

## **I Have A Dream!**

*Dharma talk by Rev. Bert Sumikawa given at  
Hawaii Betsuin on September 1, 2013*

Good Morning, everyone. It seems like I haven't been here for a while, and actually, I haven't. For the past two Sundays I have been going to Kapolei, at the Kapolei Buddhist Sangha where I also serve. But it looks like this month, you may see too much of me because I am scheduled to speak three times, twice here and once at the 9am Dharma Service. So, please bear with me, and join me in gassho:

The Buddha taught selflessness as one of his 3 basic teachings. It is our mistaken ego selfishness that causes all human troubles and sufferings.

We do not realize that we are literally able to live and enjoy life only because of other people and things.

If one really understands this truth, one cannot help but become humble and appreciate others.

Buddhism is a way of selflessness.

Namo Amida Butsu

On Monday, August 19, at the Unitarian Church on Pali Highway near here, there was a free Interfaith Prayer Brunch, calling on all religious leaders throughout the island that was sponsored by the Progressive Interfaith Community and the Hawaii United for Marriage. Its purpose was to raise awareness that marriage equality is about *right*

relationship at the *right* place (which is Hawaii) and at the *right* time, (which is now.)

Although unfortunately none of us here at the Betsuin was able to go, I believe the Bishop did go, along with Rev. Blayne Higa of the Pacific Buddhist Academy. They provided food and entertainment and of course, prayers and chants from the various religious traditions.

From the e-mail I received from the Unitarian minister Rev. Dr. Jonipher Kwong, it was a very successful and emotional event as many were left in tears knowing that there is such a network of support among religious leaders for basic human dignity and for the fact that the spirit of aloha is a central component of all of the different religious faiths.

Dr. Jonipher Kwong mentioned that words expressed by those in attendance brought life, meaning and hope, and regardless of whether or not the Governor calls for a special session, they in fact already had their special session that day. An endorsement was circulated, and over 47 religious leaders have signed on to date! Through e-mail, I did send in my support and endorsed the effort of the Interfaith Community.

Included in the endorsement is this statement:

As religious leaders and residents of the State of Hawaii, we believe that the freedom of every citizen to practice his or her religion is based on the principle of respect for the inherent worth and dignity of each individual. We therefore call upon our elected officials to extend civil marriage benefits to loving same-gender couples as soon as possible, basing our conclusion on the following reasons:

1. 'Ohana is important for all of us. We affirm that our families include couples, children, tutu, siblings, uncles, aunts, cousins, and even our faith 'ohana. The freedom to marry for all will build, support, and strengthen all in the family. Gay, Lesbian, Bi-sexual and Transgender people are not "other" people or foreign, but are part of our faith communities.
2. Religious teachings of social fairness and compassion has been central to the building of the Beloved Community, valuing diversity within the human family, calling us to love one another.
3. The first Amendment of the Constitution guarantees the separation of Church and State. In a place as religiously diverse as Hawaii and the U.S.A., this separation ensures that each religious community then chooses, according to their beliefs and values, whether to sanction marriages for Gay, Lesbian, Bi-sexual and Transgender couples or not.

Their goal is to abide by the Golden Rule, an ethic of reciprocity that can be found in most religious traditions. We want to rejoice in these families as we honor their marriages as a source of joy and celebration amongst family and friends. While committed same gender relationships have existed throughout history, the recent civil recognition of these relationships within and outside of America provides fairness, as called for in our nation's highest ideals and by our religious traditions.

Grateful for the spiritual gift of diversity, and grateful for the fairness and freedoms ensured through our citizenship in Hawaii and the U.S.A., we sign this statement as people of faith and goodwill.

This past Wednesday evening, at the Buddhist Study Center here in Honolulu, an open forum was held, sponsored by the Clergy and Lay Leaders of Faith Communities. The purpose was to ask questions and to learn more about how marriage equality would impact our faith communities. American Civil Liberties Union attorney Dan Gluck was on hand to answer some of these following questions:

- How does the repeal of the Defense of Marriage Act or DOMA and Proposition 8 affect Hawaii? Proposition 8 reflects the opponents of same sex marriage.
- What does the religious exemption clause say and how does it protect religious liberties?
- What does marriage equality really mean for our houses of Religious leaders as well as the Lay residents of Hawaii believe that the freedom of every citizen to practice his or her religion is based on the principle of respect for the inherent worth and dignity of each and every individual.

But, all is not well in this beautiful state of ours, where the word 'ohana is sometimes used as freely as the word aloha. Not all peoples of Hawaii share what we as Buddhists take as inalienable truths. The teaching of pratitya-samutpada, or dependent origination.

This is a principle in Buddhism that we all are aware of, that "Life is Interdependent." Nagajuna reveals in the doctrine of Dependent Origination or in Sanskrit, "Pratitya-Samutpada".

Let us take a few examples that establish the nature of dependent origination. Let us take first an example used by the Buddha Himself. The Buddha has said the flame in an oil lamp burns dependent upon the oil and the wick. When the oil and the wick are present, the flame

in an oil lamp burns. If either of these is absent, the flame will cease to burn. This example illustrates the principle of dependent origination with respect to a flame in an oil lamp. Let us take the example of the sprout. Dependent upon the seed, earth, water, air and sunlight the sprout arises. There are in fact innumerable examples of dependent origination because there is no existing phenomenon that is not the effect of dependent origination. All these phenomena arise dependent upon a number of causal factors. Very simply, this is the principle of dependent origination, that we are all connected to one another in a web.

In Buddhism, the problem of human rights and human duty to other people is considered in relation to all living beings in the universe. Whatever arises (e.g. mental states) is conditioned by all preceding events. Past events may not determine, but influences what comes next. In other words, we cannot put the blame on others as we are all to be responsible for what happens, in our own way. By the same token, we do not judge others.

Prince Shotoku, who embraced Buddhism under the influence of his Great Uncle Soga, incorporated the deep insight into the true nature of the ego-self into his Seventeen-Article- Constitution, of which Article 10 reads:

Let us cease from wrath, and refrain from angry looks.  
Nor let us be resentful when others differ from us. For all  
Men have heart, and each heart has its own leanings.

This Seventeen-Article Constitution is a document that was written by Prince Shotoku in 604 of the Common Era and was not so much the basic laws of the State, like in a modern constitution, but rather, it was a highly Confucian document that focused on the kinds of morals and virtues that were to be expected of government officials and the

emperor's subjects to ensure a smooth running state. It was one of the earliest moral documents in history.

Prince Shotoku admonishes that although each person has their own view of things, people should not throw themselves into criticizing others, but cast aside any and all such feelings that they may harbor that differs from others.

It was almost 50 years ago, that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his now historic, "I Have a Dream" speech. A speech of wide consequences that although was addressed to the oppression of African Americans, can easily be adapted to the issue we face today in the matter of gender equality, here in Hawaii and the rest of the United States. He said that when the architects of our Republic wrote the words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all peoples would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Governor Abercrombie, in asking all of us to "ring a bell" this past Wednesday in remembrance of the famous speech wrote that,

"Half an ocean and a continent separate Hawaii from the National Mall in Washington D.C., but we are no less impacted by Dr. King's remarkable words that day. Here in our Aloha State, our diversity defines us and remains a source of great strength and beauty rivaling the natural wonder of these islands. However, we are reminded, even today, that prejudice and injustice persist." He said that the fulfillment of King's legacy of hope, unity and freedom depends on our choices and actions beyond the day of remembrance of Martin Luther King.

While I believe that it is the prerogative of churches who in their sincerity believe that civil unions or same gender marriages are abhorrent and against religious doctrine, I believe that in the spirit of oneness and interdependence, people should not impose beliefs that differ from others. By the same token, wouldn't it also be wrong for us as Buddhists to impose our beliefs on those that differ from us? To make our thoughts known to others is one thing, but to outwardly impose what we take as sacred to others is also wrong. And I believe we have never done that.

A good rule to follow? As Buddhism is primarily concerned about personal awakening to the spiritual truth of Wisdom and Compassion, insights do not produce automatic, black or white answers concerning ethical matters that apply to all people in all circumstances. We must remember that the teachings are not about one's adherence to a rigid set of moral rules.

The key is: 1) try to be mindful and take responsibility for one's actions, 2) try not to bring pain to others and 3) try not to be judgmental of others.

And now, here is a story I want to read to you.

A newly married couple went for a walk together in the woods one fine summer's evening after dinner. They were having such a wonderful time being together, until they heard a sound in the distance:

"Quack! Quack!"

"Listen," said the wife, "That must be a chicken."

"No, no. That was a duck," said the husband.

"No, I'm sure that was a chicken," she said.

"Impossible. Chickens go 'Cock-a-doodle-doo,' ducks go

'Quack!, Quack!'" That's a duck," he said, now feeling irritated.

“Quack! Quack!” It went again.

“See! It’s a duck,” the husband said.

“No, that’s a chicken. I’m positive,” she asserted, digging in her heels.

“Listen, you! That--- is ---a---duck. D-u-c-k, duck! Got it?” he said angrily.

“But it’s a chicken,” she protested.

“It’s a duck, you, you...

And it went, “Quack! Quack!” again before he again said something else.

The wife was almost in tears. “But it’s a chicken.”

The husband saw tears welling up in his wife’s eyes and, at last, he remembered why he had married her. His face softened and he said gently, “Sorry, darling. I think you must be right. That is a chicken.

What was the insight that the husband was awakened to? Who cares whether it is a chicken or a duck? What was much more important was their harmony together, that they could enjoy their walk on such a fine summer’s evening.

So as we recall the speech made famous 50 years ago by Dr. King in addressing the oppression of our African American brethren, so to, we in this day and age address the gender equality of all peoples of the world, and hope for harmony in our relationships with our fellow beings.

That is the Buddha’s wish for the world for an environment freeing all beings from suffering, as expressed in the Monshu’s book that it is the



Buddha's wish for all beings who is living the life of delusion, to attain enlightenment and become a Buddha. What is meant by a life of delusion? It is a life in which one without knowing what is true and real in life and lives according to their own selfish desire making faults repeatedly, to do things your own way and cause people and things to suffer.

Thank you all for listening, and have a great day!

Namo Amida Butsu