



GASSHO

November

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"Hands together in reverence & gratitude"



PASSION AND COMPASSION

by rev. roland k. tatsuguchi

In this issue of GASSHO I would like to discuss the term "passion" as depicted by Mel Gibson in his movie "The Passion of the Christ" as being significantly different from the "passion" in the Compassion manifest in Amida Buddha's Vows as expounded by Sakyamuni in the Pure Land scriptures (*sutras*).

The word *passion* in Gibson's movie primarily focuses on the last twelve hours of Jesus' life beginning with the Last Supper, his crucifixion, resurrection and ascension. The filming especially focuses on the gruesome, bloody scourging and humiliation of Jesus being spit on and mocked, then horribly being nailed to a cross, bleeding to death as he finally gave up his last breath of life. According to Gibson, these final moments of Jesus' passion were based on the Four Gospels.

According to S. Michael Houdman:

"The reality of the blood of Christ as the means of atonement for sin has its origin in the Mosaic Law. Once a year, the priest was to make an offering of the blood of animals on the altar of the temple for the sins of the people. 'In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness' (Hebrews 9:12). But this was a blood offering that was limited in its effectiveness, which is why it had to be offered again and again. This was a foreshadowing of the "once for all" sacrifice which Jesus offered on the cross (Hebrews 7:27). Once that sacrifice was made, there was no longer a need for the blood of bulls and goats." See his *Got Questions.org*

MONTH'S THOUGHT



"... every minute of human life as long as it is an expression of its inner self is original, divine creative, and cannot be retrieved. ..."

D.T. Suzuki. *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist*. p. 31.



Therefore, Christians define their faith in accordance with the New Testament more so than on the Mosaic Law of the Old Testament. Christians, therefore, believe that they are saved by the "blood" that was shed by Jesus' death on the cross.

Therefore, the point to be made is that there is a fundamental difference between sinners being "redeemed by the blood shed by Jesus" compared to karma riddled sentient beings being grasped and embraced "just as they are" by Amida Buddha's Unconditional Compassion that leads them to their enlightenment and final Buddhahood. For Amida Buddha is the very manifestation of the Dharma's Truth of Selflessness and its Reality of Togetherness that embrace all beings without discriminations, favoritisms or exclusions. The point to be made is that Amida Buddha in having consummated his Vows of Universal Compassion to embrace all sentient beings did so without shedding the blood of any creature, animal or person.

Therefore, the meaning of "passion" as depicted in "The Passion of The Christ" differs from the significance of "passion" in Amida Buddha's "All-embracing Compassion" that equally embraces both the "good person" and especially
continues on p. 4

REMINDERS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

SERVICES FOR NOVEMBER 2014

1ST SUN Nov 02nd

(Services cancelled)

Fujinkai
MINI-BAZAAR
9 a.m. to 12 noon
Social Hall

2ND SUN Nov 09th

9 A.M. English Service
Dharma Talk for Children & Adults
Rev. Tatsuguchi

3RD SUN Nov 16th

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

4TH SUN Nov 23rd

ANNUAL SAMGHA MEMORIAL SERVICE

9 A.M. English Service
Speaker:
Rev. Tatsuguchi

5TH SUN Nov 30th

MONTHLY FAMILY WORSHIP
9 A.M. Eng. Service
"Dharma Talk" by Rev. Tatsuguchi

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. Etsuko Hironaka 90 yrs. July 21, 2014
Ms. Diane E. Fukunaga 67 yrs. Aug. 23, 2014

THANK YOU

for YOUR GENEROUS DONATIONS !!

2014 Memorial Service Schedule

2013	1 Year	2012	3 Year	2008	7 Year
2002	13 Year	1998	17 Year	1990	25 Year
1982	33Year	1965	50 Year	1915	100 Year

continued on p. 7

REV. SAKAMOTO'S CORNER

The Mountains Have Brought Forth a Mouse

by Rev. Hidehito Sakamoto

Hello everyone! We are now in the eleventh month of our centennial year. How are you doing?

This month, I would like to tell you about something I learned. In a movie I saw, a man said, "The mountains have brought forth a mouse." I didn't understand what he meant. So the next day, I asked someone and the person kindly told me that it means the result wasn't big after much ado. Aren't we human beings always making noises about tiny things? Don't we think we are almighty?

I heard that, and remembered a story an astronaut told me about the first time he saw the Earth. The astronaut went into space. The mission was a long one. The spaceship could only carry a limited amount of weight. It was loaded with food, water, air, experimental equipment, etc.

In space everything is floating. I imagine that someday, ministers may have to do their dharma talk while floating before floating members, if our descendants move into space.

The astronaut brought some animals into space. Of course the animals floated in space also. When the animals urinated, the astronaut caught the urine in a plastic bag and purified it in a machine to produce water for drinking. When I heard this, I was so moved: "Oh, what a nice world it is! Everything is connected! Oneness!"

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The astronaut continued into space. When he saw the earth, his thoughts completely changed. He realized what tiny creatures we human beings had been. When he saw the Earth from space, it was reflected so small. From space, we human beings would be micro creatures. But such tiny human beings still fight, and keep having wars on this Earth now. From the eyes of huge power (Great Compassion), it must look so silly.

On this Earth, we have gravity and weight. We misunderstand and think that we have self power and we can do everything. But once sent into space, we human beings don't have gravity any more and our power doesn't work as before. Like this, from the eyes of Amida Buddha, our sentient beings' power is a tiny one. Just like "Much ado about nothing!"

When we know that we are perfectly controlled by huge power, we realize our weakness, cheekiness, stupidity and ignorance. To be able to notice and meekly accept this may be the point of Shinjin awareness, I believe. Everything that we had been relying on, our self power, is really not enough. And we realize we are not capable, and gently leave everything to other power. I believe that this is the heart of Shinran Shonin when he came down from Mt. Hiei and met his *Zenjishiki* (the person who recommends and teaches the teachings of Nenbutsu), Honen Shonin. Our previous selves are denied and when we throw everything and admit our incapability, we can find our way to go.

Lastly I have one thing to inform you. Recently I lost my uncle in Japan who had taken care of me since childhood. He was a big part of my life. His will was that I take over his property, etc. So I made up my mind to go back to Japan. Thank you everyone for your kindness. I will never forget you forever.

Namo Amida Butsu, Namu Amida Butsu,
Namu Amida Butsu

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more so the "evil person" because of his inability to rid himself of the consequences of his transgressions and desecrations on his own merits and powers. The difference is that "salvation" in Christianity is based on the "blood shed" by and the "bodily death" of Jesus as atonement for all mankind's sins. Whereas, in Shin Buddhism, "enlightenment" and "Buddhahood" are for all sentient beings by virtue and power of Amida Buddha's consummation of his Vows of Boundless Compassion wherein no thing, person or being is rejected or excluded.

According to Houdman Jesus' blood and death on the cross meant that:

"... not only are we now free from having to offer sacrifices which are "useless" to obtain salvation, but we are free from having to rely on worthless and unproductive works of the flesh to please God. Because the blood of Christ has redeemed us, we are now new creations in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17), and by His blood we are freed from sin to serve the living God, to glorify Him, and to enjoy Him forever." *Ibid.*

By contrast, in Shin Buddhism, to have undergone an "awakening of true and real faith" upon taking refuge in Amida does not mean that one's "old self of sin" has been completely obliterated and demolished to be replaced by a "new self that has been born," which the term "reborn Christian" means.

To be grasped and embraced by Amida Buddha's Light and Life is to have one's karma riddled self laid bare and naked "just as it is" never to be condemned, rejected or abandoned by Amida Buddha until one's final breath of life, whereupon one then attains one's final enlightenment and Buddhahood in Amida's Pure Land. This "transformation" can be "visualized" as an "iceberg" already embraced by the ocean melting and becoming it's very waters and currents. Frozen ice "turning" into flowing water does not turn into something else but only water. Such is the meaning of being "transformed" by an "awakening of true and real faith" and what it is to be "reborn" in the Pure Land upon taking one's last breath of life.

Concerning the practice of sacrificing the life of innocent creatures in the belief that one's

sins can be purified by the blood or atoned for by the death of an innocent other, Buddha said:

"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 evils deeds of mankind? This is practicing religion by the neglect of moral conduct." Paul Carus. *The Gospel of The Buddha*. p. 33.

In Buddhism, the process of attaining enlightenment and Buddhahood through an "awakening of true and real faith" does not involve shedding the blood of innocent creatures or a blameless person to expiate one's wrongdoings.

Of his film Gibson said, "It's like traveling back in time and watching the events unfold as they exactly happened." But a movie is a movie that is nothing more than photo images of a person and not the actual person nor what actually happened. It is like watching what is not real but only what is "seeming reality." Televangelist Billy Graham in seeing the movie, said: "I doubt if there has been a more graphic and moving presentation of Jesus' death and resurrection."

By contrast, coming upon a bloodied image of Jesus nailed on a cross in a roadside shrine in Europe, the Zen scholar Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki was taken aback by such a bloodied image of Jesus in agony. So, he said:

"Whenever I see a crucified figure of Christ, I cannot help thinking of the gap that lies deep between Christianity and Buddhism. This gap is symbolic of the psychological division separating the East from the West." *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist*. p. 129.

Suzuki then further noted:

"Christ hangs helpless, full of sadness on the vertically erected cross. To the Oriental mind, the sight is almost unbearable. Buddhists are accustomed to the sight of Jizo Bosatu (Kishitigarbha Bodhisattva) by the roadside. The figure is a symbol of tenderness. He stands upright but what a contrast to the Christian symbol of suffering. pp. 133-124.

In these words of Suzuki we can see the difference

between the "passion" as depicted in "The Passion of The Christ" from "passion" in Amida's "All-embracing Unconditional Compassion" characterized by "loving kindness" (*metta*), "sympathetic joy" (*mudita*), "compassion" (*karuna*) and "equanimity" (*uppekha*).

According to dictionary definition, *passion* can mean either of the following: (1) a strong feeling of enthusiasm or excitement for something or about doing something, (2) a strong feeling (such as anger or love) that causes you to act in a dangerous way, or, (3) a strong sexual desire and lust for someone.

These meanings of *passion* ordinarily refer to a man's sensual nature that is aroused by thoughts and feelings of desire so emotionally forceful that they easily get out of control and become impelling, obsessive and even compelling. When they become coercive they end in acts of violence and destruction.

As such, human sexuality, more often than not, is about a male's *impassioned* need to affirm his masculinity and dominance over women. In these senses, the sexual drive in males impels and drives them to fulfill their sexual needs and masculine vanities. This actuality over the passing generations has not changed. It is as the adage goes: "The more things change, the more they remain the same." The nature of human sexuality has not changed over the passing generations.

Zeal implies a burning passion that compels one to react and respond as though captivated by a thing or a person. *Ardor*, on the other hand, suggests titillations that are fleeting, momentary, short lived rather than passions that are obsessive and arresting. *Fervor*, by contrast, implies that emotions persist a little longer but in the end fizzles and comes to an end. *Enthusiasm*, on the other hand, implies an eagerness to get involved in a proposal, cause, or a course of action that keeps impassioning a person to become involved and stay engaged. Becoming enthused, therefore, involves a person's mind, body and soul, or one's total person, being and personality. Now, *Right Perseverance*, the sixth path of the Noble Eightfold Path, is about such an enthusiasm that can be relied on and depended upon. It is characterized by mindfulness, earnestness, concentration, steadfastness, single-mindedness and so forth.

WORDS OF SHINRAN

"... When people first begin to hear the Buddha's Vow, they wonder, having become thoroughly aware of the karmic evil in their hearts and minds how they will ever attain birth as they are. To such people we teach that since we are possessed of blind passions the Buddha receives us without judging whether our hearts are good or bad."
SBT-Series. *Letters of Shinran*. No. 20. p. 60.

There are three underlying human proclivities that compel human thoughts, feelings and intentions. These inclinations can become coercive in what human beings say and do. The three are: greediness, vengefulness and misplaced pride. The three underlie the significance of the Shin phrases: "*zai-aku jin-ju no bombu*," which means "human beings riddled by profound transgressions and desecrations." The deeper spiritual significance of this phrase concerns that state of awareness when a person by an "awakening of true and real faith is made "aware" and "awake" of his transgressions and desecrations. It is that state in which a person has been embraced by Amida Buddha never to be condemned, rejected or abandoned until such time he comes to attain enlightenment and final Buddhahood.

Therefore, such an "evil person" who has been grasped by Amida is not the "sinner" who on a Day of Final Judgment is to be judged and finally rejected. Neither is such an "evil person" an *icchantika*, an incorrigible person, for even such a person, upon undergoing an "awakening of true and real faith" becomes "awake" and assured of Buddhahood by the mysterious powers and virtues of Amida's Compassion.

Therefore, the term "evil" or "evil person" as understood in Shin Buddhism is not to be confused with "sin" or "sinner" for sin has to do with the breaking of some omniscient, omnipotent supreme deity's commandments. Whereas, "evil" or *zai-aku* has to do with the consequences of having defied the principles of causation and karma that have effects that are irreversible. This fact is based on the actuality that once a word has been said or a course of action taken, their consequences

inevitably must follow.

For this reason, Sakyamuni Buddha admonished: "Keep your mind level. If the mind is level, the whole world will be level." Shinran Shonin in essence said the same thing when he exclaimed: "Under the influence of our karmic past we human beings will do anything" (T. Unno. Tannisho XIII. p. 24.). He, therefore, also admonished: "... we should be careful to keep our distance from those people who are given to evil. ..." meaning people who commit evils despite the consequences.

Now, Gibson's "graphic" presentation of Jesus' being horrifically beaten, lacerated, tortured, nailed to a cross bar to then agonize and bleed to death, these scenes are most gruesome and dehumanizing. Criticizers have called the movie offensive because of its barbarism. Others said it made violence a fetish, if not a prurient interest for those aroused by such cruelty, violence and inhumanism.

Therefore, we find in Steven Gray Dreydanus' *Understanding the Catholic Meaning of the Passion of the Christ*, the explanation that "certain forms of Christian piety have a morbid obsession with blood and death." However, Dreydanus then notes that there are Christians who also see "redemptive meaning in the water and blood gushing out from the crucified Jesus' side that was pierced by a spear."

Protestants who also believe in Jesus' crucifixion recognize Catholics as fellow Christians and the Roman Catholic Church as a Christian Church. There are also Protestants, however, who continue to take a dim view of Catholics, the Pope and the Catholic Church. Phrases like "an apostate church," "a blend of Christianity and Paganism," and "Babylon mystery religion" are commonly hurled at Catholicism by Christian fundamentalists who are often anti-Semitic as well. One can almost hear them asking, says Dreydanus, "Can anything good come out of Catholicism?"

The dictionary also defines *compassion* as a "feeling of empathy and sympathy triggered by the sight of someone in dire circumstances that necessity arouses the thought and desire to help and alleviate a person in distress, difficulty and need. To empathize and be sympathetic is to recognize and acknowledge another's hurt feelings and disturbed emotions. To empathize and be

sympathetic, therefore, is to express one's regrets and concern for another's pain and suffering.

But such thoughts and feelings on our part alone cannot relieve or free another person of his pain, suffering or provide for his needs. Such then is the significance of Amida Buddha's 48 Vows of Compassion, especially his Primal Vow that became his Sacred Name, *Namoh-amida-butsu*. Amida's Compassion manifest as his Name is full of virtues and power timelessly working to "transform" a person's ingratitude into gratitude, irreverence into reverence and impertinence into penitence. Such then is the significance of "transformation by faith" according to Shin Buddhism.

Although one may think enlightenment and final Buddhahood are attained through one's own moral efforts and performance of good deeds, in actuality, according to Jodoshinshu teachings, it is by power of Amida Buddha's Light of Selfless Wisdom and virtues of his Beneficent Life that sentient beings are "enabled" to trust and take refuge in his Name that then carries them into the Pure Land, or *Nirvana Without Residues*. This is like a "non-swimmer" safe on a ship called Amida's Compassion steaming to its port of destination, the Pure Land.

Such an "awakening" involves the "realization" that all that exists comes into existence and endures because of all other life forms, elements and supportive conditions constantly appearing and disappearing over timeless time. Therefore, ongoing existence is a timeless process of change governed by the orderly and uniform laws of causality, conditionality, interdependency, inseparability and karma. Such is the significance of the Dharma's Infinite Selfless Light and its Immeasurable Life of Togetherness wherein all things and life keep emerging and subsiding.

Through such an "awakening" and "realization" Shinran came to say:

"... 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 ego." SBT-Series. *Notes on 'Essentials of Faith Alone.'* pp. 38, 39.

"... 'To abandon the mind of self-power' admonishes the various and diverse kinds

of people — masters of Hinayana and Mahayana, ignorant beings good or evil — to abandon the conviction that one is good, to cease relying on the self to stop reflecting knowingly on one's evil heart, and further to abandon the judging of people as good and bad. ..." *Loc. cit.* p. 40.

In these words of Shinran we see the significance of what it is to be "grasped never to be abandoned" by the Tathagata's Light of Wisdom and become brimming over with the Amida's Compassion" whereby one's birth in Nirvana *Without Residues* is assured and a certainty. This is because Amida's Vow "does not discriminate between ... good and evil" and because it is especially "directed to the being burdened with the weight of karmic evil and burning with the flame of blind passion" (*T. Unno. Tannisho I*).

This is exactly why Shinran said:

"... the Tathagata of unhindered light filling the ten quarters, it is without color and without form, that is, identical with the dharmakaya-as-suchness, **dispelling the darkness of ignorance and unobstructed by karmic evil.** For this reason it is called 'unhindered light' not obstructed by the karmic evil and blind passion of beings. ..." *Notes on 'Essentials of Faith Alone,'* pp. 43, 44. In bold for emphasis.

According to Shinran Shonin, all persons "... lack a

GASSHO continues on p. 8

continued from p. 2

DONATIONS

SHINRAN'S WASAN

By Power of Unhindered Light
its awesome, beneficial
virtues are received!

Unfailingly "transformed" are
one's passions and vanities
Like ice into free flowing waters
of Enlightenment!

Koso Wasan No. 39
rkt trans.

Shinshu Kyokai will accept
your cans and bottles for HI-5

true and sincere heart ... and favor only evil ..." and, therefore, in both "... secular and religious worlds" human beings are possessed of a "heart and tongue at odds," and "words and thoughts both insincere' ..." (*op. cit.*, p. 49).

According to Shinran Shonin, to have undergone an "awakening of true and real faith" is to know that:

"... we are not good men, nor men of wisdom; that we have no diligence, but only indolence, and within, the heart is ever empty, deceptive, vainglorious and flattering. We do not have a heart that is true and real. ... *Loc. cit.*, pp. 49, 50.

To be "awakened" to one's reality as such a person, is to paradoxically and simultaneously "realize" that one has been mysteriously grasped never to be abandoned until such time one finally attains one's ultimate Buddhahood.

It is hoped you now understand what the difference is between the "passion" as portrayed in Mel Gibson's "The Passion of The Christ" and the "passion" that is the "Compassion of Amida Buddha," the Timeless Dharma's Truth of Selflessness and its Reality of Togetherness wherein nothing is condemned or excluded.

BUDDHIST STORY OR PASSAGE

"By seeing the image of Buddha, one is enabled to realize the mind of Buddha. The Buddha's mind has great compassion that includes all, even those who are ignorant of his compassion or forgetful of it, much more those who remember it in faith." Bukkyo Dendo Kai. *The Teaching of the Buddha* (Eng./ Japanese) p. 212.



Fujinkai MINI-BAZAAR

Sunday, Nov. 2, 2014
9 a.m. to 12:00 noon
at Social Hall

Shinshu Kyokai Mission

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QUESTION & ANSWER KORNER

QUESTION: Is God's Heavenly Kingdom the same thing as Amida's Pure Land?

ANSWER: D.T. Suzuki speaks of the difference as follows:

"From the general point of view of Buddhism ... what is most essential in the life of every Buddhist is to come back to the world of karma and work for others like Sakyamuni himself in the enhancement of realization and prevalence of Enlightenment...." *A Miscellany on the Shin Teaching of Buddhism* pp. 46, 47.

"... In Christianity God's will or love of humanity ... is expressed in the crucifixion of his only son ... whereas in Shin Buddhism Amida's will takes the form of intense determination and its solemn declaration. ... In the history of Far Eastern Buddhism ... this power has been exercised without ever shedding blood, without committing cruelties, without persecuting heresies." *Loc. cit.*, p. 56.