Nichiren Shu News

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FORMER ARCHBISHOP SAKAI PASSES AWAY AT 100

By Sandra Seki.

The 51st Archbishop of Nichiren Shu and the 82nd Chief Abbot of Ikegami Honmonji Temple, Rev. Nichiji Sakai, passed away in his sleep in the early hours of May 28, 2019. Rev. Sakai had just celebrated his 100th birthday on May 6th.

An informal wake and funeral service officiated by Rev. Nissho Kanno, the current Archbishop of Nichiren Shu, was held on May 31 and June 1. Many priests, followers, and friends came from near and far to pay their last respects to Rev. Sakai.

Born at Jissoji Temple in Ikegami in 1919, he was the only son of the Sakai family and grew up with three sisters. Rev. Sakai was a man who had interests in various fields and had a career as an actor-producer as well as a talented writer. After returning from the battlefields of World War II, Rev. Sakai returned to a war-scarred and devastated Tokyo.

The Chief Manager of Ikegami Honmonji Temple at the time, Rev. Nichiji Kaneko, felt the need to build a propagation center at the temple. A center was established and called the Roshi Club, a cultural center for the local people. The first project was to build the Ikegami Sports Club, a facility where young children could participate in different kinds of sports.

Then the Ikegami Boy Scouts, a chorus club, and various other clubs emerged from the cultural center.

After Rev. Kaneko retired, Rev. Sakai took over the position as Chief Manager of Ikegami Honmonji Temple, Rev. Sakai came up with new ideas. One of them was the fukubato, (a good luck pigeon amulet) sold at the temple during the month of January, which is said to bring good fortune to families throughout the year. Each New Year,

people would come to get a new *fukubato* for their homes.

After his service at Ikegami Honmonji Temple, Rev. Sakai was chosen to serve as Bishop of Guboji Temple, one of the main Nichiren Shu Temples in Chiba



Rev. Nichiji Sakai was Archbishop of Nichiren Shu from 2006 to 2010.

Prefecture. Rev. Sakai started a number of new annual events at Guboji Temple which to this day draw crowds.

Nine years later, Rev. Sakai returned to Ikegami Honmonji Temple, this time as the Chief Abbot. He went on to become the 51st Archbishop of Nichiren Shu in 2006 and retired in 2010.

Rev. Sakai was a man who loved to spend time around people. He would socialize with priests of different orders, saying that the different Buddhist orders should mingle and exchange ideas for the betterment of society. He helped establish "Namu no Kai," an organization made up of priests from different Buddhist orders. The organization still holds lectures and workshops to help people understand the basics of Buddhism and is open to the public.

Rev. Sakai was an outspoken man with a strong character, but he was loved by all who got to know him. He was warm and loving, and he cared very much about the future of Nichiren Shu.

A formal funeral service will be held for Rev. Sakai on September 4, 2019 at Ikegami Honmonji Temple.

THE OBON AND SEGAKI CEREMONIES

By Rev. Ryuei McCormick

The Ullambana (called Obon in Japan) is a ceremony for presenting offerings of pure water, food, sweets, fruits, and other things to our ancestors. It is based upon the story of the Buddha's disciple, Maudgalyayana, whose mother had been reborn as a hungry ghost. According to the *Ullambana Sutra*, the Buddha taught that, at the end of the summer retreat, offerings should be made to the Sangha. The merit generated by that offering is

dedicated to freeing those who had fallen into the three evil destinies of the hells, hungry ghosts, and animals, so they can be reborn in the heavens. When this was done, Maudgalyayana's mother was liberated. As the summer retreat ended in the middle of the seventh month of the lunar calendar, the 13-15th of the month became the dates for the annual Ullambana Ceremony. Some places (like Tokyo) observe it in July, but other places observe it in August, which is closer to the dates of the lunar calendar.



The Torch-Mouthed Hungry Ghost threatening Ananda.

The *Ullambana Sutra* was supposedly translated into Chinese by Dharmaraksa (233-310), but most scholars feel that it was a Chinese work written as a response to criticism that Buddhism undermined filial piety. The Ghost Festival that was derived from it was first celebrated in China in the year 538. The term "ullambana" may be related to the following Sanskrit words: "avalambana," that means "hanging upside down," perhaps the fate of some hungry ghosts; or "odana" that means "cooked rice," which is then combined with the Chinese word for "bowl"; or "ullapana," that means "rescuing."

Closely connected to the Ullambana is the Offerings for the Hungry Ghosts Ceremony (called Segaki-e in Japanese). This ceremony is also called the "Food Offering" (Seijiki) or Ceremony for the Spirits in the Dark and in the Light (Meiyo-e). It is usually held in conjunction with the Ullambana, though it may also be observed apart from it at other times. In this ceremony, offerings are made particularly for the sake of all hungry ghosts but also to alleviate the suffering of all beings in the six worlds. This ceremony is based on the Sutra of the Buddha's Explanation of the Dharani for Saving the Torch-Mouthed Hungry *Ghosts* that was translated into Chinese by Amoghavajra (705-774). According to the sutra, the torch-mouthed hungry ghosts, whose flaming mouths turned food into ash before they could eat it, threatened the Buddha's attendant Ananda. They told him that if he couldn't find a way to feed them all, he would



A setup of the Segaki altar at a meeting of the Nichiren Buddhist Sangha in Oakland, California.

become a hungry ghost in three days. The Buddha then provided Ananda with a dharani, or protective spell, that would empower a meal offering capable of satisfying all the hungry ghosts.

In other schools of Buddhism, the recitation of the Lotus Sutra is not a particular feature of either the Ullambana or the Hungry Ghost service. However, in his treatise The Opening of the Eyes (Kaimoku-sho), Nichiren Shonin said, "The statement in some other sutras that anyone can attain Buddhahood is not confirmed in reality. When a woman became a buddha in the Lotus Sutra, a mother's attainment of Buddhahood was assured. When Devadatta, an evil man, became a buddha, a father's attainment of Buddhahood was guaranteed. This sutra is the Classic of Filial Piety of Buddhism." Therefore, in Nichiren Shu, the recitation of the Lotus Sutra and the Odaimoku are key features of these services, as it is our conviction that the merit of chanting them enables the attainment of Buddhahood by all sentient beings.

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GREAT FIGURES WHO HAD FAITH IN NICHIREN SHU (7)

NIHON FUKUSHI UNIVERSITY ESTABLISHED BY REV. SHUGAKU SUZUKI

By Rev. Sensho Komukai

Rev. Shugaku Suzuki (1902-1962) was born in Aichi Prefecture. His parents operated a business in the wholesale confectionery trade. He took over the family business and had considerable success in the bakery business. However, he never felt happy, repeatedly asking himself, "For what reason was I born? Am I going to die with my heart unfulfilled? What is happiness which we can't buy with money?"

When he was 23, his uncle introduced him to a lady named Tatsuko Sugiyama who had established a Buddhist aid society that worked to provide social welfare services based on faith in the Lotus Sutra. When he confided his anxieties to Tatsuko, she answered, "If you want to be satisfied with your life, you will need to sow the seeds of happiness through the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. The best way is to bring up orphaned children and help them to have a happy life. I am carrying a heavy load, and I'd like you to help carry the burden. Can you do this for me?" Her request was made in such a serious manner that he was sure it would be a great mission, so he decided to accept her offer.

He was appointed to operate a farm in an offender rehabilitation facility, where he took on 17 youthful offenders and lived together with them to do farm work. He also undertook the running of a foster home for orphaned children, children abused by their parents, children sold to the circus, and handicapped children. Together with the children, he worked hard in the fields to cultivate rice and other crops.

He never scolded the children, but rather praised them all the time. Of this, Suzuki said, "Children who had been abandoned or abused by their parents are always frightened and lack confidence. Praise them when they do something good, and they will become gentle and honest. Children can place their full trust in those who give them a compliment." This firm belief he had was based on the Lotus Sutra, where the Buddha said, "I would cause all living beings to become exactly as I am." Suzuki explained further, "All living beings who are born in this world are children of the Buddha. According to the Lotus Sutra, anyone, including the mentally handicapped, can equally attain



Buddhahood, and everyone is entitled to attain real happiness. The Buddha shows all of us the right path to awakening and tries to make our Buddha-nature blossom." As Suzuki treated every child without discrimination, he was respected and trusted by everyone.

When World War II ended in 1945, there were more than 120,000 children who were orphaned by the war throughout Japan, but orphanages only had the capacity for 20,000 children.

Suzuki took many parentless children under his wing, but over 100,000 war orphans were left unattended. To overcome this miserable situation, Suzuki made every effort to develop better social welfare services for these poor children. He worked hard to secure protective institutions, establish care at an early age, and provide an education for the children.

In 1946, Suzuki became a Nichiren Shu priest. Four years later, Rev. Suzuki entered the 100-day aragyo ascetic training at the age of 49. He completed the aragyo training three times. "I would like to learn the Lotus Sutra more intensively, so that the seed of happiness may be sowed for the children. It is best for me, therefore, to become a Nichiren Shu priest and work hard to carry out Buddhist practice. It is my duty as a Buddhist minister to lead people to the path of righteousness. It is important to take the initiative in practicing the right teachings. You have to be a good example for the children. You must train yourself to be a role model. The *aragyo* training gave me a good opportunity to discipline myself."

As Rev. Suzuki continued to promote social welfare work, he was convinced that development of human resources would be necessary for future social welfare. To meet that need, he decided

to establish a university to train leaders who could be engaged in social welfare. In 1957, he established a four-year university called Nihon Fukushi University in Nagoya in Aichi Prefecture. The university specializes in social welfare education. Since that time, more than 60,000 students have graduated from the university, pursuing various careers in social welfare.

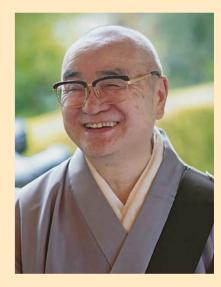


Main Building of Nihon Fukushi University in Aichi Prefecture.

REVEREND KANNO PREACHES (58)

"Nichiren was born as a son of a family of chandala in the Province of Awa. Isn't losing one's life for the sake of the Lotus Sutra comparable to changing stones into gold?"

—Sado Gokanki-sho (About the Government Censure and Sado Exile)



Son of a Family of Chandala

"Chandala" means those engaged in hunting and so forth in accordance with India's class system. At the time of Nichiren Shonin, a 'chandala' was "The lowest class of people in India; outcasts who made their living by hunting, slaughtering cattle, burying dead bodies, etc. and were considered to be on the same the level as animals" according to the Dictionary of Japanese Buddhist Terms by Hisao Inagaki. In this letter, Nichiren Shonin proclaims that, because he was born in a fisherman's family, he belonged to the lowest class of society. Notwithstanding the Founder's narrative, our Founder is supposed to have come from a middle-class family engaged in fishing according to the Nichiren Shu Dictionary.

Shakyamuni Buddha entrusted Superior Practice Bodhisattva with the task of propagating the teachings of the Lotus Sutra after his final nirvana. The Buddha wanted the person engaged in this mission to be one who would "sympathize with the grief of all people, ranging in class from the bottom to the top," have the "power of faith" that takes every phrase of the Lotus Sutra as the word of the Buddha, and have the resolve to risk his own life to spread the sutra. Nichiren Shonin met all these qualifications and is an earthly manifestation of Superior Practice Bodhisattva.

In this letter, Nichiren Shonin showed us how great his own awareness of Superior Practice Bodhisattva was by mentioning the allegory of "changing stones into gold." This teaching is highly important for us living in the present age.

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



Students of Nihon Fukushi University collecting donations for the victims of natural disasters.

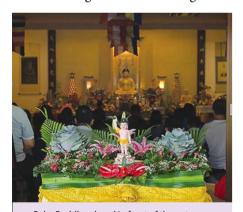
PENANG WESAK FESTIVAL 2019

By Rev. Kenin Ito. Photographs by Mun Wai Leong, Ichinenji Temple Member.

The colorful Penang Wesak Festival has been held by the Malaysian Buddhist Association (MBA) every year since 1949, even before the independence of Malaysia. Wesak is the full moon day of the fourth month of the lunar calendar (called Vesakha in Pali, or Vaishakha in Sanskrit). On that day, South Asian and Southeast Asian Buddhists sincerely recollect the life of Shakyamuni Buddha and commemorate his birth, awakening, first discourse, and final nirvana. In Malaysia, Wesak is recognized as a national holiday. Ichinenji Temple joined the MBA's Wesak Celebration in 2010.

This year, May 18 was the Buddha's full moon day. Ichinenji Temple was filled with members and their families for a special service held in the morning. After a vegetarian lunch together, we chanted the Odaimoku and transferred the main statue of the Buddha from the temple's altar to the high seat on the back part of a float decorated with more than 8,000 fresh cut flowers.

Though it rained in the morning, the weather cleared by the time we lined up near the MBA headquarters for the parade in the evening. This year, 35 Buddhist groups participated, and 28 floats were prepared. It was fun to see each colorful and illuminated float honoring the Buddha with unique design and various tastes. At 6:00 in the evening, the parade started down the route through George Town, the World Heritage district of Penang where



Baby Buddha placed in front of the entrance to the main hall at Ichinenji Temple



Members transferring the statue of the Buddha from the Ichinenji Temple altar to the float.

the major Buddhist temples are located as well as Taoist and Hindu temples and Islamic mosques. The procession took more than three hours to complete the seven kilometer circuit. There were about 10,000 spectators along the route who were bowing faithfully in gassho as the floats passed by.

At the head of the procession for Ichinenji Temple were the flag bearers. The float was pulled by a forklift run by a big electric generator with an electrician on board. Temple members marched behind the float beating drums and chanting the Odaimoku.

The Ichinenji Temple float was built using the base of an old bus. First, the float was cleaned up and thickly laid



Members work on building the base of the float.

with flowers on its surface. This year, we decided to place a one-meter-tall baby Buddha at the front of the float, where last year seven lotus flowers were placed. To gather large amounts of flowers, some members drove a truck for five hours to Cameron Highland, the remote mountain in the central Malay Peninsula, where one of the members runs several flower nurseries.

There were so many things to prepare for the festival such as decorating and lighting the float, flower arrangements for the temple, lunch preparations, uniforms, and safety equipment for the procession. The Ichinenji Temple members shared the necessary work and cooperated for the success of the festival.



Ichinenji Temple float lit up in the evening parade.

The Ichinenji Temple chairman, Mr. Ang Tiang Soon said, "The festival is accomplished by the members' volunteer work. We do not compel anyone to do anything. Mutual respect is the most important thing. It is necessary to maintain an atmosphere that anyone can always try to do something for the temple. Temple membership is only two Malaysian Ringgit (MYR), or about 55 yen per month, per person. So our budget is limited. However, there are many things that each member is willing to offer, so the festival is successful."

Several members said, "We usually can't come to the temple, because we are busy with our work and family affairs. Once a year, by sharing the preparation of the Wesak festival and walking the seven kilometer circuit in the city, following the Buddha's float, chanting the Odaimoku with all of the Ichinenji Temple members, we are very delighted at the prospect of devoting ourselves to the Buddha and our temple."

Getting totally soaked with sweat, we all felt a pleasant fatigue, and the Wesak Festival 2019 broke up around 10:00 in the evening. We greeted many people and smiled to one another. I hope our chanting of the Odaimoku reached everyone who aspires to create a world of peace and friendship beyond the difference of faith. I hope the circulation of the Odaimoku will grow little by little, and more people will participate in the next Wesak Celebration.



Adding finishing touches to the float, preparing it for the statue of the Buddha.

Buddhism Q&A(14)

By Rev. Ryuei McCormick

Why do we chant the last part of Hoben-pon three times?

A common practice of Nichiren Buddhism is a triple repetition of a portion of the opening prose section of Chapter 2 of the Lotus Sutra, but not many know why we do this. In English, this passage reads: "...that is all phenomena in regard to their appearances as such, their natures as such, their entities as such, their powers as such, their activities as such, their causes as such, their conditions as such, their effects as such, their recompenses as such, and their equality as such despite these differences." This is the list of the "ten suchnesses" or aspects of phenomena (dharmas in Sanskrit) that comprise reality.

The three repetitions are actually a recognition of three ways of reading

the ten suchnesses in accordance with threefold truth taught by Tiantai Zhiyi (538-597). The threefold truth consists of: (1) the truth of emptiness, meaning that all phenomena are empty of a permanent, unchanging or



Prayer book used at Jyokyoji Temple in Tokyo.

independent self-nature; (2) the truth of provisionality, meaning that nevertheless they do have a provisional existence on the basis of the interdependent flow of causes and conditions; and (3) the truth of the middle way, meaning that things are simultaneously empty and provisionally existent. All three truths of the threefold truth imply one another. Because things have no self-nature, they have a provisional existence, and vice versa. Both emptiness and provisionality express the middle way of empty yet provisionally existent. This is a very subtle and complex teaching which is at the heart of Tiantai Buddhism and was also held in great esteem by Nichiren Shonin.

In the Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra, the Great Master Tiantai points out that by rearranging the Chinese characters of each of the ten phrases, one can read them so that one part or another of the threefold truth is emphasized. The first way is to emphasize the suchness of each of the ten. Because suchness is a synonym for

emptiness this is a recognition of the truth of emptiness. For instance, to read "such their appearance is" (ze-so-nyo; 是相如). The second way is to emphasize the distinct character of each of the ten as a recognition of the truth of provisionality. For instance, to read, "their appearances as such" (nyo-ze-so; 如是相). The third way is to emphasize the copula "as," representing the truth of the middle way. For instance, to read "as such their appearance" (so-nyo-ze; 相如是).

This doesn't work as well in English as in classical Chinese, and we don't actually rearrange the characters in our own practice. Nevertheless, the triple repetition is a way of recognizing that each of the ten suchnesses should be understood in terms of the threefold truth of emptiness, provisionality, and the middle way.

We welcome readers' questions about Buddhism and Nichiren Shonin. Please send us your questions by e-mail to editor-nichirenshunews@nichiren.or.jp or contact us through your local temple.



Nichiren Mission of Hawaii Florence Aihara, President of Fujinkai

Minobusan Students Attend Memorial Day Service

Twenty-nine students and three teachers from Minobusan High School attended the annual Memorial Day Service for all American and Japanese soldiers who lost their precious lives at Pearl Harbor. The Nichiren Mission of Hawaii is the only temple that preserves a list of all casualties of the Pearl Harbor attack.

Together with the graduating class of Minobusan High School, the members honored and prayed for the repose of the spirits of the deceased. Six young future ministers who recently graduated from Minobusan High School assisted Bishop Kanai in the service. *Gagaku*, Japanese imperial court music, was also performed by two other students. Following the service, the 29 students and three teachers were invited to lunch to interact with our members who wished them well.



Thanks to the efforts of everyone who assisted in the event and the donations of pineapples and carrot cake from Mr. Hisashi, Mrs. Sally Matsumoto, and Mrs. Mildred Sumida, the luncheon was enjoyed by everyone. After a hearty lunch, the students went for a hike up to the Diamond Head Lookout.

Las Vegas Kannonji Temple Rev. Shoda Kanai

Odaimoku for the Deceased

Recently, I was asked to conduct a funeral for a gentleman who passed away from cancer. Though he was born a Catholic, he gravitated more towards Buddhist teachings. Previously, he studied under different orders of Buddhism but left after disagreeing with their ideology. The family off and on practiced by themselves but never with another sangha.

During the Odaimoku chanting and incense offering, his wife chanted along as she was familiar with this practice. Then from above and to her right, I heard a male voice loudly chanting the *Odaimoku* a couple of times. During the incense offering, I stood to the side. I did not want to move my head, but I used my peripheral vision to try to see who it was. Later, during my sermon, I looked to see who it could have been. My only conclusion is that the deceased husband had been there next to his wife, to support her and chant the Odaimoku. I told this to the family at the end of my sermon, and they were surprised!

Death is difficult for everyone. We can no longer communicate with our loved ones who have passed on. There could be some things said or not said that we regret. It takes time to grieve and come to acceptance. In Buddhism, death is not the end but just a transition. Even so, dealing with death is still difficult.

Try talking to the deceased at your family altar. If there is no altar, then try talking to the *ihai* or family tablet, if there is no *ihai*, then talk to the *Gohonzon*. The *Gohonzon* represents the universe and the Ten Realms. Your ancestors will surely be able to hear you from there.

Periodically, offer the deceased's favorite foods and drinks on the altar, chant passages from the Lotus Sutra, and offer the merit generated by that to them. I am sure they will hear you just as the deceased gentleman was able to join his own funeral and chant the *Odaimoku*.

Nichiren Mission of Hawaii Rev. Shokai Kanai

The Lotus Flower

The first lotus flower of the year fully bloomed at the Nichiren Mission of Hawaii on April 29. The lotus flower is a well-known Buddhist symbol. The lotus grows only in muddy water, but it is never influenced by the dirt in the water. It blooms into a beautiful flower. In Chapter 15 of the Lotus Sutra, the bodhisattvas who practice the sutra are compared to lotus flowers: "They are not defiled by worldliness just as the lotus flower is not defiled by water." So the lotus represents purity in the midst of impurity.

The lotus seed also symbolizes long life. The late Prof. Ichiro Oga, a famous researcher of lotus plants who was nicknamed "Dr. Lotus," discovered some lotus seeds that were apparently more than 2,500 years old. He found the seeds while doing excavations near the Kemigawa River in Chiba Prefecture in 1956.



He successfully grew the seeds into fully blooming lotus flowers. According to Dr. Willard Libby of the University of Chicago, the seeds may have been 3,000 years old. That is based on the carbon dating of canoes that were above the seeds when they were found. So the seeds may have come from a time before the historical Buddha was born. Since the Lotus Sutra reveals the Eternal Life of the Buddha, the longevity of lotus seeds and their ability to produce flowers is quite appropriate.

Another particularity of the lotus is that the bloom of a lotus contains the fruit or seedpod. In most plants, the fruit comes after the flowers. So the simultaneity of the lotus flower and its fruit is taken to symbolize the simultaneity of cause and effect taught in Buddhism. We often forget what causes illness or misfortune, but whether it is good or bad, every effect has a cause, and every cause immediately produces an effect.

So when you see a lotus flower, let it remind you to always rise above a bad environment, to have confidence that everything is part of an eternal existence, and to be ever mindful of the law of cause and effect.

FAREWELL DR. KYOTSU HORI

By Sandra Seki

Former Nichiren Shu News editor, Dr. Kyotsu Hori, passed away at the age of 93 on June 10 in Kapolei, Hawaii. He was born at Nitchoji Temple on the Noto Peninsula in Ishikawa Prefecture on May 1, 1926. Dr. Hori received a degree in history from Waseda University in Tokyo. Later, he served as assistant minister at the Nichiren Mission of Hawaii while studying at the University of Hawaii. He then moved to New York and studied at Columbia University where he obtained a doctorate in history in 1967. That year, he began his teaching career at the University of Utah and then moved to the east coast to teach Oriental History and Culture at University Center in Richmond, Virginia. He served as chief minister of the Nichiren Mission

of Hawaii from 1971-1980 then returned to Japan to teach at the Tokyo Rissho Junior College for Women until his retirement in 1997.

In 1985, Rev. Shinkai Oikawa, the President of NOPPA (Nichiren Shu Overseas Propagation Promotion Association) organized the English Translation Committee for translating and publishing the writings of Our Founder, Nichiren Shonin. For the propagation of Nichren Shu, Rev. Oikawa felt this was very important. Dr. Hori was asked to join this committee and spent numerous years translating treatises and more than 400 letters Nichiren Shonin had written to his disciples and followers which expressed his thoughts and daily life.

Dr. Hori's publications began with Nichiren Shonin's Kaimoku-sho (Open

Your Eyes to the Lotus Teaching) in 1987. Followed by four other major writings such as the *Rissho Ankoku-ron*



(Treatise on Spreading Peace throughout the Country by Establishing the True Dharma) in 1992.

While Dr. Hori was involved in translating the works of Nichiren Shonin, he also worked as the Editorin-Chief for Nichiren Shu News from August 1984 until June 1991. After retirement, he returned to Hawaii, his wife Doris' homeland, and led a quiet life in Mililani, Oahu.

Dr. Hori always felt a sense of obligation and gratitude to the United States for giving him the opportunity to continue his studies. "No country would have given a youth with aspiration but with no financial resources the chance to study," said Dr. Hori.

The funeral service was held on Sunday, July 7 at the Nichiren Mission of Hawaii at 1:00 p.m.

Calendar for August 2019 – September 2019

AUG 13-16 Obon (Traditional Lunar Calendar) SEP 3 Memorial for Niko Shonin Memorial Ceremony for Victims and Unknown War Dead **AUG 15 SEP 12** Tatsunokuchi Persecution Memorial Day and Prayer for World Peace at Chidorigafuchi National Cemetery, Memorial for Nisshin Shonin **SEP 17** Sponsored by Nichiren Shu **Grand Ceremony at Shichimensan SEP 18-19** Matsubagayatsu Persecution Memorial Day **AUG 27 SEP 20-26** Autumn Higan (Equinox) Week

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