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RUNNING TIDE



Buddhism at Work

Dharmavidya on Right Livelihood

Plus articles on Other Centred Ideas, The Four Noble Truths, Buddhism & the NHS, and Friendship as Refuge

Including Poetry Corner, Books, What's On Guide and more

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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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.

4 **Right Livelihood**

Dharmavidya David Brazier OAB

"A person who entrusts themselves finds him or herself on a path."

7 **Buddhism & Work: Other Centered Wisdom**

Prasada Caroline Brazier OAB

"We can appreciate that those work-place cultures which seem most assertive and even aggressive are actually defensive."

10 **An interview with Maia Duerr: human and bodhisattva**

"On a personal level, my practice has really helped me through a couple of heartbreaks."

13 **Buddhism Psychotherapy and the NHS**

Anne Jones MAS

"To be able to listen, without being preoccupied by theories or judgements, helps me to enter... that intangible space of the person's private worries or terrors."

16 **More than Mindfulness**

Sr Modgala OAB

"I swiftly became aware that the Buddha's teachings encompassed all the branches of psychology"

19 **Rob's Comment: Buddhism at Work**

Rob McCarthy MAS

20 **Poetry: Faithful and Red Dog**

22 **Book Extract: You Might as Well Die Here as Anywhere**

Sr Modgala writes about her time in Zambia

24 **Friendship as Refuge**

Bob Chisholm

"So what is it about authentic friendship that makes it so psychologically redemptive? We might say love..."

27 **Questions in the Sand**

Q&A with Dharmavidya

29 **What's On Guide & Contact Details for Amida Centres**

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Open to anybody who supports Amida Trust and is interested in spirituality and its application. To join please send a donation (£20 per year suggested) to Amida Trust with a covering letter. Membership of the Kai does not imply membership of the Amida Order or School or any particular religious affiliation. For subscription queries contact: The Buddhist House.

Editorial

Kaspalita & Fiona Robyn

Kaspalita writes: Years ago, the word ‘work’ echoed with resentment for me. Work was doing a job I half-enjoyed just for the sake of getting a paycheck at the end, or completing someone else’s syllabus to get that certificate I wanted.

It was the in-between spaces I lived for.

These days the lines have become more blurred. Work might be the part-time job I have which helps keep the wolves from the door, or it might be creating this edition of *RT*... and the days off can be less satisfying than those filled with work.

I’m fortunate to have found an energy that drives my life. A vocation that encompasses the whole of my day. Fiddling about with the margins, the font settings, finding beautiful images to accompany the articles - all of this has been great fun and a very satisfying piece of the jigsaw puzzle of my role.

There *are* koans of course - finding a way to pay the bills in the midst of my vocation will be an ongoing experiment. I know there are people in our sangha contemplating the same issues.

Dharmavidya writes about some of these issues in his essay on Right Livelihood. I’m sure his words will serve as a guide for those of us reflecting on what work is, and how it fits into our lives.

Prasada approaches the topic from a more psychological perspective, whilst Modgala thinks about how the Four Noble Truths might apply in her work with people with mental health problems.

I think that we’ve created a great issue, with lots of wisdom and personal reflections. I’m sure each of you will take something away from this month’s *RT*.

In the next issue we’ll be thinking about *Icons and Sacred Spaces*. Do get in touch if you’d like to contribute something, in the meantime - I hope you enjoy this *Running Tide*.

Kaspa



Kaspa and Fiona look at the shrine at their wedding

Fiona writes: Kaspa & I have been asked to edit the next few editions of *Running Tide*, which is a great honour. We hope that we can keep up the extremely high standards that Susthama has set, and continue to put together a magazine you’ll want to read cover to cover.

Kaspa & I met in 2009 on the Buddhist psychotherapy course, when Kaspa was still resident at The Buddhist House. Since then we have got married, moved to Malvern, started a business and started a small Amida sangha in Malvern. Kaspa has learnt to drive, and I have become an aspirant.

We’re both still studying on the psychotherapy course. A busy year, you could say!

We hope that our particular experiences as Pureland Buddhists will bring a certain flavour to the magazine. We are both interested in integrating practice into our daily lives, and in bringing our wonderfully diverse international sangha together. We are also passionate about growing our sangha and spreading the Dharma. We’ve both experienced all kinds of benefits from being in relationship with both The Amida Trust and with Amida Buddha.

Most of all, we’d like to hear from you. What benefits do you find from your practice or from your faith?

What are you struggling with? Where are you on your journey into Buddhism? What would you like to know more about? You can email us at

fiona@writingourwayhome.com or

kaspalita@amidatrust.com or by snail mail c/o The Buddhist House. Namo Amida Bu.

Fiona



Right Livelihood

What does right livelihood mean in today's world?

Dharmavidya talks about the principles of right livelihood, and how they've played out in his own life.

Right livelihood emerges as the fifth limb of the eightfold path. In my reading of the Dharma, the eightfold path is the outcome of living a life of faith sufficiently robust to convert the energies roused by inevitable affliction into a life of spiritual fidelity.

A person who entrusts themselves finds him or herself on a path. Their vision and thinking change. Speech and actions change correspondingly. Hence the fifth step is a wholesome lifestyle. Such a lifestyle is a basis for right application to life's tasks - effort, patience, capacity, engagement. The result is wholeheartedness and consummation. Such is the Buddha's dispensation.

What does this mean in the contemporary world? Entering adulthood, I personally was awash with ideals, many of them inspired by the Buddhadharma, but there were also the influences of my ambient cultures. It was the time of the permissive society, hippies, student revolution and the cold war reality. Post-war euphoria had not entirely evaporated. I belonged to the "bulge" - the generation of hope born in the aftermath of the great conflict. I still carry some of the sense that I was born to bring something better into the world, a baton to carry forward and pass on to others. I am

doing my best to do so.

In the course of life one has to work with the resources to hand. This commonly means that, unless you are born rich, you need to get a job in order to accumulate the resources to do anything. One person alone without resources can do very little other than give a conscientious example. The world of employment, however, can be and often is a trap that drains away the whole of a person's energy. Many people live lives in which they work all day in a job that they do not particularly believe in in order to have the money to maintain the lifestyle that one needs in order to be the kind of person who does that kind of job. What sort of an existence is that?

Better options are either that one find an employment that does actually express and embody ideals that one believes in and/or that one uses whatever time and energy are left over for activities that do contribute to those ideals. The latter approach is good but can be exhausting. The former can be a search for something elusive. I tried both. Sometimes I changed jobs in order to do something closer to what I believed in. Sometimes this involved taking lower pay which could mean that the time or money available for activities outside work was reduced. Sometimes those outside activities were taking so much of my energy that



Dharmavidya in Lakimpur, meeting with the Tataghata Trust. Photo by Jnanamati.

I was generating stress and not actually myself living the ideal I was advocating. These dilemmas are, I'm sure, familiar to many of us. Nonetheless, stepping outside of the world of employment, giving up a well paid job with excellent prospects, in order to set up an independent agency offering training and psychotherapy seemed at the time (1981) exciting verging on recklessness. I certainly did not know at that stage that it would lead on to Amida Trust, a religious community, an international sangha, books and such friendships as I have now. I have, as they say, never looked back. Yet if I do do so I now see 22 years of varied employment in which I gathered a wide range of skills followed by 30 years of "independence". Both periods have contributed. I do not advocate one lifestyle for all - each must find what is the best way he or she can contribute. I put independence in quotes because whatever we do we are finding our way through a matrix of conditions and working with whatever is to hand. We never know quite how it is going to turn out. However, with the Dharma as a guiding star I have gradually gravitated to my present position taking the necessary risks along the way. Why do few others follow? Because, I suppose, they do not have such a star, or maybe have other stars. I think it is very important to have a star of some kind or one will be sucked into the cyclical

meaninglessness that I spoke of earlier.

So why are there not more people living the kind of life that I now do? It is certainly a wonderful one. I suppose that the answer is that few are willing to take the intermediate steps along the way. Many people say to me, in effect, 'I envy what you do but would not be willing to do it', which is a bit strange, if you think about it. They then say, sensibly, 'you have to have a job to pay the mortgage, after all, don't you?' Well, who can contradict that? Yet, somehow, I have paid off my mortgage - and I don't just mean the one that I owed to the bank. I think that is what Shakyamuni and all the other great sages wanted me to do. I've had some good luck and some bad - quite a bit of each, having lived rather fully - but throughout it all I have gone on learning from every situation and kept faith with a light that has certainly been with me from earliest infancy, and that is what, in the long run, has made all the difference.

I don't believe in "positive thinking" and all that "abundance" stuff. Life can be hard. Dukkha is real enough. But it is a beginning, not an end point. It is not a matter of trying to pretend that the world is other than as it is, it is a matter of whether one can love in a world such as this - can one live a noble life in the midst of samsara? Can one rise above defeats? Can one be flexible enough to cope with change? Can one seize the



nettle when necessary and, at other times, be patient until conditions change? Through it all one can keep faith. For me that faith is like a little candle in my heart. In the darkest times, I peep in and, miracle of miracles, it is still burning.

I'm happy with my life. I'm loved. I travel. I do what I love doing. I do not have much money, but, as my parents used to say "Income one pound, expenditure a pound and six pence, result misery; income a pound, expenditure nineteen and sixpence [old money in those days], result happiness." Prudence has its place. I feel that I live in the service of the sacred and there is no better service than that. All this and I am only an ordinary chap. Isn't it amazing?

I see people agonising, asking themselves and those around them "What am I going to do with my life?" as though a practical plan and access to a particular worldly status would make all the difference, but it wouldn't. We do have to be practical, but the practical comes second. In fact, it comes third. First comes faith. Second, good relationships - keep good company. Bread and butter decisions are made within the context of our convictions and connections.

In practical terms my life might have been very different. My parents very nearly emigrated to Australia when I was ten - what a difference that would have made! Yet, I believe that it would have made no difference to the really



Kannon by tsieb Flickr/Creative Commons

important matter which is the faith which has always pulled upon me. Shakyamuni was right. Life is full of obstacles and suffering, but if one really has faith and as a result is willing to follow one's dream - even if the outward shape of that dream changes (as it does many times) - then liberation follows and one is on a path of inspired vision, thought, speech, action and, yes, livelihood, the basis for an energetic, inspired and amazing life. That is what he taught. In my experience, it's true.

Dharmavidya is the spiritual leader and co-founder of the Amida Trust.



Dharmavidya working the land in Amida France. Photo by Jnanamati



Buddhism & Work

Other Centered Wisdom

Prasada Caroline Brazier talks about bringing Buddhist practice into our working lives



How can Buddhism offer a support to our working lives? Indeed, does it have a place at work? It is common for Western Buddhists, perhaps influenced by their protestant Christian roots, to try to bring their practice out of the temples into their everyday lives. Though not all Eastern Buddhists would agree that their religion should influence their work life, for Westerners the choice of career or other financial and practical activities is often related to their Buddhist beliefs. They might, for example, take the Buddhist principle of right livelihood, an element derived from the teaching of the Noble Eight Fold Path, as an injunction to work ethically and productively, choosing a wholesome occupation which generates good karma for themselves and others and becomes the route to purity and enlightenment. Or they might be inspired by the bodhisattva vow to save all sentient beings to adopt a more self-less, altruistic livelihood.

Other Buddhist teachings find their way into the workplace in the form of practices. Mindfulness techniques are employed not only in the psychological professions, but in processes of decision making, mediation and other human relations activity. Even at the computer a mindfulness bell can remind the Buddhist employee to pause and breathe for a few moments before resuming work with a calmer mind and hopefully pleasanter manner. Even when a practitioner does not particularly intend to bring their methods into the workplace, the influence of a regular practice may be apparent in the person's way of being, and lifestyle choices such as following precepts: not drinking or eating meat may lead to a person exuding a

sober temperament, which work colleagues notice.

These practices influence the individual in his or her behaviour in the workplace, but Buddhism can also give us tools for understanding what might be going on in the work situation as a whole. As a system which offers insight into human process, it offers both diagnostic frameworks and remedies. Buddhist psychology has obvious applications in the world of therapy and counselling, but these models can also be applied to social groups.

Other-Centred Approach, the methodology taught at Amida Trust which derives from Buddhist psychological theory, offers a way to approach situations in the workplace and beyond. Buddhist psychology suggests that humans are driven by the anxiety and fear which arises from the precariousness of human life. Affliction and impermanence are omnipresent. As a result humans tend to seek control and reliability through attachment and the creation of identity, which is based on greed, hate and delusion. We identify with and desire some things whilst rejecting and denying others. We create allies who support our sense of self and we make enemies of those who do not.

The relevance of this to the work setting is that these processes of identity building operate in corporations just as they do in individual psychology. Indeed corporate identity and image is deliberately cultivated and is seen as important to many situations, even in surprising areas (Do we really need our hospitals to present a uniform 'NHS' image?). The idea that consistency of presentation, from mission statement to letterhead, inspires confidence in



the users of a service goes without question. Public statements are pared down to simplistic bullet points so that a message is conveyed in easily digested sound bites which conform to the image. Such clarity and consistency is regarded as good, if not essential, and is widely advocated in training programmes and popular TV make-over shows, even if it glosses over the real complexity of situations.

From the perspective of Buddhist psychology, identity building is a response to fear. It happens through greed and hate and an attempt to control the uncontrollable. Modern society is caught in a vicious cycle. We have been sold a message based on the values of progress and competency, yet behind these lies fear. We live in a world where much is precarious on all levels; political, social, financial and environmental. We strive for permanence, but face impermanence, not only as individuals but as a species. These factors lie behind much of the consumerist culture with which we live.

Understanding that such culture is based on fear and its companion, guilt, we can appreciate that those workplace cultures which seem most assertive and even aggressive are actually defensive. This appreciation invites the adoption of a softer style and a more understanding approach to others that shows willingness to compromise and allows others to be weak and mistaken. Appreciation of the other's perspective, and empathic engagement with them, characterises the other-centred model. It allows the certainty of the individualist position to bend to the complexity of multiple other perspectives. Through a more other-centred approach we become more open and understanding of confusion. All well and good.

The theory which Buddhism provides offers both methodology and wisdom to understand and maybe ameliorate the manifestations of human nature in the work place. People really can become calmer and less reactive. We can see through our attachments to being right and promoting our own interests and identities, corporate or individual, over others. But as ordinary human beings, we do not inhabit the world of theory, but rather the reality of human

nature in all its messiness. Personally I find myself constantly disappointed in my own behaviour and that of others around me. We are far from enlightened in our work, leisure or the in-between spaces we inhabit. It is easy to identify with the struggles of our Pureland masters, Honen and Shinran, who both, in their own ways, reached their spiritual breakthrough through despairing of their human nature.

For example, despite an awareness of the difficulties of self-preoccupation, it is difficult in many fields of work in this modern world not to promote oneself. In Buddhism no less, and perhaps particularly, the cult of the celebrity is rife. Personally I am all too well aware that the fact that I have written books draws people to events which I run and that my picture appears on advertising for events. This is, it seems, standard practice, but it feels no more comfortable for that fact. I am also aware that I often look at such materials and see a persona being presented with which I can come to feel little identification. It is as if I, whoever that is, could slip out sideways and go my own way while the person on the web page, or on an author information sheet, carries on giving out her message. The relationship between the deliberately fostered persona and reality is slippery. Even when one strives for authenticity, the act of sharing and repeating personal details itself concretises and reifies the fluid. The delusional self par excellence is manufactured. One creates a story and then one inhabits it, and finally one starts to believe it.

I have had many times when I have faced teaching in the midst of personal change and sometimes turmoil. At such times, the professional who works from the heart is faced with dilemmas. Whether one is working as a Buddhist teacher or as a therapist, one feels a responsibility to be authentic and at the same time to offer stability and hope to others; this at a time when one does not necessarily feel at peace in oneself. Here I draw deeply on my Pureland faith. Over the past two years, which have been a time of difficult transitions for me, I have come to realise that the only way I can teach with integrity was to teach out of my dark



Office Building by Andrea - Flickr/Creative Commons

places rather than simply a public persona. If I try to present a facade of peaceful holiness, I cut off the source of my capacity to help others. I am not present for them. Of course this does not mean that I should stand before groups of practitioners weeping about my personal troubles, but it does mean not avoiding the pain or confusion. It means finding within difficult emotions the solidity and faith which lie beneath them. Amida's grace is to be found in the midst of blind passions if we look deeply enough. As Pureland Buddhists it is the only place from which we can really teach.

Weakness is not a quality that is generally valued in the modern workplace. It can lead to our being discredited and misunderstood, yet to go into our weakness and distress may be the only route to authentic engagement and real freedom. When we hit bottom we discover that there is bottom. When we give up the struggle

to maintain appearances, we discover that what is really true has a beauty of its own. When we incorporate the dark side with the light we find true power.

So in the workplace the challenge is to transcend the candyfloss culture of image and mission statement; to go deeply into the complexities of human deviousness, and yet within it to find the clarity which Amida's light offers. The Buddha's light is always with us. It illuminates the right and the wholesome and throws compassionate wraps around our mistaken-ness and that of others. Beauty is truth and truth beauty, but in our modern world the two are all too easily replaced by spin. So above all, let's cut the spin and get back to authenticity. Let's get beyond the persona and make real contact with one another and with our world. Only thus will we really bring Buddha into the workplace.



Running Tide talks to Maia Duerr Human Being and Bodhisattva

In this issue of Running Tide we're delighted to be talking to Maia Duerr. As well as being an online bodhisattva, writing about socially engaged Buddhism at *The Jizo Chronicles* and on her "Buddhism by stealth" blog *The Liberated Life Project*, Maia directs the Upaya Zen Center Buddhist Chaplaincy Program. RT caught up with Maia online. We asked her about finding Buddhism, about the interplay of faith and work, and for some advice.

Hi Maia, Could you start by telling us a bit about how you came to Buddhism?

I grew up Catholic -- 12 years of Catholic grammar and high school, as a matter of fact. I appreciated the emphasis on living our faith in the world, and people like Dorothy Day, Mother Teresa and Archbishop Oscar Romero were exemplars in that way. In other ways, though, it wasn't a tradition that resonated with me.

As I recall, I first got to know something about Buddhism in college when I took a class on religion and film and we watched the movie *Siddhartha* (based on the Herman Hesse novel). I was deeply moved and wanted to learn more. My interest stayed dormant for many years, though, because it wasn't clear where one could go to learn more about Buddhism. (This was back in the 80s, when Buddhism was much less visible.)

Finally, when I went to graduate school at the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco in 1993, I had a chance to really learn dharma teachings and practice when I took a class on Buddhism, Shamanism, and Deep Ecology. The course was taught by Roshi Joan Halifax, who remains a colleague even to this day. I was hooked, and resolved to learn more. That was easy to do in the Bay Area, and I got involved with a sangha that practiced in Thich Nhat Hanh's tradition, and also volunteered at Parallax Press.

Could you tell us something about your different spheres of work?

There are three main areas.

First, I have a consulting business called Five Directions which I founded in 2008. Through Five Directions, I help small nonprofits find ways to get their members and supporters more engaged in their cause. I bring my background in cultural anthropology, writing, editing, and marketing into this work.

Second, one of the organizations that I work the most with right now is Upaya Zen Center here in



Blue Jizu by Dave Rowley: www.creativechai.com

Santa Fe. I have been directing Upaya's Buddhist Chaplaincy Program for the past three years, and I recently took on a role there as "Director of Community Outreach and Development." Basically, I am helping to weave Indra's Net there.... helping to connect all the amazing people who come through Upaya, both in the local sangha and from a distance. Upaya really is a gem in the world of engaged dharma; Roshi Joan Halifax's work has made such a huge impact in end-of-life care, peacemaking, prison ministry, and so many other fields.

And finally, I created and curate two websites that I'm very proud of. One is The Liberated Life Project. This is my stealth dharma project, as I call it -- I write and collect stories about people who have gone beyond their own limited beliefs and fears in order to live full lives that are dedicated to the wellbeing of all. The other is *The Jizo Chronicles*, a blog dedicated to share news and stories from the world of socially engaged Buddhism.

How does your Buddhism impact on these different projects, and how does your faith inspire you to act in the world?

It's nice you used the word "faith" in there! That doesn't show up too often in the context of Buddhism. Actually I remember a teaching from Roshi Joan a long time ago -- she said that Buddhism



requires faith in only one thing: that awakening is possible. And that's still how I hold the concept of "faith" in my life.

I believe that each person has a spark of awareness that can be cultivated, and within that awareness is a desire to be happy and to live in peace with all beings. So in all my work, I'm always trying to keep the space open for awareness to emerge, whether that's in an individual or an organization.

How has your Buddhism helped you to meet challenges?

On a personal level, my practice has really helped me through a couple of heartbreaks... it's helped me to remember how connected I am to the whole world even if a particular relationship falls apart.

On a social level, it's helped me to find skilful ways to address the suffering in the world. In my 20s, before I had a dharma practice, I worked as a counsellor with psychiatric clients. It was a very difficult job, and I had no effective way to process all the feelings that were coming up inside me or the people I worked with. I was very burned out as I faced a system that just didn't work for these folks. Since I started practice, I feel as though I've learned how to work with intense feelings of pain or despair in a much more transformative way. I haven't had a social service job since then, but I try to translate that insight into whatever setting I'm in. And my practice has also helped me to address social issues such as war and economic justice in a different way -- I feel that I'm better able to have equanimity while being an activist, and my actions are rooted in love rather than fear.

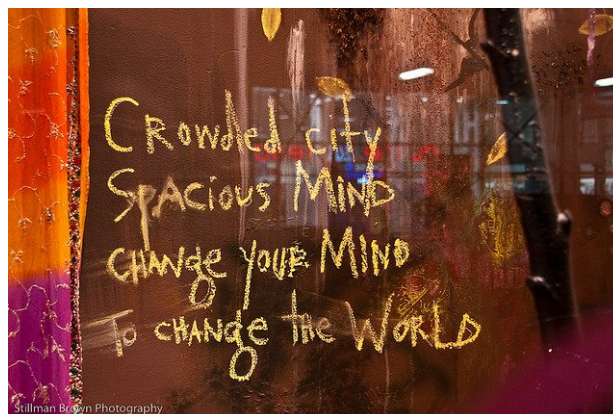
What in your practice most helps you in your day to day activities?

I think it's the capacity to catch myself before I react to something, or at the very least, while I'm in the middle of reacting to something. Also, having a felt understanding of no-self and impermanence (as I experience them in zazen, for example) has been very helpful. Those teachings remind me that I am not a fixed entity, that every day and every moment I have the ability to change the way I see things and relate to them. There is always an open space for a new response or a new perception on my part. It doesn't have to depend on anything or anybody else changing. I find that very liberating.

What would you say to someone who wants to bring more of their Buddhist practice into their ordinary life?

Ordinary life *is* Buddhism! And Buddhism is ordinary life. Take one activity in your life -- it may be washing the dishes, taking your dog for a walk, spending an hour with your daughter, or even paying your bills -- and see if for that amount of time you can practice bringing your mind "back home" when it wanders elsewhere. Be curious about that activity, feel the texture of it, see how it connects you to others in ways you might not usually see (where does that water for washing your dishes come from?), and give yourself the chance to reflect as you're in the midst of it. And there are some wonderful books to help out with this as well. Two of my favorites are *Being Peace* by Thich Nhat Hanh, and *Momma Zen* by Karen Maezen Miller.

Thank you Maia.





Buddhism, Psychotherapy and Working in the NHS

Amida Shu member and graduate of the Diploma in Buddhist Psychology, Anne Jones, talks about her work in the NHS

“Let's see how you get on with this one” were Dharmavidya's words when I applied for the Diploma in 2005, confessing that I had rejected, two-thirds through, two other recognised courses. Happily I gained the Diploma in 2007 and on the strength of it have been working in a London teaching hospital with children's mental health services since then.

Recently I have been battling with the cumbersome paperwork required to obtain accreditation by the BACP, essential if I am to continue offering psychotherapy after the NHS throws me out along with thousands of others in

order to 'save money'. I have been reflecting on what I learned on the course and how it has helped me. It would be good to know the thoughts of other Diploma holders (should we be called Amida Diplomats?).

The first thing that comes to mind, possibly because I am in a hospital setting where hierarchies abound, is how seldom now am I bothered by notions of 'status'. In western thinking this features strongly; in Buddhism it is a mental construct and does not exist. All around me ranting is going on about the 'unfairness' of so-and-so being a “band whatever” which bears no



relation to the valuable work taking place, and the respect placed upon the families worked with. In general, my colleagues in the NHS leave no stone unturned to help children and families, their commitment and care flies in the face of all the gloomy newspaper reports which so undermine the service. Being fortunate enough to work alongside committed people feels reward enough.

In the training at Narborough we spent a lot of time thinking about notions of 'non-self', this took me away from notions of exclusivity as a social care practitioner. This proved so helpful in my work in mental health, encountering people whose deprivations are on an immense scale. People whose determination to do their best by their children in this often hostile environment shines out. I humbly offer what I am able, be it simple listening, or more complex work involving another specialist or a school. The parent who said of himself "I'm just another useless single parent on a sink estate" had been infected by Western false constructs about people in society, and Buddhist training helped me detach myself from such constructs, to relate to the courageous human behind the label.

To be able to listen, without being preoccupied by theories or judgements, helps me to enter, as far as I am able, that intangible space of the person's private worries or terrors. Just occasionally when another is speaking of some appalling loss, our griefs will meet and I will feel my eyes filling up, and I have been relieved to find that this goes unnoticed because s/he is too absorbed in their own outpouring. Afterwards, there is sometimes a sense of catharsis in the room. The complexity of the problems has not gone away but a clearing in the tangle has emerged.

The therapy training constantly reminded me of my '*bombu* nature' - my foolishness and self-

delusion - a very necessary stripping of self-kidding if I was to be able to reach out as humanely as possible to people who are frightened by the formalities and trappings of hospital settings. Fortunately I work in a setting where practitioners are respected enough (up to a point) to permit a level of freedom, so it has been possible to by-pass the formal clinic-based appointment system in favour of traipsing the streets to see people. These are people who might not speak English, might be illiterate, or who are so beset with traumas and crises they cannot organise timed meetings, or even a bus pass. Once a warm, empathic connection has been made in their home, changes can begin.

'Home', in London, can mean just one room for a family of five, or a damp-infested flat that causes respiratory diseases. I am frequently amazed at how little has changed in relation to housing since my days working in this same area of south east London forty years ago (by serendipitous coincidence). Curiously, a huge housing project that was built after I left here is now about to be demolished, having apparently failed to meet local needs in the way intended - one reason being that crime there soared. Many families have been distraught at the enforced moves, and I understand the buildings are still in sound condition.

(Planners delusions on a huge scale?)

Traipsing the streets with names such as 'Pilgrimage St.', I am reminded of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, his humour in describing the idiosyncrasies of pilgrims hundreds of years ago on their journey, and I reflect how unchanged *bombu* nature is. And I pass 'Guinness Buildings' - built by nineteenth century philanthropists, renewing my hopefulness for man's humanity to man.

Learning, Carl Rogers style, to be 'an authentic



human' involves reaching levels of humility that I had not known. It involves respecting the strengths, values and knowledge in others and working alongside them to help struggling children. In this job I have to draw on the expertise of others: Clinical Psychologists, for example, who test children for 'ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder)'. This diagnostic description has been challenged by many practitioners and journalists, but it has a value in highlighting for teachers and parents that a child is simply prone to some extreme behaviours. It does not confer an automatic prescription for calming drugs - parents and children can opt out - and they can be helped in finding ways of managing their behaviours, given time and caring attention.

The knowledge of this diagnosis itself can be helpful to parents and children. Pre-course, I was far more sceptical, making judgements that potentially excluded help. This is just one example of many myths around children and

mental health. Dependant origination teaches us that everything depends upon everything else.

The jumbled words or baffling, extreme, behaviours of a child begin to make sense once a story is heard, links are connected, an incomprehensible picture deciphered, a process of communication begins, the inexpressible becomes expressed. Sometimes it's like magic.

Working in a teaching hospital gives me access to constant opportunities to update my knowledge on child development. Sometimes, for all the impressive words and statistics and breakthroughs such as MRI scans that enable researchers to detect brain activity I find myself wondering how 'new' this all is. It is now established that baby's brains thrive on good quality care (food, cleanliness) and above all love, without which brain connective tissue shrivels and dies. Did not most mothers down the ages know this instinctively? And did not the great, kind Quan Shi Yin express this many aeons ago?





More than Mindfulness

Sr Modgala talks about her work with people with mental health problems

Prior to becoming a Buddhist nun I did many jobs and brought up a family. In Scotland I was a youth worker, I worked in a day centre for people with alcohol problems, and then in a project enabling people with severe mental health problems, who had been institutionalised for much of their adult lives, to live back in the community. My studies of Buddhist psychology began during this time alongside completing a Psychology BSc through the Open University.

I guess I was interested in doing this work because of my own background of depression, heavy drinking and overeating. I had needed, and still need, many tools to understand and go beyond these tendencies. I had thrown religion and spirituality out of my life as an angry twenty year old. When I found Buddhist teachings at forty years old, I started to be reconciled with spirituality as a whole.

In the alcohol centre where I worked I knew we needed to be person-centred: to sit alongside people as they faced the suffering that their addiction both caused and was a result of. We needed to help them face psycho-dynamically some of the roots of their afflictions. We needed to help them learn new behaviours to supersede the old destructive ones. We needed to be able to explain cognitively how their unwise behaviours took root.

I swiftly became aware that the Buddha's teachings encompassed all the branches of psychology, branches that were much more compartmentalised in the West. And it offered

more. There are both down to earth practices alongside a sense of something much more wonderful, beyond our little selves.

The Buddha gave many teachings in his long life. He taught about selflessness *Anatma*; how to focus on the other rather than oneself; in doing so we can sit beside others in their suffering, and allow others to sit beside us. He taught us that affliction *Dukkha* is unavoidable, we all suffer. He taught how all things are impermanent - *Anitya*; which means that just as we learn unwise behaviours we can learn wiser ones. To learn these wiser ones he taught how unskillful behaviours of body and mind originate in dependence on conditions - *Dependant Origination*. In learning our chains of dependence we can let go of old habits and so learn the newer wiser ones.

A core teaching in Buddhism that has implications for ourselves and for the care of others is the Four Noble Truths. There is affliction; we have reactions to these afflictions; that the energy in these reactions can be harnessed; and that doing this sets us on a wiser path. Here the word Truth means reality, just as it is. The word noble means inescapable and so we need not be ashamed. Buddhism is about facing our suffering squarely.

The First Truth is *Dukkha*. There is affliction. We think we shouldn't suffer - there are hospitals, doctors, dentists, all reasonably easily available. Yet we are disappointed if they can't take all the pain away. It keeps happening. We are very rarely ready to face death, even when we, or our parents



Modgala at the Hague photo by Dharmavidya

are old, and we try to hide from all that reminds us of this. We have things we don't want, and want things we can't have. And from this a cycle of avoidance goes on.

The second Noble Truth is *Samudaya*. Things come up when we suffer. Painful passions: fear, anger, sadness, jealousy, etc, and we crave to run away from the painful feelings. We have strong desires, like wanting to quench the most terrible thirst. These can take three forms. Firstly we try to escape this truth in things; such as alcohol, drugs, sleep, busyness, shopping, reading, TV, games, almost anything you can name. If this does not work we try to lose ourselves in work, parenthood and other identities such as “alcoholic”, “depressive” etc. that take us away from the suffering. Then finally if this does not work we search for oblivion.

In Scotland suicide is the second commonest form of death in young men.

When my daughter was at university in Scotland in one terrible weekend one old school friend of hers succeeded in killing himself while another

two friends made attempts. She is now in New Zealand, which has the highest incidence of suicide in young men between 18 and 23 in the world. She believes that one of the reasons is a lack of meaning that can exist in a hedonistic society.

I know all these methods of hiding well. In my own case, traumatic events as a child and young woman exacerbated my probably genetic tendency to depression.

Staying with the pain, harnessing the passion, is the third Noble Truth *Nirodha*.

So often in Scotland, especially under the influence of alcohol, passions would flare out of control. Fights would ensue - with many injuries. Or there would be drug-induced deaths as others sought oblivion. Still others would get lost in the maze of the mind in psychosis, depression and suicide as the spark of liveliness was damped down in despair and the desire to hide from the worries of the world. While the televisions and cinemas, papers and magazines try to tempt all to spend their money on this and that and feed the fires of greed we need to find ways of facing the



realities of our lives without being overwhelmed, then our energies can be used in a different way.

The Buddha spoke of the path as the Fourth Noble Truth *Marga*. This is the path that comes out of the harnessed passions that is more wholehearted, less full of distractions. In following it our points of view change. Thought processes and the way we speak and act are transformed, and we become able to focus more. Ultimately our vision of life and its possibilities can become much wider. In fact all the Buddha's teachings are about how we can go beyond our learnt, unhelpful, ways of thinking and behaving and do things differently. This is the liberation and enlightenment that Buddhism speaks about.

The circle of dependant origination indicates that if we can change one condition all others change too. So often we build up habits that make things worse. However we can also change conditions for habits to grow that can enhance life, which means the old habits such as drinking, drug taking and old mental processes and resultant behaviours can become obsolete. Our awareness/mindfulness of all things in life increases and we start to be more fully alive.

The Buddha offered many tools to help us on this path that can enable us to find greater clarity, wisdom and compassion. These can be found in a variety of Buddhist practices that can help us to break through the wall of self-obsession that the circling mind creates. These enable people from vastly different backgrounds to make the changes they need to have a fuller life. Whenever I share and teach about meditation and mindfulness I encourage some sharing of experiences and look for examples and practices to suit the individuals and groups I am working with.

Where it is possible for meditation and mindfulness practices to be taught and take place

there can be a great reduction in both fear and pain. They can also help people go beyond the whirling mind. There are many different forms of meditation and a variety of Buddhist practices that can help. Personally I find chanting is a great aid to help me go beyond fear. Another practice is sending out love *metta* to people we love and hate and to those we don't really know, wishing them all well.

Here in St Pancras Hospital, in my monthly session I focus for part of the session on getting to know the body in the space it occupies - grounding us all and locating and easing points of stress within the body. Body and mind work together so easing the body can help ease the mind. In the second part of the session we focus on one of the senses and I bring in a bag full of items to see or hear, smell or touch. This is the simplest form of mindfulness and a great tool to help get away from the whirling mind. I hope that people will take away with them the exercises that work for them and are able to draw on them both in the ward and beyond.

Above all the Buddha teaches frequently about the importance of *Sangha* - community and friendship. Together we can learn to recreate communities, build friendships and sit beside others in their suffering, helping them to face the afflictions squarely. Sharing our stories is healing and in them we can find wisdom to go beyond our limitations. Compassion and wisdom together are needed for us to grow. And together we can create these conditions to help us find more freedom.

All these understandings and practices help ourselves and others go beyond our little selves into a deeper experiencing of the life that surrounds us. A life that is much more than mindfulness.

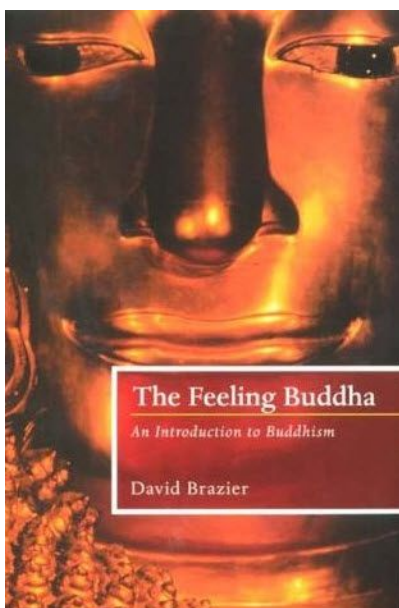


Sr. Modgala is an Acharya Amitarya in the Order of Amida Buddha. She runs a monthly group on Mindfulness in the mental health ward at St. Pancras Hospital.

The Feeling Buddha

by David Brazier

Learn more about the four noble truths



The Feeling Buddha is ten years old - but its message is as fresh as ever. Including Dharmavidya David Brazier's compelling interpretation of the four noble truths, *The Feeling Buddha* presents a picture of the Buddha as a very human figure whose success lay not in his perfection, but in his method of positively utilizing the energy generated by personal suffering.

This admirably clear and perceptive book has much to offer, particularly for those with some experience of the Buddhist practice - Library Journal

David Brazier writes with clarity and authority about the zen way - Mark Epstein MD, author of *Thoughts Without a Thinker: Psychotherapy from a Buddhist Perspective*

Rob's comment

Taking the Buddha to work?

The workplace has been changing rather a lot over the last twenty years or so. A lot has been technologically driven of course, particularly since the internet was born. But the change I am looking at is that now employees have to develop a corporate persona, so little tolerance is given for personal values. The new norm is that you, as the worker, are increasingly required not just to perform the particular task as directed but to be looking, acting and feeling as directed also. Is there room anywhere there for Amida?

Don't many employers intuitively fear that Amida Buddha will be experienced in the workplace?

That is why there is so much control over all aspects of behaviour; of the employee's inner world. There is so much in so many workplaces that needs defending from Amida's presence. Employees must surrender to this ethos, identify with it, and that is the price of much employment today. This corporate identity is not just worn at work - in time this identity pervades the whole lives of many workers.

Until the 1980s unionism through Europe, the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia provided workers with a means to express passion, ethics and actions in the workplace which were not the ethics of the employer. There was not so much push from employers towards surrendering to a corporate identity. I suspect that this push originated in the United States and traveled the world with the rise of global corporations. The push to break autonomous union power was as much to do with power of identity as economic control.

Rather than take this path, I would advise a simple life of simple needs, to stay clear of bureaucracies and to work in a very small business or to be self employed, doing something that seems to have a clearly useful side for developing the sort of society we Buddhists might smile at.

Rob McCarthy MAS



Faithful

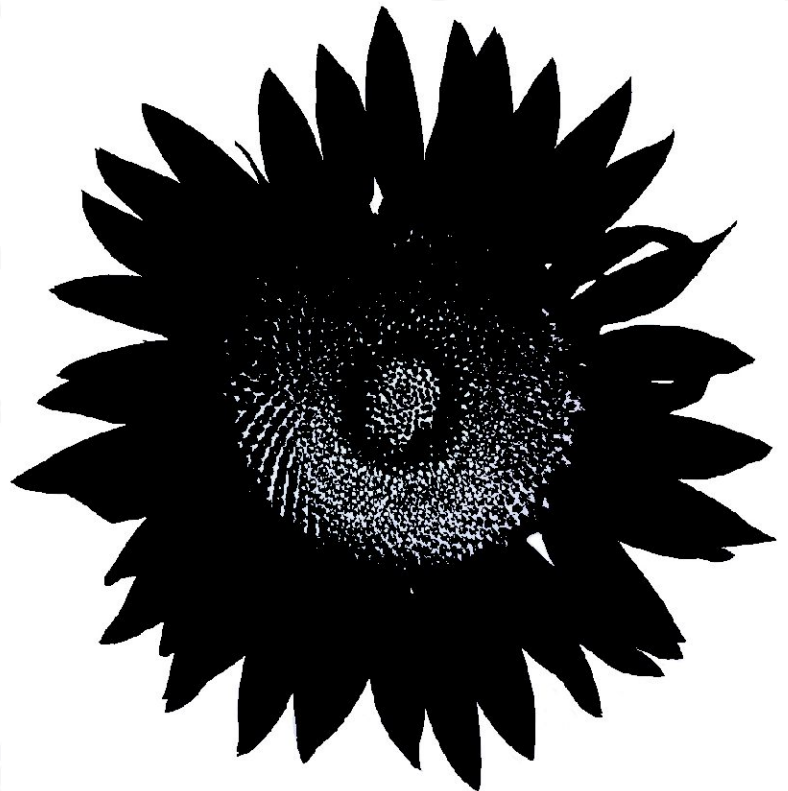
In the middle of a flowerbed
just in front of my livingroom
stands a firm stalk.

It's the only survivor of eight sunflower plants,
carefully sowed and planted out
but night by night eaten by slugs or snails
which hide from sunlight.

Its stalk is huge and naked
some little dead stems hanging here and there
no sunflower, as it was eaten before it could grow.
At the top, three times three leaves
as three chaplets around a maypole
reaching to the sky
drinking sun and light
wonderful in their joy and beauty,
offering all they have.

No mindtwists about all the havoc below them.
They live, faithful to the call of Light.
They inspire me.

Katrien Sercu





RED DOG

By Jnanamati

I notice how their kind inhabits space as if they hold something vital that my kind doesn't. I notice that this weighs heavy on them sometimes. I notice that they are wary of giving over to others, that they are restless. It is to my master mostly I look. He is stern and as likely to give me a kick as he is to ruffle my neck with affection. I am sure however that I can trust the limits within which he functions. I am sure I can trust my life to him.

Today there is unease. I have seen it expressed in the nature of the light. Through the trees the sun blinks on/off, on/off. Wind blows clouds, branches swing. This morning this appears like one burden too many. My master is away. I lay round the back of his house, in the yard, facing the woods. There is a presence of other men behind me, his kind, going about their business. My head lulls to the sound of their feet dragging.

These woods carry many memories. The time of the storm when a third of the trees were lost. The time I awoke to hear a loud buzz, like an amplified bee, coming from where the ancient poplar stood. I recall how it was taken down a section at a time. The time I watched a streak of lightning fork towards the horizon, then as another tore the majestic redwood to pieces. I can still see wood strewn like dismembered limbs after a bomb blast. I ponder these things and the experience of stillness this distils in me. I ponder the savagery of nature.

As time passes I become restless. It is early evening and the sun is going down. My master is not home. My world is now largely uninhabited. Some indistinct figures disappear in the distance. They cast no shadows and move like drunks. In the light of the setting sun my coat is turning to flame. I do not see, I do not see. I somehow stiffen in anticipation. I do not hear, I do not hear.

The whack of a door just behind me startles. It is like a gunshot. I have learnt how to still my reaction to such surprises, though if you were to come close you could see something in my eyes. Most of your kind know the subtle expression, but have no words to explain what they say. I see her now, or rather I experience her primordial power. It is like rumbles of thunder when a storm breaks, all about you but from a source you can't quite locate. I am chilled by the thought of her vigour, but mostly it is her suppressed energy that wraps me in fear. This is the realm where she marries the wind. The crack of the rug in the air becomes a refusal to submit to our master's hand.

I won't curl up at her feet as she sits inside by the light of the fire. I will wait as she waits. I will wait here under the window watching the shadows cast by the flickering fire. I will remain outside her discontent and her strength as it grows by his hand into fearlessness.

Jnanamati Williams

This is a prose-poem response to Kerry Hardie's poem, 'Humankind', written by Jnanamati during the Words & Movement: Connecting with Others Workshop, Amida France, July 2011.

Book Extract



“You might as well die
here as anywhere”

Modgala Louise Duguid

A Buddhist nun's journey in Zambia

Over the next couple of weeks we see quite a lot of George and hear of their desperate search for medicines to help their child. Nothing seems to help him. Finally we hear that he has been admitted to hospital because he is so weak. They are still hopeful of a cure. A few days later, knowing we have a trip to the hospital with patients coming up in a few days, I call into their house to offer mother and baby a lift home if they are ready to be discharged.

I am not prepared for the sight I find. I had not yet been inside a funeral house, and I am not prepared. I did not realise the baby was so sick. The house, which I last saw full of furniture, warm and welcoming, is stripped bare. All the furniture is gone, piled up into one of the bedrooms. In the two main rooms the only things to be seen are rush mats. In one room a small group of

women sit around the walls long legs and dusty feet stretched out before them. Some of them are covering their faces with cloths, and lean into them, wailing.

As I enter, the wailing grows to a crescendo and then dies down to a low keening. I take a place against a wall. Some women glance briefly at me but none of the women look at each other. We just sit, no words are spoken, there is just a haunting keening that from time to time rises and falls from each of the women there. Someone else enters, she is wailing loudly and almost falls as she collapses against the wall. Again the wailing increases into a crescendo of grief and then quiets a little until the next arrival.

We are united in grief. We are women together, mothers crying, at the fragile reality of life and death.



The mourners will stay for hours; some will stay the night, others for many nights; but I have work to do; there is a body to collect and a funeral to arrange.

The shape of the men's grief is different. A small grim-faced group of men sit outside under the tree talking quietly while George paces around, occasionally stopping for a few moments, gesticulating wildly. Then he recommences striding around and cursing. He is raging at the hospital for having let the baby die, all for want of a blood transfusion.

The baby has died from anaemia. This is a frequent cause of death in Zambia, as both malaria itself and the chloroquine used to treat it deplete the iron in the blood. Blood tests showed that he was just above the very low limit at which a transfusion will be given. As he speaks I sadly know that even if he had had the transfusion, the child would probably have eventually died anyway. Because of the HIV there is a terrible shortage of blood and a reluctance to give it unless it is going to be life saving

George comes back with me to Tithandizane to ask Amrita if the vehicle can be used for the funeral. Yes, of course we will offer the vehicle to collect the body and carry him for burial. Nd wali is away at a training course in Lusaka and Amrita is responsible for an outreach baby clinic the next day, so I will be the driver. I arrange to collect George and the funeral party early next morning.

"You might as well die here as anywhere"

Sr Modgala, writing of her experiences in a bush health centre in Zambia, vividly reveals the everyday realities of the ordinary people living there. Her stories of life and death are sometimes shocking, sometimes joyful, but always engaging and deeply moving in their unsparing simplicity. *Padmaghosa Tony Danford*

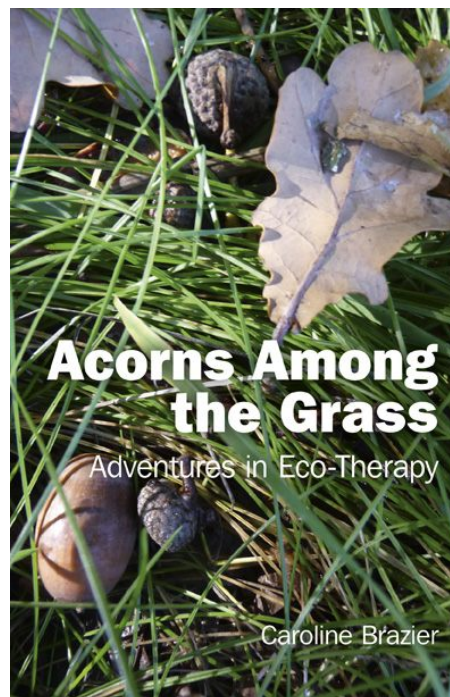
**Available now from Amida Trust and online at:
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ISBN 978-1-4477-0452-2

Acorns Among the Grass **Adventures in Eco-Therapy** Caroline Brazier

Out Now

ISBN 978-1-84694-619-6



Modern life cuts us off from our roots. Our urban lives, often full of activity and anxieties, despite their apparent comforts, commonly lack many of the resources which ground us and feel fulfilling. At the same time, our behaviour as a species threatens to destroy the planet on which we live. Reconnecting with the natural world can be deeply transforming, both psychologically and spiritually.

Acorns Among the Grass gives a whole new meaning to the term "groundwork." Here, at last, is the foundation for an Earth-based psychotherapy that connects us with the oldest, most powerful healer of all - the planet that gave us birth, sustains our lives in each moment, and catches us when we fall. I can't imagine a more positive development in this time of global environmental crisis - one that gives hope for the individual and for the Earth itself. Clark Strand



FRIENDSHIP

BOB CH

Pencil

I bleed meaning on the world,
my trail a dark dancing
driven as a honey-bee's;
I skate myself out forever
announcing my every move
is a message.
I have written I love you more
than life and because you are crazy
that's why stay gone I do bills
I work sums, I say and say
rubbing my face on Earth
that can only erase me by eating itself.
I salaam into space as into the sun
and etch it.

I wish you could see me all at once
I am an explosion,
my lines exulting vines, black
flash twisted as a Pict cufflink.
You cannot imagine it,
you are less alive,
more like a tree than a pencil,
with nothing much in you to say,
no visible trail. It will be hard for you, blind
hand I have carried so long, that clings to me
with such tenderness, so playfully, when I have
finally sung myself out, worked my finger to the
bone.

G. K. Fowler 2010

Last night I had a long telephone conversation with an old, dear friend, a poet, G. K. Fowler, who lives in America and is going through a very dark period of his life. He is underemployed, that is, he has a part-time job without health insurance, which does not pay him enough to meet his basic expenses for housing and food. A recovering alcoholic who suffers from hypertension, my friend had relied on anti-depressants for years, but when he lost his full-time job last year which provided

medical benefits, he was soon deprived of his medication which is simply too costly for him now. As a result he now suffers from long periods of untreated depression and tries as best he can to ward off occasional panic attacks. To add to his financial and medical misfortunes, his twin brother who lives more than a thousand miles away from him, is suffering from terminal cancer and is expected to die before the year is out. It is doubtful that my friend will be able to afford the journey to see his brother once more



P AS REFUGE

ISHOLM



photo by James Fischer - Flickr/Creative Commons

for the last time. Indeed, my friend's future seems almost as hopeless as his twin's.

Yet, surprisingly, he is not hopeless, for he has a friend, another recovering alcoholic with whom he has enjoyed a celibate relationship for several years now and who shares whatever fortune or misfortune life might throw at him. Contemplating the very real possibility of being made homeless, my friend said: "I would live under a bridge with John." Later, as our conversation took a different turn, we talked about how the biochemistry of the body affects moods and he made this observation: "Twenty minutes of conversation with you and I feel fine. Friendship is the best anti-depressant there is." He may be right, but a problem still remains,

for friendship can never come in a pill.

In fact, it seems that people who enjoy strong, enduring relationships based in mutual affection and trust are likelier to be happier and show greater emotional resilience than those who, by themselves, have to face the problems of living. But how is friendship to be prescribed? Merely associating with others is not the same as friendship, even when the desire for companionship might provide the reason for seeking the company of others. Indeed, loneliness, the felt sense of emotional isolation, can become most acute in the company of other people. This is particularly so if one feels deficient in any of the qualities that are supposed to make one likeable or attractive:



looks, intelligence, style of dress and self-presentation...the list is virtually endless.

Moreover, such self-appraisal can go on forever if it is premised on the idea that one is fundamentally unworthy of affection and respect. Self-examination under the sign of inadequacy is like searching for facial flaws in a cracked mirror, but it is what a consumerist society encourages us to do. Even many types of psychology bid us to regard ourselves symptomatically, as if self-doubt and anxiety were manifestations of “character disorders” rather than true indicators of actual feelings. None of this is to cast doubt on the reality of psychological suffering which can indeed feel like being sucked inescapably into a whirlpool of dread. But any psychology that confuses symptom for cause may well be making matters worse.

So what is it about authentic friendship that makes it so psychologically redemptive? We might say love, except that the word has become so laden with questionable associations that it no longer means much of anything. Indeed, love is more likely to betoken the compulsive desire for a prized object than evoke the knowledge, empathy and deep acceptance of the other that are surely essential features of true friendship. Love that pursues its correlative in a perfect object of desire seeks an inhuman ideal; friendship that establishes an association between people who recognise each other's insecurities and foibles embraces the human condition.

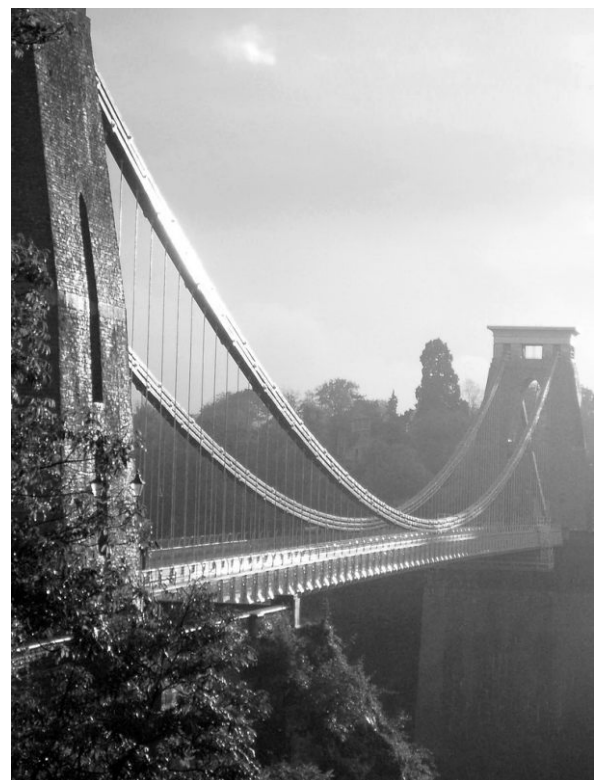
My friend met his friend John when John struck up a conversation at a bus stop. It soon emerged that they were both alcoholics in recovery and their rapport seemed as deep as it was instantaneous. But a doubt lingered in my friend's mind. Having suffered his entire life over his sexual identity, after their first meeting, my friend wondered if John would want to continue their friendship if he knew that my friend was gay. Finally, my friend gathered up his courage and made his painful self-disclosure. John regarded him in disbelief for a moment before making a simple response: “Duh!”

Yet for all of the apparent spontaneity of their friendship something was in place for both of

them beforehand that had prepared the ground for their relationship. It was their past experiences of alcoholism and their shared recognition that they both needed the support of others, and faith in a higher power to help prevent their fatal slide back into addiction. In other words, it was their prior experiences with Alcoholics Anonymous which had given them an example of spiritual fellowship that enabled friendship to flourish.

The same principle can be observed in Amidism so long as it is understood that this is a principle of faith, rather than reason. We are *bombu* who place our faith in Amida, the Buddha of infinite light whose grace allows us to reach out to others who are similarly fallible. That we are able to see past our own foolish preoccupations and see the other as a friend is because of that measureless light.

I wish I could say that there is a happy ending to my friend's predicament, but there isn't one, at least not yet. Today he sought treatment at a public hospital, but was refused on the grounds that as a US Army veteran he should seek care at a Veteran's Administration hospital instead. In his present glum mood he is inclined to believe that the VA will also find grounds to deny him treatment. But he is not hopeless. He has a friend.



Bridge by Adam Byron
Flickr/Creative Commons



Questions in the Sand

Questions & Answers with Dharmavidya



Zen garden by euart - Flickr/Creative Commons

A member of the sangha wrote to me as follows:

While I have been chanting Namō Amida Bu for three years on a daily basis, just last week I received some insights. In my experience and my process I recognized three stages:

1. Calling out to Amida.

Having faith about Other Power, Amida, trusting and finding a safe space. Feeling at ease when my mind goes crazy. When having nightmares I call out to Amida and feel safe again.

2. Receiving

Just last week when I did my nembutsu I suddenly and very unexpectedly I received love. When I call out I feel love, being held. The Light of Amida is shining on me and in me.

3. Giving

Then a miracle happened. Just after stage 2. Calling out to Amida I recognized that I am love. I am giving love. Light pours out of me. Calling out to Amida is giving love to the world.

Is this something you recognize and/or can comment on?

Answer: Yes, thank you. Excellent. This kind of experience is most likely to happen when one is a bit separated from one's normal everyday routine. When we create a kind of safe space away from our everyday stimuli it is easier for Amida to reach us. Even if we are at home it helps if we create a space with some boundaries (even a quarter hour in a special place). This is similar to therapy, there has to be a safe space. Simply having faith is a way of creating such a space. But if one has enough faith one has such a space wherever one is.

Then within that space, if there is an open heart, light may enter. Then occasionally one maybe has such an experience. This experience will fade but it will never go away completely. It will remain like a candle burning in the depths of the cave of one's mind and it will give one strength in the future, helping one to make wiser decisions and to cope with set-backs without despair. It is a glimpse of how life would be if one were free from one's "ordinary neurosis". We all suffer from a variety of ordinary neuroses that give us stress and bad dreams and impede our daily life, but we also have intermittent access to the sacred light which is liberation.

Occasionally, usually when we are in retreat of some kind, the neurosis temporarily drops away or is over-whelmed by the light. This glimpse is precious. We cannot demand that the light come back, but our nembutsu is a reminder of it and an expression of gratitude for it and this helps us to remain open. The more we remain open to this light, the more it appears in our life. The angels speak to us if we go on listening. This is really the root of all creativity. Different people will talk about it in different ways. Amida communicates in whatever way might work for the particular person. After we have had such experience we return to ordinary life. We cannot hang onto the experience, but it remains an important landmark that we can refer back to in our mind. It strengthens our faith and helps us in life. Our ordinary neurosis continues, but, as it were, alongside it, there is now another thread.

Recognising stages in the process is fine, but do not then think that this is some kind of formula that can be repeated. We cannot coerce Amida in any way. In fact, it is a major element in having faith that one realise this. No procedure or routine will make Amida behave the way we want. One has to let go of that element of self-power. Just live your life. Enjoy; play; create; help and be helped; and, from time to time, the angels will touch you.

What's on guide

Autumn & Winter Events in the Amida World

SCARCITY AND ABUNDANCE RETREAT

Sunday 11th September 10am until 4pm
Sukhavati, London

What feeds our spirit with Sister Modgala and Richard Meyers.

BELGIUM: FOUNDATION CERTIFICATE IN OTHER CENTRED APPROACH

16th September - 17th September
Ghent, Belgium

For the first time Amida Trust is offering The Foundation Certificate in Other-Centred Approach outside the UK. From Autumn 2011 it will be possible to complete the certificate in Ghent, Belgium. This weekend the subject is **Grounding, Presence and the Unconditioned**. For full details of the course dates: <http://amidatrust.typepad.com/psychology/belgium-course-calendar.html>

SUKHAVATI OPEN HOUSE

17th - 18th September 10am until 4pm
Sukhavati, London

THE YEAR TURNS AUTUMN EQUINOX WALK

20th September 6pm until sunset
Gillespie Park or if an Arsenal match, Finsbury Park (London)
Evening walk with Richard Meyers.

COFFEE, CAKE & DHARMA: KARMA

24th September 10am until 12midday
North Malvern

See www.malvernsangha.co.uk for more information.

BUDDHISM & PSYCHODRAMA DAY WORKSHOP

8th October 10am until 5:30pm
Sukhavati, London

This is a unique opportunity to participate in an experiential and reflective workshop with two well-known experts in Buddhism and Psychodrama, Caroline Brazier and Olivia Lousada, D. Psych. They will be exploring the changing of attitudes through similarities and differences of these two disciplines. We welcome everyone with an interest in the subject. No experience of Buddhism or Psychodrama is required. CPD Certificates will be available.



OCTOBER PSYCHOTHERAPY COURSE BLOCK

8th October - 16th October

The Buddhist House, Narborough

October 8-9 Therapeutic Relationship

October 10-13 Empathy and Encounter

October 14 Day Seminar: Core Conditions of Other-Centred Work

October 15-16 Object Related Work

POETRY TO MAKE US LAUGH OUT LOUD

Saturday 22nd October 10am until 2pm

The Buddhist House with Marilyn Ricci

Do you find poetry intimidating? Does it all seem too serious, deliberately obscure? Some of it is like this, but there's also a lot of poetry which is funny, wry, witty, hilarious and even downright silly. So come along and have a laugh by exploring some fine, well-known comic talents like Wendy Cope, John Hegley and Ogden Nash; and discover some less well-known ones including local poets such as Brian Fewster and Caroline Cook. We'll have a go at working out how it's done asking such questions as: does it always need to rhyme at the end of a line to be funny? Does there have to be a certain rhythm or beat? How are comic characters created with a few deft strokes? Bring along your own favourite comic poetry and we'll try our hand at writing and sharing our own, just for the fun of it.

FEAR & FAITH RETREAT

Saturday 22nd October 10am until 4pm

Sukhavati, London

What frightens us and how can faith help. With Sister Modgala.

TEN DIRECTIONS CERTIFICATE IN OTHER-CENTRED ENVIRONMENTALLY BASED THERAPIES

October 23rd - October 29th

Amida France

This is the first block of the training programme in environmental therapies. See website for details enrolment by application: <http://amidatrust.typepad.com/france>.

COFFEE, CAKE & DHARMA: DEVELOPING FAITH

29th October 10am until 12midday

North Malvern

See www.malvernsangha.co.uk for more information.

MEMORY WALKS

30th October 10am until 2pm

The Buddhist House with Annie Waldax

Description: Walk mindfully and collect things that you see - leaves, flowers, and other beautiful objects that you find along the way. After gathering a collection of items we will then spend time making a postcard collage as a souvenir of this walk outdoors.



TSA TSA DAY WITH VEN ANI CHOESANG

Saturday 5th November 9.30am until 6pm
Sukhavati, London

Tsa Tsas are figures made from plaster into beautifully defined statues, particularly of Green and White Tara.

SAKYADHITA INTERNATIONAL WOMENS GROUP: UK branch meeting and AGM

6th November 10am until 4pm
Sukhavati, London

How can we support each other in these difficult times? Time to share how it is and tangible ideas to help us in the coming year.

FOUNDATION CERTIFICATE IN GROUPWORK

November 5th - November 11th

The Buddhist House, with David Brazier and Caroline Brazier

Autumn 2011 sees the launch of a new 21 Day Groupwork Certificate. The course will be grounded in an Other-Centred Approach and will combine it with Western groupwork theory.

This 21 Day Groupwork Certificate is open to anyone who works with groups. Basically therapeutic in its orientation, it provides experience which will be helpful to any group-worker who uses interpersonal interaction as a basis for facilitation of therapy, personal growth or learning, but it will also be of interest to those working in more task focused situations.

DANCES OF UNIVERSAL PEACE

12th November 2pm until 6pm
The Buddhist House

The Dances of Universal Peace provide a joyful, multi-cultural way to touch the spiritual essence within ourselves and others. Being inspired by the wisdom and sacred phrases of the many spiritual traditions of humankind, they are essentially a form of celebration and meditation in sound and movement. There are no performers or audience, new arrivals and old hands form the circle together. The Dances are easy to learn, and everything you need to know for each Dance is taught first. Even though you might feel unable to sing 'in tune', or feel you have 'two left feet', these Dances are welcoming to all.

REIHAI SESSHIN: "DEVOTION TO THE SOURCE OF LIGHT"

November 16th - 20th
The Buddhist House

Reihai means worship and giving thanks. In this retreat we examine the workings of prayer, adoration and gratitude. We shall practice 108 prostrations and the Quan Yin sadhana. We shall count our blessings and foster our feelings of devotion toward the source of spiritual inspiration in our lives and all the spiritual ancestors.

While some Western Buddhism has been founded upon a rejection of the spiritual disciplines that are central to the Asian practice of the religion, this retreat expresses the aspiration to restore the tradition of reverence that is the spiritual heart of original Buddhism. On this retreat we shall learn how to do that and bring the magic of spiritual inspiration into our lives.



REFUGE RETREAT

19th November 10am until 4pm
Sukhavati, London

What do and can we turn to when things get tough. With Padmagosha Tony Danford.

BELGIUM: FOUNDATION CERTIFICATE IN OTHER CENTRED APPROACH

19th November - 20th November
Ghent, Belgium

Exploring the conditioned mind.

COFFEE, CAKE & DHARMA: DEALING WITH DIFFICULT EMOTIONS

26th November 10am until 12midday
North Malvern

See www.malvernsangha.co.uk for more information.

TEN DAY NON-STOP CHANTING INTENSIVE

November 22nd - December 2nd
The Buddhist House, Narborough

Each year we do a period of continuous chanting. A few years ago we did 24 hours. Then we increased it to three days. This year we propose to do ten days. This is a challenging practice. The aim is to chant all the time that you are awake. Those who do the whole practice remain in the hall throughout, only leaving for brief time to take refreshment or use the conveniences. Otherwise they remain in the hall chanting the nembutsu. The chanting is organised as alternating periods of sitting and walking, but the chanting never stops. Others may join for only a part of the chanting period - a few hours or a few days. All one has to do is to call out the name of the Buddha. This is a team effort as well as an intense personal practice. There are also opportunities for people to assist the retreat by bringing food and by helping with the domestic support.

CRAFTWORK EVENT

Saturday 10th December 2pm until 6pm
Sukhavati, London

Handmade gifts for all the family. Join Modgala for afternoon tea and buy gifts that raise funds for the Amida India project.

MUSIC EVENING

Saturday 17th December 6pm -9:30pm
South London

End of Year celebration. Homemade fun for all.....

For more information on any of these courses go to:
<http://amidatrust.ning.com/events>.



Contact Amida

UNITED KINGDOM

The **Buddhist House** is home to the training community of the Amida Order and host to courses and retreats throughout the year.

The Buddhist House
12 Coventry Road
Narborough
Leicestershire
Le19 2GR
UK

Telephone: +44(0)116 286 7476
courses@amidatruster.com
www.amidatruster.com

Amida London is our centre in North London, with regular day retreats and other events.

Sukhavati
21 Sussex Way
London N7 6RT

Telephone: 0207 2632183
Modgala@amidatruster.com
www.amidalondon.org.uk

Amida Newcastle has regular weekly meetings in Gosforth

sujatin@gmail.com
http://lotusinthemud.typepad.com/amida_newcastle/

Amida Sheffield have weekly meetings

Amida Malvern have weekly & monthly meetings in Malvern.

Telephone: 01684 572 444
Kaspalita@amidatruster.com
www.malvernsangha.co.uk

Amida Nuneaton have weekly meetings

Telephone: 07971 387 872

EUROPE

Amida France our retreat centre in central France set in 30 beautiful acres of woodland.

Amida France
La Ville au Roi
18210 Bessais le Fromental
Cher, France

Telephone +33 (0)2 48 60 70 19
courses@amidatruster.com
<http://amidatruster.typepad.com/france/>

Amida Belgium Sangha that meets in Belgium, with a retreat open to newcomers once a year.

<http://www.namoamidabu.be/>

WORLDWIDE

Amida USA & Amida Hawai'i

The Amida USA is a non-profit church based in Hawai'i created to further the spread and practice of Amida-shu Pureland Buddhism.

<http://www.amidausa.org/>

Amida Mosaic (Ontario, Canada)

The Amida Mosaic Sangha is a community of spiritual friends. Amida Mosaic Sangha activities are held in London Ontario under the leadership of Prajnatara T. Bryant, a Gankonin with the Amida Order.

<http://www.mosaicretreats.ca>

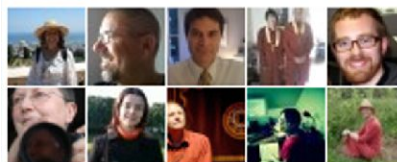
Online Sangha



Friends of Amida

Blogs, discussion, groups,
photographs, video & audio
teachings - Come talk about
Culturally Engaged Buddhism

Over 900 members



<http://amidatruster.ning.com>