

PURE LAND NOTES

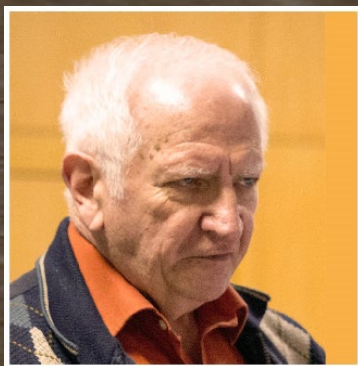
Journal of the Shin Buddhist Fellowship UK

ISSUE #45 NOVEMBER 2020

SPECIAL EDITION

IN LOVING MEMORY

JIM PYM



A HUMBLE PIONEER

5TH JAN 1941 - 20TH OCT 2020

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PLN#45 NOVEMBER 2020 SPECIAL EDITION

IN LOVING MEMORY OF JIM PYM 05.01.41 - 20.10 2020

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Back cover: *On White Ashes* by Rennyō Shōnin.

Rennyō Shōnin was the 8th monshū of Hongwanji and the author of several works relating to Jōdo Shinshū doctrine. His most influential work is his collection of letters to various Shinshū *montō* (lay groups), popularly known as *Gobunshō* (Compositions) in the Nishi Hongan-ji tradition. The best-known letter is the *Hakkotsu no Sho* (Letter on White Ashes) which is a reflection on the impermanence of life and the importance of relying on Amida Buddha's Vow.

Commonly read aloud at Jōdo Shinshū funeral services.

PUBLISHED QUARTERLY BY



CHOMON HOUSE

OBITUARY

JIM PYM

5TH JAN 1941 – 20TH OCT 2020

ANNIE MILLER

Jim was born in Hastings, East Sussex on 5 January 1941 to elderly parents, Sam Pym and Eileen Carey. His mother was a devout Catholic and aspired for Jim to become a Priest. However, Jim proved to be unsuitable for Junior Seminary because he asked too many questions. But, he soon became interested in Buddhism, and then came across Quakers by chance. He later studied to become a Buddhist priest (see p18). The fact that he left school at the age of sixteen with only two O-levels, makes his self-taught, life-long, study of comparative religion, leading him to become an acknowledged authority on the subject, all the more remarkable.

Jim and Beryl, a nurse, were teenage sweethearts and were married in 1964. Their interest in spiritual healing started in their early twenties, and was mentored by the great twentieth century English spiritual healer, Harry Edwards. They became early members of the National Federation of Spiritual Healers (NFSH).

Jim held down a variety of jobs after leaving school, including being a semi-professional musician, (double bass, guitar and banjo) playing in local folk and jazz bands, (he had a very acute ear for music). He and Beryl spent the best part of a year with the newly formed Findhorn Foundation in the late 1960s. On returning to London, Jim was appointed secretary to the London branch of the Vegetarian Society, then became assistant manager of Watkins esoteric bookshop, and around 1977, he became manager of the Friends Book Centre, Euston Road, which he developed successfully. Later he moved to the publishing side of Quaker books, which involved him on trips to the USA meeting

American Quakers, and sometimes Beryl was able to accompany him.

His influential booklet, *What kind of GOD, What kind of HEALING?* was published in 1989. After being made redundant in the mid 1990s, he wrote three more acclaimed books in his accessible conversational style: *Listening to the Light*, 1999, Sessions; *The Pure Principle*, 2000, Sessions; and *You don't have to sit on the floor*, 2002, Rider.

In 2000, Beryl retired from being matron of two cottage hospitals in the Cotswolds, and they moved to Devon. As often happens when married couples retire, they sadly found that they had grown apart. They agreed to live separately, but remained Best Friends for the rest of Jim's life.

Jim first met Annie, an NFSH Quaker member, retired academic economist and basic income advocate, while conducting a retreat in St Andrews in 2005. He moved to Edinburgh in October 2006, where he soon became an active and much-loved member of Central Edinburgh Quaker Meeting. He missed the presence of a Jodo Shinshu Buddhist Sangha in Scotland. He continued his healing ministry with local NFSH groups, the Friends Fellowship of Healing, and through distant healing, much of it requested by email. He continued writing, teaching, and conducting retreats, sharing his knowledge of comparative religion and mysticism, and inspiring people to learn to meditate and to be in touch with the Spirit within.

From about 2016, Jim suffered from pulmonary fibrosis, bravely borne while becoming increasingly frail. He was hospitalised following a fall at his home in August 2020, but was looking forward to being discharged on 23 October, to return home to his beloved books and music, when he contracted Covid-19 in hospital and died suddenly on 20 October. He leaves an enormous gap in the lives of many people.

IN MEMORY OF JIM PYM

A MAN OF EFFORTLESS EMPATHY

REV DAICHI GARY ROBINSON

Jim Pym went into semi-retirement in 2013, and the first edition of Pure Land Notes that I compiled and edited was published in the August of that year. In those early days of my tenure I struggled to find enough copy to fill its pages, so I asked Jim if he would continue to write book reviews for it. He graciously agreed and in the ensuing years he contributed reviews of three or four books for each quarterly issue of PLN.

One of my fondest memories of Jim comes from those early days. Once, when we were discussing book reviews, I confessed that I couldn't read that much - at that speed, let alone write coherent appraisals on what I had read. Jim quipped, "You don't think I read them *all*, do you?" He went on to tell me that he scans the index, thumbs through the book to find one or two parts that he likes, and writes his review accordingly, concentrating on those bits he enjoyed or appreciated the most. Effectively, he never wrote a bad review.

Jim was the same with people. He could see the good in a person, and he was indiscriminate. No one was excluded, and he spread his effortless empathy evenly.

For many British and European Shin Buddhists, a shared and abiding memory of Jim would surely be the talk he gave at the 2014 Shin Conference, held here in my hometown of Southampton. It was not the talk or even the words he was saying, yet a beautiful air of calm came over the hall

The whole text of Jim's seminal 2014 ESC talk is republished on pages 7 – 11 herein, divided into two parts.

In the first part of Jim's presentation he talks at length on the subject of impermanence. This was one of his favourite subjects and typically, even here he looked for areas of mutual interest between Buddhism and other cultures and religions. This first part of Jim's talk was more or less the sort of thing people would expect to hear at a Shin Buddhist conference. The same could not be said of the second part of Jim's talk when his style of delivery changes and it becomes a poetic meditation, called simply *Namu Amida Buddha!*

Meditation is a subject that many Shin Buddhists go out of their way to avoid! Put simply, in the Shin way of thinking, meditation is seen as a 'self-power' practice and therefore, not Shin. Notwithstanding this, a Shin Buddhist would not tell someone they should not meditate, but they would say you don't have to. Why? Because, as Jim so simply said, we prefer to rely entirely upon the nembutsu.

Elsewhere in this issue of PLN Jim is described as a pioneer. How true this is! Jim gave his talk in 2014 and only now, six years later, meditation remains an issue that is lively discussed and sometimes incorporated into many Shin circles.

Jim showed us a way a long time ago but reactions to his meditation were polarised. Some thought 'it was just not Shin' but the majority though it quite wonderful. When Jim finished it was as if we had just woken up from a dream! Someone close by asked, 'What just happened? Hard to believe I know, but I was there!'

It would be great if that same air of calm would wash over you as you read Jim Pym's ESC17 meditation, but unfortunately that is most unlikely. As the old saying goes, you had to be there. The text of Jim's talk herein is just ink on a page For some of those who were there that day it was an intimate circular encounter between the speaker, the audience, and Amida.

Goodbye Jim. We will miss you enormously.

TRIBUTE TO A HUMBLE PIONEER

REV JOHN PARASKEVOPOULOS

It was with much sadness that I learned of Jim's passing in October. Reflecting on my association with him over the years, I felt some regret that I never had the opportunity to spend more time with him, seeing as we were separated by such a great distance. While maintaining a regular correspondence from around the mid-1990s onwards (when he was the inaugural editor of this journal), we didn't get the chance to meet in person until the 1998 Shin Buddhist conference at Wadham College in Oxford (the first ever held on British soil). Jim did a superb job of organising this memorable event at which he managed to bring together a stellar array of very fine scholars and speakers.

Following the conference, he and his delightfully affable wife, Beryl, invited me to stay at their charming home in the Oxfordshire countryside for a few days. During this time, I got to know Jim better and recall, with much fondness, the many wonderful conversations we had in his garden during those lovely long summer evenings. As I was leaving, he made the extraordinarily kind gesture of gifting me his very own signed copy of the original 1949 edition of D.T. Suzuki's *A Miscellany of the Shin Teaching of Buddhism* (which he, in turn, had received from Rev. Jack Austin)— a rare but important work which, sadly, has remained out of print ever since. I shall always treasure it as a memento of our friendship.

What was particularly exceptional about Jim was his broad ecumenical approach to the Dharma which, as many of you would know, extended to his tireless efforts in promoting the cause of Buddhist-Christian dialogue — a task he undertook with considerable sensitivity and understanding.

Jim was a humble pioneer and an enriching presence in the UK sangha. He always brought unique perspectives and refreshing insights to his teaching given the love he had for both Pure Land Buddhism and the spirituality of the Quakers. He saw rich parallels between them and, in this sense, was a genuine bridge builder between these traditions, both of which had clearly brought him much inner sustenance. However, over and above these achievements, Jim Pym was simply a sincere seeker, not to mention a gentle and thoughtful confidant to many who appreciated his avuncular wisdom during periods of spiritual doubt and confusion.

May this worthy servant of the Dharma receive his due recompense in the Land of Light.



Jim Pym – Joined Palms
at ESC17, Southampton 2014.

This was only the second time that the ESC took place on British soil.

Rev John Paraskevopoulos traveled all the way from
Australia to attend ESC10 in 1998 and ESC17 in 2014.

THE ALCHEMY OF INFINITE LIGHT

JIM PYM

The essence of the Pure Land Way is that of Alchemy. Alchemy is the science of transmutation, and is common to both East and West, though it is not often mentioned in Buddhist writings. It was known in the Tibetan traditions, and recently some Western writers have used it in terms of relating Buddhism to the teaching of C G Jung. It was also one of the key elements of Taoism, and so would have influenced – directly or indirectly – Ch'an and Zen buddhism and the Shingon school.

However, the alchemy most familiar to us is that of European myth and history. Not that it is limited to any particular time. No! Alchemy is the great work of bringing whatever is base, dark, heavy within ourselves into the Divine Fire, the Golden Light and Absolute Freedom. David Goddard, a western initiate in the Qabalistic tradition, expresses it clearly in his book, *The Tower of Alchemy*.

Alchemy is called the Royal Art, for it is the means whereby the divine potential within a human being is unveiled and manifested.... This process is often called the Magnum Opus, the Great Work, because it is the final ascent of the Mystical Mountain of Attainment by which freedom from the Wheel of Birth and Death is obtained.

Note the Buddhist references; David sees many parallels within traditional Western Alchemy and Tibetan Buddhism.

However, the study of alchemy – as with the study of any new spiritual path – requires one to learn a whole new language. Whether it is the alchemy of the Qabalah, or that of the Vesas, the Taoists or Tantric Buddhism, the principle is the same. There is a great deal to be learned, and it is vitally necessary to have a teacher who has trodden the way

before you. Those are called to this path – and, make no mistake, it is a calling, for it takes a whole lifetime's commitment – will know it, and will have discovered their own contacts and teachers.

My concern here is with the simple yet profound alchemy of the Pure Land Path. Those who have attended this conference will by now be familiar with the language of Pure Land Buddhism, so we will stick to that, only referring to the correspondences where it makes understanding easier. Be clear about this; the same principles of transmutation are to be found in the simple practice of the nembutsu, and by cheerfully walking the Pure Land Way in our daily lives. The great paradox is that it is often easier to explain these principles using the complex structure of the alchemical language, philosophy and practice, than it is to point to the Simple Singular Reality that is always here in front of our eyes.

The Pure Land Way is nothing else but alchemical in practice. In it, we accept our inability to achieve enlightenment, or even to change our ignorance and faults. In doing this, we surrender ourselves and all that implies to the Infinite Light, in which there are no boundaries, no place where it does not shine in fullness. Instantly, without any restriction of time, we are buddha, for did not Amida promise that he would not be enlightened unless we are also? Even though our faults and ignorance persist from moment to moment, at any timeless time we can live as Buddha, in the nembutsu.

Here, now, at this very moment is the Great Mystery, the Royal Art, which enables us to escape from the wheel of samsara. The Truth that the Buddha revealed is that nirvana is samsara, and vice versa. This is something that our minds cannot grasp, yet is profoundly true, and we can experience the fruits of it in our everyday lives. In the presence of Buddha, and the power of his Name, we can experience it as true, but the moment we try to explain it as from our own understanding, we have to

be silent, or we lost it.

In the Shingon tradition, there is something called the Fire Ceremony which probably grew out of the alchemical *Agni Puja* of the Hindu tradition. In it, those who participate cast sticks which are dedicated to certain faults or desires, and with the symbolism that the sacred fire will burn them up, and enable the opposite good qualities to manifest. The awareness of Amida Buddha as the Infinite Light can be viewed in the same way. In Amida's Light, our negative qualities are transmuted in the ultimate alchemy.

Jim Pym participating in ESC17, Southampton 2014



The following is a Western style of alchemical meditation which is easily applied to the Pure Land Way. As with all such, it is infinitely variable, and can be adapted to meet whatever needs you may have, and the wording accordingly. However, in line with what I understand to be the teaching of the Buddha (in all traditions) I feel it is important to close with loving kindness and compassion directed to the suffering world, of which we are an integral part.

TST X 1 4 4
1 7 1

Namu Amida Buddha!

(Jim Pym's ESC17 Meditation)

***I take my refuge in Amida
The Buddha of Infinite Light
and Life.
Listen!... Silence... Peace...***

***What does this mean, NOW?
I accept
That my mind cannot grasp
this Mystery.
Listen!... Silence... Peace...
The Light is here.
Here... Now...
Without any boundaries...
Without any shadow...
Without any self...
Namu Amida Buddha;***

***The light is the sacred fire
within me,
The fire of infinite Light.
Namu Amida Buddha;***

***On it I place all my doubts.
In Its Light, I express faith;
Namu Amida Buddha.***

***On it I place all my ignorance.
In Its Light, I express Wisdom;
Namu Amida Buddha***

***On it I place all my pride.
In Its Light, I express
humility,
Namu Amida Buddha.***

***On it I place all my greed;
In Its Light, I express moderation;
Namu Amida Buddha.***

***On it I place all my selfishness;
In Its Light, I express loving
kindness and compassion...***

To myself...

To those I love...

To those I know...

To those I do not know...

***To those who have angered or
upset me...***

To all beings...

***May all be free from suffering
And the causes of suffering
Namu Amida Buddha,***

***If once is enough, then ten
times are also enough
Namu Amida Buddha.***

A LETTER OF THANKS TO MY DEAR FRIEND, THE LATE REVEREND JIM PYM

KEMMYO TAIRA SATO, DIRECTOR OF THREE WHEELS, LONDON

First of all, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to you, Reverend Jim Pym, for all that you have done for Pure Land Buddhism and for Shin Buddhists in particular.

You were a founding member along with Reverend Hisao Inagaki and Reverend Jack Austin of the Shin Buddhist Association of Great Britain, the first British Shin Buddhist group and the forerunner of the Pure Land Buddhist Fellowship. It was you who, having taken over the editorship of the Fellowship's occasional newsletter in 1983, proceeded to develop it into a well-respected quarterly Shin Buddhist journal, known as *Pure Land Notes*, continuing your editorial work right up until 2005. Subsequently the publication was taken over by Reverend Daichi Gary Robinson and *Pure Land Notes* are still appearing to this day.

Being one of the Buddhist Society's Trustees, you were also for many years a teacher of their Pure Land Classes where indeed I myself first had the pleasure of meeting you.

Not only were you one of the pioneers of Shin Buddhism in this country but you were also a fervent advocate of the Interfaith Movement and as such would regularly attend Quakers' meetings every Sunday throughout your life. By virtue of your long dedication to the Interfaith Movement, you succeeded, very naturally and just by being yourself, to bridge the gap not only between Christianity and Shin Buddhism but also between Zen and Shin. It must have had a lot to do with how completely honest and true to yourself you always were that you were able to provide this amazing bridge between Eastern and Western religions. I shall

always treasure the wonderful memory of your ordination, held in your own home, with Zen monk, Venerable Tairyu Furukawa, officiating.

It was also a great joy for me always to meet you at the European Shin Buddhist Conference every two years and be able to listen to your inspirational talks, your special evaluation of sitting in meditation as a Shin Buddhist, for example.

Last but not least, I have very much appreciated your friendship, through which you introduced me to those interested in our tradition. I am still enjoying my spiritual encounter with some of them in our Sangha.

See you soon in the Pure Land.

With palms together in Namu-Amida-butsu.

南無阿彌陀佛

JIM PYM AT THE 1998 10TH EUROPEAN SHIN CONFERENCE

HOYU ISHIDA. UNIVERSITY OF SHIGA PREFECTURE, PROFESSOR EMERITUS

Late in the 1970s, I was studying Buddhism and world religions in Cambridge-Massachusetts in the United States. My friend showed me an article about Shin Buddhist gatherings in the UK organized by Reverend Jack Austin and Professor Hisao Inagaki. A photo of Reverend Zuiken Inagaki was attached to it. This article gave my first understanding of the flow of the nembutsu in Europe.

It was at the 10th European Shin Conference held in 1998 at Wadham College, Oxford in the UK that I came to know Jim Pym. When I heard that the Conference was going to be held at Wadham College, I was thrilled because it is the very place where more than a century ago Friedrich Max Müller (1823-1900) partially in collaboration with Nanjo Bunyu (1849-1927) from Japan first completed the work of translating the Three Pure Land Sutras into English. Müller as a professor of comparative philology at Oxford University was a Sanskrit scholar, a philologist, and a pioneer in the fields of Vedic studies, comparative philosophy, comparative mythology, and comparative religion. Nanjo went to Oxford to study Sanskrit in 1876 and there he learned European modern techniques of the Buddhist studies under Müller. Takakusu Junjiro (1866-1945) later also went to Oxford to study Sanskrit under Müller.

The Shin Conference at Wadham College was held from August 5th to 9th, sponsored and combined by the International Association of Buddhist Culture, the International Association of Shin Buddhist studies, and the Pure Land Buddhist Fellowship together. It was therefore, technically speaking, a conference of a mixture— of academic and

practical—if there is any difference between the two. This was the intention of Jim Pym, who was the organizer of the event. The previous conferences had been divided into two parts: The International Association of Shin Buddhist Studies European Conference was followed by the European Shin Conference respectively. For the IABC, therefore, I had an opportunity to confirm the mixture conference on phone before the conference. I was in Japan, while Jim was in the UK. When I called him, he said he did not want to disturb his wife, and that she was still sleeping and needed good sleep since she was working. He told me his telephone was near their bedroom and he could not talk loud or long. Though mortified, I felt then how decent Jim was to say something like this to a person he was not very familiar with like me. He was a gentleman to his wife as well as to me.

Jim had attended the 9th Conference in Düsseldorf, which was the first time he attended the ESC. Referring to the 9th Conference, he says he was “overwhelmed with the presence of so many people for whom Shin Buddhism was the essence of their lives and leaning.”

In the opening of the report for the 10th ESC, Jim Pym tells how he volunteered to become the organizer for the 10th ESC while he was at the 9th ESC:

“Why not hold the next one in England,” I rashly said. “Oxford would be a good place, and I could help organize it.” Why or why will you not learn to keep quiet on such occasions. Maybe I will another time, for, if I am asked to comment on the 10th European Shin Conference in a few words, my instinctive reaction is to say, “Never again!” But then I remember all the wonderful experiences, learning opportunities and deep friendships which the conference presented, and I am not sorry that I did it. So, maybe....sometime in the future...who knows?

Organising the conference such as this is a great learning experience in many ways. I learned about people, about organisation, bureaucracy, and about decision-taking. But most of all I learned about Buddhism and Buddhists, and specifically I learned a lot about Shin Buddhism that I

could have learned in any other way. And I must admit that this last point is the most important, and that the opportunity to organise such an event was something that was quite unique.

For the 10th European Shin Conference, the then Shinmon Kojun Ohtani (now Monshu) visited Oxford from our mother temple Nishi Hongwanji in Kyoto, Japan and officiated the *kikyoshiki* confirmation rites. Four European residents received the *kikyoshiki* along with some members from Japan. Among the European residents was Reverend Daichi Gary Robinson who is now the representative of Shin Buddhist Fellowship U.K.: Chomon House. Gary also succeeded Jim Pym as editor of Pure Land Notes. I well remember Gary sitting solemnly on a chair in front of Shinmon Kojun Ohtani during the *kikyoshiki*. Reverend Kaishin Louella Lynn Matsunaga also received the *kikyoshiki* at the same time and gave a message of appreciation to Shinmon Ohtani on behalf of all the receivers. Louella later received the *tokudo* ordination rites in July 2019 at Nishiyama-betsuin Temple in Kyoto. Out of 20 overseas candidates of the *tokudo* ordination rites at Nishiyama-betusin in Kyoto four were from the UK. Along with Louella, Reverend Kekai Enrique Galvan-Alvarez, Reverend Ocho David Quirke-Thornton, and Reverend Eshin Caroline Joy Brazier received the *tokudo* ordination. The UK now accounts for a large percentage of Reverends in Europe.

Going back to the 10th Conference, as a treat, we enjoyed a bus tour to Shakespeare's birthplace. I had finished presenting a paper on "Nietzsche and Saṃsāra: Suffering and Joy in the Eternal Recurrence." Professor Taitetsu Unno (deceased 2014, age 85) gave me some advice about my paper after my presentation in the question and answer session, and I was seated with him and his wife in the bus. Professor Hisao Inagaki had given a welcome message on behalf of the IASBS, while representing the IABC, Professor Esho Sasaki had read a message for Professor Joryu Chiba (deceased 2008, age 87) due to his absence.

Recalling the conference overall, I was moved by the many distinguished guests and participants from all parts of the world and from various backgrounds who assembled together and shared the same aspiration. It was a very successful and meaningful conference.

Jim Pym expressed what I feel about that conference in much better and more eloquent words, in the conclusion of his conference report:

Overall, the conference provided a kaleidoscope of memories and sensations. I am sure that each one who was there will have their own. I am also sure that, as organizer, I may have at times been too busy to appreciate some of the subtleties which impressed others deeply. Although my initiative—and only half joking—reaction is “Never again,” I do not seriously believe that this is the whole truth. The memories of deep exploration in a subject that means more to me as time goes by, of controversy that was stimulating but never got out of hand, and of the joyful feeling of being together with a group of people who were walking similar paths, will not go away. And above all, the possibility of seeing old friends again and making new ones is always a temptation.

When I met Jim Pym at Oxford for the first time at that conference in 1998, I was in awe. The very last time I met Jim Pym was at the 17th European Shin Conference held in Southampton in 2014. I noticed he was participating in the conference. He came to me and said, “I was told to ask you about this.” I was not sure what he was after. He had some problem, but I unfortunately couldn’t help him. We just exchanged a few words frankly and casually. Yet, he was distinctively outstanding. The moment he came up to me, I said to myself happily and excitingly, “Oh, here is Jim Pym!” He was a person of spirituality and embracement. We all deeply miss him.

IMPERMANENCE AND THE PURE LAND WAY

JIM PYM

Anicca, the view that "All things are impermanent; all are subject to change" is one of the Buddha's "three signs of being". It has a particular relevance for us right now in the affairs of Jodoshinshu and the Pure Land Teaching in the UK and Europe. This short article examines - though from a personal viewpoint - some of its history, significance and possible future.

I can still remember the day - though not the actual date - that I first met Rev Jack Austin. He had come down to Hastings to give a talk to the East Sussex Buddhist Society, and I remember being very impressed by what he said. Most of our visiting speakers were monks of various traditions, whose viewpoint implied - with a few notable exceptions- that only monks (not even nuns!!) could possibly achieve enlightenment.

Jack was an ordained Soto Zen priest who emphasised the Buddha Dharma in everyday life, and its relevance to those of us who lived "in the world", with the necessity of raising families and earning a living. On reflection, he was already moving towards the Other-power Way. After his talk, I approached him with a question, and his response was to invite me to share a coffee while he waited for his train. We had a good talk, and arranged to keep in touch. This was the start of a thirty-year friendship and of my Pure Land pilgrimage.

I moved to London soon after this, and met Jack on a regular basis. He shared with me his unease within Soto Zen, and spoke enthusiastically of his discovery of Shin Buddhism through his correspondence with Rev Saizo. Inagaki, a Japanese Jodoshinshu priest.

Jack's intuition (some might call it "Buddha Mind" or, indeed "Amida Buddha") was leading him towards a deeper exploration of the Other-power traditions of Buddhism, and I joyfully shared the fruits of his search.

By this time Jack had gathered a small group of friends with whom he shared this journey. He introduced me to other members and immediately I felt at home. In particular, Max Flisher and his wife Rosy (who lived in Suffolk but often journeyed into London) became good friends. Jack also introduced me to Rev Hisao Inagaki, Rev Saizo's son, who was also a Shin priest, and who taught Buddhism at the School of Oriental and African Studies of London University. It was from him and his wife Eiko that we learned much about what it really means to live a life of Shin Dharma.

We used to meet at Hisao's house to chant, listen to a Dharma talk, and discuss aspects of Jodoshinshu and Other-power Buddhism. Jack also sponsored the visit of the then Monshu, who conducted the first Kikyoshiki ceremony for members of the group including Jack, Max, Rosy and myself. This led to the idea of forming a "Shin Buddhist Association of Great Britain", and also to Jack's decision to go to Japan and be ordained as a Shin priest. This duly came to pass, and Jack returned home fully immersed in Jodoshinshu and determined to establish the SBAGB and register it as a charity.

However, this was not to be, as Jack's health deteriorated and he was not able to proceed with the work involved. The rest of us continued to meet, even after Hisao returned to Japan. By this time we had a number of contacts throughout the UK, but there was no enthusiasm for the idea or a formal organisation. We decided to continue as a loose organism (rather than an organisation) membership of which would be free and open to those who wished to communicate, and which people could just as easily leave if they ceased to do so. The name "Pure Land Buddhist Fellowship" summed up what we intended. We would be open to any

who were interested aspect of Other-power Buddhism, and we would be a "Fellowship", without hierarchy and willing to learn from each other. We further agreed to issue an occasional printed letter, sent to all 'members'. Max became the first editor, and this continued for several years, growing in size as more people joined the "network".

When Max wished to give up the editorship, I took it on. Following the inspiration of the American "Zen Notes", I decided to call ours "Pure Land Notes". It grew to a regular 20 pages with a coloured cover and a nominal subscription. I instituted an exchange programme with various other Shin and Buddhist journals, and borrowed articles from these and commissioned others from correspondents in the USA, Japan and elsewhere. Publishers sent us books to review, and we had a 'news page' which carried items of general Buddhist and interfaith interest. At our peak we printed almost 100 copies, though only about 60 were paid subscriptions. The International Association of Buddhist Culture (IABC) in Japan gave us a small grant which helped to cover losses and the cost of meetings and the rest was covered by readers, all of whom were considered to be 'members' of the PLBF. We had regular meetings in members' homes, at Amaravati in Hertfordshire, at the Buddhist Society and elsewhere, though often poorly attended.

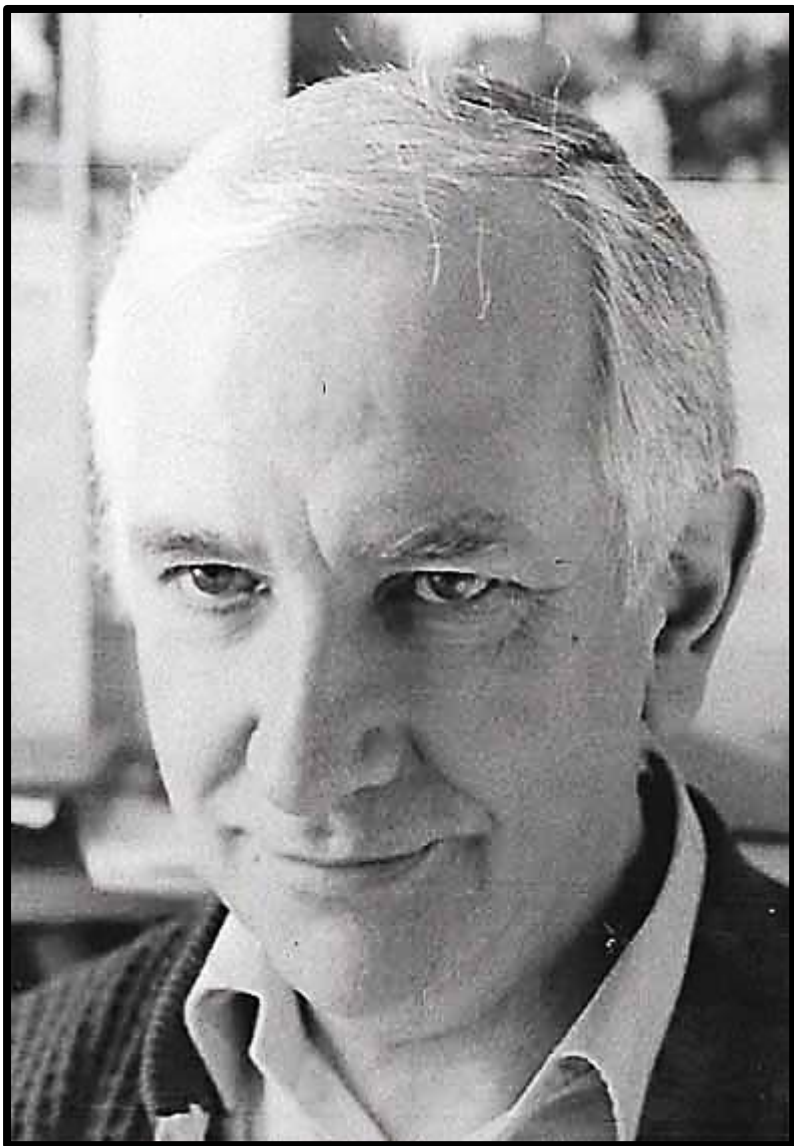
Through my links with the Quakers, I was invited to meet a visiting Buddhist priest, the Ven Furukawa. I felt an immediate affinity with him, even though he did not speak English (his daughter Sayuri was an able translator). Roshi, as he was known, was the head of the Seimeizan order, which combined lineages of Shin, Zen and Shingon. He was a master calligrapher who had exhibitions in Italy and Poland, as well as throughout Japan. He was passionate about Buddhism as a source of world peace and reconciliation, and was regularly invited to the great Peace Conference organised by the Catholic Church. He also worked for the abolition of the death penalty in Japan, and for reconciliation between Japan and China.

Roshi was a great admirer of Albert Schweitzer, and had a relic of this great soul enshrined in his temple. He also ran a retreat centre in Japan with a Roman Catholic priest and two nuns. He visited the UK on several occasions, and on one these visits he ordained me as a member of his order, thus giving his blessing to our work and providing some authenticity for the Buddhist funerals - and even one wedding - that I was being asked to conduct.

Then, just as all looked good for the future and I was feeling proud (a great mistake!!) of what we had accomplished, impermanence struck. I will not go into the details, but the upshot was that I was involved in a series of moves, from Oxfordshire to Devon, then to Kent, and then to Edinburgh. The PLBF dissolved, and PLN ceased publication.

Enter Gary Robinson, whom I had known for a number of years. Gary was one of the few with whom I kept in touch, and he had a vision - which I encouraged - to continue the work of the PLBF, including PLN. Not only that, he had a small Sangha meeting regularly, and a further vision of becoming ordained as a priest of the Nishi Hongwanji, which duly came to pass. Gary took over the editorship of PLN, with the results that you see before you [Published in PLN 19, August 2013]. However, with the vagaries of the economy, and the new possibilities of communication, opened by the internet, further changes may need to evolve. This is both natural and right.

The next chapter commences here! The original vision of Jack Austin and others for a formal Shin Buddhist organisation in the UK will be met by the Shin Buddhist Fellowship (UK) which will be officially launched at the 2014 European Shin Conference in Southampton.



Jim Pym

5th Jan 1941 - 20th Oct 2020

PURE LAND NOTES

Journal of the Shin Buddhist Fellowship UK

On White Ashes by Rennyō Shōnin.

See inside front cover for details on this important text.

When I deeply contemplate the transient nature of human existence, I realize that, from beginning to end, life is impermanent like an illusion. We have not yet heard of anyone who lived ten thousand years. How fleeting is a lifetime!

Who in this world today can maintain a human form for even a hundred years? There is no knowing whether I will die first or others, whether death will occur today or tomorrow. We depart one after another more quickly than the dewdrops on the roots or the tips of the blades of grasses. So it is said. Hence, we may have radiant faces in the morning, but by evening we may turn into white ashes.

Once the winds of impermanence have blown, our eyes are instantly closed and our breath stops forever. Then, our radiant face changes its color, and the attractive countenance like peach and plum blossoms is lost. Family and relatives will gather and grieve, but all to no avail.

Since there is nothing else that can be done, they carry the deceased out to the fields, and then what is left after the body has been cremated and turned into midnight smoke is just white ashes. Words fail to describe the sadness of it all.

Thus the ephemeral nature of human existence is such that death comes to young and old alike without discrimination. So we should all quickly take to heart the matter of the greatest importance of the afterlife, entrust ourselves deeply to Amida Buddha, and recite the nembutsu.

Humbly and respectfully.

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