

Nichiren Shu News

Published by the Head Office of Nichiren Shu & NOPPA

No. 266

February 1, 2025

1

FOR THE COMING 750TH MEMORIAL SERVICE OF OUR FOUNDER

Honorable Rev. Nissho Kanno, Archbishop of Nichiren Shu, Chief Abbot of Ikegami Honmonji Temple, Tokyo

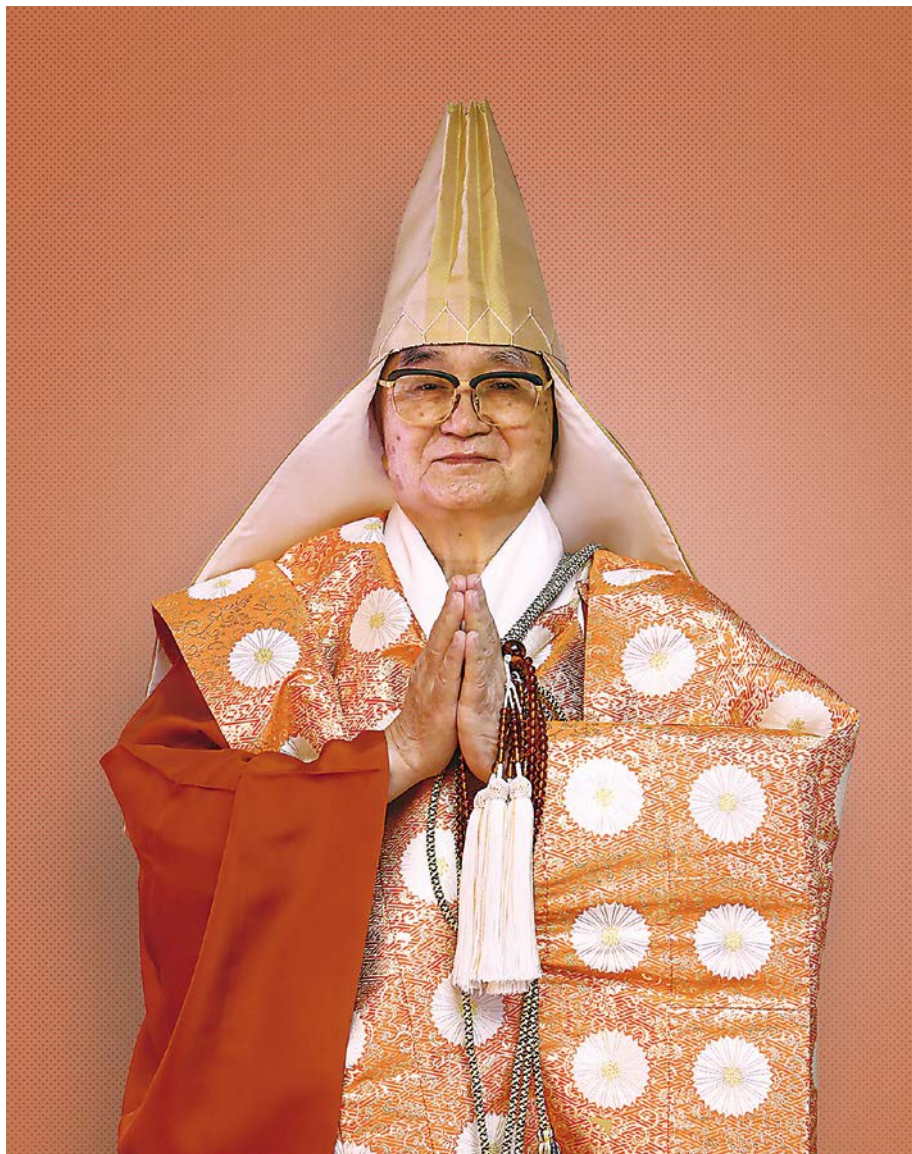
At the beginning of 2025, I truly wish peace of mind to all those who chant Odaimoku as well as to those who have not yet had a good opportunity to receive the merit of the Odaimoku.

October 13, 2031 will be the 750th anniversary of the passing of our Founder, Nichiren Shonin. This will be more than just an occasion for holding a memorial service. This will be an ideal time to settle down to relearn and practice what our Founder did for us and understand how he led us to a religiously worthwhile life.

Nichiren Shonin stated in the "Rissho Ankoku Ron" (Treatise Spreading Peace throughout the World by Establishing the True Dharma), "You have lived a faithful life based on the Lotus Sutra and the Odaimoku. Taking it into account more seriously, you had better work strenuously for the realization of true happiness for all living beings. That is what the Buddha teaches us."

He said this 750 years ago, but even today there are still wars going on, despotic governments and egoistic countries prevailing, epidemics raging, and natural disasters happening, together with social unrest and deep mistrust between people. Even worse than in the time of our Founder.

We, the disciples of Nichiren Shonin, understand that his teachings are "not something from 700 years ago, but something that is happening right now."



We believe that Nichiren Shonin is still calling out to us to meet him at Mt. Sacred Eagle by each of us answering the questions, "What can I do now? Is there anything I can do?"

Nichiren Shu as well as Honmonji Temple at Ikegami have had committees to discuss what can and should be done to best commemorate the coming 750th anniversary. Nichiren Shu ministers of the more than 5,000 temples should think deeply about what we can do toward the year of 2031.

We have a missionary slogan, "Bowling in Gassho to All Life," which is to protect the precious life of people all around the world.

"Life" in Buddhism means that each of you have the Buddha nature equally given by the Buddha and that you will be able to lead the same tranquil life as the Buddha. "Praying in Gassho" means to respect each other. When you bow in gassho to each life, gradually people of the whole world will bow in gassho to all life, which will create a genuinely peaceful world.

The slogan shows our gratitude toward Nichiren Shonin to devote ourselves day and night to realizing the true peace and, as a result, it will lead to your happiness.

In this early spring, I hereby offer my New Year Greetings, wishing for each of us to have a peaceful life trying to practice, "Bowling in Gassho to All Life." With Gassho.

THE YEAR OF THE SNAKE

According to the twelve animal signs of the Chinese zodiac, 2025 is the Year of Snake. A snake, waking from its hibernation over the winter, slithers out of its hole and onto the land with the coming of spring. This symbolizes a new life, a re-emergence or rebirth, coming after finishing the conventional way of life.

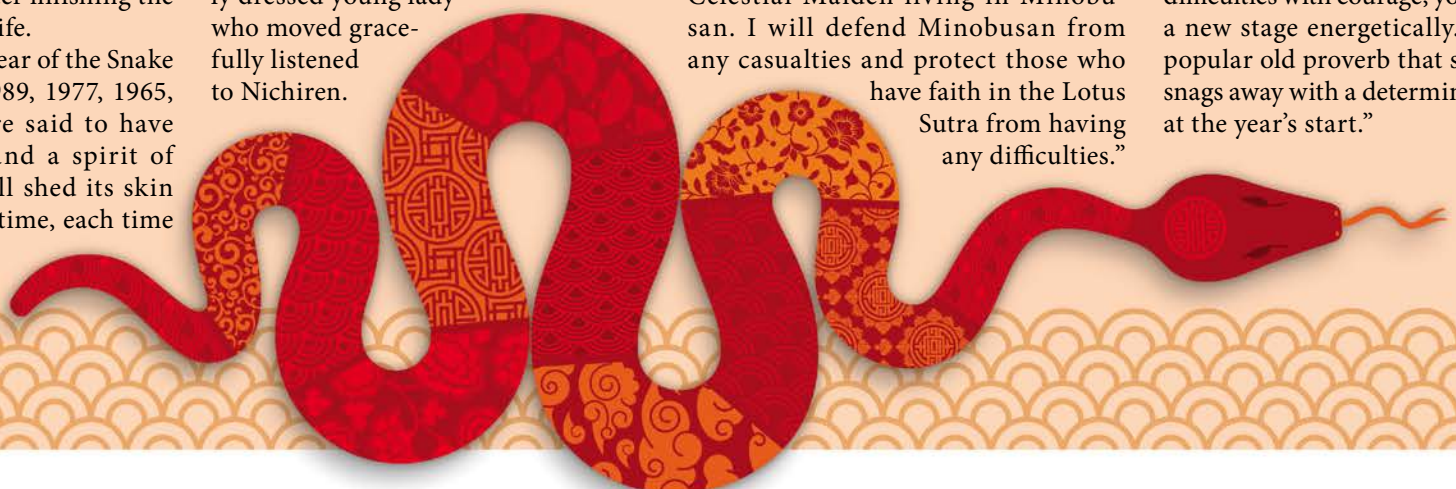
Those born in the Year of the Snake (2025, 2013, 2001, 1989, 1977, 1965, 1953, 1941, 1929) are said to have profound wisdom and a spirit of tenacity. A snake will shed its skin many times in its lifetime, each time

changing its skin, symbolically being reborn into a new figure, bringing up ideas of revival and eternity.

From the time of Nichiren Shonin, there is a famous story that involves a snake. When Nichiren was preaching a sermon around Minobusan, an elegantly dressed young lady who moved gracefully listened to Nichiren.

Many people viewed the lady with suspicion, because they'd never seen her before. Nichiren knew who she was, and he asked her to show her true self. She transformed into a three-meter-long serpent, saying in a powerful voice, "I am Shichimen, the Celestial Maiden living in Minobusan. I will defend Minobusan from any casualties and protect those who have faith in the Lotus Sutra from having any difficulties."

Much as a snake will shed its skin in order to continue to grow and live, this year is a good chance to escape from old conventions and outdated ways of thinking. It is perhaps a good time to take on new challenges. While major changes may occur, as you overcome difficulties with courage, you can reach a new stage energetically. There is a popular old proverb that says, "Clear snags away with a determined attitude at the year's start."



THE CHANGING FACE OF SHUKUBO



Rev. Zeken Hayashi and his wife Sachiyo at the entrance of Temple Hotel Habanobo.

By Kanjo Bassett

It was the beer that did it, setting Habanobo on a new path as a *shukubo* (temple lodge) focused on providing a unique individualized experience of Nichiren Shu practice for anybody coming to stay at the historic lodging in Minobusan. Beer and the COVID-19 pandemic. Rev. Zeken Hayashi of Habanobo explains, “Nobody came to stay when the COVID panic hit in 2020, and our entire stock of beer went past its expiration date. I was going through it looking at all the waste, and I decided right then and there to go back to the basics — no more beer or alcohol, only *shojin ryori* (Buddhist vegetarian cuisine), no TV, and no groups.”

‘NOTHING’ CAN BE A SALES POINT: Instead of the standard *shukubo* routine of welcoming large groups of pilgrims, Rev. Hayashi decided to provide a tailored individualized program. “Habanobo is smaller than most other *bo*, so catering to large groups of visiting pilgrims was never something we could offer even if we wanted to, offering ‘nothing’ compared to the other *bo* can be a sales point,” he explained. In a way it’s not really new. Habanobo has a long tradition of focusing on individuals rather than groups. Large groups of pilgrims visiting Minobusan did not happen until the Edo period. Before then, there was much less foot traffic, and the main route into Minobu was also different. Travelers would travel south along the Fuji River and then take the northern route, which runs past the front of Habanobo (the entrance gate *shukubo*) as reflected in their kanji character name. Since the Edo era, the southern route, which leads to San-Mon Gate, became the main route.

Rev. Hayashi acts as a personal tour guide, talking with visitors about the basics of *bo* life and ways of practice, such as explaining Buddhist and Nichiren Shu basics at evening service, including what we chant and how to offer incense. When I visited Habanobo in September, room guides and menus were meticulously translated into English, as was their web site. This ‘backend’ service is provided by Otera Stay, a venture business that started in 2016 with the aim of connecting *bo* with new visitors, outside of the traditional Buddhist temple members.

A NEW BUSINESS MODEL WITH OTERA STAY: It’s an open secret that the numbers of pilgrims and visitors coming to

Minobusan has been declining for years, long before COVID, and that Kuonji is facing serious financial difficulties. The past won’t come back. Habanobo decided to change things on their own terms. Rev. Hayashi found Otera Stay through a fellow Nichiren Shu priest, Rev. Genjun Kondo, who acts as a Otera Stay outreach advisor.

Otera Stay is part of ShareWing created by Mai Sato, who is also its CEO. The Otera Stay idea came to her gradually. It grew out of a longtime family friendship with the resident priest of a Zen *shukubo* in Tokyo. Her family were not temple members, she stressed. “We were just family friends. However, whenever I visited the *bo*, I was always struck by its beauty and serenity. I thought how wonderful it would be for others to visit and enjoy it.” Yet access was hidden away from non-temple members.

One of the challenges for inbound (international) visitors of staying at a *bo*, or Temple Hotel as Otera Stay grandiloquently calls it, is that the system was traditionally centered on priests bringing groups of pilgrims for events. Arrangements were made directly with the *bo*, not through travel agencies. Minobusan *bo* for example only started accepting online reservations in 2015, and there are still holdouts who prefer the traditional ways. Online reservations involve the risks of reservations not showing up without canceling. The result is leftover prepared food and lost business from turning away other guests. There’s also the challenge of taking care of international guests with a tiny staff that is already busy taking care of others.



Mai Sato created Otera Stay to help more people discover the beauty and serenity of Shukubo.

Otera Stay attempts to solve all these challenges. Sato says it’s “creating an experience by looking at it from the point of view of customers rather than that of temple members.” Building something of value. Otera Stay works with the *bo* to create ‘the customer experience’ —

applying for Japanese government inbound tourist subsidies on their behalf, creating a beautiful Japanese/English website and other necessary bilingual materials for guests, and creating English profiles for major online booking sites, like booking.com, as well as providing their own multilingual reservation system. For reservations that come through the Otera Stay pipeline, they get a percentage of the transaction.

Otera Stay-affiliated *bo* charge a higher rate for international “inbound” tourist reservations. While this is a common industry practice, it was hard to convince the Buddhist-based *bo* to implement it. “There was a lot of resistance,” Sato explained. “They are used to charging one set price for everyone, but there’s more time and cost involved with international visitors.” Not all visitors want to pay a higher price for the Otera Stay experience, but a surprising number do. About 70% of the Minobusan *bo* visitors after COVID restrictions were lifted are inbound. The Takayama Otera Stay *Bo* is around 90% inbound.

Not all the inbound-friendly Minobusan *bo* are with Otera Stay. For example, Kakurinbo has created an outreach program that leverages a large staff of Australians on working holiday visas to take care of guests who are all inbound. It is a small miracle that they come to a place as remote as Minobu, but Kakurinbo puts on elaborate Kyoto Gion-like tourist shows about Nichiren Shu culture, featuring things like Mando and Gagaku. Guests can wear kimono and eat meals while admiring the Japanese garden. Unlike Habanobo there is no practice, and going to Kuonji morning services is a distant option.

Visitors seem to enjoy the experience. Feedback has been positive. Susan Kanner from California had this to say of her Kakurinbo stay:

“The thorough and thoughtful explanations provided at Kakurinbo helped me understand the Buddhist traditions and culinary delights... Dining as I gazed at the gardens truly added to the magic... I’m not a morning person, but I certainly didn’t mind getting up and taking that beautiful stroll up the hill to Kuonji Temple. The sights and sounds, colors and movements were mesmerizing. They not only allowed but encouraged us to participate which made this spiritual experience even more memorable... Being able to observe and participate in their spiritual practice was incredible and moving, and I very much appreciated the opportunity to experience it all.”

The Kakurinbo approach is somewhat controversial within the Minobusan *shukubo* community. They put a lot of outreach effort to bring inbound visitors, but that effort doesn’t extend to cooperating with the surrounding *shukubo*. Their recent foray in micro-brewing raised a few eyebrows when the Kakurinbo proprietress asked her *shukubo* neighbors to buy her beer. It wasn’t seen as a win-win proposition. One *bo* staffer commented, “Why should we buy their beer when they are the ones making money off of us?”

While there is nothing wrong with going all in for inbound tourist business, there is a real tradeoff: bringing in

inbound tourists means losing Japanese customers. And once Japanese customers stop coming, they never come back. It’s an open secret that the Japanese clientele who had regularly stayed at Kakurinbo no longer go there. What do they do if the inbound tourist boom goes bust?

Hence the dilemma. Sato says her basic goal with Otera Stay is “building something that can last.” A worthy goal but a difficult one. The challenge of any crafted ‘experience’ comes down to this: what do first-time visitors to Minobusan take home with them? A nice memory and smartphone video clips to share with friends on social media, or a deeper sense of wanting to explore and experience more of the spiritual side of Nichiren Shu Buddhism? Is it sustainable when the novelty wears off, or then the favorable exchange rate disappears? Time will tell.

It’s healthy for Minobusan *shukubo* to be trying different approaches. Each is following a path that they think is best for them. For example, Rev. Yosei Ikegami of Chijakubo focuses on providing a spiritual haven for those struggling with end-of-life issues. Rev. Kochi Uchino of Shimizubo focuses on taking care of pilgrimage groups.

In the face of a changing society, there is no other choice but to adapt. The original job of *shukubo* was to provide lodging for pilgrims and priests. Now there is the added responsibility of “outreach,” a socially acceptable non-religious way of saying propagation in our shallow social media era in which religion is often seen as something to be avoided. One size never fits all. To paraphrase Chapter 2 of the Lotus Sutra, the most important thing is working together, each according to their unique abilities, despite their differences to achieve that goal, as trial and error is only path to success.



KAKURINBO IMAGES COURTESY OF S. KANNER



At Kakurinbo, beautiful kimono line the hallway, and the dining room overlooks a traditional garden.

STUDY CLASS ON THE LOTUS SUTRA AND NICHIREN SHONIN'S TEACHINGS



The Seven Great Parables in the Lotus Sutra (6): "The Gem Inside a Garment"

By Rev. Kosei Uchida

There is a proverb, "A book that remains shut is but a block." This means that even useful things are of no help unless they are put into practical use. You must make the best of your prodigious talent, otherwise it will all be wasted. A parable called, "The Gem Inside a Garment" in Chapter 8 of the Lotus Sutra, "The Assurance of Future Buddhahood of the Five Hundred Disciples" delves into this point.

"Suppose there was a poor man who loved to drink without making any future plans. One day he visited his good, wealthy friend. The poor man was treated to drink and fell asleep drunk. His friend had to go out on official business. Worrying about his future, the good friend fastened a priceless gem inside the garment of the sleeping man as a gift to him and then went out. The drunken man did not notice what his friend had given him. After a while he got up, and he went to another country. He had great difficulty in getting food and clothing. He satisfied himself with what little he had earned. Some time later, the good friend happened to see

him still leading a hand-to-mouth life. He said, 'Alas, man! I fastened a priceless gem inside your garment so that you might live peacefully and satisfy your five desires. The gem is still there, and you do not notice it. You are working hard worrying about your livelihood. What a fool you are! Trade that gem for what you want! You will not be short of anything you want.'"

Remember, this story tells that you can become rich not financially but spiritually. The good, wealthy friend is the Buddha. The drunken man is likened to us ordinary people who only seek their own benefit, living precariously day to day. The priceless gem is the Buddha nature and the lining of the garment represents the innermost part of our heart. The Buddha says that we are not aware that we all possess the Buddha nature at the bottom of our hearts, losing our way in life. This parable shows that it is important to be conscious of the Buddha nature that is inside you and to reconsider your self-indulgent way of life. Do not handle your life callously. Once you notice the precious gem inside of you, you'd better cultivate it so that it will flourish and blossom.

Two Vehicles Obtaining Buddhahood (*nijo sabutsu*) and Buddha Attaining Enlightenment in the Eternal Past (*kuon jitsujo*)

Rev. Sensho Komukai

According to *Kaimoku-sho* (*Open Your Eyes*), there are two vitally important doctrines in the Lotus Sutra: (1) the Two Vehicles obtaining Buddhahood, and (2) the Buddha attaining enlightenment in the eternal past. These two doctrines will help you understand what Nichiren Shonin meant in his two important treatises, *Kaimoku-sho* and *Kanjin Honzon-sho* (*Spiritual Contemplation and the Most Venerable One*).

Two Vehicles Obtaining Buddhahood (*nijo sabutsu*)

In Buddhism, the mind of living beings contains ten realms (hell, hungry spirits, animals, asura demons, human beings, heavenly beings, *sravaka*, *pratekyabuddha*, bodhisattvas, and Buddhas). *Sravaka* are those who are delivered from worldly desires by hearing the teaching from the Buddha. *Pratekyabuddha* desire to enter Nirvana by discovering the interconnected causes by themselves. In Mahayana Buddhism both *sravaka* and *pratekyabuddha*, commonly called the "Two Vehicles," are not considered to be able to attain Buddhahood, because they are seeking their own salvation, not doing something helpful for others.

However, the Lotus Sutra says that even the Two Vehicles can obtain Buddhahood. Why is that? The "mutual possession of ten realms" is a teaching of great importance. Each of the ten realms contains characteristics of the other nine realms. A human mind possesses characteristics of the other nine realms. When you are angry, you are in hell. When you are greedy, you are in hungry spirits. When you act on impulse, you

are in animals. When you are quarreling, you are in asura demons. When you are beside yourself with joy, you are in heaven. When you are seeking Bodhi Way for your own sake, you are either in *sravaka* or *pratekyabuddha*. When you help others out of your compassion, you are a bodhisattva. When you are awakened and you try to make others awakened, you are a Buddha. Even while you are human beings, you have the dispositions of the other nine realms. You can attain Buddhahood, because you have a disposition of the Buddha. Those in each realm can have both potentials to fall into hell and also to become a Buddha. This is the basic doctrine of "mutual possession of ten realms."

So, if the Two Vehicles are unable to obtain Buddhahood, this means that the realm of Buddhas is not contained in the Two Vehicles, and therefore the doctrine of "mutual possession of ten realms" cannot be realized. Other Mahayana sutras do not accept the Two Vehicles obtaining Buddhahood, but the Lotus Sutra assures those who are part of the Two Vehicles, like Sariputra, of their future Buddhahood. Without the Two Vehicles attaining Buddhahood, "mutual possession of ten realms" cannot be brought into existence. All those in each realm can attain Buddhahood. You see how important the "mutual possession of ten realms" in the Lotus Sutra really is.

Buddha Attaining Enlightenment in the Eternal Past (*kuon jitsujo*)

Shakyamuni Buddha, who people believe attained Enlightenment at Buddhagaya in India for the first time, reveals in Chapter 16 of the Lotus Sutra, "Duration of Life of the Tathagata," that he has been enlightened since the eternal past and has resided in this *saha* world to edify and save people. He appears in this world out of his compassion toward us as a provisional figure in human shape to expound the Truth. Expediently, he showed his Parinirvana, but he did not pass away. In fact, his life is eternal. Why does he show his Nirvana? Because people become arrogant when the Buddha is always at your side. Do not be disappointed that the Buddha never shows up. He always stays with you and will appear to save you when you wish to see the Buddha with all your heart. Feel the Buddha in front of you. The world we live in is the very land of tranquil light where the Original Buddha of Eternal Existence always stays to expound the true teachings.

The idea of "3,000 existences contained in one thought-moment (*ichinen sanzen*)" is based on these two doctrines.



Mt. Sacred Eagle in India, where the Lotus Sutra is expounded.

LOTUS JEWELS

People today without karmic relations with the Lotus Sutra, wishing to be reborn in the Pure Land to the west, are in fact praying for rebirth in the land of rubble, giving up the Saha World, which is the Pure Land.

—Nichiren Shonin, *A Treatise on Protecting the Nation, Shugo Kokka-ron* (ST 15)

Discouraged by the difficulties and confusion surrounding us today, it is understandable that we would long for another world in which we are happier and more comfortable. The Buddha teaches us that we are Bodhisattvas who chose to come to this world, to work with all the other protective deities here to benefit all beings. Our faith in the Wonderful Dharma of the Lotus Sutra brings us the courage and vision to keep working to transform our world and face its hardships with joy and determination.

—Rev. Shinkyō Warner



A JOURNEY OF CELEBRATION

By Rev. Ervinna Myofu

In November, I had the honor to participate in significant anniversary ceremonies at three Nichiren Shu temples in India and Singapore: Bodhgaya Isshinji Temple, Nagpur Dragon Palace Temple, and Singapore Daimokuji Temple.

Bodhgaya Isshinji Temple

On November 11, there was a celebration for the 16th anniversary of Bodhgaya Isshinji Temple. Rev. Myoan Katayama, the international missionary stationed in India for four years, continues to engage actively with the local community. Her effort expands not only in holding the services in the temple but also in providing food donations for the local community and visiting Delhi to give regular lectures on the Lotus Sutra for newly joined followers. The anniversary event was conducted with five priests from Japan, who performed a beautiful

procession playing Gagaku (traditional Japanese music) and flower showering, from Sujata Hotel to the temple. Heart-warming chanting of Odaimoku by the local children marked the opening of the ceremony, and it inspired me to see the blossoming of a new Sangha.

Nagpur Dragon Palace Temple

The 25th anniversary ceremony at Nagpur Dragon Palace Temple took place on November 15. We were graced to have the presence of Ven. Nichiyu Mochida, the Chief Abbot of Minobusan Kuonji Temple, along with a group of 30 participants from Japan (members from the Nichiren Shu International Buddhist Fellowship Association and the Nichiren Shu National Believers Association). Over 200 attendees, including local Theravadian and Tibetan monks, came together for this joyful and poignant occasion. Notably, attendees from the local community joyfully welcomed us with drumbeats and chanting, which

impressed upon me the deep roots of Buddhism and of the Odaimoku in Nagpur. The dedication of Ms. Sulekha Kumbhare and the late Ms. Noriko Ogawa, who worked tirelessly for the temple's establishment, was indeed remarkable. It was a touching moment when Ms. Ogawa's family, who attended this anniversary, reflected on her legacy.

Singapore Daimokuji Temple

The celebration for the 20th anniversary of Singapore Daimokuji Temple was held on November 17. We rejoiced with three priests from Japan. This was the first large celebration since the temple's 15th anniversary. It symbolized a revival in the community, especially after the challenges posed by COVID-19. With restrictions of gathering during the pandemic, we witnessed a decline in attendance and an increase in the average age of the congregation. However, I observed a renewed awareness among younger members, indicating the

potential for future growth. It is crucial for us to nurture the ties of family and community, ensuring that we continue our mission in Singapore.

Reflections

This journey reaffirms that while establishing a foundation in Asia is vital, we face challenges with the generational transition of temple leadership. The impactful work of Rev. Katayama is particularly inspiring as she is fostering engagement within the community following the pandemic. In our mission to sustain the temple, patience and perseverance are essential during this transitional period. As we adapt our practices to the times, I firmly believe we will reclaim a path of growth.

Despite an exceptionally busy November, the joy of visiting the holy sites of Buddhagaya and Rajgir, and being part of the anniversary events at three temples, has filled my heart with great happiness.

Calendar for February – March 2025

FEB 3 Setsubun (last day of winter in the traditional Chinese calendar)
FEB 7 Nikko Shonin Memorial Day
FEB 15 Nirvana Day

FEB 16 Commemoration Day of the Birth of Nichiren Shonin
MAR 17-23 Spring Higan

Nichiren Shu News c/o The Head Office of Nichiren Shu, 1-32-15 Ikegami, Ota-ku, Tokyo 146-8544, Japan; Tel. +81-3-3751-7181. *Nichiren Shu News* is published by the Nichiren Shu Overseas Propagation Promotion Association (NOPPA) and the Head Office of Nichiren Shu.

Editorial Board Sensho Komukai, *Editor*, Shoda Kanai, *Assistant Editor*, Kosei Uchida, *Staff Writer*, Yuon Ito, *Advisor*.

Managing Editor Kanjo Bassett **Art Director** Alan Rowe

If you have comments, questions or story ideas, please contact us at editor-nichirensunews@nichiren.or.jp or use the QR code.



日蓮宗
Nichiren Shu

©Copyright 2025 Nichiren Shu.
All rights reserved.