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## GREETINGS FROM THE OCEANIA AND EAST ASIA DISTRICT REPRESENTATIVE

By Rev George Gatenby, Hongwanji  
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### From the Boondocks

This year marks forty years since I set out on the white path between the rivers of water and fire and took the road of nembutsu. It has proven to be an extraordinary life-changing event that has carried me through a sometimes-difficult life. It has afforded the opportunity – indeed, as the *Seikatsu Shinjo* says - to ‘live life to the utmost with strength and joy.’



Initially encouraged by an acquaintance who lectured on East Asian culture at Sydney University, I was immediately alone in my religious allegiance all those years ago, but embraced in the Vow of Amida Buddha, nevertheless, just as we are at death.

Soon, however, people began to appear as spiritual companions and guides, including my Australian colleagues in ministry, John Paraskevopoulos, Mark Healsmith, and Gregg Heathcote. Added to that was the lively and refreshing Japanese-Australian community, beginning with war brides, then businessmen and, from 1994 onwards, the great privilege of having the service and friendship of a succession of Japanese-born ministers as our spiritual leaders in Australia, living with us on our home turf.

Now, in 2013, it is interesting to re-

flect on how the spiritual and intellectual life of Jodo Shinshu has developed in the West at large. My first resources for understanding and spiritual nourishment were the translations of the *Kyo Gyo Shin Sho*, *Shoshin Nembutsu-ge* and the *Sanjo Wasan*, produced by the Ryukoku Translation Centre. These are quite excellent masterpieces: translations that provide the seeker with a wealth of information, analysis and access to the original text.

The gradual development of the Shin Buddhist Translation Series was also an important development, which culminated in the excellent and definitive *Collected Works of Shinran*. This publication still stands as a remarkable achievement, serving both as a translation, and a work of exegesis. It is very hard to conceive of this book ever being surpassed for its scholarly quality and painstaking preparation. There have also been other fine works of translation, including those of Hisao Inagaki and Ann Rogers, which were published by the Numata Centre for Buddhist Translation and Research.

As a long-time member of IASBS, and a layman in things scholarly and academic, the annual publication of *The Pure Land* journal has always been a welcome event. It is of mixed quality but it is important to keep abreast of research and new ideas, if only to challenge one's comfortable prejudices or affirm ideas that one has already felt might be worth taking seriously. It also gives a person like me, a remote participant in the Pure Land stream, an opportunity to test the wind of intellectual life in this school.

On the basis of the ideas I have encountered, especially in this resource, I would like to make a plea to the world of Buddhist academia and scholarship regarding a couple of general principles that seem to me have become evident in perhaps the last twenty years or so.

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*Naturalness* by Jérôme Ducor

## WHAT'S NEW

The North American District of the International Association of Shin Buddhist Studies is happy to announce that it has been accepted by the *American Academy of Religion* (AAR) as a *Related Scholarly Organization* (RSO). RSO status will help facilitate greater ties between Pure Land Buddhist Studies and the broader array of religious studies scholars.

## PURE LAND JOURNAL

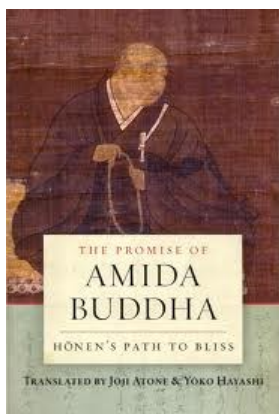
The IASBS annually publishes *The Pure Land: Journal of Pure Land Buddhism* (ISSN 0911-7660), an academic journal in English that contains research articles, essays, translations, and book reviews. Subscriptions to the Journal are available through [membership in the IASBS](#). All the past volumes of the Journal are currently hosted online by the American Theological Association Series. Members, please login to the [IASBS homepage](#) to view and download copies of the *Pure Land*.

# THE NEWSLETTER OF THE IASBS

## SUGGESTED READING



The Shin Buddhist Classical Tradition: A reader in Pure land teaching



This work is the first complete English translation of a seminal collection of writings by the Japanese Pure Land school's founder, Hōnen-shōnin (1133-1212). Drawing on the so-called Japanese Anthology (Wago Tōroku) which include, short writings, letters of exhortation and public pronouncements, one is offered a portal into Hōnen life and thought.

A great strength of this volume lies in the manner with which the writings of Hōnen are allowed to speak for themselves. Thus, the tremendous force of this great thinker, teacher and spiritual personality shine forth with clarity and warmth. This volume also offers a comprehensive introduction featuring a valuable essay titled "The Historical Development of Nembutsu: From Meditation to Recitation".

I believe that the world of academic and scholarly research owes a respectful duty of service to people who can benefit from these endeavours, and it is important to keep in mind the fact that the object of their study is a living religion. As Kosho Yamamoto points out in his 1965 publication *Other Power*, we can study religion from comparative interest, as a source of metaphysical speculation, or as an 'oasis in the human desert', to quench our spiritual thirst. More than anything else, scholarship is indebted for its relevance to those seeking to absorb themselves in the last of these three perspectives.

That brings me to what I see as a burgeoning dereliction of duty: the lack of relevance that is displayed by many participants in the academic and scholarly sector.

For example, I find it quite strange and incomprehensible that some commentators have recourse to non-Mahayana exegetical tools, and even take them seriously. Surely the basis of Pure Land hermeneutics ought to be the inexhaustible affective, philosophical and religious resources of the Mahayana. So why does one so often encounter exponents of Jodo Shinshu, especially, who have recourse to ideas that derive from Theravada principles or Abrahamic speculative theology, especially in its liberal protestant form? Of even more concern is the use of psychotherapeutic theories for this purpose.

It seems quite ill-disciplined and wasteful of one's skills and energies to use alien exegetical tools like these. It is a technique that is rarely engaged in by exponents of other religious traditions, who take pride in their own resources and use them creatively. It makes it difficult for people like me, consumers of academic and scholarly work, seeking to deepen my own understanding in order to help others, to find anything of value in the entire corpus of this irrelevant interpretive genre.

I think that this habit is beginning to undermine the foundations of Jodo Shinshu. It is rare to find an exponent of our tradition, for example, who has recourse to the Mahayana tradition of Two Truths (*lokasamvrittisatya* and *paramarathasatya*) and draw out its relevance for Jodo Shinshu. But I think these conceptions of truth are of vital importance in all forms of Mahayana exegesis. It is a valuable tool and pro-

vides a contextually sound way of explaining the dharma to interested seekers and faithful alike.

Another tendency that worries me is the identification of Shinran's teaching, in particular, with transitory fashions in ideological activism. Although I am not necessarily conservative in my own social outlook, there is something oppressive about the idea that faith is borne out in one's life by this kind of additional effort. The genuine signifiers of deep faith are surely more likely to be joy, an enthusiasm for life, a sense of lightness of spirit, and profound gratitude to the source of one's felicity.

My point in all this is that the attempt to turn Jodo Shinshu into a secular movement is oxymoronic. It is a violation of the foundational principles of the Mahayana: the quest to turn illusion into enlightenment. Recourse to dubious and unrelated theories associated with the systems that I have mentioned as examples above, will shackle Shinshu to the world of illusion and impermanence, isolating it from the world of truth, purity, and the timeless reality that transcends all things.

To entangle the teaching of the Primal Vow with mundane theory means that it will fade away as all of the secular ideologies eventually do. It is for its profound and deeply satisfying spiritual nourishment that Jodo Shinshu has immortal value for most people who drink at its fountain. To immerse it in the dross of temporal and secular superficiality is to drown it in the pond of fatal irrelevance.

Even so, I would like to end on a more positive note. At my distance, it has been encouraging to witness the slow flowering and development of the IASBS. It has been a useful resource at times and I wish it every success in the future.

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# THE NEWSLETTER OF THE IASBS

## North American District's Activities at 2013 American Academy of Religion Conference

*By Dr Scott A. Mitchell, Institute of Buddhist Studies, Berkeley, CA*

In 2013, the International Association of Shin Buddhist Studies was granted Related Scholarly Organization (RSO) status with the American Academy of Religion (AAR). Having RSO status allows the IASBS to host meetings in conjunction with the AAR's annual meeting, held in a different North American city every November. The AAR attracts thousands of scholars and religious professionals to its annual meeting, and there is a large contingent of Buddhist studies scholars who attend. The Buddhist Studies Section at the AAR has hundreds of members and hosts a minimum of six panels every year, in addition to panels and sections devoted to Japanese religions, Chinese religions, Buddhism in the West, and other Asian religious traditions, all of which attract a large number of scholars.

To celebrate RSO status, the North American District hosted a reception at the AAR meeting in Baltimore, Maryland, on Saturday November 23. The reception was announced via multiple scholarly networks and was well attended. Prof. Mark Blum, chair of the North American steering committee, delivered welcome remarks by himself and IASBS President, Prof. Kenneth Tanaka. Both the national headquarters of the IASBS and the Institute of Buddhist Studies in Berkeley generously supported the reception.

In addition to the reception, the North American district also hosted a panel during the annual meeting titled "(Re) imagining the Founder: Shinran in Modern Japanese History." The panel was organized by Daniel Friedrich and Orion Klautau who are presently working on a project devoted to studies of Shinran in modern Japan. They will be hosting another panel at Ryukoku in 2014 and hope to produce a volume of essays on the topic. Papers presented in Baltimore included:

- Orion Klautau of the University of Heidelberg:  
"A World Unifying Prophet: Shinran and Nationalism in Imperial Japan"
- Ryan Ward of Meiji University:  
"Shinran and the Fictive Imagination"
- Melissa Anne-Marie Curley of University of Iowa:  
"For Myself, Shinran Alone: The Separation of Shinran and Shinshū in Kyoto School Philosophy"
- Daniel Friedrich of McMaster University:  
"Conjuring the founder: Images of Shinran in Contemporary Shin Buddhist Practice"
- And a response by Makoto Hayashi of Aichi Gakuin University

Approximately two-dozen people attended the panel, and a lively discussion followed the presentation of papers. In future years, the IASBS will be able to host similar panels, short symposia on special topics, or discussions around newly published books in the field.

This new relationship positions the IASBS to make our work known to the wider North American scholarly community and attract potential new members. It is the hope of the North American District that this arrangement marks the beginning of a new era of activity for our organization, and the ability to expand and deepen our work on Shin Buddhism and Pure Land Buddhism.

# THE NEWSLETTER OF THE IASBS

## Book Review

By  
Jérôme Ducor

**KANAMATSU, Kenryo: *Naturalness, A Classic of Shin Buddhism; Introduction by Reverend Tetsuo UNNO (The Library of Perennial Philosophy, Spiritual Classic Series); Bloomington, World Wisdom, 2002; 132 pp. (ISBN 0-941532-29-1).***

**KANAMATSU, Kenryo: *Le Naturel, Un classique du bouddhisme Shin, suivi d'un commentaire de Reza SHAH-KAZEMI, traduits de l'anglais par Ghislain CHETAN, préface de Françoise BONARDEL; Paris, L'Harmattan (Collection Théôria), 2011; 121 pp. (ISBN 978-2-296-13070-8).***

*Naturalness* is a handy book which made its way as a convenient introduction to Jōdo-Shinshū beside more difficult academic works and translations of the scriptures. Evidence of its success is the recent – and remarkable – translation of it into French, with a preface by Françoise Bonardel, professor of philosophy of religions at Paris-Sorbonne University, and a commentary by Reza Shah-Kazemi, a specialist in comparative mysticism.

*Naturalness* was published for the first time by Higashi-Honganji in 1949, under the more explicit title *Amitābha, The Life of Naturalness*. A revised and enlarged edition appeared in 1956 as *Naturalness* (Los Angeles, The White Path Society), with a « Note by a Nisei Youth » by UNNO Tetsuo 海野徹雄. It was reprinted in Japan under the same title (Kyōto, The Bummeido Press, 1978), and eventually reedited as *Naturalness, A Classic of Shin Buddhism* in 2002.

Born in Kyōto, Kanamatsu Kenryō 金松賢諒 (1915-1986) was raised in a Jōdo-Shinshū temple and graduated in philosophy at Ōtani University (1938), once the seminary of Higashi-Honganji. He did a specialisation at Kyōto University (1943) and became assistant teacher at Ōsaka Prefectural University (1950), before spending two years under a Fulbright scholarship at Cornell University and the University of Chicago (1952-1953). Having received his doctorate (1962), he became professor at Ōtani University (1964), where he was also involved in Esperanto studies. A specialist of Plato, he is - with Mitsui Kō 三井浩 (1905-1980) - the co-translator in Japanese of *Phaedrus*, *Lysis* and *The Symposium* (*Sekai kyōiku hōten* 世界教育宝典, 18; 1959), as well as of *The Republic* (1982). He also published a study on the theology and cosmology of Plato (*Puraton no shingaku to uchuron* プラトンの神学と宇宙論; Kyōto, Hōzōkan, 1976).

In his Preface to *Naturalness*, Kanamatsu expresses his indebtedness to Suzuki Daisetsu 鈴木大拙 (1870-1966) and Sasaki Gesshō 佐々木月樵 (1875-1926), two famous figures of Ōtani University. By so doing, Kanamatsu places himself in the spiritualist trend (*seishin shugi* 精神主義) which this university developed in the field of Buddhist studies in general, and Jōdo-Shinshū in particular. This trend emerged towards the end the 19<sup>th</sup> century following the confrontation between modern astronomy and traditional Buddhist cosmology. One of the precursors of this *aggiornamento* is Inoue Enryō 井上圓了 (1858-1919), but its most emblematic representative is certainly Kiyozawa Manshi 清沢満之 (1863-1903). Besides Suzuki and Sasaki, other important figures include Soga Ryōjin 曾我量深 (1875-1971), Kaneko Daiei 金子大栄 (1881-1976), Yasuda Rijin 安田理深 (1900-1982), as well as Nishida Kitarō 西田幾多郎 (1870-1945), a philosopher who is at the origin of what is usually called the “Kyōto School” (*Kyōto gakuha* 京都学派). Most of those thinkers were censured both by Higashi-Honganji and Ōtani University for having left traditional Jōdo-Shinshū scholasticism (*shūgaku* 宗學), which had systematized Shinran’s teaching over the past centuries through a somewhat dry reading of his works, crossed with the Pure Land sūtras as well as the commentaries of his predecessors and successors. Instead, Kiyozawa and his epigones began a free and original reflection by rediscovering the freshness of the famous *Tannishō*, and by drawing largely on the idealist Buddhist traditions such as Vijñānavāda, Zen, Kegon and the equally famous *Daijō-kishinron* 大乘起信論, which was translated for the first time by Suzuki. However, in their eagerness to facilitate convergences with Western thought and Christianity, they could not avoid some ambiguities, including the notion of “sin”. In the same way, they dealt with the Buddha Amida and his Pure Land as a “myth”, without explaining sufficiently to which of the numerous definitions of this term they were referring to – a vagueness which can be traced back to Kanamatsu’s *Naturalness* as well (2002 ed., p. 23-24).

The spiritualist reflection of Kanamatsu lead him to write that the Buddha Amida is “the Eternal Spirit” (p. 5), “the Supreme Spirit from whom all spiritual revelations grow” (p. 63), or “the Absolute One” (p. 91). Touching on “Amida-consciousness which is the Eternal and Perfect Consciousness”, Kanamatsu states that “The key to this Perfect Consciousness, to this Cosmic Consciousness, is in the spirit – the *world-man* we have in us – who is immortal” (p. 63-64). As far as the Pure Land method is concerned, it would amount to this: “man becomes true by being one with Amida. (...); we are ever to *become* Amida. There is the eternal play of love in the relation between this *being* and *becoming*” (p. 55); “Man becomes perfect man (...) when his heart realizes itself in the Infinite Being who is Amida” (p. 58-59). Clashing as it does with the canonical Pure Land scriptures, Kanamatsu’s interpretation expresses a freedom which has a charm of its own, and actually made his success. But his endeavour appears more fragile as soon as he attempts to refer to the Jōdo-Shinshū doctrine itself: “Shinran refers to Amida as “Thou” revealed in the enlightened consciousness of Shakyamuni, and to Shakyamuni as the revelatory “I” ” (p. 68); “the basis of *Shinshu* is firmly laid upon the blending of “Thou” and “I” in the selfsame enlightened consciousness of Shakyamuni, the Human Buddha” (p. 72). Here at least one would like to see Kanamatsu providing some light on how this understanding of his is related to Shinran’s teaching. But there is little space for Shinran in *Naturalness*. All that is quoted is a single extract from the first chapter of his *Kyōgyōshinshō* (p. 67-68) and seven loosely collected passages from the anonymous *Tannishō* (p. 45-47, 105-110). At this point, it should however be emphasized that Shinran’s own teaching is clearly based on a specific Pure Land Chinese line: the Shandao tradition (*Zendōryū* 善導流); and this tradition is categorical in rejecting any idealistic or spiritualist interpretation such as “Amida in our own mind” (*koshin no Mida* 己心の彌陀), or “the Pure Land in mind only” (*yuishin no jōdo* 唯心の淨土), which are springing up in Kanamatsu’s thought.

Kanamatsu and D. T. Suzuki were sufficiently close that Suzuki entrusted Kanamatsu with the task of proof-reading and publishing his *A Miscellany on the Shin Teaching of Buddhism*. It was only natural that Suzuki’s book should exercise significant influence on Kanamatsu’s *Naturalness*, even in the choice of scriptural quotations, including the two from the *Anjin-ketsujō-shō*. A general comparison of Suzuki’s text with Kanamatsu’s reveals the particular qualities of *Naturalness*: “existential, intuitive and poetic” (Introduction by Unno, p. xi).

In his preface, Kanamatsu states how much he has been helped by the book *Sadhana, The Realisation of Life*, published by the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) in 1913, the very year he received the Nobel Prize in Literature. What Kanamatsu means by “help”, however, needs to be looked into further. Let us return to the above-quoted extract from *Naturalness* about the Pure Land method, which states that “Man becomes perfect man (...) when his heart realizes itself in the Infinite Being who is Amida”. This sentence appears at the end of a paragraph which reads in full:

“Man's cry is to reach his fullest expression. It is this desire for self-expression that leads him to seek power or wealth. But he has to discover that accumulation is not realization. It is the *inner light* that reveals him, not outer things. When this light is lighted, then in a moment he knows that man's highest revelation is Amida's own revelation in him. And his cry is for this - the manifestation of his heart, which is the manifestation of Amida in his heart. Man becomes perfect man, he attains his fullest expression, when his heart realizes itself in the Infinite Being who is Amida whose very essence is expression.” (p. 58-59)

Let us turn now to Tagore’s *Sadhana*, which says:

“Man's cry is to reach his fullest expression. It is this desire for self-expression that leads him to seek **wealth and power**. But he has to discover that accumulation is not realisation. It is the inner light that reveals him, not outer things. When this light is lighted, then in a moment he knows that Man's highest revelation is **God's** own revelation in him. And his cry is for this - the manifestation of his **soul**, which is the manifestation of **God** in his **soul**. Man becomes perfect man, he attains his fullest expression, when his **soul** realises itself in the Infinite being who is **Āvīh** whose very essence is expression.” (p. 32-33)

Except for the words in bold, Kanamatsu is thus simply duplicating Tagore. Other examples would be too long and numerous to quote in full here. The 155 words of Kanamatsu from “That we cannot absolutely possess the Infinite Being” to “her final freedom” (p. 53-54) are word for word identical with Tagore’s 155 words (p. 121), with this one exception: where Tagore has “soul”, Kanamatsu writes “heart”. Even in the case of the typically Japanese “*oya*” (Parent) – which Suzuki would make famous - Kanamatsu draws from Tagore:

*Naturalness*: “Therefore it is the self of man which the Great **Parent** of the Universe has left free. In his self **man** is free to disown **his Parent**. There our **Amida** must win his entrance. There he comes as a guest, not as **the Parent**, and therefore he has to wait till he is invited. There he comes to court our love. It is only in this region of will that anarchy is permitted; only in man's self that the discord of untruth and unrighteousness **holds** its reign; and things can come to such a pass that we may cry out in our anguish: "Such utter lawlessness could never prevail if there were a God!" Indeed, **Amida** has stood aside from our self, where his watchful patience knows no bounds, and where he never forces **upon** the doors if shut against him. For this self of ours has to attain its ultimate meaning, which is the **spirit** not through the compulsion of **Amida's** power, but through *love*, and thus become united with **Amida** in freedom.” (p. 60-61)

*Sadhana*: "Therefore, it is the self of man which the great **King** of the universe **has not shadowed with his throne - he** has left it free. (...) **Man (...)** has to acknowledge the rule of his King, but in his self **he** is free to disown **him**. There our **God** must win his entrance. There he comes as a guest, not as a **king**, and therefore he has to wait till he is invited. (...) there he comes to court our love. (...) It is only in this region of will that anarchy is permitted; only in man's self that the discord of untruth and unrighteousness **hold** its reign; and things can come to such a pass that we may cry out in our anguish, "Such utter lawlessness could never prevail if there were a God!" Indeed, **God** has stood aside from our self, where his watchful patience knows no bounds, and where he never forces **open** the doors if shut against him. For this self of ours has to attain its ultimate meaning, which is the **soul**, not through the compulsion of **God's** power but through love, and thus become united with **God** in freedom." (p. 33)

One could also compare the poetical Chapter II of *Sadhana* (p. 34-35), with *Naturalness* (p. 61-62) and so on, like Tagore p. 58-60 and Kanamatsu p. 41-43, etc. Is it not disappointing to find more of Tagore than Shinran in *Naturalness*? Of course we may explain it away by saying that Kanamatsu is writing out of "tremendous urgency and bodhisattvic compassion" as the Introduction tells us (p. ix). Nevertheless, it does not seem possible to qualify this as representative of Shinran's teaching. As a Hindu, Tagore is inspired by Vaishnavism and is quoting at length from the *Upanishads*. But it does not seem appropriate to introduce Jōdo-Shinshū by simply exchanging at will the names Brahma, God and Amida. Is not the following just plainly confusing?

Tagore : "**So** it cannot be said that we can find **Brahma** as we find other objects; there is no question of searching **from** him in one thing in preference to another, in one place instead of somewhere else. We do not have to run to the grocer's shop for our morning light; we open our eyes and there it is; so we need only give ourselves up to find that **Brahma** is everywhere. (...) So our daily worship of **God** is not really the process of gradual acquisition of him, but the daily process of surrendering ourselves, removing all obstacles to union and extending our consciousness of him in devotion and service, in **goodness** and **in** love." (p. 118-119).

Kanamatsu: "It cannot be said that we can find **the Universal** as we find other objects; there is no question of searching **for** him in one thing in preference to another, in one place instead of somewhere else. We do not have to run to the grocer's shop for our morning light; we open our eyes and there it is; so we need only give ourselves up to find that **the Universal** is everywhere. So, our daily worship of **Amida** is not really the process of gradual acquisition of him, but the daily process of surrendering ourselves, removing all obstacles to union and extending our consciousness of him in devotion and service, in **goodwill** and love." (p. 51-52)

It should not then be a surprise to find that the original commentary by Reza Shah-Kazemi in the French edition (p. 85-119) is devoted to drawing parallels between *Naturalness* and monotheisms like Christianity and Islam, with references to the Gnostic Frithjof Schuon (1907-1998). In his own preface, Kanamatsu expresses the hope that "the western reader will have an opportunity of coming in touch with the *true* spirit of Buddhism as revealed in the sacred texts of *Shinshu*" (p. xvii). Although *Naturalness* doesn't provide an introduction to Shinran's thought, this book will remain as an original testimony of a quite personal reflection on religion.