

Nichiren Shu News

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2008 NONA Convention Held at Texas Nichiren Buddhist Sangha



Overseas ministers and Rev. Kanju Ueda (center, front line) following Oeshiki Service. Rev. Ueda is flanked by Rev. Myokei Caine-Barrette (left) and Rev. Shokai Kanai (right)

The 2008 Nichiren Order of North America National Convention and the 63rd Ministers' Meeting were held in Houston, Texas from October 23 to 26 with the great hospitality of the Nichiren Buddhist Sangha of Texas, Myokenji.

On the first two days of the events, 13 ministers attended the NONA ministers' meeting. They discussed the

agenda such as the ministers' workshop, pilgrimage to Japan in 2009, workshop for lay people, Nichiren Shu campaign, Centennial Anniversary of NONA and so forth.

To promote the Nichiren Shu campaign "Rissho Ankoku Odaimoku Kechien," which NONA has titled "Transmission of Odaimoku Brings Peace to Society and Joy to All," new

committees were organized to oversee the education program, booklet publishing, the centennial event, and public relations. The members of the committees have begun putting ideas together to promote the Nichiren Shu campaign.

At the end of the two-day ministers' meeting, a guest minister from Japan, Rev. Kanju Ueda of Myokenji in Osaka, gave a lecture to the ministers about the merit of the Lotus Sutra and the Odaimoku.

Rev. Salvadore de Mundo of the Menninger Clinic, who is a Baptist, was invited to give a speech about clinical pastoral work. He and Rev. Myokei Caine-Barrette are working together for patients in hospitals.

The second two days, of the NONA National Convention were held with the attendance of delegates of NONA member churches, temples and sanghas. At the beginning of the meeting, a report was made that the New York Dai-Seionji, the Nichiren Buddhist Sangha of Greater New England, and the Nichiren Buddhist Sangha of Charlotte, NC had been approved to become member organizations of NONA.

The major agenda was the centenni-

al anniversary of NONA that will be celebrated in 2014 at the Los Angeles Temple along with the temple's centennial anniversary. They also discussed fund raising for the anniversary.

On the final day, an installation ceremony of NONA's new officers was held in front of the altar. Bishop Shokai Kanai, President of the NONA Council, Mr. John Petry of San Jose, Vice Presidents, Mr. Neil Yocom of Boston and Mrs. Midori Sugimoto of Chicago were re-elected. The new Board of Directors from the Ministers' Association are Rev. Join Inoue and Rev. Ryuei McCormick.

Following the installation, an Oeshiki Service to commemorate Nichiren Shonin's 727th memorial day was held. The service was officiated by Rev. Kanju Ueda, assisted by Bishop Kanai and Rev. Caine-Barrette along with other NONA ministers.

During the service, Hokke Wasan was performed by volunteer members led by Mrs. Kumiko Kanai. In front of the Great Mandala with a drawing of Bodhisattva Myoken, Rev. Ueda gave a sermon about his relationship with the Houston Sangha through Bodhisattva Myoken.

The next NONA business conference will be held at the Nichiren Buddhist International Center, Hayward, CA in 2010 and the next National Convention will be held at the San Jose Nichiren Buddhist Temple in 2012.

COMPLETION: The ceremony to celebrate the restoration of the five-story pagoda was held on November 5 at Minobusan. Attended by lay devotees and the parties concerned, totaling about five hundred devotees, the ceremony was officiated by Rev. Zuio Inoue (photo), Director General of the Minobusan Kuonji Temple. The construction work started on March 2006 following a two-year period of preparation. The grand ceremony to mark the completion is scheduled for May 13 to 17, 2009.



OESHIKI: Some 330,000 visitors thronged the Ikegami Hommonji Temple, Tokyo during the Oeshiki service, October 12 to 13.



Events

October–November, 2008

- Oct. 1: Ceremony of changing clothes for the Statue of the Founder in the Founder's Hall at Minobusan
- Oct. 2: Docho: Initiation Ceremony at the Seichoji Temple on Mt. Kiyosumi
- Oct. 10: Service in memory of the Founder's exile to Sado Island
- Oct. 11–13: Oeshiki. (Oct. 12: Mando lantern parade at Minobusan, Ikegami and many other Nichiren-shu temples throughout the country; Oct. 13: the 727th Memorial Service for the Founder)
- Nov. 1: Annual 100-day "aragyo" ascetic practice starts at the Nakayama Hokekyoji Temple, Nakayama, Chiba. This year 177 priests are participating in the practice. The practice winds up on February 10, 2009.
- Nov. 3: Airing of the Shogyoden Hall at the Hokekyoji Temple, Nakayama, Chiba. About 500 people visit the temple and take a look at the "Kanjin Honzon Sho" and other original manuscripts of the Founder.
- Nov. 5: Memorial service commemorating the eighth anniversary of the Dragon Palace Temple, Nagpur, India. Visitors surpass 50,000.
- Nov. 11: Service in Memory of the Komatsubara Persecution
- Nov. 13: Memorial Service for Nichizo Shonin

by Rev. Tsuoh Yokoi

The Life of Sakyamuni Buddha (8)

By Rev. Shinkai Oikawa, Litt. D.

9. Sakyamuni's Manhood

(5) The Invocation of the King of the Brahma Heaven

A god called the King of the Brahma Heaven appeared and said to Sakyamuni, "Great Buddha, it is a pity that you will die without preaching what you attained by enlightenment. So would you please preach it to the people?" Although the god encouraged Him to do so three times, He was not willing. This is called "the invocation of the King of the Brahma Heaven." He was perplexed.

Sakyamuni knew very well that this world is multifarious (consists of numerous aspects). He understood the dominant principle and various laws of the world. But He did not intend to preach because He did not want his present peace of mind to be disturbed by listening to the people before He preached. So He was at a loss for a response.

Although Dr. Nakamura said that the Buddha was embarrassed because He could not speak clearly, I think that the Buddha understood everything because He was entirely enlightened and truly became the all-knowing, omniscient and omnipotent Buddha (Awakened One, Enlightened One) then.

Sakyamuni went on a journey in order to preach about the "enlightenment" He attained under the Bodhi tree. He traveled throughout the country to the end of His life for forty-five years from the time when He attained enlightenment at the age of thirty-five to the time of His death at the age of eighty.

He preached sermons suited for each occasion and person. These are called "sermons according to the occasion and person." Therefore, there are a great number of Buddhist doctrines.

Reading these remaining sermons in later years, people thought out various Buddhist theories such as "the 37 kinds of practices for attaining Nirvana," "the four noble truths," "the eight-fold noble path," "the twelve link of cause and effect," and so on. However, if you



Rev. Shinkai Oikawa

study, you will find that He did not preach "Buddhist theories" but sermons suitable to the occasion and person, that is, "improvised sermons."

He kept on giving answers quite suitable for what people wanted most. What did He preach then? To tell the truth, there are some parts we cannot understand, because they are not systematic coherent ways of preaching. But I am going to tell you what we know about how He thought and what He preached.

(6) The Substance of Enlightenment

Such religions as Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, are called monotheism, preaching that there is a god who created the heavens and the earth, dominates human beings, and that everything is decided by the will of this god. Therefore in these religions there is only one god, that is, the absolute existence, to whom we can pray for everything good or evil. We can find there was this kind of absolute existence everywhere in the past. In India, too, there was absolute existence called the King of the Brahma Heaven, Bon or Bonten in Chinese, who dominated India.

However, Sakyamuni denied the god. All human beings depend on "inga" or "cause and effect." In our modern language it means that every action has a cause and an effect. As for myself, I was not created by the god. The Buddha taught us that "the Sun Goddess" did not make us. We were made by our parents and confined in

our mother's womb for about ten months, and were brought up by our parents' love."

Thus effects come after causes, and the world is made up of cause and effect. This is a very important point. We can find only our father and mother, or our grandfather and grandmother. But of course we know we have many ancestors because we are in this world. What is more, I think we will have our children and grandchildren in the future.

Sakyamuni is supposed to have kept sitting under the Bodhi tree thinking like this at night. Then it is written, He could completely "remember" His "past life," how He was born and each successive life since then.

We cannot know such things. People at the time of Sakyamuni often used "rinne" or transmigration. We are born and we die, and we are born and we die again and again continuously. They thought that we were turning around and around ceaselessly in circles.

As for myself, I do not know where I am going after my death. According to the ways of transmigration, it may be said, "Since he is always doing something wicked and talking glibly, he will be reborn something like a mynah bird." On the other hand, good people are said to be born in a beautiful heaven where gods live without exception.

To tell the truth, I do not want to be born in heaven because it is too beautiful to be good. There is no distinction between the sexes there. There are beautiful ladies, but they all look sexless. So I do not want to go to a place like this. Clear distinction between the sexes is more favorable for me. Therefore, I prefer to be born in the world of human beings. The human world is really wonderful. I want to be born again in this world. But we do not know whether it is possible or not.

I am afraid that I will be born in the world of animals or hungry demons, or what is worse, hell. I never want to go down to hell at all because it is supposed to give us a great deal of torment. We sometimes hear about boiling in a caldron. Criminals are put into boiling

water. It is strange that they are living with torment without dying instantly. It is quite cruel anyway.

I am now translating "the Sariputra Abhidharma Sutra" of the Southern Buddhism. Some scholars made mistakes in the old translation of the sutra, because they did not know about hell. For example, we can find "an iron skewer" in the sutra. What do you think it was used for? It was used for punishment. Since the scholars did not think it was used for punishment, they translated it into "an iron bar." They wrote it as if a gymnast were hanging from the horizontal bar and turning a somersault. It is not correct.

It was used for punishment. A criminal was put on the top of the skewer from the buttocks first. And then the criminal went down little by little. At last the skewer came out of the top of the head. The criminal must have felt excruciating pain. So I think hell is the last place that I want to go to.

Hell, the worlds of hungry spirits, animals, asura, and men, and heaven are called the six worlds (rokudo). They are the six worlds where we must go after death. We say "rebirth in the six worlds." It is inevitable that the worst criminals go to hell.

While Sakyamuni was meditating like this, His senses came to be finely sharpened and He received the power to see through people's past, which is called "Shukujuchi." What is more, He is said to have received the power to see through people's future a few hours later at midnight, which is called "the divine eye."

(Trans. by Rev. Kanshu Naito)
(to be continued)



A stone sculpture of a Buddha and bodhisattvas preserved in the Museum of History in Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan. This sculpture is one of a few Buddhist remains in the Islamic country along the Silk Road.

Book Review

Writings of Nichiren Shōnin BIOGRAPHY and DISCIPLES — Volume 5

Compiled by Kyōtsū Hori, Edited by Jay Sakashita
(University of Hawaii Press, 2008, 255p)

By Eric Kawatani

The newest volume 5 of the Writings of Nichiren Shonin, subtitled, "Biography and Disciples," compiled by Kyōtsū Hori and edited by Jay Sakashita, continues NOPPA's series of English translations of Nichiren Shonin's writings with selected letters by Nichiren Shonin that give us insight into his fundamental views about Buddhism and his society and how he instructed and encouraged his disciples regarding these views.

As with earlier volumes of this series, the English translations are modern and readable and each translation is prefaced with a descriptive summary of the date and circumstances under which each letter was written. This is particularly helpful

because a number of the letters are only fragments and other letters refer to context outside of the translated letters.

The selections begin with a short translation of the "Fudo Aizen Kanken-ki," which reveals the young Nichiren Shonin's personal visions of Fudo and Aizen and the declaration of his succession to the dharma transmissions from the Great Sun Buddha.

This manuscript is dated 1254, a year after he declared his belief in the O-Daimoku. It is fascinating since it shows the depth of his spiritual mastery of even esoteric Buddhism even though he later strongly criticized Shingon esoteric Buddhism and the Great Sun Buddha.

The selections are then paced with letters, some as short as a sentence

and others quite long, but which reflect consistent themes in Nichiren Shonin's teachings. The underlying theme of all the letters is that based on his study of the entire Buddhist canon, the Lotus Sutra is not only the Buddha's supreme and complete truth but the only effective truth for those living in these troubled times known as the Age of Degeneration.

Many of the later letters were especially sharp against Ryokan of the Gokurakuji Temple whom Nichiren Shonin held responsible for the illegal attempt to execute him. He also criticized the Hojo regent who governed Japan for conspiring with Ryokan in this miscarriage of justice.

Even in the 13th century, Nichiren Shonin cites to a legal process by which the accused was to have a chance to respond to the charges made before the sentence was delivered. Instead, the government arrested him and rushed to try to behead him at Tatsunokuchi without a trial and failing to do that, sent him into exile to Sado Island, both actions which he attributed to the mischief of Ryokan. While there are several letters in the volume which

describe this, the "Shuju Onfurumai Goshō" contains a summary of this incident.

This book is very important to those who study Nichiren Buddhism. In modern society, we tend to feel uncomfortable and want to ignore the sharp and intolerant statements Nichiren Shonin made against his contemporaries. However, reading this book, we are given an explanation in Nichiren Shonin's own words of why he made those statements and more importantly, he explains that they are meticulously based on historical and Buddhist texts support.

While others may paint him to be an intolerant critic, these writings clearly show a perceptive of a man of action who saw the crises of the times, researched all the scholarly documents and texts in Japan, and made a decisive conclusion. As our generation now faces a world that is uncertain both politically as well as economically, reading this volume of the Writings of Nichiren Shonin is timely and inspiring and is an excellent study of this man of action. (This is an excerpt of Mr. Kawatani's original text.)

Nichiren Shonin and His Lay Followers (8)

By Rev. Kanji Tamura
Associate Professor,
Rissho University

The Nanjo Family (2)

Nanjo Shichiro Jiro Tokimitsu (1259–1332) succeeded Nanjo Hyoe Shichiro (?–1265). Hearing the news of the death of Hyoe Shichiro, Nichiren Shonin visited his grave at the Ueno District of Fuji County. Tokimitsu, only seven years old then, was too young to accept the faith of Nichiren. However, his encounter with the Founder planted the seed of faith in him.

From around 1274 when Nichiren Shonin entered Minobusan, the relationship between Nichiren and Tokimitsu developed rapidly. Being very honest and straightforward, Tokimitsu continued to keep a strong faith. As shown by the letters written by Nichiren Shonin, which exist today, Tokimitsu was the first person that sent offerings to Nichiren Shonin after the Founder entered Minobusan. He remained an eager follower of Nichiren Shonin even after the death of the Founder.

In his letter dated the 11th day of the 11th month in 1274, the Founder writes Tokimitsu, “I was told that though your father was a warrior, he faced the last minutes of life peacefully because he believed in the Lotus Sutra single-mindedly. Since you succeeded your father, professing the faith in the Lotus Sutra alike, the soul of your father is supposed to be very much delighted in the other world. It is really admirable. If your father were alive, how pleased he would have been. Those who keep the faith in this sutra will be reunited, even if they are unrelated, on Mt. Sacred Eagle.

“How much more possible it is for



Rev.
Kanji Tamura

you and your late father, eager believers of the Lotus Sutra, to be reborn on the same Mt. Sacred Eagle! You may regret that you lost your father while you were still young and were deprived of the privilege of receiving paternal guidance while other people enjoyed living together with their parents for 50 or 60 years. I can hardly keep back my tears when I think of your heart.” These words of benevolence must have reached the depth of Tokimitsu’s heart.

In the first month of the year after Nichiren Shonin entered Minobusan, he dispatched Nikko to Ueno of Fuji County to recite the “Jigage” verse in front of the grave of Hyoe Shichiro. Thus Nichiren Shonin tried to establish rapport between Nikko and the Nanjo family, making them leading figures, respectively, of disciples and lay followers in the Fuji district.

Tokimitsu, his mother and wife, and members of the family often sent offerings to Minobusan. Beginning with coins, the articles sent to Nichiren Shonin included food such as white rice, fried rice, dried cooked rice, rice cake, wheat, seasonings such as salt, oil and vinegar, vegetables and fruits such as yam, taro, burdock, radish, soybean, ginger, bamboo shoots, citron, orange, persimmon, medicinal herbs, sake, tofu, devil’s tongue paste and others. Offerings were mostly commodities rather than money. This was because Minobusan was near the Fuji district where Tokimitsu was engaged in farming.

Tokimitsu was sometimes con-

demned by the Kamakura government for his dedication to the faith in the Lotus Sutra. He, however, declined to abandon his faith in the Lotus Sutra. In 1279, Nichiren’s followers at Atsuwara of Fuji County were persecuted by the Kamakura Shogunal officials. Three followers were beheaded and about 20 devotees were imprisoned. Nisshu and Nichiben, leaders in this area, had to flee as far as Shimousa, present Chiba Prefecture. By order of Nichiren Shonin, Tokimitsu gave refuge to Shinto priests and other persons of the area who received teachings from Nisshu and other Nichiren priests.

In the government, Tokimitsu was blamed behind his back for his support of Nichiren Shonin. Tokimitsu overcame the difficulty and stuck to his faith. Nichiren Shonin even called him, “Ueno Sage,” and acclaimed him, saying “He seems to have attained Buddhahood.” In the funeral of Nichiren Shonin, Tokimitsu played the role of “scattering flowers.”

Tokimitsu was also a follower of Nikko, who claimed Tokimitsu as his “foremost disciple.” When Nikko left Minobusan in 1288, Tokimitsu welcomed Nikko, donated land at Ooishigahara of Fuji. There he built the Taiseikiji Temple in 1292. However, several years later, Nikko moved to Omosu of Kitayama upon the request of Ishikawa Yoshitada, local lord of Kitayama of Fuji. In 1298, the 17th anniversary of Nichiren Shonin’s death, three structures—a hall enshrining the statue of Nichiren Shonin, a shrine dedicated to the Sun Goddess Amaterasu and the fundamental Hommonji (the origin of the Kitayama

Hommonji)—were constructed.

Nikko had the intention of building the foundation temple based on the teachings of the hommon division of the Lotus Sutra at Kitayama, Fuji. It is suggested that he regarded the Hommonji of Kitayama as the center of his mission rather than the Taiseikiji Temple. It is stated on the munefuda plate (wooden amulet) of the Kitayama Hommonji that the temple was built by the donation of Tokimitsu and Ishikawa Kazutada, assisted by “Hokke devotees of Koizumi” and “Hokke group members of Ueno.” Ueno is the place of Tokimitsu, the master of the Nanjo family and he was apparently the leader of the group. Both the Taiseikiji Temple, which now belongs to the Nichiren Sho-shu, and the Hommonji developed into the strongholds of the group of Nikko.

Tokimitsu passed away on the first day of the fifth month in 1332. His posthumous name is Daigyo, meaning great practice. The Myorenji Temple was built at the site of his mansion in Ueno. Nichimoku, his nephew, and Nichido and Nichigyo, his grandsons succeeded to the head priest of the Taiseikiji Temple, and Nichian, also a grandson, succeeded to the head priest of the Myohonji Temple, Yasuda, Chiba Prefecture.

(Trans. K. S.)
(to be continued)



The front gate of the Shimojo Myorenji built in the precinct of the mansion of Nanjo Tokimitsu

American Minister’s View on Shomyo-shi Training School

By Rev. Ryuoh Faulconer
Myogyoji Temple, Boston

Editor’s Note: Rev. Myokei Caine-Barrett of the Myokenji Temple, Houston, and Rev. Ryuoh Faulconer, the Myogyoji Temple, Boston, attended the annual Shomyo-shi training school as observers at the Jitsujoji Temple, Owari City, from October 1 to 7.

The Shomyo-shi training school is held annually in autumn at a place chosen yearly. This year, a total of 45 priests attended the school. Twenty-five of them attended the school for the first time, 17 for the second time, and one for the third time. The following is the report given by Rev. Faulconer.



Photo shows from left: Rev. Myokei Caine-Barrett, Rev. Nisshu Hayami, Shomyo Grand Master, and Rev. Ryuoh Faulconer

This training is for those priests who specialize in Buddhist ceremonies and the portions of the Nichiren Shu practice that are sung and are known as shomyo in Japanese.

We were not sure what to expect, but we were ready to try to absorb everything we could. We had the first draft of an English translation of the Shutei Hoyo Shiki with us. The Shutei Hoyo Shiki is a minister’s guide which explains ceremony manner and practice.

Reading the Shutei Hoyo Shiki for the first time in English was wonderful, but still parts of it are difficult to understand without seeing it in practice and without a teacher to help explain.

The lectures helped immensely to answer questions and clarify the meaning of the texts. Even though we were observers, the Shomyo masters were kind and attentive to us.

Ministers with varying degrees of experience attended the Shomyo-shi training. The first year Shomyo students listened in lectures and studied the Shutei Hoyo Shiki. The second year students practiced service.

You have to dedicate your-

self to study and make it a part of your daily practice. On the last day of the Shomyo training, Rev. Sensho Komukai of the Shumuin, who was graciously with us interpreting the lectures for us, had to leave so we were on our own.

The Shomyo masters would listen and observe each service as different students sang and carried out the rituals of the service.

They would give advice and critique after each service was finished. They were kind and gentle in their critique. We understood some of what was being said, but our Japanese is not that good, so it was difficult.

Rev. Nisshu Hayami, who is one of the leaders of the Shomyo-shi, wanted to make sure that we did understand and worked with us personally. What was obvious from his actions and those of the other instructors is that Shomyo practice is not about empty ritual and rules, but about making our practice

express the inner reality of our belief as Nichiren Buddhists.

We owe a great debt to all the ministers who helped make this opportunity blossom for us. My hope is that we will be able to send an American minister officially to this training.

Both Rev. Myokei and myself enjoy the shomyo. We have been working hard along with the other American ministers on singing parts of the service in English. We both feel that we as teachers in America need to be able to accurately perform ceremonies and Shomyo, but, that we also need to understand them.

This understanding helps us to more accurately develop English equivalents of the Japanese songs, and also to keep the deeper meaning. We would like to be able to pass on this knowledge and this way of celebrating our belief to future ministers here in America and in this manner help spread the Dharma to the world.

ARAGYO: A total of 177 Nichiren-shu priests have entered the annual 100-day Aragyo ascetic practice being held at Nakayama Hokekyoji Temple, November 1 to February 10. The photo shows the commencement ceremony and those sending off the priests.



Thirty-five Days of Asceticism in Shingyo Dojo

By Rev. Kanjo Bassett

Six teachers stood in front of the altar glowering at us, 68 students from all over Japan and three Americans. We sat seiza on thin cushions absolutely still and silent. The head teacher spoke. "From this time you have checked in your ego and your freedom with me. They will only be returned when you leave here." We were here to complete our training and become Nichiren Buddhist priests. Thirty-five days cut off from the rest of the world. I thought of my Japanese teachers back in college, if they could only see me now.

Launched to Japan

In early 1983 my East Asian Studies professor called me to his office and explained the university was starting a new exchange program with Kansai Gaidai University in Osaka. He said I would be a good candidate. I had doubts but his choices were limited: I was the only East Asia Studies major that year who could speak Japanese and the university had to send somebody.

My original goal was to stay three years and learn Japanese. Buddhism was far from my mind though I did enjoy comparative religion at college and was fortunate to take a class on Zen Buddhism from Dr. Thomas Cleary at Kansai Gaidai. After that I focused on work and career putting college years behind me.

Unexpected Encounter

In Buddhism it is said that you don't have the opportunity to hear the teaching of the Buddha until you are ready to. My chance came in spring 2001, when I met Rev. Tarabini who invited me to the international service which he was just starting. For some reason that I didn't understand at the time, I kept coming back to the services and eventually became a temple member. My relationship with Nichiren Shu deepened little by little as Rev. Mochida and Rev. Imai took over the international service after Rev. Tarabini left for London.

I learned many things but the real test for putting lessons into action came a few years later when my mother was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. It was a three year struggle which she faced with great courage. After she died in June 2006, I looked back at the experience and felt I owed a debt of gratitude. A week after getting back to Japan I visited Rev. Mochida and asked to become a priest. Somehow I felt that though it would be hard work, it would happen quickly. Rev. Mochida agreed and became my teacher, a lifelong commitment in many ways. I started a year and a half journey into a life I never could have imagined back in college.

The Preparation

Shingyo Dojo is the the last step of

a process that includes a written exam of theology basics, a chanting test on sections of the Lotus Sutra and a one week basic training course. The actual training is the responsibility of the teacher and is the way Buddhism has been passed down for centuries: from teacher to disciple. I trained at Rev. Mochida's temple in Asakusa, a temple with a history of almost 400 years, every weekend and spare moment. Being immersed in the cycle of temple events, Higan, Obon, Oeshiki, New Year, memorial services and most of all interacting with the temple members was and is the best training ground I could ever have.

My favorite part was studying theology with my sensei and taking the test: five days of lectures (in Japanese) and exams (in English) at Minobusan Temple that was like being back in college with novices cramming every night in the dining hall; only this time knowing how precious the time is and enjoying every minute.

What the history said to me was that in an age where Buddhist practice was complex, impenetrable and practiced mainly by priests, Nichiren taught that the essential lesson of the Lotus Sutra, expounded by the Buddha, was that all beings contain the seed of Buddha nature and that one must be actively engaged to bring it and everybody's nature to fruition in this life. Anybody, anywhere could nurture their Buddha nature by the simple practice of chanting the name of the Lotus Sutra: *Namu Myo Ho Ren Ge Kyo*. And by everybody following the path of the Bodhisattva, this naturally brings about a world of peace, literally creating the Pure Land of the Buddha in this time and place. As one fellow American shami put it after an exhausting day of lectures, "If the Pure Land isn't here, we haven't found Buddha nature yet."

Buddhist Boot-camp

Each day at Shingyo Dojo started at four a.m. with "suigyō," the ascetic practice of chanting while dousing oneself with buckets of cold water. After changing we would line up to march up the hill in lockstep while beating drums and chanting, to the main hall for morning service at Kuonji.

For the service we filed in slowly and sat seiza style in absolute straight rows trying not to move except when we had to bow, which we were expected to do in perfect unison. The service didn't last that long but by the end of it there was hardly any feeling left in my legs. When we got up to leave we always checked our fellow students on either side to make sure they could stand.

After we marched back to Shingyo Dojo and having the morning service there, the head sensei would give the



Rev. Joel Kanjo Bassett (arrow) is among the 55 shamis who completed the 35-day Shingyo Dojo practice, held on Minobusan from April 15 to May 19, this year. Two other foreigners who accomplished the Dojo practice with Rev. Bassett are Rev. Ryusho Jeffus, Charlotte Sangha, Myoshoji, and Rev. Ryunin Sorenson, Boston Myogyoji Sangha

morning greeting. No matter what the topic was for the day, the greeting inevitably boiled down to "Don't lose your focus, you only have 35 precious days here, it's the chance of a lifetime." After that a younger teacher would then chew us out and hand out demerits. Nothing we did was fast enough or good enough. Not sitting absolutely still was bad, not trying hard and not chanting loud enough was worse. Falling asleep in service was unforgivable. Any one or combination of infractions and the floor cushions or the dining hall chairs would disappear and we would sit seiza on the wooden floor. If a group did not perform their duty correctly, they would have to kneel on the wooden floor and put in extra chanting time with the teachers stamping their feet yelling at them to chant louder. One of fellow Americans who did military service said this was worse than the army, "At least with the army you had down time, here we don't have any, they keep us running all the time."

Outside of the yelling and discipline, the rest of the day consisted of ceremony practice study, and endless recitation of the Lotus Sutra. Fortunately I was allowed to use a version with both Chinese and Romanized text to help with the pronunciation. The Japanese students could only use the Chinese original and there were many who struggled with it. All of us struggled with the ceremonies, repeating them, changing roles, inevitably letting our teachers down by not getting it perfect. Simple moves are easy to learn but take a lifetime to master. When you see it done right you understand what all the practice is for.

Chanting in the Night

Our last duty before lights out was one of my favorites: Shodaigyo in which we chanted Odaimoku with the drum, with just the altar candles for light. The drum would slowly get faster and louder until we were all yelling Odaimoku at the top of our lungs, a peak of pure energy and concentration. Then the drum slowed until the bell sounded and we meditated. It



Just having accomplished the 35-day Shingyo Dojo practice, Rev. Kanjo Bassett looks fully at ease flanked by Gobert Basette, his father (left) and Rev. Kanshin Mochida (right)

only lasted 20 minutes but felt strangely refreshing every time. On our very last night, we marched to the Founder's grave with a full moon rising over the mountains. As many of us as possible squeezed onto the small platform and we did Shodaigyo the loudest we ever did. My brother was there for the graduation the next day. He later said our chanting made the hair on his neck stand up.

The next day after the graduation ceremony, we packed then sat in the training hall one last time. All teachers congratulated us and said goodbye with tears in their eyes. The head teacher looked at us and quietly said, "I give you back your ego and your freedom. Let the gates be opened." We were finally free to join the outside world. All of us were only just starting down a long path with much more to learn, but today we celebrated.

Shingyo Dojo was the last and hardest step of training and yet the most simple.

Every morning as we marched up the hill to Kuonji, we passed mountains still in fresh spring green dotted with blooming wild cherry trees and marched through quiet cool groves of giant cedar trees filled with bird song. I would think of my parents, my teachers, and all the people who led me to this point. I wondered if there was any way to really thank them for blessing me with such opportunities, experiences, and knowledge. In the end I don't think there is any way to truly thank them. But you can be grateful and endeavor to honor them with your actions. My teachers had taught me well, the only thing left to do was to do my best.

SHINGYO DOJO:

Shingyo Dojo is the institute where candidates receive the 35-day practice to obtain qualifications for being a Nichiren-shu priest. It was founded in 1937 on Minobusan. The present facilities were built in 1972.



AIRING: Nichiren Shonin's writings, preserved in the Shogyoden Hall of the Nakayama Hokekyoji Temple, Chiba Prefecture, are given an annual airing on November 23, "Culture Day." Most of the Founder's writings, including "Kanjin Honzon Sho" and "Rissho Ankoku Ron" are preserved in this hall. The Nakayama Hokekyoji Temple stands on the site of the mansion of Toki Jonin (1216-1299) who was a devoted follower of Nichiren Shonin. Following the passing away of the Founder he became a priest in 1251. He did his best in gathering the Founder's writings including letters addressed to him. "Kanjin Honzon Sho" was among the works Nichiren Shonin sent to him.



AWARD: Nichiren Shu wins the "Best Contera" award at "Tokyo Designers' Week," one of the biggest event of its kind held in Tokyo from October 30 to November 3. Designed by Katsumi Asaba, the work, exhibited



in a railroad cargo container, is designed to show the world of the belief in the Lotus Sutra. The exhibit consists of the statue of Nichiren Shonin, the mandala, an arrangement of lotus flowers and others.



STREET SERMON: Archbishop Nisso Uchino, Head Priest of Minobusan, took to the streets to give a sermon in Tono (photo) and Hanamaki Cities in Iwate Prefecture from October 2 to 5. Tono was the domain of the

Nambu Family, the ancestors of Head Priest Uchino. Head Priest Uchino is a descendant of Nambu Sanenaga who invited Nichiren Shonin to Minobusan. Our Founder spent his last nine years in the mountain.



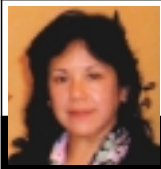
NINTH ANNIVERSARY: The Dragon Palace Temple, Kamptee, India, marks its ninth anniversary on November 13 as Rev. Kansan Mochida, president of the International Buddhist Fellowship Association (rear center in the group photo), officiates the ninth anniversary service at the temple. The temple is located in the suburbs of Nagpur, Maharashtra State, a rare Buddhist city of India. The temple was founded in 1999 with the joint effort of Ms. Slekha Kumbare (on the left of Rev.

Mochida), who was then Water Supply and Sanitary Minister of Maharashtra and Ms. Noriko Ogawa who provided funds. Visitors to the temple on the occasion totalled 50,000.



HOMYOJI TEMPLE: About 300,000 visitors turned out in the precinct of the Homyoji Temple in Ikebukuro, Tokyo, on October 12, the eve of Oeshiki. A total of 50 mandos paraded to the temple. Many of the mandos are followed by those who chant the Odaimoku to the beating of hand drums and also standard bearers who show their skills in swinging them. The temple is well known for enshrining Hariti, the daughter of a yaksa. It is not known how the drum has become an important instrument of the Nichiren Shu. However, drum beating is referred to in the Sutra on the Great Extinction. The sutra says, "When a poison painted drum is beaten in a crowd, they all die even if they do not dare to listen." At many temples, the Odaimoku is chanted to the beat of the drum at memorial services and other occasions.





Temple Events

By Sandra Seki

TORONTO CANADA

Mrs. Fukushima's Visit

Rev. Kenno Fukushima and his wife are living far apart: she lives in Japan taking care of an elderly parent and he lives alone in Canada as a resident minister for the Toronto Nichiren Buddhist Temple.

From October 1 to 14, Mrs. Fukushima was able to visit her husband and get familiar with the temple members. She helped with the annual garage sale and prepared homemade dishes for the potluck after the Oeshiki service.

She also attended a service at the "Momiji" senior residence home and played the piano after the service. She was able to return safely to Japan and sends her sincerest gratitude to all the members and friends who welcomed her with warm hospitality.

Autumn Garage Sale

The annual autumn garage sale was held on Sunday, October 5 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Although it was a cloudy day, 12 members including Mrs. Fukushima helped to sell donated articles to raise \$385.06. The temple is planning its next garage sale at the end of May or the beginning of June 2009.

Because of the decrease in members, fundraising is very important. Rev. Fukushima would like to ask the cooperation of all members.

Ms. Sheila Receives Docho

Ms. Sheila Gifford (center in the photo) became a Shami this spring and on October 2 and 3, she attended the Docho ceremony at the Seichoji Temple in Chiba Prefecture, Japan. It has been seven years since she first asked her teacher about becoming a Nichiren Shu minister. She studied Japanese and read the sutras in order to prepare for this accreditation.



Upon arriving at Seichoji, she was surprised at how serene the environment where Nichiren had studied was. All

the other novices were also women and many were curious that a Canadian was interested in becoming a Nichiren Shu minister.

The teachers and staff were very kind and she was able to feel relaxed in the environment.

After the Docho, she also visited Minobusan with her teacher to report to Nichiren Shonin that she had attained her first qualification to become a minister.

Homepage for Temple Established

A homepage for the Toronto Nichiren Buddhist Temple has been established.

<http://www.nichiren-shu.ca/> Mr. Knight, husband of one of the members (Chieko Knight) made this homepage for the temple and also donated the provider bill for one year. There is an introduction of the temple plus information about the monthly events held. There is also an e-mail address on the site where people can send inquiries.

This homepage is in English, however, Rev. Fukushima has his personal blog in Japanese. Its about his daily life in Toronto and is updated every Sunday evening.

PORTLAND

Oeshiki

The 727th memorial service for Nichiren Shonin was held on Sunday, October 12. The guest speaker was Rev. Kanjin Cederman, the new resident minister of the Seattle Nichiren Buddhist Temple.

Belmont Street Fair

The Belmont Street Fair held on September 6 was another successful fund-raiser for the Portland Nichiren Shu Temple. Traffic between 33rd and 36th Street and Belmont St. was stopped and booths from different organizations were set up.

The members and friends had an early start at 7.30 a.m. to set up the temple booth. Food stalls selling yakisoba, tofu bento, chicken bento and beverages were thriving with customers. Although the sky was overcast in the morning, by noon it turned out to be a beautiful day.

The fair was supposed to end at 5 p.m. but customers continued to come and so the booths were open for another 45 minutes. Although it was a

long and tiring day for the members and friends, it was worth it.

This kind of event made the community realize the existence of the temple and many inquiries were made concerning where the temple was located and what kind of services it offered. The 'team' effort brought great success and a link with the community.

HONOLULU

Mayor's Fair

The Fujinkai participated in the Mayor's Craft Fair on Saturday, November 22 at the Blaisdell Exhibition Hall from 8.30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Handcraft items, cookies, jam and jelly, bread, pickles and small plants were put on sale.

Year-end Cleanup

The annual year-end cleanup is scheduled for November 30, December 6 and 21. The cleanup will be divided into sections and the mansion building cleanup is scheduled for November 30, the social hall of the new temple building is scheduled for December 6 and the temple building for December 21. Since there is always a shortage of hands, please make an effort to participate in this year-end event in order to welcome a Happy New Year!

New Year Basket

The Nichiren Mission is planning to hold a fund-raiser by arranging 60 pretty baskets this year. They will be sold at \$25 per basket for the New Year.

SAN JOSE

Floors Refurbished

The flooring in the Senshokan (photos) was sanded and refurbished in the beginning of October. It looks almost brand new! The floor had gotten warped and dirty since it had not been touched since the completion of the building in 1986.

For this project the temple received large amounts of donations from the San Jose



members from Japan on the morning of November 27.

ITALY

Firm Belief

In the beginning, almost all the members of this small organization were ex-Soka Gakkai members. The leaders of the Soka Gakkai felt their members were being "stolen" by Nichiren Shu so they officially declared war on Nichiren Shu Italia.

They threatened to send all the Nichiren Shu priests back to Japan even though Rev. Shoryo Tarabini is an Italian. They harassed the small organization in many ways.

Rev. Tarabini told his followers never to participate in this so-called war and not to speak badly of Soka Gakkai. Nichiren Shu Italia's policy was one of non-participation in this war and to chant the Odaimoku and specific chapters of the Lotus Sutra. With the desire to "use only the strategy of the Lotus Sutra" Rev. Tarabini encouraged the believers to recite daily, Chapter 20: Never Despising Bodhisattva; this has become the daily Nichiren Shu liturgy of the group.

Another problem that had arisen was that a family was trying to secretly buy the building and land where the temple stands. They contacted local officials and the police, bad-mouthing the group. Even the townspeople also looked upon them with biased eyes.

After four years of turmoil, the group has become a unit and is firmly bound with the Lotus Sutra and Nichiren Daishonin's teachings. Recently the Soka Gakkai has ceased its official declaration of war on Nichiren Shu Italia.

The family that has been harassing the temple cannot press charges because the local officials know that the temple is not doing anything against the law. The townspeople are slowly beginning to realize that the Renkoji Temple is a small but united organization with ardent followers.

The temple held its annual Oeshiki procession through the small town. Many came to watch it and better understanding of Nichiren Shu seems to be growing.

With this strong unity and firm belief the future of Nichiren Shu Italia seems to be positive.

LAS VEGAS

Service at Founder's Mausoleum

Nichiren Shonin wished his tomb to be erected at Minobusan. After his death, six of his senior disciples were in charge of taking turns at the gravesite for one year to serve their master as if he were still alive. After Nikko Shonin was appointed head priest of the Kuonji Temple, head priests of all Nichiren temples took charge. Fifty years ago, it was decided that all Nichiren Shu priests together with their followers were to conduct a service in front of our Founder's grave on Minobusan.

Therefore, Rev. Shokai Kanai held a service with his three sons, wife, and five

Corrections: The date of the discovery of the reclining Buddha in Bago, Myanmar, was erroneously stated in the story on Page 2, No. 168 issue. It was discovered in the 19th century, not in the 15th century. On page 4, the correct location of Charlotte Sangha, Myoshoji is in North Carolina, not in South Carolina. Editor.

Nichiren Shu News

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