

Nichiren Shu News

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REFLECTIONS ON THE LAHAINA WILDFIRES



By Diane Omura

The Hawaiian island of Maui is shaped a bit like the top of a person's body. Lahaina, where the wildfires occurred, is around the forehead and bridge of the nose of Maui. Fortunately, Pu'unene Nichiren Mission is located at the back of the neck so the temple was far from danger. Consumed by our own fears and cut off from the world, we were not aware of the destruction happening on the west side. I called Rev. Shokai Kanai, who prayed for rain. We did not get enough rain, but the winds died down and steered the flames away from our home. I also felt grateful, as my husband had been in Lahaina for business the day before.

Pu'unene Nichiren Mission drew a crowd and kicked off the 2024 Obon season on Maui. From the yagura, Rev.

Kanai and Shami Edde Kanai gave dedication prayers for the Lahaina victims and blessings prior to the Bon Dance. Most recently, at the Nichiren Mission of Hawaii, Bishop Kanai and Shami Myoshin Ariyoshi conducted a touching memorial tribute to remember the 2023 Lahaina wildfire victims. In the tribute, the names of the 102 victims were read.

Joy Kubota is a first-grade teacher at Princess Nahi'ena'ena Elementary School who commutes to Lahaina from Kahului. She is a granddaughter of very strong Nichiren Shu members. She continues to support our church in various ways and shares her story.

"Although I am not a resident of the West Side, I was indirectly affected by what my co-workers went through and shocked and saddened by the deaths of two students from our school.

August 8, 2023, was supposed to be the first day of school for students. Teachers were on alert because of strong winds, due to a passing hurricane. Fortunately, due to a power outage, we were sent a text message that school would be closed. Had school been open, I may have become trapped in the fires and away from my elderly mom for whom I care. It was a real blessing that school was canceled due to the electrical outage. If the schools had been open, there would have been many more deaths. In addition to worrying about my students and co-workers, another concern was for the elderly minister and his family at the Lahaina Jodo Mission, with whom I have a close relationship. While their church was destroyed, a bronze statue of the Buddha and bell were miraculously saved. Two other Buddhist churches were sadly lost.

Not knowing what was going on that day and later seeing what happened on the news was terrifying and depressing. Somehow though, good emerges from misfortune. I learned that my brother, who lives in Kahului, became stuck in Lahaina while providing a ride for a customer, but they managed to make it to safety. It is also amazing how local people band together to help. An online spreadsheet was made to account for Lahaina residents to provide relief in locating missing persons. People from all walks of life donated time and resources.

It was very difficult to drive back to Lahaina and realize the extent of the destruction. Everything in my memory about scenic Lahaina was gone and



replaced with what looked more like a war zone.

It wasn't until October that we were allowed back on campus for our students to return. I was relieved to see our displaced students safe and adjusting well.

One year later, those who lost everything are still waiting for the clean up and rebuilding process to begin. Only now are they able to drink their water. Only now are they making some progress with their insurance companies. Even so, I have things to be thankful for as my school community is finally "home," and we are again able to support one another. Together, we are stronger."

EXPLORING MODERN CHINA—COPYING SUTRAS

By Rev. Yuon Ito

In June 2024, as I had an opportunity to visit China after five years as an international missionary. I have learned a lot again from this "amazing" country, both culturally and in terms of business. Below, I would like to share the experience of the Copying Sutra that I joined at a local Buddhist temple.

I visited Hanshan Temple in Suzhou which was described in a famous Chinese poem and is one of the most well-known Buddhist temples in China. Zhejiang and Fujian are coastal provinces located to the south of the Changjiang River, which flows through the middle of the country.

These provinces are known as cultural centers, and the people are deeply religious. With a population of 1.3 billion people in China, this famous temple was also crowded with worshippers, of which I waded through the crowds trying to visit the main and other prayer halls. Suddenly, I came to a quiet area. Unlike other places, it was sparsely occupied, and it seemed to be a building for copying sutras.

Inside the building, there was a large space with long desks and cushions for

about 40 people. Some people were quietly copying sutras, and a woman who was volunteering there came up to me and explained the process as follows:

(1) Choose a piece of paper that has one of several famous sutras, such the Heart Sutra.

(2) For A3-A4 sized paper, it usually takes about 40 minutes.

(3) Trace the faintly printed characters with a gold pen.

(4) Write at your own pace, and offer it to the Buddha when you are finished.

(5) In order to focus on the practice, private conversations and use of mobile phones are not allowed.

It had been a long time since I had copied a sutra. However, as a Japanese person, I

was fortunately able to enjoy a quiet and relaxing time while hearing the hustle and bustle of crowds in the distance. As I finished the practice, the gold characters on the paper were particularly fresh and beautiful, and the practice made a divine impression on me.

In today's world, quiet time, analog or physical activity and the action of "writing" itself are taking on different meaning and value in our lives. In this sense, I am confident that the tradition and antiquity that these Buddhist practices have provided for people—although they are often thought of as "old fashioned"—are still useful, especially as the idea of "digital detox" has been more common in recent years.

Since ancient times, the Japanese people have learned a great deal from continental China. As my friend calls me a 'modern envoy to the Tang Dynasty,' I immediately had the idea that I would "copy" this activity itself and bring this experience to my own temple upon my return to Japan. Contact me personally for more detailed information about this activity, and please share this idea with anyone you think might be interested.



SITUATION FOR THE NOTO TEMPLES HALF A YEAR AFTER THE NOTO PENINSULA EARTHQUAKE

From *Nichiren Shu Shimbun*

On January 1, a large earthquake hit in Noto Peninsula.

Many Nichiren Shu temples in Noto Peninsula, which is in Ishikawa prefecture, were severely damaged or destroyed.

Exactly half a year after the earthquake, we visited the quake-hit area to see the current situation.

What we saw there was a shortage of manpower at the sites, but on the other hand, there was strong will for temple reconstruction.

TIME HAD PASSED BUT NOTHING CHANGED

A completely destroyed temple, Honjuji Temple is located in Shoin Town in Suzu City, where the damage from the earthquake was significant.

For the town and the collapsed Honjuji, not much has changed since the last visit in February.

It gave me the impression that only time had passed as destroyed houses were left untouched, and buildings that had been abandoned with exposed lumber had started to deteriorate.

The shelter where Rev. Tessho Daiku, Honjuji's chief priest, was evacuated to has been experiencing water shortages.

The water flows up the street facing the residential side, but the pipes leading into each house were damaged by the earthquake.

Not only have there been delays in removing the collapsed buildings, but the shortage of manpower for water restoration has been forcing people to live under dire conditions.

As for removing collapsed buildings with public funds, only 4% of more than 20,000 requests have been carried out as of July 1.

The government is aiming to complete the rest by next October, but local residents including Rev. Daiku are understandably skeptical.

It seems that the completion rate in Shoin Town and the center of Wajima City haven't even reached 4%.

It would take a long time to get the town back to how it used to be, even if this whole area could be bulldozed to start over from the ground up.

Furthermore, the costs for construction materials have also been rising. They are almost a third more expensive compared to 2021.



Noto Peninsula temples were significantly damaged in January. Long-term recovery faces serious challenges.

TEMPORARY MAIN HALL BONDS PEOPLE'S HEART TOGETHER

Some temples, such as Daijōji Temple in Noto Town and Jissoji Temple in Nanao City, have closed their main halls to avoid secondary disasters due to shifting foundations in the buildings. They have moved their Buddhist statues and other important items to a nearby study halls and garages for protection.

Chokoji Temple in Nanao City also had severe damage to its foundation, but they are aiming to re-open after some temporary restoration work.

Rev. Honryu Imae, chief priest of Daijōji, commented that "We all feel much better in preparing the environment for our temple. This is our starting point."

Myokokuji Temple in Wajima City, which had its ceiling collapse, moved their Buddhist statues into a prefabricated unit behind its main hall.

The existence of places to worship is essential for faithful followers.

In the case of Honjuji, their Buddhist statues and Gohonzon are still under the collapsed roof that used heavy Noto-gawara roof tiles that were resistant to the cold and high winds.

They have been asking for the roof to be removed by heavy equipment so that they can carry out the statues. However, a schedule hasn't been decided, because of the shortage of a manpower.

Currently, Rev. Daiku chants along with some followers in front of the main hall of the temple where the statues have been buried, but his hope is to rescue the statues as soon as possible and to transfer them to the Kuri (priest's quarters) and make a temporary worship place for everyone there.

CHALLENGE FOR THE TEMPLES THAT ARE OPEN TO THE COMMUNITY

Some temples, such as Daijōji in Noto Town and Myokokuji Temple in Nanao City, open their doors to their communities to support local people under such difficult circumstances.

In June, an event called, "A market that connects people" was held in Daijōji with help from local residents and a volunteer group to make an opportunity to ease everyone's mind.

It was filled with many smiles of local children and adults who were enjoying the bazaar, food trucks, and games.

The temple had been open to the community since before the earthquake and looking ahead to the future as a place for everyone.

Myokokuji is part of a group of 16 mountain temples, which includes six Nichiren Shu temples.

Right after the earthquake, they streamed the supply list by SNS to direct needed resources efficiently from the temples and volunteer groups to people.

They started a soup kitchen in February and held events like concerts and parties to bring kids together to play.

Myokokuji was not as open to the community before, but the chief priest's wife, Junko Suzuki, always wanted to make their temple more interactive with the locals. The earthquake became the reason to make her wish come true.

Myokokuji's chief priest, Rev. Waken Suzuki, said that "We have anxiety and so do the earthquake victims. People feel much relief by being able to express what is stuck on their minds, and I also feel the same way. Moreover, I am grateful to be able to share the peaceful time with them."

THE 20 FAMILIES OF FOLLOWERS,
WHOSE REPAIR EXPENSES WILL BE
IN THE TENS OF MILLIONS
OF YEN, WILL NEVER GIVE UP
THEIR EFFORTS TO REBUILD

Here is a list of temples and their status, starting with Honjuji and Myoshiji in Suzu City, both completely destroyed. Myosoji, evaluated as completely destroyed by Wajima City. Daijōji and Myoeji in Noto Town, along with Joryuji were evaluated as completely destroyed. Hoonji in Wajima City, Myokoji in Shiga Town, Chokoji, Jissoji, Honnenji, Jorenji, Chokyoji, and Myokokuji in Nanao City all have ground deformation, shifted foundations, and tilted pillars.

The expenses required to repair these badly damaged temples will be extremely high. It would take 10-20 million yen just to repair a temple's foundation. Moreover, it could be more than 40 million yen if it needs additional repair to the ground, pillars, and walls.

The chief priests of each temple are holding their heads in their hands and trying to think of how they can manage to raise money for the repairs.

It seems difficult to ask each follower to bear the costs of such repairs, because their numbers are few and the financial burden will be huge.

However, none of the chief priests have given up on the reconstruction of their temples.

Of course, they know their followers have also been affected by the earthquake.

Rev. Seigaku Minamitani, the chief priest of Jissoji Temple in Nanao City, expressed his strong intention to reconstruct the temple even if it takes 10 years.

Rev. Oku always says, "We will figure it out" to the followers reassuring them when he hears someone saying that "Suzu City is finished."

Everyone we met in the Noto area had deep faith in the Lotus Sutra and also strong determination to keep the ever-burning dharma lights on.

—Translated by Akiko Canada



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



Detail of a carved wooden panel at Daikyoji Temple in Tokyo depicting a scene from "The Simile of Herbs."

The Seven Great Parables in the Lotus Sutra (4): "The Simile of Herbs"

By Rev. Kosei Uchida

Chapter Five of the Lotus Sutra revealed the Simile of Herbs called, "Three Blades of Grass and Two Trees" as follows:

"Suppose the various trees and grasses including herbs growing in the thickets, forests, mountains, ravines and valleys, on the ground, and by the rivers, all these plants being different in names and forms, were covered with a dark cloud, and then watered by a rainfall at the same time. The small, middle, and large roots, stems, branches, and leaves of the trees and grasses, including herbs, growing in the thickets and forests were watered. So were the tall and short trees, whether they were superior or middle or inferior. Those plants were given more or less water by the same rain from the same cloud, and grew differently according to their species. They obtained

different flowers and fruits although they grew on the same ground and received water from the same rain."

There are various kinds of trees and grasses on the earth. Each of them grows differently according to their sizes and nature. Once a dark cloud appears in the sky and rain falls, any roots, stems, branches, and leaves of all the trees and grasses are equally watered, however small, medium, or large they are. Just like that, ordinary people can equally receive the Buddha's teaching according to their capacities and dispositions. The cloud is likened to the Buddha. A rainfall is His teaching. Each of us has a different capacity to understand and embrace the Buddha's teaching. Like various trees and grasses equally given water by the same rain from the same cloud, ordinary people, whether superior, average, or inferior, can equally receive the Buddha's teaching and wisdom. Though there is a difference in our capacities, each and every one of us can be equally endowed with Buddha-nature.



The Odaimoku is the Buddha's offering to us. When we chant the Odaimoku, we receive its merits and transform them into an offering to all beings.

—Nichiren Shonin, *A Treatise Revealing the Spiritual Contemplation and the Most Venerable One, Kanjin Honzon-sho (ST 118)*

Shakyamuni Buddha's merit of practicing the bodhisattva way leading to Buddhahood, as well as that of preaching and saving all living beings since His attainment of Buddhahood are altogether contained in the five characters of *Myo, Ho, Ren, Ge, and Kyo*, the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Dharma, and consequently, when we uphold the five characters, the merits which He accumulated before and after His attainment of Buddhahood are naturally transferred to us.

—Rev. Shinkyō Warner

Kaimoku-sho, Open Your Eyes (2): Jogyo Bodhisattva and the Three Great Vows

By Rev. Sensho Komukai

Nichiren Shonin's treatise, "Open Your Eyes," begins with the following sentence, "There are three people for us to respect: our lord, our master and our parents." Our lord is protecting us, ordinary beings, our master is edifying us as a spiritual leader, and our parents are pouring out boundless compassion for us. According to Nichiren, it is only Shakyamuni Buddha who fully possesses all three virtues. The Buddha is our lord, master, and parents to save us all. The "three virtues" teaching is based on the verse part of Chapter Three of the Lotus Sutra, which says, "This triple world is my property (= our lord). All living beings therein are my children (= our parents). There are many sufferings in this world. Only I can save all living beings (= our master)."

Shakyamuni Buddha has had an infinite vow since awakening. He said in the Lotus Sutra, "I once vowed that I would cause all living beings to become exactly as I am, leading all living beings into the Way of Buddhahood." (Chapter Two, Expedients) He continued missionary activities to lead living beings to entering the Buddhist Way.

To the Four Great Bodhisattvas headed by Superior-Practice (Jogyo) Bodhisattva, the Buddha entrusted the spread of the Lotus Sutra after His extinction (Chapter 21). Attaching great importance to the Buddha's words, Nichiren Shonin kept asking himself and his disciples, "Who can be the Superior-Practice Bodhisattva in the Latter Age of Degeneration?"

There are two phrases which greatly pressed Nichiren Shonin to make up his mind to spread the Lotus Sutra with unbending efforts. One is what is called the "six difficulties and nine easier actions."¹ The other is "the twenty verses"² in Chapter 13 in which there are three kinds of powerful enemies who will persecute expounders of the Lotus Sutra during the Age of Degeneration. Based on both the "six difficulties and nine easier actions" and "the twenty verses," Nichiren Shonin said with confidence, "My life has been consistent with the words of the Lotus Sutra. I alone read the sutra from experience," and became aware of himself as Superior Practice Bodhisattva. Especially, the 14th verse of

Chapter 13, "We will not spare even our lives. We will treasure only unsurpassed enlightenment," made him swear to have an unbending aspiration to spreading the Lotus Sutra whatever difficulties he might face.

According to Nichiren, not only the Buddha but also the practitioner of the Lotus Sutra in the Latter Age of Degeneration is endowed with the three virtues mentioned in the first paragraph. In order to realize the Buddha's infinite vow and as Superior-Practice Bodhisattva, who was asked to spread the Dharma, Nichiren made three great vows, "I will never break my vow to become the pillar of Japan, to become the eyes of Japan, and to become a great vessel for Japan." The pillar stands for our lord or savior who protects the country and keeps it from decline. The eyes mean our master who tells right from wrong, giving us the right way to wisdom. A great vessel represents our parents who save us from drowning in a spiritual darkness and in a big wave of life and death. The three great vows take over the Buddha's vow to save all living beings. In his treatise, "Open Your Eyes," Nichiren's awareness of being Superior-Practice Bodhisattva is implied and Nichiren's determination to spread the Lotus Sutra as a disciple of Buddha and as a true practitioner of the Lotus Sutra is clearly expressed.

1. The verses of Chapter 11, "Beholding the Stupa of Treasures" says that when spreading the Lotus Sutra after the Buddha's extinction, you will encounter six difficulties and nine easier actions. The six difficulties are: (1) preaching, (2) copying, (3) reading, (4) upholding, (5) listening, and (6) revering the Lotus Sutra. The nine easier actions are: (1) preaching sutras other than the Lotus Sutra, (2) hauling Mt. Sumeru to other Buddha Worlds, (3) kicking the whole universe with a toe, (4) preaching sutras on top of the Highest Heaven, (5) grabbing the sky with the hands and walking around the world, (6) carrying the great earth on the foot to the Brahma Heaven, (7) walking through the fire with hay on the back, (8) preaching 84,000 sutras for people and giving them superhuman powers, and (9) leading the masses to become sages and giving them superhuman powers.

2. The verse part of Chapter 13, "Encouragement for Keeping This Sutra" consists of 20 lines, where there are three kinds of powerful enemies shown: (1) Lay followers who will slander, abuse, threaten those who spread the Right Dharma with swords or sticks; (2) Self-conceited priests who incite ignorant people to cause harm to those who spread the Right Dharma; and (3) Priests who are highly respected but in fact are filled with evil thoughts and worldly desires who instigate a power holder to persecute those who spread the Right Dharma. They will frown upon us, or drive us out of our monasteries from time to time. But Nichiren Shonin considered the verses to prove the Buddha's prediction that those who spread the Right Dharma would face many unprecedented difficulties.



Wood carvings of the Four Great Bodhisattvas, with Superior-Practice (Jogyo) Bodhisattva at the far left.

SOME THOUGHTS ON SHAMI EDUCATION

By Rev. Kanjin Cederman

When I was asked to write this article, I was hoping that I had something to offer the readers concerning the subject of Shami Education. I had one Shami student finish the 35-day Shingyo Dojo training last year, and I have another that has taken Tokudo and will go to Japan for the Docho ceremony held at Seichoji Temple in Chiba Prefecture. I cannot say that I am an expert or offer any special advice on the subject. There are many others more qualified than me. So, I will share what I have learned from my experience in the U.S. both with my own students and visiting Shami from Japan in the Overseas Study Program in Seattle, Washington.

In the U.S., when one requests to study under a teacher to become a Shami, there seem to be no standards. I have been more traditional in my style of training, as taught by my master Rev. Kanto Tsukamoto during my 10 years as a Shami with him. This has been an issue for me, as there is no clear guidance in the U.S. Each Kokusai Fukyoshi has a different background and is taught differently, which can be problematic. My style of teaching may seem severe and strict to many Americans. As a result, some students were unable to keep up with my teaching and chose to change teachers. Another issue is that many of the candidates come from other Nichiren traditions and have those beliefs deeply ingrained in their practice. Sometimes, believers and priests from the same background form groups, which can sometimes disrupt

the harmony of the Sangha. My original Buddhist background, from the age of 18, is from a Chinese Tendai monastic study and practice, which I learned before coming to Nichiren Shu. It is my opinion that the influence of the teachings and thinking of other groups can become an obstacle for Nichiren Shu in the U.S. as it prevents truly understanding the nature of our order. Our traditional way is often seen as difficult and some students have chosen the easy way under teachers with such influences. Without a clear and consistent educational system, it is difficult to teach in an appropriate way outside Japan.

However, there seem to be a few that have not been influenced by these other organizations and teachers. They can see the benefit of the traditional way in the study and practice of sutra recitation, chanting Odaimoku, and meditation. The basis of teaching a new person starts at the beginning with cleaning. Through this traditional aspect of cleaning, one can learning the purpose of purification and meditation of the mind. Up to down, front to back, left to right, and that we must humble ourselves to beauty and the service to others. What rags to use, the *fukin* or *zokin*, and what it means that they are mindfully prepared using and recycling old rags. Many just want to come to get information or be in a position of authority. In the West, and in modern times in general, people tend to be intellectually inclined rather than understanding through the body. I have had people not wish to clean, fix people's shoes, or clean toilets. I have come here to learn Buddhism they say. For them,



Rev. Kane Rosman, shown with Rev. Cederman here, became a Nichiren Shu priest in October 2023.

cleaning is not an entrance they can pass. One point that we must be careful is that just because someone wants to walk the path of a priest, we must try to understand their ability and willpower. Otherwise, we will lose a student and a congregation member when they are unable to accept the requests.

Once the student can dedicate themselves to cleaning the temple for six months to a year, they can then be eligible for the Tokudo ceremony. I learned from my master the basis for our tradition is focusing on the Lotus Sutra and its recitation. Many have learned the Sutras in previous traditions, however they must start from the beginning, learning to read *kanji* characters in the method of "Ichi-Ichi Mon-Mon" (one character at one time). We take each chapter one by one, going through the meaning of each *kanji* character. This is a critical and important aspect of the training. It is essential for each leader be able to read *kanji* and go into an in-depth study and explanation of the Lotus Sutra. Through this study method as they progress through each chapter of Yohon, they will be able to read and recite without the assistance of *romaji* or *hiragana*, only using the *kanji* characters. If a Shami does not progress or make the effort, we simply continue to repeat until they are able to move forward.

In addition to this, we practice and study the teachings of Master Tiantai "Maka Shikan" and Nichiren Shonin's

Writings. It is essential that they have the basics of these practices which are the foundation of Shodaigyo that we use to educate our Sangha members. These are all based on the Tendai Sandaibu (Three Major Works of Tendai) which is the standard that we should hold our priests. Through this traditional study priests can instill in Shamis, *gengi* (debate), *mongu* (Mastery of the Lotus Sutra), and *shikan* (meditation), which is based on the Odaimoku, *Namu Myoho Renge Kyo*.

It is my opinion that outside of Japan, we have become a tradition of mediocre priests that do not have a traditional education. This is further complicated as many Shami come from backgrounds in other Buddhist traditions, and they often retain a great deal of those different ways of thinking. We must be careful about accepting these disciples, as they have been deeply influenced by other teachings. Otherwise, our traditional Nichiren Shu teachings will be difficult to maintain. What legacy will be left, especially in the U.S.? Despite all this, I believe in our traditional way of practice and study. This has led me to realize that we need to become true teachers and practitioners of our traditions. My students may see me as a strict and unreasonable teacher, however I strive to be like the many good teachers within Nichiren Shu that continue to guide and support me. Even as teachers, we must continue to learn and study, as Nichiren Shonin directed us.



Shami Kansho Oakes, with Rev. Cederman, around the time of his Tokudo Ceremony.

Calendar for October–November 2024

OCT 10 Ceremony in Memory of the Founder's Exile to Sado Island
OCT 13 Oeshiki
OCT 31 Ceremony of Changing the Robes on the Statue of Nichiren Shonin, Minobusan

NOV 11 Nichiren Shonin Commemoration Day for the Komatsubara Persecution
NOV 13 Memorial for Nichizo Shonin

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