



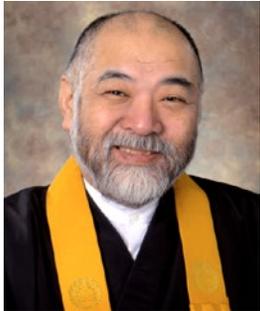
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"KEEP STANDING. KEEP HOPING. KEEP BELIEVING."

REV. KAKEI NAKAGAWA, Rinban



The battle against the Covid-19 pandemic has now entered its second month. Each of us is now striving to protect each other's precious lives.

Perhaps, because of at this unusual time, I often wonder what I am here to do. Moreover, I walk into a room with something in mind to do but I cannot

remember what it was.

We were born into this world as human beings but is it clear as to what we are here to do? The Buddha said, "Alive human beings are always longing for something. What they desire determines their value."

Certainly, humans must be living in hope of something thus, life is a place where that wish is fulfilled.

Well then, what is your desire? Is it to have a little money and live a comfortable life, to go on a trip and play at the casino as much as you wish, to eat delicious food, or to become completely healthy? Whatever our desires, if our wish is fulfilled, it will be a happy life, and if that wish is not fulfilled, it will be an unhappy life. Therefore, even in religion, the world is expected to play a role of 'happiness-machine' to fulfill such wishes. But would you truly be happy if you had money? How many people are unhappy because of money? I cannot help but think of this as I watch the daily news reports. When you eat and your stomach is full, you do not want to see the food, so you push it away. If you travel too much, you become homesick. An energetic and healthy person does not seem to know to be thankful for their health. In other words, if human happiness is solely centered around satisfying one's selfish desires, it seems to never be enough.

Shinran Shōnin's teaching is not for satisfying the fragile desires of limited human life. He taught that all human could hear the Buddha's awakening-words and encounter Sākyamuni Buddha's amitābha, which means immeasurable wisdom and compassion.

Human life is a place to lose rather than to gain. Gaining is a fleeting event. Whether it be my property, my position, my immediate family... even I must eventually have an end. Even such an ephemeral being, I can live a boundless-life, which is assured by the Buddha through the working of the original Buddha-nature. What a wonderful moment!

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REV. KAZ NAKATA



Mind your footing! Are you walking on the middle path?

Hello, Central California Sangha friends! This is my second newsletter article written after the stay at home/shelter in place orders were enacted. As I mentioned in my previous article, we started streaming Sunday services for the Central Cal at the Fresno Betsuin Buddhist Temple. If you are having a difficult time with accessing the live stream, I have attached a square share icon at the end of my article. Please take a picture of the icon with your smartphone, then your smartphone will automatically take you to the streaming site. Or please type [twitter.com/fresno_nishi] in your internet browser. You will see the site without having to log in or register your name or email address. If you still have difficulties in accessing the site, please contact me. I am happy to assist you. We have already streamed more than 7 services. Many CC Sangha friends may miss seeing their local temple/church altar, so we have decided to conduct streaming services at the various CC temples/Churches, starting with Reedley Buddhist Church. We hope everyone will enjoy seeing their temple altar!

Before the stay at home order was issued, I was last in my family to wake up in the morning. I am not making excuses for myself, but I usually write Dharma talks and articles late into the night, so I usually woke up around 7:30AM. Since the order came into effect, our family's "get up order" has completely changed. I am now the first to open the curtains and wake up my other family members!! You might be having the same experience. Perhaps your child(ren) or grandchild(ren) may be so excited to have an "extra" break and sleep, like my daughters.

Have you heard the term "the middle path" before? It is a Buddhist term. About 2500~2600 years ago in India, a man started contemplating his life and death. When he turned 29, he left his high living (lazy, to be more precise) life and started ascetic (painful) practices such as fasting. Ascetic practices were one of the traditional practices in India. By doing such practice, he experienced both extremes. The man, Gautama Siddhartha, finally realized that painful practices do not solve fundamental human questions.

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Rev. Nakagawa, continued

I would like to share the following story of a man who met Buddha's teachings.

Sâkyamuni Buddha once asked neighborhood Singâla who faithfully worshipping God in the ten directions was each morning, "What are you doing?"

Buddha started talking with Singâla and began to skillfully define the relevance of his routine conduct.

Buddha said, "If you worship every day, you should change a little, for your friends and family who worship with you."

He continued, "Who are you friends? Is he a true friend?" Buddha's questions made Singâla examine the outline of his everyday life, little by little.

Consequently, Singâla kept his habit of worshipping in the ten directions every day. However, his feelings changed to "just as if everything is uncovered now" and his daily life turned to be full of joy and love. You see, nothing is changed in Singâla's outward appearance, but his everyday life changed drastically.

"Singâlovâda Sûtra"

The end of this sûtra, Singâla became a disciple of the Buddha, but it seemed to me that was not the Buddha's intention. Buddha's intention was simply to show Singâla the method for re-reading the frame of his ordinary life for just thinking on others as well.

Please take care, Stay Home, Save Lives.

Gassho,
Rev. Kakei Nakagawa, Rinban

Rev. Nakata, continued

There were many practitioners that tried painful practices before Gautama's time, but no one acquired the answer, supporting what he realized. He decided to pursue a new method of a practice. It was Madhyamâ-pratipad (Sanskrit), which is known as the middle path. Madhyamâ basically means "middle", but also it means "being in the middle", or "standing between two persons or groups". These meanings indicate that middle is not a fixed location, point or spot. It is an adjustable and movable. Pratipad means path to be walked. The middle path can be adjusted accordingly by keeping distance from or avoiding both extremes. Gautama, as a Buddha, awakened one, introduced a new lifestyle to his five closest fellow practitioners. This lifestyle was "the middle path". The fellow practitioners did not understand Gautama's explanation, thus they abandoned him. Gautama completed his enlightenment by walking the middle path. I believe that if did not become aware of the importance of the path, he might not have become a Buddha. Now you know that the middle path is a fundamentally particularly important practice (teaching) in Buddhism.

Does the stay at home/shelter in place order makes your life lean toward one of extremes? Our human nature causes us to sometimes (maybe often!) have difficult time maintaining balance in our everyday life. For the last several weeks, I have heard the term "the new normal". But we do not need to set or accept our imbalance ways of living as the new normal. Unhealthy minds come from unhealthy lifestyles. It is no longer the middle path. Please compare your attitude about your life from before and after the order. The order was not intended to give us an extra break or more sleep. It is also not for gaining an extra pound (pounds?!). Please stay mentally and physically healthy. Watch your footing. Let us walk on the middle path.

Gassho.



How to use this square barcode icon:

1. Tap the Camera icon on your smartphone
2. Point the camera toward the icon and take a photo
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4. You will see the Central California Nishi Hongwanji site

Thank you for "attending" service!

**DUE TO THE CORONA VIRUS
WE ARE TEMPORARILY
CLOSED AND SUSPENDING
SERVICES & ACTIVITIES THRU
MAY 31ST.**

SORRY FOR THE INCONVENIENCE

**PLEASE STAY
WELL!**

With the uncertainty that still exists regarding COVID-19, Betsuin leadership has decided to suspend Betsuin Activities through the month of May. Although there is much discussion about the appropriate time to re-open activities state wide, we strongly believe it is better to exercise caution. We must insure we are providing a safe environment for our members and friends when we resume activities. Better to be safe than sorry. Thank you for your patience.