

BOWING IN GASSHO TO ALL LIFE

Time to Spread the Principle of Rissho Ankoku

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

I wish you, all the Nichiren Shu priests and devotees, the joy of the New Year and pray for your good health and success in the enlightenment of mankind.

As you all know, we have a missionary slogan, "Bowing in Gassho to All Life," which contains a message expressing the hope that "You have the same compassion as Shakyamuni Buddha for all living things deep inside your heart and any conflicts can be avoided with this compassion." This slogan is for all people who harm each other without realizing that they have this innate compassion.

However, the reality is that there are many disorders in people's minds, such as egoism, despotism, and extremely irresponsible brutality, all of which come from an empty feeling and focus on immediate pleasure and lead people to immerse themselves in temporary pleasure.

This is exactly the Age of Degeneration, or Mappo, that Shakyamuni Buddha preached in which the world situation tends to worsen day by day. Moreover, the overall population decline and the outflow of the younger generation into big cities makes it difficult for us to maintain temples all over Japan. Other unfavorable conditions, such as the trend toward being non-religious and the abandonment of religion or temples, seem too numerous to account for in our missionary activities.

I hesitated to say negative things at the beginning of the year, but I believe that now is the time to spread our founder Nichiren Shonin's spirit of Rissho Ankoku, "Spread Peace throughout the World by Establishing



the True Dharma." Shakyamuni Buddha anticipated this upcoming era and gave Jogyo Bodhisattva the mission to enlighten people in the era of Mappo. As the reincarnation of Jogyo Bodhisattva, Nichiren Shonin taught us to spread the Odaimoku, Namu Myoho Renge Kyo, and the spirit of Rissho Ankoku. We, as his disciples, need to have a strong determination to further our missionary work and temple management in order to spread his teaching.

The world is confronting a massive crisis that relates to our slogan, and the reason we raise it is to make everyone realize the compassion mentioned earlier. As for specific missionary activities, the realization of Rissho Ankoku will vary from county to county, and even from region to region in Japan. Therefore, different approaches must be made depending on each circumstance. However, the power of the Odaimoku, *Namu Myoho Renge Kyo*, is the same no matter where you are.

Preach the teaching of Shakyamuni Buddha with the spirit of Odaimoku, live with the spirit of Odaimoku, be kind to others with the spirit of Odaimoku, be a pillar of the family with the spirit of Odaimoku, and contribute to society with the spirit of Odaimoku. We can accomplish "Bowing in Gassho to All Life" by spreading this spirit.

I will constantly devote myself to preach to as many people as possible and offer them comfort. I cannot describe everything I want to say here, but let me conclude my New Year's greeting having expressed part of the way to help Buddhism prosper.

Happy New Year.

YEAR OF THE DRAGON

This year is the Year of the Dragon. According to the ancient Chinese zodiac calendar, the *tatsu* (dragon) is the fifth of the 12 horary signs indicating the east, southwest direction. Out of the 12 horary signs, the dragon is the only imaginary sign.

It seems dragons originated in India, where mythological snakes were deified and became dragons. In Buddhism, the dragon is a deity who lives in the sky, on the earth or in the water, controlling the clouds and rain at will. It is one of the eight dragons which protect the Buddha.

In many countries in Southeast Asia, seven or nine-headed dragons are many times depicted protecting the Buddha. Dragons are also often used to decorate the altars, ceilings and hand-railings of the main entrance to temples since



dragons have the power to drive away evil spirits.

Unlike most of the dragons that are depicted in the West, the Asian dragon symbolizes benevolent power that has strong energy to dispel evil, to overcome challenges, and to bring good luck

and happiness through its deep and ancient wisdom.

This year, 2024, is the Year of the Wood Dragon associated with the Earthly symbol. Dragons are those born in the years 1928, 1940, 1952, 1964, 1976, 1988, 2000, 2012 and 2024. This revered creature symbolizes strength, wisdom and prosperity.

May 2024, the Year of the Dragon, take on the power of the dragon to protect us all from natural calamities and bestow happiness to everyone throughout this new year. —Compiled by Sandra Seki

RENGEJI TEMPLE INAUGURATION CEREMONY IN JAKARTA



By Rev. Sensho Komukai

On the first Sunday in December 2023, an inauguration ceremony for Rengeji Temple was celebrated in Jakarta, Indonesia. The commemorative service was officiated by Rev. Nisshu Oikawa, Chief Abbot of Myokenji Temple in Kyoto, with ceremonial court music (*gagaku*), choral chanting (*shomyo*), and

special *kito* prayers performed. More than 150 people, including 50 local followers as well as those from Japan, Singapore, Malaysia (Kuala Lumpur, Penang, and Klang), and Sri Lanka, came to attend the service.

Rev. Myofu Ervinna, chief priest of Rengeji Temple, graduated from the Faculty of Medicine at Trisakti University in Indonesia in 2004. The following year, she came to Japan as a boarding student at Joenji Temple in Tokyo to study metabolic endocrinology at Juntendo University. During her studies, she felt the call to become a priest. She became a disciple of Rev. Nisshu Oikawa, entered into priesthood, and became ordained as a Nichiren Shu priest in 2011. As a Kokusai Fukyoshi, (international missionary), she is based at Rengeji Temple, and she regularly visits temples and sanghas in Singapore, Malaysia, and Sri Lanka.

Rengeji Temple was founded in 2003. People in Jakarta, who at first gathered in a private house for chanting Odaimoku, *Namu Myoho Renge Kyo*, began to show a lot of enthusiasm for establishing a

temple to widely spread the Odaimoku. With considerable efforts and contributions from followers and friends, a four-story temple was completed four years ago. After waiting for the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic to subside, the opening ceremony was held on December 3.

The building was constructed in 2018 with the first and fourth floors designed as multipurpose spaces, the main hall of temple itself occupies the second and third floors, the latter a mezzanine with an overview of the large main hall. As chance would have it, Rev. Ervinna's birthday was the day of the ceremony, and temple members brought in a cake to wish her a happy birthday, just as if they were family.

In his address, Chief Abbot Oikawa congratulated the temple members and Rev. Ervinna saying, "One of Nichiren Shonin's wishes has come true." Amri Ngadiman, chairman of the temple's board, gave a greeting full of hope, "When the lease ran out and we had to find another place for our group, everybody was worried about the future of our temple. It's great comfort that we have our own place where we can concentrate on Buddhist study and propagation. Going forward I hope we

can cooperate with elementary schools and be a resource that benefits our community to learn about Buddhism."

The big sign on the outside of the temple reflects this desire, it says, "Graha Pundarika," which translates as 'House of the Lotus,' a place where everyone can come together as family.

Rev. Ervinna expressed her thanks: "I really appreciate you for coming to the celebration all the way from such countries as Japan, Malaysia, and Sri Lanka. With your great support, Rengeji Temple was completed, and its opening ceremony was successfully done. Followers in Jakarta and I are experiencing the greatest happiness right now. I want everybody to come to the temple anytime you like. I will exert all possible efforts to spread the Odaimoku not only to the local area but also throughout the country and all over the world so that all human beings can have a happy life."

Enshrined in the altar of Rengeji Temple are two Buddhas, Shakyamuni Buddha and Many Treasures Buddha, accompanied by the Four Great Bodhisattvas from underground. This represents Lord Shakyamuni Buddha's tireless efforts to spread the Wonderful Dharma and lead all people to everlasting relief. As a disciple of Shakyamuni Buddha with a sharp awareness of being one of the bodhisattvas from underground, I sincerely wish Rev. Ervinna to prescribe the wondrous medicine named the Lotus Sutra for all those who suffer hardship.



LOTUS JEWELS

To begin with, as we ask where do hell and the Buddha exist, some sutras state that hell exists underground while others state that the Buddha exists to the west. Upon closer inspection, however, it is preached that both hell and the Buddha exist within our two-meter bodies. As proof of this, we sometimes disdain our fathers or neglect our mothers in our minds. This indicates that our minds contain the function of hell.

—Nichiren Shonin, *A Reply to the Wife of the Lord of Omonsu (ST 399), Omonsu-dono Nyobo Gohenji*

In this reply, Nichiren reminds us that our faith and practice is for the benefit of our lives in this world, not to enable a future reward or avoid a future punishment. This also helps us make more sense of doctrines such as "all phenomena are ultimate reality" and "attainment of Buddhahood with our present body." When we show gratitude and respect for all the beings we share this world with, we are expressing the mind of the Buddha.

—Rev. Shinkyō Warner

OFFICIAL VISITS TO NICHIREN SHU TEMPLES IN SRI LANKA



By Rev. Kosei Uchida

Sri Lanka, referred to as the Pearl of the Orient, is a Buddhist country located off the southeast coast of India. The beautiful island is famous for producing black tea and natural rubber. Many people may be surprised to learn that Sri Lanka had a violent civil war with people living in constant fear about 15 years ago. To avoid entire families dying in an act of terrorism or violent incident, family members would go to school or work in separate vehicles. However, peaceful days have returned since the conflict ended.

Even though there is an influence of Theravadan Buddhism, the teachings of Nichiren Shu are expanding little by little.

MINOBUSAN BETSUIN TEMPLE: After about an hour bus ride from the airport, a stupa and the Japanese school at Minobusan Betsuin Temple appeared on a road, surrounded by palm, cashew, and banana trees.

A group of 12 people, led by NOPPA Chairman Genichi Oikawa, Chief Abbot of Myokenji in Kyoto, Rev. Nisshu Oikawa, Rev. Jishou Toyoda, Director of the Missionary Department of Minobusan Kuonji, Rev. Mochizuki Honken, officer of the Co-flourish Department, and Rev. Myofu Ervinna of Rengeji in Jakarta, visited the temple after the opening ceremony for Rengeji. The school staff and about 50 kids welcomed the visitors in the main hall.

In normal times, there would be a graduation ceremony held each year

at the school. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it had been over three years since the last one had been held. In December, a long-overdue graduation ceremony took place. Then, a few days later, the group from the Missionary Department of Minobusan Kuonji Temple arrived, and the whole place came to life, welcoming the visitors with Kandyan dance, flower leis, and songs about Nichiren Shonin.

Besides the Japanese school, nearly 800 people attend Sunday School, and the temple has been able to manage the school independently through various grants. There still are some concerns. The renovation of their run-down building is on hold, and people cannot visit the satellite temple in Colombo because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, they are searching for someone who is fluent in Japanese to take over for the current chairman who is over 70 years old.

in Sri Lanka. Even though they had to limit their missionary activities to online only due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of believers has continued to grow, from 6 to 50.

Now Mr. Gemunu owns a rental house to use for their missionary activities, and they are expecting to open a new main hall in 2024. He told us of the challenges of their missionary paths until now.

“Before knowing the Lotus Sutra and the Odaimoku, my life was one of poverty, no place to live and days of drowning in alcohol. But one day, I heard about the Odaimoku, *Namu Myo Ho Ren Ge Kyo*, through a friend not knowing that it was from Nichiren Shoshu.

“Sri Lanka is a Buddhist country, and everyone worships Shakyamuni Buddha. I had doubts about worshipping only Nichiren Shonin, without Shakyamuni, so I asked my daughter to look into it on the internet. This led me to Mr. Ang in Malaysia. The sound of their chanting and Odaimoku was rhythmical and pleasant to me.

“For charitable activities, we served drinks and helped clean up at the Full Moon Festival, and sometimes we fixed damaged houses. Through hard work, we’ve raised enough funds to build the new main hall, which will finally be realized next year. I really hope you all can come.”

Missions overseas, such as in North America, Hawaii, Brazil, South Korea, and even in Japan, have similar histories. The effort of the priests in Southeast Asia, and all the believers, have been rewarded in the form of a new missionary base in Sri Lanka now under the guidance of Rev. Ervinna.



BUSSHIN-JI TEMPLE: The first contact with Mr. Alex Ang, a member of the Penang Nichiren Shu Buddhist Association, was in 2013. Mr. Gemunu reached out to him requesting guidance about propagating Nichiren Shu teachings in Sri Lanka. Rev. Noda, Rev. Ervinna, and Mr. Ang went to Sri Lanka to meet with him in December of that year, and that meeting was the beginning of Busshin-ji Temple.

Since then, Mr. Gemunu has built a favorable relationship with Minobusan Betsuin of Sri Lanka and continuously carried out missionary activities in his own living room. To spread Odaimoku in Sri Lanka, Rev. Oshima and Rev. Yuon Ito have been visiting not only Mr. Gemunu’s house but other families



TEMPLE EVENTS



Interment Ceremony for Rev. Shokei Steffens

A portion of Rev. Shokei Steffens' remains were interred at the Nichiren Shu Overseas Missionaries grave at Minobusan on November 16. The Interment Ceremony was officiated by Rev. Josai Fujita, Director of the Nichiren Shu Head Office Missionary Department. Attendees included Bishop Nichiyu Mochida of Kuonji Temple, Rev. Onin Hara of the Nichiren Shu International Buddhist Fellowship Association, Rev. Shuki Morioka, who now oversees Daiseion-ji Temple in Germany, and members of Rev. Steffens' family.

Nichiren Mission of Hawaii

Rev. Shokai Kanai

Mochi Pounding

Although there are many year-end traditions, none is more traditional than *Mochitsuki*.

This year the mochi pounding was held on December 28 in the social hall.

Members began cooking the rice around 8:00 a.m., and they began pounding the mochi around 9:00 a.m.

Proper COVID-19 health precautions were observed. Family and friends were welcome to help pound, make, and eat the mochi together.

New Year's Eve Service

The annual New Year's Eve Service was held at 11:30 p.m. on December 31 to say farewell to the old year and welcome the New Year by ringing the temple bell 108 times at midnight.

Toshikoshi Soba (New Year's Eve noodle) was served in hopes that 2024 would bring us health, unity, and prosperity.

Kannon Temple of Nevada

Rev. Shoda Kanai

The Sphere

There is a new attraction in Las Vegas, the Sphere Las Vegas. It is a huge, state-of-the-art concert hall venue and LED experience with seating for 18,000 people.

Outside, various images are displayed all day and night on the spherical outer LED screen. The area gets congested around the venue, with people wandering into the street taking pictures, stopping traffic.

Inside, a 250-foot-tall wraparound screen takes up roughly a third of the venue, with the remaining space available for seating.

Before entering the theater, there is an interactive show with an android named Aura. You can ask her questions, and she will reply with a joke or an answer.

My friends and I attended the inaugural showing of "Postcard from Earth," a visual



experience like no other. Each scene was breathtaking in how crisp the screen was, as if you were at the location. You can also feel the sound all around you, even though the speakers are nowhere to be seen.

I highly recommend attending the show if you get a chance to visit Las Vegas!

Ro-O-Zan Enkyoji Nichiren Buddhist Temple

Rev. Kanjin Cederman

Getting Back to Our True Base

During my recent trip to Japan, I had the opportunity to study with Rev. Kyoshun Kageyama of Shakaji Temple in Chiba Prefecture. This study focused on the traditional way of learning and reciting the Lotus Sutra. It was eye opening to go through each chapter and each character in the sutra. Dhyana Concentration and pranayama breathing are developed and found in all of these practices. These teachings help develop experiential understanding through their efforts.

I was able to learn more through Dhyana Meditation and yogic practices, which help in seeing the core and origin of all Buddhist teachings. Nichiren Buddhism is deep and vast as its techniques are established in the *Odaimoku*, *Namu Myoho Renge Kyo*.

We should re-establish our practice based on true meditation. Meditation is a basic way to enter and experience the benefits of Buddhist teachings. Learning this has been useful in our propagation efforts.

The current state of Buddhism in Japan and around the world is dire. We must look into this and re-discover our true base. With the Lotus Sutra, we can heal and inspire people to change their lives. However, we must not simply engage in academic or traditional pursuits. We are planning to open a Buddhist training center where anyone is welcome to come and study, from any tradition, to experience this power of change.



EDITORS NOTE: With this issue, Sandra Seki is retiring from Nichiren Shu News. We thank her for her many years of service and wish her all the best. Please make sure to address all future articles ideas and news items to: editor-nichirensunews@nichiren.or.jp



MY TRAINING EXPERIENCE AT NANTEN-RYO AT MINOBUSAN

By Myoshin Claire Ariyoshi

I completed my 80-day training with Nanten-ryo, a women's dormitory at Minobusan on December 20, 2023. What a magnificent experience it has been. While my transition was not easy, the training and education I received in my time there has been without a doubt, a life-changing experience.



Minobusan Kuonji has continued the same traditions and rituals for centuries. The warmth and support I felt everyday was much appreciated. Everyone was always so kind, and the little nudges and pushes in the right directions were always extremely helpful.

The women at Nanten-ryo are both beautiful and graceful. It is through their patient guidance and training that I learned about Japanese history and culture, movements, and mannerisms to be *saku nai* (inside the fence) in the Daihondo, Soshido, and Butsuden Halls of Minobusan Kuonji for morning service. Their movements were always so precise and purposeful. They were truly great role models for me.

Prior to entering Nanten-ryo, I had taken five semesters of Japanese conversation classes over Zoom from the University of Hawaii. In the training, I sometimes could only understand the gist of what was being explained

to me. However, we worked together to communicate with each other. As a result, I do not feel that language was a barrier to my absorbing my daily lessons or communicating with my teachers. Since my knowledge of *kanji* was limited, they allowed me to read the sutras in *romaji* (Romanized characters) and rewrote Nichiren Shonin's daily Gomyohan in *romaji* as well.

For any woman who is seriously interested in becoming a priest, I highly recommend entering Nanten-ryo to learn, understand, and be trained at Minobusan Kuonji. It is a one-year program. However, due to visa constraints, I was accepted for 80 days in the fall term. For me, it brought home the idea that Nichiren Shonin was a "real" living human being who believed so deeply in the *Odaimoku* and the Lotus Sutra that he dedicated his entire life to them and lived through unbelievable hardships in order to bring

this message to us. I am deeply honored to have been given this opportunity to study at Minobusan. It was intense, but it made me realize that I am stronger than I thought. To show my appreciation to Nichiren Shonin, I will also dedicate the rest of my life to repay the favors given to me by teaching and helping others so that they may also be enlightened by the words of the Buddha.



Calendar for February – March 2024

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

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Nichiren Shu

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