their connection with those they have cut off, discover deeper layers in the love that is at the core of their life and peel away layers of conceit that bind them and prevent liberation.

Sunday April 3 Pureland Retreat Day with Susthama

Feeling stressed? Anxious? Depressed? Why not come and spend a day at The Buddhist House? Come and spend a day relaxing and meditating on Amida's Pureland.

May 28-June 5 Spring Psychotherapy Course Block RELATIONSHIP OVER TIME

May 28-29 **RUPA, VEDANA, AVIDYA, RUPA. EXPLORING THE CYCLE OF CONSTRUCTING REALITIES**

This weekend skills workshop will address the central concept of Buddhist psychology, the creation of identity based on perceptual conditioning. We will look at the detail of the process of self-building and the way in which therapeutic intervention can clarify and challenge entrenched positions. This weekend will focus particularly on the processes of observation associated with listening to the clients story and identifying and amplifying power objects, significant others, critical incidents, transitional objects, etc, appearing in the clients life space.

May 30-June 2 **COUNSELLOR INTENSIVE**

This regular feature of our course programme offers students an opportunity to participate in a sustained piece of work with another student over a period of several sessions with supervision group sessions. It provides a unique environment in which to reflect on the process of a therapeutic relationship as it develops over time and gives students, both those who are about to embark on a placement and the more experienced, the chance to work in a series of longer sessions. This four day section is appropriate for students at all levels who have attended at least two skills weekends and for experienced counsellors and therapists from other traditions but is not suitable for complete beginners.

June 3 **SEMINAR: INSPIRATIONAL ETHICS, NORMATIVE ETHICS**

In this seminar we will look at different models of ethics and the way that they can inspire and facilitate the therapeutic process as well as creating safety within it. In particular we will examine the codes of ethics operational within the counselling profession and look at how they impact on the therapeutic encounter. We will explore ethical dilemmas as examples through which to better understand the impact of decision making within the codes.

June 4-5 **CHALLENGE AND BOUNDARIES**

This skills weekend will explore how vitally important matters get played out through the manner in which the client and therapist handle the boundaries of the therapeutic session. At this margin psychological patterns become apparent. A skilled therapist is aware of these developments and knows how to use the on-going negotiation of the boundary as a therapeutic opportunity, not merely an administrative or utilitarian function. We will look at ways in which clients enact their karmic patterns of relating in their behaviour at the beginnings and ends of sessions and in other boundary-related issues.

WHAT'S ON

Sesshin: Entering the Silence

July 4-8 with Dharmavidya David Brazier

A time to focus upon the heart. The retreat involves extended periods of silent reflection, relinquishing the noise of our habitual life. The practice is to sit in the presence of the sacred, enter the mystery of silence and experience a place of immediacy and mystical vastness that puts ordinary life into a new and saner perspective.

Cost of event: €150 plus accommodation

Connecting with Others: Becoming more alive through words and movement

July 11-15 with Kaspalita Thompson & Fiona Robyn

We will use a variety of exercises involving writing and movement. The programme will remain flexible. Participants will be taken on a journey together, creating and developing characters as the week progresses.

We will work towards creating something that can be shared with other participants at the end of the workshop.

Cost of event: €150 plus accommodation

Summer Teachings: Mindfulness and Pureland Buddhism

July 18-22 with Dharmavidya & Prasada

This five day teaching period will include a full practice schedule and daily Dharma talks, given alternately by Dharmavidya and Prasada, which will take the form of a dialogue exploring this important topic. There will be opportunities for discussion and questions. Talks will explore and address popular notions of 'being present', the meaning of mindful awareness and the role of non-attachment as they relate to mindfulness. It will look at the practical and spiritual implications of these teachings and at ways in which the various interpretations complement or compete with one another.

Cost of event: €150 plus accommodation

Women Together (language: Dutch/English) families welcome with separate activities for children

July 25-29 led by Annetta de Quaasteniet & Caroline Brazier

Women coming together share a special connection. Life stories, different family roles, the challenge of balancing different aspects of complex lives, creativity and nurturing, dreams and ideas; these all provide meeting points even when personal experiences may vary and we may be at different life stages and on different paths. This five day group will provide a separate space for women to come together and talk and share experiences, to relax together and enjoy closeness of mind and body through massage, swimming, and time out of doors in nature. We will dance and sing in the moonlight. We will rest in the warm sunshine. We will develop ceremony and ritual to celebrate our feminine connections and to enrich our shared experience. We recognise that many women have responsibilities for children and families are welcome to join us during this week, and we will have some time together and some alone as a group of women. Annetta de Quaasteniet is a heartwork-massage therapist and has many years experience working with women in community groups in Netherlands. Caroline Brazier, who is a therapist, writer and groupworker has also spent many years working with women's groups in community and educational settings. Both are mothers.

Cost of event: €150 plus accommodation

Reduced rates for families and those on low incomes

Summ

Familieweek met a

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Arts and Family We

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Brazier

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in developing their skill in v
plenty of creative fun for c
be posted shortly.

Cost of event: €150 plus ac

Buddhist Psychology

August 8 - 12 with C

The summer school provi
approach to experience
course. It also provides an
their attendance hours wh
centre and its locality.

Cost: €150 plus accommo
half days credit plus accom

Earth to Earth: Faci

August 15-19 with C

This week event will provi
sharing, time for solitary a
for finding new ways to let
simple rituals in nature. Th
personal experiences of g
us first about whether, and
to discuss participating in
is author of *Acorns Among*
cost: €150 plus accommo

E-mail courses@amici

Cher program at Amida France

Cher programma voor kinderen

en delen hun speciale verbinding met elkaar. De verschillende rollen, de uitdaging om te balanceren tussen de verschillende aspecten van het leven, creativiteit en verzorgen, dromen en doelen. Het biedt mogelijkheden voor iedere vrouw, in welke levensfase je ook bent. Het garandeert een speciale plek voor vrouwen om samen te komen, te wisselen, samen ontspannen en genieten van de nabijheid van de natuur, zwemmen en tijd nemen om in de natuur te zijn. We bieden licht, en uitrusten in de zon. Rituelen en ceremonie's om onze ervaring te verrijken. We begrijpen dat veel vrouwen behoefte hebben voor het opvoeden van kinderen, daarom kun je ook naar deze familieweek waarin ze een eigen programma hebben. Het is tijd om met andere vrouwen te zijn. Annetta de Quaasteniet is heartwork-therapeut, heeft vele jaren ervaring met vrouwengroepen, in Nederland. Caroline Brazier, is therapeut, schrijfster en werkt al veel jaren als trainer in woon/leefgemeenschappen en andere programma's. Beide zijn zelf ook moeder.

Accommodatiekosten, voor mensen met lagere inkomens is er een korting.

Cher (languages Dutch/English/Francais) by Maitrisimha Kouwenhoven and Caroline

aspect of having a number of resident artists with us through the week to offer master classes and coaching for those interested in various visual arts media. At the same time there will be space for children and dabblers. Full details of artists in residence will be available.

Accommodation; reduced rates for families

Cher Summer School by Caroline Brazier & Jnanamati Williams

It offers an opportunity for those who wish to sample the teachings, lectures, seminars and practical classes with staff from the Centre. There is an opportunity for registered students to complete some of their studies whilst enjoying the relaxed atmosphere of our French retreat.

Accommodation; Registered Amida psychotherapy students: two and a half weeks

Cher grief and finding healing in nature by Caroline Brazier and Geske Glahn

It offers a space for healing in nature. There will be group time for sharing and shared experience of the environment, and the possibility to go of loved ones should we wish through ceremony and ritual. This group is open to anyone who would like to explore grief, though if your loss is very recent you may like to talk with us first. In what ways, you feel ready for this work. Should you wish to advance, please do feel free to contact us. Caroline Brazier *Walking the Grass* (O-Books 2011).

Accommodation

Volunteer Week: eco-building, working on buildings & land Aug 22-25 with Amida Community

A week of working on our buildings and land. We welcome any volunteers who would like to join us for a week of practice, practicalities and fun. Innovative ideas welcome.

Cost: contribution to accommodation costs

Rivers and forests: walking retreat (languages French/English) August 29-September 2 with Caroline Prasada Brazier

This five day retreat will offer an opportunity for Buddhist practice combined with walking in the French countryside near to our centre in Cher. There will be formal and informal teachings on Pureland Buddhism, an opportunity to learn about our practice of nembutsu and the heart connection which it creates with the spiritual realm of Amida Buddha. The event will be informal allowing space for translation and discussion in French as well as English.

Cette retraite spirituelle de cinq jours sera une opportunité pour apprendre la pratique Bouddhique du Terre Pur. Ce sera combinée avec les promenades à la campagne Berrichon. Nous allons pratiquer la nembutsu, une connexion entre la cœur et le Bouddha Amida et son terrain céleste. Cet événement offrira la possibilité de la discussion en français et anglais et espace pour traduction entre les deux.

Cost €100 plus accommodation

Women, Food and Bodies Week September 5 - 9 with Susthama Kim & Caroline Brazier

A week of celebration, sharing and food. This five day group will be a space for women to get together and explore our complex relationships with our bodies through discussion, group exercises, physical activity and experimenting in the kitchen with all the wonderful produce of our Amida gardens.

Cost €100 plus accommodation

datrust.com to book



RT has kindly invited me to write something about Amida Buddhism from the perspective of someone who has come to it - relatively late in life. In responding to this, I am certainly not claiming that my life experience is particularly worthy of note (except that it has been full of more than my fair share of love, and for this I am hugely grateful). Certainly, my experience has been quite 'ordinary', with similar 'ups and downs' to everyone else, and I offer this account in the hope that it may help reassure other 'ordinary' people that they, too, can come to see themselves as acceptable to Amida Buddha 'just as they are'.

First, a bit of very ordinary biography.

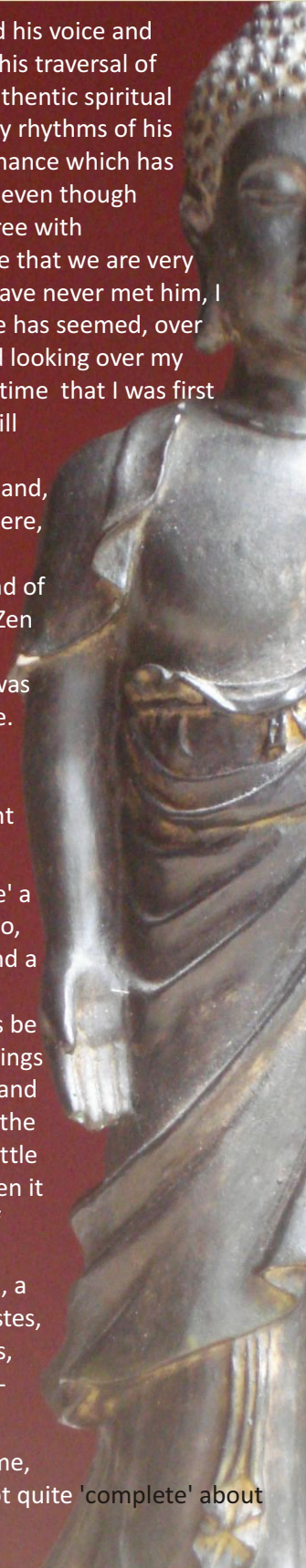
About eighteen months ago, I retired from a thirty five year career spent teaching in comprehensive schools. For most of those years, I held posts of considerable responsibility, but neither aspired to, nor felt myself to be capable of, the dizzy heights of headship. The very thought of undertaking such a stressful job brought me out in spots! I still undertake some part-time work in education. To many people's mystification and surprise, I actually enjoy working with teenagers (yes, you have read that correctly!), and am perennially refreshed by their humour and optimism (particularly as I don't, now, have to put up with it all the time!) and by regular contact with my long-standing and much-loved colleagues. I had, however, (and here comes the self-pitying bit) become somewhat 'burnt out' trying to implement an ongoing torrent of government initiatives, often very worthy in themselves, but threatening to bury me in an avalanche of bureaucracy, paperwork, and all the performance anxiety they brought in their wake. I am quietly proud of having been a teacher, but have no regrets about giving up full time teaching. I want it both ways, I suppose - the emotional rewards of having a 'vocation', without the nasty bits!

Throughout my adult life, and running alongside, as it were, the teaching, have been two other hugely rewarding preoccupations: firstly, my family (I am married with two sons, now grown up), and secondly, Buddhism. I have been interested in the Dharma since my teens. I have always been strongly drawn towards literature as well as religion, and, when I was growing up, the two came together in the work of the American Zen poet, Gary

Snyder. He was a real discovery, and his voice and tone, his love of the natural world, his traversal of vast tracts of history in search of authentic spiritual traditions, and the often incantatory rhythms of his verse combined to touch off a resonance which has never ceased to sound in my mind, even though (healthily, I think) I don't always agree with everything he says. Although I sense that we are very different people, and, of course, I have never met him, I am so familiar with his work that he has seemed, over the years, to have been like a friend looking over my shoulder. At more or less the same time that I was first reading Gary Snyder (and, as you will have gathered, I unhesitatingly recommend his work to Buddhists, and, indeed, all sentient beings everywhere, so strong is the shamanic magic his words can work!), a childhood friend of mine embarked upon training as a Zen monk in the United States, so I was starting to sense that the Dharma was becoming a bit of a theme in my life. Buddhism was cool, and certainly seemed cooler than the Church of England in which I had been brought up.

I didn't, formally, seriously, 'become' a Buddhist, until twenty two years ago, when I started to support and attend a local Theravada temple. I had very happy times there, and I will always be grateful for the framework of teachings it gave me, the friendships I made, and for the clear, principled integrity of the monks. If this statement sounds a little formal, a little prim and 'CV-ish', then it is perhaps because Theravada itself imparts a gravitas, a certain formal seriousness, to all it does. This tone, a little tepid for some less austere tastes, is quite infectious, and it is, perhaps, none the worse for that in our over-stimulated age.

I do have to say, however, that for me, personally, there was something not quite 'complete' about



BEYOND RETIREMENT– SEEK



my practice (which largely focussed on meditation of one kind or another) within the Theravada tradition. Meditation is, of course perfectly valid and beneficial, and I continue to practise regularly. There was, however, a growing sense of lack whenever I tried to move forward with my practice, the feeling that certain meditative techniques were somehow acting as a barrier rather than allowing an opening into revelation. A revelation of what, I didn't exactly know, but I knew that somewhere out there was this potentiality for it and that meditation seemed to often to be just propping up the ego and sense of self, rather than helping to dissolve it. I am quite prepared to accept that some of the fault lies with me, but a clue to the nature of this lack may be provided by my use of the word 'revelation' itself: I was feeling myself being pulled back into the sort of language of my Anglican childhood, the language of the King James Bible. Although, by now, I instinctively felt at home with Buddhism in a way in which I had never done with Christianity, much of my spiritual vocabulary was drawn from a Christian context. This almost 'inherited' language had a drama, a cosmic vastness of range, and a relevance to the turmoil which, problematically, rages in and between us all which seemed to take me well beyond the rather stark and arid ceremonial of much of Theravada life. A Theravadin might quite justifiably reply that this was a lurid attachment on my behalf which should have been overcome, but to me the issue seemed different than these big spiritual questions, too vast to be willed away on a meditation cushion, there was nothing more important. These were the grand ontologies and epistemologies, more important even than life and death, and they demanded language of a commensurate magniloquence. I still love Shakespeare and other Renaissance literature

for exactly this reason: with those, there is never any avoidance of big problems, never any denial, never a timid avoidance of the orotund. Nor do I believe that this form of language is just overblown, redundant rhetoric, an elaborately extended metaphor, the nub of which could be expressed in 'plain English'. The words are big because the thought and feeling are big. You don't have to comprehend every word of, say, a Hamlet soliloquy to recognize that a very elevated sensibility is unfolding in front of you. Shakespeare implicitly understood the sacramental nature of language, that utterance comes from somewhere far beyond the utterer, that we often articulate without understanding (and that that can be perfectly legitimate), that, in the beginning was the WORD. Shades of the nembutsu here, perhaps?

I had always been a bit contemptuous of people who chopped and changed their spiritual affiliations according to their latest whims and fancies, as if they were merely fashion accessories. I had always believed that one should stick to an adopted denomination more or less through thick and thin, as only then would a tradition start to impart its full flavour. Nevertheless, I argued to myself, I had stuck to the same tradition for over twenty years, so no-one could reasonably accuse me of spiritual promiscuity and, in the run up to my retirement (after which I hoped to be able to devote more time to my Buddhist practice), I began the search for a 'different' kind of Buddhism, in essence a 'religious' kind which wasn't afraid to meet the sacred head on.

As my association with the Theravada temple waned, and partly in response to this, and partly because of a personal crisis I was going through on account of the serious illness of a family member, I began to meet informally in Leamington with a small group of friends (Buddhist and non-Buddhist) for loving-kindness meditation, chat and 'therapeutic' mutual support. (This 'non-affiliated' friendship group and its regular meetings remains very important to me.) Also, and very significantly, around about this time (although the tectonic plates of exact chronology are always shifting subtly under the sway of synchronicity and other hidden influences!)

ING REFUGE WITH AMIDA

by Richard Ollier MAS

Debbie, my wife, and I, came across Modgala at Leamington Peace Festival, bravely 'flying the flag' for Amida on her stall, managing to create her own little micro Pure Land within an environment which otherwise had all the noise, swagger, odours, and occasional edginess of a medieval fair. That was it. I was found by Amida, or, at the very least, by Amida's smiling, open-armed representative at Leamington Peace Festival. Shortly afterwards, again in the company of Debbie, I found my way to the Buddhist House in Narborough and talked to Susthama. I went on to read key Amida texts by Dharmavidya and Prasada, and, fortified in my heart by what I read, I successfully applied for the Vow 22 Buddhist Ministry Programme and formally took Refuge with Amida in December 2009. To come back to my love of words for a moment 'refuge' is one of my very favourite, expressing, as it does, what every being yearns for. I am certainly not ashamed to say that I do, and I know others whose lives have been transformed by just this one, short word. (It's that language thing again!) I am just about to start the second year of the Vow 22 course, and I absolutely adore it. Being an ex-History teacher myself, I have particularly enjoyed the 'Ancestors of the Pure Land Tradition' module, which has helped me develop an interest which I have always had in Asian history, and 'Characteristics of Pure Land Buddhism' has really got me thinking about doctrine, practice and belief. Of course, you don't have to study these things to engage with Amida Buddhism - indeed, it is axiomatic that all you need is the nembutsu. You certainly do not need to undertake any academic study to enter the Pure Land! I'm not even sure whether I will become a Buddhist chaplain as such - although, it is interesting to note that, since I started the course, several opportunities to exercise what might be called 'chaplaincy skills' - hospital visiting etc. have come my way. Perhaps just doing the course sets up a certain vibration! Anyway, I've always loved 'being taught' and the online lectures are fantastic, and doing the assignments has helped me hone my pretty primitive computer skills. How I'll get on when I get to the 'Psychology' modules etc, where I'm less confident, I'm not sure, but hey, I'm here to learn!

So why do I like it and think so highly of it, this Amida Pureland Sangha, which I have either chanced upon fortuitously, or been led towards, according to how you interpret it? (Apart from the fact that I have been welcomed with unconditional love by everyone, that is! Thank you Amida Sangha!) Well, firstly, and perhaps most significantly, there is about it none of the appalling sexism which has embarrassed and infuriated me when I have encountered it in some other types of Buddhism. Also (and most exhilaratingly) Amida draws no rigid line in the sand, it seems to me, between ordained and non-ordained members, while retaining the respect which ordination deserves. Again, in my experience, such rigid lines, when they do appear, starve lay members of genuine

opportunities for authentic spiritual engagement and development, and set up a kind of spiritual apartheid where the 'quest for enlightenment' is effectively seen as the exclusive preserve of monastics. In the garden of Amida, there are many paths, each worthy of respect. With Amida, I no longer have to experience the spiritual life vicariously. In the 'gatherings', the stone can arrive in anyone's lap as an invitation to contribute, with all the attendant opportunity and responsibility. The days when all I could really 'do' was envy the spiritual accomplishments of the monks are long gone. Namo Amida Bu.

Namo Amida Bu. Just as I am, just those three words full of wonder. Language again, I can't stop talking about it for long...The nembutsu, the heart of Pure Land practice. I must admit that after all those years of punishingly lengthy meditation sittings and highly elaborate and rigidly enforced codes of ritualistic etiquette, the idea of Pure Land being the 'easy path' did hold an appeal! But the compulsion to align myself with Amida came from far more than just a touch of slothfulness on my part. If I'm honest, I can't really say that I 'understand' the nembutsu but chanting it, even silently to myself, has taken away from me that sense of lack which I talked about earlier. Much of my previous Buddhist practice had been very focused on trying to achieve an exalted spiritual state for myself, and there had been a very 'materialistic' and implicitly contradictory impulse behind this. You can't overcome the all pervading sense of self by developing it - you just increase your sense of alienation. Forget about yourself! Cultivate a relationship with the 'other' through the nembutsu. The nembutsu is irreducibly other!

On my beloved Vow 22 course, I have thought a good deal about the nembutsu. I love reading of a practice that has been transmitted over hundreds of years, through a clear lineage. What is it? Why does it work? How does it relate to 'faith'? etc, etc. The queries as to its nature have reverberated through the centuries. Middle class intellectuals are so keen to pin everything down, to analyse and understand! It may be heretical to say so, but in some contexts, 'understanding' seems over-rated. So many questions, yet none of them yields an answer which is anything more than provisional. To some people, this would seem unsatisfactory, and they may move on to embrace religions which are more forthcoming with answers. But this, to me, is the whole point. We cannot make the nembutsu serve us by giving up its secrets on demand as has been so accurately said, the universe is not answerable to our will. To recognise this is true letting go. In just the same

way, it is never possible to really 'know' another person completely, even if we've lived with them for years. No, the nembutsu keeps its inviolate dignity. We have to surrender ourselves to it to find a sense of completion, not the other way around. Its otherness is a constant challenge to our sense of aloneness. Just, as they say, do the practice, speak the words. To do anything else is to seek false refuge in things which try, in vain, to prop up our sense of our own importance. Namo Amida Bu.

I have always been quite an anxious person. Sometimes, when it has periodically become an agonising impediment, I have viewed this as a 'curse', and this sense has persisted. Again, sometimes, when nothing seems to diminish my sense of fearfulness, I can fall into depression about this. When this darkness strikes, no succour is out there; it seems that the world is drained of its redemptive potential, its colour. At other times, supported by my Amida practice, I am coming to realise that my fear is really my ego trying to resist the truth - and at this point the waves of that truth come crashing through! When this happens, or if it happens, seems almost completely outside my control. Sometimes I'm just stuck with the fear, but the more the breakthrough happens, in however limited a way, coming, as it were, from nowhere, the more one learns to trust that it will happen again. Namo Amida Bu. Perhaps, and I'm really sticking my neck out here, it may eventually take one beyond even the fear of death, if only one can hold Amida's hand as one passes through. I am suddenly reminded of those old Japanese pictures of a cord being tied around a dying person's hand, linking him eternally to Amida, hauling him in to the Pure Land. You start to see where these people are coming from. Death becomes a bread and butter issue as one gets older, not just a topic of mildly academic interest.

These things cannot be forced. That would be self-power again. On account of a highly personal event in my life, I have come to feel myself to have a particular karmic affinity with Quan Yin. One can imagine that Bodhisattvas are shy beings, if you pursue them for your own ends, imploring and demanding, they will elude you, wary of the intimidating power of your 'self', remaining eternally just beyond your reach. But if you call to them from the depth of your heart without any strings attached, you might just open your eyes and there they are right in front of you, smiling.

So, this is what Amida is doing for me in my retirement, and my gratitude is boundless. Although, I'm not old (being sixty this year is hardly ancient, for heaven's sake!), one does start to wonder how long one has got left. I have been given the time to develop my Buddhist practice now I have finished full-time work, and I am determined to do so. I was honoured and moved to have been invited to become a

member of Amida Shu and the ceremony took place during the Bodhi retreat last December. Very appropriately, it was Modgala, that warmly generous spirited lady, who officiated. As the sun came out over the snow at the Buddhist House, there was that smile again, welcoming me. Thank you Modgala, thank you Kaspalita (for your incomparable mentoring, thank you).....thank you everybody in the sangha entire. One of the great strengths of Amida is the wide age range of its members. I have learned such a lot from young and not so young alike, and I am immodest enough to believe, tentatively, that age has provided me with a few bits of knowledge and experience which might be of benefit to someone somewhere. I feel a bit like those adverts on telly which try to encourage older people to develop computer skills. I would say to older people who are interested in Buddhism: "You are not alone...Come to Amida!"

In some ways, of course, life goes on, and will continue to go on, much as it did before I 'retired and took refuge in Amida'. I have a loving family life, and a social life, which, on the face of it, have little to do with Buddhism. I have very secular tastes in loud rock music, and enjoy a good curry. I don't sit at home waiting for nirvana. Despite finding real solace in retreats at Narborough (another thing to be thankful for!), I very much live in the world, and have no plans to become a recluse. The world is, as some of my teenage protégés would say, 'where it's at'. I haven't drunk alcohol for over twenty years, and Debbie and I are both vegetarian, but our friends have long ceased to view this as evidence of membership of a mind-bending cult. There are still life's practical and emotional difficulties, ups and downs, bills to pay, difficult decisions to make, the state of the world to worry about. But slowly, almost unobserved, quietly yet relentlessly, the Buddhist perspective continues to take hold and comes to underpin everything that happens. Opportunities to help others arrive unbidden but urgent and, thankfully, lead one's practice to take a road far different from that which advertises itself as leading merely to personal enlightenment. I must wait to see what I can do, however small, and then do it. Old age is getting closer. Refuge is not a luxury, but a necessity like food and water. I hope the journey towards advanced years humbles me. To come full circle, like my teenage hero Gary Snyder (who is himself now eighty, and not perhaps as supple as I still am!) "I bow in roadside gravel". Namo Amida Bu.

12-15 May 2011

E-mail courses@amidatrust.com to book

6th Living Buddhism Conference

Culturally Engaged Buddhism

At this conference we shall discuss the culturally engaged Buddhism that is the hallmark of Amida Trust's work in Europe, Asia and North America. We will have presentations and workshops to explore principles and practice.

The picture is of a small statue of Manjushri Buddha that is iconic for the people of Assam. Amida Trust has recently forged an alliance with the Tathagata Trust in that region as a working alliance to advance socially engaged Buddhist projects for the benefit of the people. Jnanamati work. He will be at the conference to report on progress and future opportunities.



In Delhi, Amida sangha emancipation of ex- of some of the poorest sectors this work at the conference.

continues to work for the untouchables and the education of society. Sahishnu will talk about

In France, Prasada has taken on the leadership of the Amida Retreat Centre and is developing a range of programmes in Buddhist Psychology and in Eco-Therapy. Her new book on the latter subject is expected later this year. She will talk about her work at the conference.

In Canada, Prajnatarra has established the Amida Mosaic Sangha in Ontario and in Hawaii Franco Acquaro continues to give good leadership to the sangha that there that now has its own centre. He will be at the conference.

In Narborough, the Amida Trust has its main base and also carries out a wide range of chaplaincy work in the town, including the Maitri Project interfaith drop in centre. This work will be described at the conference. Susthama will talk about her work as a hospital chaplain.

In Newcastle upon Tyne, in Sheffield, and in London, Amida Sangha members are working is a wide range of community engagement - conflict resolution, community mediation, chaplaincy, interfaith, mental health - leading members of these sanghas will be present at the conference to talk about their work.

The sources of our inspiration are in the Asian and especially Japanese traditions of Mahayana Buddhism as they have been brought into the modern world by such pioneers as Sensei Gisho Saiko, the founder of Shinshu Counselling. Present at the conference will be Kazuo Yamashite from Japan to talk about this work.

Come and join these and many other great people to get up to speed with what is going on and help carry it into the future.