

MISHIMA'S CARVING OF "OJIGAGE" ENSHRINED AT RINZO-BO TEMPLE



By Rev. Ekou Murakami

What made him accomplish such a devoted work to carve "Ojigage" character by character? With his strong faith, Mr. Kazuto Mishima, a member of the Seattle Nichiren Buddhist Church, finished carving each kanji character of "Ojigage," (from Chapter 16 of the Lotus Sutra), in cherry wood in April 2000. It was finally enshrined at Rinzo-bo Temple in Minobusan in September 2024 as Mr. Mishima had wished. It was a great accomplishment for him, and I would like to introduce his great work.

Mr. Mishima was born in California in 1926. When he was around ten years old, he moved to Ehime, Japan. There he encountered Nichiren Shu. Whenever he faced hard times in his life, including fighting as a Japanese soldier during World War II, he had always felt as if he was protected by the teachings of the Lotus Sutra and Odaimoku.

In 1965, Mr. Mishima decided to move back to the United States with his family. He started his new life in Chicago, and it was there where he decided to join the Chicago Nichiren Buddhist Temple and met Rev. Yohaku Arakawa, the founder and resident minister of the Chicago temple. Over the next 30 years, Mr. Mishima devoted his life in serving the temple and Rev. Arakawa along with his own work. As he was good at making things from wood, he handmade items such as tables and

platforms for the altar. This was a great help to Rev. Arakawa. Guided by his teachings, Mr. Mishima chanted very well, too. This relationship continued until Rev. Arakawa at the age of 91 passed away on August 3, 1996. About a year later, Mr. Mishima began work on the carving to pray for Rev. Arakawa's enlightenment and show appreciation towards him. At that time, Mr. Mishima was in his 70s. He would only carve when his mind was peaceful. It took him three years to finish the carving. On the backside of the carving, the purpose of the project is also engraved along with Mr. Mishima's name and the date of completion, April 8, 2000. What overwhelming concentration he had!

Around 2010, Mr. Mishima moved to Seattle where one of his daughters lives. He is now 98 years old. He regularly attends services at the Seattle Nichiren Buddhist Church and enjoys his life in Seattle. When the Seattle temple celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2016, his great carving was presented near the altar during the commemorating service to show how the faith in overseas missionaries had kept well.

Mr. Mishima had wanted to dedicate the carving to a temple that for years had been closely related to Rev. Arakawa in Japan. Rev. Arakawa had a connection with Rinzo-bo. Eventually, it was settled that the carving would be donated to Rinzo-bo, the perfect place where Mr. Mishima had always envisioned.

Recently, I had an opportunity to speak with Mr. Mishima. He was being helped in the interview by his daughter, Susie Mishima Saalwaechter.

Q: How did he start this project?

A: My father began earnestly planning it when he found the right kind of wood. It is a cherry, which is beautiful on its own, without any finish or varnish. It took him around three years to carve, and it was completed in 2000.

Q: What was he thinking about while he was carving?

A: When he was working on the carving, he thought about Rev. Arakawa's many accomplishments and about how kind he was and how he helped everyone without any expectation in return. He was very inspirational and played a major role in the spread of Nichiren Buddhism in the United States.

Q: How did he feel when he learned that the carving was going to be enshrined in Rinzo-bo?

A: It was a relief for him to know that it has finally found a home. He is glad that his work will be memorialized in honor of Rev. Arakawa. The night before he gave the "Ojigage" carving to Rev. Ekou Murakami to take it to Japan, my father had a dream about Rev. Arakawa, and in that dream Rev. Arakawa was quite pleased with the work.

I also had a chance to speak with Rev. Yosei Ikegami, the current chief minister of Rinzo-bo.

Q: How did you feel when Mr. Mishima's "Ojigage" carving was dedicated?

A: I felt it was amazing to see Rev. Arakawa's overseas propagation had permeated so strongly. He planted Buddha seeds to the people.

Q: Are there any memories that you have with Rev. Arakawa?

A: Rev. Arakawa visited Rinzo-bo every two or three years when he visited Japan. He always shared stories about his overseas missionary work. These were great memories for me, especially from when I was a young priest.

Q: What do you wish for Nichiren Shu's overseas missionaries?

A: It would be wonderful if we can create a platform or methods to connect studies and propagation in ways that would help lead the local members.

When I saw Mr. Mishima's "Ojigage" carving for the first time at the 100th anniversary of the Seattle Nichiren Buddhist Church, I was really impressed. Mr. Mishima helped the temple in many ways. He was always calm, and I learned a lot from him. It is a great honor for me to introduce his faithful work, this beautiful carving, to everyone.



Mr. Mishima's meticulous carving of "Ojigage" is now enshrined at Rinzo-bo Temple in Minobusan.

DISCOVER THE POWER OF JUZU

By Rev. Bunsho Ishikawa

In our busy daily lives, filled with endless tasks and digital distractions, we often find ourselves seeking something “special” — something that can ease the anxiety and fear lurking in our hearts. One thing that comes to mind are *juzu*, the prayer beads, which have been cherished by practitioners for countless generations.

Are *juzu* merely accessories? The answer is no, and this truth becomes clearer as one develops a deeper relationship with these sacred objects.

Juzu, warm to the touch and comfortable between your fingers, bring peace and hope to our hearts. They serve as a tangible connection to our faith, a reminder of our spiritual journey. But there is an even deeper meaning and power hidden within them, one that reveals itself through personal experience and sincere practice.

One day, a young man visited our temple. The man was not particularly robust in build, but he was always cheerful and polite to everyone, greeting fellow practitioners with genuine warmth. Several years before he started coming to the temple, he experienced something extraordinary. After an extra long day at work, exhausted from all the hard work and the mental strain, he was riding his motorcycle home through the quiet evening streets. Just minutes into his journey home, a car suddenly appeared in front of him. It had run through a stop sign. Despite his attempt to avoid a collision, the car slammed into him, overturning the motorcycle and



NOT JUST FOR PRIESTS: Juzu can become an important part of your individual spiritual life. Juzu can serve as a touchstone for feeling more grounded and as a steady reminder of the role of your faith in your daily life.

sending him flying. In the split second between being thrown from his bike and when he hit the ground, his life flashed before his eyes. He thought he was going to die. An ambulance arrived and rushed him to the hospital, sirens piercing the night air.

At the hospital, they found he had no injuries, not even a minor scratch.

Only one thing was broken — the *juzu* wrapped around his left wrist, a gift from his grandmother years ago. The *juzu* had shattered on impact, scattering across the pavement like tears of gratitude.

He felt this was proof that the *juzu* had existed to protect his life. It was as if it had absorbed the impact that could have caused serious injuries or even death. This experience led him to visit the temple every year to get a new *juzu*, with each visit further deepening his faith. In his heart, the *juzu* transformed from being a mere accessory into an

unwavering guardian of life, a testament to the profound protection they offer.

Juzu are symbols of faith that carry our wishes and thoughts, connecting us to centuries of Buddhist tradition. As a priest, my mission is to support people's prayers, wishes, and anxieties, guiding them through their spiritual journey. Personally, I feel slightly uncomfortable wearing a *juzu* as a bracelet, as their sacred nature calls for more formal respect. Instead, I cherish the formal *juzu* that symbolize priesthood. I handle them with reverence during ceremonies. They are my pride and an essential tool for religious ceremonies, like a guiding light illuminating my path through the responsibilities of priesthood.

The power of *juzu* became particularly evident during my daily training as a priest, through experiences that touched my soul deeply. I've experienced beads breaking at solemn moments — during

prostrations, when reciting prayers, or during confession, each instance carrying its own profound message. In these moments, the air feels thick with spiritual energy, my ears ring with an otherworldly resonance, and I sense something deep within me being called to account. It is as if the *juzu* break to expose a deception hidden in my own heart, serving as a mirror to my true self. These occurrences serve as profound messages and warnings, showing the proper spiritual state, one should maintain when holding *juzu*. They remind me of my own spiritual immaturity and the long path of growth that lies ahead.

The various emotions and thoughts we carry seem to add weight to our *juzu*, which sensitively and surely respond to these feelings, acting as silent witnesses to our spiritual journey. When holding *juzu*, we should strive to maintain a peaceful heart, remembering their sacred purpose. Only through good deeds and a calm mind will the heavenly deities protect us, blessing our path with their divine guidance. That's why I hope you'll find *juzu* that truly suit you and believe in their power, allowing them to become part of your daily spiritual practice. May they enrich your life and serve to help guide you through both challenges and celebrations. Feel the quiet strength of *juzu* in your hands and in your heart, allowing their ancient wisdom to guide you. May the *juzu* become precious companions on your life's journey, offering comfort, protection, and spiritual connection when you need it most.



Muddy water has no mind but it still catches the moon's reflection and naturally becomes lucid. Plants and trees catch the rain to blossom, but can we say they do this deliberately? The five characters myo, ho, ren, ge and kyo are not the text of the sutra nor a mere explanation. Rather, they are the sole intent of the whole sutra. Beginners may practice this without knowing the heart [of the Lotus Sutra], but their practice will naturally harmonize with its intention.

—Nichiren Shonin, *The Four Depths of Faith and Five Stages of Practice*, Shishin Gohon-sho (ST 242)

In our modern sophistication, we want to understand how things work before we believe they will work. Yet there are many things we do not understand, such as electricity, that we still depend on every day. It is the same with the Odaimoku. It sustains our lives and our wisdom whether we understand it or not. Yet the closer we keep it, the more we open the world to the Buddha's wisdom.

—Rev. Shinkyō Warner



FINDING THE RIGHT JUZU FOR YOU: When it comes to choosing your own juzu, there are so many options. The more traditional juzu have tassels and are well suited for ceremonial use and prayer, but there are also simpler, more casual styles. Juzu can be made from many different materials — wood, stone, crystals, shells, seeds, and more. Juzu are personal, so perhaps the most important thing is to find juzu that look and feel right for you.

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



The Seven Great Parables in the Lotus Sutra (7): “A Brilliant Gem in the Top-knot”

By Rev. Kosei Uchida

In Chapter 14, “Peaceful Practices,” of the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha shares a parable: “A powerful king demanded surrender of the smaller countries. Leading soldiers, he suppressed them. He was very glad to see that some soldiers distinguished themselves in war. According to their achievements, he gave them paddy fields, houses, villages, cities, garments, or ornaments; or various treasures such as gold, silver, lapis lazuli, shell, agate, coral, or amber; or elephants, horses, vehicles, menservants, maidservants, or subjects. But he never gave the brilliant gem to anyone. He carefully kept it in his top-knot, because the gem on the head of the king was special, the only one in the world.”

This story tells us that the most precious treasure should not readily be given to anyone. It should be kept carefully until the proper time and condition come to fruition. The king

in the parable is likened to the Buddha. The soldiers are like us ordinary beings. Various rewards and prizes are the many Buddhist sutras. The gem hidden in the top-knot is the Lotus Sutra.

Like the king handing out gifts to his soldiers, the Buddha expounded many sutras to his disciples and followers, but He did not expound His supreme teaching, the Lotus Sutra, until the right time came along. If the Buddha revealed the Dharma inappropriately, many people in the world would have had difficulty in accepting the Dharma or even had hatred towards the Dharma. When the Buddha feels you will be able to accept and understand the Dharma, he will reveal the Lotus Sutra, superior to all the other sutras, to you. Once you learn and practice sufficiently, you are ready to accept the treasury of the hidden core of the Buddha, His attainment of enlightenment in the eternal past (*kuon jitsujo*) revealed in Chapter 16 of the Lotus Sutra.

This story also tells us that all of us have our own precious gem inside us, because according to the Lotus Sutra, we will also be able to attain Buddhahood in the future.

3,000 Existences Contained in One Thought (*ichinen sanzen*)

By Rev. Sensho Komukai

According to Grand Master Tiantai, 3,000 modes of existence are contained in our mind. Nichiren Shonin considered the “3,000 in one thought” doctrine to be extremely important. As for its formation, there are ten realms in our mind: hell, hungry spirits, animals, asura demons, human beings, heavenly beings, *sravaka*, *pratyekabuddha*, bodhisattvas and Buddhas. We are called human beings who are endowed with reason, but once we lose our sanity, we are in a hell, hungry spirits, or animals. On the other hand, when we maintain a merciful heart, we are in a stage of bodhisattva or a Buddha. The ten realms always exist in our mind either tangibly or potentially. This is the teaching of “mutual possession of ten realms (*jikkai-gogu*).”

As each of the ten realms has characteristics of each of the other realms, there are 100 realms resulting from multiplying the ten realms by ten. Each of these 100 realms contains ten aspects of all phenomena (appearance, nature, entity, power, activity, primary cause, environmental cause, effect, reward, and ultimate equality of these aspects, according to Chapter 2, “Expedients,” of the Lotus Sutra). All living beings equally possess the ten aspects of all phenomena. You have your own appearance, nature, and body. Your powers mean your capacities in various different fields; some will have high ability in mathematics while others have high ability for music. Your activities can be your own original behavior; when washing dishes, some people will handle dishes roughly while others take great care to handle them gently.

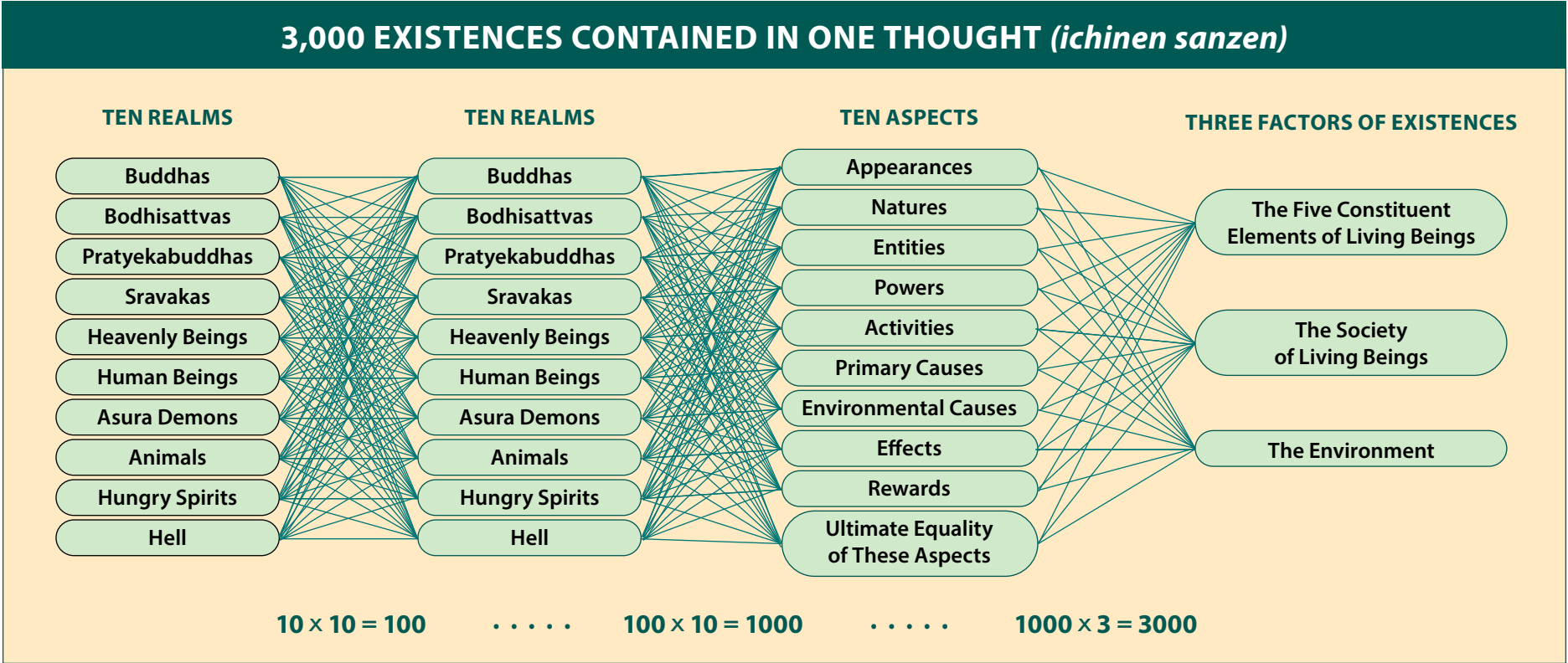
All living beings equally possess their own appearances, natures, entities, powers, and activities, while at the same time your appearances, natures, entities, powers and activities are all different from those of others. Then,

why and how can you possess these five aspects? The other four aspects give a clear explanation. You often hear the term “law of cause and effect,” but the cause cannot bring effect without environmental causes. Seeds can never bear fruit on an asphalt road or in the shade. They need sun, water, and good soil. Seeds (primary causes) can be a delicious apple (effects) thanks to nature’s bounty (environmental causes). Where effects come out, we receive rewards or retributions, whether good or bad. And the last aspect, “ultimate equality of these aspects,” means that all living beings have equally those ten aspects, though each one is different from others.

Thus 1,000 aspects exist in 100 realms. Furthermore, each of the 1,000 aspects consists of three factors of existences: (1) the five constituent elements of living beings (matter, perception, conception, volition, and consciousness), where an individual mind changes when facing someone you like, or you feel uncomfortable with, (2) the society of living beings, where people with different minds gather in one place, and (3) the environment (the land on which they live), which largely decides your lifestyles as different places have different customs. This is called three factors of existences. Now 1,000 aspects of all things, multiplied by three, becomes the 3,000 modes of existence. Thus 3,000 modes of existence are contained in one mind at any given moment.

Nichiren Shonin says in *Kaimoku Sho, Open Your Eyes*, that among all the sutras preached by Shakyamuni Buddha during His lifetime, only the Lotus Sutra embodies the gem of the “3,000 in one thought” doctrine. This doctrine makes it possible for all living beings to attain Buddhahood.

The concept of *ichinen sanzen* (3,000 Existences Contained in One Thought) will help you to better understand *Kanjin Honzon-sho (Spiritual Contemplation and the Most Venerable One)* which will be explained in the next issue.



THE TWELFTH BRAZILIAN WORKSHOP

By Rev. Yotatsu Chiamulera



The 12th Brazilian Workshop was held on January 18 and 19.

The theme of this training, continuing from the previous session, was “Practice.” Last time, we used “The Five Types of Dharma Masters” as a subheading, because we were going through and explaining each of the five practices and incorporating practical exercises. However, within the limited time, this training inevitably felt “broad but shallow.” This time around, we focused more narrowly on “Receiving and Upholding” (*juji*), the foundation of all practices — meaning “accepting and maintaining faith” — by structuring the program around Odaimoku chanting and sutra recitation. We also reviewed etiquette as a prerequisite before diving into this practice.

As Buddhists, our devotion to the Three Treasures (Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha) is absolute, and the practice site is a *dojo* where the Buddha resides. Thus, when entering the temple, one must always step in with the left foot, proceed straight to the main altar, and perform bows and prostrations. This applies even in personal homes or rooms with altars. These may seem like rudimentary ideas, but in the *dojo*, we often greet fellow practitioners and engage in conversations. At home, however, awareness of this space as a *dojo* tends to fade. These protocols are



vital to remind us that we are always in the presence of Shakyamuni Buddha.

During the training, significant time was dedicated to sutra recitation and how to do it through proper body posture, mental mindset, and behavior. Alongside the traditional Japanese chanting (*shindoku*), we unofficially incorporated Portuguese readings. The aim was not only to repeat the practice and further experience its merits, but we also did this to help participants understand and internalize the Lotus Sutra’s teachings in their own language. We live in an age of AI and increased access to global information, but not all of that is positive. Much of that available “information” is uncertain. Falsehoods and misinformation can cause social chaos. Selecting reliable information is an individual responsibility, and we must always judge it through the lens of the Dharma.

If asked, “What is the ‘Sangha’ in the Three Treasures?” many would answer, “The community of practitioners, including lay devotees.” However, the Sangha strictly refers to those who have renounced secular life, received precepts, and have been ordained — i.e., monastics. For us, the embodiment of this is Nichiren Shonin, the Treasure of the Sangha. Thus, we clergy must strive ceaselessly to approach Nichiren’s ideal. Through us, teachings spread, and faith is passed on. We are the “glue” connecting Buddhas, bodhisattvas, Nichiren Shonin, practitioners, and non-devotees. We must remain conscious of this role. For this reason, even in Brazil’s sweltering heat, we wore formal attire throughout the training. We also asked devotees to address us as “Shonin,” “Sensei,” or “Reverend.” Personally, I think that Brazil’s greatest virtue is its warmth. Strangers speak



like friends. Yet, we deliberately created a boundary to deepen reverence for the Three Treasures.

There is a reason for this. About 15 participants participated both days. At its peak in the past, we had 40 attendees, but many withdrew or drifted away. These 15 are those who overcame challenges and solidified their faith. I trust they will embrace this new phase, even if it is more demanding.

Post-training feedback was largely positive and included the following examples.

“It was wonderful to join this workshop. I am deeply grateful to learn from masters and practice with peers. I look forward to meeting again.”

“At each workshop session, more people grow curious about the Sangha and Buddhism. We practice, learn, and strengthen our faith in the Lotus Sutra. Namu Myoho Renge Kyo!”

“A training filled with shared learning, practice, and reflection. Namu Myoho Renge Kyo!”

Moving forward, I will gradually share my experiences. As these participants absorb and act on what they have learned, a new identity will emerge: the color of Nichiren Shu in Brazil. Some things must remain unchanged, even across nations and cultures. Reflecting on this, we clergy face immense challenges. All for the Three Treasures and the Odaimoku.



Calendar for April – May 2025

APR 8	Hanamatsuri (Buddha’s Birthday)
APR 15-18	Nakayama Hokekyoji Senbu-e (1,000 Recitations of the Lotus Sutra)
APR 27-29	Ikegami Honmonji Senbu-e (1,000 Recitations of the Lotus Sutra)
APR 28	Rikkyo Kaishu-e (Anniversary of the Founding of the Order)

MAY 12	Izu Honan-e (Ceremony commemorating the Anniversary of the Izu Persecution)
MAY 12	Wesak Day in Southeast Asia (Buddha’s Birthday, Enlightenment, and Nirvana Observed)

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