



Which Way Salvation?

by **Alfred Bloom**

Professor Emeritus, University of Hawaii

There are generally two modes of salvation in the major world religions. These are the way of Works, salvation through one's own efforts or by Grace, salvation given by a God or Divine Reality. Differences lie in the conception of Divine Reality effecting the way of Works or Grace.

In the Buddhist Pure Land tradition this is the distinction of Self-Power and Other-Power. In Hinduism the distinction is known as the Cat and Monkey way of salvation. The baby monkey clinging to the back of its mother depicts the way of self-striving, while the mother cat carrying the kitten by the nape of the neck portrays Other-Power salvation.



Rev. Dr. Alfred Bloom is among the foremost Shin Buddhist authors and scholars. He is also a great supporter of the ABSC. He frequently shares his wisdom by joining Dharma discussions based on his articles held at the Center in NYC from his home in Hawaii via Skype! Check our website for upcoming Dharma discussions and plan to join us.

According to this distinction, salvation is either earned or given. In Western tradition, we often hear people say that they pulled themselves by their own bootstraps. We all know someone who claims he is self-made. This is an expression of the extreme individualism in our culture. It is actually impossible to pull yourself off the ground by your bootstraps. The emphasis in American and western culture is on independence, self-reliance, competition and continual striving. Salvation has transformed to success.

But, is this perspective really true? None of us lives in isolation. We are born into community, given our language and way of thinking. Even in the worst conditions someone has to nurture the infant or it cannot survive. If we succeed in some effort, it is probably because we have had support and encouragement from family, friends or teachers. Though our highly developed civilization requires a high degree of cooperation to maintain our standard of living, we are apt to think that we achieve entirely by our own efforts. Of course, we work hard, but that hard work only bears fruit when it is integrated within a community.

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The Buddha's Wish for the World:

Essays of a Buddhist Abbot

By **Gordon Bermant,**

General Advisor, The Buddha's Wish Committee

Among the singular events that mark the worldwide celebration of Shinran Shonin's 750th memorial, few are as joyful for us in America as the publication in English of Monshu Koshin Ohtani's book *The Buddha's Wish for the World*. How fortunate we are to have the Monshu's wisdom available to us at this time.

*The American Buddhist Study Center recently undertook a major project, the publication of *The Buddha's Wish for the World* by the Monshu (or Abbot) of the Nishi-Hongwanji, Koshin Ohtani. Monshu Ohtani is head of our school of Shin Buddhism and a direct descendant of Shinran Shonin.*

The Buddha's Wish for the World was originally published in Japan in 2003 with the title *Ashita ni wa kogan arite*. There are thirty-six chapters addressed to specific questions and concerns. The book begins with a question: *Tell me friend, why do you suppose we are alive?* Monshu Ohtani acknowledges that there is no easy answer to this profound question of existence. Indeed, the struggle for an answer is part of the answer: "the beauty of the human enterprise is the very fact that we struggle with

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Article Review:

Sharing the Dharma: An Overview of Shin Propagation in the West

Review by Hoshin Seki

Over 100 years ago Shin Buddhism was introduced to America. During the past 50 years many Americans discovered Buddhism as an alternative religion to Christianity. However, very few heard of Shin Buddhism. Dr. Alfred Bloom's article "Sharing the Dharma: An overview of Shin Propagation in the West" [The Eastern Buddhist, New Series, Vol. 40 • Nos. 1&2 • 2009] explores the why and suggests ways to bring this rich form of Buddhism out in the open.

Bloom begins with some statistics that indicate traditional religions are on the decline. Those followers of these religions are not as rigid in their faith and open to discovering new ways for spirituality. Buddhism falls into one

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Letter from the President

Dear Reader,

I hope you enjoy reading our Fall 2010 issue of *The Natural Way* as much as we enjoyed gathering the stories and putting it together. Please welcome our new editor, Gary Jaskula, a long time board member of ABSC. Gary is also a member of the New York Buddhist Church and is a past president of temple's board of trustees. Our very creative designer is Clarynne Blanchard who is also ABSC webmaster. Thank you both for doing such a terrific job in getting this journal out. I want to give a special thank you to Mark Sullivan, our past and first editor of *The Natural Way*. Mark is one of the founding board members of the ABSC.

As you read this issue, you will see we recently published Rev. Kemmyo Taira Sato's book *Great Living*. Rev. Sato was keynote speaker at our annual Symposium in 2009. He gave an interesting insightful talk on D.T. Suzuki's stance on World War II and State Shinto which was the philosophy for the Japanese people and military. Next year, we will be publishing another book written by Monshu Koshin Ohtani. This book deals with our global situation and how Shin Buddhism is so relevant today.

The work of the ABSC is only possible through your contributions and donations. Thanks to your contributions we are able to continue our work in educating and keeping Buddhism alive and well in our everyday life.

Yours in Gassho,

Hoshin Seki

President
American Buddhist Study Center

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***If they ask if Ryokan has
some last words for the world,
tell them he says: Namu Amida Butsu.***

- Ryokan (1758-1831)
*(from, Ryokan, Zen Monk-Poet of Japan,
by Burton Watson)*

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Recent ABSC Event

**Public Lecture "A Buddhist Perspective on Society"
with Rev. Daijaku Kinst, Ph.D.**

Saturday, July 10, 2010 from 2 to 4 PM

Rev. Daijaku Kinst came to the Study Center to speak on how the Buddha Dharma can support a deeper understanding of our present society and how this understanding can be expressed in beneficial ways. Hoshin Seki afterwards said: "It was refreshing to hear Roshi Kinst talk about Zen practice and the universal Buddha. I was pleasantly surprised to learn a few of our long time Shin followers had studied Zen at one time." The talk was a great success, eliciting many other favorable comments from attendees. A reflection on the talk by Tony Armstrong can be found in this issue.

Ordained in the Soto Zen tradition in 1988, Rev. Kinst is a Dharma successor in the lineage of Shunryu Suzuki Roshi. After completing her formal priestly training, she went on to study Western psychology, obtaining a master's degree and license in psychotherapy. During this time she also trained as a chaplain at UCSF Medical Center's Clinical Pastoral Education program. She has taught and led retreats in a variety of settings with teachers in the Soto Zen and other Buddhist traditions. She teaches graduate courses in Buddhist Studies, Contemplative Psychology, and Spiritual Direction and has an ongoing commitment to interfaith dialogue. Rev. Kinst received Dharma Transmission (full authorization to teach) from Rev. Sojun Weitsman. She also received a Ph.D. in Buddhism and Psychology and teaches at the Institute of Buddhist Studies, Graduate Theological Union, associated with the University of California, Berkeley. ■



Dr. Daijaku Kinst's Talk "A Buddhist Perspective on Society" at the ABSC July 10th, 2010

Some Reflections by Tony Armstrong

I was amazed. I was not sure if I was more amazed at my being there myself on the third floor library of the American Buddhist Study Center in New York City to listen to a member of clergy talk about religious principles, or at the fifteen to twenty people who also showed up to listen to the lecture. It was a beautiful but very warm afternoon in early July.

The lecture was more of an introduction to a conversation. Roshi Kinst has studied, written, and taught extensively about Buddhism and interfaith teaching. As I attend more Shin events, this conversational approach seems much more attune to Buddhist practice than the process of proselytism sometimes offered by other practices.

To be honest, when asked to write about the experience of this talk, I could not remember very much about it. I had taken a few notes on the questions asked, which I threw away a few days before this writing. However, after hours of panic, I realized that what may be most important is not what is recorded in the moment, but remembering the sense of the moment, which is more adaptable and portable in a transient world.

The topics I remember being discussed were showing compassion in this era of depravity and need, and the controversy of having a Buddhist chaplain in the military. For the former I had walked away with the sense that it is more important to help a person struggling in some sort of despair realize how they can better understand the causes of the despair instead of giving them temporary solutions, which are often more costly and illusory.

Since I am a veteran, I was probably more touched by the topic of a Buddhist chaplain in the military. Not just because I had served in the United States Navy, but also because the first time I actually entered a Buddhist Temple was while I was in military service. At first thought and through western eyes, the idea of a Buddhist chaplain in the military may seem contrary to the basic tenet of not senselessly taking a life. My understanding of this precept was enriched by the fact that this is not an ideal world – life has suffering,

sickness, and death. It is more important not just to understand and respect the purpose for a being's life, but to understand the reasons for their death.

Another interesting issue I remember: A slaughtered ovine provides many people not only with protein for staying alive, but also for traditional communal gatherings. But how was the animal treated while it lived?

Was it a living being deserving some form of respect simply because it shares life on earth with us? Or was it a commodity whose life was used to fulfill the needs of the masses? A country invades another for their land; does a Buddhist stand by as his family is killed, or does he kill in order to protect his loved ones? This is a world defined by birth and death. There can be, and often are, many other extremes in between that lead to our suffering and illness, and our pleasure and health. But it would be erroneous to adopt an absoluteness to a principle such as taking a life in a tradition that also teaches that everything is transitory. Absoluteness, after all, may be a bigger cause for conflict.

“A country invades another for their land; does a Buddhist stand by as his family is killed, or does he kill in order to protect his loved ones?”

Therefore, the most important thing we can offer is to seek understanding of our true natures, then seek to dispel the illusions (no matter how appealing they seem) that often corrupt and delude. Only then can we offer ourselves as examples for others to understand their own natures.

It was not surprising that at the end of the conversation with Rev. Kinst, when the seriousness of embracing the need to understand such a basic truth was lifted, smiles abounded. General conversations enveloped the air as we consumed the refreshments provided by Hoshin Seki. It was also at that moment that nature provided us with a welcome breeze to lure us outdoors. ■



Rev. Dr. Daijaku Kinst

***Sharing the Dharma Article Review,
continued from front page***

of religions that has stimulated interest. Shin Buddhism unfortunately is not one of them.

“In order to remedy this problem, we must begin by looking at the teachings of itself as the foundation for the spread of Shin Buddhism.” He then analyses the two main organizations, Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii and the Buddhist Churches of America, for not opening the door wider to allow more Americans to experience Shin Buddhism. These organizations originated to serve its immigrants with its historic practice and rituals. Whereas when Buddhism spread from India to China, Tibet, Korea, and Japan the people adapted it to meet their own cultural needs, here in the US the adaptation of Shin Buddhism is happening much slower.

Bloom accounts for this slowness to the “institutional political organization” itself by saying it reinforces Japanese Shin Buddhist practice by having Western clergy receive their ordination training in Japan. Furthermore it has obscured Shinran Shonin’s original teachings and thoughts. The internal political organizational struggle is overshadowed by what is really going on around them and not adapting to the surrounding changing conditions. What Bloom proposes is “propagation in terms of the teachings and the needs of modern society.” He goes on to talk about how traditional Buddhism is practiced in Japan, how it is a family tradition. This works in Japan but over here we are living in a “highly competitive religious environment of modern society.”

What is so appealing to modern society, Bloom feels, are the basic Buddhist religious principles; not to merely accept what Gotama says, but to test them through one’s own

experiences and thoughts.

“It is my firm belief that Shinran’s teaching must be revitalized and re-interpreted in a challenging, critical personal manner within the Hongwanjis, if it is to make a significant impact on the spiritual environment of Western people.... We must rediscover Shinran’s critical perspective in the context of individual and social life as a major task during this period ... to truly propagate Shin Buddhism.”

On the positive side we are making progress with the International Association of Shin Buddhist Studies conference, journals like *Pure Land* and *Pacific World*, and on the internet Shin Buddhist blogs, temple web pages, and social networks. In Honolulu the first Shin school, from

“When I found the teaching of Shinran it saved my life.”

first grade through high school, has been recently established. He mentions the Buddhist Study Centers in Honolulu, Berkeley, and New York which hold seminars and classes. Recently the introduction of lay minister training programs are provided by Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii and Buddhist Churches of America. These efforts will all help in the propagation.

Al Bloom talks about his own webpage, Shin Dharma Net, and shared some feedback from his readers:

“Following are some of the reasons I find Shin the most attractive school of Buddhism. The fact that it is a lay rather than a monastic path. I have always felt strongly that the religious person is not the one who flees life, but rather the one who is deeply

involved in life. I like the fact that rather it is a non-celibate priesthood since this means that the spiritual leaders are not separated from the experiences of the lay members of the congregation....”

“I practiced Zen for many years. I was a total failure. My evil self was too powerful to overcome, too cunning to subdue. I came to know that—despite my best intentions—I had not a single sincere and selfless thought in my body. I truly lived in misery. When I found the teaching of Shinran it saved my life....”

Bloom feels “the source of this problem [of Shin’s low profile] lies in the fact that Shin Buddhism has been centered in the Japanese American community and is regarded in the wider society more as a Japanese or ethnic religion.” The main point he makes is “it is urgently important to make clear the universal meaning of Shinran’s understanding of Buddhism and its adaptability to modern life as a lay-oriented religion.”

He goes on to explain how Shin was propagated in Japan and how it intertwined with government and the local people.

I feel Alfred Bloom wrote an excellent article on the state of Shin Buddhism in America and appreciate his analysis of how Shinran Shonin’s teaching can not only survive in our society but bring our society to a better understanding of itself. In closing, here are some final points on propagation:

1. Shin Buddhism teaches that we must understand the various perspectives on the nature of God among Western theologians, and the limits and problems of theism.
2. We must stress that the basis of Shinran’s principles is his awareness of the eternal, cosmic Amida Buddha—Infinite Reality itself as

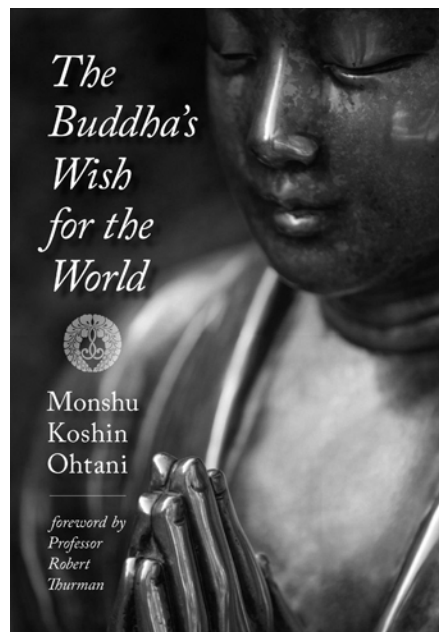
The Buddha's Wish for the World announcement, continued from front page

the question of how to live a meaningful life." Monshu advises us to take our time in contemplating our answer to the question he poses. To aid our contemplation, he proposes a subtle answer: *Our life is a gift wished into existence.*

Through the remaining chapters Monshu guides and challenges us with powerful questions and provocative answers, including for example Parents do not choose their kids anymore than kids choose their parents and Other power does not mean counting on others. And the 36th chapter, preceding an epilogue, announces a truth basic to all Buddhism without exception: All things are interconnected with one another—this truth is called *Pratitya samutpadda*. In this way, the first and last chapters form a circle: to begin, we are alive through countless causes and conditions fairly expressed as a gift of the universe. At the end, we see that dependent causality is the source of life, consciousness, suffering, and, when comprehended, release from suffering.

The book appears as a result of cooperation among numerous individuals and groups, including of course Monshu Ohtani himself, the International Office at the Hongwanji headquarters in Kyoto, the Buddhist Study Center in Honolulu, the Orange County Buddhist Church, and the American Buddhist Study Center in New York City. ■

The book is now available on Amazon.com, can be ordered through Barnes & Noble, or you can purchase it directly through the ABSC. Soft cover book is \$15 and hard cover is \$27.95. Please add \$3 for shipping and handling and make out a check for the total to American Buddhist Study Center. Send to American Buddhist Study Center at 331 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10025.



Which Way Salvation?, continued from front page

We believe that we are self-effecting, while we live interdependence and mutuality. Life is relationship and the quality of the relationship depends on our understanding of reality and the whole which takes shape as our society and culture. Our contemporary crisis is more a spiritual crisis than an economic or political crisis. Our problems in society could be resolved more effectively if there was a greater sense of our interdependence and the renewal of our understanding that liberty and freedom are indivisible. This understanding extends also to the well-being of society and community. There can be no truly healthy community when there are deep social divisions that underlie inevitable controversy and difference. Commitment to the welfare of the whole community

Sharing the Dharma Article Review, continued from pg. 4

Light and Life--which embraces us all with compassion and wisdom.

3. Western people who encounter Shin Buddhism are immediately struck by its applicability to their lives. It can enable them to gain deep spiritual insight while pursuing daily lives in the context of their own culture.
4. We can bring to Western society the principles of Shinran's teaching in a way that can reveal to them the depth of the Buddhist teachings and their meaning for the culture.

In Alfred Bloom's words:

"Shinran's vision of the interdependence and oneness of all beings is a challenge for us, in whatever situation we are, to become channels for that compassion to reach others even in a small way. This is the true practice of propagation." ■

The full text of the Alfred Bloom's article "Sharing the Dharma" can be found in the periodical The Eastern Buddhist, Vol. 40, Nos. 1&2, New Series (2009), p. 93. The issue can be ordered from The Eastern Buddhist Society in Kyoto, Japan. Their website is <http://web.otani.ac.jp/EBS/index.html>. Alternately, several libraries in the United States subscribe to this journal.

must frame the clash of differences in any area.

If our society is to endure beyond the clichés we constantly repeat on ceremonial occasions, we will need to renew our sense of interconnectedness with our fellow-human beings and with nature. Our concerns must transcend the narrow limits of one nation, religion, or culture. The individualistic images we promote and live with during periods of prosperity cannot sustain us in crisis and disaster. We have reached the point in human history when we must recognize that life is based on Other-Power, Grace, inherent in community. We are truly Kittens in the larger scheme of reality, or should I say, Pussy-cats? ■

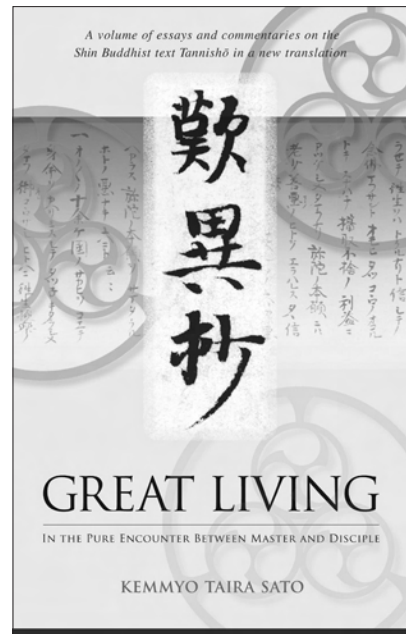
Forthcoming Book: Great Living

Rev. Kemmyo Taira Sato provides us with a comprehensive approach to the Tannisho, which has not only been a major text for Jodo Shinshu Pure Land faith, but also as classic of Japanese literature. He draws on his association with Dr. D.T. Suzuki as well as his personal religious experience to interpret the subtle nuances of the writing.

The *Tannisho* is a text with great appeal to modern people beyond the Hongwanji institution and also outside of Japan with its focus on personal faith and the significant role of the relationship of the teacher and disciple in spiritual development. The author sets the text on the background of Pure Land Buddhist history in Japan, highlighting the transformation of the Nembutsu as a means for attaining salvation to the Nembutsu as an expression of gratitude for a salvation already given.

He focuses throughout the book on the issue of pure personal faith and the transmission of the faith from teacher to disciple. For Shinran (1173-1263) Honen (1143-1212) played a pivotal role in the formation of his faith. As the title of the *Tannisho* indicates, the author Yuienbo discusses deviations from Shinran's understanding of pure Other Power faith among his disciples, particularly after the death of the founder. These deviations were brought about through interaction with other Pure Land interpreters and with believers in other traditions in Japan, based in Self-Power.

Viewing the teaching from various angles, Rev. Sato contributes greatly to the further clarification of what is distinctive about Shinran's faith as a modern faith, with its potentiality to liberate the ego from its entanglements with the contemporary world, as well as presenting the faith as universal and open to all.



New ABSC Publication: "Great Living in the Pure Encounter between Master and Disciple" – a new translation of the Tannisho with essays and commentary by Rev. Kemmyo Taira Sato of Three Wheels Temple in London, with an introduction by Mark Blum. Watch our website for further information on the release date!

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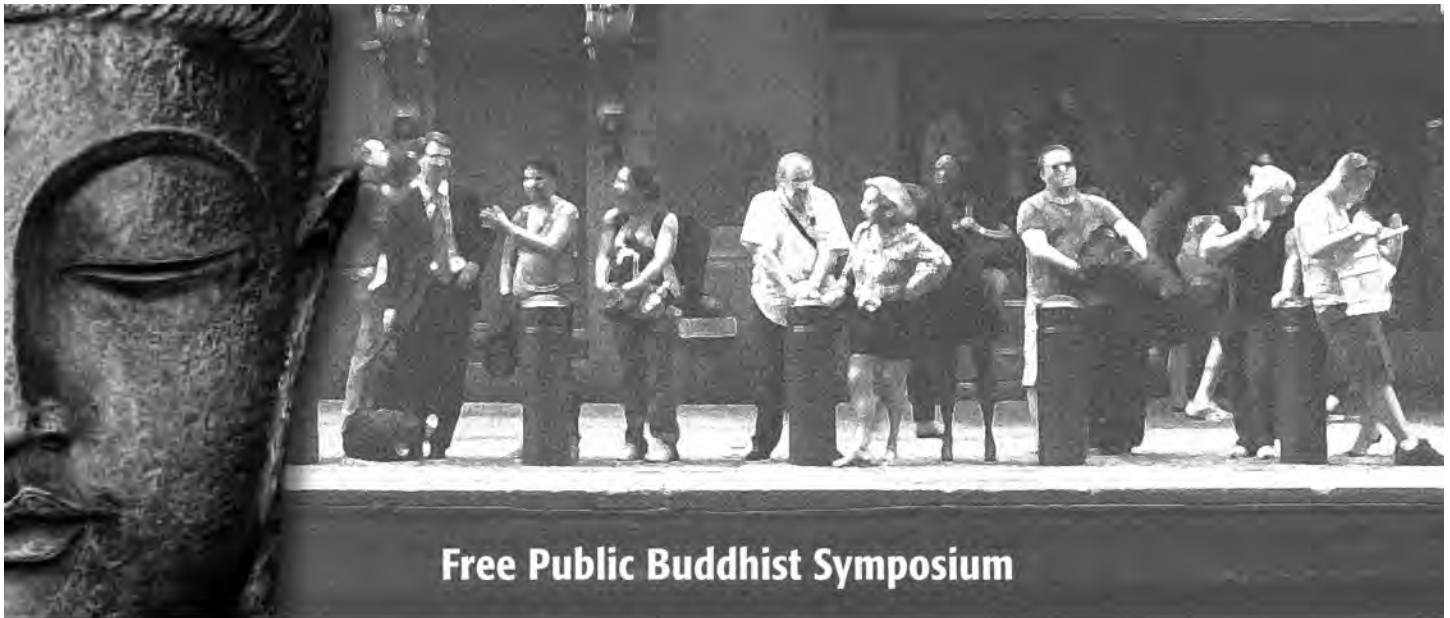
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Free Public Buddhist Symposium

Engaged Buddhism in the Age of Obama

Saturday, October 30, 2010 • Noon–5:00 PM

"Western societies are undergoing great stress at the present time because of misguided wars, ecological and economic imbalance... Global warming issues have indicated the limitations of the Western outlook on life with its incessant effort to exploit nature rather than to harmonize with it and take seriously human interdependence within nature." Dr. Alfred Bloom

The fabric of human existence in our society can benefit greatly by understanding the teachings of the Buddha Dharma. More than 2500 years ago, the Buddha identified the source of human suffering and the path to its elimination. Great teachers have interpreted the Buddha's lessons many times throughout the centuries to bring their relevance to specific cultures and historical circumstances. We are now at a cross roads: we can awaken to the truth of universal interdependence, or we can ignore the truth and pay a frightful price. The choice is ours to make.

This Buddhist Symposium will explore our society from a Buddhist perspective, exploring this rich religious philosophy for lessons applicable to our current dilemmas. Of particular interest will be the lessons of gratitude, humility, and interdependence emphasized within the Shin Buddhist tradition.

Keynote speakers:

Dr. Mark T. Unno, Associate Professor of East Asian Religions, University of Oregon, Eugene.
Rev. Kodo Umezū, Director of the Center for Buddhist Education, Jodo Shinshu Center, Berkeley, CA.

A panel discussion and audience participation will be moderated by
Dr. Gordon Bermant, Lecturer, Department of Psychology, University of Pennsylvania

Location:

New York Buddhist Church
332 Riverside Drive
New York, NY 10025

For more information, please contact Dr. Gordon Bermant at gbermant@sas.upenn.edu

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ABSC Information

Please join us for our book discussions, Dharma discussions, lectures, and other events throughout the year.

Make a habit of checking our website from time to time: www.americanbuddhiststudycenter.org

There is a lot of information there about Buddhism, the Study Center, current programs, Dharma talks, and a blog. Features are continually added by web-master Claryne Blanchard.

If you are visiting New York City, please stop by. Call our President, Hoshin Seki, at 212-864-7424. He or another member will show you our magnificent library and bookstore.

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ABSC Upcoming Events

September 19, 2010

Understanding the Pure Land in Buddhism - Dharma discussion with Dr. Alfred Bloom.

The discussion will take place in the library of the ABSC and Dr. Bloom will join in from his home in Hawaii. Time to be announced. Suggested Donation: \$5 for ABSC Members and \$10 for all others.

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October 30, 2010, 12:00-5:00 PM

Public Symposium: Engaged Buddhism in the Age of Obama

Speakers: Dr. Mark T. Unno
Rev. Kodo Umezu
Dr. Gordon Bermant

The symposium will take place in the hondo (main hall) of the New York Buddhist Church. FREE. See ad on page 7 in this newsletter.



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