



Buddhist Thoughts

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Children and Racism J.K. Hirano

*When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.
Corinthians 13:11*

I know that this past election has created so much turmoil and suffering within our society. However, my reason for worrying about our President elect is the discriminatory things his transition team are continuing to say which divides our country. I do believe that we should give our President elect a chance. However, for many of us there is a very real fear associated with racial and political discrimination. Especially a government that acts against it's own citizens with bigoted views.

I had written this story a while ago, but this election, reminded me about the very real fear and anger I often felt growing up. And I would like to share this story with all of you. For anger and fear are emotions that do not only affect those that the anger and fear are directed at, it is even worse for those that hold the anger and fear within themselves.

I was always a bit of a cry baby, but I learned how to fight from a pretty young age. My parents would remind me how I embarrassed them when I was kicked out of kindergarten for fighting, I don't remember that very well. However, I vaguely remember not really wanting to share the classroom toys with this kid named Byron. He was the only other non white kid in my class and his Mom was my doctor.

In my neighborhood, which was definitely working class at best, my family was definitely not rich, but I had more "things" than most of the neighborhood kids. My Dad was a sign painter and my Mom a housewife. However, Byron's Mom was the doctor for most of the Japanese American community in Salt Lake City. Dr. Toshiko Toyota was an amazing woman. She grew up in a small mining town in the desert of Nevada a couple of hundred miles from Salt Lake City. There were many small communities of Japanese in Nevada and Wyoming, where Issei (first generation) came from Japan, found work, married a picture bride and had kids. I had heard she was an extremely bright girl, the ideal Nisei child, quiet and good in school. She ended up one of the first Japanese American women surgeons in the United States. However, because of the racist atmosphere, she worked as a family doctor in Salt Lake City, Utah. As far

as I knew, she delivered every Sansei (third generation) Japanese American in the Salt Lake Valley. In our current society, Dr. Toyota would be living the high life with her kids probably going to private schools. However, in the early sixties, only a very few Japanese had the wherewithal to move to the East side, most were living on the West side of town, no matter what their profession. However, Byron was the most spoiled kid in the neighborhood, with every toy you could imagine. He had a toy room, that looked more like the toy department at the Grand Central stores, the Target of my day and age. We knew each other and our parents were acquaintances, I don't think there were any Japanese families that didn't know one another in the Salt Lake City of the 50s or 60s. Byron would end up being one of my rivals throughout, elementary, Jr. High and High School.

Although getting kicked out of elementary is a vague memory, I do remember getting kicked out of Jr. High School. This ninth grader named Robert kept calling me "Jap", this was in my math class. I asked him to stop, but he just wouldn't listen. He was about 5 or 6 inches taller than I was and a year older. You know how some kids look like adults when they are only 12 or 13. This was Robert, big with a slight beard, and really dumb, he should have probably been in special ed. He was definitely not going to college. More likely a menial government job, working with his hands. We had assigned seats back then and Robert had the seat behind mine. He would tap on my seat during class, whispering how we Japs lost the war and I should go back to China. This was during the teacher's lecture, so I didn't point out to the genius Robert that if I was a Jap, shouldn't you tell me to go back to Japan rather than China? Like I said, Robert was special education material. Looking back, I should have explained to him, that I was a third generation Japanese American with roots here in Utah, since the early 1900s, to my grandfather, Hirokichi "Teddy Bear" Kawaguchi. He was a track foreman at the Bingham copper mine. He got the nickname because he was a bad ass. However, he was kind to the younger workers and quite gentle to most people, but someone you didn't want to get him mad. Thus, the nickname "Teddy." However, at the time I just said, "Knock it off, Robert." This went on for about a month.

On the morning I was kicked out of school, I told my Dad about the situation. I explained there was this "Hakujin" (White) kid that wouldn't stop calling me Jap and I tried to get him to stop but he wouldn't listen. He said, "Don't get hurt, I'm glad you asked him to stop, but do what you have to do." I said, "I know Dad, but I think I can take him, thanks."

I got to school a little early, Mr. Stuckenschneider's class was close to the stairs and most of the kids sat on the stairs waiting for first period to begin. I saw Robert sitting at the bottom of the steps, I walked to the step above him and put my foot on his shoulder and said, "Robert, you going to stop calling me Jap? I'm giving you one more chance." He didn't say anything, but I could tell by his body movement against my foot that he heard me. Suddenly he jumped up and mumbled something I couldn't understand. I just reacted to his jumping up and slapped him across the face and shouted, "Are you going to stop calling me Jap!?" as I moved off the steps to face him on level ground. My adrenaline was starting to flow. Robert just got this crazy look on his face, jumped off the steps and ran towards me swinging.

Things seemed to slow down a bit when my adrenaline goes up and I thought of my Judo instructor, Mr. Nobuzo Endo's constant repetitions of the "Ippon seoi nage" (one of the nineteen traditional throws in Judo). Endo Sensei would explain how we should use the opponents weight to our advantage. As Robert came swinging his fists and making this weird high pitched kind of noise from deep in his throat, I grabbed his arm, turned and pivoted down, as I felt his body weight on my back, I quickly stood up while pulling down on his arm. I could feel him lifting

off the ground, however, unlike Judo practice, I didn't keep holding on to his arm so he wouldn't hit the ground too hard. As I felt him lift off, I let his arm go. It worked beautifully and Robert went flying through the air, straight onto his back. I saw a stunned look on his face, while at the same time, I could hear Mr. Black the vice principal shouting something at the other end of the hall, the kids were chanting, "Fight, Fight, Fight!" As I said, my adrenaline was flowing and I saw Robert look like he was going to get up. I didn't like fighting and just wanted it to stop, especially with Mr. Black barreling down the hall. With Robert still on his back, it was a split second, but I noticed his right arm sprawled out on the floor. I jumped towards him and stomped on his arm with the heel of my foot. As I put my full weight on my foot, I could feel a little cracking from Robert's arm. I knew he wasn't going to jump up again. I tried to move into the crowd of kids. Robert was whimpering on the ground holding onto his arm. I heard Mr. Black, the Vice Principal ask, "Who else was fighting?" Someone pointed me out, as I stood towards the back of the crowd. Mr. Black glared at me and asked, "Did you do this to him?" Pointing to Robert, groveling on the floor. I was always an honest kid, part of my up bringing and said, "Yes, but he started it", as the tears of relief filled my eyes. I don't know why, but everytime I got in a fight, tears would come to my eyes. Mr. Black grabbed me by the back of my shirt and pushed me towards the office.

Looking back close to fifty years. I really can't blame society or other kids from picking on me. I was a fat, Japanese American, Buddhist kid, living in a lower middle class neighborhood, in Salt Lake City, Utah, less then twenty years after the end of World War II. It could be a recipe for what makes for difficult childhoods. However, now that I am older, I can see the problems that the fear has caused within my own life and I can also see the great love and compassion that has always surrounded my life, even in times of difficulty. This is why I believe my childhood was wonderful.

The passage I began this article with is from the Bible and I have always enjoyed this particular section called Corinthians. In this passage, Paul is explaining to the people of Corith that when he was a child, he saw the world in very black and white ways. It was a World of only right or wrong. As he became a man, he realized that there is a much broader way to view the world. All the rules and commandments do not mean a thing, if they are not based in love. For myself, there was fear and anger because of the societal discrimination that was quite prevalent at the time. However, the love and compassion that surrounds me, was a much greater force in my life. I hope our government realizes that if we do not govern within the basic rights our country was founded upon, freedom or religion, non-discrimination because of race, color, creed or sexual orientation, our society will not survive and thrive as it has. It is the responsibility of all of us adults to teach our children the importance of these freedoms that has made America great. It is important that we give the new President elect a chance, but just as important that we speak up when we witness the closing of our rights as Americans and to speak up for those that may be afraid.

During this holiday season, on behalf of Carmela, Kacie, Taylor and myself, I would like to thank all of you for being a part of this great love and compassion in our lives. No matter what the government does or becomes, with all of us, living a life of Namu Amida Butsu, we will be fine. We wish all of you a wonderful new year, how can it not be wonderful being embraced in Amida's compassion. Let us each be inspired for the coming days to try to live a life of gratitude inspired by these words written over 1000 years ago, by Shotoku Taishi the founder of Japanese Buddhism, that is so relevant for today.

Let us cease from wrath and refrain from angry looks. Nor let us be resentful when others differ from us. For all people have hearts and each heart has its own leanings. Their right is our wrong, and our right is their wrong. We are not unquestionably sages, nor are they unquestionably fools. Both of us are simply ordinary people. How can any person lay down a rule by which to distinguish right from wrong? For we are all, one with another, wise and foolish, like a ring which has no end.

Shotoku Taishi, Article 10 from the seventeen article constitution

Bodhi Day/Shotsuki Hoyo December 13, 10:00 am

Deceased	Date of death	Next of kin
Aramaki Yasu	12/8/86	Hiroshi Aramaki
Hideshima Hideji	12/28/90	Tad Hideshima
Hirano Kiyoshi	12/18/73	Jerry Hirano
Ikari Hideyoshi	12/31	Sachiko Tohinaka
Ikegami Akitaro	12/2/60	Ikegami Family
Iwasaki Bunjiro	12/11/65	Paul Iwasaki
Katsuki Yoshio	12/9/87	
Kawaguchi Sato	12/1/83	Bill Kawaguchi
Kida Kiyoji	12/9/65	Jeff Kida
Komatsu Fumie	12/30/88	Judy Komatsu
Matsuno Albert	12/21/93	Matsuno Family
Mitsunaga Kiyoshi	12/16/94	Helen Mitsunaga
Mori Michiko	12/3/87	Asako Mori
Nodzu Kentaro	12/22/70	Ken Nodzu
Okubo Riyo	12/24/83	Harry Okubo
Omura Roy	12/22/87	Terry Omura
Osako Sadao	12/16/88	Yaeko Osako
Sasaki Omatsu	12/15/92	Shigeru Sasaki
Shimamura Michiko	12/14/94	Geraldine Chappell
Suyehiro Fusa	12/6/46	Greg Matsuura
Sueoka Joanne	12/1/83	Dru Sueoka
Sueoka Lillian	12/17/88	Dru Sueoka
Usui Yoshio	12/1/83	Beth Usui
Yakumo Chijun	12/13/91	Kazuko Yakumo
Yakumo Aya	12/1/82	Kazuko Yakumo
Frank Nishimura	12/31/2000	Setsuko Nishimura
Hamamoto Kiyoko	12/20/01	Aiko Okada
Shigemi Mori	12/5/08	Asako Mori
Kenny Mitsunaga	12/17/08	Tomio Mitsunaga
Henry Kawa	12/23/08	Bob Kawa

Mary Nakai	12/31/09
Akiko Takenaka	12/31/09
Mary Sasaki	12/17/11
Ayako Tohinaka	12/21/11
Hideo Morinaka	12/29/12
Yuriko Iwamoto	12/12/13

Marianne Nakai
Gary Takenaka
Sasaki Family
Ray Tohinaka
Glen Morinaka
Iwamoto Family