

Nichiren Shu News

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Wishing the Spirit of Rissho Ankoku throughout the World

Honorable Rev. Nissho Kanno, Archbishop of Nichiren Shu, Chief Abbot of Ikegami Honmonji Temple, Tokyo

In this early spring of 2021, I give my sincere compliments of the New Year season to all the ministers and devotees of Nichiren Shu, and I truly wish all of you pure and restful happiness. It is the anniversary year for Nichiren Shu to honor the 800th anniversary of Nichiren Shonin's birth on February 16th this year. The ministers and devotees in all parts of the world have made meticulous preparations for the celebration. However, much to my regret, all the plans were forced to be reduced due to coronavirus-related confusion.

A rampage of the COVID-19 virus knows no bounds on a global scale. It may be because the virus is highly infectious. But I believe there must be another reason for this: Our egocentric



attitude causes the epidemic spreading. First, eating a wild animal lacks prudence and discretion. This results from a lack of feelings of gratitude. We must not forget all living beings have Buddha nature. Second, some people refuse to cooperate with countermeasures to prevent the spread of infection, such as wearing a mask, washing your hands, or avoiding the Three Cs (closed spaces, crowded places, and close-contact settings), blindly believing nothing serious would happen. And lastly, some discriminate against those infected by the virus or against medical workers. Under such circumstances, coronavirus infections will not come to an end.

Our Founder Nichiren Shonin often mentioned in his treatises

and writings that egocentrism would ruin the nation. The roots of various evils, such as disasters, wars, and plagues, all lie in egoism of our own. The current world situation is the same, just as Nichiren Shonin warned 700 years ago. As devotees of Nichiren Shonin, we need to accept this more seriously: "All living beings as well as non-sentient beings, such as grass and trees or even a particle of gravel or dust, possess Buddha-nature. They can attain the same tranquil mind as that of the Buddha." With this in mind, let us keep the spirit of Rissho Ankoku — bringing peace to the world by establishing the True Dharma — so that we may have good qualities or behavior that other people should copy. At the beginning of 2021, I hereby offer my New Year Greetings, wishing for all of us to have a peaceful year through the Odaimoku.

Always Spare a Thought for Each Other

Rev. Hosen Nakagawa, Chief Administrator of Nichiren Shu

I would like to extend my New Year Greetings. In my New Year Greetings last year, I mentioned that the year of 2019 was the pre-final year of the 800th anniversary of our Founder's birth, hoping that everyone would deeply appreciate how miraculous it was that Nichiren Shonin came into being 800 years ago. Seeing what has happened since, however, I find unexpectedly difficult days waiting for us. Today the whole world has been plunged into chaos due to an unseen enemy—the novel coronavirus. As the serious disease is creeping up on us, fears eat away at our hearts. All of the elaborately prepared commemorating events and memorial services were left with no alternative but to be reduced or canceled. I am sure

that this extraordinary situation will allow us to find some better ways of honoring the 800th anniversary of his birth. I hope that you will be able to spend your precious time with gratitude and affection, far away from worries and anxiety.

It is now the auspicious year of the 800th anniversary of our Founder's birth. It may be difficult to celebrate his birth as we originally planned, but I think that it will repay our debt of gratitude towards Nichiren Shonin to realize how he lived while facing grief and woes in the Age of Degeneration, and to have as ardent a passion as he had to spread the Dharma teachings in this period of uncertainty. The Lotus Sutra says that it is difficult to keep this sutra,

but Nichiren Shonin kept his faith in the Lotus Sutra even at the risk of his life. He lived up to the Lotus Sutra. If we can follow the way he lived his life, we can live up to the Lotus Sutra.

We are now facing unprecedented difficulties. We have to overcome this harsh reality with the heart of being in one mind. This will let us deeply appreciate the miracle of his birth. Be aware that we are the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra and that we can attain peace of mind filled with his compassion toward us. I truly hope that all of you can put into practice our slogan of *Inochi Ni Gassho*, Praying to Life, to realize a peaceful land of the Buddha through the Odaimoku. May the New Year be full of success and happiness for you.



THE YEAR OF THE OX

2021 is the Year of the Ox, according to the Chinese zodiac. The Ox is the second of the 12 zodiac animal signs in the cycle. Oxen have been helping mankind in farming and many agricultural fields since ancient times. It is a symbol of diligence, persistence, and honesty. In Chinese culture, the Ox is a loyal friend who made great contributions to the development of society.

People born in the Year of the Ox are industrious, cautious, hold their faith firmly and are always willing to offer help. Because of these traits, they are trusted by their friends and colleagues. They have the talent to be leaders and are good at



managing things. However, they may be a bit too strict at times. The Ox likes routine and respects traditional ideas, doing things step by step. The persistence in their character makes them tireless workers. Their weaknesses are that they are too conservative, not very talkative, stubborn, and overly cautious.

The best jobs for people born in the Year of the Ox are: lawyers, doctors, teachers, technicians, politicians, office clerks, or consultants. Oxen are those born in the following years of the lunar calendar: 1925, 1937, 1949, 1961, 1973, 1985, 1997, 2009, and 2021.

—Compiled by Sandra Seki



Be earnest and amicable without showing any sign of detesting people. Act modestly and do not be accompanied by servants or ride on horseback. Go about holding a saw in hand and a hammer attached to the waist, all the while smiling with a joyful heart. If you go against this instruction even slightly, you will destroy yourself and fall into the evil realms in your next life.

—Nichiren Shonin,
Hachimangu Zoei no Koto (ST 405)

This instruction from Nichiren Shonin was written to the Ikegami brothers, Munenaka and Munenaga, about how to conduct themselves as they participated in the reconstruction of the grand Hachiman Shrine. In our time today, we are beginning to reconstruct our lives and the world, as the pandemic, which has caused so much suffering for the last year, appears to recede. Nichiren's instructions are a guide for us also, as we set our efforts towards helping one another recover from the losses we have experienced, and as we move the world towards our true purpose of bringing the Buddha's compassion and wisdom to life.

—Rev. Shinkyō Warner



These 'Senbon Hata,' or One Thousand Flags, are found on the trail and around Ichinoike, the First Lake of Shichimensan. They are offerings for ancestors, wishes for good health, and more. They used to be plentiful but have declined along as fewer pilgrims climb the holy mountains.

Buddhism Q&A

The Power of Written Odaimoku

It is said that one of the reasons Toki Jonin went to so much trouble traveling all over Japan to collect Nichiren Shonin's writings and letters was not only to preserve them, but keep them from being eaten. Much like Nichiren Shonin writing the Odaimoku on the rough sea waters for safe passage on his way to exile in Sado, followers of that time revered his words of the Lotus Sutra teachings so much that they believed the kanji characters had special protective and healing powers. They would cut out pieces of his writings and eat them.

You can find this today in traditional cures or Kito blessings. Some temples give out packets that contain tiny slips of flat edible paper-like substance with the Odaimoku handwritten on them. Followers take them with tea or water as part of the healing. You can also see it in various protective amulets for people, buildings, and even farmers' fields.

The Buddhist history invoking the power of written sutras is long and varied, but the distinctive *Ippen Shudai* (Odaimoku Mandala) created by Nichiren Shonin has a special power and style found nowhere else. But the power is not in the object, the paper, the calligraphy, or the priest's hand. Ultimately, it is the power of the Lotus Sutra expounded by Shakyamuni Buddha transmitted to our eyes and our minds from the heart of Nichiren Shonin.

—Rev. Kanjo Bassett

Protective Deities in Nichiren Shu (5) – 30 Guardian Deities

By Rev. Sensho Komukai

Thirty guardian deities, or *sanju-banjin* in Japanese, originated from Dengyo, Master Saicho, on Mt. Hiei, take turns every day of a month guarding the nation and the people. There are myriads of gods and deities in Japan. These representative 30 deities are selected to take turns at duty each day for protection.

Nichiren Shonin on Sado Island received an official pardon on March 8

of 1274. After departing Sado with his attendants, their boat drifted southwest, almost turning over due to a strong wind. When he prayed for their safety, Hachiman Bodhisattva appeared at the head of the boat. Led by him, the boat finally landed at a cape near the town of Kashiwazaki, 50 kilometers away from their planned landing place. Curiously enough, a shrine dedicated to Hachiman Bodhisattva was found on the cape. As a token of his gratitude, Nichiren Shonin

enshrined the 30 guardian deities with Bodhisattva Hachiman as the chief deity. Even today, the cape that Nichiren Shonin reached is still referred to as "Banjin Cape."

Nichizo Shonin (1269-1342) was entrusted by our Founder Nichiren Shonin to spread the true Dharma in the imperial capital of Kyoto. As Shintoism was harmoniously blended with Buddhism in Kyoto, Nichizo Shonin was convinced that faith in the 30 guardian deities would help spread the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. He energetically visited many shrines to become acquainted with Shinto priests and introduced Nichiren Shu Buddhism to them. The number of his followers increased more and more. The name, "Nichizo, the Practitioner of the Lotus Sutra" became well known to people in and around the city of Kyoto. On March 14, 1334, Nichizo Shonin was bestowed a temple called Myokenji Temple from Emperor Godaigo in praise of his achievements. This was the first Nichiren Shu temple officially approved by the central government.

When you visit old Nichiren Shu temples in various parts of Japan, you will find many more Banjin-do halls than you would expect. People still visit to pray to the 30 guardian deities, because they believe that all the deities will protect them in turn every day. That hasn't changed since ancient times.



30 guardian deities are solemnly represented. They are enshrined mainly in Nichiren Shu temples in the Hokuriku area, as Nichizo Shonin traveled around there before he went to Kyoto.



Statue of Nichizo Shonin.



Banjin Cape where Nichiren Shonin drifted ashore.



Banjin-do Hall in Kashiwazaki.

MONK'S RUN TRAIL RACE OVERCOMING DIFFICULTIES



Rev. Komatsu, dressed as Inosuke from the hit animated film "Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba," welcomed runners at the finishing line.



The last four runners of the November 21st heat finished the race together.

By Rev. Kanjo Bassett

Poor Minobusan cannot catch a break. The Shugyoso Monk's Run Trail Race profiled in 2014 was canceled in 2018 due to a typhoon that inflicted major damage on the Minobusan-Shichimensan trail. Denied use of the full course, race organizers made do with mini races covering usable parts of the trails in 2019. This year's challenge was greater than ever: the COVID-19 crisis almost canceled the event altogether. Again.

To keep the trail race alive this year, Rev. Yuji Komatsu of Takeibo and the Shugyoso organizers opted for a 17-kilometer 'mini-course race' up and down Shichimensan. They limited entry to 50 runners each day over two weekends—November 21, 22, 28, and 29—with COVID-19 protocols in place to limit crowding. It's encouraging to know that all racing slots were filled. The first race 'heat' on November 21 went very well. The weather was clear and warm. Even Keishi-in reported a

morning temperature of 6° C. Organizers did an excellent job taking care of the race and racers along the entire route. Everybody was relaxed and enjoyed a good time. If all goes well, the road linking Minobusan and Shichimensan will be repaired by mid-2021 and be open for a proper Monk's Trail Race. We sincerely hope the COVID-19 pandemic will be over or at least under control by then, so trail runners from Japan and abroad can enjoy the challenge and incredible beauty

of participating in the Minobusan-Shichimensan trail run event.



A major road used in the race is being repaired.

OUR FOUNDER'S MORNING CHANTING IN MINOBUSAN



Eight scrolls of the Lotus Sutra.

By Rev. Sensho Komukai

In May of 1274, Nichiren Shonin entered Minobusan at the age of 53. Having put up with four great persecutions, always in peril of his life, he finally found a quiet place to recite the Lotus Sutra and talk as much as he wanted with his disciples and followers of his Buddhist teachings. He wrote on Minobusan, "I respectfully recite the Lotus Sutra day and night, and expound the Great Concentration and Insight morning and evening. So Minobusan looks to me exactly like Mt. Sacred Eagle." According to Nitcho Shonin (1422-1500), the 11th Chief Abbot of Minobusan Kuonji Temple, our Founder in Minobusan would wake up early in the morning and chant every one scroll out of the ten scrolls of the Threefold Lotus

Sutra—the Lotus Sutra (8 scrolls), the Sutra of Infinite Meaning (1 scroll), and the Sutra of Meditation on the Universal Sage Bodhisattva (1 scroll). Then he faced the rising sun chanting the essential chapters of the Lotus Sutra such as Chapter 2, "Expedients," Chapter 16, "The Duration of the Life of the Tathagata," Chapter 11, "Beholding the Stupa of Treasures," Chapter 13, "Encouragement for Keeping this Sutra," Chapter 15, "The Appearance of Bodhisattva from Underground," and Chapter 21, "The Supernatural Powers of the Tathagata." Because the true intent of the Buddha is contained in every word of the Lotus Sutra, Nichiren Shonin chanted the sutra word by word so slowly and thoroughly that it took him about four hours to get through with the morning chanting. He put all his body and mind into the recitation, feeling the great compassion of the eternal Buddha through the Lotus Sutra. Nichiren Shonin once mentioned, "When you wish to see the Buddha, focus yourself on the living Buddha. Feel the Buddha is present before you, and the eternal Buddha will reappear on Mt. Sacred Eagle where the Lotus Sutra is expounded." Chapter 16 shows that when we recite the Lotus Sutra with our whole heart, any place, no matter where, can become Mt. Sacred Eagle. Nichiren Shonin must have felt so on Minobusan.



Morning Service in Minobusan Kuonji Temple.



Sri Lanka Busshinji Temple

*Kalpani Apsara,
Temple Member*

Seventh Anniversary of Busshinji Temple

On Sunday, December 13, we celebrated the seventh anniversary of Busshinji Temple of Sri Lanka. Many followers attended this celebration with their families, and



we were honored to have online messages from many priests from overseas.

We have been chanting the Odaimoku, studying the teachings of Nichiren Shonin, and practicing the Lotus Sutra. Through the help of Revs. Kangyo Noda, Ervinna Myoufu, Yuon Ito, Keiji Oshima, and other priests in Southeast Asia, we have been able to continue our faith. We also would like to express our gratitude for the help from the members of the Southeast Asian sanghas led by Mr. Alexander Ang.

Without the support from everyone, we would not have been able to move forward.

Though there are many restrictions due to COVID-19, our sangha is meeting in small groups, keeping social distance but carrying out our daily prayers.



Nichiren Mission of Hawaii

Shami Shogo Kini

Ringing the Temple Bell in Memory of the Victims

On Sunday, November 1 at noon, we rang the temple bell in memory of the 219 deaths in Hawaii up to that point due to COVID-19. The bell was rung once in remembrance for each person who had died from the virus.

The bell-ringing event was spearheaded by the Central Union Church, which invited other churches, temples, and the public to join in honoring and remembering those who had passed away from the disease.

A senior minister of the church shared the following, "We grieve with those families and communities that have lost their loved ones, and we would like to honor them in this way."

We chanted "Namu Myoho Renge Kyo" with every gong.

Nichiren Mission of Hawaii

Rev. Shokai Kanai

New Year's Eve Service

Our annual New Year's Eve Service to say goodbye to 2020, the Year of the Rat, was held on December 31 at 11:30 p.m. We rang our temple bell 108 times at midnight to purify ourselves and welcome the New Year, the Year of the Ox.

Later, we served Toshikoshi soba, New Year's Eve Japanese noodles, with the hope that 2021 would bring us unity, health and prosperity.



Renkoji Temple, Cereseto, Italy

Rev. Shoryo Tarabini

The Light of the Lamp; Meditation on the Light

We shared a candlelight meditation online to commemorate the Buddha's attaining Enlightenment during this year's Jodo-e on December 13 at Renkoji Temple. Many members and friends joined our online meditation session to reflect upon the power of the light of a candle.

Everyone imagined that they were a candle shaped like a lotus flower. The soft glow of each candle gives out light and warmth. The light represents the brightness of wisdom and the warmth is the Buddha's compassion. As you meditate, the light of your flame becomes more intense and drives away the darkness of ignorance, making it fade away. The gentle light depicts the teaching of the Buddha, which helps guide us when we are immersed in darkness. When we misbehave, or get upset, we are in the

dark. Therefore, we need the light of the Buddha's teachings to help and guide us through difficult times. When we practice Buddha's teachings, the darkness slowly fades and the rays that you are emitting expand. Your light can light up the whole world!

Everyone who joined this event online was amazed at how there was unity, peace, and calmness just from watching the flame of the flickering candle.

Nichiren Buddhist Kannon Temple of Nevada *Rev. Shoda Kanai*

Bodhi Day/Buddhist Statue Appreciation Service

On December 13 at Kannon Temple, we celebrated the Enlightenment Day of Siddhartha Gautama and honored all our Buddhist statues. At this temple, we have traditionally celebrated Bodhi Day Service a week later to coincide with our Year End Potluck Luncheon. Unfortunately, this year we had to cancel the luncheon due to the pandemic.

With the Buddha sitting underneath our little bodhi tree, usually everyone in attendance would offer a candle towards the sitting Buddha. This year, I offered candles and incense for everyone.

Towards the end of the service, I made a transition and began to offer blessings to the various statues enshrined within the temple. Then I asked everyone in attendance on Zoom, to move their camera towards their statues or hold their statues in front of them, so that a special blessing could reach each one of them directly. Though the statues could not physically be at temple, the blessing still traveled over the airwaves and purified each statue.

This year has been tough on everyone, especially our protective deities. This special blessing helped renew and recharge everyone's statues so that their protective powers will continue unabated in the coming year. Let us all appreciate what they have done for us and continue to chant the Odaimoku sincerely together.



Calendar for February – March 2021

FEB 2 Setsubun (first day of spring in the traditional Chinese calendar)
FEB 7 Nikko Shonin Memorial Day
FEB 15 Nirvana Day

FEB 16 Commemoration Day of the Birth of Nichiren Shonin
MAR 17-23 Spring Higan

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