



GASSHO

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"Hands together in reverence & gratitude"



THOMAS JEFFERSON ON "RELIGIOUS FREEDOM"

by roland k. tatsuguchi

Thomas Jefferson, the third President of the United States believed,

"... That truth is great and will prevail if left to herself; that she is the proper and sufficient antagonist to error, and has nothing to fear from the conflict unless by human interposition disarmed of her natural weapons, free argument and debate"

You often hear people say, "You lucky you live in Hawaii." However, Americans are now living in seemingly difficult global economic and political times. The majority of us do not realize how fortunate we are. Everything, however, is relative.

Therefore, whenever you reflect and contemplate on the ever changing nature of life as mythically depicted by the "six realms of transmigration," you will begin to realize how a person seemingly in a "celestial situation" full of joy can suddenly find himself in a "demonic situation."

This is why most Americans do not realize how their present lifestyles has been and yet continues to be derived from the devastation and destruction of nature's innocent ecosystems, untold numbers of dumb animals being butchered daily, while "the haves" in the top 2% enjoy the fruits based on exploiting the cheap labor of "the have nots." Human beings, in essence, are like "parasitical tapeworms" constantly consuming at one end while we keep excreting wastes at the other end. We keep polluting and compromising the very air that we are breathing, the water we are drinking, and the very things we are ingesting.

Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) was one of the Founding Fathers who helped to draft the first version of the Declaration of Independence (July 4, 1776) as follows:

MONTH'S THOUGHT



... Unless you can learn to look beyond the local dictates of what is right and what is wrong, you're not a complete human being. You're just a part of that particular social order. Joseph Campbell. *Pathways to Bliss*. p. 72



"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with inherent and inalienable rights; that among these, are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness."

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REMINDERS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

SERVICES FOR MARCH 2011

1st SUN Mar 6th:

9 A.M. Eng. Service
Dharma Talk
For Children & Adults
Rev. Tatsuguchi

2nd SUN Mar 13th:

9 A.M. Eng. Service
Dharma Talk
For Children & Adults
Rev. Tatsuguchi

3rd SUN Mar 20th:

Spring O'Higan Service
9 A.M. Eng. Service
Guest Speaker:
Rev. Shigeaki Fujitani

4th SUN Mar 27th:

MONTHLY
FAMILY WORSHIP
9 A.M. Eng Service
Dharma Talk
For Children & Adults
Rev. Tatsuguchi

WEEKLY ACTIVITIES

KARAOKE CLASS Mon 7 - 9 P.M.
Mr. Nelson Yoshioka

KARATE Tues/Fri 6 - 9 P.M.
Shihan - Walter Nishioka

FUJINKAI SEWING CLUB Wed 9 - 11 A.M.
J. Kobuke/A. Murata

HAWAII EISA CHIMUGUKURU DAIKO
Mr. Van Shimabukuro
Wed/Thur 6.30-8.30

**THANK YOU FOR
YOUR GENEROUS DONATIONS!!**

With Deepest Sympathy

Mrs. Helen H. Shibata 93yr Feb. 3, 2011

Thus, Jefferson in a memo also wrote, "The most sacred of duties of a government is to do equal and impartial justice to all its citizens." [NOTE: Henceforth Jefferson's words will be set in quotation marks as extracted from Jeremy Koselak's paper, *The Exaltation of a Reasonable Deity: Thomas Jefferson's Critique of Christianity*.] Such are the ideals of our nation that ensures the rights of its citizens to pursue freedom, liberty and justice for all.

The 1700s and 1800s were still times of slavery. The first president George Washington was a slave owner. So too was Jefferson, the third president. So, Koselak raises questions about Jefferson who, as a slave owner and having "perhaps" fathered several slave children could also advocate, paradoxically, the ideals of freedom, equality, liberty and justice for all human beings. Koselak, therefore, asks: "... how did a professed religious man ..." like Jefferson, how was it possible for him to "... attack Christianity, priests, and traditional belief?" This contradiction between the Christianity of slave owners and the Christianity of Christians against slavery was also dealt with by a Frederick Douglass (c.1818-1895), who himself was fathered by his slave owner who had impregnated his mother, a slave from the Barbados.

Let us, however, not forget also the hundreds of Native American Indian tribes that were, at this time of American history, also being decimated or driven off their native ancestral lands during the westward expansion of colonial America. Those who had survived were forced into reservations on lands that were less productive and desirable. They, as were the African slaves in the South, were cut off from their ancestral ways, traditions, cultures and religions by forbidding them to speak their native tongues. Instead they were forced to learn and only speak English in Mission Schools where zealous missionaries began converting them over to Christianity. This same process of physical and psychological displacement of traditional language and religious beliefs of native Hawaiians with Christianity and English was also being instituted by the first missionaries and their descendants from New England. The Hawaiian Monarchy, as of consequence, was finally toppled on January 17, 1893 just before the 20th century.

Our *issei* immigrant parents then began arriving at the turn of the century as plantation contract laborers.

WORDS OF SHINRAN

I, Shinran, have never even once uttered the nembutsu for the sake of my father and mother. The reason is that all beings have been fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, in the timeless process of birth-and-death. ...
Taitetsu Unno. *Tannisho*. V. p. 10.

They endured discrimination and much hardship, even abuse. During the initial plantation days the *issei* made personal sacrifices so that their children and their children's children would enjoy the right to pursue their freedom, liberties and happiness as natural born Americans as established by the founding fathers of our nation.

Therefore, in this issue I would like to talk about Thomas Jefferson and his critical views about Christianity and the established church hierarchy of priests and freelancing fire-and-brimstone itinerant evangelical preachers of his time of the so-called "wild, wild West." For much of what he said still holds true about the established religions of our time. I will mainly, as mentioned, rely on Jeremy Koselak's paper, "*The Exaltation of a Reasonable Deity: Thomas Jefferson's Critique of Christianity*," which I feel summarizes well Jefferson's views and criticisms of Calvinistic Puritanism that: "*God preordained ... a part of the human race, without any merit of their own, to eternal salvation, and another part, in just punishment of their sin, to eternal damnation.*"

According to Koselak, Jefferson was "... an atheist, theist, deist, and perhaps, even an Unitarian, Epicurean, materialist, secular humanist, naturalist, Episcopalian" He detested the corruption of the Christian religion that had occurred before and continued after the Declaration of Independence. In a letter to John Adams on October 13, 1813, he wrote:

"We must reduce our volume to the simple evangelists, select, even from the very words of Jesus, paring off the amphibologisms [uncertainties of speech] into which they have been led by forgetting often or not understanding what had fallen from him, by giving their own misconceptions as his dicta [baseless opinions or beliefs], and expressing unintelligibly for others what they had not understood themselves. There will be found remaining the most sublime and benevolent code of morals which has even been offered to man. I have performed the operation for my own use, by cutting verse by verse out of the printed book, and arranging the matter which is evidently his, and which is as easily distinguishable as diamonds in a dunghill." []s mine.

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As of consequence, we have what is known as the Jefferson's Bible.

According to Koselak, "Jefferson set out to discredit the New Testament as a source of divine revelation by performing scholarly surgery upon the document." The so-called Jefferson's Bible is Jefferson's piecing together of

"... his own versions of a non-sacred theology, entitled *The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth*, *The Syllabus of an Estimate of the Merit of the Doctrines of Jesus*, and *The Philosophy of Jesus*. These documents, though separate, have often been labeled incorrectly together and collectively referred to as the Jeffersonian Bible."

What this means is that the so-called Jefferson's Bible is really three different separate documents. Jefferson's purpose was "... to strip away the myth..." by "cutting verse by verse out of the printed book, and arranging the matter ..." in the way he saw the words of Jesus to be of a "... higher moral philosophy than anyone had before or after ... had even spoken of. This is why Jefferson considered the Old Testament and the words of St. Paul to be distortions of the actual words and life of Jesus which were like "... diamonds in a dunghill."

Therefore, it was with great interest to me to further note Koselak's pointing out that Jesus did not write down to document his teachings. This fact, says Koselak, "... forced Jefferson to evaluate the essential nature of the written word versus the character of the spoken word." These words of Koselak fascinated me to the point of recalling that this was also the case with Sakyamuni Buddha who also did not set down what he said in writing, although he himself was highly educated, literate and knowledgeable in the ancient Vedas.

What is being pointed out here is the fact that "words" are just "words." The written word cannot replace the living word being spoken in the ongoing living moment. In other words, it is easy to pontificate on matters by quoting high-sounding words, but it is quite another matter to be actually speaking the living words of truth. In other words, if the words you are saying are to be meaningful and effective, they must be alive with sincerity as you are vibrantly speaking them, and not merely reciting them like reading the lifeless words in books on a dusty library shelf.

Therefore, Jefferson said that the unadulterated words of Jesus are like "diamonds" ... when compared with the words of the Old Testament and the words of St. Paul which are like "dunghills." As you can imagine, such criticisms of the Old and New Testament passages did not sit well with orthodox and fundamentalist Zionist Christians of Jefferson's time who took every word in the Bible to be the very words of God.

The following letter to William Baldwin was written by Jefferson on January 19, 1810.

"That but a short time elapsed after the death of the great reformer of the Jewish religion before his principles were departed from by those who professed to be his special servants, and perverted into an engine for enslaving mankind, and aggrandizing their oppressors in church and state; that the purest system of morals ever before preached to man has been adulterated and sophisticated, by artificial constructions, into a mere contrivance to filch wealth and power to themselves, that rational men not being able to swallow their impious heresies, in order to force them down their throats, they raise the hue and cry of infidelity, while themselves are the greatest obstacles to the advancements of the real doctrines of Jesus, and do in fact constitute the real Anti-Christ."

In my humble opinion these words of Jefferson speak volumes as to what is presently going on throughout our nation and in the hallowed halls of our Congress supposedly in the name of democratic principles based on Judeo-Christian ideals and values. And this was exactly why the Founding Fathers, in drafting the words to the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States, not only "spoke" of human liberty, equality, freedom and inalienable rights," but especially enacted to pass laws to ensure a clear separation of State and religion which now have become obscured.

Let us now dwell on the words of Albert Einstein (1879-1955) who as a humanist said:

A human being is a part of a whole, called by us the universe, a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest, kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.

As a theoretical physicist, he said:

Any intelligent fool can make things bigger, more complex, and more violent. It takes a touch of genius — and a lot of courage — to move in the opposite direction. Peace cannot be kept by force. It can only be achieved by understanding.

Einstein, as an empirical scientist also believed as did Jefferson that:

The important thing is not to stop questioning.
Curiosity has its own reason for existing.

Therefore, like any critical rationalist and empiricist, Einstein also "... rejected outright anything that could not stand up to the test of reason and utility." Einstein declared therefore,

My religion consists of a humble admiration of the illimitable superior spirit who reveals himself in the slight details we are able to perceive with our frail and feeble mind.

Einstein further asserted:

A man's ethical behavior should be based effectually on sympathy, education, and social ties; no religious basis is necessary. Man would indeed be in a poor way if he had to be restrained by fear of punishment and hope of reward after death.

Einstein, therefore, said he believed in a deity who was "... a God who ... does not play dice ... and who was ... not malicious."

Realizing a need for a renewed moral, ethical, religious perspective that would bring conflicting cultures together, Einstein then noted that:

Buddhism has the characteristics of what would be expected in a cosmic religion for the future. It transcends a personal God, avoids dogmas and theology; it covers both the natural and the spiritual, and it is based on a religious sense, aspiring from the experience of all things, natural and spiritual, as a meaningful unity.

For when Einstein realized that his discovery of $E=mc^2$ had led to the atomic bombs that were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki to end World War II, he realized suddenly that everything in the world had been changed. He realized further that "... the path to genuine religiosity does not lie in the fear of life or of death based on blind faith."

As mentioned Einstein, like Jefferson, also sought for meanings through rational and humane knowledge. For Jefferson also said: "... the free exercise of reason is all I ask for the vindication of character of Jesus." So saying, Jefferson therefore said:

"Divest yourself of all bias in favor of novelty and singularity of opinion ... shake off all the fears and servile prejudices under which weak minds are servilely crouched. Fix reason firmly in her seat, and call to her tribunal every fact, every

SHINRAN'S WASAN

The Great Sage said:
It's easy to be reborn!
Those who are skeptical
about the Pure Land,
He calls them
people without "eyes,"
persons without "ears."
Jodo Wasan No. 90
rkt trans.

opinion. Question with boldness even the existence of a god; because, if there be one, he must approve of the homage of reason, then that of blindfolded fear." *Letter to Peter Carr, 10 August 1787.*

Therefore, Einstein, like Jefferson, also came to the conclusion that "man would indeed be in a poor way if he had to be restrained by fear of punishment and hope of reward after death."

Helen Keller (1889-1986) due to a fever became deaf, blind and mute before her second birthday. Because of a Miss Ann Sullivan's patience, devotion and steadfast unwavering determination, Helen learned to read through a raised system of dots representing letters of the alphabet called the Braille System. Miss Sullivan, devoted some 50 years of her life by lovingly staying at Helen Keller's side.

Because of the support of others and her unwavering determination, Helen Keller became a well known American author, activist and lecturer. She traveled the world widely and got to be friends with several famous people all over the world.

She wrote of a need for an inner sense and spirituality in human beings as follows:

Deep, solemn optimism, it seems to me, should spring from this firm belief in the presence of God in the individual; not a remote, unapproachable governor of the universe, but a God who is very near every one of us, who is present not only in earth, sea and sky, but also in every pure and noble impulse of our hearts, the 'source and centre of all minds, their only point of rest.'

Helen Keller was an amazing and gifted human being. As a child she made up some 60 different hand signs and body gestures so she could communicate her needs to her family. She could recognize people by feeling their facial features and also by touching what they

wore. She had an amazing memory and was able to understand what a person was saying just by putting her finger on his lips as he spoke.

Let us then now ponder Einstein's following words concerning war time rhetoric and divisive propaganda to demonize to justify and destroy one's enemies:

He who joyfully marches to music rank and file, has already earned my contempt. He has been given a large brain by mistake, since for him the spinal cord would surely suffice. This disgrace to civilization should be done away with at once. Heroism at command, how violently I hate all this, how despicable and ignoble war is; I would rather be torn to shreds than be a part of so base an action. It is my conviction that killing under the cloak of war is nothing but an act of murder.

I know not with what weapons World War III will be fought, but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones.

Einstein, then concluded: "Peace cannot be kept by force. It can only be achieved by understanding." This means that we must not be misled by "blind faith," especially a faith based on religious dogmatism tainted by racial bigotry and hypocrisy. Nor should we fall victim to dubious superstitions, dogmas, doctrines or ideologies, especially by those claiming to possess magical, mystical, if not miraculous, supernatural powers.

We must be reasonable and always be thinking not only about our fellow human beings but also about our fellow creatures and our living ecosystems with love and compassion. The future of man depends not only on the Mind of Selflessness but also on the Truth of Togetherness. According to Buddha, the complex that is one's mind-body-heart-and-spirit is an inseparable whole! They comprise and constitute a person's whole being, personhood and humanity as illuminated by the Dharma's Wisdom and permeated by its Compassion. This, then, is the significance of Namoh-amida-butsu, which means: "I trust in the Dharma's Inconceivable Light of Selflessness" and "take complete refuge in its Immeasurable Life Togetherness full of Boundless Compassion for all beings!"

BUDDHIST STORIES & PASSAGES

They who are ashamed of what they ought not to be ashamed of, and are not ashamed of what they ought to be ashamed of, such men, embracing false doctrines, enter the downward path.

They who fear when they ought not to fear, and fear not when they ought to fear, such men, embracing false doctrines, enter the downward path.

They who see sin where none exists, and do not see it where it does exist, such men, embracing false doctrines, enter the downward path.

They who know what is forbidden as forbidden and what is not forbidden as not forbidden, such men, embracing the true doctrine, enter the good path. Irving Babbitt. *The Dhammapada*. p. 48.

QUESTION AND ANSWER KORNER

QUESTION: What is the basic difference between *shinjin* and faith?

ANSWER: According to Professor Hisao Inagaki: "Faith presupposes two opposing aspects, one who believes and the object of faith – in ordinary circumstances, man and divine reality. In Shin Buddhism, *shinjin* [faith and trust] is not directed to any object completely separate from oneself. In many cases, a believing person offers love or prayer to a god. This gap or distance between the two sides cannot possibly be filled by any means. In Shin, Amida and you are essentially unopposed. From the viewpoint of the Mahayana principle of voidness and non-duality, nobody or nothing is opposed to Amida. Amida embraces all beings or things and the realization of this constitutes the experience of *shinjin*."

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