

Nichiren Shu News

Published by the Head Office of Nichiren Shu & NOPPA

No. 240

October 1, 2020

1

SIX YEARS IN INTERNATIONAL MISSION

By Rev. Keiji Oshima

On March 31, I resigned as the chief priest of Daimokuji Temple in Singapore. The six and a half years I spent in England, Italy, and Southeast Asia were a precious experience for me.

I stayed in Europe during the first two and a half years. Though I completed Shingyo Dojo, 35 days of priest training, and graduated from Rissho University, I had poor knowledge and little practical experience for mission work. When I tried to expound the Buddhist teachings, I realized that I needed to study the Lotus Sutra and Nichiren Shonin's writings more deeply. I would read over the passages again and again to find

answers to my questions to understand what they meant.

In September 2016, I was assigned to be a chief minister of Daimokuji Temple in Singapore. There were three international missionaries who regularly visited seven activity bases to conduct services, hold study classes and question-and-answer sessions while managing schedules and planning activities for the seven bases. I had many things to do, but it was a fulfilling time.

Those who visit temples in Southeast Asia may be impressed to find how deeply religious the Nichiren Shu followers are and what reverence they show toward ministers. They actively play a responsible role in organizing

their temples and sanghas while never forgetting their respect to those who are ordained to priesthood. The clergy and the laity are united with one spirit toward the purpose of developing their temples and sanghas.

Now that I have returned to Japan, I am making three plans. First, I will translate as many books as possible. Publication of translated books in different languages is an urgent task to develop Nichiren Shu Buddhism on a global level. As I can speak English, Spanish, and Italian, I can help read proofs in terms of multilingual support.

Secondly, I aim to have the Nichiren Shu manner of ceremonies and protocols established abroad and spread widely.

I attended a training course last October for *shomyo*, singing and chanting the Dharma, and received confirmation of the qualification as a *shomyo-shi*. It is my duty to teach the standard of ceremonies and protocols to priests who cannot understand Japanese and to help them attend *shomyo* training courses by overcoming language barriers.

Thirdly, I would like to spread Nichiren Shu Buddhism internationally while in Japan. My temple in Tokyo is located near the embassies of various nations. I will hold some Buddhist events, online services, and lectures using foreign languages. As a Nichiren Shu priest, I plan to start an international mission in Japan.



Rev. Oshima with members from Southeast Asia on a pilgrimage to Shinjoji Temple in Tokyo, Japan where he now serves as resident minister.



Rev. Oshima with a pilgrimage group from Southeast Asia visiting Horiinji Temple in India.



Rev. Oshima as M.C. in Penang for celebration of the 800th Anniversary of the Birth of Our Founder.

Keeping Your Faith in Times of Uncertainty

By Rev. Shoryo Tarabini

Not so long ago, a monk told me, "It is important that you go back to the starting point in a period of social unrest and confusion. You should think over again what the essence of Buddhism is to deepen your faith." I still remember his words. I am very inspired with hopes of keeping and deepening my faith and encouraging followers of Nichiren Buddhism to strengthen their faith.

Half a year ago, the world was forced to make significant changes. A new coronavirus, COVID-19, which first appeared in China, descended on Europe. The plague spread through Italy in no time. All the beds were occupied in hospitals. Many lives were lost. The national borders were closed. All of Italy went into lockdown. From February until the middle of March, everybody was only allowed to leave their homes to go to a clinic, a pharmacy, or a supermarket if permission was granted from the police. We have been hemmed in by confusion and anxiety.

The epidemic attacked some of the followers in our temple, and their parents or relatives were also infected with the coronavirus. The number of the deaths in Italy was increasing on such a large scale that it became impossible to even

hold funerals. Final goodbyes for family members were not allowed. Soldiers carried dead bodies out of rooms and burned them to ashes immediately. At that time, Italy was covered with a somber atmosphere of death. To prevent the coronavirus from spreading further, all of the churches and temples were ordered closed.

However, I never lost hope. I asked followers to chant the Odaimoku together online for an hour every morning and evening. To ease their fears, I read a passage of our Founder's writings that says, "It is necessary to offer up a prayer to the ten raksasis, female devils, of the

Lotus Sutra earnestly enough to make a wet log burst up in flame or to make water come out of dry soil." I encouraged them to overcome what difficulties might come to us, telling them that we would be protected by heavenly beings and Nichiren Shonin wherever we might be, if we pray earnestly.

I prayed for an end to the epidemic every Sunday and held an online study class on his *Treatise on Spreading Peace throughout the Country by Establishing the True Dharma*. The service and study class were shared on Facebook. As Nichiren Shonin said, "A great event is preceded by a great omen, right or

wrong. A great inauspicious event is followed by a great auspicious event." This unprecedentedly great fear and dread can be a great opportunity to better understand Buddhism and to deepen our faith. On this occasion, I donated 550 washable masks to the people of Cereseto from a deep sense of gratitude.

Another great auspicious event came up. Rev. Ervinna Myoufu of Indonesia began a campaign in which one would keep chanting the Odaimoku, *Namu Myoho Renge Kyo*, for 24 hours all around the world. We joined this event with members from Italy and other European countries. It was totally energetic, giving us courage and hope.

Thanks to chanting the Odaimoku, our members who were infected with the virus all recovered. It took us four months, but now we are finally going out again. We are still required to put on masks and maintain social distance from others, but things are improving. To all Nichiren Shu members around the world, I sincerely pray for your safety and state of perfect health at all times. I hope that this coronavirus will clear away quickly, and I am truly wishing that we can all see each other again sometime soon.

Namu Myoho Renge Kyo.



POCOPHONE SHOT ON POCOPHONE F1

2020/1/19 13:12



At any rate, as I ventured to speak up on such a grave matter, which seemed unreasonable to most of the people, I fully expected to be punished by death or banishment. I feel it indeed strange, however, that nothing has happened to me until today. Does it prove that what I insisted on was quite reasonable?

—Nichiren Shonin,
Kingo-dono Gohenji ST 73
A Reply to Lord Ota Jomyo

Speaking up is notoriously hard to do. There is even a saying in Japan, “The nail that sticks up is hammered down.” We all live in societies where the dominant culture tells us what we can say and do. This is sometimes called “duty” or “politeness.” There are strong pressures to conform. We may even believe that our speaking up will only put us in danger and ultimately make no difference. We who know the truth of the Lotus Sutra, that everyone deserves respect, we must find the courage to speak the truth, even if we speak alone as our Founder Nichiren Shonin did. When we speak from the Wonderful Dharma of the Lotus Sutra, it can help others to find their voices, since these words resonate with their true reality. We will find that when we face our fears of speaking up, when we speak truth to our dominant cultures, we are living our vows as Bodhisattvas to benefit all beings.

—Rev. Shinkyō Warner

Buddhism Q&A

Kuyo and the Importance of Remembering and Forgetting

The Japanese kanji and meaning for Kuyo (供養) apparently has no real direct equivalent in Chinese. I occasionally run across questions online from mainland Chinese exchange students in Japan asking what it means. The standard English translation, “memorial,” does almost nothing to convey what Kuyo really is.

Kuyo is praying for the spirit of the deceased to be nourished by our earthly efforts so they attain enlightenment. In this way, Kuyo is more closely related to the original ancient Indian Buddhist ceremonies and elements of Vietnamese Buddhism. This suggests that the cultural influences for Kuyo traveled to along the southern trade routes to Japan.

In traditional Japanese Buddhism through the Showa era, the 50th memorial year was the usual cutoff. However, these days the cutoff is the 33rd memorial since most of the people that are directly connected with the deceased would no longer be around to do Kuyo for them, and it is not the responsibility for later generations.

Japanese Buddhist practitioners say that forgetting is just as important in Kuyo as remembering. That sounds like a contradiction, but it is important to let go of the past even as one honors it with Kuyo prayers. This is a natural



progression not only for the living, but also for the spirits of the deceased, to leave past lives behind and to become enlightened.

2020 marks the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II. The annual Kuyo ceremony for all victims of the war and prayer for world peace was held on August 15 at the Chidorigafuchi National Cemetery. This year's event was drastically scaled down because of COVID-19, but I think it will continue to get smaller over time as the number of people with direct connections with the war becomes smaller and smaller.

When it disappears entirely I hope people will remember to forget, in the right way. I do not believe that the people of any generation would want Kuyo to go on forever or would want to burden future generations with the responsibility. They wanted them to be free from the past and to lead happy lives. The ultimate goal of Kuyo is happiness and enlightenment for all beings in the past, present and future.

—Rev. Kanjo Bassett

Protective Deities in Nichiren Shu (3) – Daikokuten

By Rev. Sensho Komukai

Daikokuten or Mahakala, widely popular as one of the seven deities of good fortune in Japan, has a puffy shape with a smile, standing or sitting on a couple of straw rice-bags, wearing a hood, with a mallet of good luck in his right hand and with a fortune bag slung over his left shoulder.

In ancient times of India, Mahakala had a fierce look from living in the darkness. He was a symbol of destruction and death. People in India had a great

faith in Mahakala, because whenever they prayed to Mahakala, they would win in battle. Mahakala was revered as a deity of battle.

As the faith in Mahakala extended through China, Mahakala was enshrined in the kitchen of a Buddhist temple during the Tang dynasty. Buddhists believed that Mahakala could offer food to anyone who maintained an ascetic practice. As such, he was praised as a deity of food.

In the early Heian period of Japan, the influence of Tang dynasty culture became strong. Grand Master Dengyo, Founder of the Tendai Sect, who had studied Buddhism in Tang China, returned to Japan with a statue of Daikokuten and enshrined it in Enryakuji Temple on Mt. Hiei. As the Daikokuten statue proved to possess miraculous powers, faith in Daikokuten spread in various parts of the country. The dress of Daikokuten was changed from a combat uniform to the Chinese garment by the late Heian period. The fierce face became a sweet smile from the Kamakura period through the Muromachi period.

The reason why he sits on straw rice-bags is that some Buddhists received a divine message, “If you offer fresh rice, you shall have no lack of food to the end of your life.” Contained in a fortune bag he carries on his shoulder are the seven treasures—gold, silver, lapis lazuli,



Mahakala, as depicted in ancient India, has a fierce look from living in darkness.

shell, agate, pearl, and ruby. The seven treasures are shown in an essential scene of the Lotus Sutra. Chapter 11, “Beholding the Stupa of Treasures,” says, “The two Tathagatas, Many-Treasures Buddha and Shakyamuni Buddha, sat cross-legged on the lion-like seat in the stupa of the seven treasures.”

In 1248, when Nichiren Shonin was in Mt. Hiei to learn and practice Buddhism, he was so impressed with the statue of Daikokuten at Enryakuji Temple that he himself carved the image in wood. After that, he treasured his carved statue of

Daikokuten. When he was 55, he gave it to Nitcho, one of his Six Disciples, whose missionary work was based from Guboji Temple in Chiba Prefecture. In 1278, Nitcho Shonin enshrined Nichiren's statue of Daikokuten in Guboji Temple. The Daikokuten statue at Guboji Temple is considered to be the oldest statue of Daikokuten in Nichiren Shu.

Nichiren Shonin explained how good it would be to deify Daikokuten. He wrote a letter to Lord Toki Jonin, one of his devout followers who established Guboji Temple, saying “When you have faith in Daikokuten, you will be able to bring good fortune, just as the tide flows in the great ocean or as the moon becomes full. Be confident that you will become peaceful in your present life and you will have rebirths in good places in your future.”



Daikokudo Hall at Guboji Temple has a statue of Daikokuten carved by Nichiren Shonin.



Daikokuten in Japan today is known as a smiling deity of good fortune.

HITACHI HOT SPRING

By Rev. Sensho Komukai

In 1274, Lord Hakii Sanenaga, who was the land steward of the Minobu area and a devout follower, invited Nichiren Shonin to Mt. Minobu. Because Nichiren Shonin endured the cold winters on the mountain for many years, his health was compromised. In December 1277, he developed a case of persistent diarrhea. The extremely cold winter in 1278 worsened his physical condition. He wrote about how severe it was to live in his residence on Mt. Minobu, "It is unseasonably cold day and night. The building of my hermitage is incomplete and unable to keep out the wind and snow. There is no carpet. With no firewood, we cannot make a fire. Water in the pots and pans, regardless of the amount, freezes and cracks. My body is chilled like a stone, and my breast feels like ice." There were always as many as 40 to 60 people visiting or attending to Nichiren Shonin. Even with donations from followers, there was never enough food or clothing. Under such difficulties, his condition never improved.

Seeing Nichiren Shonin's poor condition, Lord Hakii Sanenaga urged him to travel to Hitachi Province, in present-day Ibaraki Prefecture, for therapy at a hot spring there. He agreed. On September 8, 1282, Nichiren Shonin left Mt. Minobu for the first time in nine years.

You may wonder why Nichiren Shonin decided to go to Hitachi hot springs,



even though there are some wonderful hot springs even closer to Mt. Minobu such as Shimobe, Izu or Hakone. There are three reasons. First, Nichiren Shonin once visited the Hitachi hot spring to heal the wounds he suffered in the Komatsubara Persecution of 1264. Second, it was a safe area because Hakii Saneuji, the second son of Lord Hakii Sanenaga, was assigned as an estate steward of the hot spring area. Sanenaga's wife, Myotoku, also lived there with their second son. Nichiren Shonin wanted to avoid the areas under the control of the Hojo Clan, who were hostile toward him, so that he could safely bathe in the hot spring's healing waters. And third, Nichiren Shonin

wanted to pay a visit to his parents' graves in his hometown in Awa Province, present-day Chiba Prefecture, on his way to the Hitachi hot spring. Nichiren Shonin was already 61 and knew that his days would be drawing to their close. He had been greatly concerned about visiting his parents' graves. This could have been the main reason he agreed to travel the great distance from Mt. Minobu to Hitachi Province.

Sadly, before reaching his hometown and the Hitachi hot spring, Nichiren Shonin passed away at the residence of Ikegami Munenaka on October 13, 1282.

Sometime later, Hakii Saneuji lost his mother, Myotoku. In 1293, Saneuji built a temple in his fiefdom to pray for the

repose of her soul. The temple was named Myotokuji Temple after his mother.

Since then, the Hitachi hot spring has been developed as a place for recuperation. Resident ministers of Myotokuji Temple even served to maintain the public bathhouse. However, after the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011, hot water stopped flowing regularly from the hot spring. With a decline in the number of users, the old wooden bathing facility was taken down. Sometimes, hot water gushes out of the spring. Other times, it stops. It all now depends on the amount of rainfall in the area. The water from the spring is other in color. The abundance of healing minerals for which the hot spring is revered are still contained in the water. Successive resident ministers of Myotokuji Temple continue in their one great purpose: "This is the hot spring our Founder Nichiren Shonin once soaked in. His final destination was here. It is honorable for us to maintain the Hitachi hot spring. And it is our great responsibility to hand it down to future generations."



REMEMBERING REV. RYUSHO JEFFUS



is common for many temples that are not in Buddhist countries. Eventually, he decided to become a chaplain. This meant going back to school and working in a hospital for his internship. He even delivered pizzas to help with his income. When he graduated, he became the first

Ryusho, at that time George, first contacted me when I was an Assistant Minister at the Portland Temple in Oregon. He lived in Charlotte, North Carolina, so we communicated by e-mail and phone. Occasionally, he would visit me in Portland. When he voiced a commitment to become a minister, I tested his resolve by making him wait.

He moved to Portland near the Temple. Eventually, I accepted him as a disciple. He worked hard studying and helping with propagation in the Portland area while also taking care of the Sangha he had left in North Carolina. I was sent to New England in January 2007 leaving my master, Rev. Ryuken Akahoshi, as Resident Minister at the Portland Temple.

After Ryusho finished Shingyo Dojo in the Spring of 2008, he returned to Portland and helped Rev. Akahoshi at the temple. He then went back to North Carolina to establish Myosho-ji Temple in Charlotte. The Sangha grew faster on the Internet than it did in Charlotte, as

Nichiren Shu chaplain in the U.S.

Ryusho wrote several books about Nichiren Shu Buddhism to help spread the Dharma. "We need books," he would say. "Even if they are not great, we just need more."

Rev. Ryusho Jeffus passed away on August 11, 2020. His funeral was held online with over 70 people attending. Ryusho touched so many lives and planted many seeds of the Dharma. He will be remembered by many, and his books will live on, bringing more to the Dharma. —Rev. Ryuoh Faulconer



It is with great sadness that I have lost my dear friend, my traveling companion, and my brother in the Dharma, Rev. Ryusho Jeffus.

Ryusho was a southerner, a Marine, and a gay man, who through his passion and love of the Dharma, became a Nichiren Shu priest, a board-certified Buddhist chaplain—the first ever from Nichiren Shu. He was a passionate defender of civil and human rights, an activist in many different arenas. He was also an incredibly gifted artist, expressing himself in many different media—up to and including Legos. Many of us were gifted with his work over the years.

Ryusho wrote books and essays on the Dharma—expressing his deep love and gratitude for the many paths opened to him as the result of his practice of Nichiren Shu Buddhism. Throughout his life, he introduced many people to the Odaimoku, *Namu Myoho Renge Kyo*, and the power of the Lotus Sutra to transform lives.



It is my hope that all the many people who were touched by his life and efforts will learn of his passing and share the news of his passing widely. We have lost a treasured friend and spiritual warrior, but now we must all carry on as he would demand.

I am grateful that the suffering of his physical body is now gone, and that his spirit can now fly free to the other shore and be welcomed by the Buddhas and bodhisattvas.

Namu Myoho Renge Kyo.

—Rev. Myokei Caine-Barrett z



TEMPLE EVENTS



Nichiren Mission of Hawaii Rev. Shokai Kanai

Peace Prayer with the Lotus Sutra

Since the middle of March, I have been praying during the evening chanting for the quick recovery of those infected with the coronavirus and for attaining Buddhahood for the deceased caused by the pandemic. Shortly thereafter, a neighbor joined me every evening and later another person joined as well. In each session, we read a chapter of the Lotus Sutra in English.

In May, a few members of the Study Class and new students from the Big Island and the west coast joined our Zoom meeting. Most now participate regularly.

However, a pressing concern for me these days is the uneasy relationship between the United States and China, a homeland defense radar may be built in Hawaii and the tension on the Korean Peninsula is extremely high. War may be a possibility!

Thus, I would like to pray for "Peace" and "Security" on Earth. Since July 1, we have begun reading the entire Lotus Sutra, chapter by chapter. If you would like to join us on Zoom, please access Meeting ID: 722 0124 8932; Password: 4V35nU.

The sessions begin at 17:00 (Hawaiian Time) and last a little over 30 minutes.

Sunday Service with Regulations

Our temple is now open under the local guidelines to allow people to attend services in person. Our main hall can hold up to 40 people while keeping the six-foot social-distance spacing. We have additional outdoor seating available if we have more than 40 people in attendance.

Safety is our priority, so you are required to wear a mask while visiting. We have hand sanitizer and wipes available at the entrance of the temple.

Kannon Temple of Nevada Rev. Shoda Kanai

Obon Memorial Service

Though most temples in Japan and around the world follow the lunar calendar and celebrate the Obon Memorial Service in August, the Kannon Temple conducts this ceremony in July.

Obon season is a special time when we offer various flowers, fruits, vegetables, and dry goods to the altar for our ancestors. However, with many of the participants at home this year, it was difficult to offer incense and sprinkle water from afar.

With the COVID-19 pandemic limiting in-person attendance, our services all had to be moved online to Zoom. In doing so, we are fortunate that not only local members, but also many followers from around the country and Asia, were able to participate in the service to pay homage to their deceased loved ones. I offered incense and water for everyone who could not be at the temple, so that all the ancestors could take in the fragrance from the incense and quench their thirst with water.

In these unusual times, we can use technology creatively to reach all corners of the globe to come together to chant the Lotus Sutra and Odaimoku. This is how we can build the sangha to help spread Buddha's and Nichiren Shonin's teaching to heal the world.



Hokekyoji Temple of Brazil Rev. Yodo Okuda

A New Style in Propagation

Since early this year, the coronavirus has caused a pandemic, which is still raging throughout the world. We have been doing many activities virtually, conducting all of our propagation and lectures online at Hokekyoji Temple of Brazil. This style of communication has spread worldwide due to the pandemic, fundamentally changing the way communication and work is conducted for businesses, schools, and religious organizations.



At first, I was wondering how I could carry out this kind of online program effectively. However, I found the system quite helpful. Monday through Friday at 6:00 p.m. in Japan, I hold a shodaigyo session (Odaimoku chanting). There is a 12-hour time difference between Brazil and Japan. So as I conduct my daily evening prayers in Japan, it is time for morning prayers in Brazil at 6:00 a.m. On weekends, I hold memorial services, shodaigyo and sermons starting at 8:00 p.m. in Japan (8:00 a.m. in Brazil).

With ideas from our members in Brazil, a hand-made prayer reading book in Portuguese was put together, and people can easily download these materials from our homepage.

In order for people to become full-time members of the Hokekyoji Temple of Brazil, they must take classes for six months. After this step is completed, they are then able to receive a Gohonzon (Essential Focus of Devotion), Wagesa (a sacred sash that goes from the top of the left shoulder down to the right side of the waist), and a Buddhist name.

In January and August, we normally hold workshops where new members are acknowledged, but that was not possible this summer, because of COVID-19.

I have strived to participate in the 24-Hour Odaimoku Relays that have been carried out several times this year. I sometimes invite guest speakers to a Zoom session for the members in Brazil. The Internet is just one way of reaching out to our members, but I don't want this to become the main way. I think it is important to assemble under one roof as that is the purpose of a Sangha.

During Nichiren Shonin's time, there were many pandemics and natural disasters and dangerous persecutions. There weren't any of the handy means of communication like we have today. However, Our Founder didn't give up. Rather, he strove on to overcome those seemingly endless hardships.

We must all unite to overcome these hard times!

Rengeji Temple, Jakarta

Rev. Ervinna Myoufu

24-Hour Odaimoku Offering to Heal the World

A 24-Hour Odaimoku Relay was held on Wednesday, September 2 from 8:00 a.m. through 8:00 a.m. the following day, Thursday, September 3.

Every hour, it included Odaimoku chanting from Nichiren Shu Temples and Sanghas around the world. It was broadcast live on Facebook, so members around the world could participate by chanting the Odaimoku together. During the 24-hour session, the Odaimoku was endlessly recited somewhere in the world. We chanted the Odaimoku and sent the merits for the souls who have passed away because of the pandemic and deeply prayed for the present confusion in the society and the world to quickly disappear. We greatly appreciate everyone who joined in this. May 'Namu Myoho Renge Kyo' resound throughout the world.

"24 Hours Odaimoku Offering to Heal the World" was streamed live on Facebook, and people were able to see the Odaimoku session being carried out at different Nichiren Shu Temples around the world.

Let us put our palms together, spread the voice of the Odaimoku and pray that the wonderful light of the Buddha's wisdom and compassion will eliminate the people's anxiety. Namu Myoho Renge Kyo



Calendar for October 2020 – November 2020

OCT 10 Ceremony in Memory of the Founder's Exile to Sado Island, Minobusan
OCT 13 Oeshiki
OCT 31 Ceremony of Changing the Robes on the Statue of Nichiren Shonin, Minobusan

NOV 11 738th Memorial Service for Nichiren Shonin Commemoration Day for the Komatsubara Persecution
NOV 13 Memorial for Nichizo Shonin