

(1)

LIBERATION VIA 'THE LAW' of COURAGE

I belong to SGI-USA, a Nichiren Buddhist organization that consist of different districts around the world. The following is a revision of an essay I wrote for my North Bay district(San Francisco) on a passage from 'The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin' entitled: 'The Heritage of The Ultimate Law of Life.'[fn 1]

"For one who summon up one's faith [fn 2] & chants Nam-myoho-renge-kyo [fn 3] with the profound insight that now is the last moment of one's life, the sutra [fn 4] proclaims: 'When the lives of these persons come to an end, they will be received into the hands of a thousands Buddhas, who will free them from all fear & keep them from falling into the evil paths of existence.'" (WND, 216)

This excerpt can be very useful in preventing the youth, especially those in the inner-cities, from becoming part of what David Simon appropriately labelled 'The Throwaway Population.' [fn 5] A key element in this teaching is the awareness 'that now is the last moment of one's life.' Growing up in these inner-city 'war zones' you are constantly aware that your last moment can be caused instantly by gangs, someone in a bad mood, or of course, the police (ex. Shawn Bell, NY; Annette Garcia, Riverside; Oscar Grant, Oakland; et al). Under these circumstances one becomes programmed to always be attuned to one's impending 'last moment.' Also, adding fuel to this fire is the constant bombardment in the media of the 'fact' that a high percentage of youth are destined for an early death, or prison, which is actually an equivalent to being on life-support: half-way between life & death. All of the preceding has a devastating affect on an adult mind, & amplified that much more on one that is still being formed.

When a young person without the proper foundation is faced with these outside influences, most of their actions are due to the fear of death:

"The most dreadful things in the world are the pain of fire, the flashing of swords, & the shadow of death. Even horses & cattle fear being killed, no wonder human beings are afraid of death. Even a leper clings to life; how much more so a healthy person"

- Nichiren Daishonin [fn 6]

Therefore, instinctively they will most likely gravitate towards self-preservation tactics. One doesn't plan for a faraway future when controlled by this fear, but for what can benefit them 'at this moment' ("lack of respect for authority/laughing hard/happy to be escaping poverty/ however brief." - Jay-Z's 'Can I Live' f/Reasonable Doubt). Herein lies the trap, for often this route only increases one's odds of falling victim to the media's premonition, & landing into the hands of those who prey upon 'The Throwaway Population.' [fn 5] No coincidence that the Drug Game is known as 'The Trap.' [fn 7]

There's now a documentary about Mike Tyson in which he describes how he would transfer his fear before fights onto opponents. [fn 8] This is very similar to the Buddhist philosophy of not only confronting fears, but using them to one's advantage (turning poison into medicine). In the history of Nichiren Buddhism we have many examples of those who have applied this method successfully: Shijo Kingo & Daisaku Ikeda are two of them.

Shijo Kingo was a samurai, in the thirteenth century, that lived under similar life or death circumstances as those in the inner-cities today. Everyday for him also 'was a do-or-die struggle permitting no lapse in judgement or effort.' [fn 9] When the authorities attempted to execute Nichiren Daishonin for not conforming to their religious views, Shijo accompanied him. Shijo's warrior's courage along with his buddhist philosophy allowed him to overcome any fear of death & stand along side his mentor in the face of danger. As a result, the execution failed, & seven centuries later he is still an inspiration in courage.

SGI President Ikeda used his fear to enlighten as many people throughout the world to their 'true potential': "I strove all out year after year, fully prepared to die before I reached the age of 30. I made each year the equivalent of 50 or 100 years." [fn 10] Ikeda's method of cramming as many years possible into one is not unlike that of others who anticipate a short life span (ex. Tupac's extensive postumous music catalog).

President Ikeda, now 81, has inspired millions over the years, including Nelson Mandela while he was unjustly incarcerated. Mandela, once released, showed a great sign of appreciation by making a trip to Japan to visit Ikeda. Presently Ikeda's efforts for peace are being recognized with the distinguished honor of being placed alongside those of Mahatma Gandhi & Martin Luther King Jr. in an international exhibit. [fn 11]

The following is a brief analysis on 2 of the sources that can demoralize the youth, along with examples of how 'The Heritage of The Ultimate Law of Life' can defeat these sources:

SOURCE 1: Lack of Self-Respect & Worth

Cause: (1) Inaccurate & subpar teachings within the schools, communities, & homes that fail to allow for the development of confidence.
(2) Implantation of the inferiority complex by way of the school, media, judicial, & political entities; also subconsciously via family & friends (remnants of Willie Lynch tactics).

Side-effect: Disregard of life (self & others)

Defeat: The awareness that one is equal to The Buddha & 'The Ultimate Law' of Life & the Universe [fn 2] alone brings about a new perception of self-worth, & changes behavior.

SOURCE 2: Fear & Hopelessness

Cause: Fear - Mostly derived from the lack of wisdom on how to correctly cope with a violent & impoverished environments. (Plus other difficult obstacles)

Hopelessness - The aftermath of fear plus Source #1. When all the above come together this usually leads to

very irrational & destructive behavior that keeps one an inhabitant of 'The Throwaway Population.'

Defeat: Fear & hopelessness will be conquered with the realization that with courageous action a person not only affect the direction of his/her life, but also the direction of their family, environment, & community positively. This occurs when the actions are based on the right view of self (& others), done in the spirit of 'now is the last moment of one's life' (ie taking humanistic action with faith in one's true potential without procrastinating will result in great benefits). "Sometimes even just a subtle shift in a person's attitude or resolve can completely transform them. The human heart is a wondrous thing." [fn 12]

REFLECTION

EPILOGUE

There's a relevant article in the March 10, 2009 USA Today that explored the affect an awareness of the 'last moment' can positively have on success. Out of 250 CEOs surveyed with revenue of \$50 million or more: "22% said they have had an experience when they believed they would die &, of those, 61% said it changed their long-term perspective on life & career. 41% said it made them more compassionate leaders; 16% said it made them more ambitious; 14% said it made them less ambitious." [fn 13]

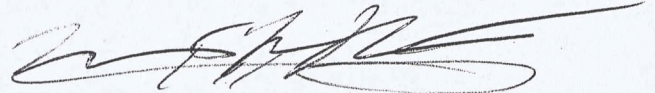
This article ended with a very profound quote from Apple CEO Steve Jobs, a pancreatic cancer survivor: "Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't let the noise of others drown out your own inner voice. And most important have the courage to follow your heart & intuition." [fn 14]

The gist of it is once there's faith in oneself you can block out the noise of others (media & the inferiority complex), & allow your inner

(5)

voice (true potential) guide you towards courageous actions that will make the impossible possible. (ex. Barack Obama) Just as the passage states, it 'will free them from all fear & keep them from falling into the evil paths of existence.' After all before reaching the tip of any mountain one must first overcome the fear of climbing it!

Recommendation: For proof of the inner-cities' necessity, & capability, to inherit this philosophy view the new documentary, 'Crips & Bloods: Made in America,' by Cash Warren & Baron Davis, narrated by Oscar winner Forrest Whitaker.



Maurice L. Harris

San Quentin, CA

5/25/09

Footnotes

- 1) Nichiren Daishonin (1222-1282): The founder of the Buddhism upon which the SGI bases its activities for peace & happiness in the world. 'The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin' is a collection of 172 of Nichiren's honorable writings, 'The Heritage of The Ultimate Law of Life' can be found at pages 216-218 therein.
- 2) Faith in the fact that there is no distinction between Shakyamuni Buddha (The original Buddha), The Lotus Sutra (Shakyamuni's scripture, in which Nichiren based his teachings on, that declares that all people can attain Buddhahood in their present lifetime), '& we ordinary human beings' (WND, 216).

- 3) Nam-myoho-renge-kyo: The fundamental law of Life & the Universe; expresses the true aspect of life. Myoho-renge-kyo is the Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese translation of the title 'Lotus Sutra'.
- 4) Lotus Sutra
- 5) David Simon: Baltimore journalist & creator of the cable series, 'The Wire'. Throwaway Population: Segment of the population that the government & the powerfully elite does not care about, except as commodities for their Prison Industrial Complexes, low-paying jobs, & political aspirations (Tough on crime, welfare, immigration, & other issues they can exploit for political gain). See, 'City of Quartz', by Mike Davis; 'Behold A Pale Horse', by William Cooper; & Gary Webb's 'Dark Alliance' on the CIAs involvement in smuggling cocaine into the streets of L.A. to help fund the Contras.
- 6) Excerpt from SGI President Daisaku Ikeda's lecture on 'The Heritage of The Ultimate Law of Life'. (quoting WND,301)
- 7) Also, see the BBC documentary 'The Trap' by Adam Curtis, esp. his analysis on 'The Game Theory', which is a study on how to possibly control people through their fears & self-serving interests; theory behind the nuclear arms race (they won't bomb us for fear of being bombed themselves). Again no coincidence that fruitful street hustles are known as 'The Game'.
- 8) "Tyson", by James Toback
- 9) March 13, 2009, World Tribune Special, B

(7)

- 10) March 13, 2009, World Tribune, p. 5. Ikeda was diagnosed with chronic lung condition, & told would not live to see 30. (May 15, 2009, W.T., p.4
- 11) "Gandhi, King, Ikeda: A Legacy of Building Peace" exhibition, created by Dr. Lawrence E. Carter, dean of The Martin Luther King Jr. International Chapel at Morehouse College in Atlanta, honors the three peace pioneers for inspiring ordinary citizens to foster peace through nonviolent means in their daily lives.
- 12) Ikeda, from April 3, 2009, World Tribune, p.4
- 13) "How cheating death can change your life" - March 10, 2009, USA Today, 1-2B.
- 14) Quoting Steve Jobs' 2005 commencement speech at Stanford College.