



GASSHO

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"Hands together in reverence & gratitude"



THE "BACKSIDE" AND "FRONTSIDE" OF OUR SELVES

by rev. roland k. tatsuguchi

According to Shin Buddhism, to have experienced an "awakening of true and real faith" (*shin-jitsu shinjin*) is to have undergone a "transformation" of one's person, self and being.

I believe that the Dharma's Truth of Selflessness and Reality of Togetherness manifest by the Buddhas was the inspiration and basis for the Declaration of Independence drafted by the Founding Fathers as follows:

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

These words, however, were also influenced by Judeo-Christian beliefs that human beings were created in the very image of God and, therefore, are superior to the rest of all creations and were authorized to use the things of nature for their needs and to their advantage.

According to Shinran Shonin and Sakya-muni Buddha, however, the happiness and safety of all sentient beings and non-sentient things are also equally included, such as "plants, trees and land" (SBT-Series. *Notes on "Essentials of Faith Alone."* p. 42). This is because all animate and inanimate things, of causal necessity, are inseparable and of dependent on each other.

MONTH'S THOUGHT



There are only two kinds of men: the righteous who think they are sinners and the sinners who think they are righteous." – *Blaise Pascal, French mathematician, physicist and Christian philosopher*



Albert Einstein as a mathematician and physicist put it this way:

"The man who is convinced of the universal law of causality cannot for a moment entertain the idea of a being who interferes in the course of events — that is, if he takes the hypothesis of causality seriously. He has no use for the religion of fear and equal little for social or moral religion. A God who rewards and punishes is inconceivable to him for the simple reason that a man's actions are determined by necessity, any more than an inanimate is responsible for the motions it goes through. Hence science has been charged with undermining morality, but the charge is unjust. A man's ethical behavior should be based effectively 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 and punishment and hope for reward after death." From *"The World As I See It,"* 1950.

For this reason Einstein believed in "a third

REMINDERS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

SERVICES FOR MAY 2017

1st SUN May 7th

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

2ND SUN May 14th

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

3RD SUN May 21st

Commemorating SHINRAN'S BIRTHDAY

9 A.M. Eng. Service
Guest speaker:
Rev. Alan Urasaki

4TH SUN May 28th

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

WEEKLY ACTIVITIES

BON DANCE CLASS 2nd & 4th Sun
from 1:30 – 3 p.m. – Joyce Gushiken

KARATE CLASSES Tues & Fri 6 – 8 p.m.
Int'l Karate League – Walter Nishioka

KARATE CLASSES Thurs 5:30 – 8:30 p.m.
Hawaii Shotokan Karate – Alan Sekiguchi

EXERCISE CLASSES Wed 5 – 8 p.m.
Natural Healing Research Foundation

FUJINKAI LADIES' FELLOWSHIP GROUP
Tues 9 a.m. – noon

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New Year donation

Special Services

Gojikai

Spring O'Higan

2017 Memorial Service Schedule

2016	1 Year	2015	3 Year	2011	7 Year
2005	13 Year	2001	17 Year	1993	25 Year
1985	33 Year	1968	50 Year	1916	100 Year

continues on p. 7

state of religious experience" which he said is a "religious feeling." According to Einstein it is most important "to awaken this feeling and keep it alive in those who are capable of it." (See M. Barone & M. Gajewska. *Einstein and the Mystery of Eternity of Life*).

Now, there is a basic difference between the workings of Buddhas from the workings of human beings. According to Shinran Shonin, this is why:

"In this life no matter how much pity and sympathy we may feel for others, it is impossible to help another as we truly wish; thus, our compassion is inconsistent and limited. Only the saying of *nembutsu* manifests the complete and never-ending compassion which is true, real, and sincere." T. Unno. *Tannisho*. IV. p. 9.

By comparison, the thoughts, intentions, words and actions of a Buddha are unblemished, pure coherent and immediately compassionate.

This is the reason why the facts of "selflessness" and verities of "togetherness" are not based on anthropocentric notions of a deity who created man in his own image to then set him above and in charge of the rest of creation. The karma of Buddhas, by comparison, and the karma of sentient beings are governed by the laws of "cause and effect." Thus, karma means "nothing happens that can-not be explained by a chain of previous cause and effects." Good causes bring about good effects, bad causes bring about bad effects.

Such is the significance of the "twelve interlocking links of causation" that governs the

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WORDS OF SHINRAN

"I do not know what the two, good and evil, really mean. ... 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." T. Unno. *Tannisho*. Epilogue. p. 36.

process of "ceaseless births and deaths" over the passing generations as characterized by the "six realms of transmigration."

In this issue, I would like to dwell on a Japanese saying and the prose of the haiku master Basho. They may be helpful in understanding the persona and psyche of President Donald Trump. Both concern observing the "frontside" of a person he pretends to be and his "backside" when he thinks no one is watching.

The Japanese folk saying is as follows:

"Children learn more by watching the backsides more so than from seeing their front-sides of their parents".

Basho's poetically expressed non-judgmental in terms of nature words are:

"Autumn leaves fall, showing their back-sides and front sides." Japanese Zen poet Matsuo Basho (1644-94).

The "saying" concerns the world of human willfulness and intentions that trigger words and actions that are hurtful and harmful. The "haiku" involves the world of "naturalness" in which things happen naturally according to their changing surroundings. Both dimensions are uniformly governed and ordered by causality, conditionality, interdependency and karma.

This is why Shinran once told Yuiembo:

"... We should know that even as trifling

a thing as the speck of dust on the tip of a rabbit's hair or a sheep's fleece is the product of the evil of past karma." T. Unno. *Tannisho*. XIII, p. 23.

So, by experiencing and undergoing an "awakening of true and real faith," we come to know why we as ordinary human beings are constantly showing a frontside of how virtuous, and diligent we are, all the while inwardly cherishing our backsides full of vanities and falsehoods.

Simply put, in the world of sensation, the physical quantity of a thing is more important than its spiritual quality. We see this arbitrary separation between the world of objectivity and the world of subjectivity in the words of William James who said: "the function of thought is to guide action and that the truth is preeminently to be tested by the practical consequences of belief." The phrase "to be tested by practical consequences of belief" means, of course, things that can be sensed and verified through the five sense organs, especially by our skin surfaces sensitive to touch sensations.

Now, in the seventeenth century there were thousands of non-Puritan Europeans who were already in North America who had settled in and around the thirteen colonies. They were there before the Pilgrims from England settled in Plymouth and the Puritans who soon followed to settle in Massachusetts. When the Puritans arrived, educating their children in the three "R's" became uppermost in their minds. As of consequence, children were home-schooled to read, write and do arithmetic. This was because as fundamentalist Christians they were duty bound to read the Bible daily.

Puritans, therefore, were strict fundamentalist Christians who literally accepted and lived by the Bible. This is how white charismatic and evangelical Christians in America came to be deeply rooted in Judeo-Christian beliefs and sentiments that they were God's "chosen people." Fundamentalist Protestant sects, as of consequence, began appearing in the "New World Order" (*Novus Ordo Seclorum*). According to the Puritans, it was necessary to be able to

read the Bible in order to receive salvation. Thus, in the New England colonies education was based on convictions that were heavily influenced by Calvinism. As of consequence, Puritans literally believed that people (children in particular) were inherently bad (sinners) and had to learn how to behave. Salvation lay in learning to check their natural instincts and behave as responsible adults according to the tenets of the Bible.

So Puritan children had a homeschooled education based on the three R's, **R**eading, **w**riting and **a**rithmetic, that were heavily colored by certain verses of the Bible. Now in the South, private tutors were hired by plantation gentry to educate their children at home. Their sons were also sent to England for further higher education.

This is how education in colonial America came to be a two-track system of education. The people of the lower classes received minimal instruction while the upper classes in the Northern and in the Southern went well beyond the basics of reading, writing and computation. Often they attended grammar and secondary schools where they learned Latin and Greek as they studied the classics in preparation for a college and graduate school education.

As a deist, Thomas Jefferson believed that an educated citizenry was most crucial in establishing the foundations for an emerging democratic nation. So, at the turn of the nineteenth century, laws were enacted to provide children with education in the form of a one-room school house that included grades from kindergarten to high school.

Children in remote wilderness and rural areas couldn't always attend. This was because many of these children were descendants of the first Europeans who came either as adventurers and later as indentured servants. Most of them were nonliterate and unsophisticated. So, the children of these lower class Europeans did not attend the schools that the later Puritans established. They had to work to support their families. Furthermore, they were times of

necessity when both the settler in the wilderness and Puritan in colonial settlements needed to be "rugged individuals" who were "resourceful," "independent" and especially "self-reliant." They were times when it was illegal to educate Blacks who were being imported and sold as slaves. It was also illegal to marry persons of African decent. So, the well-heeled, educated, sophisticated Puritan of wealth and means stood out among them.

As of consequence, the first Pilgrims and Puritans who came after the initial settlers were already embedded deep in Judeo-Christian folk ways and mores. This fact is confirmed by the American psychiatrist Jurgen Ruesch as follows:

"The core of Puritan morality was pietism, the deprecation of carnal passion, the high valuation of self-control and will power, and the assumption of personal responsibility vis-à-vis God. The Puritan valued plain living, industriousness, thrift, cleanliness, consistency, honesty, and favored simplicity of worship and cooperation with other members of the Puritan community ..." J. Ruesch & G. Bateson. *Communication: The Social Matrix of Psychiatry*. p. 96.

According to Ruesch, these core values developed into a protest of British Puritans because of their political and religious abuses, by those especially in positions of power.

The first compulsory education laws were passed in Massachusetts from 1642-1648. Parents then were at risk of losing custody of their children if they could not read and write. According to Ruesch, this was one of the reasons why:

"The first settlers were likewise faced with the necessity of setting up social relations which would favor a closely knit group because the odds against them were great and could only be overcome by superior organization. The fusion of the needs of the pioneers with those of the Puritan constituted the roots of the American value system." *Ibid.*

SHINRAN'S WASAN

While people ignorant even
of the words "good" and "bad"
are all of true heart,
My acting as though I knew
"good" and "bad" is
a manifestation of total falsity!

Shozomatsu Wasan No. 115.
rkt translation.

The melding of "rugged individualism" of the initial settlers with the later biblical minded Puritans became the legacy of American toughness, resourcefulness, purposefulness and aggressiveness in their westward expansion. Americans began to decimate and displace Native Americans in order to appropriate their ancestral lands as they kept expanding to the Pacific coast. Native American Indians were seen as heathens and idolaters to be rid as they appropriated Indian lands they saw as a New Promised Land.

Ruesch's analysis of American pioneer-puritan-morality is helpful in understanding how and why the Founding Fathers came to declare and justify their desires, impulses and aggressiveness in their westward expansion. It also helps in understanding how notions of Aryan supremacy that prevailed in Europe came to be also applied in today's White Anglo-Saxon Protestant Americans Nordic origins and assumptions of racial supremacy.

Ruesch's analysis is also helpful in seeing how President Trump's "sharp practices ... undertaken in the name of free enterprise and rugged individualism" (p. 98) characterizes his persona and psyche. It also is helpful in seeing how "gratifying a personal need is permissible when justified by a socially acceptable motive." Also how "Making money ... even if it involves ruthless exploitation of others" (p. 89) is okay as long as you don't get caught and can get away with it.

So what about the Asians who have and are overstaying their visas? The Department of

Homeland security reports that illegals from India now outnumber any other nationals from Asia such as China, the Philippines and Korea.

Today, preparing our children for citizenship continues to be one of the three broad goals of American public schools. Another is to prepare children for college and have them matriculate in a graduate school. The ultimate goal is to have them become a qualified professional, technician or a specialist in some field of expertise. Now the sad and tragic thing is that in last year's election cycle the majority of Americans obviously lost respect for the political process because of how Donald Trump won the presidency through his vilifications of his political adversaries through his deliberate lies and unsubstantiated accusations.

Many White and non-White middle class parents, because of having to work at two or more jobs, are unable to monitor what their unsupervised children see and hear, much less control what they communicate over their electronic devices of instant communication. What are their perceptions of the politicians vilifying each other? What about the newscasters wrangling, ranting and opining about a candidate's questionable behaviors, dealings and connections? The picture we get of Washington D.C. is that it is indeed a quagmire of corruption full of falsehoods and scandals. As Jesse Ventura once said: 'Our legislators keep changing the rules to fit their own agendas!'

At home, children are admonished to be filial, trustworthy and upright, all the while as they see their parents in unguarded moments acting otherwise. In our public schools they are taught to become citizens of a civilized society and exercise their civic responsibilities, while in real life, socially and economically disadvantaged children keep encountering situations of blatant inequality and discrimination as well as outright acts of psychological abuse and physical violence.

In the political arena our children keep hearing politicians promising to do one thing if elected, then pivoting to do the very opposite upon being elected especially behind closed

doors. The most disappointing thing is to hear a politician cite biblical verses to justify their profiling of their adversaries as being "agents of the devil" as though they were subhuman, if not vermin to be exterminated.

Such negative depictions of non-white minorities are most disillusioning to children, whose hearts are innocent and minds are impressionable. The bold faced lies and falsehoods told by our politicians are telling our children that it's okay to break the law as long as you can get away with it. Is this not why vilifying and slandering one's political opponents has become normal and the norm in the political arena over the last two or three decades? What about the news media whose newscasters keep slanting the facts while their pundits keep contradicting each other?

Trump has also accused American Muslims of hiding radical Islamic terrorists who are bent on killing Americans in America. Many Black American Muslim children are especially terrified of Donald Trump because he has said he will deport them back to Africa where they belong. Many teachers are reporting an increase in the use of the "n-word" by children of White-supremacist parents.

All the more poignant, therefore, becomes the Japanese saying: "children grow up more by watching the backsides of their parents more so than seeing their front sides." Indeed, our politicians, especially President Donald Trump, need to pay attention to the verity of this Japanese folk saying. But then, much of what happens in Congress happens behind "closed doors."

So, it is significant to note the paradox as pointed out by Ruesch that:

"... American motion-picture producers act as a censoring or self-censoring body controlling the 'morals' of the movies. It is of interest to note that American motion-picture producers, the church, and the public consider murder, violence, and brutality a perfectly moral subject for presentation in movie houses, where

youngsters of all ages are admitted. ..."
loc. cit. p. 99.

Does not this discrepancy aptly describe what is the "front side" and the "backside" of our American politicians and social media?

Furthermore, when we as Americans compare our lifestyles to those of others living in economically impoverished and geo-politically disadvantaged countries, does not this reveal how "excessive" and "wasteful" we are? Does it not show how the conveniences and comforts of life that we as Americans enjoy and take for granted continues to be derived at the expense of countless peoples and resources of other politically and economically disadvantaged nations that are being continually exploited and ravaged? It is well known that Americans consume far more of the earth's natural resources and live much less sustainably than people even in other advanced countries of the world.

Americans make up only 4.5% of the world's population. And yet they use one-third of the world's paper, a quarter of the world's oil, 23 percent of the coal, 27 percent of the aluminum and 19 percent of the copper and silver and so on. So the next time you hear about a family in India who has 7 children, demographers remind us that there would have to be 17 children in that family to match the lifetime consumption of energy and raw materials consumed by an American family with just one child.

So once again I now close with Shinran Shonin's Wasan concerning the inner self as differing from the external self as follows:

"Outwardly we all display
how clever, benevolent

continued on p. 8

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HISASHI MIYAKE
CHARLES SATO**

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Donations

continued from p. 2

Due to limited space due to Postal restrictions, if your donation is not listed in this GASSHO, it will be listed in a following edition. For any inadvertent misspelling of names, please accept our apologies.

BUDDHIST VERSES & PASSAGES

"Buddha-nature exists in everyone no matter how deeply it may be covered by greed, anger and foolishness, or buried by their own deeds and retribution. Buddha-nature cannot be lost or destroyed; and when all defilements are removed, sooner or later, it will reappear."

BDK. *The Teaching of the Buddha*. (5th ed. 1978)
p. 78.

and dedicated we are!
But in reality because we are
full of envy and anger,
as well as falsehoods,
We are all riddled within by
resentments and lies!

Shozomatsu Wasan No. 95
rkt trans.

These words of Shinran Shonin resound and echo in our "deepest conscience-ness" as the "voiceless voice" of Amida Buddha telling us to look at our own "backsides" even before we begin looking at the "backsides" of others in self-righteous indignation and condemnation of their "front sides!"

Hopefully, these words of Shinran will help you to see the world of *samsara* and *Nirvana* are seamless and inseparable one from the other. The basic difference being that the karma of human beings are tarnished while the karma of Amida Buddha are unblemished.

As mentioned, undergoing a "transformation" of one's person by Amida's power of Wisdom and virtues of Compassion is best understood to be like an "iceberg" melting and turning into water that becomes what are free flowing currents of the unfathomable ocean. Such a "transformation" is not to be confused with "sinners" being incinerated into oblivion and into a nothing-ness. *Nirvana* does not mean "extinction" as often misconstrued by those

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attempting to picture it as being nothing more than, a self-obliteration or self-annihilation. If a cup full of oil is not first emptied, it cannot be filled with the waters of Wisdom and currents of Compassion. This is what *Nirvana* when equated to *sunyata*, or "emptiness," does not mean oblivion.

Namoh-amida-butsu.

QUESTION & ANSWER KORNER

QUESTION: What is the difference between a commandment and a precept?

ANSWER: The difference lies in that to disobey God's commandments is a sin punishable by death, whereas, in the case of Buddhist precepts for both monks and householder are understood to be governed by causation and karmic consequences.