



GASSHO

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"Hands together in reverence & gratitude"



"TO KILL" OR "NOT TO KILL" IS STILL THE QUESTION!

by rev. roland k. tatsuguchi

Several years ago, after I had graduated in 1961 from Ryukoku University in Kyoto, a student taking a course in "situational ethics" at the U.H., knowing that Buddhists were advocates of "non-violence," confronted me with "if questions" such as: "As a Buddhist, what would you do if a serial killer suddenly began attacking you to take your life?" "Can you as a Buddhist in good conscience ever go to war?" There were other difficult "if" questions he asked of me.

Such "if questions" can always be answered by counter "questions" such as, "If a huge boulder on a cliffside suddenly came tumbling down on you, would you just stand there 'hoping' and 'praying' that it would change its course and not roll down on you to crush you? "What is the difference between an avalanche that has been triggered by an earthquake and intentionally set off by a person's hatred for the people in a village in the valley below?"

The First Noble Truth concerns the undeniable actuality that life is full of suffering. The Second Truth points out that there are causes and reasons as to why such troublesome difficulties are to be found in a person's thoughts and sentiments. This is why Sakyamuni said: "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."

Shinran (1173-1263) acknowledged the fact that a person's karma is based on the orderly and uniform rules of causality, conditionality as based on the facts of interdependency. This is why he said, "Under the influence of our karmic past we human beings will do anything" (Taitetsu Unno. *Tannisho*. XIII. p. 24). In other words, when a human being becomes obsessed by greed, hatreds and self vanities, her or his words and actions spiral out of control in the most unexpected and heinous of words and acts, the consequences of which then cannot be rectified, such as when a person takes

MONTH'S THOUGHT



... the term 'thirst' includes not only desire for, and attachment to, sense-pleasures, wealth and power, but also attachment to ideas and ideals, views, opinions, theories, conceptions and beliefs (*dhamma-tanha*). According to the Buddha's analysis, all the troubles and strife in the world, from little personal quarrels in families to great wars between nations and countries, arise out of this selfish 'thirst.' From this point of view, all economic, political and social problems are rooted in this selfish 'thirst.'
... Walpola Rahula. *What the Buddha Taught*. p. 30.



the life of another person in self defense.

Such a case appeared in the Honolulu Star Advertiser (A-11) on Friday (1/6/12) in an article by Rene Lynch, "*Hailed for shooting intruder, young mom won't be charged.*" Sarah McKinley was an 18-year-old mother of a baby son. She had just lost her husband to cancer. She "calmly used her

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REMINDERS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

SERVICES FOR SEPTEMBER 2012

1st SUN Sept 2nd:

No Service

2nd SUN Sept 9th:

No Service

3rd SUN Sept 16th:

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

4th SUN Sept 23rd:

Autumn O'Higan Service
9 A.M. Eng. Service
Guest Speaker
Rev. Shigenori Makino

5th SUN Sept 30th:

Chicken & Sushi Sale
9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

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

With Deepest Sympathy

Mrs. Hazel Y. Mikami 81 Yrs. July 17, 2012

THANK YOU
for YOUR GENEROUS DONATIONS !!

Rev. Roland Tatsuguchi
will be off Island
from Aug. 29 to Sept. 12, 2012

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

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husband's shotgun to kill" one of the two drug addicts who had broken into her home. They thought there were still unused pain killer drugs that her husband had been taking. She called 911 and asked if it was OK to shoot the intruders to protect herself and her infant baby son. She asked the dispatcher: "... I've got two guns in my hands. Is it OK to shoot them if they come in my bedroom door?"

The police dispatcher, Diane Graham, told McKinley, "I can't tell you that you can do that, ... but you do what you have to do to protect your baby." So when Justin Shan Martin, a 24-year-old addict broke down her bedroom door where she her baby son were hiding, she, then ... point blank ..., shot Graham dead in his tracks with her husband's shotgun. She then told police she felt bad about it ... but, she said, "I felt like what I did was the best for my son and I."

Obviously when someone breaks down your bedroom door and comes at you with a deadly weapon, just what should you do? Do you just stand there doing nothing to defend yourself or your infant son? McKinley was apologetic and said: "... it's not something I ever wanted to do." Indeed, these words of hers confirm the truth of Shinran's words, "... even though we do not want to kill anyone, we may be led to kill a hundred or a thousand people" (T. Unno, *loc. cit., ibid.*). McKinley was not charged for murder. The prosecutor found that she did not violate the law in any way.

When I read this article, I began recalling what my father had said to me when I asked him whether it was OK to go to war if I was drafted. For then college age students were being drafted for the Korean War (1950-1953). This war was soon followed by the Viet Nam War only a few years later (1959-1975). The Cold War with Russia had already begun on November 1, 1955. The Korean War itself had begun only some four or five years right after WWII had ended in 1945. I had just graduated from Hawaiian Mission Academy in 1949 and had been notified by the Draft Board to take the Selective Service Examination. Depending

WORDS OF SHINRAN

The utterance of namu-amida-butsu is the praise of the Buddha.* To say namu-amida-butsu is to repent all the karmic evil one has committed since the beginningless past. SBT-Series. *Notes on the Inscriptions on Sacred Scrolls*. p. 25.

*To praise Amida as Infinite Light is to have trusted in the Dharma's powers of Selfless Wisdom and to revere Amida as Immeasurable Life is to have taken refuge in the Dharma's virtues of Togetherness that are both without discriminations, rejections or condemnations.

on whether I passed or failed, I would either be drafted or allowed to go on to college. Fortunately, I passed ... barely, that is.

I have never forgotten what my dad then said to me. It was some four or five years after he had returned from an internment camp in Santa Fe, New Mexico. The very evening of December 7, 1941 he had been abruptly taken away and we did not see him for the next four and a half years or so until he was returned to Honolulu on a cargo ship after the war had ended. His words to me in 1949 were as follows: "If someone puts a red-hot flaming coal on your head you naturally have to brush it off instantly even before it can burn a hole through your head and kill you. But, you have no right to put it on someone else's head, not even on the person who put it on your head." I really had to mull over these words for quite some time.

Now that I am an octogenarian, I would like to add that "If you see someone desperately trying to brush off a red-hot coal burning on her or his head, you have to help that person brush it off and douse it even before it can set fire to everything else like a small brushfire that can quickly become a raging forest fire out of control."

Dwight D. Eisenhower (1890-1969) served as our 34th President from 1953-1961. We then were already involved in the most tragic war of wars in Viet Nam (1959-1975) that began, as mentioned, only some six years after the Korean War (1950-1953). In his Farewell Speech in 1960 Eisenhower was the first person to identify and warn the American people and Congress of what he called the "military-industrial complex":

My fellow Americans: ... we have been compelled to create a permanent armaments industry ... This conjunction of an immense military establishment and large arms industry is new in the American experience.

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The total influence — economic, social, even spiritual — is felt in every city, every State house, every office of the Federal government. We recognize the imperative need for this development. Yet we must not fail to comprehend its grave implications. Our toil and livelihood are all involved; so is the very structure of our society.

We annually spend on military security more than the annual net income of all United States corporations....

In the councils of government, we must guard against, whether sought or unsought, by **the military industrial complex**. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.

We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties and democratic processes. **We should take nothing for granted. Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals, so that security and liberty may prosper together....**

Public Papers of the Presidents, Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1960, p. 1035-1040. Underlining and bold mine to highlight the significance to Eisenhower's message.

As of consequence, our Congress has, is and yet continues to be deeply involved in the funding of our nation's military in order to maintain our nation's supremacy over the rest of the world. Thus, today, many of our Congressmen are influenced by lobbyists from the various corporate industries and governmental agencies connected to the military, such as the armaments industries besides the other businesses that keep our military personnel well fed, clothed, entertained and medically cared for. For this very reason, the "industrial-military complex" (IMC) has now come to be known as the "industrial-military-congressional complex" (IMCC).

The acronym IMCC implies is that our financial, industrial, military and various governmental agencies have become "revolving doors" for those who are in the "unseen inner circles" of power who exercise control over today's political, industrial and financial institutions so as to have access to the strategic resources of the world, such as coal, oil, precious metals, minerals and chemicals being extracted from the land as well as from the very depths of the sea. Their doings are highly secretive and kept well hidden from public scrutiny. But the decisions they make and the courses of action they take behind the scenes have and continue to have long term consequences. For instance, the various wars waged in the last two to three hundred years are still affecting the lives of innocent citizens living in the present. The

long term consequences resulting from the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico and the recent Fukushima nuclear disaster, for example, are even now having their effects for many years yet to come.

Now, the first precept "not to kill" admonishes us all to refrain from all forms of violence, especially the taking of the lives of innocent creatures as well as plants, such as is presently occurring even now when multi-national agri-business and logging corporations keep deforesting acres and acres of virgin lands at a time for timber and farm lands. In the meanwhile, the mindless devastation and destruction of flora and fauna is occurring. Many creatures and plants yet unknown to science are being made extinct in the process. Therefore, wars are especially to be avoided not only because of the death of innocent human beings, but, more importantly, because of the long term damage to living ecosystems and environments that results from the indiscriminate damage that occurs whenever "weapons of mass destruction" are used.

Therefore, Walpola Rahula explains the importance of Right Action as follows:

Right Action aims at promoting moral, honourable and peaceful conduct. It admonishes us that we should abstain from destroying life, from stealing, from dishonest dealings, from illegitimate sexual intercourse, and that we should also help others to lead peaceful and honourable lives. W. Rahula. *What the Buddha Taught*. p. 47.

Right Action clearly involves each of the Five Precepts.

More importantly, the Five Precepts are part of a seamless triadic current of energy that connects one's thoughts, words and actions. This "current of consciousness" is inseparable from one's "constantly vibrant conscienceness." Such then is the significance of the triadic structure that is the Eightfold Noble Path that begins with Right Knowing that culminates in the Right Contemplating of things sacred and spiritual.

Rahula, therefore, explains that:

Right Livelihood means that one should abstain from making one's living through a profession that brings harm to others, such as trading in arms and lethal weapons, intoxicating drinks, poisons, killing animals, cheating, etc., and should live by a profession which is honourable, blameless and innocent of harm to others. *Ibid*.

Rahula then says, "One can clearly see here that

Buddhism is strongly opposed to any kind of war, when it lays down that trading in arms of lethal weapons is an evil and unjust means of Livelihood" (*ibid.*).

Therefore, as Shinran noted, all of humankind is undeniably characterized by the words of Master Shan'tao as follows:

Truly know that this self is a foolish being of karmic evil, repeating birth-and-death since beginningless aeons ago, forever drowning and wandering without ever knowing the path of liberation. Taitetsu Unno. *Tannisho. Epilogue.* pp. 35, 36.

The term "foolish being" refers to a person "who cannot become free from the bondage of birth-and-death through any religious practice, due to the abundance of blind passions ..." (*loc. cit.*, p. 40). Unno in his *Afterword* to his translation of Tannisho notes that some people reject religion as meaningless, while others use it for their own selfish needs ..." (p. 41).

Therefore, the deeper significance of Shinran's words as quoted in the Tannisho by Yuiembo is as follows:

... I am absolutely incapable of any religious practice, hell is my only home. Taitetsu Unno. *Tannisho.* II. p. 6.

... People who make a living by casting nets or fishing in the seas and rivers, those who sustain themselves by hunting beasts and catching birds in the moors and mountains, and people who pass their lives by trading and cultivating the fields are all alike.... Under the influence of our karmic past we human beings will do anything. *Loc. cit.* XIII p. 24.

These words of Shinran show that he himself was "awake" and "aware" that he himself was incapable of upholding his monastic vows, even the minimal Five Precepts. In being so "awakened," he was "enabled" to see further that:

There is a difference in compassion between the Path of Sages and the Path of Pure Land. The compassion in the Path of Sages is expressed through pity, sympathy, and care for all beings, but truly rare is it that one can help another as completely as one desires. T. Unno. *loc. cit.* p. 9.

This is why, in realizing the truth of Shan'tao's assessment, Shinran came to realize that:

SHINRAN'S WASAN

Amida and Sakyamuni,
Employing compassionate means
And Ananda, Maudgalyayana,
Purna, Vaidehi, Devadatta,
King Ajatasatru, Bimbisara,
... and others,

All of them great sages —
By various means, brought
the most foolish and
lowest of evil people
to enter the Vow
That does not neglect people
of grave offenses
and transgressions.

SBT-Series. *Hymns of the Pure Land.* p. 65.

... it is impossible to help another as we truly wish; thus our compassion is inconsistent and limited.... *Ibid.*

The underlying reason why this is so according to Shinran, is because "... the person of self-power, being conscious of doing good, lacks the thought of entrusting himself completely to Other Power ..." (T Unno. *loc. cit.*, p. 8).

Shinran, in his day, found that even the celibate monks and chaste nuns seemingly detached and disconnected from worldly affairs, in reality, were actually dependent on the ordinary common people for their daily necessities such as provided by hunters and fishermen whose livelihoods necessitated taking the lives of innocent creatures for food, as well as on merchants selling, buying and trading in all kinds of life's necessities in which the labors of the oppressed peasantry were being exploited. Shinran, therefore, in trying to live the life of a monk on Mt. Hiei, came to realize that even the lives of monks and nuns on a holy mountaintop was tainted even more by subtle "deceptions" and "falsehoods" in comparison to the simplistic, crude lives of the naive, illiterate peasants struggling to eke out a livelihood on the lands below the mountains.

The following *Wasan* of Shinrann, therefore, indicates that in his times, the court nobles, warlords and the high ranking monks serving under them, as well as the hard-pressed peasantry, were all delving into magic, superstition, astral signs, sorcerers, occultism, spiritual mediums and diviners in the hopes of getting a reading on their personal

fortunes and future destinies. They were especially concerned about their lives after death.

Therefore the *Wasan* is as follows:

Lamentable it is that people,
whether of the Way
or the world

Choose auspicious times
and lucky dates,

Worship heavenly gods
and earthly deities.

And are absorbed
in divinations and rituals.

Shozomatsu Wasan No. 101

Ryukoku Translation Series, p. 101.

This *wasan* and others like it indicate that diviners, occultists, astral charts, shamans and necromancers were prevalent and frequently consulted in the times of Shinran as many people today still yet do.

Now, Sakyamuni Buddha, in his day, rejected the notion that the blood of sacrificial animals and innocent victims could wash and atone for a person's sins or karmic transgressions through blood of innocent animals and unblemished human beings.

That this was not so was made clearly stated by Sakyamuni as follows:

Greater than the immolation of bullocks is the sacrifices of self. He who offers to the gods his evil desires will see the uselessness of slaughtering animals at the altar. Blood has no cleansing power, but the eradication of lust will make the heart pure. Better than worshipping gods is obedience to the laws of righteousness. Paul Carus. *The Gospel of Buddha*. p. 152.

Righteousness here means living by the Dharma's Truth of Selflessness and its Reality of Togetherness that awakens a person's conscience to things sacred and spiritual. This is how things and life come to be revered and sanctified!

Therefore, even more significant are the words of Sakyamuni as follows:

Ignorance only can make ... men prepare festivals and hold vast meetings for sacrifices. **Far better to revere the truth [of Selflessness and Togetherness] than try to appease the gods by shedding blood.** What love can a man possess who believes that the destruction of life will atone for evil deeds? Can a new wrong expiate old

wrongs? And can the slaughter of an innocent victim blot out the evil deeds of mankind? This is practicing religion by the neglect of moral conduct.

Purify your hearts and cease to kill; that is true religion.

Rituals have no efficacy; prayers are vain repetitions; and incantations have no saving power. But to abandon covetousness and lust, to become free from evil passions, and to give up all hatred and ill-will, that is the right sacrifice and the true worship. *Loc. cit.*

p. 33. Underlining, [] and bold for focal emphasis.

These words of Sakyamuni, as underlined and set in bold type make it clear that the offerings of vegetarian foods, fragrant flowers, candles flickering and incense burning, such offerings are in no way to be equated to the blood and burnt sacrificial offerings made in the belief that the blood of sacrificed victims can purify another person's wrongdoings, or nullify the karmic consequences of one's transgressions and desecrations. (Read, for example, Numbers 28 and Genesis 4:1-4.)

This is why it is to be noted that food offerings made to the Three Treasures are not to be derived from that which was once living muscle and bone. This is the reason why food offerings in Buddhism are vegetarian to remind us that all breathing and pulsating life are sacred and are to be regarded spiritual. In fact, each passing moment of life is precious and sacred because each breath of life and pulsating moment that passes cannot be repeated once they have passed on by.

Fragrant, colorful flowers, therefore, are offered to remind us of the beauty and radiance of each transitory life form. Flaming candles also are offered to symbolize the flickering flame of our conscience that is connected to the Dharma's Selflessness beyond the very visible blue of the skies above and below into its very Boundless, Togetherness that is to be found all around, on and in this earth of ours that is constantly nurturing and sustaining all flora and fauna without discriminations or partiality.

The rising smoke from the burning incense, therefore, is meant to draw our spirits to soar high above the clouds and even beyond the very blue of the skies and yet into the Greater Unknown Beyond, the Dharma's Boundless Selflessness and its Ineffable Togetherness that embraces all things as well as their opposites such as the full moon in the dark of night reflecting the very light of the sun during daytime constantly radiating its brilliance even in the long night's longest darkness when there is no moon.

As mentioned in former issues of GASSHO, such visions of Selflessness and sentiments of Togetherness are not and cannot be the monopoly of any one person, race, creed, culture or religion. Therefore, the Eightfold Noble Path that leads to the World of Dharma embracing all things and beings is open to all, regardless of whether one is a Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jew or a Muslim. This is because the "paths" to the Dharma, as often mentioned, are many and open to all beings, not just only for human beings or a special, select, elect group of human beings. Thus, Selflessness is the truth of non-ego that is the Reality of Togetherness that is a non-anthropocentric reality. Anyone, therefore, can choose to uphold the minimal Five Precepts which, in essence, is to refrain from transgressing the facts of Selflessness and by not desecrating the actualities of Togetherness.

This power to choose and decide exists because human beings are all blessed with the powers of a "conscience," the faculty to discern between "right" and "wrong," especially to know when one one's self has done wrong. For this very reason, we owe a debt of profound gratitude, not only to our one and only fathers and mothers, but to our countless line of divergent ancestral fathers and mothers who, over the countless past generations, who have criss-crossed as they finally converged all the way down to our one and only father and our one and only mother, who, then in turn, brought us into this world as a human being intact with a "consciousness" that is inseparable from one's "conscienceness," the top of which is capable of soaring in the very expanses of the Dharma's Selflessness embraced by its All-embracing Togetherness below that is its foundation.

According to Shinran, in the person of O-nembutsu there, therefore, is always a twofold awareness because of this awakening. One side of which is an awakening that is the realization that:

If upholding the precepts and the disciplines are required for entrusting ourselves to the Primal Vow, how could we ever hope to go beyond birth-and-death? ... T. Unno. *Tannisho*. XIII. p. 24.

The other side of which, as Shinran says, is:

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. *loc. cit. Epilogue*. p. 34.

Therefore, in the person of O-nembutsu, there is always the twofold realization that because of one's ongoing transgressions and desecrations, whether one knows it or not, one has been, is still, and yet will always be in the grasp and embrace of Amida's Unconditional Compassion that has never forsaken and will never abandon any being, especially the karma riddled ones such as we, until we achieve perfect enlightenment equal to the Buddhas.

This is exactly why Shinran was "enabled" to realize that:

... I do not know what the two, good and evil, really mean. I could say that I know what good is, if I knew good as thoroughly and completely as the Tathagata; and I could say I know what evil is, if I knew evil as thoroughly and completely as the Tathagata. But 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.

So, in spite of the actuality that we human beings over the passing endless generations have, are and yet continue to be tainted by egoism, ethnicity, and nationality full of moral confusions and spiritual presumptions, we, as of consequence, are still unable to determine what is really "good" or what is actually "evil." This is exactly the very reason why we human beings are forever being grasped and embraced by the Dharma World's Selflessness and Togetherness that has never rejected or will ever abandon any of us until such time we all have become enlightened and become Buddhas. Such then is the significance of Amida's Primal Vow.

This is why Yuiembo said: In reality, all of us, and this includes you as well as myself, merely talk and argue about what is "good" and "evil" as based on our dubious assumptions concerning what is "right" and "wrong" without ever realizing the unfathomable depths of the Tathagata's unconditional benevolence for all of us that continues to be steadfast and unflinching.

This is exactly why it is only by having entrusted one's karma riddled self to Amida's Infinite Wisdom and her Unconditional Compassion that a silence full of joy and happiness brings a serenity to our confused minds and peace to our troubled hearts to fill it with reflective penitence. To be so "grasped" and "embraced" by the Dharma's Light of Selflessness and its Life of Togetherness is to have been enfolded in a world of silence where the sound of two sticks hitting each other, or the machinated clicks and clacks of two gears whirling and grinding against each other, are not heard.

The “two sticks” hitting each other means two persons in conflict with each other. The “gears grinding” refers to the different races, cultures and religions that are at odds and in critical and whini with each other.

For these very reasons Shinran said, “Just say the nembutsu and be saved by Amida,” for besides this “entrusting of self” and “taking of refuge in” Amida’s Primal Vow, “there is nothing else” that can save us. We who are full of transgressions and desecrations, can only say and repeat Amida’s Sacred Name — *Namoh-amida-butsu* — in pure gratitude, profound indebtedness and genuine penitence by virtue of a seremotu tjat silences conflict and a power that pacifies conflicts within and without.

BUDDHIST STORIES & PASSAGES

One many conquer millions in battle, but he who conquers himself, only one, is the greatest of conquerors. Dhmpda XIII.

The victor breeds hatred and the defeated lies down in misery. He who renounces both victory and defeat is happy and peaceful. Dhmpda. XV.

QUESTION & ANSWER KORNER

QUESTION: Isn’t the precept “not to kill” based on “non-violence?” Given the reality of human existence, isn’t this an impossible precept to uphold because in this world the “bigger fish” keep eating the “smaller fish?”

ANSWER: Walpola Rahula in addressing such questions raises the counter questions as follows: “Is it practical to kill one another? To live in eternal fear and suspicion like wild animals in a jungle? ... Was hatred ever appeased by hatred? Was evil ever won over by evil? ...” W. Rahula. *What the Buddha Taught*. p. 86, 87.

According to the Four Noble Truths, the first reality is: “life is full of suffering.” The only way for a person to live her or his life in sincerity, genuineness and honesty is for her or him to live the life of O-nembutsu through a life of gratitude, humility and reverence, especially penitence for one’s ongoing transgressions of things sacred and desecrations of truths spiritual.

continued from p.2

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to be continued in the next Gassho