

Buddhist Column #3 February, 2019

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(1)

Buddhist Humor:
“Shinran Shonin Diet”

- A: Gee, you’ve lost weight since we last met!
- B: Thanks. I am on the Shiran Shonin Diet.
- A: What kind of a diet is that?
- B: Well, you know that Shinran Shonin said the he was “neither monk nor lay,” right?
- A: Sure, but what does that have to do with a diet?
- B: How many times do monks eat in a day?
- A: Let me see, I think *once* a day, especially in China.
- B: Then, how many times do lay people eat in a day?
- A: Usually *three* times. ... I don’t get it. What does that have to do with diet?
- B: Well, “neither monk nor lay,” so Shinran Shonin diet calls for *not* eating *once* or *three* times a day. So, what’s the answer?
- A: Got it! Shinran Shonin Diet is to eat just *twice* a day, neither once nor three times per day!

*This was told to me by Prof. Gene Reeves, a dear friend, who is not a Shin Buddhist but knew about “neither monk nor lay,” a rather sophisticated teaching even for Shin Buddhists. Prof. Reeves is currently hospitalized, so please wish for his speedy recovery. Actually, I, too, have been on Shinran Shonin Diet recently ... though I don’t *fully* abide by it always ... maybe, 2 and 1/2!

(2)

An Article:**“To the Pure Land and Back” or****“Shin Buddhist Spirituality of Naturalness:
Hardly a “Christian” Buddhist Path”****By Kenneth K. Tanaka**

I have shared the first two of three parts so far, but I'm very happy to report that the ENTIRE article just appeared in the February issue of **“Tricycle: The Buddhist Review,”** a magazine produced in New York with over 100,000 subscribers with many more accessing it via internet. It's entitled, **“To the Pure Land and Back”** and is found here:

<https://tricycle.org/magazine/shin-buddhist-path/>

(3)

Televised Talks

Tricycle magazine also has televised sermons/talks. This month, it features my friend, **Rev. Marvin Harada**, a leader within the Buddhist Churches of America and the Head Priest of the Orange County Buddhist Church (of the Jodo Shinshu denomination). Rev. Harada's four talks are extremely interesting and easy to understand. I strongly recommend them:

<https://tricycle.org/dharmataalks/finding-meaning-in-mortality/>

(4)

“Just As You Are” & “On Not Murdering Anyone”

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from

Coming Home: Refuge in Pureland Buddhism

by Satyavani Robyn

(Rev. Satyavani Robyn is a priest in the Amida Shu tradition, and she runs the Amida Mandala temple in the United Kingdom with her husband Kasper. She also works as a psychotherapist. Her site is at: www.amidamandala.com)

Just As You Are

We begin here: just as you are.

This is the promise my Buddhist teacher made to me when I first encountered Pureland Buddhism. Amitabha, the Buddha of Infinite Light, loves us like this. Just as we are. Not when we've self-improved. Not when we finally conquer our out-of-control ice-cream eating. Not in three weeks' time, or even later today. Right here, as exactly this person we are right now.

This doesn't mean we don't make the Buddha sad when she sees us strike out at people, or do things that harm us. But she understands where we're coming from. She sees our history, our particular pattern of wounding, and she gets it. She sees how it is to be human. She sees the love behind the fear.

Are you feeling cynical? Indulge me for a moment. Allow for the possibility that there is *something* out there, wise and compassionate enough to enfold all of our worst dysfunctions in love. Imagine that we don't have to do anything to receive this esteem. Imagine that we are completely seen and utterly accepted.

This is where we begin.

On not murdering anyone

This morning I got off to a bad start. Rather than turning on my computer and starting my writing, I turned on my computer and went onto Facebook. My reasons were

initially virtuous – it felt important to reply to someone who'd asked for some advice the night before - but before long I was liking posts and getting caught in the infinite scroll. I was interrupted by Kasper who popped his head round my door and told me he'd rearranged the chairs in the temple shrine room, two floors up from my office. He said that I might want to look at them later, but I was eager for further distraction, and jumped up. 'I can do my writing later', I thought to myself.

After an hour of fine-tuning where we put the chairs and zafus, we were happy with the new arrangement. I came back down to my office and, after exhausting the possibilities for new emails or red notifications, I opened my manuscript. I wrote a sentence. I checked my phone. I deleted a sentence. I wondered if there were any new emails. I went to make a cup of tea. I stared at the screen. I reached for my phone.

As I sat there, I was aware of various voices in the background - "It's my fault for not sticking to my plan and getting side-tracked into furniture arranging." "You don't need to push yourself all the time – you deserve a rest." "It's Kasper's fault for telling me about the chairs." "You'll never get your book finished at this rate." "You need to give up Facebook." "Facebook is essential for your work as a writer." And so on.

These voices were different parts of me who were trying their best to get my system into a better equilibrium. The striver part was pushing hard against the lazy or avoidant parts. My creative part wanted to write, but other parts of me weren't in the mood or didn't care. The unhealthy coping mechanisms noticed that everything was getting a bit heated, and started to panic. One of these voices suggested I could eat some biscuits with my tea, and so I fetched three out of the freezer and ate them quickly, crunching through the partly frozen middles.

This is how Kasper found me when he came downstairs later – sitting miserably in my bucket chair, my kindle on my lap. I didn't even have the concentration to read. He asked me what was wrong. "I'm a terrible person," I told him miserably. "I'm not writing and I ate three biscuits."

"That's okay, you haven't murdered anyone," he said.

It was true that I hadn't murdered anyone. And, in that moment, I really was suffused with the feeling that I was a worthless lump of flesh. I am forty three now. I am no longer a spring chicken. Decades of reading about compulsions, increasing self-knowledge and practising restraint have left me just where I started – utterly unable to control myself. I find writing just as difficult as I ever did, and maybe even a bit more difficult. I not only ate three frozen biscuits, but I am at this very moment considering eating three more.

I am out of control. And here I am, back at my laptop again, typing away. I think that it was helpful to be reminded that I am not a murderer, even if I felt like one. Kasper knows me and my various favourite dysfunctions, and he has seen it all before. He knows that sometimes I feel bad about myself, and he also witnesses that I still manage to get up, dress myself and make enough money to feed myself. Sometimes I even do some yoga, and weed the vegetable patch. Once every year or so I start writing a book, complain continually about how difficult it is to write, and eventually finish it.

Kasper's fond amusement reminds me of what the Buddha sees when I sit there glumly eating biscuits. She doesn't laugh at me, but she certainly has a glint in his eye. "Ah, there she goes again. Turning away from the fear and towards sugar – yes, I can see why that happens, especially with those extra-myelinated pathways in her brain. Oh, and that sad part is in the driving seat again now, the one that feels unworthy. It's a shame she can't feel me shining my love on her, but I'll just keep standing here as I always do. Maybe sooner or later she'll catch a glimpse of me out the corner of her eye."

The Buddha also looks in this way at people who *have* murdered people. The Buddha understands the causes and conditions that led that person to murder or do other terrible things, and it makes her very sad, but she understands. It is said that there is a Buddha in every hell realm, and that we always have the opportunity to start making better choices, however much of a mess we've made of things. Murderers did decide to turn their lives around when they met Shakyamuni Buddha in historical India, and it didn't wipe their karma clean but they did go on to live productive and ethical lives. They went on to be happy. The Buddha accepts it all, from minor over-indulgence in sugar all the way down the scale to the very worst our race is capable of.

I caught a glimpse of the Buddha reflected in Kasper, and it was enough to get me out of that chair and back into this one. The worthless part of me is still hanging around, and my stomach is making lots of interesting noises. That's okay – they can sit here with me as I carry on writing. Just as I am.

(5)
Buddhist News from Japan:

Temple Bulletin Board Contest

The Society for the Promotion of Buddhism (BDK), held a very interesting and innovative contest in 2018. It was a contest of temple bulletin boards for the public to see. To BDK's great surprise, hundreds of temples applied for the contest. The mass media (TV, radio and newspapers) also took note as well, which further disseminated the Buddhist messages. Many of them are jolting, comforting, thought-provoking and humorous.

If you read Japanese, here are the winners:

<http://www.bdk.or.jp/kagayake2018/publication.html>

also

<https://www.excite.co.jp/news/article/E1533193370662/>

The passages of the top winners are: (translated by K. Tanaka)

First prize: "You, too, will die!"

Gan'nenji Temple, Gifu Prefecture

Second prize:

"Exhausted from the concocted happiness through SNS

But real happiness does not appear in photos

It glows within the warmth of daily life"

Bukkoji Temple, Kyoto

Third prize: "You are fine

You'll be able to live on!"

Shotoku Temple, Tokyo

Fourth prize:

"Are you really revering the Buddhas and gods?"

Are you sure you're not revering greed and desire?"

Shoryo Temple, Kagawa Prefecture

Other prize: "If you google it, you can find out how
to get there

But if you contemplate on where you are going
[religiously], you can find out how
best to live!"

Chokaku Temple, Hiroshima Prefecture

Other prize: "I can't change other people or the past

But I can change myself and the future."

Tsukiji Hongwanji, Tokyo

This contest is the brainchild of Rev. Tomoaki Eda. I consider him an innovative, relatively young Shin Buddhist priest. I first met him about 15 years ago, when he began a Tokyo version of "Project Dana," a Buddhist social service program that started in Honolulu, Hawaii. After a few years of running the program in Tokyo, he went to work in Dusseldorf, Germany to run Buddhist programs at Ekoji Temple.

After returning to Japan, last year another project dawned on him, that is, to run a contest of the "sayings" found on temple bulletin boards. He says he had always been attracted by what the temples put up as Buddhist messages to the outside world, but it was his innovative mind that made a contest out of it!

(4)

Kenneth Tanaka 2019 Speaking Schedule in N. America and Europe

(*Newly added)

March 10	*Enmanji Buddhist Temple: Morning service
March 17	*San Francisco Buddhist Church: Morning service & film show
August 25	San Jose Betsuin Buddhist Temple: Afternoon Seminar
September 6-7	Spokane Buddhist Temple: TBA
September 14	Enmanji Buddhist Temple: Afternoon Seminar
September 15	Sacramento Betsuin Buddhist Temple Ohigan service from 9:30 Seminar from around noon
September 20	San Diego Buddhist Temple, Seminar 7-9PM "An Introduction to Shin Buddhism through Humor: a Path of Naturalness for Greater Happiness and Meaning"
September 21	Orange County Buddhist Church Ohigan seminar from 9 - noon
September 22	Orange County Buddhist Church 10AM Ohigan service talk at Vista Buddhist Temple Ohigan service at 3PM, followed by Mini-seminar for 1-2 hours
September 24	Arizona Buddhist Temple evening
September 25	Chicago Buddhist Temple evening
September 26	Midwest Buddhist Temple evening
September 28-29	Kamloops Buddhist Temple, Canada British Columbia Province Conference
November 22-24	Eko Haus, Dusseldorf, Germany Hoonko Lectures

