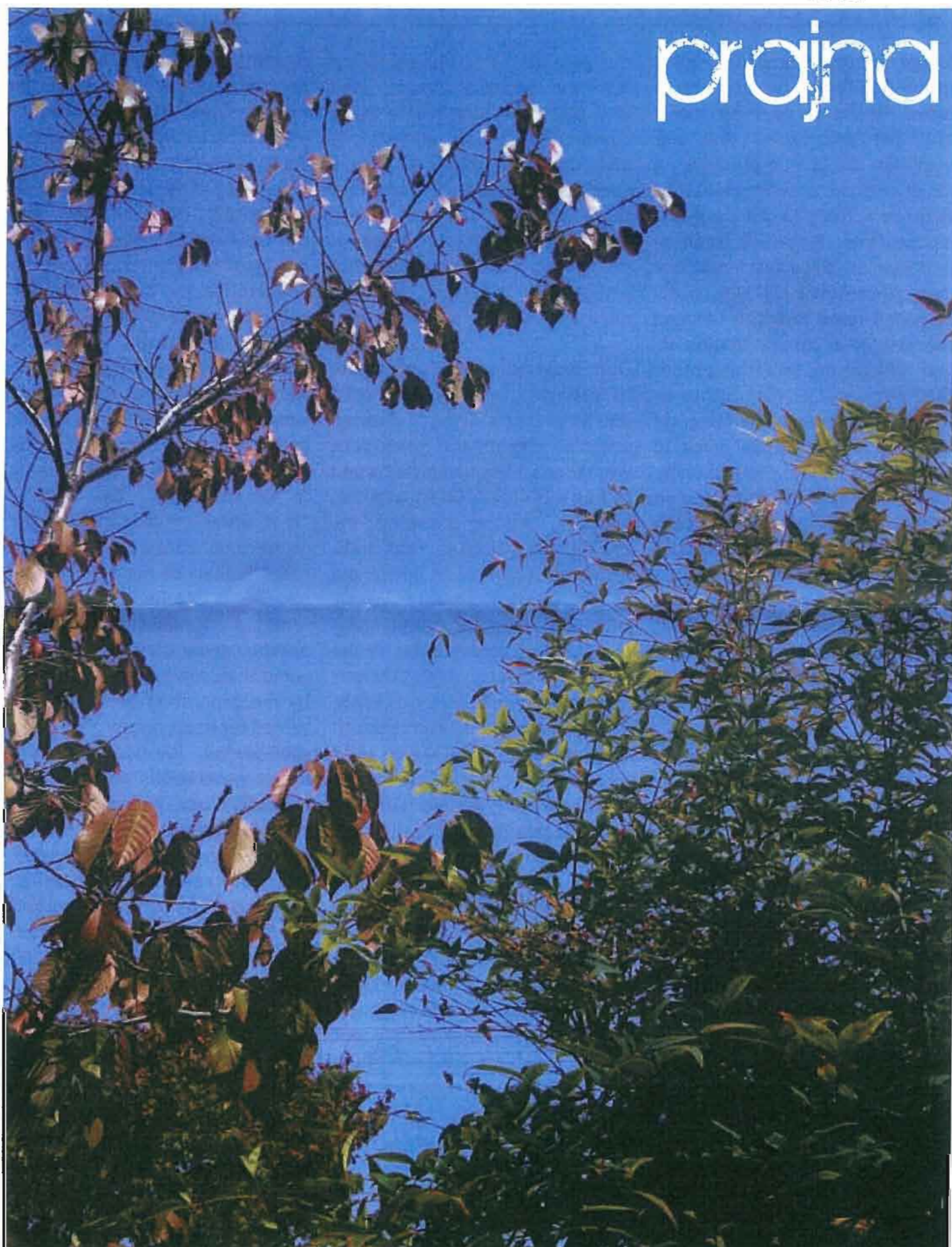


prajna



Our Practice is the Sangha

When Jodoshinshu people meet other Buddhists, we are always asked “What is your practice?” The pat answer is that our everyday life is our practice. A more precise answer would be that our activity in our sangha is our practice. Since our tradition is based on the experience that our ego-centered self can hardly be relied upon to break through the self, it is an awakening to, and reliance on, something other than our ego-self that brings us to this connective awakening. In other words, what we come to understand about Jodoshinshu teachings must be put to the test on a regular basis by interacting with our fellow members of the Sangha – our “friends and fellow travelers on the Dharma road”. Sense and sensibility is here different from logic and reason. We are not simply a thinking machine or a non-thinking machine – we are far more complex than that.

We were the first Buddhists to part from monasticism. We do not agree that the business of Bodhi awakening requires full-time effort by full-time monks or nuns who commit to a lifetime of study and meditative practices. Such an insistence very often results in Buddhist elitism and arrogance. If I have understood the most abstruse points of Buddhist philosophy and still belittle others or kick my pet when I am frustrated – what’s the point of it all? The “I” cannot see itself clearly, and needs a lot of help from friends and enemies alike. It is in a community in which one can be nurtured and grow, and

our community is not separated from the rest of the world. And in a place like L.A., where living communities or neighborhoods are a thing of the past, our temple sanghas become more important than before. Without these sanghas, what is the point of raising generations of academics and scholars to tell us what we once were or should have been?

Our practice is to participate in services, funerals, memorial services, weddings, dharma schools, seminars, retreats, workshops, flipping chickens and rolling sushi, Bon Odori, arguing, laughing, eating, cleaning up, setting up, visiting hospitals, watching each other grow old as we delight in the young, and, if you are JA, complaining, complaining, complaining all the while. By the way, don’t take our constant complaining seriously, it’s just our way of exercising to keep us healthy. An active child who comes regularly to a temple of 300 people grows up with that many uncles and aunts, jiichans and baachans, teachers and friends and is what he or she is because of them all. It is not now or never, it is always now. Now to do everything and nothing, succeed and fail, be good and bad, giving and taking away, loving and hating, agitated and calm – not either or, but both, at the same time sometimes. Namo is Amidabutsu and Amidabutsu is Namo and yet never the twain shall meet. What a trippy thing Jodoshinshu is. No prayer, no supreme being, no eternal soul, no protective amulets, no lucky or unlucky days

or signs, no miracles, no zodiacs, no benedictions, invocations or blessings, and no dogmatic ethics or morals that apply to everyone. And yet we are the ones said to have strayed most from original Buddhism? I think not. And our sanghas are proof of it. Most are astoundingly normal, with a cooperative spirit, good humor, self-effacing, calm in the face of troubles and death. Without a living temple sangha there is no Nembutsu teaching. And a living sangha only requires people to gather and be a community. Big or small, growing or not growing is not the issue. The issue is “Is it alive?” If it is alive to the mysterious contradiction called life, whether 20 people or 2,000 people, it is a bona fide sangha – and the Nembutsu is alive for another generation because that generation saw that it was valued by the generation preceding it – valued for itself, not for the future generations. We tried it for the future generations and it was a colossal failure – parents dropping off their kids at the temple for Dharma School while they went off to golf or shop. In effect saying, “This is good for you, but when you get to be daddy or mommy’s age, you get over it..” For us, you do have to be a living part of a living sangha to understand Buddhism, especially Jodoshinshu.

Gassho,

Rev. Mas