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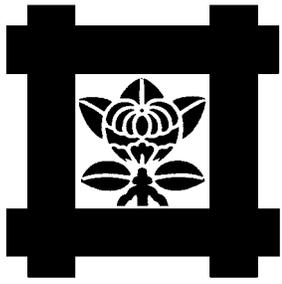
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THE WORLD OF ODAIMOKU — PART THREE

Teaching Begins in the Nation's Political Capital, Kamakura

Article by Rev. Junichi Nakamura
Illustration by Hiroshige Katsu

When Nichiren Shōnin decided to begin propagating faith and practice of the Lotus Sutra, he chose the city of Kamakura, the nation's political center at the time. Kamakura of that era is comparable to the capital city of Tokyo in Japan today.

There were a number of new Buddhist schools and movements born in this era, all of which would later come to be known as "Kamakura Buddhism." However, there were no religious figures other than Nichiren Shōnin who used the city of Kamakura as a stage to appeal directly to the common people or to address the government. Upon visiting Kamakura today, one may happen upon a stone epitaph called the "Nichiren Daishi Tsuji Seppo no Reiseki" (Site of the Great Sage Nichiren's roadside preaching), marking the spot in which Nichiren Shōnin stood along the street and preached the Dharma to passersby, calling on them to "Return to Sakyamuni Buddha, and open your eyes to the true teachings of the Buddha!" while declaring that "amongst all the sutras, the Lotus Sutra is unparalleled."

Nichiren Shōnin was originally forced to flee his homeland. However, in retrospect, wasn't having to leave his home town and never look back, the best possible propagation method Nichiren Shōnin could have taken? While there are no actual references within Nichiren Shōnin's writings to his street preaching in the Komachigatsuji area of Kamakura, the passion in which he spoke of his feelings concerning Buddhist faith as he appealed to every person he met to embrace the wishes of Sakyamuni Buddha undoubtedly left an astonishing impact on the hearts of the populace.

Of the prevalent Buddhist movements of his time, faith in the Pure Land Nembutsu form of Buddhism was by far the most popular, followed by Zen, Shingon and Ritsu, all of which wielded much influence over the Kamakura government as they competed with each other for domination over the others.

Under such an historical backdrop, Nichiren Shōnin's words were inevitable, but they also brought about a great deal of resistance.



Initial reactions of surprise to his words gave way to feelings of anger, which in turn sometimes developed even into open hatred of Nichiren Shōnin. Even though 750 years have passed since his time, there are still many people today who still say that, "It is unforgivable that Nichiren only spoke ill of other Buddhist schools!" and will not even attempt to listen to what we try to explain about Buddhism. However, if these people are not able to hear the words of Nichiren Shōnin, then it will be very difficult, if not impossible, for them to truly know and understand the Lotus Sutra. Honestly speaking, this is a very frustrating situation. There may be times in which we feel that having to deal with people who refuse to listen

Nichiren Shōnin keeps preaching the Lotus Sutra undauntedly against anger and hatred of him

about Buddhist faith, the Lotus Sutra or Nichiren Shōnin's teachings, makes it nearly impossible to create anything or make any progress. We may even feel like giving up.

However, it was exactly this same situation for Nichiren Shōnin. He had to exert enormous effort while attempting to explain the teachings of Buddhism to the people in order to bring them happiness. Similar circumstances met the Buddha Sakyamuni as well, and that was precisely when the Buddha tried to reveal and explain some of his most important teachings.

"We do not have to listen to these teachings!" exclaimed five thousand of the Buddha's disciples and lay followers, as they stood up and walked away. This occurred when the Buddha was revealing the doctrines of the *Hoben* (Expedients) or 2nd chapter of the Lotus Sutra. In reply to this incident, the Buddha stated, "Arrogant people such as those may leave." And with that, the Buddha waited for the congregation to settle down.

One point that I would like to strongly point out to you is that, whether it be Sakyamuni Buddha or Nichiren Shōnin, both of them fully understood that there would initially be not a single person who would sincerely open his or her heart and accept what they were trying to teach them.

In ancient Greece at about the same time as Sakyamuni Buddha, the philosopher Socrates attempted through debate methodology to help his young students recognize their own ignorance. He would help to them that discover truth within themselves, He would metaphorically compare this procedure to that of his own mother in child birth. In Buddhist terminology, this process is called *Kyōke*, or teaching of the Dharma.

Moving from study to teaching others

Kyōke is awakening the hearer's mind by expounding the teachings. But it is not same as mind control or brain washing.

Sakyamuni Buddha taught with the intention to awaken all people to the Truth so they could have meaningful lives. In Ch. 3 of the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha says, "All the beings are all my children." *Kyōke* means that all living beings become aware of being the Buddha's children, thus liberating them from the world of delusion and leading them into the path to the Buddhahood. Because of this wish, Nichiren Shōnin repeatedly told the people: "Believe the Lotus Sutra. Chant the Odaimoku," on a street-corner in Kamakura day after day.

Like the toll of a bell when struck, some people responded to his declaration. Among them was Nissho, who became a leader among Nichiren Shōnin's disciples, and Nichiro, who was called the most filial to his master, and samurai warriors such as Hyoei Nanjo or Kingo Shijo. This was the time when the actual establishment of Nichiren Buddhism as a religious order began. Nichiren Shōnin advanced on the path to being an important religious leader, moving from study to teaching others and then to positive action.

When I examine his way of life, I recall the three stages of life taught by Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche. The three stages are the camel, the lion and the baby. The camel represents the stage of studying, Nietzsche said that a camel walks in the desert while carrying heavy luggage, and likewise we should take up the knowledge compiled by ancient people. At the same time, we should cultivate the spirit to critically examine what we have received. Otherwise, our culture can not progress. Nietzsche compared this stage to being a lion. I remember Nichiren Shōnin's saying, "A man who has a mind like a lion king should become a Buddha. For instance it is like myself, Nichiren." (Sado Goshō) Furthermore, Nietzsche concluded that the creation of a new culture can't be achieved without the meekness of a baby. This reminds me of a phrase from ch. 16 of the Lotus Sutra, "(When they

become devout, upright and gentle." The baby analogy of Nietzsche may be similar to the Buddhist idea that we awaken as the Buddha's child. I believe that Nichiren Shōnin lived his life as the Buddha taught.

To be honest, I came across the teachings of Nietzsche in the book "Lectures of Takeshi Umehara on Buddhism." Representing Japanese philosophers, Dr. Umehara said in the book, "Evil juvenile crimes have been happening, and I suspect that one of the reasons for the crimes is that moral education is not given to the youth." He also said, "I want to hold religion classes at some elementary or middle school. The class would support moral education." His wish came true and he gave lectures twelve times at a private middle school in Kyoto. The record of those lectures were compiled in that book. At the present time when religious education is prohibited at public school, Dr. Umehara's lectures challenged modern society just as Nichiren Shōnin's street preaching had challenged his society.

Dr. Umehara said, "I was even more nervous than when I gave lectures at colleges." He also said, "Although students might have been flustered by this old scholar's lecture, they listened very closely." During the last lecture, he appealed to the students, "Now is the time when Buddhism is needed." Dr. Umehara concluded his lecture, "I hope you all become great people with the spirit to benefit yourselves and benefit other people." I found the ever-lasting wish of Buddhism in his words.

Takeshi Umehara (1925 ~)

Dr. Umehara was born in Miyagi Prefecture and is a philosopher. He graduated from Kyoto University. He served the International Japan Culture Research Center as its first chief director. He has written many explanations and commentaries regarding the depth of Japanese culture through a synthetic examination of Japanese culture, religion, and history from the Jomon Period to the Edo Period.

**People respond Nichiren Shōnin's declaration and become his followers.
The actual establishment of Nichiren Buddhism as a religious order begins.**

Ki-Ken-Tai-Icchi and Buddhism

Rev. Shinko Matsuda, San Jose Myokakuji Betsuin

● Introduction to Kendo:

Kendo, or “The Way of the Sword” is a Martial Art that arose through the many schools of swordsmanship practiced by the Samurai Class in ancient Japan. Back in that era, the only method to practice swordsmanship was to practice with a live blade (shinken) or a wooden practice sword called a ‘bokken’. Without protective armor, many students and teachers were seriously hurt, maimed, or killed as a result of practice or dueling.

To allow for swordsmen to practice without fear of injuring one another, the “shinai” or bamboo sword and protective equipment called “bogu” were developed. The first shinai was made of approximately 16-32 pieces of bamboo or reeds tied together and placed in a canvas bag. This was called the “Fukuro Shinai.” The modern day shinai is now comprised of 4 bamboo staves tied together with leather and heavy nylon. The Bogu also resembles the former “Yoroi” or Armor worn by the Samurai class. The modern equipment consists of the “Men, Kote, Do, and Tare; protecting the Head, Arms/wrists, Chest/torso, and hip/groin respectively.

There are four recognized target areas in Kendo that are hit with either a strike or a thrust with the Shinai. The three types of strikes are a blow to the head or “men”, a strike to the wrist or “kote”, and a strike to the torso or “Do.” The one thrust, “tsuki” is a thrust to the throat. When striking one of these areas, the Kendoist must “kia” or shout the target they are striking. This is an expression of the spirit and determination the person has when striking that particular target.

Today, Kendo is practiced worldwide and extensively practiced in Japan and Korea. There is also a large following of Kendo students in countries such as France, UK, Canada, Brazil, and the United States. Every three years, The World Kendo Championships are held. I have noticed that each time the number of countries represented increase dramatically.



Rev. Shinko Matsuda

● The Concept of Ki-Ken-Tai-Icchi:

I began practicing the Martial Art of Kendo since I was 9 years old. Since that time, I have practiced with many Kendo Instructors and Masters who each have their own philosophy of what Kendo is and what the most important concept of Kendo that should be practiced. Some Masters emphasize establishing strong fundamentals while others may focus on the competitive aspect.

Although each Instructor or Master may be teaching something different; every Kendo Master that I have come in contact with stress to two key concepts in Kendo.... one is the development of one’s character through the principles in the Way of the Sword or “Kendo,” and the concept of Ki-Ken-Tai-Icchi.

Simply defined, when Ki-Ken-Tai-Icchi is achieved, the Spirit, Sword, and Body move

and come together as one at the moment when we strike our opponent with the shinai.

This means that proper ‘Ki’ or spirit, ‘Ken’ correct and accurate technique of the sword, and ‘Tai’ correct posture must come together at the same time. As a Kendoist, we strive to achieve this state at every practice. Although this sounds simple, this is probably one of the hardest concepts to achieve in Kendo.

When these three concepts have come together, it is considered to be a “Yuko-Datotsu” of a successful cut of your opponent. Additionally, it is quite vital because during a Kendo Tournament, the judges refereeing a match will always look for these three components when awarding a point.

In my opinion, when I achieve Ki-Ken-Tai-Icchi when practicing or sparring with my opponent, I feel that this is the greatest and most sincere expression of oneself and of one’s strength towards your opponent.

When correctly done and achieved, both Kendoists will know that a correct point or cut was achieved with Ki-Ken and Tai seamlessly assimilated into one point in time. Many of my Kendo friends and colleagues agree that there is no other enlightening or gratifying feeling within Kendo practice. However, this feeling is but only a short episode within the practice lasting only a mere second or two. Once it is over, it is gone and we must again begin our search for the next opportunity.

● Seeking Ki-Ken-Tai-Icchi:

In my experience, I have found that the concept of Ki-Ken-Tai-Icchi is akin to the example of surfers searching for a good wave to ride on their surfboard.

There are many surfers who wake up at 4:30 each morning so that they may get to the beach by daybreak and enter the cold Pacific Ocean to try and find a good wave to ride before going to work or school.

After speaking to a few people who do this

daily, I found that the feeling they experience while riding a good wave is similar to what we Kendoists experience. We both strive to achieve that state of mind with the same perseverance and mindset.

In Kendo, the opportunity is found by crossing swords with our opponent and opportunity in surfing is found through the waves produced by the ocean, I have found that both Kendoists and surfers endeavor to find an opportunity and always prepared to take that opportunity.

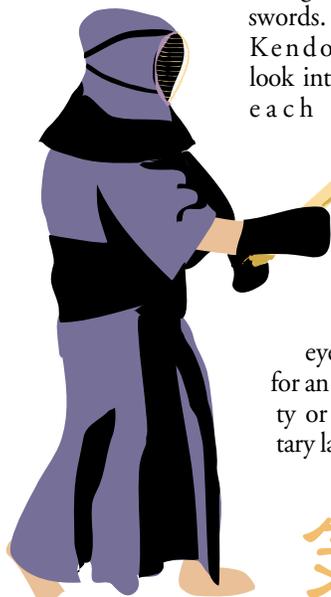
If one misses the opponent or is unsuccessful in catching the wave, then we carry on and look for the next opportunity because that moment in time has passed. We put that missed opportunity or loss behind us because it cannot be retrieved and there is no point in worrying about it. The only possible direction is to keep moving forward to find the next opportunity.

● **Harmony Between Mind and Body:**

When people view a Kendo match, especially those people seeing Kendo for the first time, the match only looks to be a highly physical and strenuous activity favoring the quicker, stronger, and larger opponent.

However, there is so much more going on between the two Kendoists. At the higher levels, the place where the duel is decided is

during the tachi-ai or crossing of the swords. Both Kendoists look into each



other's eyes looking for an opportunity or a momentary lapse in con-

centration or feeling. When a Kendoist finds the correct striking opportunity and makes a strike to the Men, Do, Kote or Tsuki, it is only a physical manifestation of this result. At this level, the Kendoist is not "striking to win, but rather striking because he has won."

When this state is reached, it is said to be a true victory over oneself and of one's opponent. This is because the Kendoist has defeated the opponent mentally, spiritually, and physically. Additionally, to be able to reach this state one must also conquer the four sicknesses that manifest themselves during a Kendo match. The four sicknesses consist of: Fear, Doubt, Surprise, and Confusion.

When this is achieved, a true harmony of the mind and body is said to exist.

With exception to the most basic of bodily functions, the mechanics of the body and the power of the mind and spirit are two mutually exclusive forces that usually work against each other.

For example, when playing golf, the mind may want to hit a golf ball in a straight line for 300 yards. However, unless we are Tiger Woods, the ball will typically not fly straight and only travel about half the distance we targeted.

I believe that the harmony between Mind and Body is the ultimate goal of all Martial Arts that exist in this world.

Bruce Lee once said in his Lost Interview, "You have on one extreme natural instinct (of the body) and on the other side of the spectrum control (mind/spirit). You are to combine the two in harmony. If you have one to the extreme (mind/spirit), you'll be

very unscientific. If you have another (body) to the extreme, you become all of a sudden a mechanical man."

Similarly, in Buddhism there is the concept of the non-duality of Body and Mind. The Buddha taught us that the mind and body are not two distinct and independent entities, but rather co-existing with each other.



Kendo Tournament

The body and mind that we as humans are comprised of is part of a single and ever flowing process. This process can be broken down into five aggregates which consist of the 1. physical form (five senses) 2. Sensation (pleasant, unpleasant, etc.) 3. Awareness of Sensations (i.e. perception of what they are) 4. Volition (i.e. conditioned reflexes or reactions, attitudes, actions, etc.) 5. Consciousness or self awareness. (to act or not act upon)

Being a pragmatic Buddhist, I believe that the balance of mind and body is best summarized on page 56 of Lotus Seeds. It states, "Not only can our physical state influence our state of mind, but our mental state can also have a great impact on our physical state."

From my experience, I realized that you must not focus on only the mind without nurturing the body or vice versa. You must have a balance between the two. They are not mutually exclusive but they must work together in order for us to be complete.

気・剣・体一致

In our busy society today, in order to lead a healthy life that is complete physically as well as mentally, I believe that it is critical that we follow the path of the Middle Way which the Buddha taught us. This Middle Way is one in which teaches us that we must maintain an equilibrium or harmony within our lives. By following the middle way, we can avoid focusing on only one aspect in our lives thus upsetting the balance.

If we fail to maintain this balance, we will upset this delicate relationship and we will be more susceptible physical illness and injury and also subject ourselves to mental and spiritual unhappiness and emptiness.

My Buddhist Master, Bishop Shingaku Oikawa, once said to a visiting group of young Kendo Students of Myokakuji Dojo, Kyoto, Japan. "I am glad that you are all taking Kendo. I have noticed that young people, whether they continue to practice Kendo into adulthood or not, tend to grow up into physically healthy, good/ sincere, and well-balanced people. Please continue to do your best in your Kendo training"

In my experience, I have also found that his statement is true. Most Kendoka and martial artists seem to have the opportunity to maintain an equilibrium between the mind and body. Because the mind and body are balanced, the mental outlook, sincerity and interaction with people is noticeably different from people such as scholars, or athletes of other sports.

Recalling Bruce Lee's example, we cannot and should not focus on any one extreme. You cannot only focus on knowledge and exclude the physical part. On the flip side of that coin you should not focus on only developing a stronger body and neglect to stimulate the mind.

Our minds have to lead our bodies, and our bodies must carry our minds for the entire duration of our lives. By following the middle way and harmonizing both body and mind, will allow us to lead a good life rich in spiritual happiness, knowledge, experience, and physical health.

(Rev. Shinko Matsuda is a Nichiren Shu minister of San Jose Myokakuji Betsuin. He is 5th Dan of Kendo and won the Kendo U.S. championship in 1993.)

Eye Opening Ceremony

On April 9, 752, a statue of the Buddha Vairocana was dedicated at Todaiji Temple in Nara, Japan. The Buddha statue was bronze and more than fifty feet in height, seated on a gigantic lotus pedestal. On that day, the whole court attended the ceremony and ten thousands of priests are said to have participated in it. While they were chanting Buddhist sutras, the officiant opened the eyes of the Buddha using a calligraphy brush. The brush is still stored at the *Shōsōin* - the treasure house of the ancient Japanese parliament. This was a milestone event in the history of Japanese Buddhism. Each Buddha is said to possess thirty-two marks of physical excellences. They can be depicted in tangible form in pictures or on statues, with the exception of one mark, the Buddhas' voice. For this reason, one must place a sutra in front of a wooden or painted image of the Buddha to endow the image with all thirty-two marks. In Nichiren Buddhism, when the Lotus Sutra is placed before an image in order to complete the thirty-one features, the image never fails to become the Eternal Sakyamuni Buddha of the perfect teaching. Nichiren Shōnin says, "Because the Lotus Sutra manifests the Buddha's spiritual aspect, when one embodies that spiritual aspect in a wooden or painted image possessing thirty-one marks, the image in its entirety becomes the living Buddha." Some statues or Mandalas are decorated so beautifully, but if they lack the one crucial mark - the Buddha's voice, they are not equal to the Buddha nor the Gohonzon. Therefore, if you would like to enshrine any statue or Mandala, these objects must have the Eye Opening Ceremony performed by a Nichiren Shu minister.



Great Buddha Statue of Todaiji Temple

●●● Shami Seminar ●●●

The Nichiren Buddhist International Center hosted the 6th Seminar for Nichiren Shu Shamis from December 13 to 15 at the center's facility in Hayward, CA.



Shamis are taking lectures during the seminar.



Shami Kanjin Cederman, Rev. Ryuken Akahoshi, and Shami Kojin Hewitt at the Closing ceremony.

The Shami seminar has been held 5 times in the past with the purpose of training shamis in the essentials of being a Nichiren Shu minister and also to prepare them for Shingyo Dojo, a mandatory period of monastic training to become a Nichiren Shu minister, in the future.. There have been 4 ministers who have already practiced at the Shami seminars and graduated from Shingyo Dojo.

Two shamis participated in the last seminar. Shami Kanjin Cederman from Toronto Nichiren Buddhist Temple and Shami Kojin Hewitt from Boston Myogyoji Temple. They flew to San Francisco Airport coincidentally on the same flight on the morning of December 13, then came to the center in Hayward. At 2:00 p.m. the opening ceremony was conducted by Rev. Ryuken Akahoshi, general manager of NBIC. It was also

attended by Rev. Kanto Tsukamoto of the Toronto temple who was in charge of training the shamis for the three days of the seminar. Rev. Akahoshi encouraged the shamis with the following words, "Please endeavor to learn new things each day for three days."

The first lecture was given by Rev. Ryusho Matsuda of the San Jose temple on "Nichiren Shonin and Bodhisattva Jogyo." The two shamis were challenged by the intense program each day from 6:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. until the closing ceremony on December 15. The schedule included copying the sutra led by Rev. Tsukamoto, a lecture on "Nichiren Shonin and the five guides for propagation" by Rev. Ryuei McCormick of the San Jose temple, a lecture on the "Honzon of Nichiren Shu" by Rev. Akahoshi as well as practicing service

manners, chanting the sutra and suigyo (water purification). After the whole program was completed, the shamis conducted the closing ceremony and demonstrated what they had learned during the 3 day seminar.

Upon completion of the seminar, Shami Cederman stated, "I enjoyed the information and practice I received from this seminar. The time and schedule was used effectively. No time was wasted. Overall I learned a lot and had a chance to review and clarify what I had learned before." Shami Hewitt stated, "I am very appreciative of the opportunity to attend the Shami Seminar at the NBIC. It was a wonderful chance to have face to face instruction. I learned some new and interesting things at the seminar." They already look forward to attending the next shami seminar.

Voice of Dharma Friend

Ronald Petrov:
a member of Los Angeles
Nichiren Buddhist Temple

Many people visit Mt. Minobu because they are members of Nichiren Shu. In my case, I became a member of Nichiren Buddhism because I visited Mt. Minobu.



Grand Hall of Mt. Minobu Kuonji, the Head Temple of Nichiren Shū.

I lived in Japan from 1990 to 1996. On a visit to Shimobe Hot Spring in Yamanashi Prefecture, I picked up a tourist brochure which prominently featured Kuonji, the Head Temple of Nichiren Shu. The pictures of Kuonji Temple looked enticing and so the following weekend I headed by train for a day of site seeing at Minobu.

The scenery by train from Fuji City is gorgeous: first snow-capped Mt. Fuji as the train winds its way through pine forest, and then the river with its wide sandy shores.

old and impressive cherry trees in full bloom. The beating of drums and the chanting of “Namu Myoho Renge Kyo” reached my ears as gust of wind caused cherry blossoms to fall like a shower of snowflakes. I felt that I had reached the Buddha’s Pure Land.

Mt. Minobu became my favorite attraction, and whenever a friend or family member visited me I invariably took them to Kuonji. My father has seen it in winter; my sister-in-law, my niece, and my sister have seen it in spring; and a lady friend from Mexico and an English friend have seen it in summer.



Founder's Memorial Hall and cherry tree at Kuonji Temple.

From Minobu Station I caught a bus to just below the two hundred and eighty seven steep stone “Steps of Enlightenment” which lead to Kuonji Temple. I arrived at the top out of breath and intensely aware of the beating of my heart. I was facing the splendor of the newly rebuilt Main Hall, and to my right two very

Due to the inspiration of Mt. Minobu, I have chanted Namu Myoho Renge Kyo while walking across mountains and bathing in hot springs from Kyushu to Tokyo.

There’s no reason to stop now, especially not after finding a Nichiren temple in Los Angeles named after Minobu itself. When I chant Odaimoku, wherever I am becomes Mt. Minobu and I re-experience the majesty and tranquility of that beautiful place where Nichiren Shonin’s heart resides forever.



287 steps of Bodaiteri leads to the Grand hall of Kuonji Temple.