

Nichiren Shu News

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Kyo-ga-take of Mt. Fuji, Where Our Founder Buried the Lotus Sutra



By Rev. Sensho Komukai

When you decide to climb Mt. Fuji, you can drive up to the Fuji Subaru Line 5th Station (at an altitude of 2305 meters). Walking along the way from the station for an hour, you will reach a sacred place called Kyo-ga-take at an altitude of 2450 meters, where Nichiren Shonin buried the Lotus Sutra in the ground.

Why did he do so? In 1260, Nichiren Shonin completed his treatise, "Spreading Peace throughout the Country by Establishing the True Dharma," in which he warned that a foreign invasion would take place in the near future. From 1266 through 1269, envoys from the Mongolian Empire visited Japan with an official demand

that it become subject to their rule. The Japanese government did not provide any response, but the envoys visited Japan persistently, even abducting local people from Tsushima Island. Everyone became restless with anxiety. The whole nation was in turmoil. Nichiren Shonin felt a sense of danger about the fall of the country. His attention went to Mt. Fuji, the highest mountain in Japan, because for Buddhists Mt. Fuji is regarded as the Buddha body itself. The Buddha can get an unobstructed view of the whole country and protect us from the highest position.

In May of 1269, when he was 48 years old, Nichiren Shonin paid a visit to Sengen Shrine in Yamanashi Prefecture, where the goddess of Mt.

Fuji is enshrined. A chief priest of the shrine named Shioya Heinai Zaemon was so impressed with his mission full of dignity and passion that he welcomed Nichiren Shonin into his house. While staying there, Nichiren Shonin copied down all 28 chapters of the Lotus Sutra. With Rev. Shioya as a guide, Nichiren Shonin climbed up to Kyo-ga-take and stayed in a cave for 100 days to read the Lotus Sutra to the fullest. Then he buried the whole copy of the Lotus Sutra to pray for national peace and security by keeping off foreign invasion.

Nichiren Shonin had an enormous impact on Shioya Heinai Zaemon. He entered the priesthood to be a disciple of Nichiren Shonin. He remodeled his house into a Buddhist Sangha, which developed into a temple called Jogyoji Temple. Kyo-ga-take has been preserved with great care by the Shioya family from generation to generation. Every year on July 1st, the opening day of Mt. Fuji to climbers, a member of the Shioya family carries a statue of our Founder on their back up to Kyo-ga-take, and places it



with full reverence in a hut for adoration.

In 1868, however, the Meiji Government issued the ordinance to separate Shinto and Buddhism. As a result, a movement to abolish Buddhism began. Temples and Buddhist statues were destroyed and burnt down all over the country. Kyo-ga-take was no exception, falling into ruin.

In 1954, the 86th Chief Abbot of Minobusan, Nichijo Fujii felt sad to find Kyo-ga-take left in a horrible state of devastation. He was determined to revive the sacred place. Collecting donations, he built a sutra-chanting hall of octagonal shape and erected a bronze statue of Nichiren Shonin at Kyo-ga-take.

Now you realize that Kyo-ga-take is a very important sacred place for Nichiren Shu Buddhism. When you go to Mt. Fuji, you are encouraged to visit Kyo-ga-take and chant the Odaimoku, Namu Myoho Renge Kyo, in front of the statue of our Founder that stands as if still preaching with a scroll of the Lotus Sutra in his left hand and juzu beads in his right.

NICHIREN SHU NEWS NEEDS YOUR HELP

We are all facing many challenges during this COVID-19 crisis. At Nichiren Shu News, we are working to improve the worldwide experience in an era of limited international mail service. Please take a few minutes to answer an online survey. By answering some questions, you can help us to spread the Wonderful Dharma to even more people. Thank you!

www.nichiren.or.jp/english/survey2020/



NICHIREN SHU ON SHIKINE-JIMA ISLAND

By Rev. Kosei Uchida

Toyoji Temple of Nichiren Shu is the only temple on Shikine-jima Island. This island is around 100 miles away from Tokyo and about a mile from Niiijima Island. According to an old document, when a Nichiren Shu priest visited Shikine-jima Island in 1415, he found many tombs for exiles and victims of a shipwreck. Though he was eager to build a temple on each island for the repose of their souls, his wish was not realized. From the middle ages to the Edo period, Shikine-jima was



a desert island, because no ample fresh water could be found. In 1888, as the Meiji government promoted development on the island, the number of residents increased.

The inhabitants of the island wanted a temple so that they could hold a funeral or a memorial service for their beloved deceased. In 1908, a small chanting hall was built. The resident minister at that time on Shikine-jima recalled, "It was so difficult to live on this island that I would rather go back to the mainland. The islanders were very enthusiastic in a new temple, which stopped me from leaving..." In 1911, the main hall was finally constructed because of their full commitment and support.

Toyoyji Temple has repeatedly faced natural disasters. In 2019, a typhoon partially destroyed the main hall and residence. A 900-year-old podocarp tree, a symbol of new life and a source of energy, fell down. Nobody felt disheartened, including the current resident minister, Rev. Chiko Yokoyama, who made good



luck charms for health and longevity from the branches of the tree and gave them out to anyone who wanted them.

The temple is alive with people. The graveyard is covered with shiny white sand which is carried from a sandy beach. It is always clean and tidy. Many people come together for a Bon festival, where a decorated lantern is lit and a Bon dance is performed on a large scale. The reason why people on the island are faithful is because their livelihood relies greatly on fishing. As the proverb says, "The sailor has only an inch of plank between him and death" Danger always lurks in the sea.

Once you go out into the sea, you cannot do anything by yourself. No human force can prevail against the power of nature. You only pray in pursuit of survival with your palms together.

Now you understand why the islanders of Shikine-jima are always obliged to the Buddha, heavenly beings and our Founder for their protection. The islands are worth visiting when you want to see and experience their inimitable faith which comes from its being remote from the mainland.

—Translated by Rev. Sensho Komukai



Creating Lecture Videos for the 'Kentei Exam'

By Rev. Kanjo Bassett, Missionary Dept.

Creating the English-language curriculum for Nichiren Shu priest education has been a ten-year effort involving the talents and efforts of many Nichiren Shu priests in Japan and around the world.

The first part of this was to complete an English-language translation of the Nichiren Shu textbook, *The History and Teachings of Nichiren Buddhism*. This effort was initiated by Rev. Chishin Hirai during his NBIC tenure and continued under his successor at NBIC, Rev. Eisei Ikenaga. The translation was finally completed in 2018.



Japanese shami go to Minobusan University for a week of intensive lectures covering their studies followed by a written exam and oral interviews, known together as the "Kentei exam."

The Kentei exam lectures have always been given in Japan by professors from Minobusan University. They review the textbook, but they also cover material that is not in the book.

Many ideas were explored with the professors on how to re-create the lectures. In the end, it was decided to create a video series that shami could watch in their own countries saving them from traveling to Japan to attend lectures and take tests.

That sounded like a simple plan, but it was missing a critical element. To make a video, you need a script, but there wasn't one. The lectures were not written down, and we could not write them.

We went to the Kentei exam lectures at Minobusan University in late 2016 and recorded all of the lectures and had students carefully transcribe over 40 hours of material. The professors then reviewed the transcripts and made any needed changes. These materials were then carefully compared with the textbook, reorganized, edited, distilled down to their essentials, and translated into English. There was a lot of back and forth between the professors, editors, and translators to make this happen, a time consuming process. A lot more work went into winnowing down the material. It would have been far too expensive to produce 40 hours of video, and it would have been hard to watch. We needed to be selective as to what to include. By early 2019, we finally had it distilled down into four rough working scripts. We had made significant progress, and we were ready to begin making the video series.

Then, Rev. Daiei Matsui, manager of the Propagation Department and International Section at Nichiren Shu Headquarters, issued a directive that the first English-language Kentei Exam would be held in December 2019. Suddenly, the video series had to be completed and delivered by mid-October.

FINDING OUR VOICE The quality of narration can make or break a project. A speaker with a great voice and a confident style can inspire people and hold their attention, but one without those gifts can put people to sleep.

Initially, we had hoped that Rev. Riju Kumazawa of Myorinji Temple would be able to do the narration. He has extensive experience in professional narration and his own home studio. However, as a resident priest and medical doctor, he did not have enough available time to take on such a large project.

The project was not something that a typical voiceover artist could do. It had a lot of specialized vocabulary and foreign words, and the script was still

evolving. There also wasn't a budget for hiring a recording studio.

With no other clear options and a deadline coming up fast, it was suggested that I take on the narration duty. I had no experience, but I was at least willing to give it a try.

I think that this endeavor would not have been possible without encouragement and production expertise of the video and sound editor on the project who managed the recording and editing. With his help, I put together a small recording space in a storage room on the fifth floor of the Head Office. I spent part of each day last summer recording there. The learning curve was incredibly steep. It was never just a matter of reading the script. It took a lot of work to find the right pace and energy to keep it interesting and natural.

As I started recording, I faced what seemed to be an endless pile of script pages. I learned a lot about the limitations of my voice. Very humbling. On a good day, I could record for about two hours before my voice would start to give out. I also learned that my voice wasn't the same from day to day. Re-recording a sentence or two was not going to match with what was recorded in an earlier session. Voices change in conversation, but the editor had to fit pieces together so those changes wouldn't be too distracting. It's not like editing text. Even when a change was just to replace a single word or phrase, it required recording a longer section to get it to fit in with the rest.

Some sections required many retakes to get them right. The passages with numerous Sanskrit names were the most challenging. The first video we worked on was the most complicated, and it was slow going. After that, we settled into more of a groove, as we learned what was and was not working.

The narration is far from perfect, and there are places where I would like to re-record a sentence or section. That being said, I was surprised at how well it

works overall. That is a testament to the persistent work and attention to detail in editing.

BACKGROUND VISUALS The final hurdle was to gather and shoot all the visual materials needed to effectively support what was being said, to give the video series more of an engaging documentary feel instead of looking like a PowerPoint presentation. I traveled to Minobu, Chiba, and Kamakura to get visuals related to Nichiren Shonin and the history of Nichiren Shu temples.

The video series brings together thousands of elements that all needed to work together.

Despite many challenges along the way, the series all came together in the end, and even a little ahead of schedule. The Minobusan University professors wanted to control access to the video material, so we made the videos available online for the shami with password protection for the month before the exam.

The written Kentei exam was held at NBIC in Hayward, California on December 7 and 8. Interviews were then conducted using Skype with professors Rev. Yosei Ikegami and Rev. Kaiei Mochizuki of Minobusan University.

I am happy to report that all of the shami passed the exam. Many people put a lot of time and energy into this project, even though only a small number of people ended up using it. Knowing that we had done our best to support this a group of shami, as well as for future Nichiren Shu priests and teachers, was incredibly rewarding.



Professors Yosei Ikegami, Tengen Hamajima, Kanto Kuwano, and Chuichi Kimura each introduced their sections of the video series.



The four-part video series covers the Life of Shakyamuni Buddha, the Lotus Sutra, Nichiren Shu Doctrine, and the Life of Nichiren Shonin. Many portions of the video use imagery from historic Nichiren Shu temples.

CLIMBING SHICHIMENSAN



By Rev. Kanjo Bassett, Missionary Dept.

My nephew passed away in January at the age of 36 from a diabetic coma. Ten years ago he came to Japan with his dad (my older brother), on a trip to Nagano where we visited several hot springs. After his son passed away, my brother said the trip had been a special memory for my nephew. I then promised to offer a memorial prayer when I climbed Shichimensan in the spring.

Then the COVID-19 crisis hit and going anywhere became a nightmare of hurdles: travel restrictions, reduced operating hours, limited transit schedules, getting enough face masks, hand sanitizer, and even toilet paper as those items became hard to obtain.

It turned out to be a memorable trip. This was not because the trip itself was difficult or long. Instead there was an otherworldly quality in attempting to do normal things in a world that just isn't normal. Japanese authorities never enacted a "lockdown." Instead, local governments requested self-restraint for businesses and the public in early April.

Throughout the month, wearing face masks at all times outside the home became routine while clear plastic barriers were put up at every store checkout. Cafes and restaurants reduced seats, then they closed altogether or switched to takeout only. Rush-hour

trains and the Shinkansen started running empty. By Golden Week vacation, normally a peak time for travel and going out, city streets and major stations were nearly empty and looked like scenes from a science fiction movie.

Going to Shichimen seemed like it would be out of the question until I called Okunoin temple and discovered that travel restrictions were lifted at the end of Golden Week. The temple was open for pilgrimages, offered food and shelter, but the priest on the phone advised me to wear a mask when I was there, and to be careful of leeches on the lower parts of the trail. I decided to take the chance, packed extra masks and disinfectant, purchased a bus ticket online and made my way to Shinjuku bus terminal on a clear Saturday morning.

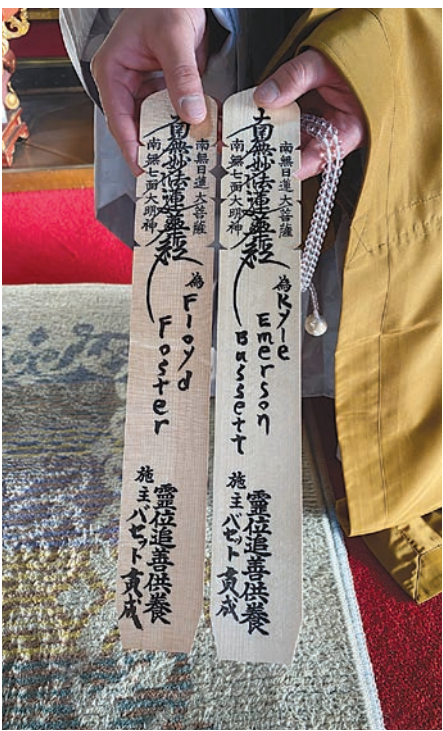
Anyone who has used Shinjuku bus terminal on a weekend knows how packed and hectic it is. However, on this Saturday morning, the terminal was empty except for the staff who checked and rechecked empty passenger lists. The bus to Minobu was empty, the expressway and rest areas were clear of cars and trucks. At Minobusan, the Kuonji morning service had just three local residents attended to by 20 priests.

And yet, things felt more normal in Minobu than anywhere else. People were running errands, schools were beginning to reopen, construction

workers were busy. On the final taxi ride up to the Shichimensan Omotesando trail entrance, the driver pointed at the gravel road and said, "take a good look because this road is going up there soon." He nodded up the hill where there was another road. "They need that road to remove rock as they bore the new Shinkansen tunnel." The new linear maglev Chuo Shinkansen line from Tokyo to Nagoya will tunnel through the Southern Alps region very close to Mt. Shichimen.

I did a quick waterfall purification at Bentendo Temple along the Haruki River and then started to climb. There are five rest area "bo" on the climb up the South Sando pilgrimage trail. All of them were closed and quiet except for the sound of bees circling clumps of Rhododendron blossoms. There were also songbirds: wrens, flycatchers and robins. The month of May is the best time to hear them since they are so active.

Trail damage from two typhoons in the past two years was massive in places. Whole valley sides are missing along with pieces of the upper trail. There are new trail sections built around them. At the gate entrance to Keishiin Temple, I noticed something new. Deer had eaten away the bark of old trees seriously damaging them. Deer overpopulation is a big problem in Japanese mountains. Protecting high mountain forests and wildflowers is a growing challenge.



The next morning, the temple priest drummed and chanted the Odaimoku until the first rays of sun shot over the horizon. He then recited the famous Kenji Miyazawa poem "Ame ni mo Makezu," "Not losing to the rain... Not fettered by desire." I thought of the quote Nichiren Shonin included at the conclusion of *Kanjin Honzon Sho*, "When the sky is blue, the land is bright, those who know the Lotus Sutra can see the reasons for the occurrences in the world."

After morning prayers were finished with a memorial *toba* for my nephew enshrined on the altar, I said goodbye to the priests and hiked down the North Sando pilgrimage trail. The forest on this side of Shichimensan was untouched by typhoon damage. Returning to Tokyo, I felt exhausted but also refreshed and grounded again. Nichiren Shonin lived in extremely challenging times, but now we are all living in our own challenging times, how comforting it is to follow in the wisdom of his footsteps.

MEMORIES OF REV. HOYU MARUYAMA

By Rev. Keiryu Shima, Jikoji Temple

I first met Rev. Hoyu Maruyama 40 years ago on April 1, 1980 in the newly established Nichiren Shu Shumbun Co. Ltd. office, which publishes the official newspaper of Nichiren Shu. It was the inaugural day of the company, which operated from the Missionary Department in the Head Office of Nichiren Shu.

Nichiren Shu Shimbun is printed three times a month. The first issue, which was a monthly one, dates back to July 1933. It now boasts a circulation of 50,000.



When I met Rev. Maruyama, I was the newly appointed managing editor of the paper, and he was a veteran reporter, formerly belonging to the Missionary Department in the Head Office, which published missionary materials including Nichiren Shu Shimbun.

Many young priests were working at the newspaper company. Rev. Maruyama trained them strictly, but always with a tender heart. All of them became effective journalists making use of the knowledge and skills that they had acquired under Rev. Maruyama for missionary activities.

He was also thoughtful of others. Several days after I started working at Nichiren Shu Shimbun, he took me to Ikegami Honmonji Temple and introduced me to Rev. Nichii Kaneko, Archbishop of Nichiren Shu and the head priest of the temple. He gave me the rarest chance to see and talk with the priest who presided over 8,000 priests of Nichiren Shu and 3,500,000 lay devotees.

Rev. Maruyama was a man who could always tell right from wrong. At the same

time, he was open and tolerant. I vividly remember his gentle look.

He was a "reporter," but Rev. Maruyama was the actual editor of the paper. He was a most able newspaperman, greatly contributing to the missionary work of Nichiren Shu. I was so happy to have worked on the paper with Rev. Maruyama for six years until March 1986. I was fully dependent on him.

Three months after we met, I asked him to become advisor to this paper, Nichiren Shu News, for which I was also working as managing editor since its first issue was published in October 1976.

I counted on his rich experience as a reporter and being well informed on matters of the Nichiren Shu order, and later as a representative of the Nichiren Shu Overseas Propagation Promotion Association, which shares the cost of issuing Nichiren Shu News with the Head Office.

Rev. Maruyama, thank you very much. With palms together, Namu Myoho Renge Kyo. Please rest peacefully in the Buddha's Pure Land.



EDITORS NOTE Rev. Hoyu Maruyama of Sempukuji Temple in Yokosuka, Japan passed away on April 4, 2020 at the age of 79. He also worked on the Nichiren Shu News editorial staff from 1980 until 2019. His keen mind, kindness, and concern for the well-being of the Nichiren Shu international community will always be missed.

TEMPLE EVENTS



Minobusan Kuonji Temple Sandra Seki, Temple Events Editor

Odaimoku Chanting All Around the World

On June 6, a 24-hour Odaimoku chanting session was held and relayed throughout the world over the Internet from Minobusan Kuonji Temple. The prayer session was held with the slogan; "Offering to Heal the World." It was carried out throughout the world by Rev. Tarabini of Renkoji Temple, Italy, Rev. Myokei Caine-Barrett of the Houston Sangha, Rev. Josho Yamamura of Honolulu Myohoji Temple, Rev. Shokai Kanai of the Nichiren Mission of Hawaii, Rev. Ervinna Myoufu of Rengeji Temple, Jakarta, Rev. Ryuoh Faulconer of the Boston Sangha, Rev. Kanjin Cederman of Enkyoji Temple Seattle, and Rev. Shoda Kanai of the Kannon Temple of Nevada. Other temples from Japan joined in the 24-hour Odaimoku chanting. Members from the sanghas in Malaysia and Sri Lanka also joined. This big event was open for everyone to join online, to pray for the victims of COVID-19 and hope for the earliest containment of the pandemic.

Kannon Temple of Nevada Rev. Shoda Kanai

Nothing is Permanent

Let us all pray together, regardless of religion or denomination, for an early end to COVID-19, for the early recovery of those affected, and for the attainment of Buddhahood for those who have passed.

I also pray that everyone is staying safe and adhering to the 'Stay-at-Home' policies set forth by the government. States may differ in the implementation of these orders, but it is best to stay home to keep you and everyone around you safe! There are those who do not wish to listen. Instead, they protest, which is their right. While they say they are speaking for everyone, they are only speaking for themselves. The issue is that they want to return to "normalcy," how it

was before. What these people do not realize is that nothing stays the same. Everything is constantly changing. We cannot return to how things were before the pandemic. Going back to "normal" will not alleviate suffering but only increase it. Change is always scary as we do not know or cannot control what is coming next. We fear what we do not know, thus we always want to remain safe, in the same place. This place, however, is non-existent.

The Buddha teaches impermanence. Nothing remains the same. There is always something affecting another thing, thus always changing form. We call this the "Law of Cause and Effect." If we stay home and do not gather in groups (cause), we can slow the spread of the virus and keep hospitals from being overwhelmed (effect). What is deadly about this virus is that it may take up to two weeks before any symptoms appear. Meanwhile, a person can be unknowingly spreading the virus.

As with anything, this pandemic will pass. Nothing is permanent. I pray that we will learn lessons from this virus to be better prepared and, more importantly, be nicer and more considerate toward others.

We cannot go back to "normal." We must change for the better and find ways to help those around us become better.

Please also continue to chant the Odaimoku, so we can begin to heal the world and make it into a Buddha Land.

With the state of Nevada slowly re-opening many businesses, the Kannon Temple has remained closed to keep followers safe from COVID-19. Instead, weekly services have moved online on Zoom. Many participants locally, nationally, and from around the world have joined in each week. In these trying times, even though we cannot meet in person, we can still connect and enjoy chanting the Lotus Sutra and the Odaimoku together. We are fortunate to still conduct memorial services and special house/statue blessings in followers' homes using social distancing and masks. Once the temple re-opens, we plan to continue broadcasting services online, so many people will be able to attend each service.



Nichiren Mission of Hawaii Rev. Shokai Kanai

Zoom Study Class

COVID-19 has changed lifestyles for many people around the world. The lockdown has created an environment to better care for nature. We could have a better society by not damaging the earth. Our temple was mainly for the local people in Hawaii, however it has now evolved to reach out to more people around the world.

In April, one of my friends living in the Los Angeles area suggested creating a Zoom video meeting. My son in Maui set up a Zoom account on my computer, and in May I started using Zoom for our Thursday Study Classes on the Lotus Sutra, then for chanting sessions and Sunday services. There are more than ten people who participated in the meeting, not only from Honolulu and Hilo but also Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Tokyo. Thank you very much for your participation.

If you are interested in the services or classes, please create an account with www.zoom.us and send your e-mail address to nichiren@hawaiiantel.net to receive our meeting ID and password.

Obon Services

Obon Service is dedicated to our ancestors and deceased friends by offering a *toba*, wooden stupa, or *toro*, floating lantern. We believe that we can accumulate great merits by offering *toba* to the Buddha and to the deceased. We can also transfer our merits to them. These offerings are an expression of our sincerity, respect, and appreciation towards our loved ones.

We held the Obon Service on Sunday, July 12. Our temple also observed the Shin-bon Service which is a service especially for those who passed away since last year's Obon. This year, the Shin-Bon Service was held on Saturday, July 18. We offered a floating lantern to each one of the newly deceased. After the service, we went to the lotus pond where we held another

ceremony, floating the lanterns on the stream of the lotus pond. This ceremony was not just for the newly deceased but for all of our ancestors.

We welcomed our ancestors on July 12. We believe that our ancestors stayed at our temple for a week before returning to the spiritual realm on July 18.

Our temple is temporarily closed for mass services, but I accept individual members who are in good health to visit the sanctuary and pray on their own. I also conduct memorial services for groups of less than ten and do counseling over the telephone and by e-mail.

May good health be with you!

Enkyoji Temple Seattle Rev. Kanjin Cederman

What is Nichiren Shu?

I would like to share the premiere of my interview with "Carving the Divine" about Nichiren Shu Buddhism. This was conducted by Yujiro Seki, Director of Carving the Divine: Buddhist Sculptors of Japan. He asked me to make a brief presentation of Nichiren Shu on YouTube as a representative of the Nichiren Shu Headquarters.

I hope you have a chance to view the interview on YouTube.com — please search for "What is Nichiren Shu?" with Kanjin Cederman Shonin.



Calendar for August 2020–September 2020

AUG 13-16 Obon (Traditional Lunar Calendar)

AUG 15 Memorial Ceremony for Victims and Unknown War Dead and Prayer for World Peace at Chidorigafuchi National Cemetery, Sponsored by Nichiren Shu

AUG 27 Matsubagayatsu Persecution Memorial Day

SEP 3 Memorial for Niko Shonin

SEP 12 Tatsunokuchi Persecution Memorial Day

SEP 17 Memorial for Nisshin Shonin

SEP 17-18 Grand Ceremony at Shichimensan

SEP 19-25 Autumn Higan (Equinox) Week

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