

PURE LAND NOTES

Journal of the Shin Buddhist Fellowship UK

EDITORIAL FOR PLN22 WINTER 2014

OUR MASTER PLAN FOR ESC17: BE PREPARED TO ABANDON ALL PLANS!

REV DAICHI GARY ROBINSON

The 17th European Shin Buddhist Conference took place in Southampton here in the UK 1st - 4th September and with 78 attendees and 20 speakers it was a great success. We set the bar high and cleared it! Sure, there were a few instances of 'could do better' but all in all it went very well and more or less according to plan.

Given that we had two years in which to devise one we did have a master plan in place for the lead in week and for the week of the conference, kikyoshiki ceremony, the excursion and the five separate dinners in five separate venues on consecutive nights but decided that we (the organising committee: Matt, Gordon, Enrique, Craig Joe and me) would meet every morning at 7.30am at Chomon House to look at the details of that days operation, discuss individual areas of responsibility, identify the times we might expect a curve ball and how we might best deal with all eventualities. A significant element of our master plan was to be ready to change plans at short notice!

Our days therefor begun with breakfast at around about 7am and because there were meals to attend every night that week we generally dispersed at about 11pm. The whole thing was quite exhausting but at the same time it was extremely rewarding, and we are now satisfied that we gave it our all. Our organisation and our abilities were stress tested to their limits and on a couple of occasions we may have buckled a bit, but we soon regained our shape and thanks to the experience, we are now stronger ... and already we are looking for our next project and our next opportunity to assist in building a Buddha Land here in the UK and indeed, across Europe, working hand in hand with our Dharma friends there on the other side of the Channel.

PURE LAND NOTES

Journal of the Shin Buddhist Fellowship UK

I did not myself present a paper at the conference, mainly because I knew that I would have to make other summery speeches or addresses on a more or less daily basis and, considering the nature of these short talks I allowed myself to stray from the conference theme of "Jodo Shinshu in Everyday Life" and speak more about the conference itself and what I thought our motivations and objectives might be. All of these talks were therefor un-scripted or spontaneous but my theme throughout was "Building a Buddha Land" and my reference piece was the chapter of that title in "The Teachings of Buddha", the well-known publication produced for free distribution by Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai (Buddhist Promoting Foundation), 3-14 Shiba 4-Chome, Minato-ku, Tokyo, Japan. They can also be contacted c/o Mitutoyo (UK) Ltd. Unit 1, Kingsway, Walworth Industrial Estate, Andover, Hants SP10 5LQ. I quote below the passage I improvised around on day one of the conference:

Let us imagine a desert country lying in absolute darkness and with many animals moving about in it blindly. Naturally they will be frightened and as they run into each other and there will be frequent squirming and loneliness. This is indeed a pitiable sight.

Then let us imagine that a superior man appears with a torch and everything becomes bright and clear. The living beings in the dark solitude suddenly experience a great relief as they look about to recognise one another and happily share their companionship.

By "a desert country" it is meant a world of human life when it lies in the darkness of ignorance. Those who have no light of wisdom in their minds wander about in loneliness and fear. They are born alone and die alone, they do not know how to associate with their fellow men in peaceful harmony, and they are naturally despondent and fearful.

By "a superior man with a torch" it is meant Buddha assuming human form and it is by His wisdom and compassion He illuminates the world. In this light people find themselves as well as others and are glad to establish human fellowship and harmonious relations. Thousands of people may live in a community but it is not one of real fellowship until

PURE LAND NOTES

Journal of the Shin Buddhist Fellowship UK

they know each other and have sympathy for each other. A true community has faith and wisdom that illuminate it. It is a place where the people know and trust each other and where there is social harmony. In fact, harmony is its life and real meaning ...

The theme "Jodo Shinshu in Everyday Life" took on a new meaning on the second day of the conference because overnight we were informed that having been admitted into Southampton General Hospital in the previous week, our good friend and Tendai priest Reverend Ganshin Rock passed away at 5.10 on Monday 1st September. We were reminded that everyday won't happen for ever.

It is noticeable that Pure Land Buddhist do appreciate the notion of 'everyday encounter'; put simply, the string of cause and effect that leads to one person to be in the same place as some other person - at the same time. I feel truly honoured that I encountered Ganshin Rock in this way and was able to benefit from his clear and sometime quite blunt guidance. It was by his example that I was inspired to start the weekly Buddhist meeting in my home, so it could be said that if it were not for the fact that in 1988 he decided to retire to the Hampshire Market Town of Romsey which is just a few miles from my home in Southampton; and if it were not for his insistence that "you are Jodo Shinshu" I might not have attended the 13th ESC held in 1996 in Oxford, took Kikyoshiki (Buddhist Confirmation) there and went on to become ordained as a Jodo Shinshu priest in 2012 and by then be supported by so many good Dharma friends we were able to accept the responsibility to ourselves organise and stage the 17th ESC 17th ESC here in the UK for only the second time in its 34 year history. We have yet to see what will come of the numerous and marvellous personal encounters that occurred at this years' conference.