

Were the Founding Fathers of the United States Buddhist?

J.K. Hirano

Religion. Your reason is now mature enough to examine this object. In the first place, divest yourself of all bias in favor of novelty & singularity of opinion. Indulge them in any other subject rather than that of religion. It is too important, and the consequences of error may be too serious. On the other hand, shake off all the fears & servile prejudices, under which weak minds are servilely crouched. Fix reason firmly in her seat, and call to her tribunal every fact, every opinion. Question with boldness even the existence of a God; because, if there be one, he must more approve of the homage of reason, than that of blindfolded fear. You will naturally examine first, the religion of your own country. Read the Bible, then as you would read Livy or Tacitus. The facts which are within the ordinary course of nature, you will believe on the authority of the writer, as you do those of the same kind in Livy & Tacitus. The testimony of the writer weighs in their favor, in one scale, and their not being against the laws of nature, does not weigh against them. But those facts in the Bible which contradict the laws of nature, must be examined with more care, and under a variety of faces. Here you must recur to the pretensions of the writer to inspiration from God. Examine upon what evidence his pretensions are founded, and whether that evidence is so strong, as that its falsehood would be more improbable than a change in the laws of nature, in the case he relates. For example, in the book of Joshua, we are told, the sun stood still several hours. Were we to read that fact in Livy or Tacitus, we should class it with their showers of blood, speaking of statues, beasts, &c. But it is said, that the writer of that book was inspired. Examine, therefore, candidly, what evidence there is of his having been inspired. The pretension is entitled to your inquiry, because millions believe it. On the other hand, you are astronomer enough to know how contrary it is to the law of nature that a body revolving on its axis, as the earth does, should have stopped, should not, by that sudden stoppage, have prostrated animals, trees, buildings, and should after a certain time have resumed its revolution, & that without a second general prostration. Is this arrest of the earth's motion, or the evidence which affirms it, most within the law of probabilities? You will next read the New Testament. It is the history of a personage called Jesus. Keep in your eye the opposite pretensions: 1, of those who say he was begotten by God, born of a virgin, suspended & reversed the laws of nature at will, & ascended bodily into heaven; and 2, of those who say he was a man of illegitimate birth, of a benevolent heart, enthusiastic mind, who set out without pretensions to divinity, ended in believing them, and was punished capitally for sedition, by being gibbeted, according to the Roman law, which punished the first commission of that offence by whipping, & the second by exile, or death in fureâ. See this law in the Digest Lib. 48. tit. 19. §. 28. 3. & Lipsius Lib 2. de cruce. cap. 2. These questions are examined in the books I have mentioned under the head of religion, & several others. They will assist you in your inquiries, but keep your reason firmly on the watch in reading them all.

Do not be frightened from this inquiry by any fear of its consequences. If it ends in a belief that there is no God, you will find incitements to virtue in the comfort and pleasantness you feel in its exercise, and the love of others which it will procure you. If you find reason to believe there is a God, a consciousness that you are acting under his eye, & that he approves you, will be a vast additional incitement; if that there be a future

state, the hope of a happy existence in that increases the appetite to deserve it; if that Jesus was also a God, you will be comforted by a belief of his aid and love. In fine, I repeat, you must lay aside all prejudice on both sides, and neither believe nor reject anything, because any other persons, or description of persons, have rejected or believed it. Your own reason is the only oracle given you by heaven, and you are answerable, not for the rightness, but uprightness of the decision. I forgot to observe, when speaking of the New Testament, that you should read all the histories of Christ, as well of those whom a council of ecclesiastics have decided for us, to be Pseudo-evangelists, as those they named Evangelists. Because these Pseudo-evangelists pretended to inspiration, as much as the others, and you are to judge their pretensions by your own reason, and not by the reason of those ecclesiastics. Most of these are lost. There are some, however, still extant, collected by Fabricius, which I will endeavor to get & send you.

Excerpt from Thomas Jefferson's letter to his nephew Peter Carr, 1787

I was standing with the crowd as the “Pledge of Allegiance” was recited at one of the High School volleyball games for Kacie. Carmela looked at me and said, “one nation under God?” I have never really had a problem stating that phrase. I am of the belief that under certain circumstances, as a Jodo Shinshu Buddhist, to paraphrase Rennyō, “One should keep the king’s law on your sleeve, but Buddha’s law in your heart.” My saying, “one nation under God” does not change who and what I am. It’s kind of like the questions I felt as a member of the local boy scout troop when they said, “Duty to God and my country.” The Buddhist Churches of America has had Boy Scout troops since the 1920s. Yet the Boy Scouts of America state:

Declaration of Religious Principle. The Boy Scouts of America maintains that no member can grow into the best kind of citizen without recognizing an obligation to God. In the first part of the Scout Oath or Promise the member declares, “On my honour I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country and to obey the Scout Law.” The recognition of God as the ruling and leading power in the universe and the grateful acknowledgment of his favours and blessings are necessary to the best type of citizenship and are wholesome precepts in the education of the growing members.

Duty to God. BSA Legal Issues, Boy Scouts of America

I have long believed that the Boy Scouts provided me and provide many thousands of young men wonderful experiences that can benefit their lives in many ways. As a Buddhist, since I had chosen to be a member of the boy scouts, it was my responsibility to show the Boy Scouts of America that as a Buddhist, I can be the best kind of citizen, without the belief in your God. The bottom line for the use of these terms is that they are voluntary actions on my part. I choose to be an American citizen and I chose to be a scout. There was no forced involvement on the part of the government or Boy Scouts of America in my joining either.

I know that there are those who make accusations that Christian beliefs or the act of believing in God are wrong. I am currently reading a couple of books by Richard Dawkins a celebrated atheist, where he points out the problems in a belief in God. In fact, that is where I first read about Jefferson’s letter to his nephew. However, I would rather turn to what the Buddha taught in his Kalamas Sutra.

“Now, Kalamas, don’t go by reports, by legends, by traditions, by scripture, by logical conjecture, by inference, by analogies, by agreement through pondering views, by probability, or by the thought, ‘This contemplative is our teacher.’ When you know for yourselves that, ‘These qualities are skillful; these qualities are blameless; these qualities are praised by the wise; these qualities, when adopted and carried out, lead to welfare & happiness’-then you should enter and remain in them.

If Thomas Jefferson had the means to read the Kalama Sutra, he might have quoted it to his nephew.

One of the most important teachings in Buddhism is that all things are constantly changing. There is a section in the book, The God Delusion by Richard Dawkins where in talking about the journalist Robert Sherman’s report of a meeting with George Bush Sr. he writes, “when Sherman asked him whether he recognized the equal citizenship and patriotism of Americans who are atheists: ‘No, I don’t know that atheists should be considered as citizens, nor should they be considered patriots. This is one nation under God.’” I’m curious if our former president had ever read Thomas Jefferson. However, we have now rid our county for the present moment of the Bushes and have elected President Barack Obama.

I personally believe that in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance or the Scout Oath, I was not betraying my Buddhist beliefs. For the most part, this country I was born in and am a citizen of, and the scout troop I was a member of did not and does not try to purposefully inflict harm on others without justification. I do believe that the beliefs of our founding fathers such as Jefferson, Franklin, Madison, who are often referred to as Deists, if alive would currently be considered Buddhist. Namu Amida Butsu

BWA Report

Gail Minaga & Karie Minaga-Miya

July: Busy summer activities involving cooking, prepping, selling and dance practice took up most of June & July in the BWA and Buddhist Temple preparations for **Obon**. The BWA Food Committee lead by Reiko Matsuura and Reiko Watanabe working side by side with Junko Mitsunaga and Setsuko Nagata helped with another successful year with Obon celebrations. When the rainstorm chased everyone indoors, our food sales increased leading to sold out food items by 6:30 in the evening. That helped BWA members who typically are not able to participate in Obon Odori to dance this year! A huge appreciation goes out to everyone who came out during the week to help Junko and Setsuko prepare the sushi ingredients and somen toppings. In addition, the Friday preparation could not have been successful without the numbers who turned out to help (both in the kitchen and to set up the booths and clean up the patio. Domo Arigato to everyone.

August: Thank you goes out to Jane Sakashita for arranging a bus trip out for BWA members and their families to help the **Las Vegas Obon** celebrations be a success. This bus trip is very popular, so filling it with BWA members first was a great idea.

Following the Las Vegas Obon trip, we all came home and prepared for the **BWA Steak Fry** at Sugarhouse Park. Thanks to Judy Watanabe and Holly Black for organizing this popular summer activity. We appreciate Brenda Koga for reserving our site at Sugarhouse Park early in the year. We had about 70 participants and very delicious dishes that BWA members brought to share as we enjoyed the steaks. Thanks goes out to our grillers, Henry Kuramoto, Troy & Bryon Watanabe, Paul Terashima & Dave Black (plus others) for helping again this year!!! We couldn't do it without your support & help.

September: Dharma School starts with a picnic at Sensei & Carmela's home. It was a success in spite of the rain. BWA meeting helped plan for the upcoming activities in October/November. The theme of the **Fall Naikon Workshop** held on September 21st, focused on "Abundance". We appreciate the lessons shared by Dr. Carmela and the organization and nourishments prepared by Dot Richeda and Sherry Koga. With the beginning of Fall, we appreciated our sermon from Sensei reminding /us of "**balance**". The dictionary defines it many ways, but in essence it is a state of equilibrium or equipoise. As we head into a very busy fall/winter season, it is always good to be reminded of balance. The BWA members are often pulled in many different ways; not only at the Temple but at home and work as well. Knowing that, we are very grateful for our members who come and give so generously of their time and talents in so many ways. There is a time for everything, and if you find a pull to one demand over another, we understand and will be here when you can return. I know I have been pulled away from BWA and the Temple at times, but I am always welcomed back when the time comes to return.

Upcoming events:

- October 4th- 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. **Bazaar prep** (cooking and cleaning) at SLBT
- October 5th- 7 a.m. sushi rolling – 1:00 – 8:00 **Food Bazaar**
- October 12th FBWA delegates meeting – West LA Buddhist Temple. Registration due 9/1/13.
- **SAVE THE DATE** FBWA Conference – October 10th & 11th 2014 – Irvine California – BWA Bus???
- October 19th, 2013 – **Eshinniko Seminar** – Rev. Yukiko Motoyoshi
- October 20th, 2013 – **Eshinniko Service** – Induction of New BWA Members & Luncheon
- November 1-3, 2013 **Mountain States Conference** – **Host Temple** – **SLBT**.
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Dharma School Welcomes You Back!!

Judy Watanabe, Superintendent

Welcome back to Dharma School! I am grateful to serve as Superintendent again this year. My hope this year is to have a fun year! I love coming back to Dharma School and seeing all our friends again. The friendships we make here are one's that last a lifetime. Many of my husband's friends are ones he made in Dharma School when he was little. How lucky we are to have church to come to and have friends from different schools and

neighborhoods and share our cultural and religious experiences.

Our **Officers** this year are: Judy Watanabe – Superintendent; Sherrie Hayashi and Stephanie Sueoka - Co-Assistant Superintendents; Faye Eng – Secretary; Robert Tokita – Treasurer. We are lucky to have great **teachers**: Li Ying will teach the Pre-K and Kindergarten class; LaVerne Kyed will teach the 1st and 2nd grade class, Gail Minaga and Faye Eng will teach the 3rd and 4th grade class; Judy Watanabe will teach the 5th -6th grade class; and Troy Watanabe will teach Jr. and Senior YBA classes. We love having the kids in our classes, it makes Church so much fun. We also have a great Dharma School Board who is working hard to make fun activities. The **Board** members are: Ashley Holbrook, Rise Hirabayashi, Tracy Akimoto-Roberson, Gail Minaga, Holly Black, Faye Eng, LaVerne Kyed, Mary Misaka, Sherrie Hayashi, and Stephanie Sueoka. We have an opening for a teacher for the 5th-6th grade class, if anyone is interested, please let me know.

Thank you to all of you who came to the Dharma School picnic. I would like to thank Rev. Jerry Hirano and Dr. Carmela's for their kind hospitality and hosting us in their home. We played games and had good food, all seemed to have a good time.

Our next activity will be our Halloween Party on Oct. 27. This is a favorite activity because we get to see all the kids in their cute costumes, as well as some brave adults who dress up. The costume parade will begin after lunch and then we will play games with the kids. We will have our traditional chili and hotdogs for lunch. We are asking people to bring salads or side dishes to help with the lunch. Everyone is invited; I hope to see you there.

Thank you to all the parents who support the Dharma School. Registration for the kids to attend Dharma School is \$10.00. The registration form is included in this newsletter. Please return your form and fee to Judy Watanabe. This money allows us to provide the activities for the kids and helps with supplies for the teachers. Again, thank you for your support.

I hope you will join us, see your friends, and have a fun year at Dharma School!

Mt. States District Conference

November 2-3

Speaker Rev. Kodo Umezu (Bishop of the Buddhist Churches of America)

Registration is free

9:00 Registration

10:00 Opening Service

11:00 District Business Meeting

12:00 Lunch

1:00 Workshop (How is Buddhism Relevant in your life?)

3:00 Workshop (Buddhism and Psychology)

6:00 Dinner and activity

Sunday

10:00 Closing service (Bishop Kodo Umezu)

Salt Lake Buddhist Temple Dharma School Student Registration 2013-14 Year

Father's Name _____

Mother's Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone _____ E-mail _____

Children

(1) Name _____

Birth date _____ Grade _____ Age _____

(2) Name _____

Birth date _____ Grade _____ Age _____

(3) Name _____

Birth date _____ Grade _____ Age _____

(4) Name _____

Birth date _____ Grade _____ Age _____

(5) Name _____

Birth date _____ Grade _____ Age _____

\$10.00 donation per child for registration. Please return form to Judy Watanabe
Your cooperation is greatly appreciated

October Shotsuki Hoyo

Service will be October 27

Deceased	Date of death	Next of kin
Akita Sakae	10/25/36	Janet Thomas
Iwasaki Ritsuko	10/25/61	Dean Iwasaki
Kano Gunpei	10/13/65	Marilynn Shimada
Masuko Kyushiro	10/25	Robert Kasubuchi
Mitsunaga Ruth	10/30/95	Faye Mitsunaga-Eng
Muto Chiyo	10/15/83	
Ninomiya Katsuji	10/20/42	Yoshiko Ninomiya
Nishihara Alice	10/20/90	Greg Matsuura
Oda Mitsuji	10/9/31	Mumatsu Sasaki
Ogawa Fusaye	10/19/31	Bob Sugino
Ogawa Kuma	10/6/19	Bob Sugino
Oike Katsuye	10/14/74	May Koike
Saito Shizuno	10/26/21	Yoshiko Ninomiya
Sasaki Sukeichiro	10/19/68	Charlie Sasaki
Shiba Yoshiro	10/19/52	Yuri Uyeda
Sugiyama Unosuki	10/27/84	
Tadehara Masami	10/9/87	Tadehara Family
Tohinaka George	10/28/95	Ayako Tohinaka
Tokunaga Shigao	10/27/90	Tokunaga Family
Tsuyuki Ikuzo	10/3	Mark Tsuyuki
Wakayama Gerry	10/7/94	Wakayama Family
Yamamoto James	10/25/71	Eleanor Nakamura
Tamagawa Frank	10/18/95	Fred Tamagawa
Hisae Tsutsui	10/15/01	Geraldine Chappel
Frank Ling	10/02/02	Elaine Fukushima
Betty Yamaguchi	10/8/04	Jeannie Yamaguchi
John Imada	10/24/05	Imada Family
Otome Hasegawa	10/11/10	Roxanne Hasegawa
Takashi Nagasawa	10/21/11	Yaeko Nagata
Masako Morinaka	10/22/2012	Glen Morinaka