



VOLUME 55  
ISSUE 3

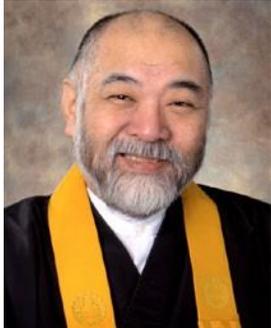
Website: [www.fresnobuddhisttemple.org](http://www.fresnobuddhisttemple.org)

MARCH  
2020

“MAY ALL BEINGS HAVE HAPPY MINDS”

REV. KAKEI NAKAGAWA, Rinban

REV. KAZ NAKATA



### 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 mountains, Here in the village, And here in the fields.

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

Ha-ru ga ki-ta, Ha-ru ga ki-ta, Do-ko ni ki-ta?  
Ya-ma ni ki-ta, Sa-to ni k-ita, No ni mo ki-ta

Ha-na ga sa-ku, Ha-na ga sa-ku, Do-ko ni sa-ku?  
Ya-ma ni sa-ku, Sa-to ni sa-ku, No ni mo sa-ku

To-ri ga na-ku, To-ri ga na-ku, Do-ko de na-ku?  
Ya-ma de na-ku, Sa-to de na-ku, No de mo na-ku

“Spring has come (Ha-ru ga ki-ta,)” is a Japanese children’s song that is still familiar amongst American-Japanese-Ancestry. The cold winter is over, the Blossom Trail begins to change color, and the joy of the long-awaited spring has come when we see the birds singing on their twigs. The spring season is invisible, but everyone has experienced it.

It is said that there is no Japanese culture that is not under the influence of Buddha-dharma. Even children’s song like this is no exception.

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 in our eyes. The beauty of a person’s appearance is immediately recognizable, but the beauty of the person’s internals 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 are measured by mere numbers on pieces of document paper, causing human killings and wars.

*Continued on page 2*



### How we can explain what Buddhism is?

Greetings to Sangha friends of Central California! We are heading into the warm and beautiful Spring season. I sometime take my family to parks and enjoy the nice breeze and the scent of sprouting plants.



Several Central Cal temples/churches have asked me to start study, discussion or training classes. More Sangha friends are interested to know/learn more about our teachings, which is a positive thing. When I hold a Buddhist discussion, one frequent question is, “I’ve been coming to temple/church for many decades, but still I don’t know what Buddhism is.” So, in this article, I would like to write about what Buddhism is and what its main objectives are. If your friends ask you, “what is Buddhism?”, please share this article.

As a typical Japanese citizen in Japan, I grew up without attending any services or events at a Buddhist temple. During my childhood, I really did not know that there were the historical Buddha’s teachings, Jodo Shinshu teachings or how Shinran Shonin shared his understanding of the Buddha’s teachings. My first serious encounter with the Buddhist teaching was at Ryukoku University in Kyoto, Japan. The school was founded in 1639 to provide ministerial studies for those who wish to become Jodo Shinshu ministers. As a freshman, I had to study the very basics of Buddhism and it was a very good opportunity to learn from scratch. I did not have any foreknowledge or education on Buddhism, so I was able to experience the lectures and seminars without any bias. Ryukoku University offered me several choices of a basic Buddhist lecture courses. They were taught by various professors, but I chose the course which was offered by Professor Tensei Kitabatake. He was a scholar in Buddhist studies and the president of Ryukoku University. His lectures on the basics of Buddhism were straightforward and logical. I tend to be more inclined to lean toward logical explanations so I very much enjoyed Prof. Kitabatake’s lectures. I especially appreciated his explanation of Buddhism and its main objectives. Now, when I am asked what Buddhism is, I always refer to the professor’s explanation as my basis.

*Continued on page 2*

Rev. Nakagawa, continued

Every time I feel spring and remember this children's song, I always hum the following poems made by Takamatsu Gohô, the most Venerable in 20th century in Japan.

*"I can't see the Buddha in the voice, but the voice itself is the Buddha. Ūkya-muni Buddha becomes the six-syllable voice, changes its appearance to Na-mu-a-mi-ta-bha, and returns as a Buddha-nature to 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 ourselves, we will know that the Buddha's words "a practicing follower is always close to me" is true. The Buddha is still untiringly caring and guiding me to the realm of perfect peace and utmost bliss.

Rev. Kaz, continued

"What is Buddhism?" Essentially, Buddhism is a teaching of becoming a Buddha or an "enlightened one", the main objective as to why people practice Buddhism. If one practices Buddhism and one cannot attain Buddhahood or enlightenment, what was taught was not what the Buddha taught. It was a fabrication and claimed as the Buddha's teaching. In the early discourse of the Buddha's dialogue in the Pali language of southern India, he consistently speaks of the way to enlightenment. This explains that Buddhism does not exist without enlightenment.

"What is Buddhism?" Buddhism is the teaching delivered by the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni. There are numerous Buddhist masters and scholars who have shared and taught their understandings of Buddhism to followers for over 2,500 years. If their understandings differ from the historical Buddha's teachings, these are most likely their "commentaries" on Buddhism, not the Buddha's teachings itself. We must carefully realize that the Buddha's teaching and the masters' understanding of Buddhism are two different things. For example, you may have heard about "life after death" in Buddhism. Was this factor actually taught by the historical Buddha or does it come from another source? From the philological standpoint, the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni did not respond to the question on the afterlife. He may have even denied the notion of "afterlife" because of it being a metaphysical concept and not a factual one. When a concept is indicated in Buddhism which doesn't seem right, then it is possible that it is not the Buddha's teaching. Shakyamuni Buddha's teaching is the Universal Truth in contrast to the religious truth. Any teachings of the Buddha can be understood or accepted with no need for religious belief or faith. Universal truth is not a creation of the Buddha. This world (universe) is filled with numerous universal truths and the historical Buddha introduced these truths so that one could become awakened. An "awakened one" awakes to the universal truth and eliminates false or metaphysical concepts in one's way of living.

"What is Buddhism?" To reiterate, Shakyamuni Buddha re-introduced the Universal Truth to the common people after his own enlightenment. His main focus on the universal truth was pratītya-samutpāda. In fact, it was re-introduced at his first Dharma talk. It is a Sanskrit word and is known as the "law of causality" in English. In a broad sense, it can be understood as the interdependency in our life. Once one starts practicing authentic Buddhism, one's way of living will be filled naturally with the sense of gratitude (more precisely, you do not need to force yourself to be grateful). If you feel you have been practicing Buddhism for a long time but you do not have that sense of gratitude, you have not been hearing the Buddha's pratītya-samutpāda. The truth of pratītya-samutpāda does not ask for belief because it is not religious truth. That truth itself is what should make sense. Oftentimes, the Japanese express their gratitude toward truth of interdependence, by saying "o-ka-ge-sama" (fortunate to have help and support of others).

In this article, I have shared the essential objectives of Buddhism. Without these objectives, Buddhism does not exist. When one speaks of Buddhism without including these objectives, one is actually sharing their own notions or creating their own beliefs. The Dharma that the Buddha shared established just how logically valid and true he was. His Dharma explanations are clear, understandable, and undeniable for those of here in the 21st century.

If there are any questions about what Buddhism is, please come to me to find out further explanations or I would be happy to visit you. In Gassho