

# Nichiren Shu News

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## OESHIKI CEREMONY & FESTIVITIES



Left: Children play music in Mando Lantern Parade at Ikegami Honmonji Temple (circa 1920).  
Above: Activity in modern Mando Lantern Parade at Horinouchi Myohoji Temple in Koenji in Tokyo.



Woodblock print of Oeshiki in the Edo period.

By Rev. Shoryo Tarabini,  
Renkoji Temple, Italy

In every Nichiren Shu temple in Japan and around the world, the Oeshiki Ceremony is observed in October combining solemnity, remembrance, and joyful celebration. Oeshiki marks the passing of our founder, Nichiren Shonin, and his entering Parinirvana on October 13.

Nichiren Shonin departed Minobusan on horseback on September 8, 1282, accompanied by some of his disciples and Lord Hakii's retainers. Ten days later, they arrived at the residence of Ikegami Munenaka, one of Nichiren Shonin's

devoted lay followers. Munenaka invited Nichiren Shonin to rest at his home, since he was exhausted after his long trip from Minobusan, and Nichiren laid down to rest.

At 8:00 a.m. on October 13, Nichiren Shonin peacefully passed away surrounded by numerous disciples and lay believers chanting the Lotus Sutra and Odaimoku. At this time, the senior-most disciple, Nissho Shonin, rang a bell to mark Nichiren's entry into Parinirvana as the earth gently quaked and a cherry tree in front of the residence began mysteriously blooming out of season as the world acknowledged the passing of a great sage and Bodhisattva.

These wondrous occurrences and events have formed the traditions that we follow to this day during the Oeshiki Ceremony. We adorn our temples and altars with festive handmade paper cherry blossoms.

On October 12, thousands of believers converge upon Ikegami Honmonji Temple to parade hundreds of *Mando* lanterns (literally, "10 thousand lanterns," often formed as pagodas) adorned with cascades of cherry blossoms and scenes depicting Nichiren Shonin's life.

The Mando Lantern Parade is accompanied by musicians, joyful dancing, the beating of the *uchiwa daiko* drums in rhythm with the chanting of the

Odaimoku. At this time, we promise to uphold our faith, to practice our Founder's teachings, and to accomplish his great dream of *Itten Shikai Kaiki Myoho* (all beings under the vast sky and within the four seas will return to their original enlightened state of the Wonderful Dharma).

Whether at Ikegami Honmonji, the Head Temple of Minobusan Kuonji, other major temples in Japan, our local temples around the world, or even at home, Oeshiki is the most important ceremony and festival dedicated to recognizing and expressing our profound gratitude by celebrating our Founder, Nichiren Shonin.

### PILGRIMAGE TO JAPAN FOR THE 800TH ANNIVERSARY OF NICHIREN'S BIRTH

By Keith Nagai, President,  
Nichiren Mission of Hawaii

Fourteen of us from Hawaii and the mainland United States traveled to Japan for our 800th Anniversary pilgrimage. We were there to see and witness the parade to commemorate the 750th Anniversary of Nichiren Shonin's entrance into Minobusan. We were also honored to have an audience with his Holiness, Chief Abbot of Minobusan Kuonji Temple, Rev. Nisso Uchino.

We planned this pilgrimage for two years and finally were able to travel as the pandemic and the rules for traveling abroad were relaxed.

My gratitude to Rev. Shokai Kanai for bestowing upon me the honor of reading the Rinban Hoshi Vow at the mausoleum that houses some of the physical remains of our Founder, Nichiren Shonin. I am not fluent in the Japanese language and only understood a few words that were outlined in the five-stanza vow. The evening prior, Rev. Kanai advised me to read it clearly, read it loudly, read it with confidence, and with sincerity.

As I read the vow, there was no anxiety or tension. It is as though Nichiren Shonin was waiting for us and saying, "You have known me all your life. Thank you for coming. Now, what do you want to tell me?"

We all make vows and promises. Through Rinban Hoshi, these statements outline our responsibility and intention to keep our faith, to protect our ministers, to preserve our temple, to maintain connections with our ancestors, and

more importantly a vow to keep, read, recite, and expound the Lotus Sutra, generation after generation. Meaning, we vow to live and to manage our temple so that we all will contribute toward creating a peaceful society in which we all will thrive.

For me, this also includes a vow to prepare and develop the next group of leaders, to teach temple management that will secure and ensure that Nichiren Shonin's mandate to spread the Odaimoku far and wide will remain alive and well through the generations to come.

I was able to read the Rinban Hoshi, because I was thinking of the parade the day before and of Lord Sanenaga Nambu's trust in Nichiren Shonin and his faith in the Lotus Sutra. This thought never left me. I do not know if Lord Nambu was thinking about or could even conceive of the effects of his generosity 750 years into the future. However, I truly believe Lord Nambu knew at the time that it was the right thing to do, given his position, power, and authority. I believe the same.



Our pilgrimage group at Minobusan Kuonji Temple.



# Celebrating the Restoration of the Main Hall in Honkokuji Temple in Kyoto

By Rev. Kosei Uchida

On June 5, many priests and followers attended the grand service to celebrate the restoration of the main hall of Honkokuji Temple in Kyoto.



Honkokuji Temple is one of the six major head temples of Nichiren Shu with the rest including Tanjoji Temple in Chiba, Honmonji Temple in Ikegami, Myokenji Temple in Kyoto, Honmonji Temple in Fuji, and Hokeyoji Temple in Nakayama.

Originally, the temple had been located at Matsubayagatsu in Kamakura where Nichiren Shonin resided at the Hokke-do Hall. After the Izu Persecution in 1263, Nichiren renamed the hall Honkokuji Temple and used it as a fundamental seminary and missionary hall over many years. After Nichiren Shonin passed away, his disciples, including Nichiro, continued to keep the temple as a missionary hall.

In 1345, Emperor Kogen ordered Honkokuji Temple to move to Kyoto to pray for national peace. As a seminary to study Nichiren Shu Buddhism, many learned priests were produced from Honkokuji Temple.

There is a famous story that when Nichiren Shonin was exiled to Izu, he cured Lord Ito Tomotaka from illness. As a token of his gratitude, Lord Ito gave him a standing Buddha statue which had been found in the sea. From that time, Nichiren Shonin always carried the statue with him until he passed away. The precious Buddha statue has been enshrined at this temple. There are other priceless items preserved at the temple, such as six Gohonzons that Nichiren

inscribed, and three letters of pardon from the Izu, Tatsunokuchi and Sado persecution incidents.

When you visit Kyoto, it is better to stay away from the busier tourist sites and to experience the feeling of Nichiren Shonin at a place of tranquility such as Honkokuji Temple.



## LIVING IN THE ODAIMOKU: FROM SINGAPORE TO FUKUOKA

By Rev. Shodan Mizukami,  
Honju-ji Temple, Fukuoka City

Sri Ram Rajaram, a member of Myojo-ji Temple near Kokura Castle, has been in Japan for ten years. He was born and raised in Singapore and had been interested in Buddhism since childhood. In junior high school, he studied Thai Buddhism at a temple in Thailand for about a year. He was also interested in Japan and hoped to live there someday. He studied Japanese language for about a year in junior high school.

In Singapore, he worked for an oil company. It was a good job with a salary that afforded him security, but he thought that he would never leave Singapore if he continued along that path. If he wanted to work overseas, the time was now. He started looking for jobs in Japan and found a position as an ALT (Assistant Language Teacher). He then started a new life in Japan, here

in Kokura, teaching English at a junior high school.

In Singapore, he had joined a Hokke based organization and was naturally attracted to the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. After coming to Japan, he learned about Nichiren Shu and was interested in it. He was introduced to Myojo-ji Temple by someone at work. This was the beginning of our relationship. Before long, he began to frequent Myojo-ji Temple, where he was taught by Rev. Watanabe, former chief priest, and his son, Rev. Kosuke Watanabe, and began participating in morning services when he had time. He also actively participated in the temple's events and functions.

Before long, Sri Ram took the lead in co-sponsoring various events with the temple, such as English conversation classes for children and adults, courses in Singapore culture, and Indian curry making. The cross-cultural experience, which is rare at temples, is popular not

only with members but also with the general public.

Sri Ram said, "I hope that the circle of Nichiren Shu Odaimoku and the circle of people will expand to as many people as possible. Younger generations are becoming estranged from temples, so they have an opportunity to come to temples. I wish I could do more." He also says, "When you are troubled, if you chant Odaimoku from your heart, there will be some kind of guidance in finding a solution." He says he wants people in the younger generation to think more about how their lives can change for the better through Buddhism.

Currently, he lives with his wife and son, who is 21 months old. His son's name is 'Ren' (Lotus) taken from the Odaimoku, "Namu Myoho Renge Kyo." Born during the COVID-19 pandemic, Sri Ram wanted his son to become a person who can bloom pure flowers just as the lotus flowers bloom from

muddy water. Little Ren even joins his hands together in Gassho and recites the Odaimoku together with his father every day.

Seeing Sri Ram, who is passionate about his faith and taking action, and his son Ren putting his hands together in Gassho, I see them carrying on the essential tradition of passing our faith to future generations.



Father and son, Sri Ram and Ren, are keeping the tradition of faith alive.

## Travel on the Fujikawa River to Minobusan during the Edo Period

By Rev. Sensho Komukai

Nichiren Shonin arrived at Minobusan on May 17, 1274, taking six days from Kamakura. In those days, it took six to ten days for visitors from urban Tokyo areas to travel to Minobusan by rickshaw or on horseback. The hardest part of the pilgrimage to Minobusan was crossing the Fujikawa River. Nichiren Shonin wrote about how dangerous the river was, "The Fujikawa River, the swiftest river in Japan, runs from the north to the south. High mountains tower on both the east and west sides of this river. The valley is deep, and huge rocks are lined upon both sides of the river like tall folding screens. The river water flows swiftly as if a mighty samurai shot an arrow into a cylinder. Travelers go along the left or right bank of this river or cross the river by boat. As the river flows swiftly and is inundated with many rocks, boats are often smashed."

After the Edo Period began, Ieyasu Tokugawa, founder of Tokugawa Shogunate, commanded to improve the riverbanks of the Fujikawa River to open shipping transportation to collect rice as a tax payment from Kai Province (Yamanashi Prefecture).

Five years later, the river improvement project was completed in 1607. The total length was 72 kilometers from Kajikazawa (Yamanashi Prefecture) to Iwabuchi (Shizuoka Prefecture). Before the shipping transportation started, it took three or four days from Kajikazawa to Iwabuchi by foot, but it only took five hours down the river by boat. Besides sacks of rice and salt, no more than 15 passengers were allowed on board.

As shipping transportation became popular, the number of pilgrims to Minobusan greatly increased. Their popular route was to visit Onmyoji Temple in Isawa, Myohoji Temple in Kajikazawa before reaching Minobusan. After visiting Hon-onji Temple of Mt. Ono or Enjitsuji Temple of Mt. Hakii,



The Takase-bune river boats reduced the amount of time it took for people to reach Minobusan.

they went down the river to reach Iwabuchi Port. The number of ships amounted to more than 100 during the Edo period and 800 in the Meiji period. There were over 2,000 boatmen and 15 to 30 boats going back and forth each day.

The boats were called Takase-bune, long, narrow river boats. Four sailors were regularly assigned to each boat. Good rapids shooting would depend on the skipper's skill in propelling a boat with a pole. As a rock came closer, the skipper changed the direction of the boat by poking the rock with a pole. An erroneous poke would have thrown people into the river. Advanced skills and momentary judgment were required for skippers. They were respected and admired like movie stars in the region.

Many lost their lives, though, due to the raging torrents of the Fujikawa River. As sailors realized soon enough that they would have only an inch of plank between them and death, they became superstitious and firm in their religious faith, especially adoring Shichimen Celestial Maiden who they believed would be the water deity. They offered a boat to the pond at the top of Shichimensan, dedicated sacred straw ropes to the Yogo-seki rock (it is believed



Shichimen-do Hall standing halfway up the mountain in Kajikazawa Town.

that Shichimen Celestial Maiden appeared on a rock on Shichimensan), and constructed the Shichimen-do Hall on a hillside of Kajikazawa Town so that Shichimen Celestial Maiden could watch over them traversing the river. They never failed to visit the Shichimen-do Hall with their families to pray for their safety in their journeys.

In March of 1928, the 316-year history of transportation by boat on the Fujikawa River ended, because the operation of the Minobu Railway commenced. Now it only takes around four hours to reach Minobusan from Shinjuku Station by train or by bus while reading a book or chatting, but it is advisable to take your time and look out over the swiftly flowing Fujikawa River to imagine the many difficulties the pilgrims in those days had trying to visit Minobusan.



# FROM BOMB TO BELL, RINGING FOR WORLD PEACE

By Rev. Kengo Yamaguchi,  
Honjuji Temple, Akita City

The Showa Emperor radio address that announced the surrender of Japan and ended the Pacific War took place on August 15, 1945. The day before, August 14, the Japanese government had accepted the Potsdam Declaration. On that date from 10:30 p.m. until 3:30 a.m. on August 15, the final American air raid of the war took place over Akita City, my home and birthplace.

Let me tell you about that day. The Akita City Tsuchizaki Minato (harbor) district had been targeted because of the oil refinery there. The harbor and railroad provided excellent shipping conditions, and it had developed into the largest oil refinery in Japan. The Americans dropped 7,360 100-kilogram bombs and 4,687 50-kilogram bombs, completely destroying the refinery, harbor, and surrounding city center area.

In my home area, it is a custom for the temple priest to visit member homes and chant every month on their ancestor's memorial anniversary day. After the sutra chanting, we talk about everyday life, but occasionally the discussion will turn to their war experience on that fateful night.

**THE RAID:** "It was Obon, and I had just come home from the children's group evacuation to visit the family grave, from the mountainside that we had escaped to. We could see the bombs dropping on the harbor. They looked like fireworks for a moment then lit everything up like day. I watched while the ground shook.

"As soon as I heard the tremendous noise of B-29 squadrons, bombs started raining down. I was too frightened to speak from the shaking ground. I fell on the way (escaping) and was so scared I couldn't run. I bent down over a dam in the rice field trembling until the air raid was over.

"My family screamed at me to run away. I escaped barefoot running and walking 27 kilometers to the next village. When I got there, the war was over.

"The wounded were taken to the girl's school in the pine grove. The elementary school and temple were a makeshift morgue. It was like a scene from hell. When the oil refinery was bombed, it rained oil and burned for three days. Even the ground was burnt black. I still occasionally have nightmares of the trucks carrying out the dead bodies. Why did they have to bomb our city when the surrender would be broadcast only eight hours later?"

The more I listened to their stories conveying the tragedy and regret of war, the more heartbreak I felt. It is said that over 200 people were injured and over 250 people died during this air raid.

**THE AFTERMATH:** One day, shortly after the air raid, a temple member in an area that had been burned down and destroyed brought the tip of an unexploded bomb. During the war, temple bells of all sizes had been confiscated by government as scrap metal for the war effort, so there was not a single bell in the temple. He had brought it in hoping the tip of the unexploded bomb could replace the main hall bell (keisu). If you look closely, there is something like a bullet in the center of the bell. You can see part of the fuse and a mark like the serial number on the outside.

What was originally made to destroy buildings and to kill and injure people became a bell as a symbol of peace in order not to forget war. Even now, the sound of the bell echoes in the main hall of this temple every day, and the members also ring it when visiting during Obon season.

Now, 78 years after the end of the war, there are only a few people who know about the air raids in this area. Even

now, conflicts between people continue without end. That's why I want to pass down to the next generation of young people the experiences of the fire and horror of war.



This bell is made from the tip of an unexploded bomb from the air raid.

If you'd like to hear what this bell sounds like, just scan the QR code to watch a YouTube video. The bell's tone is quite amazing.



## THE 14TH MAHAKALA DEITY FESTIVAL

On June 18, the 14th Mahakala Deity (Daikoku) Festival was held at Hodoji Temple in South Korea. 80 Korean devotees attended the service. When Rev. Woo Beop-Hyoen, head minister of Hodoji Temple, had completed his third Aragyō ascetic practice, he conferred small statues of the Mahakala Deity to many devotees.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Mahakala Deity Festival became much smaller and was simplified. However,

without restrictions this year, even ministers from Japan could attend the service to enliven the atmosphere.

Rev. Woo commented after the service, "I soothe my breast, because I can finally get back the feeling that the hands of a clock are advancing again since the Mahakala Deity Festival was performed. Next year will mark the 15th Mahakala Deity Festival. I sincerely hope that many more people will come to the service to enhance the atmosphere of the festival."



## Remembering Rev. Shokei Steffens

Rev. Shokei Steffens of Daiseion-ji Temple in Wipperfurth, Germany passed away in Japan on August 5 at the age of 80. Originally from the Kobe-Osaka area, she studied music and voice, and she performed as an opera singer. Later, she ventured to Germany and married there. After the death of her husband, Steffens became a Nichiren Shu priest under the guidance of her master, Rev. Nissho Takeuchi.

Together, they built Daiseion-ji Temple in 2000 to promote interfaith dialog. She promoted dialog with the Catholic Church, various Christian faiths, Judaism, Islam, and other Buddhist schools. In 2018, she welcomed the Nichiren Shu International Study Tour to Daiseion-ji for a series of interfaith lectures. She was always eager to support Nichiren Shu's growth in Europe and to promote world peace.



In 2018, Rev. Shokei Steffens invited the Nichiren Shu International Study Tour to Daiseion-ji Temple in Wipperfurth, Germany for a series of interfaith lectures.



*Scaffolds are needed for building a great tower, and after completion of a tower scaffolds are demolished. This is what is meant by "discarding the expedient." A stupa is built by using a scaffold, but no one worships a scaffold without a stupa.*

—Nichiren Shonin, *A Response to My Lady the Nun, Mother of Lord Ueno* (ST 388), *Ueno-dono Haha-ama Gozen Gohenji*

Nichiren uses this analogy to remind us of the foolishness of following teachings other than the Lotus Sutra. Nichiren shows how all of the pre-Lotus Sutras, and even all non-Buddhist teachings, are merely preparations for the Wonderful Dharma: that all beings will attain Buddhahood and that the ever-present Shakyamuni Buddha is constantly leading us to enlightenment.

—Rev. Shinkyō Warner





### Nichiren Mission of Hawaii Rev. Shokai Kanai

#### Seminar for Shami and Members

On August 19, *Shomyo* masters, Revs. Shunko Kawasaki and Hakujun Makino, came to the temple from Japan to teach *Shomyo* to our three shamis, Shougou Kini, Myoshin Ariyoshi, and Mikio Tomioka.

We also resumed the lay training that had been suspended for three years due to COVID-19.

Previously, only the members of the Nichiren Mission in Honolulu were trained. This time, members from the Wahiawa Mission, Honolulu Myohoji, Puunene Mission, and Hilo Mission were invited. Revs. Kawasaki and Makino conducted a special seminar to train and

educate lay supporters in our practice for *Dojo-ge* and *Buso*.

The purpose of this workshop was to train lay leaders who will become able to teach their children and others in the future. This seminar was an opportunity to ask the specialized teachers questions regarding daily practice and other topics of consideration.

Explanations were given in both English and Japanese. The course lasted about an hour and a half, followed by regular



Sunday service for everyone to put into practice *Shomyo* they just learned.

After the session, the members welcomed the lecturers to a buffet luncheon.

### Kannon Temple of Nevada Rev. Shoda Kanai

#### Zen Garden in the Desert

The other day, a family requested a one-year memorial service for their late mother. Their home was on the outskirts of Las Vegas and it seemed that the family had put much time and love in creating a special Japanese-themed oasis for her.

I was struck by the various rock gardens surrounding the house. I felt a calmness in the presence of the garden. With all the excitement that Las Vegas can offer, there are still small pockets of serenity to relax the senses.

In a couple of years, we hope to find a new location for the Kannon Temple, a

place where both priests and lay people can come to study but also a place where one can escape the outside world and enter the world of the Buddha. Seeing this rock garden has given us ideas of how to create a place of tranquility!



## Southeast Asia Pilgrimage to Minobusan and Shichimensan

On June 18 and 19 this year, Rev. Myoufu Ervinna and a group comprised of several Southeast Asia sanghas made a pilgrimage to Minobusan and Shichimensan, climbing to Keishin-in Temple accompanied by former SEA Kokusai Fukuyoshi Revs. Kangyo Noda and Yuon Ito. For many of the members, it was their first time visiting the area. Following are some of their impressions.

The hike up Shichimensan during our pilgrimage to Minobusan in June was both very trying and challenging for both of us, especially because of our age and because we usually don't exercise that much.

We continued chanting the Odaimoku while hiking up, which gave us motivation to move forward. It took us about five hours to reach the summit. We could feel the tranquility, peacefulness, and see the beauty of this scenic spot which made us forget all about our tiredness.

We were extremely happy that we were able to successfully climb Shichimensan in our lifetime!

We were lucky to have a Bodhisattva appear behind us when we were climbing



Members from several Southeast Asia sanghas made a special pilgrimage to Minobusan and Shichimensan.

down the mountain. He was 79 years old and told us that he climbed the mountain once a month. At first, we told him to go ahead, because we did not want to hold him back with our slow pace. However, he kindly told us, "Don't worry. I will be behind you to protect you all the way down the mountain."

The Buddha must have sent this Bodhisattva to help us!

It took four and a half hours to make our way down the mountain, but it was such a worthwhile experience for us. We shall never forget this encounter and will cherish this memory forever.

—Cindy Tong and Lee Beng,  
Klang Sangha, Malaysia

The pilgrimage to Minobusan was an eye-opening experience for me. Everything I had heard about and studied through books became real. I was able to touch the statue of the Buddha, which Nichiren Shonin had always carried around with him, and breathe in the atmosphere of Minobusan. Seeing, feeling, and touching some of the actual sites and things that Nichiren Shonin experienced bonded me closer to our Founder.

After returning to Sri Lanka, I have related my precious experience to all the members of our Sri Lankan sangha, and I have showed them many photos taken while on the pilgrimage.

One day, they would all like to also make a such pilgrimage to these sacred

places and pay homage to our Founder, Nichiren Shonin.

This was certainly a wonderful, once-in-a-lifetime experience!

—Gemunu Ranasoora, Chairman,  
Busshinji Temple, Sri Lanka

I was so impressed by the beauty and tranquility of Minobusan. We were able to hike up Shichimensan, which was a challenge but also an unforgettable experience. We were able to visit many sacred spots where Nichiren Shonin had propagated. Ikegami Honmonji Temple, was one of the most amazing spots.

Though I had seen many of these places in pamphlets and photos, it was amazing to see them with my own eyes. I told the other members about our pilgrimage, and many were interested in visiting the sacred spots connected with Nichiren Shonin.

If I have a chance, I would like to visit other temples in Chiba, Sado Island, and Izu where our Founder propagated.

—Kalpanee Apsara,  
Busshinji Temple, Sri Lanka



### Calendar for October–November 2023

**OCT 10** Ceremony in Memory of the Founder's Exile to Sado Island

**OCT 13** Oeshiki

**OCT 31** Ceremony of Changing the Robes on the Statue of Nichiren Shonin, Minobusan

**NOV 11** Nichiren Shonin Commemoration Day for the Komatsubara Persecution

**NOV 13** Memorial for Nichizo Shonin

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Nichiren Shu

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