

Nichiren Shu News

Published by the Head Office of Nichiren Shu Buddhism & NOPPA

No. 207

April 1, 2015

1

CELEBRATING SETSUBUN

By Rev. Kanjo Bassett

Setsubun is the last day of winter in the traditional Chinese calendar year comprised of 24 solar periods. In the Edo period, Setsubun became a popular celebration of seeing out the old year and welcoming the new.

The practice of throwing roasted soybeans to drive out *oni*, Japanese demons, dates from the Muromachi period. This practice then spread and split into endless local variations and traditions all over the country.

The one thing common among all these traditions is that demons do not like the smell of either roasted soybeans or sun-dried sardines hung in the front doorway, a custom still seen today in the Japanese countryside.



A prayer ceremony was held to prepare for the event.

There is also the side benefit that once the demons are dispatched, one can eat the beans and dried sardines for good luck, preferably washed down with gulps of sake.

These days, large temples and shrines invite famous people to put on traditional dress and throw bags of beans

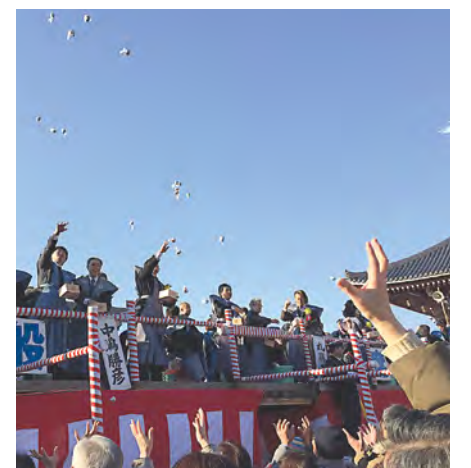
from the ceremony hall foyer to the crowds below. Ikegami Honmonji holds one of the largest Setsubun celebrations in Tokyo. More than 10,000 people attended this year's event, which began with a ceremony and prayers to dispel misfortune and bring good fortune to the whole world.



More than 10,000 people gathered for this year's Setsubun celebration at Ikegami Honmonji Temple in Tokyo.

As the famous professional wrestler Rikidozan is buried on the temple grounds, the invited bean-throwing guests included a number of former professional, K-1 and sumo wrestlers, such as Akebono Taro, a former sumo champion, Jun Akiyama, president of the Pro Wrestling Association, and Katsuhiko Nakajima, a popular pro wrestler from the same association.

Setsubun also begins a busy month of celebrations that includes the Buddha's Nirvana Day on the 15th of February and Nichiren Shonin's birthday on the 16th of February.



Bags of roasted soybeans are thrown into the crowd.



Every year around April 8, the Flower Festival, *Hanamatsuri*, is celebrated at Buddhist temples throughout Japan.

According to old scriptures, Prince Siddhartha Gautama, the historical

Hanamatsuri, the Flower Festival

Buddha, was born in 563 B.C. in the Lumbini Garden, in present day Nepal. He was the long-awaited son of King Suddhodama and Queen Maya of Kapilavastu, a small kingdom in Nepal.

On her way to her parents' home to give birth, labor pains began and Queen Maya gave birth under an Asoka or sala tree in the Lumbini Garden. Upon his birth, the Buddha is said to have taken seven steps forward and declared, "Above and under the heaven, I alone am revered," pointing to the heavens with his right hand and pointing to the

ground below with his left hand. At this moment, legend says that sweet nectar showered from the heavens, beautiful flowers bloomed at once all over the garden, and pure water sprang from the ground. Hanamatsuri originates from this legend commemorating the birth of the Buddha.

In most temples, a *Hanamido*, miniature flower altar with a statuette of the baby Buddha in the center, is set up and the attendees of the ceremony pour *amacha*, sweet tea, over the statuette. This recalls the gentle nectar rain that



showered on the baby Buddha in the Lumbini Garden.

The altar is also adorned with beautiful spring flowers to celebrate His birth. —Sandra Seki

SHAMI SEMINAR 2014

The 2014 Shami Seminar was held from December 3-7 at the Nichiren Buddhist International Center in Hayward, California. It had been two years since the last Shami Seminar was held. There were originally several applicants for the program, but when the day arrived there were only two attendees: Guilherme Chiamulera (26) from Brazil, studying under Rev. Yodo Okuda, and Kanse Capon (26) from London, studying under Rev. Kanto Tsukamoto.

Rev. Ikenaga, the main organizer of this program, felt that more time should be taken out for *gyo*, actual training and practice, rather than spending long hours on lectures. Followers in the West seemed to do a lot of studying on their

own and their knowledge of Buddhism and history are deep. However, in order to walk the path of a Nichiren Shu priest, one must understand the culture and background of the religion.

The curriculum started with *suigyo*, splashing cold water to purify the body, then morning prayers, cleaning the premises and helping to prepare meals. Training also included *shakyo*, copying the Lotus Sutra in calligraphy, *shodaigyo*, chanting the Odaimoku, and the evening prayers. Bishop Kanai gave lectures on the Lotus Sutra.

Rev. Ikenaga presented the history of Nichiren Shonin. Other ministers assisted in teaching the sutras, how to fold the robes and other ceremonial procedures.

Shami Kanse commented, "I had expected the seminar to focus on



chanting practice which would involve long hours of sitting in seiza on one's knees. However, that wasn't the case. One aspect that could have been given more attention was the role of Nichiren Shu priests in western society and how that might be different from the role of priests in Japan."

Shami Guilherme noted, "All of the study material was well prepared, so I was able to get a clearer picture of what I was studying. After this seminar, I was convinced of my belief in Nichiren Shu. One of the problems I face from here is how to put into practice what I have learned and how to spread this to others correctly."

—Rev. Eisei Ikenaga, NBIC



Splashing ice-cold water over their bodies in the middle of winter may seem extreme, but water purification is just another part of the routine for the priests in the 100 days of intensive aragyo training.

KEGYOSHO ARAGYO 2015

By Rev. Kanjo Bassett
Photographs by Jan Deputy

Kegyosho Aragyo, the formal name of Aragyo, is one of the most distinctive traditions within Nichiren Shu. It also sets Nichiren Shu apart from the other Japanese Buddhist orders, some of which have their own ascetic practices. But none have anything similar to the extremely rigorous and famous 100 day, midwinter practice of Aragyo.



141 new Shuhoshi priests take part in the Joman-e completion ceremony for the aragyo training.

This year had 141 participants who successfully completed the 100 days. It was notable for the participation of Rev. Hosho Sugawara, Kaikyoshi of Hilo Nichiren Mission, completing his third Aragyo, called Sangyo. Rev. Shoda Kanai, from the Kannon Temple in Las Vegas, Nevada, completed his second Aragyo, known as Saigyo.

On February 10, the weather was clear and cold at Hokekyo-ji Temple. Standing water on the temple grounds was covered in inch-thick ice. At 6:00 a.m., the Zuimon gate of the practice hall opened, and the priests marched out in single file loudly chanting Odaimoku in ragged voices. The gate was surrounded by temple members from all over Japan, Hawaii and North America holding handmade temple banners and shouting “welcome back” to their home priests.



“It was a tough hundred days. Sometimes, it made me wonder why I did it. It was a different kind of practice this time. I could have done better, but I completed it. I’m finished.” —Rev. Shoda Kanai



Denshu Nittan Arai, head priest for the training, addresses the priests upon completing the training.

After marching around the perimeter of the temple grounds, the priests fetched their bags and prepared for the Joman-e completion ceremony. The gathered crowd of temple and family members squeezed into the small main hall and quickly overflowed onto the balcony and front steps, trying to keep warm in the morning cold.

Rev. Junko Kobayashi, Chief Administrator of Nichiren Shu offered words of congratulations, encouraging the new Shuhoshi, the official name for priests who successfully complete the 100 days of training. He urged them, “Do not forget the preciousness of what you accomplished in your 100-day practice, but continue your practice to propagate to people far and wide.” At the end of the ceremony, all the priests lined up facing outwards and performed a huge Kito blessing for the audience. People who had escaped the cold in their cars came out and ran back up the temple steps to receive the blessing.

After the ceremony was over, the windless morning cold melted away. Family members stepped in to whisk their weary priests back home. On the way to the station, the young priests, still dressed in their white Shuhoshi robes, pulled their luggage and walked along with their families, talking about going home, eating hot meals, and taking long, hot baths.



“It was more difficult compared to my second time. There wasn’t a structured program. However, in place of that, I was helping a lot behind the scenes and on my feet the whole time. It was more work and responsibility.” —Rev. Hosho Sugawara

First Buddhist Academic Forum Held in Korea

By Rev. Woo Hokken,
Hodoji Temple, Korea

Last October, the first Buddhist Academic Forum was held at Kyung Hee University in Seoul, Korea. We invited Prof. Zencho Kitagawa of Rishso University, Rev. Shoshi Mihara of the Institute of Modern Religions from Japan, Prof. Huh Woo Sung of Kyung Hee University, and Prof. Cha Cha-seuk of Dongguk University. They delivered lectures which focused on the significance of Buddhism, especially of the Lotus Sutra.

Prof. Kitagawa said in his lecture, “Nichiren Shonin spread the Lotus Sutra because he aimed at establishing a peaceful society all over the world. It is necessary to have great compassion, to be gentle and patient, and to have no attachment to all things.” Rev. Mihara added, “If we wish to have peace for ourselves, we should first of all pray for the peace of the country. If the whole world is not peaceful, it is impossible for each of us to live a tranquil and comfortable life. The importance of religion depends on our praying for world peace.”

The forum, hosted by Hodoji Temple, is a good start to make Nichiren Shu Buddhism known to the public in Korea. We know



Rev. Mihara addresses the forum, talking about the significance of the Lotus Sutra in Buddhism.

how difficult it is to spread Nichiren Shu Buddhism in foreign countries. Hopefully, this can be a first step to spread the True teaching of the Lotus Sutra in Korea as well as in other areas.

As the old proverb says, “The longest journey begins with a single step.” We, as Nichiren Shu Buddhists, should continue to move forward to realize our Founder’s wish: “May all beings under the heavens and within the Four Seas live in accordance with the Wonderful Dharma.”



Forum participants gather in front of Hodoji Temple.

REVEREND KANNO PREACHES (35)

“Our own eyebrows are not visible even though they are close to our eyes, just as our own evils are not discernible by ourselves.”

—Nichiren Shonin,
Soya Nyudo-dono-gari Gosho*



The Eyebrows

We say that one’s own smell is not unpleasant, that we do not notice our own faults. We are mild to ourselves but strict to others. There are many similar ideas. The existence of such ideas shows how this kind of advice is important, and at the same time it is hard to follow.

Though we cannot see our own eyes, we are able to see them in the mirror. Likewise, we could naturally perceive our own selfish mentality in a mirror that reflects the state of mind.

Nichiren Shonin teaches us that the Odaimoku of Namu Myoho Renge Kyo has the function of this mirror. When we chant the Odaimoku in the morning in front of the altar, the Odaimoku leads us to attain the purified state of mind and, at the same time, makes us pliable and reflects upon our deeds. We are able to look on the true reflection of our own nature.

Our future depends on whether we repeat this work of reflection, so learn and teach the wisdom of our past masters.

Rev. Nisso Kanno, Head Priest, Kaichoji Temple, Shizuoka Prefecture

*This letter was written at Mt. Minobu in 1275, addressed to Soya Nyudo and Ota Kingo. Along with Toki Jonin, they were three important supporters of Nichiren Shonin.



I thought that visiting another country might change the way I look at things, but I didn't think it could change me so much.
—Hirofumi Sakata



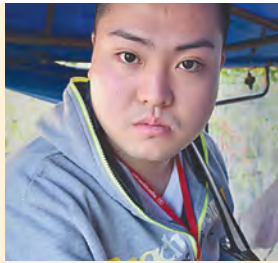
For me, this trip has been such a wonderful and unexpected adventure. It's been so refreshing. I'm now looking at things in a whole new way! —Reisen Tsuboi



I was a bit worried as I thought life in a Thai village would be so different, but the people there were so kind. It was a wonderful experience. —Asuka Yagi



I had been really looking forward to this trip, but I never imagined that I would be so moved by the experience! —Shuri Hashimoto



This has been a real eye-opener for me. I was surprised by everything I saw and experienced. —Chiryu Deguchi



Before coming to Thailand, I didn't know what to expect, but I've been surprised by how warm the people are. —Ribun Nagai

STUDY TOUR 2015 THAILAND

By Revs. Zenjo Nibe and Kaikei Ochiai, Missionary Department



Everyone here was so open and so friendly. Thailand is a beautiful and inspiring place! —Minori Mizutani



This trip has been very moving for me. I will return to Japan with a whole new perspective on life! —Yu Nagasaka



I have met such wonderful people and seen great places. I will never forget this! —Ryota Yamashita



Bringing offerings of food to the monks as they make their way around the village in the morning.

The 11th Nichiren Shu Study Tour was held from February 7-14 in Khemarat District, Ubon Ratchathani Province, Thailand. A total of nine participants from Japan joined the tour, ranging in age from 19 to 39. The tour has been held annually as part of an international cooperation propagation movement supported by Nichiren Shu. This year the Services for the Health in Asian and African Regions (SHARE), an NGO in Japan also helped set up the program. A local NGO, Health and Share Foundation (HSF) also helped out.

This year's program included a homestay in Nasanam Village, in the Khemarat District, sharing information on the prevention of HIV and studying the modern history of Thailand. The

participants got together with HIV positive patients, doctors and nurses, and members of the local community to learn more about precautions for preventing AIDS and how to care for those who had already been infected.

Unlike previous years, participants this year were able to stay at local homes and get a first-hand experience of life in a Thai village. The village had no wi-fi or any modern facilities. The villagers could not speak Japanese or English, and we could not speak Thai. Therefore, we used sign language and gestures to express our ideas and communicate. The participants rose at dawn, gathered ingredients for meals, and helped with daily chores. This in turn created a bond between the villagers and the participants.



The group also visited the Nasanam Nawa Kasem Village School and played with the local children. It was the first time anyone from outside Thailand had visited the school. The children were very excited to meet the Japanese guests and welcomed them with a brass band performance and songs. The principal of the school was very cooperative. This



leisurely experience. Many felt that the Buddhist temples in Japan were simpler in structure and more peaceful, making them more like a sanctuary for tranquility and meditation.

In this Study Tour, the participants were able to actually see and experience the variety of life in Thailand, from a simple village to a busy city. Even



enabled us to mingle with the children and share such precious moments.

After leaving Khemarat, the group toured famous sites, including the Wat Phra That Nongua Temple and Wat Arum Temple built along the Chao Phrya River. They also visited the Wat Pho, Temple of the Royal Family, and the famous Wat Phra Kaew, known as the Temple of the Emerald Buddha built on the site of the ancient palace.

The crowds and hustle and bustle of Bangkok were a stark contrast with the simple village life we had experienced. Some participants remarked that it was like walking the crossings of Shibuya with so many cars, bikes, and people talking on their cellphones.

The grandeur of the Temple of the Emerald Buddha was overwhelming, but the sites were too crowded for a

if we are able to hear stories, or even look at pictures on the Internet, it is only a virtual experience. The time shared with the local people brought about a cultural exchange between Japan and Thailand and also a better understanding of Thailand by the group. "Seeing is Believing!"

This was a precious experience for all of us.



The villagers tied strings around participants' wrists to symbolically connect them over distance.



Almost like family: staying in local villagers' homes resulted in deep bonds being formed quickly.

TEMPLE EVENTS



Nichiren Buddhist Kannon Temple of Nevada Bishop Shokai Kanai

December 20, 2014 marked the fourth annual Dharma Seminar hosted by the Nichiren Buddhist Kannon Temple of Nevada. We were honored to host Venerable Ryusho Matsuda of the Nichiren Buddhist Temple of San Jose and Rev. Ryusho Jeffus of the Nichiren Buddhist Temple of Charlotte, North Carolina. Lectures during the seminar covered the Mandala Gohonzon of the Ten Realms, the parable of the Magic City, and instructions on how to write the Odaimoku in Japanese characters with a *fude* pen, used for Japanese calligraphy. Rev. Jeffus's reason for chanting the Odaimoku was extremely powerful. Realizing that Nichiren Shonin was reminding his followers that we can change the world, and that love and kindness should be given to others.

Nichiren Mission of Hawaii Bishop Chishin Hirai

Children's Day Cultural Festival

The Fujinkai (Ladies Auxiliary) will have a special festival this spring. This is a new Eco-friendly project featuring Make and Take "Up-cycled" T-shirt tote bags, and racing cars made from recycled materials. There will be kites, taketombo (dragonflies made from bamboo sticks), bean bag toss, origami (folding objects with colored paper), felt carp bags, greeting cards and bookmarks. There will also be a calligraphy booth, where you can have your name written in Japanese with a *fude* brush. For food, mochi, hot dogs and shaved ice will be sold for \$1.00 each. Join in for the fun!

Joint New Year's Party 2015

The Nichiren Mission of Hawaii will hold a New Year's party on Sunday, March 15 from 11:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m. This is a joint event with Honolulu Myohoji and Wahiawa Nichiren Mission. All members and friends are cordially invited. Donations for lucky number prizes will be greatly appreciated.

Seattle Nichiren Buddhist Church By Rev. Eko Murakami

On December 14, 2014, Rev. Eko Murakami was formally assigned the position of Resident Minister of the Seattle Nichiren Buddhist Church. The church has had no resident minister for nearly five years. Though Rev. Murakami experienced much difficulty getting an R-1 visa to propagate in the U.S., she finally completed the procedures and came to Seattle on November 24. On

December 7, the annual *mochitsuki*, or rice cake pounding event, took place with the support of the members. Rev. Murakami was amazed to see how the members cooperated and were willing to help one another. Rev. Murakami said, "I was overwhelmed to experience the warm welcome from the members and realized how earnest each member was in their strong belief in the Lotus Sutra. I thank Bishop Shokai Kanai, Rev. Join Inoue, and Bishop Chishin Hirai for their patience and help. I will do my best to get advice from others and carry out my responsibilities as a resident minister."

Honolulu Myohoji Dean Makinodan, Member

One Day Meditation Retreat

On January 31, Honolulu Myohoji held a One-Day Meditation Retreat, led by Rev. Kyoshun Kageyama. Rev. Kageyama has a deep understanding of Nichiren ascetic training. He is also versed in yoga practices and therapies, meditation and psychology. The event was well attended since it linked the worlds of Buddhism, yoga and meditative practices. All sessions were held with English interpretation.

The morning session was a two hour lecture covering Nichiren Buddhism's connections with the meditative traditions of India, including yoga, and therapeutic practices such as Ayurveda. Rev. Kageyama's presentation also included an overview of the formation of the western understanding of Buddhist meditative practices and their development in their present forms as Vipassana meditation and mindfulness meditation.

After a vegetarian lunch, the afternoon session was devoted to basic yoga tech-

niques and an introduction into the Indian medical system of Ayurveda, which was born from meditative knowledge. Rev. Kageyama emphasized that the important goal of yoga or any meditative practice is not the acquisition of physical strength or ability, but to quiet the mind so that we may always hear our Buddha nature, the voice of conscience in daily life. With examples of easy to carry out methods, he encouraged the participants to develop the habit of shifting our consciousness away from ego and back to the mirror of the mind, which is the source of the voice of our conscience. We were reminded that all religious practice aims to lead one back to the mirror of the mind.

The session was concluded by a Shodaigyo session where the participants were asked to chant while placing upon the mirror of their mind the experience of Namu Myoho Renge Kyo, rather than chanting with just a rational understanding.

Thanks to this seminar by Rev. Kageyama, the Honolulu Myohoji has taken a step forward into the profound world of Kuon Jitsujō Honshi Shakyamuni Buddha. We look forward to future opportunities to understand our tradition more deeply. Namu Myoho Renge Kyo.



PROPAGATION STARTS IN SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka is a Buddhist country. The lifestyle and culture of Sri Lanka have a deep connection with Buddhism. Sri Lankan people enjoy visiting their local temples to offer their prayers to the stupas and Bodhi trees. At each full moon, they go to temples and make offerings to the Buddha, Bodhisattvas, and monks. They practice sutra chanting and meditation to cultivate their Bodhi heart. Sri Lanka also has many Buddhist historical sites. Old stupas and temples are well preserved by the people.

In this spiritual country, we continually meet people who are eager to learn and practice the Lotus Sutra. Since December 2013, we have started regular visits to Sri Lanka. Near the Colombo area, there is not yet a Nichiren Shu *dojo*, or place for practicing. Therefore, we conduct regular meetings in members' homes. We sometimes travel for five hours in a van to visit people in other towns who want to hear the Dharma. We travel from North to South, from East

to West within the island of Sri Lanka. We explain the teaching and practices of the Lotus Sutra at different homes. We hold question and answer sessions with members each time, so that it helps them broaden their understanding of how the Buddha guides all living beings.

Thanks to the sincere support from all of the Sri Lankan members, we had a ceremony of Gojukai and Mandala Gohonzon bestowal in December. On the day of the ceremony, more than 70 people came to the home of one main member, Mr. Gemunu Ranasooru, who has been taking care of the Sri Lankan members earnestly. Twenty new members made their vows to the Buddha and Nichiren Shonin and received their Mandala Gohonzon.

On the following day, we began house visitations to enshrine Mandala Gohonzon for all the new members. On the way to Anuradhapura, the historical capital city of the ancient kingdom in Northern Sri Lanka,

we made a short visit to the Minobusan Betsuin Kindergarten to join their graduation ceremony, recite the Lotus Sutra and chant the Odaimoku with Rev. Myoetsu Yoshimura, head of the kindergarten, in front of the Triple Gems in the main hall. That evening, we enshrined the Mandala



Rev. Noda conducted a Gojukai ceremony, enshrining the Mandala Gohonzon in a main member's home.

Gohonzon while chanting the sutra and shared the Dharma with a new member and his family.

The next day, we visited Galle, a southern seaside town, to conduct an enshrinement service and hold a Dharma study session with people there. The day after that, we went to the members living near the Colombo area to bring the Mandala Gohonzon to their homes. We shared the Dharma at every house. Many people had questions for us, and we answered them. We were able to visit two or three homes per day. We spent ten days to complete the enshrinement of all the Mandala Gohonzons for the new members.

It was a tiring trip but a very meaningful journey. We will always try to continue spreading the Lotus Sutra and Odaimoku in Sri Lanka so more people can awaken to the Nichiren Shu teaching in this beautiful country. We will make our effort to bring the Lotus Sutra and Odaimoku from the East to the West. —Rev. Kangyo Noda

Calendar for April 2015–May 2015

APR 8 Hanamatsuri (Buddha's Birthday)
APR 15-20 Nakayama Hokekyo-ji Senbu-e (1000 Recitations of Lotus Sutra)
APR 17 Honolulu Myohoji 85th Anniversary Ceremony
APR 27-29 Ikegami Honmonji Senbu-e (1000 Recitations of Lotus Sutra)

APR 28 The 762nd Rikkyo Kaishu-e (762nd Anniversary of the Founding of the Order)
MAY 12 The 754th Izu Honan-e (Ceremony honoring the 754th Anniversary of the Izu Persecution)

Compiled by Rev. Kaikei Ochiai

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, E-mail: kokusai@nichiren.or.jp
Board of Trustees Junko Kobayashi, *Chief Administrator, The Head Office of Nichiren Shu*; Bungyo Yoshida, *President, NOPPA*; Kenitsu Saito, *Executive Director, Missionary Department*; Momi Shiozaki, *Executive Director, General Affairs Department*; Kenyu Yoshida, *Director, Missionary Department*
Editorial Board Sandra Seki, *Editor*; Shinkyo Warner, *Assistant Editor*; Alan Rowe, *Art Director*; Keiryu Shima, *Chief Advisor*
Staff Kanshu Naito, Gyokai Sekido, Kanji Tamura, Chishin Hirai **Advisor** Hoyu Maruyama