

4 February 2021

One of the key aspects of our sangha is our diversity. Dharmavidya has always done his best to reflect Amida's light to shine on us so that we grow, develop, and blossom in our own way. However, the stronger the light, the darker the shadow, just like Mara walking right behind Shakyamuni. Amida's love is there to help us feel more comfortable with seeing our weaknesses that might be hidden in the shadow equally as much as it is there for us to enjoy the warm glow of the unimpeded light.

As you all know, I have been Dharmavidya's disciple for a long time and I, just like you, are getting used to the idea of Dharmavidya no longer being the Head of the Order. He is the visionary behind the Amida Shu and has been spreading the dharma to anyone and everyone who is interested. The Dharma is limitless and boundless, the sentient beings in the universe are numerous and the ways to reach out to people are also innumerable. He has not left the Order and is still very much active in the sangha.

When the health pandemic forced countries into lockdown, I suggested that Dharmavidya, who has been living alone managing his place in France, make some 5 minute podcasts. If you receive these podcasts then you will know how well received they were at the time, and still now, remain an enjoyable and thought provoking source of Dharma. This led to some people wishing to take refuge and soon developed into an online sangha community. It has been and still is open to all members of the Amida Shu and others. One need only be interested to meet like minded people from different parts of the world. We are all friends along the Dharma path and are fortunate to have the technology that allows us to meet, albeit on a screen, but meet all the same.

The term global sangha became the best term to describe the multi-cultural, international make up of the group and is the Amida Shu's outreach programme led by Dharmavidya.

Our western Pureland group has always been international. We are a small niche and when people who have a karmic affinity with Amida come across our particular form we form a very precious bond even when we are halfway across the world and very rarely have the chance to be in each other's company. Our faith in Amida is a settled one and some of those members can often be found doing engaged Buddhist activities of a Bodhisattva in their locality. Every now and then we get a full report from Order members and what they are doing and the report is a treasure trove of love and compassion being enacted out in society.

Perhaps one of the shadows is our fear of that which is different. However much we rejoice our differences there is also the discomfort or shock when we encounter someone or something that is new and alien to us. In the 12 links of dependent origination, one of the stages, is ignorance. It is often depicted as a blind person. Our natural response to not knowing, not seeing, is to proceed in a defensive way, it is part of our need to survive. One of our koans as a sangha therefore is how to encounter the other power in our midst, seeing that the other will be a mystery and a force that might not be familiar to us.

If there are any doubts or concerns about the global sangha then please come and join one of the meetings. If you have a pre-existing group that now meets online and you would like others to join in then please let me know and we can

include those meetings on the Amida Shu webpage and also in Dharmavidya's newsletter that he sends out to the global sangha.

There are so many meetings run by different members of the Amida Shu. There are some practice sessions, some discussion ones, some study groups, and more. If you would like more information then please let me know.

We started lockdown almost a year ago and for many of us, we are still in lockdown. All of the online sangha meetings have been a lifeline for many of us living in isolation or in remote areas. Please come and visit again for more wonderful information about what is going on in the Amida Shu.