



# Buddhist Thoughts

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## Born This Way J.K. Hirano

*My mama told me when I was young  
We are all born superstars  
She rolled my hair and put my lipstick on  
In the glass of her boudoir*

*There's nothin' wrong with lovin' who you are  
She said, 'cause He made you perfect, babe  
So hold your head up girl and you'll go far  
Listen to me when I say*

*I'm beautiful in my way  
'Cause God makes no mistakes  
I'm on the right track, baby  
I was born this way*

*Don't hide yourself in regret,  
Just love yourself and you're set  
I'm on the right track, baby  
I was born this way*

*Born This Way, Lady GaGa*

There are times when I worry about the world my children will inherit. A few months ago, I was so disappointed by our country's war with Iraq and Afghanistan. I really wondered if there could be a change by voting for one president over another. I guess it was my naiveté that allowed me to think that it was a top down situation. Change will only come through the way we live our lives.

My good friend Rev. Marvin Harada had never heard of the artist Lady GaGa. He was asked by one of his Dharma School students how Buddhism and Lady GaGA could relate to one another. Rev. Marvin had no idea what a GaGa was. I felt a little more hip than Marvin; I had at least heard of her. My girls love to listen to her music. I know I should be more attentive about listening to what they are listening to, but sometimes I just don't have the time or inclination

to check on their music. However, this song “Born This Way” has a wonderful message about life. Although she references God, I don’t have a problem with her belief. The message of accepting yourself and others is so Buddhistic.

There is another popular culture phenomenon that I really enjoy; it is the television show Glee. It is one of the most encouraging shows on the air. It accepts and encourages us to live together whether we are black, white, brown, Asian, disabled, gay, straight or confused. Kacie told me that some of her friends are not allowed to watch Glee because their parents don’t like the acceptance of gay people on the show. I would question whether I want Kacie to associate with kids who are raised by such narrow-minded people. When popular culture teaches our children to be open-minded, I feel much better about the future. This is the bottom up approach. Maybe the Tea Party is just the death throes of a racist majority. We can only hope.

June is traditionally a month for weddings. So in honor of weddings, I wanted to reintroduce my thoughts on Gay Marriage.

1. *To undertake the training to avoid taking the life of beings.*
2. *To undertake the training to avoid taking things not given.*
3. *To undertake the training to avoid sensual misconduct.*
4. *To undertake the training to refrain from false speech.*
5. *To undertake the training to abstain from substances which cause intoxication and heedlessness.*

#### The Five Precepts

*The deed which causes remorse afterwards and result in weeping and tears is ill-done. The deed which causes no remorse afterwards and results in joy and happiness is well done.*

#### Dhammapada

There seems to be a great controversy about the legalization or recognition of gay marriages in this country. I have been asked by a number of people what the Buddhist viewpoint is in regards to this subject. The area that this subject would fall under is Buddhist ethics and morality. This is a very large and convoluted area of research so I would like to simplify the subject, by explaining it through my own simplistic understanding of Buddhist ethics and morality.

In Buddhism, the actions that we create are based on body, speech and thought. Each of these types of actions has consequences. If you hit someone, it may result in you getting beat up, someone else getting hurt, you being thrown in jail or out of school or possibly all three. If you say something good or bad about someone there are obvious consequences. If you hate someone, the consequences are that you will be extremely stressed and the hate will probably create problems that will eventually engulf your own life and cause you more suffering than the object of your hate. From a Buddhist ethical standpoint, when you are making a choice about the actions you commit, you should first ascertain whether that action would be harmful to oneself or to others. If you were working toward acting in a Buddhistic manner, the choice of action would be to avoid harmful actions. As the Buddha said in the Dhammapada, “The deed which causes remorse afterwards and results in weeping and tears is ill-done. The deed, which causes no remorse afterwards and results in joy and happiness is well done.” This practice results in the development of a skillful way of thinking. Sometimes we call this mindfulness.

As for moral conduct, the basics for our lay centered lifestyle would be based upon the five precepts. These five precepts are very different from the Christianity’s Ten Commandments. With the Ten Commandments, a breach of a particular commandment can result in punishment by God. In the

case of the five precepts, a breach would result in negative consequence and one should be aware of the consequence and try to avoid it in the future. As to negative consequence, this would pertain to the question of whether the result had caused harm to oneself or others. I would say that the Buddhist response to the breach of a precept would result in fewer feelings of guilt, than the Judeo Christian equivalent. Buddhism places a great emphasis on training of the mind to cultivate a calm and peaceful lifestyle and in the process, avoid the mental anguish associated with remorse, anxiety, guilt, etc. This cultivation of a peaceful lifestyle is done through trying to follow the five precepts.

The first precept is to avoid taking the life of sentient beings. This precept refers to all beings and living things and is not limited to humans. Therefore, some people have used this precept as the rationale for their choice of vegetarianism. My personal feeling in this regard is that my living results in the death of countless living beings. Whether I eat meat or vegetables, I have killed. This same question can be taken to the subject of abortion or service in the military, both of which result in death. Abortion results in the death of a fetus. In the majority of cases the military results in the death of someone. Buddhism does not make the decision for you. Yet it encourages you to be mindful of your actions and the consequences. For myself, mindfulness is in understanding the gratitude I have for life. As to food intake, I should be aware of the lives sacrificed for my living and express gratitude. In the case of abortion, I do not know what the consequences would be for the mother or father of the unborn child, so I could not make a judgment, because it is **their** personal choice. As for the military, I would hope that there is no war, but I am grateful that there are other human beings who are in the military to protect family, my country and myself.

The second precept of not taking things not given is a pretty obvious statement. Yet how often have you taken time out from your job? For instance, took a few extra minutes for your lunch hour or were late for school or work. If you are paid six dollars an hour that roughly breaks down to ten cents a minute. If you were ten minutes late, you have taken one dollar from your employer. If you make more than six dollars an hour, you do the math. This precept is not just about stealing money. It can also refer to taking credit for something you didn't do, but were rewarded for. I think that most of us have broken this precept.

The third precept of avoiding sensual misconduct is where the question of gay marriage would fall. In Buddhism, there is no basic difference between homosexuality and heterosexuality. In Pali, the actual precept says, "*Kamesu micchacara veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami.*" The literal translation of this precept is, "I take the rule of training not to go the wrong way for sexual pleasure." I don't read Pali, but this is the way I read it is to be translated. There are some who may also translate the *Kamesu* as sensual rather than sexual. This is how I prefer to accept it and in so doing, we would also have to take in the sensual aspect of food, or in the Christian vernacular, the sin of Gluttony. In doing wrong or causing harm to oneself or others, what harm is done in eating a large juicy bacon cheeseburger, along with a large order of fries and diet coke. I have cried many nights over my indulgence of a few thousand calories from a juicy bacon cheeseburger, not even thinking about the cow or pig that I ate, which shows the callus nature of our appetites as humans. Where does it end?

Living in a largely Christian society, it is so easy for some of us to act as though our own religion follows similar morals and to judge others accordingly. But as Rev. Mas Kodani said, "I hopefully live in a Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu and Buddhist Society." One of the Christian arguments against homosexuality is that it "goes against nature." There have been countless studies showing that homosexuality is natural for the homosexual individual. Homosexuality is a natural response for some human beings and animals, just as heterosexuality is for others. If we agree that sexuality is a natural part of the human psyche, we must ask what is natural about celibacy, which is encouraged by the Catholic priesthood?

Another argument is that it is written in the Bible that homosexuality is condemned. If you were to read the Bible closely it also argues that women should be socially isolated during menstruation; that working on the Sabbath in some instances should result in capital punishment, and encouraging parents to kill their children if they worship any god other than the Christian God. I believe and hope that there are

few Christians who believe in these ideas even though they are in the Bible. Yet homosexuality is condemned simply because the Bible says so.

If we were to use the Buddha's words from the Dhammapada to judge homosexuality or in this instance homosexual marriage, "The deed which causes remorse afterwards and results in weeping and tears is ill-done. The deed, which causes no remorse afterwards and results in joy and happiness is well done." What do you believe to be the result? I have only observed tears of joy from those couples that were finally recognized as a couple. Why would you deny them that because of your own personal prejudice or discrimination?

The fourth precept is to refrain from false speech. Although lying is the obvious action, gossip, rumor and other talk that leads to weeping and tears, would be a breach. Have you gossiped lately?

The fifth precept is to abstain from substances which cause intoxication and heedlessness. Although some people have used this as an argument against drinking, this precept is in a special category and is not inferring evil upon intoxicating substances. Rather, it is a warning that indulging in these substances may result in breaching the other four precepts. By indulging in substances that result in intoxication, you may no longer have the ability to follow the preceding four precepts.

As you may see, morality and ethics in Buddhism are to be judged from a different perspective than our Christian friends. For myself, I have found that I have broken each of these five precepts many times. I try not to break them, but I am weak. As Shinran says, "Immeasurable is the light of Wisdom. Of all beings with limited attributes, none is there unblest by the Light. Take refuge in true illumination." Or as Lady GaGa says, "There's nothin' wrong with lovin' who you are. She says, "cause he made you perfect babe." With my limited attributes I can only try to be mindful of my actions and to try to act without causing harm to others and myself. I really don't have time to be judging others, while trying to be mindful of my own actions. I am grateful that Amida Buddha accepts me as I am. This doesn't mean that I can or will do that for others; only that I will try. As a result, all I can do is to deeply respond with a grateful Namu Amida Butsu.

## President's Message

Dot Richeda

April 30<sup>th</sup> started out to be a very cold day with snow, however, First South was hot with Nihon Matsuri preparing to come alive. Slowly the skies cleared up and the fun began. I would like to thank Connie Imamura, Reiko Matsuura and Dean Hirabayashi- chairs from the Buddhist Temple for all their efforts in making this a successful event. It takes all of us to make this event a huge success every year. We learn and try to improve each year. Hope to see you all next year.

Please remember to pay your dues for 2011 to Maya Chow, Treasurer. It is now due.

Obon is July 9<sup>th</sup> and we are looking for volunteers. Please see Chair-David Sekino, Co-chairs-Mark Minaga, Karie Minaga-Miya, Jim Eng, Shelly Doi if you would like to help.

It will take the whole sangha, friends, family to make this a success.

Obon practice will begin on June 27, 2011.

Toban: Tomio Mitsunaga, Phil Sakashita

June:

Dean Hirabayashi\*

Rise Hirabayashi

Karen Uemura

Alan Aoki

Christine Munson

Daniel Larson

Brent Koga\*

Sherrie Koga

Christine Clifford

Sherrie Hayashi

Kristen Lorsa

Please check with Tomio or Phil on the procedure for cleaning the Temple as we have a new list.