



GASSHO

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"Hands together in reverence & gratitude"



ON NON-VIOLENCE

by rev. roland k tatsuguchi

In this month's *GASSHO*, I would like to deal with the charge that Buddhist "non-violence" encourages "passivism" and "escapism" instead of becoming "actively engaged" in solving the problems that vex our world.

To counter this misperception, I will be quoting from Paul Fleischman's *The Buddha Taught Nonviolence, Not Pacifism*. Fleischman is an M.D. and a practicing psychiatrist. I will also quote from Lindsay Perigo's *The Pitfall of Passivism*. Perigo gave up a life that would have made him a multi-billionaire for a lesser way of life by organizing his *Sense of Life Objectivists* (SOLO).

According to Fleischman, a key difference between the Buddha's life of "nonviolence" from that of merely advocating "ethical pacifism" (or political anarchism) is that "non-violence is continuous, a pervasive and quotidian effort." "Quotidian" means that "a student of *Dhamma* actually lives the life of nonviolence towards his friends, acquaintances, animals, trees, and foods" and that she or he avoids words that desecrate and acts that are destructive (i.e., exploiting, abusive and demeaning).

A person who is a "committed meditationist," says Fleischman, is characterized by her or his "quotidian efforts" to hold herself or himself "aloof from causing injury" even to things like "seeds or plants." Such a commitment to be kind, gentle, compassionate and equitable arises, as I often mention, from an unwavering vision of Selflessness and Togetherness that embraces all things, not only terrestrial or celestial, but also that are of cosmic proportions.

Such a "cosmic vision" of all-embracing Togetherness was given to all mankind by Sakyamuni in his story about a mythical King called *Dharmakara* who, as an aspiring Bodhisattva, set

MONTH'S THOUGHT



An error does not become truth by reason of multiplied propagation, nor does truth become error because nobody sees it.

— Mohandas Gandhi



forth and fulfilled his 48 Vows of All-embracing Compassion, to then become Amida Buddha who now is tirelessly working to save sentient beings, especially those helplessly caught in the "six realms of transmigration."

According to Shinran, to break out of the "cycle of endless births and deaths," all a person has to do is "trust" and "take refuge" in Amida's Sacred Name by uttering *Namoh-Amida-Butsu* with a humility full of penitence and gratitude for having been "grasped" by this Buddha who never "abandons" any being. Such utterances of *Namoh-Amida-Butsu* are not supplications imploring a supreme deity for a personal benefit or a miracle.

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REMINDERS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

SERVICES FOR APRIL 2012

1st SUN APR 1st:

HAWAII BUDDHIST COUNCIL'S HANAMATSURI SERVICE

No services at SKM
Please attend HBC Service

2nd SUN APR 8th:

Shinshu Kyokai's
Hanamatsuri Service
9 A.M. Eng. Service
Rev. Tatsuguchi

"Infant Buddha's 7th Step!"

3rd SUN APR 15th:

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

4th SUN APR 22nd :

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

WEEKLY ACTIVITIES

KARAOKE SINGERS CLUB Mon 7 - 9 p.m.
Mr. Nelson Yoshioka

KARATE CLASSES Tues & Fri 6 - 8 p.m.
Shihan - Walter Nishioka

FUJINKAI LADIES' FELLOWSHIP GROUP
Wed 9 a.m. - noon

HAWAII EISA CHIMUGUKURU DAIKO
Wed & Thurs 6.30 - 8.30 p.m.
Mr. Van Shimabukuro

THANK YOU
for YOUR GENEROUS DONATIONS !!

2012 Memorial Service Schedule

2011	1 Year	2010	3 Year	2006	7 Year
2000	13 Year	1996	17 Year	1988	25 Year
1980	33 Year	1963	50 Year	1913	100 Year

According to Shinran, this is why the *nembutsu* is:

... neither a religious practice nor a good act. Since it is practiced without my calculation, it is "non-practice." Since it is also not a good created by my calculation, it is "non-good." T. Unno. *Tannisho*. VIII, p. 13.

This is because the uttering of *Namoh-amida-butsu* is entirely the working of the Dharma's Truth of Selflessness and its Reality of Togetherness manifest as Amida's Name full of powers and virtues that have, are and yet working to free a person from her or his spiritual egotism by transforming it into gratitude, humility and penitence. This working of Another Power that transforms a sentient being's "self complacency" is without discriminations and favoritisms. This process is like a river flowing and flowing until it finally "disappears" into the boundless ocean to instantly become its very unfathomable waters and free flowing currents. The river in "disappearing" into the ocean has not become a "no-thing-ness" or been "incinerated" into "oblivion."

Therefore, the true, real recitation of *Namoh-amida-butsu* that is sincere according to Shinran is:

... nothing but Other Power, completely separated from self-power, it is neither a religious practice nor a good act on the part of the practitioner. *Ibid*.

For this reason, what Fleishman explains as being a "quotidian effort" on the part of a "committed meditationist" is like a person uttering *Namoh-Amida-Butsu* from the bottom of her or his heart where her or his self has "become" a "no self-working" because it has been "transformed" into a self that is "true working." Since such a selfless self becomes full of joy, its happiness is beyond description, explanation, and conceivability." There are no words that can adequately describe it!

WORDS OF SHINRAN

... Know that it is impossible to be born in the true, fulfilled Pure Land by simply observing precepts, or by self-willed conviction or by self-cultivated good. *Notes on Essentials of Faith Alone*. pp. 38-39.

For when a person's self becomes a "no-self working," such a person becomes a person of faith who abstains from violence. Such a person also becomes a person who strives to live a life of unwavering kindness, gentleness, caring, reverence, especially a life expressing gratitude even for things seemingly insignificant as seeds, pebbles and grains of sand. Paradoxically, such a person, then, in becoming penitent all the more sees how her or his self undeniably is full of hopeless transgressions and desecrations because they now have been fully exposed for her or his eyes to see and penitently reflect on. This means that such a person of gratitude and penitence has been completely grasped by Amida never ever to be abandoned. This deeper realization that one has been so "grasped" never to be forsaken by Amida emerges as one's heartfelt gratitude that becomes her or his utterances of *O-nembutsu*.

The "quotidian effort" that follows such an "awakening of faith" leads one to live the life of non-violence. As of natural consequence, each moment-to-moment of such a person's life then progressively makes her or him even more deeply "aware" of how her or his thoughts, words and actions are undeniably ego-driven and tainted by her or his self-serving strategies and agendas being pursued even at the expense of others and innocent things of the environment. Such a progressive deepening of awareness then is of a twofold significance, that one is a hopelessly karma riddled self, and the other is the realization that simultaneously one has been embraced by the ultimate, highest Dharma's Truth of Selflessness and its Actuality of Togetherness that paradoxically saves both "good" and "bad" persons without prejudice and favoritism!

Such a "twofold awakening of faith" becomes a reality only after one has "trusted" and "taken complete refuge" in the powers and virtues of the Dharma's Selflessness and its Togetherness that not only grasps "good persons" but especially takes in to embrace hopelessly karma riddled beings without

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any condemnations, rejections or exclusions. This is like the boundless ocean taking in all kinds of rivers whether they be clear, murky or polluted.

The life of *O-nembutsu*, therefore, is a life of gratitude and penitence. In no way is such a person "disengaged" or "withdrawn" from this world tainted by human greed, cravings, jealousies, resentments and vanities. A person living the life of *nembutsu*, therefore, is not a person who merely talks about non-violence, a person who merely gives "lip service" to its principles while doing nothing about the abuses and desecrations she or he is committing. This is because a person of *nembutsu* is especially pained by her or his own inconsistent and limited acts of compassion and how difficult it is to help another as completely as one truly desires and wishes (see Tannisho Ch. IV).

The following words of Shinran, therefore, see all things to have sacredness (Buddha-nature) and spirituality (Buddha-mind). They are as follows:

The realm of nirvana refers to the place where one overturns the delusions of ignorance and realizes the supreme enlightenment.... Nirvana is called extinction of passions, the uncreated, peaceful happiness, eternal bliss, true reality, dharmakaya, dharma-nature, suchness, oneness, and Buddha-nature. **Buddha-nature is none other than Tathagata. This Tathagata pervades the countless worlds; it fills the hearts and minds of the ocean of all beings. Thus, plants, trees, and land all attain Buddhahood.**

SBT-Series. *Notes on Essentials of Faith Alone*. p. 2. The words in bold verify that the world of things and life and the world of Amida and Dharma are one and inseparable.

In other words, all things through the "eyes of Amida" have the potential of becoming Buddhas. Therefore, we should never desecrate things sacred or disparage spiritual truths.

Fleishman's words, as already quoted above, help us to "flesh out" these words of Shinran based on a life of gratitude, reverence, humility and penitence. They show us that what the Buddha taught is not an "-ism" born of an egocentrism, ethnocentrism or a theocratic anthropocentrism in which a sense of race, ethnicity, tribe and nationality become sentiments working to set things in opposition and conflict with each other, such as in

judgments of what is "just" from "unjust," and by "pitting" those who are "saintly" against those who are "sinful" in a battle to the death. Life is not a football game or a chess game.

Therefore, a self working (which) is of "true working" does not mean that the teachings of the Buddha on Selflessness is a "do-nothing-at-all-ism" as its detractors attempt to depict it. The Buddha taught that if a person is to be truly emancipated and become free, she or he must first free herself or himself of all "-isms," especially those "isms" tainted by "egoism," and "egotism," "tribalism," "racism," and especially a "nationalism" prejudiced by a "patriotism" impassioned by racial bigotry and religious hypocrisy.

According to Fleishman "**the student of Dhamma seeks the least harm at all times.**" Such a person is committed to a life of "non-violence." Such a person seeks to work for the well being of all living and non-living things as illumined and awakened by the Truth of Selflessness and its life-enhancing visions of Togetherness that all things and life forms should never be abused or desecrated or be taken for granted. A person so "awake" and "committed" understands that **"the goal of every moment is to generate empathy and compassion, to minimize anger and hate"** by upholding and living the minimal Five Precepts as a "student of the Dhamma."

According to Jodoshinshu, a person whose faith is genuine and sincere is a person characterized by an inner strength and serenity full of penitence and commiseration for others and environment. For this reason, Buddhist precepts, as already mentioned, are not the commandments of an all-knowing, all-powerful deity who rewards those who "submit to" and "fulfill" his will by obeying his commands while punishing those who "defy" and "disobey" his will and commands even with death (see Numbers 15:32-36).

This is why, after some twenty years as a cloistered, celibate and vegetarian monk on Mt. Hiei, Shinran returned to the world of everyday life to become a layman and a family man. He is said then to have proclaimed: "It is easy to be holy on the mountaintop, but ah ... I am only but the marketplace!" As of consequence, he began referring to himself as "Gutoku Shinran," meaning Shinran the burr-headed simpleton who was neither the ordinary layman "unaware" of things truly sacred and spiritual, nor a monk who assumes that he can become an enlightened Buddha in this very life by upholding monastic precepts and

fulfilling his vows of poverty, vegetarianism and celibacy. After some twenty years of inner turmoil, Shinran became fully "aware" and "awake" that, in actuality, he was undeniably a mere mortal riddled by embarrassing passions, desires, moral transgressions, and that he, in actuality, was constantly desecrating things sacred and defying spiritual truths. Therefore, he was a person incapable of fulfilling any monastic vows.

This is also why deep in all of us, like Shinran we are also all riddled by our egoism, personal likes and dislikes, especially our assumptions and presumptions of knowing what is "right" and "wrong" as well as to what we believe to be "good" and "evil." Because of our sense of being moral beings, we human beings talk as though we know what is really "right" from what is really "wrong." The truth, however, is that we know nothing about what is truly "good" or what is really "evil." This is why what humans think is "correct" often turns out to "incorrect" and what they condemn as "wrong" often turns out to be what is "right." As of consequence, human beings experience much contradiction and paradox in their moral and ethical judgments of what is "good" and "evil"!

In coming to realize that Amida's Benevolence is beyond human comprehension and understanding, Shinran began to "experience" the paradoxical significance of Amida's Primal Vow for himself as a person hopelessly riddled by passions and vanities as follows:

When I ponder on the compassionate vow of Amida, established through five kalpas of profound thought, it was for myself, Shinran, alone. Because I am a being burdened so heavily with karma, I feel even more deeply grateful to the Primal Vow which is decisively made to save me. T. Unno. *Tannisho. Epilogue.* p. 35.

Therefore, Shinran in being so awakened came to further realize even more deeply:

... I don't know what the two good and evil really mean. ... In this foolish being filled with blind passion, living in this impermanent world of burning house, all things are empty and vain; therefore, untrue. Only the nembutsu is true, real, and sincere. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

In saying that "only the *nembutsu* is true, real, and sincere," Shinran was not claiming to be a cult leader or the founder of a newly established

SHINRAN'S WASAN

The light of compassion that grasps us
illuminates and protects us always.
The darkness of our ignorance
already has been broken through.
Yet the clouds and mists of greed
and desire, anger and hatred,
Still cover as always the sky above
of true and real shinjin.

SBT-Series. *The True Teaching about Practice ...* Vol I. p. 162.

religion. Instead, in having personally experienced the twofold awakening he came to realize how riddled by karmic evils he was, and that this was why he had been grasped by Amida never to be abandoned by his Benevolence and her Beneficence.

Clearly, the words: "it was for myself, Shinran, alone" show clearly that Shinran's "twofold awakening of faith" was not that of a "cult leader" claiming to have experienced some kind of direct personal revelation from a supreme deity that called upon him to found a new religion as many founders of newly established cults and religions claim today.

In other words, if it were not for the *Dharma's* Light of Selflessness and Life of Togetherness constantly being manifest as Amida Buddha grasping and embracing sentient beings especially riddled by their *karmic* transgressions and desecrations, it would not have been possible for Shinran to have been "awakened" to his own being riddled by *karmic* evils who, for this very reason, had been do grasped and embraced by Amida never to be condemned or abandoned.

This is why what Sakyamuni Buddha taught as the Truth of Selflessness and Reality of Togetherness as the Dharma is not the sole property or monopoly of any one person, race, creed, culture, religion, or historical point in time, or a special geographical site. For the Dharma's Truth of Selflessness and Togetherness manifest as Amida's Wisdom and Compassion are not commodities that can be packaged and sold for personal gain or profit as many institutionalized religions do.

In having become a person never to be abandoned by Amida, Shinran had become like a

lotus bud that had broken the surface waters of a swamp to become a radiant lotus blossom under full sunlight. A lotus, however, that was still deeply rooted in the stench and muck of a swamp, destined to finally wilt and return to the very elements from whence it came from.

Shinran had become such a person fully "awake" and "aware" who had broken out of the rounds of ceaseless births and deaths into the very unbounded cosmic dimensions referred to as the "ten endless directions," likened to a lotus bud that had broken through the water's surface to become a fully blossomed radiant lotus in full sunlight. This is how and why Shinran came to realize further that "... a person of nembutsu" is like a lotus in whom "... opens up the great path of unobstructed freedom" (see T. Unno. *Tannisho* Ch. VII, p. 12).

Therefore, such a person, for these very reasons, said Shinran:

... should not be anxious that Tathagata will not receive you because you do wrong. A foolish being is by nature possessed of blind passions, so **you must recognize yourself as a being of karmic evil**. On the other hand, **you should not think that you deserve to attain birth because you are good**. You cannot be born into the true and real Buddha Land through such self-power calculation.... SBT-Series. *Letters of Shinran*. No. 2, p. 23. In bold to explain the twofold aspect of shinjin or what in Jodoshinshu is an "awakening of faith."

What these words of Shinran mean is that the *Dharma*, in being forever manifest as Amida's powers of Selfless Wisdom and her virtues of Unconditional Compassion for all beings, is not based on any "-ism" tainted by an "egoism," "egotism" or "egocentrism" that are but anthropomorphic illusions born of one's spiritual imagination that one's self is an unchanging and permanent entity. A person is conceived and born of mortal parents who, paradoxically, begins dying as it lives as soon as she or he is born. That such a self in living is at the same time also dying, this is not just a theory or something rhetorical or conjectural. It is fact and reality. Therefore, that one is dying as one is living, this actuality is not an illusion or a contradiction.

The psychiatrist Fleischman put it this way:

The "Dhamma," or path to liberation for which the Buddha was spokesman, is not

an idea but **a mode of conduct and a way of life** that leads to personal realization. ... the Buddha did not teach social and political philosophy; ... he taught a path of life, not a blanket ideology. Bold for emphasis.

The goal of Buddhism as Fleischman explains it is:

... to release its practitioners from authorities and ideologies not anarchistically or capriciously, but through training by deepening their personal experiences of the nature of their true self and its ethical implications. It is through this long cultivated, gradually deepening experiences that the Buddha led his followers to autonomy from ideas, philosophies, scriptures, even from himself.

These words of Fleischman help us greatly in understanding and appreciating why the *Dharma's* Truth of Selflessness and its Reality of Togetherness cannot be the monopoly of or a commodity that can be appropriated by any one man, race, culture, creed, religion, special geographical site or a specific point in historical time. This is because the power of the *Dharma's* Selflessness and its virtues of Togetherness transcend one's whole being, regardless of one's skin color, age, gender, ethnicity, cultural upbringing, nationality or religious affiliations.

The *Shin* in *Shin-shu*, therefore, means the Truth that is the *Dharma's* Selflessness that is genuine, all pervading and thus all-embracing. The *-shu* then means the Essence of the Dharma that is a Togetherness that permeates all things and forms of life as it keeps nourishing and sustaining them in spite of their transgressions and desecrations. Selflessness and Togetherness co-arise and co-subside (*pratitya samutpada*) in this world of distinctions and differences, all things, much like the sun and moon appearing again and again over the eastern horizon to disappear again and again over the western horizon, also keep appearing and disappearing again and again like the waves of the ocean.

So, it is crucial that we as *Jodo Shinshu* Buddhists come to know and become aware as to why Shinran said:

... the truth is that we are all foolish beings, filled with evil and dwelling in a transient world, which is as fleeting as a burning house. Moreover, all things [of this transient world] without exception are false and

devoid of any real substance. Nothing is true and real; only the Nembutsu is true and real. R. Fujimoto. *Shin Buddhism's Essence. ... Concluding Words.* p. 46.

The Sage Shinran in having said these words was not saying that he was the founder of a new religion.

For Shinran said:

It is quite ridiculous that those who are devoted solely to the Nembutsu would engage in disputes over divisions between one's own disciples and those of others. R. Fujimoto. *loc. cit.*, Ch VI, p. 18.

The reason being that:

There is no difference [whatsoever] among those who make their living by catching fish, using a line or a net, in rivers or the ocean or those who eke out an existence by hunting game or fowl in the fields or is not based on an elitist dogma that is an exclusivist doctrine, that is, a faith that accepts only "good people" while excluding "bad people." *ibid.*

These words of Shinran indicate that human beings in their deepest selves have elements of good and bad, the beautiful and ugly and so forth regardless of their racial, cultural, national, religious or ideological differences. All human beings have failings and shortcomings because of their greed, jealousies, resentments and vanities deep in their hearts!

This is exactly why Walpola Rahula in his *What Buddha Taught* said that anyone who upholds and lives by the minimal Five Precepts is a Buddhist. The reason is because the *Dharma*:

... needs no label; it is neither Buddhist, Christian, Hindu nor Moslem. It is not the monopoly of anybody. Sectarian labels are a hindrance to the independent understanding of Truth, and they produce harmful prejudices in men's mind. p. 5.

This is why the minimal Five Precepts cannot be equated to the Ten Commandments, the disobedience, defiance, rejection or desecration of which entail the punishments of a God whose jealousy, wrath and anger are well documented throughout the Bible (see Numbers 15:12; Acts 5:3-5, 9, 10).

P. Lakshmi Narasu in his *Essence of Buddhism* states his reasons as to why the teachings of the Buddha are non-anthropocentric and universal:

... for its moral precepts **the Dharma seeks no external sources of authority.** No Buddhist regards the various moral precepts as commandments by the Buddha. Coming from him whom every Buddhist takes as his model of perfection, these precepts have indeed a higher value than any commandments. But still in no sense are they commandments, **for no man has any right to command his brother men. They are but the ways pointed out by the Blessed One for avoiding the evils of life, and he who does not tread on the path shown will have to bear the consequence.** ... p. 83. Bold for emphasis.

What these words of Walpola and Narasu mean is that Buddhist precepts (and, therefore, the Four Truths and the Eightfold Path that Sakyamuni taught) are not based on some supernatural omnipotent and omniscient deity who is "envisioned" as meting out rewards for good deeds and meting out punishments for bad behaviors.

Such divine interventions and dispensations are not what *karma* is all about. *Karma* has to do with a person's volitions and the consequences that follow what one has thought, said and done, which, of natural necessity, are governed by the uniform and orderly processes of causality, conditionality and interdependency, the effects which equally apply to all that exists, especially to what one is thinking, feeling, saying and doing in each passing moment.

A religion based on some supernatural divinity's selective dispensations and interventions sounds too much like B.F. Skinner's behavior modification (or operant conditioning) that rewards only desired responses while withholding rewards from those that are "judged" to be undesirable. Rewarding behaviors that are "targeted" involves changing a person's responses by altering and controlling the things and people in a person's external surroundings ("contingencies of environment"). The punishing of unwanted behaviors in operant conditioning is accomplished by withholding "rewards" from reactions and responses that are not targeted or, as in religions, behaviors that are "bad," and therefore "sinful" and "abominations" to a Supreme Deity.

Such controlling and manipulating of a person's reactions and responses by modifying the "external" things, variables and conditions in a person's immediate surroundings, this certainly differs from what is a true and real internal transformation of one's thoughts, intentions and sentiments that naturally trigger a person's "words" and "actions." This "inner transformation" of a person's thoughts and volitions brings about words of tenderness and acts of kindness. This was pointed out by the Buddha as follows: "All that we are is the result of what we have thought; it is founded on our thoughts; it is made up of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with a pure thought, happiness follows him like a shadow that never leaves him" (*Dhammapada* I. *Praises of Buddha*. p. 151). The kanji for "thought" is a pictogram of one's brain and heart connected to one's spinal cord that connects to all vital organs and one's senses to the extremities of one's anatomy!

According to Fleishman, to uphold and abide by the principles of "non-violence," therefore, does not mean "inactivity," "indifference," "withdrawal," "resignation," or a refusal to take part in solving the problems of oppression, inequality, discrimination and injustice. This has been well illustrated by the lives of people the likes of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King and many others who were "inspired," "awakened," and "transformed" by the Truth of Selflessness and its Actuality of Togetherness regardless of their ethnic, racial or religious orientation. There is something inexplicably intriguing as to why such people come to be assassinated.

The teachings of Jodoshinshu, therefore, are not based on splitting one's inner self from one's outer self as though they were two disconnected unrelated entities, which is also to perceive and treat one's body, mind, heart and conscience as though they were discrete, separate and disconnected and independent, one from all the others. Nor is the life of *O-nembutsu* a way of life that cuts off and casts out those parts of one's brain, heart, anatomy, or spirituality that are perceived to be "sinful" and "evil."

This is why as human beings, said Shinran:

Maddened beyond control by blind passion we do things we should not and say things we should not and think things we should not. But if a person is deceitful in his relations with others, doing what he should not and saying what he should not

because he thinks it will not hinder his birth, then it is **not an instance of being maddened by passion. Since he purposely does these things, they are simply misdeeds which should never have been done.** *Op. cit. Letters ... No. 16, p. 52.* Words set in bold are the difference between being "out of control" and "knowingly" and "intentionally" saying or doing something.

Therefore, in Letter No. 19, the Shonin admonished:

You must not do what should not be done, think what should not be thought, or say what should not be said thinking that you can be born in the Buddha Land regardless of it. **Human beings are such that, maddened by the passions of greed, we desire to possess; maddened by the passion of anger, we hate that which should not be hated, seeking to go against the law of cause and effect; led astray by the passions of ignorance, we do what should not even be thought.** But the person who purposely thinks and does what he should not, saying that it is permissible because of the Buddha's wondrous Vow to save the foolish being, does not truly desire to reject the world, nor does he consciously feel that he himself is a being of karmic evil.... *Op. cit. Letter No. 19, p. 57.* The plight of humans beings when blinded by passions and out of control, in bold.

This is also why, said Shinran, "... To such people we teach that since we are possessed of blind passion, **the Buddha receives us without judging whether our hearts are good or bad**" (*loc. cit., Letter No. 20, p. 61.* Bold for emphasis).

Like the Buddha, Shinran exhorts us also to act in ways that our deeds and words are based on our inner thoughts and feelings as "inspired" and "transformed" by Amida's all-embracing good will and selfless kindness. Shinran, however, realized that because of our implacable passions, vanities and egoism, we human beings are inclined to think, feel, speak and be predisposed to act in ways that enhance only our own interests, advantages, vanities and pleasures. We come to see and realize this truth only by trusting and talking refuge in Amida's Benevolence.

This is why it is best not to say and do anything and remain silent and "non-reactive" when in doubt as to what is "right" or "wrong" by

restraining one's self from being opinionated, overbearing in imposing one's beliefs and convictions on others because we assume the beliefs of others to be wrong.

This is why it is best to follow the Noble Eightfold Path and abide by the minimal Five Precepts. Both are based on the principles of "non-violence" and "self-restraint" which are not to be confused with passivism or escapism. Precepts, as already mentioned, are not the commandments of an "all-knowing" and "all-powerful" Supreme Deity whose will and directives, if disobeyed, entails his wrathful punishments that are to be feared, even death (see Acts 5:1-5). To uphold the minimal Five Precepts is to make "quotidian efforts" to abstain from acts of violence, especially transgressions of things sacred and desecrations of spiritual truths.

Therefore, Lindsay Perigo in his *The Pitfall of Passivism* warns us all that: "to be a passivist is to be vulnerable to dogmatists pretending to know it all, when in fact," as Narasu has pointed out above, and as Perigo also agrees, "they are not more qualified to live your life than you to live theirs." Therefore, says Perigo: "My concern about people asking for more advice on how to apply objectivist principles is that it might not be the activism they are trying to practice, but *passivism* — relying on someone else to tell them how to do it." Therefore, this is why we find persons who are convinced that "God told them to do it," or that "the devil made them do it!"

Therefore, "the most important point" about *karma* is that "the choice to be made is yours to make." In our present troubled economic, social and political times, says Perigo, there are "some who say in a very loud voice that the most virtuous thing you can do is make money — lots and lots of money." However, "in no way that it follows," said he, "that making lots of money is the only virtuous path." So, he warns,

To treat money as an end in itself is a horrendous fallacy, akin to that other notorious Objectivist trap of treating rationality as an end in itself. One does not live to make money; one makes money to live. One does not live to be rational; One is rational in order to live.

So he admonishes us all: "... don't expect — and don't ever seek — a blueprint telling you what to do. The book of life that is in your hands is yours, exclusively; it's up to you to write the text."

This is also exactly why Sakyamuni in his dying moments said to his beloved cousin Ananda and grieving disciples:

Therefore, Ananda, dwell making yourselves your island (support), making yourselves, not anyone else, your refuge; making the Dhamma your island (support), the Dhamma your refuge, nothing else your refuge!
Diga-nikaya. ed. Nanavasa Thera. (Columbo. 1929) pp. 61, 62.

I hope that it is clear by now that the *Dhamma* (S. *Dharma*) is the Truth of Selflessness and Reality of Togetherness as governed by the uniform and orderly processes of causality, conditionality and interdependency that equally and uniformly applies to all things and forms of life especially a person's thoughts, words and deeds, or what are her or his *karma*.

To entrust your *karma* riddled self by taking refuge in the "transformative powers" of Amida's Selfless Wisdom and her "healing virtues" of all-embracing Compassion, this, therefore, is to take that leap of faith that "leaves everything, whether it be good or bad, up to Amida Buddha's Benevolence and Beneficence that does not abandon, condemn or reject any sentient being."

Having taken such a leap of faith in Amida's Wisdom and Compassion, however, does not exempt a person from upholding and abiding by the minimal Five Precepts which, as mentioned, are not the commandments of some omnipotent and omniscient deity. Nor does a person's "faith" in Amida set her or him apart or above from those who are seen as being morally inferior and spiritually decadent, such as they are called heathens, pagans, Gentiles, "non-believers" and aborigines, terms that were often applied to primitive peoples thought to be backward by European colonialists, American expansionists and Christian missionaries in the 1400s and especially in the 1700s through the 1800s, and even up to our present times.

Indeed, if such a perception of supremacy exists in a person's mind, then such a person's faith is "not true working" because the person's mind and heart are still "working" in ways that "profile" those of other faiths to be that of "non-believers" who need to be "converted" and "recruited" over into their religious fold most likely in terms of increasing their membership and, therefore, as a source of income. Such can be seen as being the case with televangelists of mega-church operations.

Therefore, it is interesting to note that in Jesus' "analogy of the nets," good people are gathered in while the "wicked are cast out into a furnace of fire" (see Matt 13:47-99; 4:19) like fishermen casting out the bad fish and keeping the good fish.

BUDDHIST VERSES AND STORIES

Buddha appears in the world of suffering because He cannot desert suffering people. His only purpose is to spread the Dharma and to bless all people with its Truth. BDK. Teachings of Buddha (Eng./Jpnese), p. 56.

People call one phase of the moon a full moon, they call another phase a crescent moon; in reality, the moon is always perfectly round, neither waxing nor waning. Buddha is precisely like the moon. In the eyes of men, Buddha may seem to change in appearance, but in truth, Buddha does not change. Op. cit., p. 58.

QUESTION & ANSWER KORNER

QUESTION: What does it mean "to be grasped never to be abandoned" by Amida?

ANSWER: In the Glossary of *Notes on Once Calling and Many-calling*, to be "grasped and never to be abandoned" is explained as follows:

... A man is grasped by true compassion at the moment he attains shinjin, and thus freed of the bonds of birth-and-death, there is no possibility of his being abandoned or forsaken.... (This) has several connotations: the active and unremitting pursuit of all beings, especially those who turn away from the Vow, the grasping of all beings without discrimination; and the inevitable act of taking each being completely into the heart of true compassion.... () mine. p. 59.

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