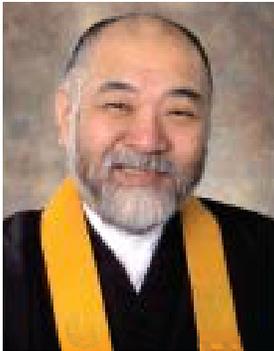




"WE CAN FIND A NEW HOPE EVERY NEW DAY AND EVERY NEW YEAR. MAY YOU FIND YOURS"

REV. KAKEI NAKAGAWA, Rinban



"Strength in Sangha"

When the Fresno Betsuin Buddhist Temple new board chairman Gordon Ah-Tye presented his 2020 theme of "Strength in Sangha", I was immediately reminded of one of the most popular poems in 20th century Japan written by the most famous Buddhist poet Kenji Miyazawa. A logo was created for the T-shirt, which is of geese flying in V-formation over the new



Hondo and the sunrise in the background. This explains his wish for a bright future for our sangha and mutual support of all members. Surprisingly, in the Japanese Buddhist tradition, sunrise means the ideal of Buddhism and bird's flying formation represent humans traveling in life.

Following is the poem by Kenji Miyazawa, translated by Roger Pulvers and edited by Rinban Nakagawa;

STRONG IN THE RAIN (1931)

Strong in the rain, Strong in the wind
Strong against the summer heat and winter cold
He is healthy and robust, Free from desire

He never loses his temper, Nor the quiet smile on his lips
He eats four cups of unpolished rice, miso & a few vegetables a day
He does not consider himself, In whatever occurs...

His understanding, Comes from observation and experience
And he never loses sight of things

He lives in a little thatched-roof hut, In a field in the shadows of a
pine tree grove

If there is a sick child in the east, He goes there to nurse the child
If there's a tired mother in the west, He goes to her and carries her
sheaves

If someone is near death in the south, He goes and says, "Don't be
afraid"

If there's strife and lawsuits in the north, He demands that the
people put an end to their pettiness

He sheds tears of sympathy for migrant workers far away from
home, He plods about at a loss during the cold summer
Everyone calls him "Blockhead"

No one sings his praises, Or takes him to heart...
That is the sort of person, I want to be"

These tallies all happened coincidentally, but all came from Mr. Gordon Ah-Tye's sincere wish for the future of our Fresno Sangha without doubt. I am truly grateful and strongly impressed.

REV. KAZ NAKATA



**Beyond Living and Dying
how much makes you feel
enough?**

"Natural death is not in the least mysterious, but it as understandable as birth itself. Both occurrences are part of a biological process that provides for a perpetual fountain of youth. Remarkable as human bodies are, Nature eventually discards them for fresh ones; and it ought not to be surprising if, remarkable as human personalities are, Nature adopts the same policy towards them." Corliss Lamont "The Illusion of Immortality", p73

In January, I conducted Ho-onko (Annual observance of Shinran Shonin's memorial) at several temples/churches in Central California. He had 90 years of life in the 13th century. The average lifetime in the century was mid-30s to 40. In fact, a famous Japanese critic, Kenko Yoshida (c. 1283-1352) stated "To have longevity is a shame. We should die before turning 40" in his essay, "Tsure-zure Gusa." Kenko's essay suggests that Shinran Shonin was a very rare case to have such a long life.

A few years ago, I took a comparative religion class. It used Moreman's "Beyond the Threshold (2017)" as the textbook where death and dying in Buddhism and other religions were presented. In the beginning of my article, I quoted Corliss Lamont's passage which appears in the textbook. Interestingly, in the class, there were students who worked in the medical field as doctors and nurses. They had shared, in class, the medical aspects of death and dying. As a minister, I have had many experiences observing those who have died or were dying while conducting bedside services known as the makurakyo service. None of these experiences have been a "mysterious occurrence" even if lives were lost through accidents or unknown causes. Lamont's book was published in 1935. According to the Social Security Administration, Life expectancy at birth in 1930 was only 58 for men and 62 for women, and the retirement age was 65!! Since then, many health and medical techniques and technology advancements have changed the world. These advancements have changed the definitions of death and dying substantially.

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Rev. Nakata, continued

I would like to share an example.

One day I received a phone call from a woman. She requested a makurakyo service at the hospital for her husband. When I arrived at the hospital, his family members were gathered and were waiting for my arrival. He was about in his mid-40s and appeared to be sleeping. His children, I'm guessing, were teenagers. His wife mentioned that he had been in a deep coma for a few days. The doctor reported that though there was brain function, there was no response. This man was being kept alive by a life support system. In this state he could possibly live another 5 to 10 years.

The wife explained, "We were told that he was in no pain. Our family discussed over the course of the past several days about how we should take care of him and we decided to let him go. So when you are finished with the chanting, the doctor will stop the system and we will end his life..."

Having experienced such situations on many occasions, I knew what I needed to do and what to expect. As I was chanting, in my mind I questioned whether there was any possibility for this man to regain consciousness. Before the existence of the life support system, those in critical condition simply ended their lives and their family had to accept the loss. The advancements in medicine now has made "something that could not be done" to "something that can be done."

Rev. Sokusui Murakami, Kangaku (Jodo Shinshu scholar), argued that:

...however much we are convinced that one aspect of our life is fulfilled, it will become an empty delusion when we face our own death. Death is lying at the bottom of our life so that there is no fulfilled life as long as our life is threatened by death itself. Our life can be truly fulfilled only when we transcend the mystical delusion of fearful death. That is the reason why Buddhism encourages us to cope with the solution of death. *"Misunderstandings and understandings to Shinran's teachings."*

Nowadays, it is very rare to see and encounter natural death as well as natural birth. We are surrounded by numerous options which make our life longer or shorter. The example of my makurakyo experience indicates that the length of our life can be practically managed by manmade solutions or man's will. It means we are dealing with and challenging the area of "threshold". Therefore, Buddhism, simply, may question us with, "So what?" These dealings and challenges do not settle the fundamental problem of how we can transcend the "mystical

delusion of fearful death." One suggestion Buddhism offers in making such decisions when you or a loved one is facing death is to think about what is enough in living beyond a natural death. There is no right or wrong answer to that question in Buddhism. Buddhism is a teaching of awareness so that there is mindfulness of everyday life circumstances.

There is, then, a realization of what is important beyond living and dying. Once this realization takes place one can live a truly fulfilled moment of life.

Gassho.

