



# Buddhist Thoughts

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Rev. Hirano's contact numbers: Office: 363-4742,  
home: 299-8727, emergency 718-5755

## Thanksgiving Potpourri

J.K. Hirano

You, as you are, you are just right  
Your face, body, name, surname,  
For you, they are just right.

Whether poor or rich  
Your parents, your children  
your daughter-in law, your grandchildren  
They are, all for you, just right.

Happiness, unhappiness, joy and even sorrow  
For you, they are just right.

The life that you have tread, walked,  
is neither good nor bad  
For you, it is just right.

Whether you go to hell or to the Pure Land  
Wherever you go is just right.

Nothing to boast about, nothing to feel bad about,  
Nothing above, nothing below.

Even the day and month that you die,  
Even they are just right.

Life in which you walk together with Amida  
There's no way that it can't be just right.

When you receive your life as just right  
Then a deep and profound faith begins to open up.

Just Right

Goromatsu Mayekawa, translated by Rev. Taitetsu Unno

This poem translated by Rev. Taitetsu Unno is a favorite poem of mine. It's interesting how time quickly passes, I used it the other day in a Dharma Talk and a number of people came up to me and told me how much they liked that poem. I used to use it a lot in the past, but I didn't want to overuse it and here it is that people are hearing it again, as if for the first time. I don't know anything about the author of the poem, other than his name and that he was a devoted lay Shin Buddhist. And a number of people wanted copies so I thought I would use it to begin my article.

My latest obsession is jazz. I haven't really listened to jazz since I was in High School and the first few years of college. One of my favorite musicians is a trumpet player by the name of Chet Baker. I could listen to him for hours. He made beautiful music, but had a very difficult life. He died at the age of 58. Many people believe he died from his drug addiction. He fell out of a hotel window and was found in the street. Heroin was found in his body and hotel room. Other favorite and famous musicians such as Charlie Parker, John Coltrane and Miles Davis, also suffered from serious drug addictions. It's somewhat ironic that a number of my favorite musicians and authors have committed suicide. My favorite Japanese author is Yasunari Kawabata, Nobel prize winner. One of my favorite American authors is Ernest Hemingway.

Both of these men died by their own hand.

The other day Ruth Kawashima lent me a cd to listen to called "Paramita". In parenthesis it said, "American Buddhist folk music." She said it was one of the funniest cds she had ever heard. It wasn't meant to be a funny cd, but after listening to it, I had to agree. I could only listen to it for a short time, switching from song to song. It was folk music with guitars and fiddle as the instruments. The instrumentals weren't bad, but some of the lyrics to the music was terrible. There was a song called "Yashodara" about Shakyamuni Buddha's wife and how he left her. Another one called "American Beef Cow", was about vegetarianism. The inside flap of the cd cover was a picture of musicians in their monk's robes. It was as if the music were a hammer trying to pound Buddhist concepts into my head. Kind of like Big Bird on Sesame Street teaching the ABCs. I get the concept, but I wouldn't listen for the musicality.

In many ways Buddhism has become a marketing tool. I see advertisements or the cover page for books, where the author puts "Buddhist monk", as a qualifier or endorsement of sorts. Monks become monks as a way to leave the everyday world of the householder and they shave their heads as a sign of humility. In many instances in the west, it seems as though shaving one's head and donning robes is a status

symbol. You don't become a monk to boost your status as a human being.

This week I have been asked to speak at the Alberta Buddhist Conference in Calgary. The theme is "Everyday Buddhism." I believe that Buddhism can only be found in our everyday experiences. The study of Buddhism is a whole different thing than being a Buddhist. Buddhism is about living our lives in an authentic way. Moving away from the pretenses and ego accouterments.

As I listen to Chet Baker's version of "Tenderly" or "Autumn in New York" I can feel his humanity and emotions. I can share what he is feeling. The same with other great musicians, you can feel what they are feeling through their music. It can help you better understand who and what you are. It doesn't have to be labeled, "Buddhist Music". Listening to these musicians is part of my everyday Buddhism. It is important that each of us know ourselves better, to understand who and what we are as human beings. Listening to this jazz does this for me. Listening to a music labeling itself Buddhist music, does not necessarily make it Buddhist.

This month we celebrate Thanksgiving. Although it is a very American Holiday initiated by Christians, it is a good opportunity for we Jodo Shinshu Buddhists. What could be more Jodo Shinshu of a name than Thanksgiving. Which brings me to the main focus of this article. Thanksgiving at my house is one of my favorite

holidays. As I have mentioned in the past, we even celebrated Thanksgiving in Japan when I was a student there. I love the mixture of foods our family has at Thanksgiving dinner. We always have the traditional Turkey, but I put tamales in the stuffing. Along with mashed potatoes, we have white rice, gravy and shoyu. Last year we had empanadas added to the mix. We usually also have a couple of kinds of sushi. Carmela has added Filipino dishes, such as adobo or deep fried and sugared bananas. It is American, Mexican, Japanese, Filipino and whatever else can be thrown in. That is why I love this holiday and so deeply grateful for the family and friends I share it with.

If you are still reading this article, by now you are probably wondering, "What the hell is Sensei rambling on about!" Well here it is, the poem, "Just Right", Jazz, Chet Baker, John Cotrane, drug addiction, suicide, buddhist folk music, vegetarianism, beef cows, monks, their bald heads and robes, Yasunari Kawabata, Ernest Hemingway, turkey stuffing with tamales and adobo. This potpourri of ideas running through my head, is much like my favorite Thanksgiving dinner, it is all about gratitude and finding Buddhism in our everyday lives.

The musicians like Chet Baker and authors like Ernest Hemingway, were able to touch into the deepest realities of our human existence. At times, this life can be difficult, life is not

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always happy. Yet, it always has deep meaning when we can see it with the proper perspective. These artists were able to touch into their humanity without being able to find this perspective. This perspective is the last line of the poem. "When you receive your life as just right, then a deep and profound faith begins to open up." When we realize the infinite causes and conditions that have all worked for the benefit of our existence, it is neither good or bad, it just is. Our response can only be to truly live a life of deep humility and gratitude. Cheers! Happy Thanksgiving, Namo Amida Butsu, Itadakimasu.

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