



Three Wheels NEWS



Three Wheels is a branch of Shogyoji Temple in Japan

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Spiritual Encounters in the History of Three Wheels The 148th London Eza

On Sunday 8th of December, a large number of guests gathered for a very special Eza to commemorate the 25th Anniversary of the establishment of Three Wheels and to pay their respects to the late Mrs Hiroko Sato, wife of Rev. Kemmyo Sato, who sadly passed away exactly one year earlier. In fact, so many people came that the Buddha room had to be very hastily rearranged to accommodate everyone.

During the service everybody was able to offer incense in front of the Buddha to Hiroko-san, who is still so acutely missed, and spend a few moments in quiet remembrance. The whole service was pervaded by an atmosphere of peace, respect and gratitude and everybody was able to think about Hiroko-san and all that they had received from her.



**Prof. John White and Dr. Stephen Montgomery
offering incense**

After the service had finished Rev. Kenshin Ishii gave a talk entitled, *Spiritual Encounters in the History of Three Wheels*. This really was a wonderful talk, and helped everyone to understand much more fully how Three Wheels came to exist and the spiritual history that has made Three Wheels the place that it is today for us to be able to visit and hear the Buddha Dharma.

Since its creation, very many activities have occurred

at Three Wheels which have led to a great deal of spiritual encounters and friendships. For example the building of the Zen Garden not only resulted in a very beautiful garden that attracts a large number of visitors every year, but also helped to forge and strengthen many of those friendships, not least of that between Rev. Sato and Prof. John White, who designed the garden, and also between Rev. Sato, Prof. White, and Mr Ogawa, the main creator of the garden. Mr Ogawa, a top Kyoto gardener, has been visiting and helping Three Wheels ever since at least once a year.

Another very important event, which started in 1997, is the annual Reconciliation ceremony to pray for world peace and reconciliation. This started at the request of Mr Masao Hirakubo, a WW2 veteran. Since then many British and Japanese war veterans who had suffered in the terrible battles in Burma, and who had nothing but hatred for their enemies, were amazingly able to meet and reconcile, and at last be able to find peace. They were even able to form strong personal friendships with their former adversaries. In light of his work with the reconciliation movement and other contributions to Anglo Japanese relationships, in May of this year Rev. Sato was awarded the Order of the Rising Sun by the Emperor, a very prestigious award. Rev. Sato accepted this honour with humility saying that it was a decoration to be shared with all the people who had helped him. Along with the above recognition, and many other achievements, Rev. Sato has worked tirelessly over the last quarter of a century to make Three Wheels a haven for everyone and a place where we can hear the precious teachings of Shinran Shonin, the Founder of the Shin Buddhist tradition.

Of course, the main person helping him was his wife, the late Mrs Hiroko Sato, who had joined him in the U.K. in January 1995. Her warm welcoming smile

made a huge impression on everyone who visited Three Wheels and it seemed to be in her nature to want to help and patiently listen to everybody. Rev. Ishii said that although Mrs Sato and Prof. White may have kept themselves slightly in the background of events, what they have done in helping Rev. Sato develop Three Wheels over the years has been immense.

Rev. Ishii's talk richly illustrated just how much has happened over the last 25 years, how much we owe to so many people, and what a special place Three Wheels is. We were also reminded that 25 years is just a milestone and that Three Wheels must continue to grow and develop far into the future.

Afterwards there was time for the guests to reflect on their own personal experiences at Three Wheels and how it has affected their lives, especially their warm memories of Hiroko-san. We heard just how much her life has had such a large effect on so many people. Through her compassion, wisdom and kindness she has without doubt planted a seed to make us want to listen to the Buddha-Dharma, and to aspire to be born in the Pure Land through the Nenbutsu. She is the Mother of Three Wheels, still helping and guiding us. Thank you to everybody who has made Three Wheels possible.

Chris Dodd

What has been done for me by the Three Treasures **The 24th Shokai Retreat**

The 24th Shokai Retreat was held between 11th and 13th October. The theme of this retreat was 'What has been done for me by the Three Treasures'. All the participants reflected upon this theme as homework, and joined the opening service on Friday evening. Sam K, who kicked off the meeting with great energy announced, "Let's make the most of the great opportunity that this Retreat offers us!"

Kei S, who following the late Mrs Hiroko Sato's advice will undertake the introspection session at Shogyoji temple in Japan, gave a Vow of Sincere Practice. During her vow, she said her encounter with Three Wheels for the last five years has been a gift. She was filled with gratitude towards her family, friends and her colleagues. She explained how it was the people around her that enabled her to feel love, compassion and warmth. Hiroko-san showed her how the Buddha dharma can live and help her life and it was Hiroko-san who showed her the path to see Amida's light which she would like to follow for the rest of her life.

Rev. Kemmyo Taira Sato gave a welcome greeting in which he expressed how happy he was to have three new participants joining the Shokai as well as a guest from Japan, Mrs Rie H. He taught us that appreciating the Three Treasures is not enough, as Prince Shotoku stated, "Taking refuge in the Three Treasures" is very important so we need to be aware of how much we are supported by the Sangha, turn within oneself, and take refuge in Buddha.

We had two sessions to share our Shokai preparation "homework", one in the evening of the first day, and the other in the morning of the second day. Rina P who was the youngest, spoke her thoughts with tears remembering her recent introspection session at

Shogyoji temple; "Even though I am the greediest being, I'm accepted by my parents and those around me as if they are Buddhas. My Dharma-teachers, who sat for hours listening and taking enormous responsibility and trust symbolised the Sangha for me". Renata read out her letter addressed to the late Mrs Hiroko Sato, who Renata called 'spiritual mother'. She expressed in the letter how much Hiroko meant to herself, which we all commonly felt. It was clearly Hiroko-san that guided Renata to join the retreat. Furthermore, Rie H openly talked about her difficulties in her life, yet she found that these bad conditions were in fact blessings from the Buddha. She was grateful about her re-encounter with Rev Sato and Hiroko 20 years ago at Three Wheels which changed her perspective enabling her to become who she is today. Many Dharma-friends shared their homework and mentioned how grateful they were for the opportunity to come and listen to the Dharma. The support, love and compassion that they received by the Three Treasures changed their perspective of their lives.

The morning session on the second day was new to the Shokai. Rev Sato introduced an essay written by DT Suzuki, entitled *Infinite Light*. The participants took turns reading the essay out and at the same time had the opportunity to raise their own questions and comments about its contents. From reading the essay and listening to the discussion these passages especially touched my heart; "It is this very conceit and delusion that causes the final downfall of the self-power."; and, "One is first to struggle desperately with doubt and self-power but the denser the cloud of doubt the brighter the light that then reveals itself."

After lunch and a general work session around the temple, Rev. Kenshin Ishii led a chanting rehearsal

for the service of the following day's London Eza ceremony. We were taught that the most important point of chanting is to express our gratitude towards the Buddha and for what has been done for us. Later Rev. Sato's English translation of the *Shoshinge* was read out by Andrew W and many of us were moved by how beautiful the words of the *Shoshinge* are in Rev. Sato's new rendering of its verses.

During the closing ceremony, Prof. Shimoda who would later give the main talk for London Eza was able to join us, and everyone shared their overall impressions of the retreat. A newcomer to the Retreat, Amit K, said that he learnt how important it was to simply entrust Amida rather than his intellectual thinking in order to grasp Buddhism. Each participant

expressed their own ways in which they find the Three Treasures precious. In summary many of the participants expressed their wish to consistently join in Sangha activities through which they can follow and listen to the Dharma and entrust themselves to Amida through taking refuge in him. When I shared my thoughts with the Sangha, I expressed my own apology for failing to actively reflect on my present existence, which we have always been taught is a most important way of taking refuge in the Buddha. By pronouncing the Nembutsu with everyone in the Buddha-room I felt very warm, peaceful and blessed to be embraced by the Three Treasures.

Kaori Punwani

Establishing the Pure Land in the U.K. The 147th London Eza

For the 147th London Eza, the Three Wheels Sangha welcomed the world-renowned Buddhist scholar Professor Masahiro Shimoda of Tokyo University to join the annual Hoonko Otorikoshi ceremony, and were very much encouraged by his observation that the spiritual atmosphere at Three Wheels appears to be of entirely the same character as that of its parent temple Shogyoji on the other side of the world.



Prof. Masahiro Shimoda

Following the service to the Buddha, Prof. Shimoda presented a carefully and meticulously prepared talk entitled *The Establishment of the Pure Land* which set out to help those gathered become "further acquainted with the essential characteristics of Buddhist and Pure Land thought." The talk, which was both erudite and practical, cannot be easily summarised. However, in essence, Prof. Shimoda sought to explicate the dynamic relationship, or "constant flow of interaction", between this dualistic world, "including ourselves", and the world of "the uncreated". Buddhism, he said, teaches us how to become awakened to the latter world and become liberated from the former. It does this initially by 'naming' the former 'Realm A' with

certain fictitious names. This has the effect of drawing the 'realm of the uncreated' Realm A into our everyday dualistic world B. At the same time, however, at this moment there is the danger that Realm A ends up merely as another differentiated element of Realm B. In order to overcome this problem the power of negation is applied to the fictitious name: as for instance in the title of Amida Buddha where the negative 'a' qualifies the Buddha's Light and Life-span (*mita*) which are thus entirely beyond measure. As Shimoda-sensei explained, "Because Amida Buddha has a name that can be interpreted as 'name of no name,' he is not a being of the world of Realm B but continues to endlessly open up the world of Realm A."

The second part of Prof. Shimoda's talk applied his previous remarks to the practical question of attaining faith-awakening; as outlined in Rennyō-shōnin's teaching of the 'five-elements'. In particular he discussed the importance of the 'good teacher', stating that "moving from B to A, presupposes the existence of Dharma friends and good teachers [...] in whom we see the world of A unfold within their being." This "discovery means that A is awakened within our own selves." Later on in the meeting, this aspect of Shimoda-sensei's talk was illustrated in a remark from Rev. Ishii who described an encounter he had witnessed between a Dharma friend, Mr Chris Dodd, and the late Mrs Hiroko Sato. On her death bed Mrs Sato said to Chris, "I will see you again in the Pure Land." After hearing this Mr Dodd said that for the first time he experienced the desire to be born in the Pure Land. Rev. Ishii explained, "This shows us how, just as Shimoda-sensei described, Chris's good teacher, Hiroko-san, saw Realm A in his heart and was able to bring it forth in the moment of the negation of her

own life.” As Prof. Shimoda himself said in his talk, “Now that Hiroko-san has literally attained birth in the Pure Land, Realm A has unfolded even further to beyond the borders of both this and the other shore [...]”.

At the conclusion of Prof. Shimoda’s wonderful presentation, Prof. White praised him for summarising the essentials of Shakyamuni Buddha’s teaching in such a precise and succinct manner. However he also gave a caution to all assembled about the dangers of falling into dualistic ways of thinking, and reminded us that Mahayana Buddhist philosophy speaks of the ultimate as “neither is, or is not”. These comments were welcomed by Prof. Shimoda as very helpful in reflecting on the most appropriate ways to express Buddhist teaching in the English language.

A guest asked Prof. Shimoda to clarify why Buddhism insists on positing an uncreated realm or locus (which Prof. Shimoda called ‘Realm A’) apart from the dualistic, everyday world of differentiation and discrimination (‘Realm B’). “Why can’t we simply be satisfied with the plurality of existence? Why do we need to seek harmony by positing another realm or locus?” he added. Prof. Shimoda said that the reason for this is due to the fact that we live with others and that, within Realm B, their otherness is absolute and cannot be overcome - even by coercion or control. Only through self-negation can harmony be achieved.

Another participant of the meeting spoke of the ‘in-

solubility’ of the bond forming the master-disciple relationship, and his delight at finding Prof. Shimoda’s explanation of this in his words, “To a good teacher, the seeker’s world of B is not an object of negation. Instead it is accepted and elevated (sublimed) together with the teacher him or herself into the Realm of A.”

Rev. Kemmyo Sato concluded the discussion by thanking Prof. Shimoda and praising him as “a rare and precious practitioner-scholar, whose studies and exposition of Buddhism are deeply rooted in spiritual experience”. After becoming momentarily lost for words to express his feeling, Rev. Sato said, “Prof. Shimoda-is beyond me. I can’t describe him. But his presence here is unfathomably important for this sangha. If you should encounter any serious problems with the translation of Buddhist texts that can’t be solved within the Sangha when I am gone, please ask for his help” Rev. Sato, also thanked Professor Shimoda for providing a foreword to his book *5-7-5 The Haiku of Basho*, recently translated and published with his friend and collaborator Professor John White. “Shimoda-sensei loves haiku and in his foreword helps us to see that haiku also point us to Realm A, the Uncreated.”

Concluding the meeting, the assembled gathering heard from Mr Shimpei Hashimoto, visiting along with his daughter Yoko, who said appreciatively, “Since I lived at Three Wheels nearly two decades ago the chanting has become much stronger.”

Andy B

Just As We Are The 149th London Eza

The 149th London Eza was held at Three Wheels on 23rd February. This was the first Eza in 2020 which represents, as Andrew Webb said in his opening comments “a new chapter in Three Wheels history”. This Eza was also an opportunity to welcome Rev. Goshin Takehara from Japan, whom many of the Three Wheels Sangha were meeting for the first time. The focus of this Eza was a talk by Rev. Sato on *What is meant by Sonomama in Asahara Saichi’s Poems*. Recently, at the Buddhist Society, many of us have been enjoying attending Rev. Sato’s study groups looking at the writings of D.T. Suzuki. A number of these works contain references to Saichi and his poetry, so this talk is very relevant to recent Three Wheels activities and, as such, was eagerly awaited by several of us who are keen to learn more about Saichi and his wonderful poetry. Rev. Sato has had a keen interest in Saichi’s poems since he was in his 20s, studying them under D.T. Suzuki and has translated a



A large number of guests attended the Eza

great number of the poems and published books about them in Japan.

Rev. Sato opened his talk with some background on Saichi. He explained that Saichi was a type of Shin Buddhist called *Myokonin* – a term used to

refer to people of pure faith who are “characterized by their piousness, unworldliness, liveliness, good-heartedness and profound spirituality.” Many of the *Myokonin* were largely illiterate so most of what we know about them comes not from their own writings, but from books written about them, often by Shin Buddhist priests who were using their stories to inspire other followers.

However, in the case of Saichi, he kept a diary which contained many thousands of poems in which he described his own experience of attaining pure faith and the rich joyous life he was living as a result. Rev. Sato explained that in this way, we are able to obtain direct insight from these records, rather than relying on a third party witness who may not have known what Saichi was experiencing first hand.

Saichi was heavily influenced by Rennyō Shōnin – in particular by the *Ofumi* (Letters) that are read out in Shin Buddhist services. Rev. Sato said that the use of simple and easy to understand Japanese in the *Ofumi* made the teaching accessible, even to people who are not educated. He explained that Saichi would read out Rennyō’s letters morning and evening, “tracing the spaces between the lines with his index finger”. He said that he had personally seen Saichi’s copy of these letters and the places where the index finger had been tracing had worn through to be almost completely transparent.

Next, Rev. Sato started going through examples of Saichi’s poems, showing how he described his deep spiritual encounter with Rennyō Shōnin, despite a difference of almost 400 years between their lifetimes. Following this, he moved on to the main topic of the talk – Saichi’s use of the Japanese words *sonomama* and *konomama*. *Sonomama* can be translated in this case as “just as you are” whereas *konomama* can be translated as “just as I am”, referring to the truth that Amida Buddha embraces us with his compassion “just as we are”.

Rev. Sato explained that in Saichi’s earlier poems, he used the word *konomama* in a positive way, however, over time his attitude towards this word changed considerably, eventually becoming quite negative. He explained that Saichi’s attitude changed “as a result of the profound introspection within him by the deepening processes of his faith-experience”. To demonstrate this, he recited several of Saichi’s poems that express the belief that if you expect birth to be attained *konomama* (“just as I am”), “you are mistaken”. As his attitude shifted to a negative feeling towards *konomama*, he often used the other word *sonomama*, meaning “just as you are”. Rev. Sato explained that the reason for this is that “just as

I am” will “turn into an empty word and sound vain and pretentious” if it is used “other than at the feeling of unity with Amida Buddha at the very moment of salvation”. On the hand, he showed that *sonomama* is like a message “addressed to the devotee from Amida Buddha himself” saying “Entrust yourself just as you are”. Whilst this is not necessarily an easy distinction to make, I liked this explanation as it reminded me once again that we don’t achieve true faith through our own self power (*jiriki*) but from Amida Buddha himself (*tariki*). As Rev. Sato clarified, with *sonomama*, we are being called from the other side, whereas with *konomama* this is not the case. *Konomama* ends up acting as our own self affirmation. As he said, it is like *sonomama* is the voice of Amida Buddha that Saichi heard addressing him directly.

Rev. Sato next went on to say how incredible it was that even with his lack of schooling, Saichi was able to see clearly such a subtle difference between these two words. He also explained that Saichi occasionally used a third word – *arinomama* meaning “just as it is”. Finally, he concluded by saying that these three words express the three kinds of naturalness in Shin Buddhism. *Konomama* represents Karma and *arinomama* represents the uncreated whereas *sonomama* represents Other Power which is “the very essence of Shin Buddhism”.



Christopher Duxbury asked a question to Rev. Sato

Andrew Webb summarised the talk by saying that he could feel the warmth of Saichi coming through the words of his poetry, showing just how much work Rev. Sato must have put into the translations to preserve these feelings. He said that “behind these simple words, there must have been a deep religious struggle” and that Saichi, as an uneducated person, must have achieved his pure faith “not through intellectual study but through true Buddhist practice”. He added that we can all try to follow his path through our own listening to the Dharma.

I then asked Rev. Sato to clarify for me what is meant

by *Myokonin*, to which he replied that it is a “person of true faith”. He expanded on that to re-iterate that many books were written by priests about *Myokonin* to help others achieve true faith, however Saichi’s work is direct in that Saichi wrote it all himself and in this way, we can get a greater insight into the true faith-experience. He then reminded us that although the *Myokonin* might have been functionally illiterate, they had undergone hard spiritual training. In Saichi’s own case, he listened to the Dharma for 40 years from the age of 19 until he achieved true pure faith.

Chris Dodd then asked Rev. Sato to expand on the differences between *konomama* and *sonomama*. Rev. Sato replied that although D.T. Suzuki used *konomama* in a positive way at times, if it is used at any time other than at the moment of the attainment of true faith, it becomes self centred as if we are “interpreting it just how we would like”.

The final comments were from Rev. Ishii, who said that the subject of the difference between these words reminded him of his spiritual encounter on the day he had the offer to become a priest. He said that on that occasion, he felt true unconditional love and all he

could answer that with was “Thank you!”. If you say “As I am”, there is probably still some doubt there, because you might just hear the words but not feel the unconditional love. He also said that we don’t need to immediately understand this point, but that we should keep considering it throughout our lives and that our answer might change after another 20 or 30 years, so we should just keep working with it.

For my own part, I found Rev. Sato’s talk was a much needed reminder to not just rely on our own self power. The poems offered such beautiful descriptions of the true faith-experience which I found both inspirational and moving. Through recent reading of Rev. Sato and Prof. John White’s translations of the haiku of Basho, Buson and Issa, I have been finding poetry to be a unique way to gain insight into the Buddhist experience. Their translations of Saichi’s poetry also seem to contain so much that points to the deeper meaning behind the words. I look forward to reading them again many times over in the future.

Christopher Duxbury

How Have We Been Feeling Recently? The 25th Shokai Retreat

The 25th Shokai was entirely different in its form to all the previous retreats as it was held completely online due to the pandemic. However, I am very grateful to report that the depth of spiritual introspection and communication between all the participants was as profound as if we were all meeting together in the Buddha-room at Three Wheels. The Shokai was condensed into three meetings held over the weekend of 25-26 April 2020 and a total of 19 people participated using video and audio calls.

From the Buddha-room at Three Wheels, Rev. Kemmyo Taira Sato and Rev. Kenshin Ishii led the opening service of chanting the *Shoshinge*. Everybody was able to join in facing towards the Buddha from their own homes. Despite us all being located over a very wide geographical distance, though the shared service to the Buddha, it felt like we were all together in oneness before the Buddha-shrine at Three Wheels.

Before the Shokai we were all invited to reflect on the question, “What have I been feeling recently?” taking in mind Ven. Chimyo Takehara’s advice that Dharma-friends could use this period of social distancing and isolation to “turn within”. We shared this homework together at the first faith-meeting (*zadankai*) held immediately after the opening service. Everybody

gave their own unique impression about what they had been feeling since the country became ‘locked down’ as a result of the pandemic.

The range of emotions and feelings the participants described ranged from fear, anger, and deep sadness to gratitude and happiness. Worries were expressed about close family and friends and the effect social isolation was having on their lives. One participant described how each day his “believing mind easily evaporated” as he became involved with the stresses and problems of everyday life, “But I know that it is only my blind passions clouding my mind, and that I have the Three Treasures to take refuge in and bring me back to the truth”.

Another Dharma-friend described how the teachings she had received from Shogyoji and Three Wheels had become the most important source of direction in her life. “It is purely because of receiving the Dharma”, she related, “that I can look into myself however difficult it may be to do so”. At the conclusion of the meeting Rev. Ishii asked us to relax, digest all the words that we had received from our Dharma-friends and look into ourselves before coming back to listen to Rev. Sato’s Dharma-talk that afternoon.

Rev. Sato's Dharma talk consisted of three parts; his translation and commentary on a letter by Rennyō Shōnin entitled, 'On an Epidemic', reading a special letter from Ven. Chimyo Takehara, the Head Priest of Shōgyōji, and Rev. Sato's own free talk on the contents of Ven. Takehara's letter.

Rev. Sato's commentary on the letter by Rennyō Shōnin was entitled, *The Shin Buddhist attitude towards death*, and he made clear to us the essential points of this letter written in 1492, when Japan was suffering from a very serious epidemic which killed a great number of people. Many people blamed "evil spirits" or the "flow of bad air" for the spreading the disease and were very superstitious about the reasons for the epidemic. In this letter Rennyō Shōnin encouraged everyone to not become attached to such viewpoints and recognise the truth of impermanence, in which disease is only one of the unavoidable karmic conditions that inevitably lead to our death.

Rev. Sato then emphasised how Rennyō Shōnin, in the second part of the letter, taught us that faced with impermanence, "we should entrust ourselves to Amida Buddha and continue living our lives with gratitude to him for all that he has done for us". We could strongly feel through listening to Rev. Sato that, faced with such turmoil in the world around us, and the ever-present risk of death, it is only through entrusting ourselves to Amida Buddha that we can find true and lasting spiritual peace.

Though separated by 500 years in time, Ven. Takehara's letter to Dharma-friends entitled, *Facing the turmoil of the Coronavirus* was equally concerned with our spiritual condition during a time when our lives have been completely changed through an epidemic. Ven. Takehara began by reflecting on the nature of viruses and how they interact with their environments, noting that viruses which colonise different hosts for its own survival are, "very like us human beings whose hearts are likewise filled with never-ending desires". He then went on to encourage us to receive the Buddha's teaching, "in a truly personal way, as if receiving the light of the full moon from beyond the realm of phenomena".

Reflecting on Ven. Takehara's description of the coronavirus as having no membrane to protect it, Rev. Sato remarked that, although our consciousness is surrounded by the hard skin of our self-centredness, because everything is interrelated, we are easily influenced by others and can react very badly when our self-centred world is disturbed. "Whilst sitting

in meditation and thinking about Ven. Takehara's words", Rev Sato continued, "I saw how I was in a bad condition, similar to that of a virus. The problem of our consciousness is that we believe everything we feel is permanent and true. The only way is to go beyond this self-attachment is take refuge and entrust ourselves to the Buddha. Receiving this letter from Ven. Takehara my sadness turned into happiness. Everything becomes one in Namu Amida Butsu. I hope such a wonderful world will be born after this epidemic."

Responding to Rev. Sato's talk, Rev. Ishii commented that, "Our bad karma, just like the Coronavirus, will always be with us. However, although we are still waiting for a vaccine for the Coronavirus, we already have the Dharma, which is the only cure for the activity of my blind passions. This light of the Buddha, shining in our hearts, is the spiritual activity we are all waiting to receive." After a period of free discussion, we all went away to look into ourselves in the light of the talks we had received today and prepare our impressions for the final faith-meeting on Sunday morning.

After a short period of meditation we began the final meeting of this Shokai in which we shared our thoughts and feelings about the retreat and how our minds had changed as a result of listening to our Dharma-friends. Here are some of the impressions that were given by the participants:

How much free will do we have over our karma? I have had this question since the first Shokai I attended last year. Now I have fewer questions and more faith in the Buddha's teaching.

The value of Sangha, our spiritual community, is that we are on the Pure Land path together sharing great encounters, learning from and supporting each other.

I felt like Rennyō Shōnin was pointing me away from worrying and anger towards the Buddha-Dharma. It reminded to focus on what is important - my family, friends and Sangha. I know when we finally get back together I will appreciate Three Wheels much more than before and not take it for granted.

Through Sangha I came to feel very strongly that my self, my true self, is not something I own but beyond me, in my friends, in the world and in the hands of the Buddha.

My karma is so strong and heavy that it was only when

I was forced to face the risk to my husband's life that I could truly feel grateful to him. I am full of karma, an imperfect self, but Namu Amida Butsu guides me.

Sitting in meditation before the meeting I realised that I have never sat still in silence in my own house. I felt more content that I have before. After hearing everyone's homework and seeing the Buddha Shrine I felt a great sense of relief. Being brought up at Three Wheels I feel I could not have had a better start in life.

Despite our physical distance and the many worries

we have all been feeling in our lives due to social isolation, I felt how much this Shokai brought us closer together as a Sangha. I am very grateful that through Shokai being held as an online meeting, this very special faith-movement we have received from Shogyoji Temple could continue and show us the light of the Buddha-Dharma in such dark times. Thank you very much to Shogyoji Temple and to Three Wheels for sharing with us the inconceivable gift of the Buddha-Dharma.

Andrew Webb

Voices from Japan: Amida's Light that Illuminates the Dark Night The 65th Annual Summer Training Assembly at Shogyoji Temple

Some group online meetings began in early July this summer, when almost all Japanese people in Britain were suspended in the spiritual darkness by having to give up their journeys back to Japan, their own home country, due to Coronavirus pandemic. When Three Wheels held the first meeting, only people who had participated in past Shokai Retreats joined. Receiving an advice from Shogyoji, however, that "Taking advantage of the remote meeting, please invite as many Japanese people as possible to the training assembly", I felt the great love and compassion of Amida Buddha, which saves anyone without exception. In total, forty Japanese people from Three Wheels' Sangha participated in weekly online discussions held in different groups.

[Children's Group]

At the online meeting for primary school pupils, the members of Children's Meeting of Three Wheels were given an opportunity to meet two Japanese children online who participated in the training assembly in Japan. Despite our worries if the children could communicate well with the two children in Japan, they smiled as if they had been reunited with their close friends and they had a very good time together. Next, the children shared their impressions of reading two articles, *The Buddha is always watching you* and *Thank you for telling me off*. When I saw the children expressing their impressions such as "I want to be like the girl who could receive love through their experience of being told off," I realised that all of them were children of Buddha.

[Mothers' Group]

It was for the first time for mothers in this group, who only knew each other through their participation in the monthly Children's meeting, to have such a big opportunity to digest Buddhism together in their own meeting to read a Buddhist text. Having



A view of Shogyoji Temple

read the book they shared a number of impressions during the weekly meetings which included, "I have been measuring and judging people with my own self-centered viewpoint and have only been seeing the faults of my child during this lockdown" and "If I forget my gratitude I only get angry." Having been illumined by Amida's light from the words of the book, each person's remarks changed from the attitude of "correcting children" to "correcting themselves". I felt from listening to them how they had been released from their own spiritual restraint even though they were actually forced to endure great difficulties due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

[Women's Group]

Since one of members of this group honestly stated her impressions of reading the chapter on "self-sacrifice" in the book, each member's expression has changed completely. A few years ago, when she consulted with the Late Mrs Hiroko Sato about difficulties with her family and bringing up her children, Hiroko responded back to her with just a simple question, "Do you have to work?" The question from Hiroko has remained in her mind for a long time. This dialogue with Hiroko gave her a time of introspection and let her awaken

to her own feeling that her working life reduces the amount of time she can spend with her child, but also that if she would give up working, she will lose an important part of herself.

As a response to her, another member of this group said, “I have the same feelings” and shared her feeling of dissatisfaction with the fact that she gave up her job to become a housewife for her family. This person also shared her feeling of pessimistic self-sacrifice and of her jealousy to her husband who is very successful with his career. The suffering of the two which had been hidden in their hearts was released at once through reading the book and expressing their feelings at this meeting. After that, each participant shared their issues while looking back on their daily lives and was given the opportunity to become aware of their own “mental negative habits” being illumined by the teachings in the book.

[Business man/woman Group]

Ms. Mika Aoki (resident in Tokyo Japan), who has a long relationship to Three Wheels, also joined this group together with those who live in the U.K. I suddenly realised through their participation that the members of this group, including me and my wife, had all been given so much by Three Wheels. Among

them, Mr. Shogo Sakimura shared his impression from a teaching, “Everyone is my teacher except me”, in a Buddhist book we read and remembered that the late Mrs Hiroko Sato, who was on her deathbed, asked him “Who is your master?”. This remembrance reunited himself with her. Also, at each meeting, Ms. Kei Suzuki and Ms. Mako Webb shared their feelings that they also came to remember Hiroko’s words through reading the book and that they feel that Hiroko is still talking to them.

Having come to know the minds of all the participants, who each listen to the Dharma so faithfully, sincerely and respectfully in their everyday lives, I felt that the spiritual darkness of each of us were gently illuminated by the light of love and compassion of Amida, which reached us like moonlight through the teachings we received from author of the book who is the Dharma Lord of our tradition, Venerable Chimyo Takehara, the head priest of Shogyoji temple and the late Mrs Hiroko Sato, whose posthumous Dharma name is “Shakyamuni’s Disciple, Good Nun, Wonderful Seed”. I also felt that each of seed of Nenbutsu planted carefully by Hiroko in the darkness of our hearts is now beginning to sprout in the spiritual dawn.

Kenshin Ishii

Unconditional Love A talk by Rev. Kemmyo Taira Sato

Editor’s Note: This was a talk given by Rev. Sato for the 24th Summer Reunion for Peace and Friendship held at the Japanese Embassy in London. This is an annual meeting held by the Embassy to celebrate all the work which has been done by its participants to further peace, reconciliation and friendship. Due to the conditions of the pandemic this meeting was held entirely online.

Hello everyone whatever country you are from – Japan, the UK, or another country – and whatever religious tradition you belong to. Thank you very much for giving me your attention during the online meeting of the 24th Summer Reunion for Peace and Friendship held by the Japanese Embassy. In the brief few minutes at my disposal, I would like to bring to your attention two wonderful examples of unconditional love manifested through different individuals. It is not some philosophical or religious concept that I am thinking about here, but things that actually happened in the course of the long history of our Anglo-Japanese relationship.

First of all, I would like to go back in time to 1865, when a Japanese student studying here in London, fell



Rev. Kemmyo Sato delivering his talk

terminally ill with tuberculosis. The poor young man, Kosaburo Yamazaki by name from Choshu Province, was taken in and tended to until the end of his life by a certain Professor Alexander Williamson and his wife, Emma, who had been looking after the very first student intake from Japan, known as the Choshu Five.

Yamazaki himself died on 26 February 1866. When I finally discovered the grave of Professor and Mrs Williamson in Brookwood Cemetery, very close to the graves of Yamazaki and three other Japanese students who had succumbed while in London, I was

moved to tears. Just thinking about how much care so many young students from Japan had received from the professor and the unconditional love shown them though the existence of this one special individual and his wife, I knelt down and prostrated myself in front of the grave in gratitude.

Uppermost in the minds of the Japanese students who braved the long journey to the UK must have been the importance of acquiring Western scientific knowledge and modern technology. They will have undoubtedly been far less aware of the vital importance of their encounter with reliable and trustworthy Western people and of that unconditional selfless love that reveals itself through such individuals. As I reflect on the progress of those early students once they returned to Japan, I cannot help feeling that it was largely due to their encounter with the selfless love and humanity shown by a number of Western people that they were able to pioneer the modernisation of Japan and speak with such confidence with Western leaders to maintain their country's independence.

Today, as we enjoy a very happy Anglo-Japanese relationship in the political, economic, and, culturally speaking, academic, sporting and artistic fields,

it is very important that we also remember the unconditional selfless love and mutual trust between our two countries that flourished right at the very start of our Anglo-Japanese relationship.

Today, too, we can find a further uplifting example of this same unconditional love, embodied in the work of our immediate predecessors in the reconciliation movement. Immeasurably saddened by the breakdown in the relationship between our two countries occasioned so tragically by war, they did their very best to re-establish harmonious friendship and peace between Japan and the UK - sometimes at a risk to their own lives. Even after becoming very old and frail, having to walk with a stick or travel in a wheelchair, they still journeyed great distances to attend the reconciliation ceremonies to pray for peace, world peace and inner peace.

I would like to conclude my talk by expressing my deepest gratitude to the predecessors of our reconciliation movement for all they have done to help our nations continue to live in mutual trust and peaceful harmony.

Kemmyo Taira Sato

The Three Wheels Ladies' Meeting

I joined the Ladies' Meeting (*fujinkai*) held each Monday at Three Wheels just after I decided to retire in 2017. I finally had free time during weekdays after working full time for over 30 years.

On Monday morning, we first have a service together and then clean the temple. Sharing such practices with other members of group is kind of reverification that we are both a team and a Sangha.

In our group sessions, we each read aloud some sentences from a book relating to Buddhism. This book has been written by an author who lives in Japan and it often tells us that we are lacking in warmth and generosity of spirit in modern life. We sometimes struggle with the classic style of written Japanese as the author refers to a book written a few hundred years ago so Kenshin-san explains the meanings of those words as well as the special terms relating to Buddhism. We exchange our thoughts on the book and have discussions about the readings and sometimes our worries in everyday life which is then followed by a nice cup of tea together. I sometimes reminisce on the precious times we shared with Hiroko-san during the Ladies' Meeting activities.



Rev. Kenshin Ishii and his wife Sanae

Soon after the lockdown started, the weekly Ladies' Meeting resumed via the LINE video app which has meant that people who live far from the temple can join in as well. We certainly benefit from modern technology as more people can regularly join the meeting.

The online Ladies' Meeting begins with a service lead by Rev. Kenshin Ishii and, as we used to do, we read an article from a book which Mrs Sanae Ishii sends to the members in advance. At first, I wondered just how an online Ladies' Meeting could work using mobile

phones or personal computer, however that was just a worry. I guess that some of the members are shy and may feel embarrassed to talk on screen, however I still discover truth in the words from those who are not very confident speakers. I appreciate how we members can be open and share our problems and thoughts during the meetings. We of course have lively discussions too which always put me out of any bad mood.

I am not 100% physically fit as I had a cancer operation last year but I feel that I am really okay when I am together with the members of the Ladies' Meeting. I really look forward to having tea again with the Ladies' Meeting members at Three Wheels after the Covid-19 restrictions are relaxed in the near future.

Kyoko Mamiya



The members of the ladies' meeting

A poem by Kobayashi Issa

chō tobu ya
kono yo ni nozomi
nai yō ni

a butterfly flies
as if wishing for nothing
that's here in this world

This haiku by Kobayashi Issa is taken from the book, 5-7-5 The Haiku of Issa by John White and Kemmyo Taira Sato, published by the Buddhist Society Trust 2019.

Editors' Note.

For comments, criticisms, and questions concerning the Newsletter or if you want to provide material for inclusion, please contact Three Wheels Temple.

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