

I CANNOT PUSH TIME AROUND

By Kosuke Koyama in “Three Mile an Hour God”

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.

Matthew 6.33

I see a towering pine tree in the park on my way to the university. “Good morning... if you were in the compound of a Shinto temple no doubt you would be worshipped as a sacred tree. But ... in New Zealand people do not do that kind of interesting thing!”

I have a special feeling about the pine tree. What is it that moves mysteriously within my soul when I see this tree? What is it that my inner ear hears when the wind rumbles through the branches? What do these pine cones speak to me when I pick them up? Why is it that I feel I want to touch the pine tree? Am I trying to receive its “supernatural power” (*mana*)? Do I have this strange sensation about the pine tree because I am Japanese? One spot of the trunk I touch every morning as I pass. There are commuters in Tokyo who do this. On the way to the railway stations, they touch... it may be a roadside postbox, a telephone pole, the edge of a table of a vegetable stall. If they fail to do so they do not feel well that day. I touch this morning the same spot of this great tree and I feel assured.

I touched the tree this morning. Now I am released until tomorrow. Between today and tomorrow — until I touch you again — time flows away without my pushing it. A coffee cup will not go away unless I push it away. An oxcart will stay unless the ox pulls it away. A jumbo jet will not fly until the powerful engines propel it. But time slips away without the aid of anyone or anything. How strange! Time makes me feel as though I were not important. How important I

feel when I push something or someone. Saul (later the apostle Paul), with the letter of authority from the high priest in his hands, arrested Christians (acts 9.2,3). Arresting is an intense form of pushing. He must have felt a strong sense of self-importance. Is not pushing a physical expression of inner self-importance? The more one pushes the more one feels important. I realized this suddenly when I was pushing my way into the crowded rush hour train in Tokyo. There is a strange sense of satisfaction in pushing others. The sense of satisfaction must be related to a sense of self-importance.

But time humiliates me. It limits me. I cannot push it. Time pushes me. I say innocently that “time flows”. Actually it may be I that am flowing. If, then, I flow, I hope to flow with time and in time. It would be intolerably lonely to be outside of time. Timelessness would be homelessness. I don’t want to be orphaned by time. When I think about time I have no other choice than to be humble.

Nirvana (from the verb nibbati “to cool by blowing”) is the highest good of Buddhism. It is the state of absolute tranquility that comes to one who is completely cooled.

For him who is attached, there is vacillation; for him who is not attached, there is no vacillation. When there is no vacillation, there is calm; when there is calm, there is no delight; when there is no delight, there is not coming-and-going (i.e., continuous birth and death); when there is no coming-and-going, there is no disappearance-and-appearance; when there is no disappearance-and-appearance, there is nothing here nor there or between them; this indeed is the end of suffering. (*The Udana, Inspiring Words of the Buddha*)

This is *nirvana*, the cooled man in the cooled situation. To be cool is to be tranquil. Coolness comes to man when he frees himself from attachment. Attachment produces a “hot” man and a “hot” situation. When a man is attached to a colour television set and wishes to purchase it (NZ \$1,000) he will find himself getting “hot”. From this attachment a series of *hots* will follow. He must pay \$600 as his first instalment. Then the rest \$400 must be paid within eighteen months with interest. Eighteen months of “hot season”! Suppose he has a similar arrangement with his car. Then the hot-season will be doubled or tripled. A great deal of sweating. Attachment is the source of disturbance. Eliminate attachment and you are cooled as the flame of a candle is blown out. Hotness is anti-tranquil. It is damnation. Coolness is tranquil. It is salvation.

.... I hear the Buddha speaking to us.... Wh don't you get rid of *tanha* (thirsting greed)? When you are free from thirsting greed (excessive greed, uncontrolled self-importance) you will begin to have a distance from “hotness”. Distance from heat is distance from the paralyzing effects of time, namely, old age, sickness, and death. For the cooled man, time also is cooled. Cooled time is tranquil. For the hot man time is hot. Hot time is violent. Freedom from greed is freedom from time. In reverse, closeness to thirsting greed is closeness to the effects of time. The more you thirst after yourself the stronger the grip of time upon you. Thirst after yourself? Yes. All sorts of thirsting after self-importance. I perceive... I may be wrong... in the message of the Buddha subtle suggestions of a relationship between *greed* and *time*. Time will be destructively at work upon the hot man of greedy self-importance. But time will be *nirvana* (cooling) to those who are free from thirsting after self-importance.

I must admit that this is an unfamiliar thought to me. Greed is greed, and time is time. They seem to me to be two independent subjects. But the Buddha seems to be combining them.

My greed will dictate my relationship with time. I would use my time selfishly. By using time selfishly I become progressively more selfish. The selfish use of time will bring *spiritual* destruction (age, sickness, and death) to me. I experience this to be true. Somehow selfish time is destructive. I cannot explain why it is. Selfish or not selfish I shall get old, sick, and die. But... there must be a possibility that I can get old, sick, and die, yet remain spiritually hopeful, meaningful, and creative. I think so. I hope so.

How can I be not selfish? Must I abandon all concern about myself? Totally? That would be plainly impossible. But I must be able to abandon *thirsting* after self-importance. I must be able to control my excessive selfishness. I should be able to distinguish between sickly selfishness and healthy self-knowledge. I sense that the total eradication of selfishness is difficult. Only a few “religious virtuosi” (Max Weber) complete such a feat. Self-knowledge, far more creative than radical self-effacement or destruction of self, is what I must seek.

I touch my tree. Am I touching time, as day by day I relate myself once more to this constant physical reality? I want to live a life humbled by time. Touching my tree, day after day, reminds me of time. It tells me that I can only wait for time. I cannot push it or hold it. Between today and tomorrow when I touch my tree again, I can accept only those opportunities that come to create a new non-thirsting, less greedy, relationship with others and with things.

My Master said, I remember, seek the kingdom and all shall be added. He did not say seek all these things and the kingdom shall be mine.