

Nichiren Shu News

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“STOLEN BUDDHAS” AND WHAT’S BEING DONE TO PROTECT THEM

By Rev. Kanjo Bassett

The day after Christmas 2019, a Nichiren Shu priest noticed a broken temple door. Inside the hall, one of the Buddhist altar statues, Many Treasures Buddha, was missing. The temple is deep in the hills of the Boso Peninsula, accessed by a single narrow private road with a locked chain at the entrance. “Only the locals know about the temple,” said the caretaker priest, who tends the temple and the small community of 20 temple families on a part-time basis in addition to his family temple in Tokyo’s Edogawa Ward.

He called the local police, and they duly recorded the crime scene and started an investigation. However, to date (July 2022) they have yet to find any trace of the statue or any leads at all. It’s a difficult job, searching for an object with only a written description to go by as there was no picture or detailed measurements of the missing statue.



Police are on the case, but it can be difficult when there are no images or measurements of the stolen pieces to help them in their search.

An isolated temple in a remote rural area, with no resident priest, with no regular visitors, and only the most basic of door locks protecting the contents... these are the perfect conditions for the theft of Buddhist statues and other temple treasures according to Tomoyuki Okochi, associate professor of Cultural Property Studies at Nara University.

“The most important thing to remember is that an antique Buddhist



Here is just a sampling of some of the recovered stolen statues and other important historical items taken.

statue is like leaving a diamond in the open. A diamond that can be exchanged for money.” Professor Okochi outlined the challenges of protecting the cultural property of temples without resident priests, especially in isolated areas with shrinking populations.

The biggest problem is the time it takes for a theft to be discovered and reported to the police. In remote rural areas, it may be days, or even weeks, before a caretaker visits a temple or shrine for cleaning and discovers the theft. After the police are called, there is the challenge of collecting evidence, the most important being what the object looks like. There is very little that the police can do when they don’t have pictures and measurements of a missing statue. Unfortunately, this is often the case.

In 2008, local papers in Shizuoka reported a rash of 18 thefts in remote rural temples and shrines in the upper Oi River Valley. There were more. Professor Okochi explains, “Prefectural police

are poorly integrated when it comes to dealing with cultural theft. In that particular case, there were similar thefts in neighboring prefectures, but there were no coordinated efforts to find the thieves.” There was a similar but much larger string of temple statue thefts in Wakayama prefecture in 2015, involving a total of 60 statues. Fortunately, the thief was caught, and some of the treasures were returned.

Because of these events Professor Okochi works tirelessly with local communities in Wakayama promoting simple security measures to protect sacred objects. He explains, “Temple and shrine treasures represent the cultural history of these local communities. Theft not only robs the temple of a statue, it also robs communities of their history and identity.” The lack of coordination and sharing of information on a national level is a big problem. The Agency for Cultural Affairs made a small step in 2018 by setting up a website that lists stolen religious items, but there is a long way to go.

Professor Okochi’s program is a simple one: the cataloging of cultural assets by photographing and measuring them, and setting up surveillance cameras in unattended temples. For important cultural objects that are hard to protect in open temples, he promotes creating accurate replicas using 3D printing technology for altar placement while keeping the originals in a safe place.

But why is this happening now, and why the relatively sudden increase? Professor Okochi thinks it is due to the rise of internet auction sites like Yahoo Auction, “The internet makes it easy for anyone to steal and profit.”

“Basically, you have a two year statute of limitations under the law, the antique goods sales law of 1949,” he explained. “If an item is returned in the first year, the owner does not have to pay anything when recovering a stolen item from a

dealer. In the second year, the owner pays some costs to cover dealer losses. After that, the only choice is buying it back or taking the dealer to court, which can take years and be quite costly. In a court trial, dealers let themselves off the legal hook saying, ‘I didn’t know it was stolen.’”

Even during the first year, it’s sometimes faster to simply purchase the item. Indeed, a recent high profile case was solved when the stolen statue was offered for sale on Yahoo Auction. It was quickly recognized and removed. Rev. Daiun Miki of Ryuhonji Temple in Kyoto explained the chain of events.

“The person who did it knew the area and planned it. The hall where the statue was enshrined was the only building in the temple compound without a surveillance camera, he also knew what time the gate was opened and when nobody would be around. He seems to have kept it for a while, then he sold it to a local dealer who had it professionally cleaned. The local dealer in Kyoto then sold it to a dealer in Oita Prefecture in Kyushu, who then put it for sale on Yahoo Auction. Thank goodness we had given pictures of the statue to the police. If it wasn’t for that, the police couldn’t really do much.”

Rev. Miki said the Kyoto Prefecture police were very helpful and have a section well versed in investigating stolen antiques. The statue is now back in its rightful place with a security camera guarding the entrance.

Professor Okochi continues to work with the police, communities, temples, and shrines to protect and preserve local religious cultural history for future generations. “Priests and temple members should never feel embarrassed or like it’s some kind of divine punishment when a statue is stolen. It’s all about money, so protect it like you protect your money. It’s that simple.”



This priceless Buddhist statue was abandoned. It had been cleaned with household detergents, but then it was just left out on the roadside.



With thefts on the rise, Professor Tomoyuki Okochi has been focusing on ways to protect Buddhist statues and other temple treasures.



To safeguard irreplaceable items from being stolen, some temples and shrines have been placing 3D printed replicas on their altars.



CONGREGATIONAL TRAINING IN BRAZIL

By Rev. Yodo Okuda

On January 4, I went to Sao Paulo, Brazil for congregational training. Due to the pandemic, we limited the training to two days, January 8th and 9th, and we also encouraged online participation, as some members live as far as 2,500 kilometers away.

Around 40 people from Nichiren Shu Brazil attended. About half of them attended online. On the first day, we all listened to online lectures from Rev. Myofu Ervinna, Rev. Kangyo Noda, who was an international missionary in charge of Southeast Asia, and Rev. Shingyo Imai, who has been delivering online lectures on the second Saturday of each month.

The Chapter 16 sutra-reading practice was done sentence-by-sentence. This practice was limited to onsite participants to avoid the time lag online.

Many members were already familiar with Nichiren Shu Shodaigyo, because I had been live-streaming Shodaigyo in Portuguese online from my temple on weekdays. However, many of the nuances of tone, volume, and rhythm are hard to follow online. In person, I could explain and demonstrate how to create harmony with resonant voices

of all of the participants to express the Buddha's Pure Land.

We started the second day with chanting Jigage. In the Dharma lecture, we talked about people abandoning their faith or constantly searching for a different religion or sect. People cannot calmly look at themselves when their minds are restless. It is important to mindfully practice the basic Buddhist teachings, such as the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, and the Four Dharma Seals, in our daily lives.

Buddhist names were given to four practitioners and the Gohonzon Mandala was conferred to a practitioner. I was also able to present statues of the Three Treasures and Nichiren Shonin



Great Devotee Ikegami Family

By Rev. Sensho Komukai

The Ikegami Family has a wonderful historic background. Munenaka, a virtuous child of the Ikegami Family, was an estate steward of Ikegami District and an immediate vassal of the Shogun. He was also the civil construction magistrate, charged with building the residence of the Shogunal family, as well as temples and shrines. No doubt, he was of wealth and good lineage.

Invited by his uncle Nissho, one of the Six Senior Disciples, and by one of the great devotees, Kingo Shijo, Munenaka met Nichiren Shonin and listened to his teachings with his brother, Munenaga.

The Ikegami brothers became devout followers of Nichiren Shonin.

Their father, Yasumitsu, was extremely angry with their conversion because he venerated the priest Ryokan of Gokurakuji Temple as a living Buddha. When Nichiren Shonin was exiled to Izu and Sado and almost executed at Tatsunokuchi, Yasumitsu said to his sons, "Nichiren was punished because he slandered Venerable Ryokan. It is no use to be his follower. Discard the Lotus Sutra and break off relations with Nichiren." Far from accepting their father's forceful demand, the brothers' faith in Nichiren Shonin became even stronger. Munenaga had a warm disposition.

However, the older brother, Munenaka, was so stubborn and direct, that the conflict with his father intensified. As a result, Yasumitsu disowned Munenaka.

The quarrel between father and sons continued for 20 years. The brothers kept their faith in the Lotus Sutra and Nichiren Shonin, and continued to argue with their

to those who kept following my lead after I had left Brazil. Some of them were even moved to tears. The statues were donated by Rev. Yuki Ishikawa of Cho-onji Temple and Rev. Yudai Ishiguro of Shorenji Temple in Aichi Prefecture.

Online missionary activities were born mostly out of necessity during the pandemic, but these efforts turned out to be surprisingly successful and have opened up new possibilities. We can now connect with people in other Portuguese-speaking countries, like Portugal and Angola, and with Brazilians living in Japan.

Even so, I believe that a sangha should study and practice together in person

as much as possible. Fortunately, many of the pandemic limits have now been lifted in Brazil, and the sangha has been gathering again. I am looking forward to my next visit to Brazil to pray and practice together with them side by side. My deep gratitude goes to the member temples of the Nichiren Shu International Buddhist Fellowship Association, to the NBIC, and to all the Kokusai Fukuyoshi who have been involved in the online lectures.

NOTE: This article has been excerpted from an essay by Rev. Yodo Okuda that appeared in July in *Shuho* (Nichiren Gazette) published by Nichiren Shu.



Hongyoji Temple had been the Ikegami family residence.



Figurines of Ikegami Munenaka and his wife.



*You should therefore establish your fame
as one who practices the Lotus Sutra and
devote your life to it.*

—Nichiren Shonin, *Shoho Jisso-sho, Treatise on
All Phenomena as the Ultimate Reality* (ST 122)

In our world of global communication and celebrity, far too many of us seek fame through working long hours to train ourselves as scholars, athletes or musicians, devoting ourselves to the goals of companies or political organizations, or even getting as close as we can to famous people hoping their fame will somehow rub off on us. Nichiren teaches us that true fame comes from the true Dharma, and that by practicing and upholding the Lotus Sutra, worldly fame is irrelevant.

—Rev. Shinkyō Warner

Writings of Nichiren Shonin

VOLUME FIVE
NEW SECOND EDITION

By Rev. Shinkyo Warner

As part of the Nichiren Overseas Propagation and Promotion Association (NOPPA) project to revise the *Writings of Nichiren Shonin*, Volume 5 is being published on October 13 and will be available on Amazon.

This volume includes the *Shimoyama Letter* (ST 247) in which Nichiren helps his disciple Nichiei explain to Nichiei's father why he will not vow to abandon the Lotus Sutra and devote himself to the Pure Land Sutras. It is an example of how Nichiren shows his followers the benefits of practicing the Lotus Sutra, and the importance of responding to those who slander the Lotus Sutra, especially if they are parents, employers, or officials who would make our lives difficult.

The volume is entitled "Biography and Disciples," since it includes at least 16 writings in which Nichiren covers details of his life from his days as a novice priest at Seichoji Temple, through his propagation and persecution in Kamakura, his exiles to Izu and Sado, his attempts to warn the Japanese government of foreign invasion, the joys and hardships of his life at Mt. Minobu, and the decline of his health towards the end of his life.

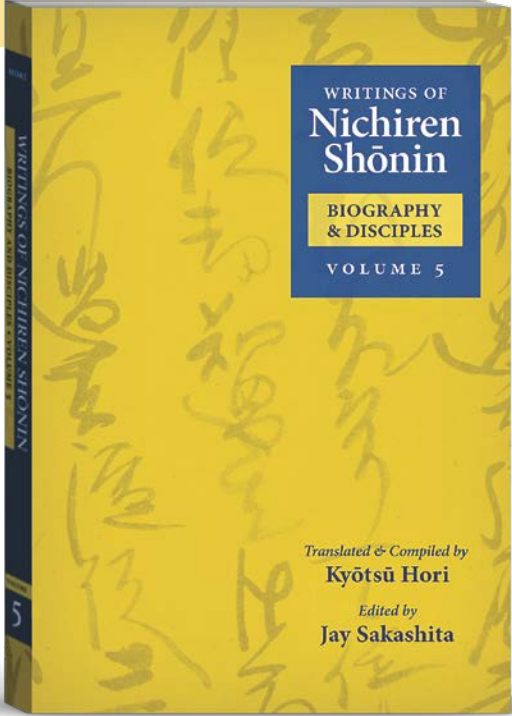
In most of his writings, we see Nichiren as a scholar who precisely dismantles the arguments of other schools of Buddhism. In other writings, such as *Sovereigns of our Native Land* (ST 168), we have seen Nichiren as a politically astute historian. But in these writings, such as the *Mt. Minobu Letter* (ST 432),

we see both Nichiren's skill as a poet, and his appreciation of other poets:

In the rapids of the swift mountain streams, I rinse vegetables, and as I wait impatiently for my dampened sleeves to dry, I think of the old poet Hitomaro who recited,

At Waka-no-ura,
The fishermen think
of the passing of their lives
As they wait for
the seaweed to dry.

We hope that these new editions will help to bring us all a deeper appreciation of Nichiren Shonin's life as a gift for us and the entire world.



DOCHO KOFU SHIKI CEREMONY FOR TWO NEW SHAMIS

By Sandra Seki

It has been three years since Rev. Shokai Kanai was installed as Head Priest of the Nichiren Mission of Hawaii. In his installation message, he said it was his goal to educate and raise Dharma teachers, lay leaders, substitutes for Nichiren Shu priests and part-time as well as full-time ministers. He hoped that these new Dharma teachers were



born and raised in America, and more specifically in Hawaii.

Shami Shougou, Kalei Kini, vowed to become a priest in 2020. He has been coming to the temple every morning to chant with Rev. Kanai and help keep the temple neat and clean for everyone. Due to the pandemic, his official Docho Kofu Shiki ceremony was postponed until this summer.

The other candidate for Shami is Claire Ariyoshi. She retired from her job at the end of 2021 and took an oath to train as an assistant minister in January 2022.

She received the name Myoshin from Rev. Kanai.

Shami Shougou and Shami Myoshin, accompanied by Rev. Kanai, attended the Docho Kofu Shiki in Kiyosumi, Seichoji Temple on July 28, 2022.

They received the official Tokudo precepts and are on their way to becoming Nichiren Shu priests. A part of Rev. Kanai's wish has come true.

By Shami Myoshin Ariyoshi

Kalei Kini and I, along with Bishop Shokai Kanai, were so honored to be able to attend the Docho Kofu Shiki at Kiyosumi this year on July 28. For Kalei and me, this was our first visit to Japan. It was such a wonderful and amazing adventure. There were so many magnificent historical structures here at Kiyosumi. To stand at Asahi-Ga Mori where Nichiren Shonin stood and first chanted the Odaimoku and to see the beautiful panoramic view that he saw, was so awe-inspiring. I could not help but shed tears of joy.

My heart was full of gratitude standing at this sacred location, where I could feel the power of his presence. I thanked Nichiren Shonin for showing me this breathtaking site and asked for his guidance as I embarked on my journey to become a Nichiren Shu priest, to propagate his teachings as he would

want them to be taught and help others find the light of the Lotus Sutra.

I want to thank the Missionary Department for helping us participate in this Docho Kofu Shiki ceremony and for giving us an opportunity to experience firsthand, the majesty and grandeur of the ceremony and this location. My memories will remain in my heart and will be treasured for the rest of my life.



THE FIRST TRANSLATOR OF ALICE'S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND

By Rev. Kosei Uchida

In Buddhism, the translation of Buddhist writings or scriptures is essential for missionary activity. Thanks to the strenuous efforts of priests from old times to the present age, the Lotus Sutra has been translated from Sanskrit to Tibetan, Uighur, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, English, Italian, French, Portuguese, and other languages.

You may have heard of some priests who translated foreign books in fields other than sutras, such as medical or scientific books. Now let me introduce a Nichiren Shu priest who translated a famous children's story. His name is Rev. Eikan Maruyama. He translated "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" where Card Soldiers, the Cheshire Cat, the White Rabbit with a watch appear on the scene. The book written by Lewis Carroll was published in 1865. There were a few translators who rendered the famous English book into Japanese, but many additional stories and figurative scenes were added arbitrarily and the result was essentially a new story.

Those could only be called "adapted stories" instead of translated works. Rev. Maruyama was the first person who made a faithful translation of the original. His translation was published in 1910.

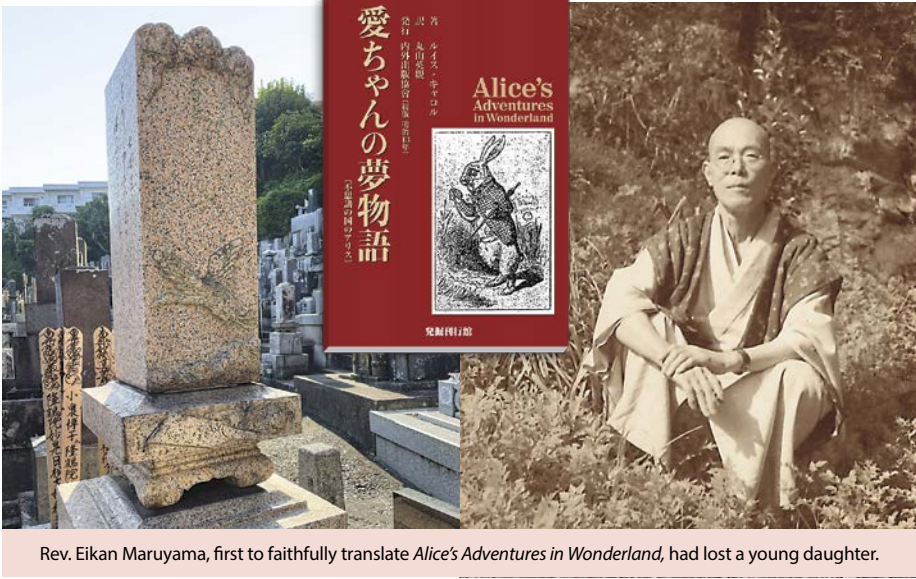
Rev. Eikan Maruyama was born in 1885 in Yokosuka City in Kanagawa Prefecture. The nearby temple looked

after him soon after birth. As he grew up, he learned at an educational facility for monks called *Danrin* in Tokyo and enrolled in the English Literature Department of Waseda University. It is presumed that he had an opportunity to read *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. After graduation, he taught English at a high school. Then, he became the chief

priest of Sempukuji Temple in Yokosuka. After he got married, he was blessed with twin girls. Unfortunately, the younger of the twin sisters died at the age of seven from a disease. He was overwhelmed with grief. For the repose of her soul, he erected a tombstone, feeling so sorry for her not playing enough in her playful age that a crane, a traditional handball, and a battledore racquet were inscribed on her tombstone.

He was devoted to his older daughter, giving her an English education and dedicating all of his accomplishments to her. He was also earnest about children's education in the neighborhood of the temple. He welcomed all children and emphasized the importance of learning, willingly giving them lessons so that they would be able to read and write.

Lewis Carroll said in his essay, "One of the deep secrets of life is that all that is really worth doing is what we do for others." As a Buddhist priest Rev. Maruyama maintained Sempukuji Temple, providing an elementary education deep rooted in the area. He passed away in 1956 at the age of 72.



Rev. Eikan Maruyama, first to faithfully translate *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, had lost a young daughter.



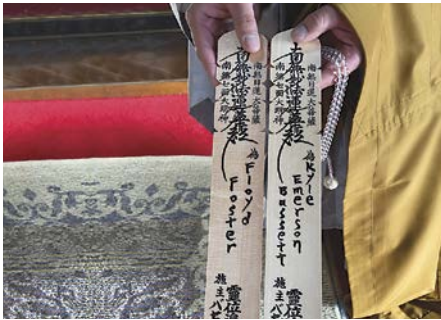
Kannon Temple of Nevada
Rev. Shoda Kanai
Five-Story Pagodas

I believe everyone is familiar with the five-story pagodas that are built on many temple grounds in Japan. Typically made from wood, they stand out with their exquisite beauty and prominence.

Where did the five-story pagoda come from? The concept originated in India. The Buddha told his disciples to bury his ashes in a *stupa*, which is a Sanskrit word meaning “heap.” It was a burial mound, usually constructed of dirt. In later years, the mounds became more ornate and were built with stones. Besides holding Buddha’s ashes, other relics and sutras were stored inside these mounds.

These *stupas* became places where the disciples and followers could congregate to chant and be in the vicinity of Shakyamuni Buddha. By paying homage and showing appreciation in the presence of the Buddha, one could surely attain Enlightenment.

As Buddhism spread throughout Asia, the *stupa* slowly transformed from a mound into a building structure. As *stupas* were a place to meet the Buddha, they began to represent Buddha himself. From the head at the top, to the face, chest, stomach, and finally the legs at the bottom. The five levels also represent each of the five elements of the universe: earth, water, fire, wind, and space (void). Building pagodas, however, was very expensive, so smaller wooden planks (*toba*) were created to represent the five-story pagoda.



With the *toba*, it is easier to commune with our ancestors as we can hold them with our hands and can physically chant to them. Though their spirits are all around us, when we see their names inscribed on the *toba*, it is as if we can actually see them in person, and there is a much stronger sense of connection.

You can request a *toba* at any time, not just for *Obon* or the spring and autumn *Ohigan*. If you are interested in honoring your ancestors, please contact the temple.



Honolulu Myohoji Temple
Rev. Josho Yamamura
Special Guest

Rev. Kyoshun Kageyama, from Shakaji Temple in Kamogawa City in Chiba Prefecture, visited Hawaii for the first time in three years since the pandemic started.

Rev. Kageyama and Rev. Yamamura of Honolulu Myohoji visited Maui Island, the Puunene Nichiren Mission to have their Bon Service and a special Kito Blessing on July 30. Around 50 members and followers gathered at the service to receive the Blessing. After the ceremony, they visited an elderly member’s home to hold a prayer service. The Puunene Nichiren Mission of Maui welcomed its 100th Anniversary this year.

On July 31, Rev. Kageyama performed another Kito Blessing at the Honolulu Myohoji Temple. Members were amazed at his blessing method, and Wahiawa Nichiren Mission’s followers also joined the ceremony.

Rev. Yamamura was invited to the annual Nagasaki Peace Ceremony at the Hawaii State Capitol on August 8, commemorating 77 years since an atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. The Mayor of Honolulu, Rick Blangiardi, and many other representatives of the community joined the ceremony. Rev. Yamamura offered a prayer at the beginning of the ceremony.

Bon Services

The Honolulu Myohoji Temple General Bon Service was held in person at the temple on Sunday, August 14, at 10:00. Due

to the ongoing pandemic, Rev. Yamamura also offered an additional Bon Service on Saturday, August 13. Attendees were asked to make appointments prior to the services, and it was mandatory for those attending to wear masks. Also, the Bon Services were prioritized for families that had lost their loved ones last year, which would be the Shin (new) Bon for them.

Nichiren Mission of Hawaii
Rev. Shokai Kanai

Planning for a Pilgrimage Next Year

We are planning a pilgrimage to Japan from June 14 to June 22 in 2023. Due to the pandemic, pilgrimages have been canceled in recent years. This pilgrimage is to commemorate the 800th anniversary of Our Founder’s birth and also to focus on the 750th anniversary of when Nichiren Shonin entered Minobusan.

The tour will include a pilgrimage to Ikegami Honmonji Temple, Daibo Hongyoji Temple, and Seichoji Temple. At Minobusan, we will participate in the 750th anniversary of Nichiren Shonin entering Minobusan, and Rinban Hoshi, cleaning Nichiren’s gravesite. Finally, we will go to Kamakura and visit Ryukoji Temple, Ankokuronji Temple, the Tsuji Seppo site, where Nichiren Shonin preached on the streets, and Tsurugaoka Hachimangu Shrine.



People will purchase their own flight tickets to Japan, and the travel costs within Japan are expected to be around 250,000 yen per person. We will hire an English-speaking tour guide.

Please contact Rev. Kanai for more details if you are interested in joining us for this pilgrimage.

Renkoji Temple, Italy
Rev. Shoryo Tarabini

A Busy Month of August

August is an extremely busy month in Europe, but not in the usual sense. Everyone is preoccupied with their holiday travels. Furthermore, summer is always the hottest time of the year, and people are eager to escape the heat and retreat to the mountains or oceanside to relax and maybe enjoy some cool refreshments.



While most of the year we are busy with ceremonies, study groups and the like, August is a month when people who normally are unable to venture far from home will come to visit the temple to chant the Sutra and Odaimoku together. They also get involved in *Samu-gyo*, cleaning, working in the garden, etc.

It is an opportunity for many people, who normally can only follow online, to actually practice physically inside the temple and meet with many of the Sangha members in person. During this time, people come from as far away as Taranto, Calabria, Napoli, Abruzzo, Venezia, Toscana and Roma, as well as Switzerland, a delegation from Russia, and a family from Germany. Before going off on vacation, however, their first stop was at Renkoji Temple. Many of them had been waiting and planning for their visits to the temple for months. And while here, not only did we chant together in Italian, English and German, we also discussed activities in Germany and planned some special projects for the upcoming Oeshiki Ceremony. Their sincere faith and devotion truly touched and encouraged us all.

Perhaps living near a temple, or even around an hour away from a temple, we may tend to take for granted the importance of having a Nichiren Shu Temple near us or in our lives. But for people who must travel thousands of kilometers just to be able to recite the Sutra and Odaimoku before the temple’s Mandala Gohonzon, they are keenly aware of the great treasure we possess. Often these people will tell us, “If I lived closer, I would be here every weekend.”



Calendar for October 2022–November 2022			
OCT 10	Ceremony in Memory of the Founder’s Exile to Sado Island, Minobusan	NOV 11	Nichiren Shonin Commemoration Day for the Komatsubara Persecution
OCT 13	Oeshiki	NOV 13	Memorial for Nichizo Shonin
OCT 31	Ceremony of Changing the Robes on the Statue of Nichiren Shonin, Minobusan		

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