



VOLUME 50  
ISSUE 10

# Fresno Betsuin Buddhist Temple

# GEPPŌ

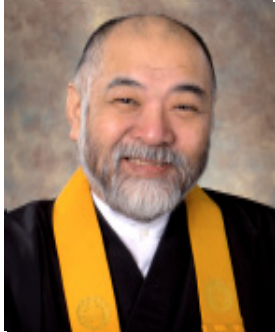
Website: [www.fresnobuddhisttemple.org](http://www.fresnobuddhisttemple.org)



OCTOBER  
2015

2015 BCA Theme: "Live a Real Life" - Makoto no jinsei wo ayumon

Rev. Kakei Nakagawa, Rinban



### Life is limited. Yes, Indeed.

A visitor once came to me and asked, "How can I start learning Buddhism?" I replied, "You'd better know his unique point of view about this world and raise your abstract degree of world recognition."

2600 years ago in India, Buddha guided his disciples to observe this world as it is until they realize the truth-reality, which

everything and occurring in this world is constantly changing, moment by moment and nothing can stay in one place forever.

This would become the first point of view of Buddhism that the followers recognized. Until realizing this truth-reality, people will live in a delusional world and will never be released by spending one's life in vain.

Buddha delivered the "Avadāna sūtra" as follows;

"A traveler, chased by a furious tiger, tries to hide himself by descending into a dry well by means of vines that grew in it. However, as he climbs down, he notices with horror a huge venomous dragon hissing towards him from the bottom of the well and decides to cling to the vine for safety. Now the vine that the traveler is clinging to is the sole support for his life. After a while his arms grow tired and his heart almost stops as he watches two mice, one black and one white, gnawing at the vine. If the vine breaks, he will be thrown into the wide-opened mouth of the giant dragon. In a desperate attempt to drive these small rodents away, he swings the vine, and by chance tastes a drop of honey dripping down from a beehive that happened to be at the base of the plant. The traveler, forgetting all about his danger, enjoys the 6-7 drops of sweet honey with rapture."

Buddha concluded "The traveler represents a man with a meaningless life. The tiger and dragon refer to the fate of human beings who is confirmed death. The vine represents the continuity of human life. The black and white mice symbolize night and day, and the sweet honey stands for the rare happiness that distracts our thoughts from the suffering of passing years. One drop of honey represents one decade of human life."

This is a warning to every one of us, who have already spent half or one-third of our lives. Buddha teaches us, "Be brave and see reality as it is and aspire to the way out of this suffering of impermanence."

See "Life", page 2

Rev. Alan Sakamoto



### The Truth of a Myth

The other day, I was speaking with a young man, and we pleasantly chatted about many different topics, but when we came to the subject of Buddhism, he suddenly became quiet. I asked him if something was wrong, and, after a bit of asking, he finally admitted that he had a problem with the story of Gautama Siddhartha's birth. As you may recall, Queen Maya was on her way

to her family hometown, and stopped in Lumbini's Garden where she gave birth to Prince Siddhartha, who would eventually become Shakyamuni Buddha. He told me that he could not believe that a recently born baby could take 7 steps and speak. He intimated that he could not believe in a religion that was founded on the questionable and unbelievable story of its founder. This is a common and reasonable position, as I once asked one of my teachers about this very same concern.

I looked up the word "myth" on dictionary.com, and found several definitions:

1. A traditional or legendary story, usually concerning some being or hero or event, with or without a determinable basis of fact or a natural explanation, especially one that is concerned with deities or demigods and explains some practice, rite, or phenomenon of nature.
2. Any invented story, idea or concept.
3. An imaginary or fictitious thing or person.
4. An unproved or false collective belief that is used to justify a social institution.

Each of these definitions focus on something "without determinable basis," "imaginary," "fictitious," or "false." It is easy to understand that someone who has been told that the story of Shakyamuni's birth is a myth would interpret this event has being just a false story, one without truth as its basis.

In Pre-modern times, the purpose of a myth was an attempt to express some of the more elusive aspects of life that cannot be expressed in a rational, logical means. A myth is more than history or just a plain ole story; it is an attempt to explain the deeper significance of an event. Sometimes a well-described myth is something that in some sense happened, but also happens all the time.

See "Myth", page 2

Rev. Matthew Hamasaki



"Mind is the forerunner of all actions. /All deeds are led by mind, created by mind. /If one speaks or acts with a corrupt mind, suffering follows, /As the wheel follows the hoof of an ox pulling a cart."

This quote is the first line from the Dhammapada, which was originally put together as a response to a growing community of Buddhist monks. It can be seen as something

of a collection of directions to follow the Buddha's teachings. Since what the Buddha taught is so expansive, the Dhammapada was an attempt to narrow down the teachings into a concise volume which would be easier to comprehend.

The content of this line is straightforward, and while perhaps intuitive and pretty easy to understand, it is still insightful. All things start with our mind. From a thought comes an action which leads to a corresponding consequence. And following this logic, when someone has an ill thought, it leads to an ill action which will lead to an ill reaction. So it becomes pretty easy to see that one should have good thoughts and this will lead to good actions and a good life. Simple, right?

All too often we have thoughts that probably aren't the best. Our ego has to label one thing as better than the other because of our bias towards ourselves or towards objects which we attribute value. We like MY style better than others. We like shiny things over not shiny things. We prefer one television show over another. And the ones we don't like are bad. Or if someone has something better we get jealous.

So if we are incapable of preventing unhappy thoughts from arising in our minds, how can we remedy it? Instead of harboring these thoughts and having successive ones, we must take a good hard look at ourselves and realize we are putting the labels on everything. And realizing our mortality and how short life is, that there is no time to continue to have these kinds of thoughts. The Dhammapada explains,

"Animosity does not eradicate animosity. /Only by loving kindness is animosity dissolved. /This law is ancient and eternal. /There are those who are aware that they are always facing death. /Knowing this, they put aside all quarrels."

"Life", continued

The reason for Buddha's emphasis and enumeration on this point that is so axiomatic is his distinguishing from contemporary philosophy on the constancy of existence. Buddha wished to lead people from the world-view of delusion to enlightenment, from the night of ignorance to the light of awakening. The realization of transiency is indeed, the starting point of Buddhism. We should know that Buddhism is the religion to teach us not only how to die peacefully, but also how to live courageously. Fearlessness of death is nothing other than a fearless living of life.

"Myth", continued

Let's just think about the story of the rabbit and the tortoise. A common and popular children's story that provides us with a lesson, that emphasizes working consistently and diligently towards a goal instead of hurriedly beginning and then taking it easy towards the end. It provides us with a timeless and universal truth in an easy to remember story. Now, if we look at the reality of the story one could say that it is ridiculous since rabbits and tortoises don't talk to each other, at least as far as we know. But, if we stand back, and look at the lesson that is taught, then the truth, wisdom and greatness of the story appears.

Karen Armstrong says, "A myth makes sense only if it is translated into action either ritually or behaviorally." A myth truly becomes relevant when we take the lesson, let it inspire us, and more importantly, apply it in our lives.

And the story of Gautama Siddhartha? The 7 steps represent all the different directions or everywhere. And his speaking "I alone am the World-Honored One" sounds pretty arrogant and hard to align with Buddhist teachings, but speaks to the Buddha Nature that we all have within ourselves, and our own individual ability to find and develop our awakening.

A myth can put you off, or it can put you in the right spiritual position or direction. It can be seen as fiction or as a universal truth. Together with your Sangha and Minister we can work to find an appropriate path.

I go to the Buddha for guidance.  
I go to the Dharma for guidance.  
I go to the Sangha for guidance.

For Your Information: I will be guest speaking in Las Vegas on Sunday, November 8<sup>th</sup> at 10 am at the new Las Vegas Sangha Temple. You are invited to join us as we share the Dharma, visit with our Sangha friends, and possibly do some fundraising for the new Fresno Buddhist Church Hondo. For more information, check their website at [www.lasvegasbuddhist.org](http://www.lasvegasbuddhist.org).

Because of my guest speaking, the normal Open House that is scheduled for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Monday of each month will be postponed one week to Monday, November 16<sup>th</sup>. Look forward to seeing you in Las Vegas and at the Open House.