

31 January 2021

Even though we are in a time of uncertainty within the Amida shu, I still feel a lot of love. This love was there when I first joined the community in 2003. It was there when my urge to leave was at its peak (18 months after joining). It was there when the training community moved out of the Buddhist House and it is still there now, as we experience a seismic shift happening in the Order.

About 15 years ago, I used to go along to the dances of universal peace with some of my friends in Leicester. There is one particular dance that is about love and structure, faith and practice, and self and other. I will try and describe it in words, and hopefully, as soon as we get a chance to meet in person, I can show you this dance and we can dance it together.

This spiritual dance involves all of us holding hands. We start off in a large circle, with arms stretched out but holding the hands of the people on either side of you. Then the person at the front who is leading the dance, lets go of one hand and starts to walk, taking one step inside the circle and pulling the person behind her who is then leading the person behind her and so on until everyone is moving around and pulling the next person, who pulls the next one, and so on, until everyone is walking, very slowly, in a circular direction. The leader takes another small step into the middle and keeps walking around into the circle so that the circle is now a spiral of people, and it gets smaller and smaller until eventually, the leader is in the middle and the people are circling all around like a spiral. As soon as the leader is in the middle, she makes a very small turn in the opposite direction, and starts to work her way back out of the circle, still holding hands and pulling the person behind her to follow exactly in her steps. There are now people on either side going in different directions but still holding hands. As you work your way around, it's like going through a maze, but with people as walls, and the walls are moving, until eventually, the last person makes her way to the middle and follows out along the same steps. Everyone is moving, slowly, back around the spiral to form the larger circle that we started off in. The form that was there for those at the front is not the same form as the one for people at the back. Depending on where you are in the line of joined hands, your experience of the structure that this dance creates as one moves into the middle of the circle will change.

When there is trust and patience, then everyone will get to the middle of the circle, whether or not you are at the front or at the back on the line. If not, then only a couple of people at the front of the line go into the middle. The reluctance and resistance to stay in a big circle is strong if the people are new to this dance or each other.

The Buddha teaches that the Dharma, Amida, the unborn are always there. Our part in this relationship is to awaken to them, to discover or perhaps rediscover them. Structures can help us create conditions in which love can be seen and felt. Rituals and worship bring Amida to life. Meetings and discussions can help us to understand each other better. But how are we to understand and grasp the unborn? Furthermore, how can understanding it help us?

The Buddha carried on living a long time after giving this talk about the unborn so he couldn't have meant taking one's life. Dharmavidya teaches us to understand this psychologically. What is being born is our identity and in order

for us to feel secure we invest in certain objects so that who we think we are is reinforced by what we see around us, what we hear, and so on. When forms and structures reinforce the kind of person we think we are then we feel safe and happy. In this process, our sense of who we are as fixed and permanent is born, or more precisely, the self is born and we know it, especially when we are outside of our comfort zone. You could say that everything outside our comfort zone is unborn, but the things that we gave birth to can also be unborn if we can see that they are all dharmas in and of themselves that have nothing to do with who we think we are. We just give birth to them as and when it suits our identity.

Structures that govern the Amida Shu are all dharmas, however, they can also be used to reinforce the self. Like the movement of the dance, the structure can create the conditions for love to manifest and they can also make people feel uncomfortable. In order to dance well with others, one needs time and familiarity, faith and practice, and a certain amount of willingness to let go of oneself. Whether we do or not, the unborn, the dharma, and Amida will still be there to love and support us.