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# RUNNING TIDE

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# Running Tide

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

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**Membership Of Amida-Kai** is 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: Sukhavati.

# Editorial

Kaspalita



**Faith and praise are like love, hard to fake. When we are truly moved by something our celebrations are spontaneous. Some *nembutsu* are like this, “Namo Amida Bu!” Thank you for the unconditioned Buddha, for the Pureland and for the “universe that glitters in ever direction” as Dharmavidya calls it over the page.**

What can we do to be more loving? Perhaps having some sense that it's good to do is a good place to start.

In his article, Dharmavidya talks about how praise and worship are often missed out in Buddhism in the West. He talks about how important they are and how, in liberation, one praises everything.

Sumaya has a talent for sharing her spiritual journey. She is willing to open up and share the questions she is facing in her life - an attitude that I find worthy of praise. In her column she talks about some of the questions she is thinking about right now, and how it is faith that can show her the way through.

As a Western Zen Buddhist, Michael Cosgrove struggled with some of these ideas of faith. Can it really be so simple as saying the Buddha's name? He writes about his time in India, giving us a sense of the project there and of his own journey, and of moving towards a position of respect (perhaps fondness?) for Pureland teachings.

The project in India always needs our support. The Delhi project is thriving, and with new friends in Assam (where we'd like to place a volunteer this year) we need your help more than ever. Have a look on page 11 to see how you can help.

The beautiful Kannon on the front cover of this issue is dedicated to Richard Ollier, who writes movingly about his own relationship with Kuan Yin. A very personal account of faith and praise.

*Love and its Disappointment*, the title of Dharmavidya's most recent book describes how love works in this conditioned world. We love, and we are disappointed. In this issue, Dankwart responds to the book with some questions and thoughts about how possible it is to love unconditionally.

In RT 24 I published Katrien's poem *Faithful*. In this issue she returns to the poem and tells us what she has learnt since then... She writes in praise of sunflower seeds.

Barb MacCarl got in touch with Fiona and me when we were wearing our literary, non-Buddhist, hats, but it turns out she's a Pureland Buddhist from Canada, and I'm delighted she's let me reproduce her poem here.

And finally... Just a few days ago, by chance, I heard a few verses of a John Masefield poem. I could have sworn I was hearing an ancient account of the Pureland. It's wonderful to be able to share some of Masefield's vision, and my reflections, with you at the end of this issue.

Thanks and praise to all the contributors.

For the colour edition go online to: <http://issuu.com/kaspalita>. (Do share the link online.) Namo Amida Bu!

# Praise and Worship

by Dharmavidya



Praise and worship are not what people in the West nowadays generally associate with Buddhism. This, however, is substantially a modern prejudice. Many people nowadays are attracted to Buddhism because they see it as different from the monotheistic religions, which it is. However, this then easily leads to a rejection of anything that has a superficial similarity to anything that happens in those approaches. In fact, Buddhism is about overcoming the ego and this, for many Asian Buddhists, means reaching out to something beyond

themselves. If one cannot put anything "higher", as it were, than oneself, then the danger of one's spiritual practice just being an exercise in narcissism fundamentally, even if couched in pleasant sounding language, is actually quite high. As we in the West take on Buddhism, we are, to a substantial degree remaking it in the image of our phantasy, but this phantasy is, as yet, only at an adolescent stage of development. You will remember that when you were adolescent - it was certainly true of me anyway - one tended to believe that one was "free" in that one was in rebellion





against the things that the previous generation stood for. Of course, at that stage one was not really free at all as the ideas that one clung to were just as much determined by their forebears as they would have been if one had been a total conformist. Reaction does not constitute liberty.

Real freedom, paradoxically, comes from putting something, and in due course, many things, on a higher level than self. Eventually self disappears altogether, they say, but not many of us get to that point, not, at least, for extended periods of time, though the glimpses can be wonderful and encouraging. In Buddhism what we put on a pedestal are the Buddha, Dharma and

therefore, is nothing to do with sectarian loyalty or choosing this faction over that one. It is to do with recognising that there is wisdom and love to be had, as it says in the Pratyutpanna Samadhi Sutra, in every direction. Worship is fullness of awe.

We may have ritual forms in which we worship the West "because that is where Amida is" and that is fine because it gives meaning to our act of devotion, but Amida's "West" is everywhere really. If one can worship in one direction then one can worship in all directions. In every direction there is something one can worship, many things, many many things, and each of them reflects the light in particular colours and shades. That is the glory of this life. If

## we start to esteem the ten thousand things

Sangha. Then all buddhas, all dharmas and all sanghas. Then we start to esteem the ten thousand things as each and every one of them acts as a mirror of the universal light. We live in a universe that glitters in every direction with the glory of the buddhas. But if we try to skip the early stage, it is commonly the case that we do not really get to the later one either since our skipping is motivated by an over-high self-evaluation.

One of the things that has gone wrong with worship as a form of practice is that people have fallen out over who or what one should worship. Of course, from a Buddhist perspective, everything that is worthy of worship is a buddha, a teacher of compassion, wisdom and truth. But then an earthworm can be so if you approach it in the right way. Worship, one must stress,

I can let my ego subordinate itself to the glory that is all around me then I can find peace, compassion, creativity and liberation wherever I go. I can swim in an ocean of other-power.

Following Vasubandhu, we can talk about worship as "with the body", praise as "with the voice" and then what is left for the mind is *nei quan* and *chih quan* which come together as *nembutsu*. Beyond all that lies liberation which, from a Pureland perspective, takes care of itself, which is why we worship in the first place, because worship is essentially a way of saying "Thank you". The most basic Buddhist attitude is gratitude. Gratitude is the other side of the coin of generosity. They go together. We are the recipients of the *dana paramita* of all the Buddhas. We are protected by their *sila paramita*,



encouraged by their vitya and kshanti,  
encompassed by their dhyana and released  
by their prajna, which goes much deeper  
than we can even imagine.

To practice with body, speech and mind is  
best. Practice is not some kind of self-  
improvement technique - though it does  
have an improving effect. It is a way of  
letting go of the ego, the self-power  
generator, and finding that when we turn  
down the little light that is so close to our  
nose that it blinds us, there is actually a  
much greater light that was not generated  
by ourselves. It is that great light that  
enables us to wander the world freely,  
greeting one another with "Namo Amida  
Bu" in all the thousands of languages that  
people speak. A smile is a smile the world  
over, and the person who walks in the aura  
of greater beings can smile freely just about  
anywhere.

With body speech and mind, humbly I  
prostrate

and make offerings both set out and  
imagined.

I confess my wrong deeds from all time  
and rejoice in the virtues of all.

Please stay until samsara ceases and  
turn the wheel of Dharma for us.

I dedicate all virtues to great  
enlightenment.

Thanks be. Namo Amida Bu. ★

# Faith, show me the meaning

by Sumaya

There is a famous Buddhist saying -  
the glass I'm drinking from is whole  
and, at the same time, already  
broken.

The life I'm living is always new, full of vital,  
progressive, competitive, expansive energy,  
and at the same time it is cracked and  
cracked again.

It's not a great thing to be dependent, I  
really want to be independent. I really want  
other people, my friends, to be strong and  
independent, and when this happens, it  
results in life, which is full of "me". And still  
there is something "natural" in this "survival  
energy". It is hard and enjoyable, when  
nature grows, nettle and rose next to each  
other, who is going to win? Who is stronger?  
Probably the rose, even though the dry  
weather can kill the rose.

I also would like to merge, to be one again,  
with life, with nature, with the other/Other,  
with my parents....

Being separate and being one, I want to be  
in control of these drives. The voice in me  
saying "grow up", how to make it happen? I  
know that both drives are not right. Why are  
they not right, when they are "there"?

I live day by day, quite a full life, we all do  
something with our life.

Are you living your meaningful life?

Are you living the life?



Crack! by वपायर via Creative Commons: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/c0t0s0d0/2243034045/>

Sometimes I love this question, this constantly present question, inviting me, asking me, encouraging me, to be present, to engage, to act, to reflect.

Sometimes I hate these questions. What is the meaning in your life? What good have you done in your life? What good have you done for other people? Straight response - one thing is good for one person, and bad for the second one, I did it with a "good" intention, and the results are "bad", because I just didn't know enough. Or could the bad results turn into good results at the end?

Hugely surprising that I don't know it all. We do our best to know it all, to get the knowledge, skills, confidence, maturity, and

still we don't know it all.

Can I engage with both wanting to know, and knowing that I won't know?

Can I engage with both wanting to be independent, and knowing that I will never be?

Can I engage with both wanting to merge, and knowing that we humans cannot live in that place?

To engage with both .... faith can help, and it can show me that this could be the meaning, to live one's journey alongside other people's journeys, and to do it with all these different conflicted parts inside me.

Namo Amida Bu ★



# From Amida Delhi

by Michael Cosgrove, Amida Delhi volunteer: Jan-Feb 2012



Mid-January, having just completed a 12 day pilgrimage with my own Teacher and Sangha, I arrived at Amida Delhi's local metro station, Shahdara. I was met by Jnanamati, Amida UK's main man on the project at the time, and we took a cycle rickshaw to my new home for 6 weeks. A home that, having watched the rider wrestle his way through seemingly chaotic traffic, a poor road surface and finally through what I would describe as alleyways, I was pleasantly surprised by.

We occupied the second floor of a two storey house, each of us having our own room as well as there being a separate kitchen, communal room, shrine room, bathroom and

toilet. By 'we' I mean Jnanamati, myself and soon to join us, the project manager: Sahishnu. Jnanamati, who had already been here now for some months, would only be with us for another two weeks. So 'his' room doubled also as our communal room. Our hosts, Prakash and his family, occupied the ground floor. Our floor was actually quite new only having only being built some months ago! Mod-cons included: a semi automatic washing machine, a fridge, and the modern Westerners essential: an internet connected computer.

Jnanamati cooked a welcome and tasty curry that night. The following day we went to my first class in Shanti Nagar. This was my start





to an afternoon class routine that would run each week from Friday to Wednesday inclusive giving me Wednesday afternoon and Thursday off. Each class was usually about an hour and a half. Two of the English classes were followed by half-hour Buddhist classes. Then there was usually tea and *namkeem* [salty snacks] with our hosts and finally the trip back with Shiv, our cycle rickshaw driver, to our district, Ashok Nagar. It usually took about an hour to get to class, but one class was two hours away. In short - this exercise took all afternoon. Just as well too, as often in the afternoons the electric would go off for a few hours!

### Classes

Initially I didn't think I was contributing much to the classes other than by being a second person adding some weight to the importance of the teachings by Sahishnu and acting out rhymes - a key component of many of the classes.

At the start I was sometimes a little overwhelmed. For example, by three enthusiastic kids all wanting to have a written exercise marked at the same time! I once found myself attempting to help a child fill in the missing vowels of a series of words, only to discover they had a poor knowledge of the alphabet. I should have given up at this stage and encouraged the kid to do what Sahishnu had suggested for kids with little English, colour in the sheet. However I persisted in attempting to teach the kid the first letters of the alphabet including the vital a e and i letters - a bit much for both of us I can see now!

However in time I began to appreciate the value of having a second person to shepherd

enthusiastic kids into some sort of form and to regularly scan the fringes of the classes for disruptive behaviour.

What I didn't fully appreciate until Sahishnu pointed out to me, was that in time, the kids do learn. So we might have some significant disruption to start with and I mightn't totally deal with it, but they did get the idea at some level and they too wanted less chaos. In time things tended to get easier because they adapted! Maybe kids are not so bad after all.

### Pureland/Zen

I, a Zen Buddhist, complete with brown stole, was pleased to be welcomed into the shrine room of another tradition. But that acceptance did lead to me questioning that tradition that in a way sometimes, I confess, verged on aggressive.

So what was it like for a Zen practitioner working alongside Pureland practitioners?

Fine mainly, I think, although there was a tendency on my part to notice the differences in our traditions, particularly living in such close quarters to people practicing in a different school. There was also the challenge of being away from home, Indian culture, and the project itself, which pushed me to take refuge in what I believed my practice to be.

I was quite inspired by Jnanamati's practice and his composure, which led to me questioning my own practise.

Now, some weeks after those first days, I can appreciate that there are significant similarities in both our traditions. Both are fundamentally simple. Amida-Shu encourages us to sincerely chant: Namo Amida Bu. My own tradition, DharmaMind,



encourages us to simply be still. Both shy away from attempts to do or control things, Amida calls this 'self power' whereas DharmaMind talks about 'the practice of no practice'. Indeed both Pureland and Zen both came from the same, Tendai, tradition. One reason for the Pureland school's separation was the question; how can a compassionate Dharma only be available to those who had the time to meditate?

Without getting into the detail of the arguments that led from conflict to the reconciliation suggested above, I can say that there was lots of discussion on this topic. Especially with Jnanamati, who handled this sensitive subject gently and articulately. So gently, I felt like one of the children in our English classes, with a certain curiosity as to where the boundary was. I was eventually to find out.

I admit outside of the classes I made a number of challenges to the approach that Sahishnu and Jnanamati (Jnanamati in particular) seemed to take to what seemed like minor issues. For example dealing with a mice issue we had. From my perspective Jnanamati's approach was overly ideologically driven, focussing on the first precept rather than what I would describe as a heart/mind approach which might have suggested a different, perhaps brutal, but more realistic strategy.

Eventually Jnanamati told me with some emotion to stop telling him how to practice the Dharma, "Respect!"

I am reminded that rather than assert or search aggressively for a view, that I should let others views be expressed in good time and consider them accordingly.

After all this I feel like I am better at living with the slightly uncomfortable feeling (for me) that there is something quite compelling about just chanting Namō Amida Bu with complete faith.

There are good practical reasons I realise to do voluntary work. However what this trip highlighted for me was that I also had deeper reasons for wanting to volunteer. In particular a desire to sincerely engage with people (as opposed to the more usual traveller activity of sight-seeing).

Working in a place is, in my view, the best way of engaging with a culture. What was unusual about this trip was the breadth of engagement this project afforded.

I have worked on other projects in other countries before. Usually we were in some sort of compound, our working engagement with the culture limited to this space, locals helping us out and our handlers. There is no compound in the Amida project. We were in the midst of the people we were working with, dealing directly with Indian children and their community representatives or Buddhist parents. A little more animated than a Danish park I had helped ready for a festival, or a Belgian ruin I had helped to excavate; and consequently all the richer an experience.

Sincere engagement seems to me what it's all about, whether that is a richer travelling experience, dealing with disruptive children, or exploring the Dharma. I think this engagement is a natural expression of what arises when I am still (in meditation) or when I chant. ✨

Michael Cosgrove is a member of DharmaMind.





# Amida India appeal



Michael knows the answer to a question Sahishnu puts to the class...

You've just read about some of the important work we do in India. How we live and work next to our friends, teaching them English, giving them the chance to get better jobs and help their families. Many of these live hand to mouth, and worry about having enough money to buy food and medicine.

Many of the Buddhist families we support are extremely poor, and often have little support from the few monks in India (who are usually living on the edge of poverty themselves). A few years ago these families asked to share our Pureland practice, with its emphasis on all beings being acceptable just as they are. This sharing of practice led to a Delhi branch of Amida-Shu and, earlier this year, the ordination of our first Indian Order members, Suvidya and Suando, as Gankonin (Priests of Amida Order). Suvidya and Suando are materially poor but spiritually wealthy, they share their faith in Amida with their own community with great joy, and have been essential supports to the work of the Order in Delhi.

In 2010 Dharmavidya and Jnanamati visited a rural community in North Lakhimpur, Assam, where a small Buddhist organisation runs an English medium primary school. Jnanamati stayed for three months to help teach English and create networks of support for the school and local Tai ethnic Buddhist communities. This year we will place a volunteer with the school for five months and a twinning project with a school in England is underway.

The support of volunteers and International Order members who visit India is vital to the faith of these communities, who can often feel isolated in their own country. To keep teaching English to these impoverished communities, and to maintain our spiritual friendships, we need your help.

## Ways to help:

Hold a fund-raising event:

Tabletop sale? Sponsored dance? Bathing in a tub of baked beans? Let us know what you can do.

Make a one-off personal donation: Either by cheque, to Amida Trust c/o Sukhavati (see back page), or donate online at <http://amidatrust.ning.com> via Paypal.

Set-up a regular payment to Amida to support the Indian project. For more information please contact Jnanamati: [Jnamamati@amidatrust.com](mailto:Jnamamati@amidatrust.com) or call 0207 263 2183

# I call upon the Bodhisattva who sees and hears the sufferings of the world

By Richard Ollier

Kuan Yin, the Bodhisattva of Compassion and close associate of Amida Buddha, has been kind to me.

Twelve or so years ago, for various reasons, life was very difficult for my immediate family. Many families go through times like this, I guess. Whenever we glimpsed what seemed to be the light at the end of the tunnel, it turned out to be an oncoming train ready to knock us down again.

I did, though, meet Kuan Yin at more or less the same period in my life. I cannot really explain how. It's not just that I can't remember: the meeting did not take place in a conventional way. I had been a Buddhist for over a decade by this time without having really been aware of her, but now I began to notice her everywhere. I'd had a basic grounding in Buddhist iconography and looked up Kuan Yin to confirm that the delicate little lady, yes, holding her willow branch and her vase of nectar, and clad in the robes of a nun, who had begun to appear regularly in, as it were, my peripheral vision, was indeed her. Passing clouds, or garden shrubs, or rocks seemed, on occasions, and rather unnervingly, to assume her shape. Often, I would forget her for days at a time, only for her to reappear arbitrarily, heard or seen fleetingly, or 'sensed'. Eventually, extreme scepticism was overcome because I needed her help and had read in the Lotus Sutra that she offered it unconditionally to those who called on her :

Whoever sees her face or learns about her,  
Who can hold this Bodhisattva's name,  
Will leave behind the sorrows of existence....

I called on her. Namo Kuan Shih Yin P'u-Sa. I felt embarrassed about what I felt might be the 'superstition' of this, the fact that despair had reduced me to howling forth a cry out of the wilderness. The sorrows of existence were all part and parcel of being human and I should just endure, I told myself, with good old Theravada stoicism - without resorting to seeking solace in fairy tales. But cry, and howl, and call out the name I did , internally



and externally, over and over again. I had barely heard of the Pure Land tradition at this time, and was later amazed to discover (on becoming a Friend of Amida) that what I'd been doing was, of course, a version of the Nembutsu! What I had felt were my ignorance and lack of sophistication were the very things deemed essential by Honen himself !

Time passed. Things started to get better. Lots of people helped us. Thank you. The family set out tentatively on a road to recovery which at last felt firmer with every step. Things could probably have improved anyway, without the help of the Divine Giver of Compassion, one might say. But they might not have done. My son bought me a book on Kuan Yin (complete with a small portable shrine) for Christmas. "You and me and Kuan Yin have a special relationship, dad", he said. I cried.

Quite simply, I adore Kuan Yin. In my experience, her light shines incomparably bright, and the loveliness of her indivisible compassion is without parallel. I have kept calling her. She has gradually, almost imperceptibly, moved from the corner of my eye to





my core. I sometimes catch sight of her in other people, and their actions. The mind is conditioned by its objects. I try to maintain her as my object, to lay my mind on her mind and my heart on her heart. When times are dark, and she seems to be far away, I try to understand it as me having moved away from her, not the other way around. She, as the eternal 'other' is always there. I, on the other hand, shift, change, sulk, get angry, waver, am trapped by, and in, my mutability and my frailty. I push her away through doubt, through endless and fruitless speculation about her 'reality', through obsessive rituals, through anxiety about whether and in what ways I should be asking her to 'intercede' and whether my 'prayers' to her are couched in appropriate terms and so on and so forth. The only way through this slough of despond is to call and keep calling, I find. The proverbial light bulb, energised by the urgency of my call, turns on, flickers perilously, goes out, flickers again, and this time stays on for longer. Theoretical problems find a 'resolution' of sorts in the mere fact of religious practice itself. This, to my mind, is where the 'faith and praise' come in: if anything can transform my cupidity, hatred and delusion into something at least a bit more seemly, then it is surely the calling. Amida's Universal Vow assures us that our calling will be heard. Shinran wrote:

Xuanzang. As (much to the tolerant bemusement of my pupils!) I prostrated, lit incense and made my devotions to the Buddha on the temple steps, I speculated perhaps a little fancifully, that if it hadn't been for Kuan Yin these sutras may not have arrived in China at all : constantly harried by bandits and warlords, and crossing deserts and mountain ranges in diabolical weather conditions on a pilgrimage which took him several years, all the time guarding his sacred cargo, Xuanzang tells us that the name of Kuan Yin was forever on his lips. Calling to her kept him going. When he finally arrived back in Xian, then known as Chang'an, the scripture scrolls were stored in the Wild Goose Pagoda. I was also aware that Chang'an was where, earlier, the great Buddhist scholar Kumarajiva had made his translation of the Lotus Sutra: the very sutra which dealt so eloquently with Kuan Yin in its 'Universal Gateway' chapter. Here I was in a place whose very walls resonated with the call of Kuan Yin! Thank you, merciful Bodhisattva.

I worry sometimes that I don't have the answers to the big questions that are often expected of so-called 'religious' people. I don't, for example, have a convincingly clear explanation of why bad things happen to good people. Although I'm interested in chaplaincy work, I don't really know what to say to people whose loved ones have just died, if I'm honest. It feels presumptuous to say anything when I

## Namo Kuan Shih Yin P'u-Sa.

Obstructing evils have become the substance of virtues;  
It is like the relation of ice and water:  
The more ice, the more water;  
The more hindrances, the more virtues.

Yes, sometimes, if I am fortunate, the chanting turns things inside out : somehow, negative experiences can be reframed, one can recognise in them the many hands of Kuan Yin, collecting the meltwater, and her face, always gently smiling....For her, controversially, mercy is always more important than justice or even wisdom, and I, as a foolish being , can relate easily and with gratitude to this.

Three years ago, during a school trip to China, I was privileged to visit the Temple of the Wild Goose Pagoda at the city of Xian. Xian is at the eastern end of the Silk Road , the route by which hundreds of Buddhist Scriptures first entered China, brought from India by one of my heroes, the Tang Dynasty monk

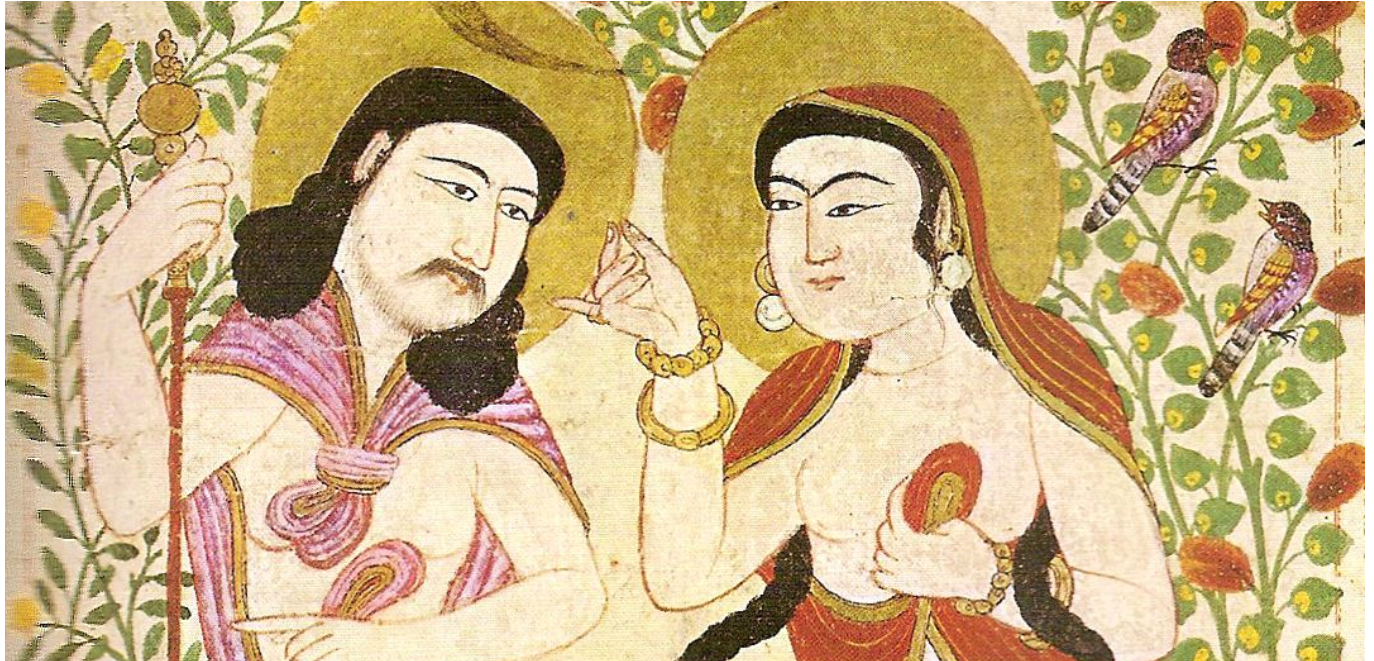
fear the disillusion which I know will visit me, too, in such circumstances. Perhaps, to all of us at such times on one level words like 'faith' or 'praise' seem at best irrelevant, and at worst part of a cruel joke. I don't feel I can give any sort of consolation based on 'reasoning'. But perhaps I just might try to find the courage to tell people that, with their permission, I could chant 'Kuan Yin' for them, as I have found great consolation in 'just doing it', or even suggest, if the moment seems right, that they call out themselves, as it's really helped me... If they want to know who she is, I could even say ,if it seemed appropriate, that she's a bit like the Virgin Mary, to provide them with a comparison they might understand. The Divine Feminine.

Who really knows?

We rock our little frail boats, tear our sails to tatters, break our masts, all with the furious storm of our passions, our terror and despair. Under us, the great swelling ocean of Kuan Yin's love... ★

# (Un)conditional love some thoughts and some questions...

By Dankwart Kleinjans



I have just finished re-reading Dharmavidya's *Love and Its Disappointment* and this has left me with some questions and thoughts that I would like to share.

Dharmavidya argues that the therapist should love the client unconditionally. No objection to that. At the same time I assume that most of us Amida Buddhists believe that Amida Buddha loves us unconditionally. With this I also agree.

I started thinking about this when someone in our Belgian Sangha said that he loved someone else unconditionally, just as they are. Of course, this is a sincere and beautiful expression of love, but is it possible to realize this? Should unconditional love towards people who are meaningful to us be something we should aim for?

I think, just as Dharmavidya proposes in his book, that we can only love people we know and who are meaningful to us. Of course we can feel an expression of love towards a stranger, and in most cases it is possible to love these people unconditionally, because we don't know them.

On the other hand, we know the people in our network who we love. The relationship we have with them is shaped by our own and their own

pasts and futures, and is determined by conditions, and is therefore not unconditional.

A therapist ought to love his patients unconditionally, because in his role as a therapist he should be able to accept anything the patient presents. Do we do the same with people we know and who are meaningful to us? I would say we don't, and I would suggest that it is better not to do so, because these people are meaningful to us. This meaning, which leads to esteem and to love, is in its nature concrete, conditioned and unique, as everybody we know is different, in themselves and to us, and as a part of our network. Without this unique meaningfulness, each person would be a stranger to us.

When someone says to me "I love you unconditionally", of course this is well meant and I appreciate it, but I question the possibility of being loved just as I am, for it seems to take away both the conditionality and uniqueness of the relationship I have with this person.

Both loving a person for just what he is, and loving a person for this and this reason, seem to be inadequate ways of expressing something. Both seem to express too much and too little at the same time, when we assume that people who are





meaningful to us have expectations of us, and that we likewise expect things from them. Ideally, love would not be based on expectations, and spiritual and divine love are like that. But I think love between finite and foolish beings is by definition conditional and finite. How can we express it otherwise, as small dependent parts of the bigger whole?

I consider each concrete relationship we have as a motivation for us to love this concrete person, who has a unique place and function within our network. Let's love this person for what he is, but if you are disappointed in something in this person, let's try to fix this problem. This seems to me to be more realistic than just accepting the disappointment. I'm sure the person you love will love you in return in one way or another, and he will be willing not to disappoint you, unless there's a good reason for this.

Can we maintain love without expectations? For a therapist this is possible, for his patients ought to occupy the same place in their network, and the relationship is not reciprocal. For Amida Buddha it is the same, for his love is infinite, and he loves all sentient beings for what they are, without expecting anything from them. For Shakyamuni Buddha, I guess it starts to get more difficult. I'm sure he loved all his disciples and all sentient beings, but at the same time we read that he loved Ananda the most. For this to be true, there must have been reasons...

The point I want to make is that concrete conditional love between concrete people who know each other is often more personally important and intense, but at the same time much more difficult and disappointing, than unconditional love. I suppose most people love this one way, determined by conditions. In principle, unconditional love should be the same for all people, or even for all sentient beings and for the universe as a whole, for there are no conditions that shape the love, or that give it a particular flavor. I would say, let's love each other as much and as unconditionally as we can - you can do this anywhere, anytime - but don't forget to love your concrete particular meaningful mother, father, spouse, child, sangha member and so on. This second type of love will prove more difficult and disappointing, but can we (and do we want to) live without this love or without these people? Not at all, we love them and care about them more than strangers, just because of the conditions that shape our esteem for them... I'm sure they will appreciate your unconditional love towards them, but I guess they will expect more from you... ★

## Monday Nembutsu

by Rob McCarthy



A few weeks back Rev'd Sujatin suggested we could share some chanting on each Monday, and whilst chanting be conscious of the shared nature of the chant. Now, on Mondays, our chant is heard all around our planet.

Our new online group 'Monday Nembutsu', on [amidatrust.ning.com](http://amidatrust.ning.com), already has over twenty members and we know this Monday call is heard in Australia, Belgium, England, Canada and Hawaii. We consciously add our voices to the chant and welcome love into all our lives. Please log-on and tell us where else the chant is being heard on Mondays.

When we chant we are opening ourselves to the love that we know is real. In our sharing of this call we know of a real connection, an actual community that does link around our planet. Here we feel held by love, grounded in love, inspired by love, part of a loving chain around our planet; from this place we naturally act more lovingly, we turn to healing and nurturing and caring. This is love's journey.

Our practice is to just say *Namo Amida Bu*. On each Monday, at any time through the day, we will chant; knowing that this is a shared community practice, with the intention of welcoming love as our life guide, of calling to Amida Buddha.

Please join this chain each Monday. ★



# Perception

## by Katrien Sercu

At the end of last year I wrote a little poem called 'Faithful' - it was printed in the autumn Running Tide. The poem grew out of watching the daily troubles of the sunflowers in my garden. As I wrote the poem I was convinced of the truth of my perception. I did not think anything more would grow on the flower apart from the three small leaves.

At the beginning of October I was astonished to see a little flower rising up, hidden between the chaplets of leaves, above the naked, three metre tall stalk! It grew open, into an amazing, wonderful, solitary sunflower with hundreds of seeds.

The stalk is still in my garden. I brought the flower inside to protect it from the birds, who got all the others seeds that were outside through the winter.

Today, (April 2012) I planted twenty five little plants, grown from the seeds of this one sunflower, and I put thirty more seeds into fresh earth to germinate. I have only used one tenth of the whole flowers worth of seed... So many more could be planted, each one creating hundreds and hundreds of new seeds. Each one bringing colour, light and beauty.

Last autumn I saw the very hard battle of this one sunflower that survived, but now I see its enormous richness. Praise this seed and all the conditions which make it just as it is.

I have learnt to be careful with my perceptions. It can be good to look beyond the havoc. ★



### 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.

Sunflower by Claudio.Ar via creative commons: [http://www.flickr.com/photos/claudio\\_ar/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/claudio_ar/)  
Freesia in the rain (right) by John Morgan via creative commons: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/aidanmorgan/>





## Early Morning

Early morning, quietly lying  
 Nurturing raindrops gently falling  
 My being is filled with joy  
 As my thoughts become one  
 Namoamidabutsunamoamidabutsunamoamidabutsu  
 Contentment met with glimpses of clarity  
 Unique to this experience  
 Gratitude  
 Inexpressible in bombu terms  
 How my nature cries out  
 In perfect unison with multitudes  
 Of those gone before, and yet,  
 To come again  
 My song, not new,  
 But so perfectly complete  
 Namo Amida Butsu

Barb MacCarl

Barb MacCarl belongs to the Kelowna Buddhist Temple, B.C. Canada.

“After hearing Amida's gentle voice for most of my life, I finally responded 3 years ago and have since experienced nothing but gratitude and fulfillment.

The quiet and stillness of morning is always a special time to say the Nembutsu, it was such a morning before I got out of bed that this poem came to me.”★



# A Pureland Sutra by John Masefield

by Kaspalita

Last Sunday, in the midst of a short English heatwave after weeks of rain, I walked through the rolling hills of Herefordshire. I walked through copses, and ancient orchards, and meadows strewn with buttercups and Queen Anne's Lace.

My friend Anna Stenning (who has just started to learn the bellmaster role for our evening services in Malvern) is studying the poetry of Edward Thomas and Robert Frost for her PhD. She was leading a group of us through the paths those two poets used to walk, and past the house that Frost once lived in.

At the halfway point of the walk we stopped in the shade of deep hedgerows and flowing horse-chestnuts and someone read out an extract from the John Masefield poem, *The Hounds of Hell*.

Masefield was poet Laureate of the UK from 1930 to 1967, and he was born in Ledbury, not far from where we were walking.

The poem, a ballad, tells the story of a 'Wild Hunt'. The wild hunt is a myth that pops up throughout Europe. The dead, or fairies, or ghosts are riding through the skies. They have wild horses and hounds and are hunting...

In the ballad a hunter terrorises the land taking livestock. The people call upon their priests who are unable to say a word in the face of it. Then St. Withiel comes to hear of the hunt, and attempts to make a stand against the ghostly rider. He thinks he can do better than the priests, but his own voice fails and he becomes its prey.

The saint runs, chased by the spectral hunter and its hounds until he crosses a stream and enters a Pureland.

I do not use the word lightly. As in the Larger Pureland Sutra, in Masefield's Pureland, there are silver sands and birds that sing the Dharma.

Here's the section from the poem:

The saint leaped far into the stream  
And struggled to the shore.  
The hunt died like an evil dream,  
A strange land lay before.

He waded to a glittering land,  
With brighter light than ours;  
The water ran on silver sand  
By yellow water flowers.

The fishes nosed the stream to rings  
As petals floated by,  
The apples were like orbs of kings,  
Against a glowing sky.

On tall and steady stalks of green  
The outwards flowers grew.  
The ghost-flower, silver like a queen,  
The queen-flower streaked with blue

The king-flower, crimson on his stalk,  
With frettings in his crown;  
The peace-flower, purple, from the chalk,  
The flower that loves the down.

Lilies like thoughts, roses like words,  
In the sweet brain of June;  
The bees there, like the stock-dove birds,  
Breathed all the air with croon.

Purple and golden hung the plums;  
Like slaves bowed down with gems  
The peach-trees were; sweet scented gums  
Oozed clammy from their stems.

And birds of every land were there,  
Like flowers that sang and flew;  
All beauty that makes singing fair  
That sunny garden knew.





Åsgårdsreien by Peter Nicolai Arbo (Norway 1831-1892) Painted 1872. Public Domain image

For all together sang with throats  
So tuned, that the intense  
Colour and odour pearled the notes  
And passed into the sense.

And as the saint drew near, he heard  
The birds talk, each to each,  
The fire-bird to the glory-bird.  
He understood their speech.

One said: "The saint was terrified  
Because the hunters came."

Another said: "The bloodhounds cried,  
And all their eyes were flame."

Another said: "No shame to him,  
For mortal men are blind:  
They cannot see beyond the grim  
Into the peace behind."

Another sang: "They cannot know,  
Unless we give the clue,  
The power that waits in them below  
The things they are and do."

Another sang: "They never guess,  
That deep within them stand  
Courage and peace and loveliness,  
Wisdom and skill of hand."

The birds go on to give the saint more encouragement, and he goes back across the stream to meet the hunter. The hunter reveals herself as a sick and 'dwindling' woman. And the saint exhorts her to leave this world, which she duly does.

A while back I made an informal study of lots of different people's spiritual experiences - from the reports in William James book, to earlier and more contemporary accounts. With these in mind it is hard not to read Masefield's description as an account of his own spiritual experience.

The parallels to Buddhist descriptions are striking, from the metaphor of crossing to the other shore to the land of light and jewel like fruits and flowers.





The saint in the poem crosses to the other shore out of desperation. He is being chased by this foul hunter and in his fleeing jumps into the stream and fights his way across the current to the far shore.

I'm sure this is one way in which people do cross to the Pureland. Pursued by our demons, we think we have nowhere to run and then suddenly the light changes and we are somewhere else.

Masefield's demons are part of the outside world and perhaps, as students of modern psychology, we would tend to place these ghosts inside in our own minds. In the poem the hunter chases many men, and the hunt happens time and time again. Wherever you think these demons live, there is something universal about them. We are all chased by similar spectral hunters.

As Pureland Buddhists we would tend to place the power beyond the grim as outside ourselves, rather than deep within ourselves. But I suspect this is not as important a distinction as it first appears.

Perhaps the most striking difference is that Masefield's saint tells the 'Woman Death' to leave, whilst Buddhist teachings suggest that there is a greater wisdom in making friends with our demons, rather than banishing them to another place, from which they are sure to return.

Did St. Withiel slip into another world, or did he simply have the scales removed from his eyes and see this world as it really is, with its silver flowers and Dharma singing birds?

Today I am leaning towards the second answer, but I suspect it's the wrong sort of question to be asking.

Speaking of those Dharma singing birds - it is clear from Masefield's poem that liberation is not only the experience of the Pureland but also it is what St. Withiel receives from the birds singing - the lesson that beyond what people say and do is something wise and compassionate.

In Buddhist terms we might say that if you can look beyond your karma, and samskaras, you will find the world is full of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

In the traditional Buddhist scheme of things we are



Contemplation of the jeweled trees in the Pureland from the Tiamo Mandala.

reborn into the Pureland in order to hear the Dharma, to have something transmitted from the unconditioned realm, and *somehow* carry it with us into this world.

I am reminded of the image on the cover of this issue - look closely and you will see Kannon carrying Amida Buddha.

It is not the small differences in language, or the difference in how this saint behaves compared to some Buddhist sages, that I take away from this poem - but the universality of spiritual experience, the sense of certainty that this place of silver sands exists, and the sense that having seen it we are fuelled on towards liberation.

Namo Amida Bu \*





# What's on guide

## Summer events in the Amida world

### **TERAPIA ZEN Y PSICOLOGIA BUDISTA en Vitoria, Espana**

June 9th - 10th

*Centro de psicología y Consciencia Plena, Vitoria, Espana*

Un taller sobre los elementos de terapia del perspectiva de psicología budista como presentado en el obra de David Brazier en sus libros Terapia Zen, El Buda Que Siente y Padece, y otros.

Para obtener informacion, pregunta a Oscar: omzcoaching@gmail.com

### **ZEN THERAPY: EMPATHY FOR THE DEVIL**

**June 16, 2012 from 10am to 5pm**

*Sukhavati, Finsbury Park, London*

What is the daimonic? Any natural function which has the power to take over the whole person, an archetypal function of human experience, and an existential reality. Being possessed by daimonic energies leads one to psychosis; suppressing them leads one to the anti-daimonic, which is another word for apathy. Eros, sex, anger, rage, craving for power: the things the daimonic evokes are powerful and unambiguous. This workshop will be mainly experiential and interspersed with study of texts from the Zen and the existentialist tradition. With Manu Bazzano and Dharmavidya David Brazier. Cost: £50/day £75/weekend.

### **JEALOUSY AND SELF DEFEAT**

**June 17, 2012 from 10am to 5pm**

*Sukhavati, Finsbury Park, London*

The green emotion is one of the most powerfully self-sabotaging. Resentment and bitterness introduces a painful poison into relationships and into individual life. Envy and jealous, possessiveness and indiviousness, have an obsessive quality and well illustrate the principle of Buddhist psychology that dysfunctional states can be stable in the sense of being circular and self-reinforcing. We all suffer from it from time to time and some have their lives destroyed by it. It lies behind much violence and self-destruction. In this day we will explore the theme in our own lives and those of the people we work with. Day Seminar with Dharmavidya David Brazier. Cost: £50/day £75/weekend.



### **SILA SESSHIN**

June 18, 2012 at 8am to June 22, 2012 at 4pm

*Sahishnu's House in Bolsover, Derbyshire, UK*

This intensive five day retreat is focussed upon the nature, application and meaning of Buddhist ethics. In this approach to Buddhism, ethical guidelines are considered as expressions of and supports to faith and the mind of awakening; as such they are "koans" or "hwadu" - foci for spiritual practice to be worked with on-goingly through life.

Each ethical precept is a facet of nembutsu, an aspect of the relationship between the foolish limited being and intuited, unimpeded light of awakening. This retreat will include silent sitting, daily recitation of 156 precepts, groups for self-reflection and for discussion of the application of ethics in daily life and in society. There will also be extended periods of silence. This retreat forms part of the series of five sesshin recommended to all Amida Buddhists who wish to seriously deepen their practice.

The cost: £250 fully residential or £65 per day  
(concessions available)

### **BUDDHIST ACTION DAY**

July 7, 2012 all day

*Gillespie Park, London*

This Interfaith work session will comprise of extensive repairs to a seating area outside the main ecology centre building. In effect the finished structure will be an arbor and a place for visitors to sit quietly. Constructed of recycled lengths of hazel, wired together into a trellis, into which living branches will be woven. The finished job will resemble a green cave and provide a cool place of refuge during warm weather. Contact Modgala at Sukhavati for more information.

### **CHANTING INTENSIVE**

July 8, 2012 from 10am to 6pm

*Abdisstraat 10 in Gent, Belgium*

An eight hour nembutsu chanting event hosted by Lut Moerman, Amida Shu member, on behalf of the Belgium sangha. This is an opportunity to share in the spiritual intensity of calling the 'Name' with other nembutsu practioners and to enter into the deep experience of Pureland practice.

If you are interested in coming please contact [jnanamati@gmail.com](mailto:jnanamati@gmail.com) for details





## PURELAND INTENSIVE PRACTICE WEEK

July 16, 2012 at 6:30am to July 20, 2012 at 9pm

*Sukhavati House, London*

The Pureland approach centres on faith with nembutsu as the medium by which ordinary (bambu) beings discover connection with Amida Tathagata, the Buddha who exemplifies limitless love and compassion.

Whilst nembutsu is the primary practice for Pureland Buddhists we might also say that engaging in other practices is another way in which we can express our gratitude for the grace we receive and the joy that comes from hearing the Name. By this we are acknowledging in a profoundly spiritual way the nature of what Amida brings to our lives.

This is an opportunity to join us in a period of intense daily practice. Participants do not need to attend every day but can be involved as and when available to do so. During the week we will engage in a range of different practices reflecting the Amida shu approach, including sutra recitation, silent contemplation, nembutsu chanting as well as daily service.

The daily practice schedule will commence each day at 6.30 and end at 9.00 a.m. The second period will be between 10.30 and 2.00 p.m. The evening session will run from 7.00 p.m. to 9.00 p.m.

## PURELAND SERVICE

*Amida Atherstone, 23A Long Street, Atherstone, CV9 1AY*

Join us for the first Pureland service to take place in Atherstone. Led by Kusumavarsa, Gankonin (Priest) and Amida Order member. The service will include chanting and sitting meditation plus Dharma discussion. There will be a 'potluck' vegetarian supper and refreshments afterwards.

Donations welcome. Contact Kusuma (01827 719926) or Jnanamati (0207 2632183) for more information.

**FOR DETAILS OF REGULAR PURELAND MEETINGS AND CONTACT DETAILS, SEE OVERLEAF.**

The Tathagata pours down the rain of Dharma on great and poor, good and bad, alike. How we are affected depends upon our karmic condition, but grace cuts through karma.

~ Dharmavidya

# Contact Amida

## UNITED KINGDOM

**Amida London** is the office of the head of the Amida Order. It hosts regular day retreats and other events.

Sukhavati  
21 Sussex Way  
London N7 6RT

Telephone: 0207 263 2183  
[modgala@amidatrust.com](mailto:modgala@amidatrust.com)  
[www.amidalondon.org.uk](http://www.amidalondon.org.uk)

**Amida Newcastle** has regular weekly meetings in Gosforth.

[sujatin@gmail.com](mailto:sujatin@gmail.com)  
[http://lotusinthemud.typepad.com/amida\\_newcastle/](http://lotusinthemud.typepad.com/amida_newcastle/)

**Amida Sheffield** have weekly meetings.

Telephone: 0114 272 4290  
[amidasheffield@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:amidasheffield@blueyonder.co.uk)  
<http://pureland.wordpress.com>

**Amida Malvern** have weekly & monthly meetings in Malvern.

Telephone: 01684 572 444  
[kaspalita@amidatrust.com](mailto:kaspalita@amidatrust.com)  
[www.malvernsangha.co.uk](http://www.malvernsangha.co.uk)

## EUROPE

**Amida Belgium** has regular meetings, 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 Prajnatarā T. Bryant, a Gankonin with the Amida Order.

[amidamosaic@gmail.com](mailto:amidamosaic@gmail.com)  
<http://amidamosaic.com>

### Amida Israel

Amida Israel Sangha meets on the 3rd Sunday each month, 20:30 - 22:30 for practice & sharing.

[ymatri@gmail.com](mailto:ymatri@gmail.com)

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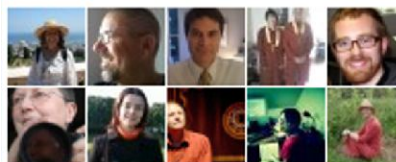
## Online Sangha



### Friends of Amida

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

Over 1000 members



<http://amidatrust.ning.com>