

Nichiren Shu News

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The Other Side of Mt. Minobu: Hiking the Old Akazawa Trail

By Rev. Kanjo Bassett

Nichiren Shu followers are well acquainted with Minobusan, site of Kuonji Temple and the resting place of Nichiren Shonin. Both followers and tourists have visited the top of Minobusan via the ropeway to see Shishin-Kaku Temple, breathe cool fresh mountain air and take in the view of Mt. Fuji and the Fuji River valley below.

The more adventurous way to the top for pilgrims, or even trail race runners, is to hike the old trail from Kuonji to Shishin-Kaku Temple. Only the truly adventurous, or hard-core trail runners, then continue on the trail to reach Shichimensan. That trail goes down the other side of Minobusan passing long-shuttered *bo*, inns to host visiting pilgrims, through the village of Akazawa. The name of the town, red mountain stream, comes from the reddish colored rocks found in the Japanese Southern Alps and surrounding foothills.

Akazawa dates back to the Heian Period. It has been designated an historical preservation district. Its history is tightly bound to the history of Shichimensan, which was established as a holy mountain and pilgrimage site long before Nichiren Shonin arrived at Minobusan in 1275. The trail from Minobusan might sound romantic, but it long ago disappeared into a road that zig-zags down the backside of the mountain. Only at the entrance to Akazawa does it become a foot path again, a steep stone path winding through the village.

ANCIENT PILGRIMAGE PATH Near the top of the stone path is Myofukuji Temple. According to Rev. Chiyu Ide, the head priest of Myofukuji, its history extends back to the deepest roots of Japanese Buddhism. "Have you heard of Shugendo?," he asked. This was one



27th generation innkeeper Kinu Mochizuki runs Edoya, Akazawa's last remaining inn for pilgrims.

of the first forms of Japanese Buddhism. It incorporated mystic elements of both Buddhism and Shinto. Shugendo ascetics and priests journeyed through deep valleys and peaks as part of their spiritual practice, worshipping huge boulders, giant trees, and the mountains as sacred vessel bodies of gods, seeking enlightenment and rebirth in the rising sunlight over the mountain.

Shichimensan itself is a *kekka*, a sacred barrier, protecting Mt. Fuji. If you watch an equinox sunrise from Shichimensan, the sun rises directly over the peak of Mt. Fuji. On that day, the sun shines in a perfect line across the top of Mt. Fuji, through Shichimensan, and straight to Izumo Shrine in Shimane Prefecture. Izumo is one of the most important Shinto Shrines, said to be older than Ise Shrine itself.

"This was established as a Shugendo temple," Rev. Ide explained. "In Nichiren Shonin's time, it was Shingon. Nichiro Shonin, a Senior Disciple of Nichiren Shonin, convinced the head priest of Myofukuji to convert and become part of Kuonji." Some of the

Myofukuji Temple structures today look new. Inside the Founder's Hall, colorful *kifuda* line the walls. In the Main Hall, there's a restored ceiling painting of Shichimen, the protector of the holy mountain. Asked about the number of temple members here in Akazawa, Rev. Ide became quiet for a moment. "I have to travel a lot to support the temple. I'm not here as much as I would like to be."

Buddhist priests in country temples usually have to work other jobs to make ends meet. Rev. Ide travels extensively doing Kito blessings and other consultations. It not only supports the temple, but also helps bring new practitioners and pilgrims to Akazawa and Shichimensan.

THE WOMAN GENERAL OF EDOYA Further down the stone path, almost at its end, is the Edoya Ryokan, the last surviving inn of Akazawa. It is run by 92-year-old Kinu Mochizuki, the *Okami*, or proprietress. She is the 27th in her family line to hold this honor and responsibility. *Okami* is one of the many Japanese words almost impossible to translate into English. The two characters that make up *Okami* are "woman" and "Shogun." It conveys a woman general who runs the family business, raises the children and keeps the tradition going. Still today, the longest running Japanese family businesses, some dating back to the Heian Period, are invariably run by women generals.

Mochizuki-san's back is bent with age. She walks with a cane, but is cheerful, bright and always happy to show you her inn while explaining the history.

"I'm 92, and since last year I've had pain in my lower back," she explained. But that did not stop her from opening up the sliding doors to reveal the big interior room.

"This is where guests chant Odaimoku, eat and sleep." She pointed out the hallway that ran outside the tatami rooms. "As you can see there is plenty of space for groups of 50 to 60 to put their luggage and other belongings."

"We have groups staying here from May to November, 700 or 1,000 people sometimes, so all the inns (meaning Edoya and the other *bo* surrounding Shichimensan) have to cooperate and divide guests among the inns. We all serve the same food and charge the same price. 60 stay here, 40 there, and so on. When that happens we all sit around making hundreds of *onigiri*, rice balls. Even though my back hurts, I can do it. I only have these hands, but I endeavor to do my best." She thrusts out her hands for emphasis, strong country hands that have clearly done a lot of work.

Continued on page 2.



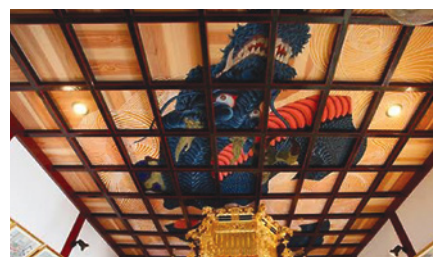
Myofukuji Temple Founder's Hall and Main Hall.



The Akazawa stone path leading down from Myofukuji Temple toward Edoya.



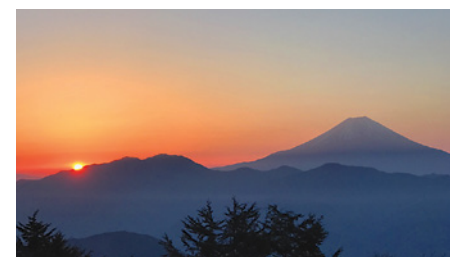
View looking over Akazawa as seen from near the top of Shichimensan.



Restored painting on the Main Hall's ceiling.



Yoshiya, one of Akazawa's six former inns for pilgrims, has been closed for many years.



Sunrise over Mt. Fuji as seen from Shichimensan.



Statue of Lady Oman, the first woman to climb Shichimensan, near the Shichimensan trail entrance.

The Future of Akazawa

Continued from Page 1

What is the future for the last remaining inn in Akazawa? Mochizuki-san says, "I have a grandson. He is interested, but I don't know if he is willing to take on the responsibility of running Edoya. I have no say in the matter of what happens after I die. What's the point of worrying about it?"

"Nowadays, who wants to take on this difficult work when there are easier ways of making a living? There really isn't anything here in Akazawa. It is 100 *cho* (the old distance measure of approximately 109 meters) to Minobu, 50 *cho* to Shichimensan. There weren't

that many pilgrims when I was growing up because of the distance. And there were not many pilgrims coming during the war. Those who came had to bring their own rice, and we would cook it for them. They had to have enough for the whole journey because of war rationing.

"It became dangerous here, too. Near the end of the war, seven bombs were dropped in the village below, because the B-29 planes had to clear their holds on the way back from bombing Kofu. It's hard to believe that a person like me experienced that. We had to clear metal debris from our fields. As junior high students, we were required to work in military or agriculture production. There was no freedom. We can look back now and say how stupid it all was, but back then it was simply what one had to do."

Mochizuki-san went on to explain that modern roads and bridges changed everything. Now people can drive to the bottom of Shichimensan, park their car and start walking. When groups come now, they don't hike from Minobu. They drive up from below, stay overnight, and then drive back down to the Shichimensan trail entrance. The pilgrims have changed, too. Most of those coming now are from Reiyukai, not Nichiren Shu members.

She waved her hand at the big empty room. "In the old days, the ceilings and



Osakaya had been closed for years but reopened this spring, licensed as a guest house.



Osakaya has been providing a warm welcome to hikers coming through this historic area.



The Mochizuki family has been running Edoya, an inn for pilgrims, for 27 generations.

walls were covered with silk banners and *senjya fuda*. They disintegrated long ago. When the pilgrims came, it wasn't just once. They arrived every year, no matter what." Nichiren Shu members stopped coming during the late 1980s bubble era, when values changed and Japanese birthrates went into steep decline. A culture carefully built up over centuries can disappear in the blink of an eye.

"There used to be six inns here in Akazawa. We're the last one. Osakaya had been closed for ten years, but this spring, someone rented it and has opened it as a guest house for backpackers from overseas. There's even a

man from France who wants to live here," she said, as if a man from France was an unexpected turn of events.

If you come to Minobusan, Akazawa and Shichimensan, you can breathe the air and experience directly the faith and practice expounded by our Founder Nichiren Shonin. You can see all that this faith and practice has built over the course of centuries, one pilgrim, one step at a time. Don't let these hard-earned accomplishments fade away. Come to Shichimensan and hike the same path of countless pilgrims over centuries past. The path is the same, taken one step at a time.

—Rev. Kanjo Bassett

Buddhism Q&A (6)

By Rev. Gyokai Sekido, Ph.D.

What is the Enbi?

Enbi is the pointed hat worn by a priest at a formal Nichiren Shu service.

The Chinese priest Tendai Daishi, who lived from 538-597, received an expensive piece of fabric from the Emperor during the winter. He then wrapped the fabric around his head. This is said to be the first use of head coverings for priests.

The Japanese Tendai priest Saicho lived from 767-822 during the Heian Period, 794-1185. In Japan, folklore says that Saicho received a hat from the Emperor. A portrait of Saicho shows him wearing one.

Nichiren Shonin did not wear a hat. He only wrapped a cloth around his head. Hats worn by Nichiren Shu priests were originally round. Over time, these changed to a pointed shape. These hats were worn for conducting

solemn services. When the priest wore a *shichijo*, a seven-panel *kesa*, the *enbi* was a required accompaniment.

The *enbi* is made from a gold brocade material. It was first introduced from customs of the Chinese Imperial court. The nobles would wear crown-like hats with tightened strings stuck to the crown and the rest of the strings hanging down their back in two sheets. It was also used by the Zen school during the Song dynasty in China, 960-1279.

The name *enbi*, swallow's tail, comes from how the tail part of the hat which hangs down looks like a swallow's tail.

Contrary to the etiquette of removing hats during a memorial service or sermon, a priest must not remove the *enbi* until they leave the prayer hall since this is part of their formal full attire.

We welcome readers' questions about Buddhism and Nichiren Shonin. Please send us your questions by e-mail to editor-nichirensnunews@nichiren.or.jp or contact us through your local temple.



The *enbi*, pointed hats worn by Nichiren Shu priests, evolved from our Founder wrapping a cloth around his head.

REVEREND KANNO PREACHES (48)

"The desire to attain Buddhahood begins to appear when one worries about one's sickness."

—Reply to Lady Nun Myoshin,
Nichiren Shonin's letter written
at Minobu, August 16, 1275.
(ST 191)



"Sickness"

Nun Myoshin and her husband, who was a lay priest, were devoted followers of Nichiren Shonin. The couple lived in what is today Shizuoka Prefecture. When he learned of the illness of the nun's husband, our Founder wrote this letter to the nun, encouraging both her and her husband to deepen their faith in the Lotus Sutra and take advantage of this opportunity of his sickness. He even wrote that her husband's sickness may have been at the Buddha's discretion, adding, "It is preached in the Vimalakirti Sutra and the Nirvana Sutra that a sick person will indeed attain Buddhahood."

We hold a monthly "Odaimoku Chanting Session" in the main hall of Ikegami Honmonji Temple. There is one married couple who have attended regularly. The husband used to say his primary concern was his job, while things religious were solely up to his wife.

Three years ago, the husband was diagnosed with prostate cancer and received treatment. Since then, he has been coming to chant Odaimoku together with his wife. He always tells me, "Kanju-san (chief abbot)! Thanks to the cancer, I have learned the preciousness of life, the value of religious faith and Odaimoku as well as the ties of marriage and family. Now, my real life has begun. I am determined to lead a worthy life from now on."

Whenever I see this couple from behind as they are chanting Odaimoku, I bow to them with palms together in great respect and reverence.

Rev. Nissho Kanno, Bishop of Ikegami Honmonji Temple, Tokyo

Creating the World's Largest Mandala, Again!



Rice Mandala created in 2015 in Vercelli.

By Rev. Shoryo Tarabini,
Renkoji Temple, Italy

Two years ago, we created a huge Mandala made of rice in the International Rice Exchange in Vercelli. It was then recorded as the world's largest Mandala in the Guinness Book of World Records.

This year in June, we created a Mandala in the form of a Lotus Flower in Casale Monferrato's marketplace, next to the castle in the historic center of the city. It was twice the size of the one we made in 2015. We spent the first day drawing the entire Mandala, a Lotus Flower, to represent the Lotus Sutra,



Participants drawing outlines for the Mandala.



Rev. Tarabini and participants chanting and drumming while circling around the completed Mandala.

the Buddha, and all of Buddhism. On the second day, we filled the Mandala with colored paper confetti. The paper for the Mandala was made from natural wood and was given to us as a donation.

After the Mandala was completed, the entire congregation of about 120 people walked around the Mandala, reciting the *shomyo*, songs praising the Buddha, sections of the Lotus Sutra, and the Odaimoku accompanied by *uchiwa daiko*, hand drums.

A prayer was dedicated for peace, tranquility and harmony to be brought to all the people of the city of Casale Monferrato, the surrounding towns and region, all of Italy, all of Europe, and the entire world.

After the consecration, I delivered a short sermon on the Buddhist concept of Impermanence of all phenomena in life. Then, we dismantled the Mandala to show that all things in life, not only beautiful things but also problems,



Aerial photo of the Mandala made from confetti.

are impermanent. We returned the Mandala to nature, which had let us use the beautiful material to create this work of art for the city and people of the region. The entire congregation helped dismantle the Mandala. We threw confetti into the air with gratitude and as an expression of joy for having been able to participate in the day's event. It was an unusually hot day, but the people enjoyed taking part in this unique Nichiren Shu event. The collective effort put into this project created a deep emotional experience for many of the participants. We felt touched by the Lotus Sutra and the Buddha.

An aerial photograph was taken to show this achievement and to give people an idea of its grandeur, scale and beauty. This kind of cultural event surely presents a great opportunity for propagation and promotion of Nichiren Shu Buddhism and the Lotus Sutra in Italy.

NBIC Hosts the 2017 Shami Seminar

By Shami Kanse Capon

The 19th NBIC Shami Seminar was held from July 19-23 at the Nichiren Buddhist International Center (NBIC), in Hayward, California in the U.S. I was fortunate to participate this year, together with six other shami: Elizabeth Roen Drewello, Gabriel Kan-E Rosman, James Cody Kanyu Kroll, and Chad Kanjo Grohman from the U.S., Guilherme Yotatsu Chiamulera from Brazil, and Mauro Yoei Petriw from Argentina.

For five days, we lived separated from the outside world as we devoted ourselves to the study and practice of

Nichiren Shu doctrine and ceremony. Each day started with *suigyō*, water purification practice, and included daily services, cleaning and classes. Many people were involved in organizing the seminar. We were fortunate to have the opportunity to learn from such excellent teachers.

Instruction in Shomyo and ceremonial manners was given by two Shomyo masters from Japan, Rev. Chiryo Moriwaki of Hokkeji in Hokkaido, and Rev. Zenryu Fujisaki of Togakuin in Tochigi. They taught the meaning and significance of Nichiren Shu services. They also showed how to use our voices and movement to

demonstrate our appreciation to the three treasures: Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, according to Nichiren Shu tradition. Many of these elements are difficult to master and perform with grace, but the teachers encouraged us to keep practicing, and educate our bodies through repetition.

Lectures on the Buddhist sutras, the life of Nichiren Shonin, and the Six Senior Disciples were given by Rev. Ryuei McCormick from San Francisco, and Rev. Eisei Ikenaga of the Nichiren Buddhist Temple of Portland. Rev. Tetsudo Takasaki, Manager of NBIC, taught *shakyo*, sutra-copying, and sutra-chanting. All of these classes gave invaluable skills and knowledge that we as shami need to learn to move forward in our training. The classes also encouraged us to think about how to teach Buddhism and bring Nichiren Shonin's teachings and the Lotus Sutra to people.

Throughout the seminar, translation into English and Spanish was provided by two interpreters: Rev. Douglas Shoda Kanai from Kannon Temple of Nevada, and Rev. Keiji Oshima of Daimokuji, Singapore. Delicious and nutritious meals were provided by Mrs. Takasaki, whose careful planning and preparation of the food allowed us to concentrate on our practice and remain in good health.

Even meals were like classes. The first time I went to the NBIC Shami Seminar



in 2014, mealtimes were for me one of the most difficult parts! I had thought mealtimes would be a time that we could relax. During training, meals are in total silence, and the students must be constantly ready to serve the teachers whenever they even look like they might like more food or tea. Sometimes, it is difficult to finish our own food, because we're taking care of the needs of others. I remember sitting on the edge of my seat the whole time when I was sitting, and trying to eat as fast as possible when I wasn't up serving tea or getting more rice or soup for others. I have come to appreciate this training during meals as a way of becoming aware of what is going on around me, and giving up my own comfort in order to serve others.

I would like to thank all of the instructors, our interpreters, Mrs. Takasaki, my fellow shami, and everyone who supported us. My experience at the seminar inspired me to continue my training with increased vigor. Thank you again.



TEMPLE EVENTS

Nichiren Mission of Hawaii Rev. Chishin Hirai

Minobusan High School Students' Visit

A group of students from Minobusan High School, led by Vice Principal Tetsuji Muramatsu, visited the Hawaii Betsuin on May 21 to attend the service for Memorial Day. The service was a prayer to remember our loved ones and all the veterans who lost their lives during past wars. Following the service, the students joined local attendees to enjoy all-American favorites like hot dogs and chili at a luncheon provided by the *Fujinkai*, our women's association.

The students brought a wonderful gift from Minobusan: a greeting from Archbishop Nisso Uchino, Chief Abbot of Minobusan Kuonji Temple. We were so honored to receive the following thoughtful message.

Greetings from Minobusan,

Hello, fellow members in Hawaii. The Minobusan High School students visit you again this year. This has become an annual event, and I appreciate your warm welcome every year. Considering that it may be difficult for you to come to Minobusan to see me, I send my greetings.

I understand that Japanese-Americans faced hard times during World War II and its aftermath. The teachers and students of Minobusan High School studied how difficult people's lives in Hawaii were then. The students who visited in past years became aware of the emotional hardships you have been through. Your health and long life have been in their prayers even after returning to Minobusan. The visit to the Hawaii Betsuin is a wonderful experience for the students, and I hope they have not been causing any inconvenience for you.

I conclude this message with my prayer for your health, peace and long life filled with happiness and joy. If you have a chance, please come and visit me at Minobusan.

With Gratitude,

Nisso Uchino

Namu Myoho Renge Kyo



Hilo Nichiren Mission Rev. Chitoku Kawaguchi

Tsunami Memorial Service

The Hilo Nichiren Mission held a tsunami memorial service at the temple on May 13 to commemorate the lost city of Shinmachi, a predominantly Japanese community in Hilo that completely disappeared in the tsunami of May 23, 1960. Sixty people who were relatives of Hilo Nichiren Mission members lost their lives in the tsunami.

After a regular morning service at the mission, a *shodaigyo-angya* procession made its way from the Tsunami Memorial Museum to the Tsunami Memorial Park. The tsunami memorial service was conducted in the park in front of the memorial monument, which is located at the center of the former city of Shinmachi.



After resident minister Rev. Hosho Sugawara was reassigned to Japan, the Hilo Nichiren Mission has been left without a minister. Since I was assigned to Maui last year, I have committed to visiting the Hilo Nichiren Mission once a month to fulfill the wishes of the mission's members. The *shodaigyo-angya* procession for the tsunami memorial service was requested by members, and I was happy to help.

The voices of the members of the Hilo Nichiren Mission chanting the *Odaimoku* could be heard throughout Hilo Bay on that day.

There are many active members in Hilo, and I would like to keep contributing to the development of the mission.

Honolulu Myohoji Mission Rev. Josho Yamamura

Historic Treasures

Professors Shoshi Annaka and Naomi Sasaoka of Rissho University, Tokyo, visited our temple in February to examine the Buddha statues on our altar. They are studying the statues and treasures enshrined in Buddhist temples in Hawaii.

I was surprised to hear that the sitting statues of Shakyamuni Buddha and Many Treasures Buddha were made in the early Edo Period. This makes them at least 400 years old. The professors also believe the



bell in the columbarium was made in the Heian Period more than a thousand years ago. This is, of course, before the time of Nichiren Shonin. If this bell is proven to be from the Heian Period, it will be an important cultural treasure for Hawaii. Additionally, the Daikoku statue in our office is likely at least a hundred years old.

I am sure we will learn that many important Buddhist and cultural treasures are at Honolulu Myohoji. I ask that you all help me and the temple officers to protect these treasures for future generations of our temple and mission.

San Jose Myokakuji Betsuin Rev. Ryusho Matsuda

Paper Toba

Our temple invites you to submit a *Toba*, a prayer sheet, three times a year: at the Spring and Autumn Ohigan Services and the Obon service in July. One writes the names of their ancestors on the prayer sheet. These are then placed in front of the Gohonzon during the services. The officiant priest offers a special prayer to your ancestors by reading the Buddhist names and common names of the deceased and the priest purifies each prayer sheet with holy water.

It is a Buddhist custom to dedicate a flat memorial tablet bearing inscriptions such as passages from the sutras and the posthumous Buddhist names of the deceased. This is called a stupa or toba in Japanese. *Toba* is a shortened form of the term *sotoba*, the transliteration of the Sanskrit word *stupa*, a type of shrine originating in India where the relics of Shakyamuni Buddha were kept.

The wooden *toba* are placed upright behind or beside a grave after a memorial service in Japan, but because such customs cannot be carried out in the U.S., we use a paper memorial sheet called "Paper Toba."

When you see the form for the prayer sheet, you will find two Chinese characters written on the top of the column. It says *Myoho* which is the abbreviated form of *Namu Myoho Renge Kyo*. Although it is

hard to memorize Buddhist names, when you write the names of the deceased on the prayer sheet, your prayers will reach your loved ones. This is also a good time for you to recall the wonderful memories you have of your ancestors.

Puunene Nichiren Mission, Maui Rev. Chitoku Kawaguchi

Annual Shin-Bon Service and Bon Dance

Puunene Nichiren Mission held the annual Shin-Bon Service and Bon Dance Festival on Saturday, June 10.

"Shin-Bon" is the first year memorial for newly deceased spirits. We offered prayers for one newly deceased spirit during this year's service. After the service, we held a Bon Dance from 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. Many people participated, dancing continuously for two hours straight!

Members and friends of the Puunene Nichiren Mission spent one week preparing food items for sale at the food booths. These included lima bean manju, chow-fun noodles, roast pork plates, Japanese curry rice, shaved ice, and cold drinks. Almost all the food we prepared sold out. The game booths for children were also very popular and lively.

My six-month overseas ministry training took place in 2008 at the Nichiren Mission of Hawaii in Honolulu. During my training, I visited Puunene Nichiren Mission where Rev. Tetsudo Takasaki was resident minister at the time, and helped prepare for the Bon Dance season. The Puunene Bon Dance starts the many Bon Dances throughout the Hawaiian Islands, so it is very special. At the time, I came in a few days before the actual event, so I didn't know how much preparation went into it.

This year, since I am the resident minister of Puunene Nichiren Mission, I found that there were many things to be done, and we needed the help of several people working together before the event. Along with the members of the Puunene Nichiren Mission, I would like to thank all the helpers and visitors for making our Bon Dance a success. Mahalo.



Calendar for October 2017–November 2017

OCT 1	Ceremony of Changing the Robes on the Statue of Nichiren Shonin, Minobusan	OCT 13	The 736th Memorial Service for Nichiren Shonin
OCT 10	Ceremony in Memory of the Founder's Exile to Sado Island	NOV 4	The 18th Anniversary Grand Ceremony at Dragon Palace Temple in Nagpur, India
OCT 12	Minobusan and Ikegami Mando Parade	NOV 12	Commemoration Day for the Komatsubara Persecution
OCT 13	Oeshiki	NOV 13	Memorial for Nichizo Shonin

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