

The Fresno Buddhist Church

Fresno Betsuin Buddhist Temple

GEPPPO



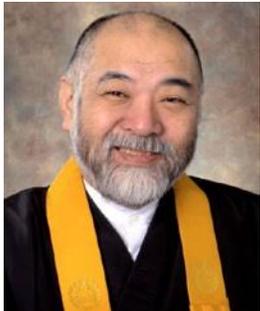
VOLUME 56
ISSUE 4

Website: www.fresnobuddhisttemple.org

APRIL
2021

“LIFE IS NOT ABOUT BECOMING ATTACHED TO THINGS, PLACES, OR POSSESSIONS. INSTEAD, LIFE IS ABOUT FINDING UNITY WITH ONESELF, AND ALL THAT YOU ARE.”

REV. KAKEI NAKAGAWA, Rinban



Haru Ga Kita Spring Has Come

Spring is coming, Spring is coming,
Where is spring now?
Here in the mountains, Here in the village,
And here in the field.
Flowers bloom, Flowers bloom, Where do
flowers bloom?
Here in the mountaints, Here in the village,
And here in the fields.

Birds are singing, Birds are singing, Where do birds sing?
Here in the mountais, Here in the village, And here in the fields.

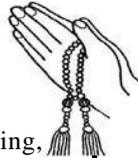
“Spring has come (Ha-ru ga ki-ta,)” is a Japanese nursery rhyme that is still familiar among Americans of Japanese ancestry, particularly seniors. The cold winter is over, the world changes color, and the joy of the long-awaited spring has come when we see the birds singing on the twigs. The season of spring itself is invisible, but it is a world that you can feel in your life. It is said that there is almost nothing in Japanese culture that is not influenced by Buddhism. Even the lyrics of such nursery rhymes are no exception.

There are two constructive worlds in our world. A world that can be seen with our eyes, and a world that cannot be seen. You can see buildings, television and people, but you cannot see the air, people’s hearts, affection, trust, and warmth.

In today’s world, products for beauty and health are said to sell well. Certainly, things that can be seen with the eyes, such as the appearance of beauty and youth, are attracting attention. Conversely, the world that cannot be seen, such as enjoying senior life, wishing well for the sake of others, thinking a lot about humane conduct, etc. are becoming less visible.

Buddha taught us to value the invisible world as well as the visible world. We know that we can’t judge anything just by looking at it, but often we get stuck by looking at the world with our eyes only. The beauty of a person’s appearance is immediately recognizable, but the beauty of the person internally is not visible. And because only the things that can be seen with the eyes are taken care of, the “world that cannot be seen” becomes less visible, then tragedy occurs. If the “world that cannot be seen” disappears, human values will be measured by mere numbers on pieces of document paper, and then it will become cause for human killings and wars.

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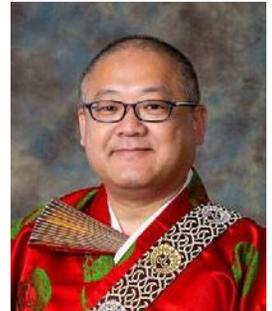
The Eight Essentials of Jodo Shinshu: No. 1, Recitation of Namo Amida Butsu is an expression of our deepest gratitude to all sentient beings
(Sho Myo Ho On)

Hello, all Central California Sangha friends! Since the stay-at-home order was first enacted, we have been living the pandemic life for a full year. I hear that many of our CC Sangha friends have received their vaccinations and some Temples and Churches are discussing re-opening for in-person gatherings. Once your temple is able and safe to re-open, I hope I will see you soon at O-tera!

The pandemic has forced us to change many things, some things drastically like our lifestyle. The stay-at-home order limits our ability to communicate with others in-person, including our own family members. Many people have been forced to learn how to use “ZOOM” in order to communicate with their relatives and their “tech geek” grandchildren. By now, you may be comfortable using internet devices to make your communication much easier. These internet devices help a lot especially under the current situation, but there are also some shortcomings. One being that the Buddhist teachings can easily be misinterpreted or misunderstood.

A few months ago, I read an article on the internet about Jodo Shinshu. There was an author’s credit. The author claims that the Jodo Shinshu teachings and the Theravada monastery teachings share similarities because both mainly practice the Eight-Fold path. In his monastic life at Mt. Hiei, our Jodo Shinshu, Nishi Hongwanji founder Shinran Shonin practiced Eight-Fold paths for 20 years and realized that it was not an accomplishable practice. He left Mt. Hiei which meant he gave up the practice of Eight-Fold paths and entered a path of the Amitabha teaching. The Amitabha teaching did not require any monastic practice, besides the O-Nenbutsu, the recitation of Namo Amida Butsu. I can say that one of the main reasons why our Jodo Shinshu started is because Shinran Shonin quit Eight-Fold paths. If he was comfortable to continue practicing Eight-Fold paths, he might end his life as a monk of Tendai Buddhist order in Mt. Hiei.

REV. KAZ NAKATA



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The life of the irreplaceable value would become the same value of mere stone. Buddha taught that the visible world is wrapped and supported by a world that cannot be seen. Shinran Shonin has fulfilled his life of practicing the Dharma with the Nenbutsu, *Namômitâbha* (Namu-amita-âbha).

One ought to know that there is no power in the Nenbutsu itself. **Its power derives from Úâkyamuni Buddha who recites the Nenbutsu**, whose wisdom is already completed; whose compassion does not exclude any sentient being. Perfect wisdom and compassion lie in the Nenbutsu, which prepares for the work of Úâkyamuni Buddha's amita-âbha. The Nenbutsu of true-and-real enlightenment is the peerless Nenbutsu, the Dharma beyond comparison.

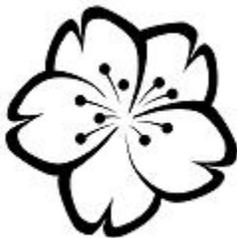
It can relieve all suffering. It is true. It is not mistaken that Shinran Shonin entrusted himself to the Nenbutsu.

"However, if it is Nenbutsu as my act, it is not worth it, but it is of wonderful value because it is working like the real Buddha," said Venerable Takamatsu Gohô who led Shin Buddhism in 20th century Japan. He continues, *"I'm just putting my hands together and saying, 'Nann Mann Da' (Namômitâbha). Everything is the appearance of Úâkyamuni Buddha's amita-âbha, immeasurable merciful wisdom and kindness."*

Venerable Takamatsu concludes in his poem: *"I can't see the Buddha in the voice, but the voice itself is the Buddha. Úâkyamuni Buddha's amitâbha becomes the voice of Nenbutsu, changes its appearance to Namu-amita-âbha, and comes back for me."*

We know the signs of spring through various phenomena. In the same way, if we truly realize the voice of Na-mu-a-mi-ta-bha by uttering the Nenbutsu ourselves, we will know that the Buddha's final words, *"A practicing follower is always close to me"* is true. The Buddha is still untiringly caring and guiding us to the state of perfect peace and utmost bliss.

**Spring Has Come. Spring Has Come.
I feel your touch and I can hear you sing.
Thankful for all the gifts that spring of dependent
origination will bring.**



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Shinran Shonin realized the difficulty of doing "right" things such as Eight-Fold paths. For example, people who do not obey the speed limit on the freeways are disqualified and excluded from Eight-Fold paths to enlightenment. I guess most of "us" are disqualified, aren't we? Buddhist monks, such as Theravadin monks are seriously spending their whole life to do "only" right things to accomplish Eight-Fold paths. I do not think that I have the ability to follow or practice what they do.

I sincerely hope that at least CC Sangha friends receive an appropriate understanding of the Jodo Shinshu teaching, or Shinran Shonin. In this and the next seven issues, I would like to write on the Eight Essentials of our Jodo Shinshu. In this issue, I would like to share the idea of *Sho Myo Ho On*. Have you heard this Japanese term before? If you have not, no problem. You will learn today. It means, *Sho Myo - Recitation of Namô Amida Butsu is, Ho On - an expression of our deepest gratitude to all sentient beings*. *Sho Myo Ho On* is a very essential (verbal) action in our Jodo Shinshu. You may understand what *Sho Myo Ho On* is by reading the English translation. This term relates to the Gatha, *On Doku San*. If you know the meaning of *On Doku San*, you will understand what *Sho Myo Ho On* is.

Last year, I purchased a Pulse Oximeter device to measure the oxygen level in my blood. I often pinch my middle finger with the device to check whether I am ok or not. If my oxygen level is very low this device could help to determine whether I may be infected by the Coronavirus. Each time I check & look at my levels, I say to myself, "oh, how fortunate I am to sustain my life by many others." How often do you feel you are so lucky to live your everyday life? I feel or realize it many times each day, so I can be so positive while living my everyday life.

In the past and since 2008, I have hosted a monthly Howakai (a Dharma Discussion gathering) at Lodi Buddhist Church. At these gatherings, participants questioned me on how we can more precisely explain the idea of *Sho Myo Ho On*. We spent many hours creating a precise explanation and finally, we published one paper. The title is "Our understanding of Jodo Shinshu".

"I am a part of oneness, I am a part of the entire universe. I receive always Amida's light of compassion that is called other power to sustain my life.

Although I cannot always be kind and gentle to others, they help me always to sustain my life.

How wonderful it is that Amida's light of compassion illuminates the universe to sustain my life.

When I experience Amida's light of compassion entering my heart, Namô Amida Butsu becomes my expression of deep gratitude from the bottom of my heart....

Reverence for Shinran Shonin"

This explanation was created based on the Golden Chain but you may notice that some expressions are opposite of the Golden Chain. Obviously, the Golden Chain is written, based on Eight-Fold paths.

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Rev. Kaz, continued from page 2

While people struggle to accumulate good deeds, and right actions of Eight-Fold paths to enlightenment, Shinran Shonin's Jodo Shinshu idea provides a much simpler teaching for walking a path to enlightenment, which is Sho Myo Ho On.

Why did you enter the gate of Jodo Shinshu? Was it because your mom and dad are/were members of Jodo Shinshu temples or did you want to practice Buddhism like monks? I entered the gate by myself when I was a college student. Shinran Shonin's idea made sense to me when I read his books.

Why did I enter this gate? It was because I was seeking equanimity after experiencing the earthquake in Kobe, Japan where more than 6000 people lost their lives. Jodo Shinshu shows a path to the state of Equanimity. Since then, I have been so positive to live my life. Even under the pandemic, I have been enjoying my life with gratitude, like I explained earlier.

Every single action in our everyday life is an opportunity to gain a sense of gratitude. If we spend even one day without being mindful, we may miss thousands of chances to feel gratitude on that day. This is the reason why enlightenment is often translated as "awareness" or "awakening".

Sho Myo Ho On gives us an opportunity to practice gaining our sense of gratitude. Gratitude leads us to live our life positively and make us smile more often. Jodo Shinshu does not force you to do anything. How you design your way of living is your choice. However, I sincerely hope that many readers will enjoy their life in O-Nenbutsu.

Gassho.