

Nichiren Shu News

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“O-BON, THE SPIRIT FESTIVAL” IN THE PORTLAND JAPANESE GARDEN

By Eriko Rowe • Photography by Jonathan Ley

“Join us during the magical hours of dusk in the garden as we pay tribute to the memory of loved ones by lighting incense and watching candles float in the Upper Pond near the Moon Bridge. The evening will include purification sake, chanting of the Lotus Sutra by Reverend Zuigaku Kodachi, and reading the names of the recently departed.”

—Portland Japanese Garden, Portland, Oregon

With this invitation, “O-Bon, the Spirit Festival” is scheduled to be held on August 13th and 14th at the Garden.

On the west coast of the U.S. and Canada, Obon has been observed by Japanese immigrants since the early 1900s. It has developed into cultural events mostly held by and for Japanese-American communities to enjoy the Obon Dance and to reflect their spiritual tradition to honor ancestors.

O-Bon, the Spirit Festival has a somewhat different origin as it was mindfully planned and developed by Rev. Zuigaku Kodachi, who has been in America for 65 years as a missionary.



Rev. Kodachi has led the ceremony for 45 years.

He is the head priest of Nichiren Shu Minorikai and a professor emeritus at Lewis & Clark College. He believed that holding a Shinbon service in the Garden would be a good way to introduce Americans to the virtuous Buddhist tradition of honoring the departed, rather than holding it as a service aimed mainly toward people of Japanese descent.

The event started in 1976 as a special gathering for members of the Portland Japanese Garden. Reservations are required due to space limitations, but people with reservations, regardless of their religious affiliation or background, have always been welcome. With growing numbers of requests to attend, the one-evening event has grown into two- and three-day events. “To honor the departed in this way is not part of American culture,” says Megumi Kato, an official with the Garden. “Most of the people coming are Portland locals with diverse religious and spiritual backgrounds. They know that they’re participating in a Buddhist ritual, but they seem to really appreciate that we provide a safe place for them to honor the spirit of their loved ones.”

For Rev. Kodachi, who thinks of himself first as an international missionary, then as a servant to the community, and finally as a practitioner of Buddhism, the popularity of the Obon events in the Garden among Americans is a dream come true.

“I am deeply moved by the fact that the Obon events in the Garden, which have been held over the past 45 years, have really taken root in this country. People in the U.S., even those who are not affiliated with any religious group, share the same feelings of love and respect for their deceased loved ones as people in Japan. During the service, I ask attendees to close their eyes as I read out a hundred names of the deceased. They all follow my instructions and shed tears with their palms together. I recite the Lotus Sutra in Japanese without English translation. It



The Obon event in the Portland Japanese Garden has become one of the Garden’s most popular events.

seems that people here can relate to the spirituality and mystery of Buddhism, beyond the language barrier. I do explain the origins of Obon in English though. People seem to understand the meaning of the sending fire, or *Okuribi*, represented by the light of the floating candles. I think that it is a common wish for all of humankind to guide the deceased safely to the other world.”

O-Bon, the Spirit Festival has become one of the most popular events held at the Garden. 300 members could attend each of the two or three nights to socialize and mourn and honor the departed together peacefully with like-minded people.

“Then COVID-19 struck in 2020,” Ms. Kato explains. “We almost canceled the event altogether out of safety concerns for attendees. However, we also knew that it would be especially meaningful to hold an Obon event in the middle of the pandemic as it has caused so many deaths. People needed a safe place to cry and console the spirits of those who passed away unexpectedly.”

In the end, the 2020 Obon event was held virtually using Instagram Live, streaming video of the *Okuribi* live and inviting people to type in names in the chat space. With the help of modern technology, the spirit of this ancient

Japanese Buddhist ritual traveled far beyond the space and geographical limitations. The virtual event was joined by people from all over, including people from other countries like Japan, Brazil, France, and Britain. “The pandemic definitely changed the nature of the Obon event,” Ms. Kato continued. “It used to be a rather lighthearted summer event, but now it’s a more solemn and poignant ceremony, really focusing on the spiritual aspect of Obon.”

In 2021, the Obon event was held as a hybrid event. 100 people came in person to the Garden for each of the two nights, and the event was also again shared virtually online.

As Omicron and other variants still present a threat, the Garden is planning to hold a scaled-back, in-person event with 100 people per night for two nights, and they are planning to share the event online on the first night. Updated information for the event can be found on the website of the Portland Japanese Garden at <https://japanesegarden.org/events/o-bon-the-spirit-festival-2/>

NOTE: Comments from Rev. Kodachi in this article were published earlier in Japanese in his essay in *Shuho* magazine.



Okuribi, sending fire... These floating candles help to guide departed spirits safely to the other world.



Rev. Kodachi leads the ceremony, chanting the Lotus Sutra as people pray for the souls of the departed.



CELEBRATING VESAK IN ITALY

Rev. Shoryo Tarabini

In Italy, there are many Buddhist traditions from different nations and cultures that have peacefully lived and practiced side by side for decades. Besides Nichiren Shu, there are some other smaller Nichiren traditions, a few lay organizations, four schools of Tibetan Buddhism, Sri Lankan and Thai Theravada, groups of Vietnamese, Chinese, Korean, and Japanese Tendai Buddhism, and the Zen traditions of Rinzai and Soto.

Just as in Southeast Asia, where our Nichiren Shu temples participate in the festivities honoring the life of the Buddha, all the Buddhist traditions here in Italy also embrace the Vesak festival. The Japanese, Vietnamese, Korean, and Chinese Mahayana temples normally celebrate the various events of the Buddha's life with separate ceremonies and festivities. For example, Hanamatsuri, the Flower Festival on April 8 celebrating the Buddha's Birth, Jodo-E on December 8 celebrating the Buddha gaining enlightenment, and Nehan-E on February 15 commemorating the day the World Honored One entered Nirvana. Vesak combines all these separate festivals into one and

is celebrated together by the many traditions in honor of the life of Shakyamuni Buddha. During these celebrations, each school performs their ceremony in accordance with their tradition in Pali, Sanskrit, Tibetan, Chinese, Korean, and Japanese. The accompanying pageantry of color, music, rituals, and cultural events is as rich as the vast array of languages.

The first of the Vesak celebrations in Italy this year began on May 28 and 29 in Torino, under the auspices of the Italian Buddhist Union (UBI). It was the first held in public since the nearly three-year period of closure due to the pandemic. A further Vesak celebration was held two weeks later by the Buddhist temples of Northern and Central Italy in



The judgement of right and wrong should be made solely by the doctrine, not by arbitrary consideration nor by superhuman powers.

—Nichiren Shonin, *Sho Hokke Daimoku-sho, Treatise on Chanting the Daimoku of the Lotus Sutra* (ST 23)

In this treatise, Nichiren Shonin describes the superhuman powers of the Buddha's disciples as irrelevant to their ability to practice the Buddha's true teaching. Today we look far too often to those who have superior abilities, such as athletes, the wealthy, politicians, and other influencers for examples of how to live. Nichiren teaches that power is just another arbitrary consideration that can lure us. To benefit all beings, we must stay focused on the Wonderful Dharma.

—Rev. Shinkyō Warner

the pre-alpine town of Graglia (Biella) in the Piedmont region in northwest Italy on June 12 and 13. Since UBI and all of Buddhism has become officially recognized by the state, the current President of the Italian Republic, Sergio Mattarella, and other governing officials sent letters of congratulations.

The ceremonies over these two weeks of celebrations were performed in the languages and customs of each school, including our Nichiren Shu Shomyo. Accompanying cultural and other events included Tibetan Mandala sand painting, a vibrant Japanese Taiko presentation, an art competition, a painting through meditation event, music, a theatrical presentation, and round-table discussions including clergy and laypeople.

Through holding these events finally in public, we witnessed the emergence of a general need to return to normality,

joyfully practice Buddhism together, and actively bring our temple's activities to the forefront. Furthermore, we see an increased awareness and interest in Buddhism by the general public. Other than fellow practicing Buddhists and sympathizers, these activities and related cultural events attracted Catholics, Muslims, Hindus, and many others. Another issue which is beginning to emerge, is the necessity of conducting our rituals, at least in part, in our native language of Italian so that everyone present can understand what is happening, regardless of what school they follow, while still maintaining the different individual traditions. All of this is a shared effort by all the schools to promote Buddhism, further people's awareness of the Dharma, and create a bond with the Buddha in Italy, a predominantly Catholic country.

Myokenji Temple Holds Its 700th Anniversary Ceremony

By Rev. Kosei Uchida

On May 17, 2022, Myokenji Temple in Kyoto held their 700th Anniversary Ceremony in Myokenji, Kyoto. The temple was established by Nichizo Shonin (1269-1342) in 1321. Nichizo was a younger brother of Nichiro, one of the six senior disciples of Nichiren Shonin. At the age of 13, Nichizo was



Priests gather for the 700th Anniversary Ceremony.

entrusted by our Founder Nichiren Shonin to spread the true Dharma in the imperial capital of Kyoto. In the time that Nichizo spent in Kyoto, Nichiren Shu teachings had been spread more broadly throughout the city because of his great missionary activities. Nichiren Shu's rapid expansion caused other sects, especially Mt. Hiei of the Tendai sect, to become hostile toward Nichizo and Nichiren Shu. Nichizo was banished from Kyoto three times.

Much distress and damage can be found in the history of Myokenji Temple. 21 Nichiren Shu temples in Kyoto, including Myokenji, were burnt down in 1536 due to the fierce opposition aroused by Mt. Hiei. From 1579 through 1608, such powers of the time as Nobunaga Oda, Hideyoshi Toyotomi, and Ieyasu Tokugawa took oppressive measures against Myokenji Temple. Additionally, the edifices of the temple were all destroyed by fire in 1788. Then in just

three years or so, a reception hall, a residence, a bell tower, and a founder's hall were all rebuilt with the financial help of the tradespeople in the Osaka area. Their faith in Hariti enshrined at Myokenji Temple had been deep ever since Nichizo Shonin established the temple. One reason was that emperors of the time came to the temple to pray to Hariti. Another reason was that Nichizo was never overpowered by any hardships. He was just trying hard to realize his master's goal to spread the Lotus Sutra in Kyoto. People of the merchant class praised Nichizo for his great achievements despite adversity. They wanted to follow his indomitable spirit and to gain spiritual and material benefit through prayers to Hariti of Myokenji Temple.

Along with ceremonies marking the 700th anniversary, a great deal of emphasis has been placed on maintenance work such as barrier-free

access, toilets for the handicapped, and a renewed web page so that any person can have easy access, both physically and mentally, to Myokenji Temple.



Hariti enshrined at Myokenji Temple.

Writings of Nichiren Shonin

VOLUME FOUR
NEW SECOND EDITION

By Rev. Shinkyō Warner

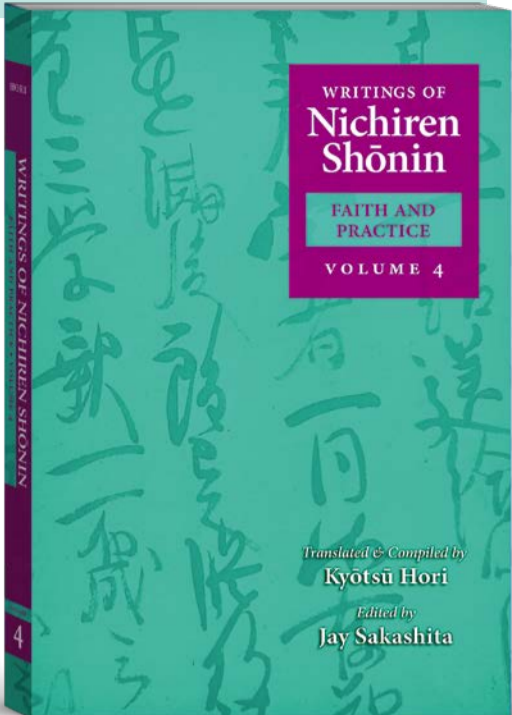
In June of this year, we released the second edition of volume four of the *Writings of Nichiren Shonin*. The volume is titled “Faith and Practice” to match that of volume four of the *Nichiren Shonin Zenshu, Complete Writings of Nichiren Shonin*, from which it is taken. While this volume does not include any of Nichiren Shonin’s major writings, it does contain several of his more well-known writings such as the *Emperor Sushun Letter*, *Sushun Tenno Gosho* (ST 262), and the *Treatise on All Phenomena as Ultimate Reality*, *Shoho-jisso Sho* (ST 122), as well as a detailed explanation of why we do eye-opening ceremonies, *Opening the Eyes of Buddhist Images*, *Wooden Statues or Portraits*, *Mokue Nizo Kaigen no Koto* (ST 138).

This volume also contains several letters that are either directly addressed to women or discuss how the *Lotus Sutra* is the only sutra to assure the attainment of Buddhahood by women. One of these, the *Treatise on Prayers*, *Kito-Sho* (ST 113), is known to have been addressed to Sairen-bo, a Tendai monk. However, in the introductions to the four writings for which the addressees are not known, the translators each bring out the assumption that because these discuss the attainment of Buddhahood by women, these writings must have been addressed to women.

I question this assumption. As Nichiren writes in the *Treatise on Subhakarasinha*, *Zemmui-sho* (ST 46), “Truthfully speaking, even men cannot become Buddhas through those other sutras.” Nichiren may have believed

that it was important for men to realize that women did not need to become men to become Buddhas, that we all carry the potential for enlightenment within us. Nichiren could have addressed letters about women becoming Buddhas to both women and men. In fact, we actually have a clear example of this in the *Treatise on Prayers*, which is addressed to Sairen-bo.

We continue to work on the remaining volumes in the series and hope to have them all available by the end of this year. We hope that this and other volumes in the series will help all of us who practice the Wonderful Dharma learn more about Nichiren’s wisdom.

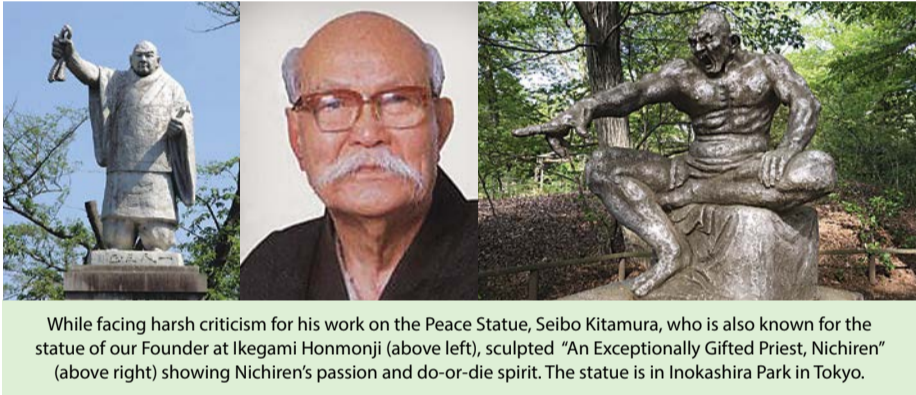


THE SCULPTOR WHO CREATED THE PEACE STATUE IN NAGASAKI

By Rev. Senshō Komukai

When you visit Ikegami Honmonji Temple in Tokyo, you may see a statue of our Founder Nichiren Shonin. The statue looks straight ahead, holding the right hand up in front with a scroll of the Lotus Sutra in the left hand as if he was powerfully preaching on the street. This statue was created by Seibo Kitamura (1884-1987). The sculptor was born in Nagasaki. He often made statues of valiant human figures. His most well-known work is the Peace Statue in Nagasaki. Commissioned by the city of Nagasaki, where the atomic bomb was dropped on August 9, 1945, Kitamura created the Peace Statue in the hope that such a terrible disaster would never happen again in this world.

The bronze Peace Statue is around 9.7 meters in height. The index finger of the right hand points toward the sky indicating the menace of the atomic bomb, and the left hand extends out horizontally symbolizing peace. The



While facing harsh criticism for his work on the Peace Statue, Seibo Kitamura, who is also known for the statue of our Founder at Ikegami Honmonji (above left), sculpted “An Exceptionally Gifted Priest, Nichiren” (above right) showing Nichiren’s passion and do-or-die spirit. The statue is in Inokashira Park in Tokyo.

closed eyes imply eager prayers for the souls of the victims of the atomic bomb. It took him four years to complete the statue starting in 1951. During that time, he was exposed to severe criticism from the public. “A statue cannot fill stomachs. The highest priority should be on reviving the devastated area in Nagasaki,” people complained. “We should not spend this large amount of money for a Peace Statue but rather for the medical treatment for the *hibakusha*, the restoration of schools and hospitals.” The statue itself aroused

criticism: “We do not feel like praying devotedly before this Peace Statue. It lacks religious power.”

Receiving this harsh criticism and threatening letters, Kitamura created a bronze statue of Nichiren Shonin in his art studio. He entitled it “An Exceptionally Gifted Priest, Nichiren.” He felt empathy with Nichiren, who suffered persecution and faced hardships, but Nichiren did not mind risking his life to save the country and the people by spreading the True Dharma. He never gave in to authority

or criticism. Kitamura, inspired by Nichiren’s unbending spirit, completed the Peace Statue in Nagasaki. When Kitamura spoke in public, it was with an air of finality. “A gruesome sight is horribly unspeakable after the nightmare of the war. You may want to avert your eyes from the bombed area. Who doesn’t grieve over the war victims? Who doesn’t wish to restore a tranquil life? With fervent hope for everlasting peace, this Peace Statue has come into being.”

Each year on August 9, a peace memorial ceremony is held in front of the Peace Statue in Nagasaki, and a peace declaration is sent to the whole world.



PRAYERS FOR UKRAINE

By Rev. Chitoku Kawaguchi
Zuikou-ji Temple, Kyoto

Zuikou-ji Temple held a special Memorial Ceremony for Ukraine on May 29 in Kyoto.

We are never able to react quickly enough to crises in the world and feel impatience when we watch the terrible news about the war in Ukraine. But Rev. Chiko Kawaguchi, resident minister of Zuikou-ji Temple said that we can pray with the Odaimoku as Nichiren



Shu temples for Ukraine, because the Ukrainian citizens have been oppressed by Russia. We can support them from all over the world with Nichiren Shonin’s Odaimoku power. This is the reason why we decided to officiate this memorial ceremony for Ukraine.

The ceremony started with a silent prayer. Otonowakai, which is a Gagaku Japanese Imperial court music group in Kyoto that is chaired by Rev. Chiko Kawaguchi, played the national anthems of Ukraine and Japan.

Rev. Chitoku Kawaguchi, vice-resident minister, and former international missionary, performed the invocation and dedication in English for the spirits of the deceased Ukrainian people. He also performed Vadana and Tisarana as an English Shomyo for Ukraine.

Zuikou-ji members offered many Stupa (toba) towers for Ukraine. Their donations, which included the Stupa tower fees, were donated to Ukraine through Kyoto city.

The Zuikou-ji Temple committee members told us that we could give support to Ukraine even from Japan, so I would like Nichiren Shu followers to understand that we can support and pray for Ukraine from all over the world through chanting the Odaimoku.

Rev. Chiko Kawaguchi told the attendees to think about Nichiren Shonin, his teachings, and especially about the *Rissho Ankoku-ron*, which Nichiren Shonin had sent to Hojo Tokiyori, the Kamakura Regent during the Kamakura period.

“You should promptly discard your false faith and take up the true teaching



of the Lotus Sutra at once. This triple world of the unenlightened will all become Buddha Lands.”

We as followers of Nichiren should propagate Nichiren Shonin’s teachings to Russia.

We must think again deeply about the many victims of this war. We believe that our prayers will be received by Ukraine, and we also must pray for the medical staff and caregivers, and for the refugees from Ukraine to keep their good health and long life with happiness and a peaceful mind, and for the war to end soon.

Rev. Chiko Kawaguchi said that there are many Nichiren Shu temples and missions in the world, and they will also hold memorial ceremonies, so please pray for Ukraine together with the Odaimoku.

Namu Myōhō Renge Kyo.

See the video of the National Anthems of Ukraine and Japan
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tWBE5LmGWl>





Kannon Temple of Nevada Rev. Shoda Kanai

Maneki Neko

I am sure many of you are familiar with Maneki Neko, commonly referred to as “Lucky Cat.” Actually, Maneki Neko, means “beckoning cat.” Many businesses, stores, and restaurants have this figurine placed at the entrance, with the cat facing outwards. At Kannon Temple, we carry on this tradition and have our own cat by the door. From ancient times, cats were considered to have mystical and magical qualities. It is said that Maneki Neko was created in the late Edo period in Japan.



If you look closely, the cat is holding a golden coin, and has a bib and collar with a bell. During the Edo period, many of the upper class dressed their cats with bibs and a bell so that they could easily find their cats when they went astray.

The color of the Maneki Neko varies from white, calico, gold, black, green, to red with each representing different types of fortune. The calico version is considered the one which brings the most luck.

If you see one with the left paw raised, this symbolizes welcoming customers. If the right paw is raised, this symbolizes raking in money. There may be some figurines with both paws raised to bring in both customers and money! The paws are bent forward as this is the symbol of “beckoning” in Japan. The cat is not “waving” at you.

These figurines are not just for business. They are also fun to have as decoration in your home. To bring the best luck, place the cat close and facing the front door.

Enjoy collecting your own figurines and make sure to look for the one placed at the Kannon Temple.

Honolulu Myohoji Temple

Rev. Josho Yamamura

Fureai Kannon Statue

Rev. Zuiei Watanabe visited the temple in April. She mentioned that she would like to enshrine a Kannon statue at Myohoji Temple. I was overjoyed and accepted her request with an open heart.

Although the Golden Fureai Kannon was quite heavy, the transportation went smoothly, and we welcomed the statue within a week after her visit.

Rev. Watanabe is the wife of a business owner in Tokyo, and she has enshrined a Keirou (that is Respect for the Elderly) Kannon in Atami, Japan.

The Fureai Kannon was carved by Ven. Kocho Nishimura, one of the most important Buddhist Art sculptors in Japan. He is a Tendai priest and was nominated for the honorary title, “Houin” by Tendai Zasu, Head of Tendai Shu, Hieizan. The main reason the statue was carved was from a heartfelt request from a Buddhist practitioner who is blind. People who are blind are not able to see the statue, which makes it hard to perceive the figure of the Buddha. By carving the intricate details of the Buddha, the blind can finally connect and feel the figure by touching it. Because of this, the statue is called Fureai Kannon which can be touched by everyone. “Fureai” means touching with the heart.

Ven. Nishimura commented after completing the piece: “If you are physically ill, please touch the exact place of your pain. If something is troubling you, please touch the Kannon’s chest, and if you are praying for a wish, please touch the Kannon’s head. The Kannon will warmly listen to our wishes. Kannon Bodhisattva’s mercy will surely be transmitted from our hands to our minds and bodies.”

These Kannon statues are enshrined in famous temples like Hieizan Enryakuji, Kiyomizudera in Kyoto, Eihei-ji in Fukui, etc. Honolulu Myohoji is the first Nichiren Shu temple in the world to receive the Fureai Kannon.



Nichiren Mission of Hawaii Shami Myoshin Ariyoshi

Reflection

It has been four months since I became a shami at the mission.

When Rev. Kanai first approached me to become an assistant minister, my first reaction was to ask, “Am I worthy enough to be a minister? Will I be able to devote the rest of my life to helping others?”

Before my parents passed away, I was fortunate to come across some extremely caring and kind doctors, nurses, and other people who helped me through some really tough times and some even tougher life decisions. When they passed away, I felt an overwhelming desire to help others as I was helped, to return the favors that were given to me by my parents and by the many people I’ve come across in my life.

In Rev. Kanai’s Lotus Sutra class, in Chapter 5, “Simile of Herbs,” we learned that Shakyamuni Buddha is like a huge rain cloud that rains equally on everyone. He does not segregate the good from the bad, the kind from the evil, or the big from the small. Instead, He envelops everyone and calls us all His children. He teaches everyone equally and leaves it up to us on how much we absorb, how much we grow, and how we use what He has given us not just to better ourselves but, more importantly, to help others make their lives better so that we may all achieve the enlightenment of the Buddha.

For me, I have chosen to absorb the raindrops of Shakyamuni Buddha, to be a positive influence on my faith and the people around me, to help and support others as I was helped and supported in my time of need.

In conclusion, I would like to quote this passage from Nichiren Shonin’s words of advice in *Myoichi Ama Gozen Goshosoku*, “Those who believe in the Lotus Sutra are like the winter season for many hardships come incessantly. Winter is surely followed by spring. We have never heard nor seen that winter returned to fall. We have never heard that the believers in the Lotus Sutra go back to ordinary men. The Lotus Sutra says that all people who listen to this Sutra will attain Buddhahood.”

Namu Myoho Renge Kyo.

Nichiren Buddhist Sangha of Greater New England

Shami Ryusei Iizuka

Bringing Mindfulness-based Recovery Services to New England

Just before the New Year, Shami Ryoen Drewello launched Inari Recovery Counseling. It is a new mindfulness and meditation-based recovery service that brings needed services to the Merrimack Valley area of Massachusetts, one of the areas most impacted by America’s opioid epidemic. Shami Ryoen is a talented therapist who has earned her masters degree in Social Work from Simmons University and a Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker. She specializes in addiction recovery, trauma, LGBTQ+, and spirituality counseling.

The counseling service’s namesake, Inari Daimyōjin, is central to the recovery practice as a deity representing prosperity and health. Offering a Buddhist alternative to traditional western twelve-step recovery programs, Inari Daimyōjin is not used as a higher-power to seek salvation, but rather as a source of inspiration and strength to draw from as Inari-sama is broadly known for having healing powers. Our sangha has been a member of the Recovery Dharma Network for years, and this new service aligns perfectly with the temple’s previous offerings and mission to save all sentient beings.

With the counseling offices located just one floor above the temple, it has been seamlessly integrated into the temple environment. The service’s rollout was a beautifully communal effort by the sangha. The logo was designed by Rev. Ryuoh Faulconer, the articles of incorporation were filed by Shami Ryusei Iizuka, and the entire sangha helped with moving into the space.

As we all seek to walk the path of the Bodhisattva in the age of Mappo, we hope to extend our compassion to those who are most in need and suffering from addiction and walk with them on the path to end suffering.



Calendar for August–September 2022

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

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Art Director Alan Rowe

日蓮宗
Nichiren Shu

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