

PURE LAND NOTES

Journal of the Shin Buddhist Fellowship UK

THE JODO SHINSHU FAMILY

DAVID QUIRK-THORNTON

In August, the Buddhist Churches of America (BCA) organised three events over the same long-weekend: the Jodo Shinshu Correspondence Course (JSCC) workshop, the Minister's Assistants Program (MAP) workshop and the Pacific Seminar at the Jodo Shinshu Center in Berkeley, California. This meant that many folk from around the world had an opportunity to come together and to share their thoughts on current challenges and future prospects for Jodo Shinshu. The Pacific Seminar in particular had an international flair with speakers from Australia, Brazil, Nepal, the US and Europe. There was a lot of interest in Jodo Shinshu in Europe and great warmth to support us.

Rev. John Paraskevopoulos gave the key note lecture at the Pacific Seminar and was brilliant in getting to the heart of the matter, to reminding us of the samsaric traps and distractions that we need to avoid and the issues that we can face with courage in faithfully pursuing the Nembutsu path.

We often refer to each other as *Dharma friends* but my experience in August was not one of *Dharma friends* getting together but rather of a *family gathering*. We received a very warm welcome and our hosts could not have been more helpful in ensuring everyone had an opportunity to participate and to connect. The experience was one of 'encounter' rather than just attending a conference or seminar - a deep sense of shared belonging. There was also an honesty in the discussions that I welcome and this underscores a deep respect and appreciation for each other, for those who have gone before us (our shared ancestors and teachers) and for Jodo Shinshu.

There are relatively few Jodo Shinshu Buddhists in Europe (at the moment!) and we are spread far and wide but my experience in the US this Summer helped me to a) remember that Sangha is one of the three jewels and b) to really appreciate the efforts that folk make to stay connected - the

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emails, the social media posts and the *family gatherings* such as the European Shin Conference (ESC). Ours is a Sangha that was nurtured by letters and gatherings over the years and we owe a huge debt to those who made the efforts to share Jodo Shinshu in the UK and across Europe. The challenges are many but they are far exceeded by the prospects, and the joy, of sharing Amida's Dharma.

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