

Nichiren Shu News

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1

This Nichiren Shu Priest Trained as a Kamikaze Pilot

Rev. Kosei Uchida

Rev. Hoji Mitamura, a former chief priest of Myokenji Temple in Kyoto, was born in 1922 in Zushi, Kanagawa Japan. When he was 23, he was placed in a “special suicide attack” corps, a group more commonly known as



In his 99th year, Rev. Hoji Mitamura remains active, and he has an important message to share.

Kamikaze pilots. His mission was to crash into enemy troops or an enemy ship with a bomb-laden plane. When Rev. Mitamura arrived at his military base, a senior officer told him, “You are already considered to be dead. Cut and leave fingernails and hair, and write a will. You are as good as dead. You must be resigned to death.”

Rev. Mitamura had a close friend who was scheduled to make his flight the next morning. The friend had a wife and children, and said to Mitamura that night, “To be honest, I wish to see my family one last time.” The following day his plane took off never to return. “It was impossible to stand up and say, ‘We don’t want to die.’ We kept telling ourselves that if we made these suicide attacks, our families’ lives would be spared and that victory and peace could be gained only with the sacrifice of our lives,” Mitamura recalls with great remorse.

Their families and relatives were not able to express their true sentiments. Though many of their cherished sons were lost in the war, they had to show pride in their sons who had “died with honor in battle.” If they expressed their deep grief, they would be looked down on as an unpatriotic people.



Rev. Mitamura, wearing a sash in the front row, at his birth temple before he was sent off to the front.

Mitamura’s mother, Etsu, secretly wrote down a poem about her son during the war:

*Every time I recall a memory
with you as a young child
A thousand emotions throng
on my heart.*

*It is a difficult assignment for you
to fulfill your mission.*

*It is a difficult time for me
to wait long for your return.*

The war ended in defeat on August 15, 1945. Rev. Mitamura saw many friends fly off to their deaths, warns, “The young soldiers, with whom I shared joys and sorrows, died when their planes crashed and exploded. The loss of young life makes you and your family fall into deep grief. Tears of regret will never stop. We must never repeat the horrors of war. I am now 99 years old. It is time to tell young people that any war, whether won or lost, will bring a miserable result.”

MOUNTAINS SEND-OFF BONFIRES IN KYOTO



Rev. Sensho Komukai

Generally, August 13-16 is the Obon period, when the souls of deceased family members are believed to return home from the other world. A fire is burned as a guide sign to welcome our ancestors on the evening of the 13th and to send off the spirits on the 16th.

Great send-off bonfires are seen on five mountains in Kyoto on the evening of August 16th. Each bonfire has a different character as follows: Dai (大), Myo (妙), Ho (法) a boat shape, and a shrine gate shape. At 8:00 p.m. the character of Dai is lit first. Myo and Ho are then lit ten minutes later.

Myo and Ho bonfires have been prepared for centuries by the Nichiren Shu supporters of Yusenji Temple and Myoenji Temple of the Matsugasaki district in North Kyoto. Myo has 103 burning woodpiles, and Ho has 63. Each woodpile has been traditionally allotted to a family member of the two temples.

One woman who came to Matsugasaki after marriage said with a sigh, “It is still hot in August. When the bonfires are lit, there is no refuge area from the heat. I was all sweaty, dying of thirst. I helped the bonfire event out of a sense of obligation. Once we finished, I went down the mountain with a sense of great

relief. However, when I arrived home, my grandmother-in-law had brought a family *ihai* tablet out into the garden and was holding her palms together in Gassho toward the bonfires on the mountain, I felt ashamed of myself. People in Matsugasaki respectfully send off their ancestors with all their

heart. Their religion and culture have been handed down with high esteem. It was my mistake to think so little of the bonfire event.”

After the bonfires of Myo and Ho burn out in 30 minutes, the Bon dance starts in the precincts of Yusenji Temple. The dance originated in 1307, when a Tendai priest, Jitsugen, who was very impressed by Nichizo, converted his faith to the Lotus Sutra and Nichiren Shu teaching. All village people of Matsugasaki became devotees of Nichizo and Nichiren Shu. Priest Jitsugen felt joy chanting the Odaimoku while beating the drum. The villagers began to dance, and this “Daimoku dance” became the origin of the Bon festival dance. In modern times, people dance with simple beating of the drum and quiet chanting rather than a joyful dance. They want to think back deeply to the days they spent with their beloved families and silently express gratitude toward their ancestors on the Obon send-off day.





LOTUS JEWELS

This is not because I, Nichiren, am honorable, but because the power of the Lotus Sutra is superior. If I walk with pride, I would be considered arrogant. If I humble myself, I would be considered despising the Lotus Sutra. The higher a pine tree grows, the longer a hanging wisteria grows.
—The Sage Knows the Three Periods (ST 176)

This passage comes from a letter believed to have been written to Toki Jonin in 1274 after Nichiren Shonin entered Minobusan. It explains how Nichiren Shonin’s ability to understand the world around him was based on his practice of the Lotus Sutra. The superiority of the Lotus Sutra is its power to lead all suffering beings to Buddhahood. This power is available to us today, as we use Nichiren Shonin’s example as our guide. Our pride comes from our reliance on the Wonderful Dharma. Our humility should not be mistaken for uncertainty. We are the wisteria reaching from the heights of the Wonderful Dharma to brighten the world for all suffering beings below.

—Rev. Shinkyō Warner

Buddhism Q&A

What’s the Difference between Obon and Osegaki?

It is easy to confuse Obon and Osegaki as people sometimes use them interchangeably. Obon itself is a time for welcoming ancestors back to the family altar with all the various regional cultural practices of *mukaebi*, *okuribi*, spirit boat offerings, Bon Odori and so on; some of them influenced by Shinto, not all of them necessarily Buddhist though the origins are generally said to be so. The actual temple ceremony commonly held during Obon is Osegaki, and it is

specifically Buddhist. Suffice it to say that in this day and age of Buddhism in Japan, Osegaki is a ceremony for temple members to offer prayers and offerings to their departed loved ones out of respect and gratitude with the hope that their souls, and the souls of all beings, living and departed, can be freed from suffering. —Rev. Kanjo Bassett

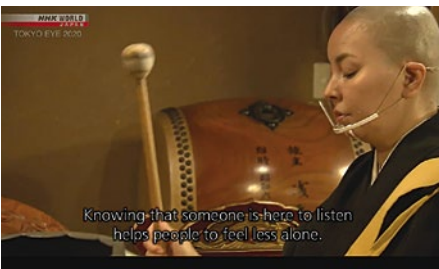


Things Do Get Better

By Rev. Kanjo Bassett

The outreach efforts of Rev. Naho Sakai of Ko-ji Temple in Saitama Prefecture during the COVID-19 crisis were highlighted in a recent segment of NHK World. Her practice of listening to the challenges people are facing in their lives, and simple actions such as practicing Shakyō, copying sections of the Lotus Sutra or the Odaimoku, help them focus and see their problems in a

different way. She has helped students who can no longer attend school due to stress, and young people who have lost parents to COVID-19. In the segment, Rev. Sakai explains her approach, “When times are tough for everyone, it’s difficult to express your anxieties. I felt that a lot of people were suffering. Knowing that someone is here to listen helps people feel less alone. I think that’s what temples are for. Things do get better however slowly. Buddhism encourages people to believe that. I want to be there for people as much as I can.” You can watch the entire NHK World Tokyo Eye segment titled “Tokyo Pandemic and the Temples of Calm” on the NHK website: <https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/ondemand/video/2053206/>



Unknown Histories of Nichiren Shu Temples in Sado (2) – Myosenji Temple

By Rev. Sensho Komukai

In 1324, Emperor Godaigo (1288-1339), out of disgust with the Kamakura military government, secretly planned

to overthrow the Kamakura Shogunate. A court noble, Lord Suketomo Hino, took part in the secret plan. But the plan was leaked out beforehand, resulting in failure. The emperor made a clean

escape, but Lord Hino was captured and exiled to Sado Island. In 1331, Emperor Godaigo tried again to topple the government but was not successful. Emperor Godaigo was banished to Okinoshima Island. Lord Hino was also blamed for both disturbances, and he was beheaded on June 2, 1332. On Sado Island, Lord Hino copied all eight scrolls of the Lotus Sutra for the repose of the souls of his deceased parents. It has a postscript dated May 21 1331, the year before he was executed, and is kept by Myosenji Temple on Sado Island. As he prepared himself to die, he composed a farewell poem:

“The four elements creating all matter are transient. The five aggregates composing the body and mind of all sentient beings have no entity or self. My head is to be exposed to a drawn sword, but it is as void as cutting a summer breeze.”

Lord Hino’s grave is at Myosenji Temple on Sado Island. To commemorate Lord Hino, a Noh play is performed at the main hall of Myosenji Temple every year on the anniversary of his death, which is July 3rd according to the new calendar, and June 2nd according to

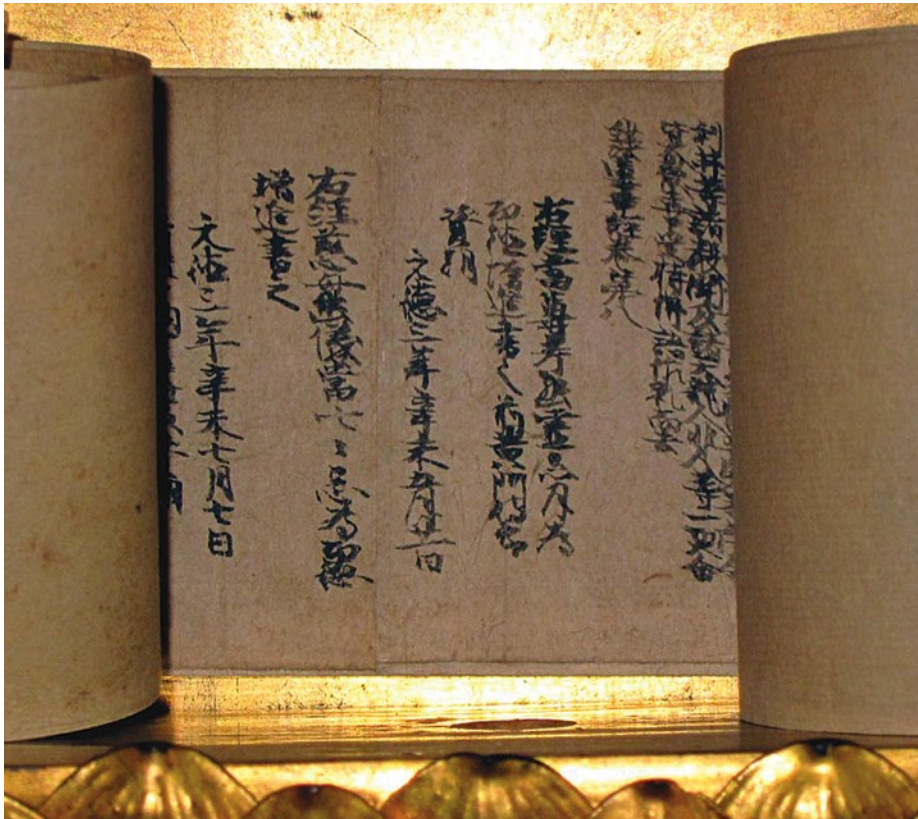


A Noh performance is held at Myosenji Temple each year on the anniversary of Lord Hino’s death.

the old calendar. Noh performances have traditionally been popular on Sado Island because a Noh playwright, Zeami (1363-1443), was exiled to Sado Island in 1434. Zeami wrote the Noh play based on the eventful life of Lord Hino, which is still performed today.



Myosenji Temple.



Lord Hino’s handwritten copy of the Lotus Sutra is kept in the Abutsu-bo of Myosenji Temple on Sado Island.

A New Manager for the International Section



It is an honor to be assigned as the Manager of the International Section. For six years, I have been dedicated to overseas propagation in Europe and Southeast Asia. During that time, I visited the United States, Hawaii, and Brazil for the various Nichiren Shu activities. The most impressive experience was the 800th Anniversary Ceremony of Nichiren Shonin's Birth held in Penang, Malaysia. This was the first time for me to participate in organizing a huge event. It left an impression as well that I participated as an instructor in the first English Sodorin, part of the training program

for Shami, novice priests. I am sure that these experiences as a missionary have helped me to understand the current situation of international propagation of Nichiren Shu and of our temples. My task now is to draw up the grand plan to realize the goal of our propagation, just as our founder, Nichiren Shonin, aspired to benefit all beings. Building on what Rev. Sasaki has done over the last nine years, I will continue to work to bring further development in the overseas mission of Nichiren Shu, especially in projects for translation and education for non-Japanese speakers. We are not yet able to provide them the

opportunities to receive all the lectures and training in English with the same quality as we do in Japanese. This is not only due to the lack of materials in English, but also we do not have enough experienced instructors in our educational section who speak both English and Japanese fluently. Considering how the situation of our international propagation will change over the next several decades, it will be necessary to develop instructors who have qualified skills.

Additionally, translated materials are essential not only for the education of Shami but also of Sangha members. Of course, the reading materials in various languages will be required to propagate all over the world. However the Head Office has limited resources, and it is difficult to manage translation into languages other than English. For translation into other languages, and other projects as well, we will need assistance from Nichiren Shu members. I sincerely request help from all of you to bring our projects to reality, to benefit not only the members of our Nichiren Shu Sangha but also for all the people of the world.

—Rev. Keiji Oshima



On June 30, I retired from the Head Office, and I would like to express my sincere gratitude to everyone for their kindness during my tenure.

I worked for the International Section for about 10 years. In that time, I worked not only in office administration but also on reforms for the development of our international missionary work.

It is regrettable that the English-language Shingyo Dojo scheduled for 2020 could not be held due to the pandemic, but I am very grateful to have been able to complete some of the institutional reforms needed for future international missions.

From now on, I will devote myself to the education of believers of my temple. Thank you again. With Gassho.

—Rev. Kobun Sasaki



Nichiren Shonin in Kabuki

From the Nichiren Shu Shimbun

In 2013, Nichiren Shu News ran a series titled “Nichiren Shonin and Kabuki” written by Reverend Kanji Tamura. In the introduction, he wrote:

“Kabuki is one of the representative art forms of Japan. When we observe a Kabuki performance, we find elements of Buddhism scattered about, such that it is possible to see forms of Buddhist culture naturally immersed in the everyday lives of commoners of the Edo Period... It goes without saying

that among all the Buddhist texts in Japan the Lotus Sutra remains the most read and most respected by measure of faith. Therefore, it is not surprising that many scenes borrowed from the Lotus Sutra are interwoven into Kabuki. It is also possible to see many scenes within Kabuki works which are related to Nichiren Shonin.”

Given how popular the story of Nichiren Shonin was with Edo Kabuki audiences, how appropriate then that Nichiren Shu sponsored a series of Kabuki performances at the famous Kabuki Theater in Ginza, running from June 3 to June 28, celebrating the 800th anniversary of Nichiren Shonin's birth.

The highlight was the performance of Nichiren portrayed by Ichikawa Ennosuke IV, an immensely popular Kabuki actor. In an interview held at the Shumuin on May 20, Ichikawa commented on his hopes and thoughts around these performances:

“In these challenging times, with COVID-19 still not under control, Nichiren Shonin teaches us how to face these difficulties. Though Nichiren Shonin has the image of a strong challenger towards the Kamakura government, I think that he was quite kind and understanding toward his believers and female followers.

“This Kabuki performance portrays a younger Nichiren Shonin, when he

was still known as ‘Rencho.’ During the Kamakura Period, people were suffering from poverty, sickness, and insecurity. Buddhist priests at the time didn't do much to help the people. They only had time for heated discussions on their theoretical ideas. Nichiren Shonin was tired of these discussions and was determined to help those who were suffering. Nichiren Shonin's belief was that it was wonderful to have been born into this world, because we are Bodhisattvas working to help people. This was the beginning of Nichiren Shu,

which has been closely interconnected with the people.

“I don't want to portray a super-powerful Nichiren Shonin trying to drive away the pandemic. I'd like to portray Nichiren as one who faces difficulties directly. I'd like the audience to go home with something in their hearts.

“Nichiren Shonin lived during the Kamakura Period, when there were civil wars, natural disasters, drought, famine, and epidemics. People were troubled and suffering, and they were looking for salvation. Nichiren Shonin questioned the government for not helping its people. He also propagated the importance of living for today and prayed for the happiness and salvation of all people. I hope all of you who come to see the performance understand the message Nichiren Shonin is trying to give us.”

—Translated by Sandra Seki

EDITORS NOTE: In connection with the Nichiren Shonin Kabuki performances, we are republishing the ‘Nichiren Shonin and Kabuki’ series from the paper on the Nichiren Shu blog. Please visit www.nichiren.or.jp/english/blog/2021/07/15/nichiren-shonin-in-kabuki/





Rengeji Temple, Indonesia Rev. Ervinna Myoufu

Helping Others through Troubled Times

It has been almost two years since our lives have been changed with the COVID-19 pandemic. Every one of us has the same chance to get infected with unpredictable effects to the body. We live with worry and fear all the time, and a lot of things are affected badly because of the pandemic. Especially in Indonesia, with the fourth largest population in the world, every day cases of COVID-19 are increasing fast. Some people can work from home, but still many people need to risk their lives to earn money for their families. For some people, income has dropped dramatically.

Seeing this, our temple members thought to contribute something to needy people in society in these difficult times. In November 2020, we decided to make food donations. We started distributing lunch boxes once a week on Thursdays, and we're still doing it now. Members usually cook dishes at home and send them to the temple. At the temple, members cook rice and put the dishes together as bento boxes.



From the front of our temple, we distribute them to people who still have to work, and also to the needy people who live near the temple. People just pick up a lunch when they walk by the temple. We feel grateful that, even in this hard time, we still can contribute something to society. We hope this modest contribution will help people.

Because the situation is still bad, the temple cannot open its doors to the public. We are still doing our services and dharma talk sessions online.

Since last year, all the Nichiren Shu Sangha worldwide, chant the Odaimoku together on the day of the full moon to pray for this world together. I hope more people can join the Odaimoku chanting. We do a live broadcast on Facebook, so everyone can join to chant with the *Itai*

Doshin spirit to pray for a peaceful and healthy world.

Last but not least, may all of us stay healthy, safe, and keep continuing our good faith and practice of the Lotus Sutra and the Odaimoku. May all of us overcome this difficult time together and try to help others whenever we can. No need to do huge things, start with small things that we can do. Sometimes, it means a lot for others when they are in a difficult situation. Take care everyone!

Busshinji Temple, Sri Lanka Kalpanee Apsara, Member of Busshinji Temple Busshinji Wesak Festival

One of the biggest events in Sri Lanka is the Wesak festival held in May to commemorate the birth, attainment of Enlightenment and Nirvana of Shakyamuni Buddha. But in May of this year, Sri Lanka was locked down as the number of COVID-19 infected people increased. The whole country was quiet as people celebrated Wesak in their homes not like past years' celebrations. Busshinji Temple members in Colombo couldn't visit the temple to celebrate Wesak day to pray and bathe the little statue of Prince Siddhartha. However, we had the opportunity to join in with all the Southeast Asian Temple members to celebrate Wesak Day online. Prayers conducted by Rev. Ervinna Myoufu and a Dharma talk by Rev. Shingyo Imai were provided. It was great, and we felt that we were not alone in this situation. We could chant and listen to the lectures together with the other members. The priests always encourage us every Sunday and on Poyadays, our public holidays. On behalf of the Busshinji Temple members of Colombo, I would like to send our gratitude to Rev. Ervinna Myoufu and all the other priests who are always encouraging us. We hope Shakyamuni Buddha will always bless all of us and protect us from this virus. Hopefully, next



year we can all celebrate the Wesak Festival together without any suffering!

Namu Myoho Renge Kyo!

Kannon Temple of Nevada Rev. Shoda Kanai COVID-19 Update

Good news! Nevada is gradually lifting its restrictions, and Kannon Temple re-opened for in-person services starting from June 6. There are still some rules to abide by, such as getting vaccinated, wearing masks, bringing your own Dharma Book, and maintaining social distance. There will be no meals after the services, so please do not bring anything to eat to the temple. So far, one person has come for in-person services.

Services are still being broadcast online using Zoom. For those interested in participating, please contact the temple at: kannontemplenv@gmail.com to obtain a meeting ID and password.



Nichiren Mission of Hawaii Rev. Shokai Kanai Pet Monument Erected

Our lovely Pet Monument was erected on May 14, by Alan Yamada, Shami Shougou Kini, Keanu Kini, and Rev. Kanai. This has been one of our goals for the 800th Anniversary of Nichiren Shonin's Birth. We are very fortunate that Mr. Yamada donated the eight-foot post, concrete and his carpentry skills.

Our Pet Monument is located on the slope below the Bodhi tree and is visible as you walk down to the pond. It is a lovely area to reconnect with your pet as you sit under the Bodhi tree or in the seating area overlooking the pond. We will announce the opening of the monument and provide information on how to scatter ashes.

Funeral and Memorial Services on the Internet?

Yes, it is possible! We now regularly broadcast Sunday Services and classes over the internet. We can also broadcast funerals and memorial services using Zoom.

Please make your request when you are scheduling a funeral or memorial service with Rev. Kanai.

Father's Day Service

A father's function of providing, caring, and guiding the family in a safe and responsible manner is a delicate balance of maintaining discipline while, at the same time, providing warmth, hope and peace of mind. We held a service on July 20, honoring all fathers and praying for those deceased fathers who had devoted themselves to this temple.

Honolulu Myohoji Temple Rev. Josho Yamamura

Donation of Buddhist Items from the Nichiji Shonin Kenshokai

Honolulu Myohoji Mission celebrated its 90th anniversary in 2020. For this celebration, the sacred *Ihai*, memorial tablet, of Nichiren Shu's first overseas missionary, Nichiji Shonin, was presented to us by the Venerable Bishop Tsumyo Ito, the head of the Nichiji Shonin Kenshokai, the Association Honoring the Life of Nichiji Shonin. The bestowal of Nichiji Shonin's *Ihai* to our temple was a first for Nichiren Shu missions in Hawaii.

The *Kei*, Buddhist ceremonial bell, the *Kei-dai*, the stand for the bell, and several *Sanbou*, offering stands, were also donated by the Reverend members of the Nichiji Shonin Kenshokai.

Our board of directors and members of Honolulu Myohoji were deeply moved and delighted by their kindness. We would like to express our deepest gratitude to Venerable Ito and the other Reverends of the Nichiji Shonin Kenshokai.

It took about five months for the items to arrive due to the COVID-19 pandemic. From that fact, we memorialized the spiritual hardship of Nichiji Shonin during his overseas propagation. We want to thank Rev. Koyu Suzuki, Deputy Secretary General of the Nichiji Shonin Kenshokai for his efforts to ship the items.



Calendar for August–September 2021

AUG 13-16	Obon (Traditional Lunar Calendar)
AUG 15	Memorial Ceremony for Victims and Unknown War Dead and Prayer for World Peace at Chidorigafuchi National Cemetery, Sponsored by Nichiren Shu
AUG 27	Matsubagayatsu Persecution Memorial Day

SEP 3	Memorial for Niko Shonin
SEP 12	Tatsunokuchi Persecution Memorial Day
SEP 17	Memorial for Nisshin Shonin
SEP 18-19	Grand Ceremony at Shichimensan
SEP 20-26	Autumn Higan (Equinox) Week