

# DHARMA ESSAY

Rev. Shokai Kanai

(Chapter IV)

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## **NICHIREN DAI'SHONIN**

### **750<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Propagation of the O'Daimoku**

(LOTUS #9, March/April, 1996)

Saint Nichiren was born in Kominato, a fishing village in the Province of Awa (Chiba Prefecture), on February 16, 1222.

At the age of 11, he entered Seicho-ji Temple, a temple of the Tendai Sect, as a page to Chief Priest Dozen. Later, he was ordained under his master, Dozen. The temple at that time was the largest center for education in Awa District. He studied and advanced his knowledge. Soon he realized that the library of the temple was too small to satisfy his desire for learning. At the age of 18, he went to Kamakura and studied at the library of Tsurugaoka Hachimangu Shrine. In less than a year, he studied all Buddhist scriptures and commentaries.

His major concern of study was in answering the question as to why there were ten sects of Buddhism, while Buddhism was expounded by only one Buddha, Sakyamuni. “Which sutra reveals the true teaching of the Buddha?” “Which denomination practices the true teaching of the Buddha Sakyamuni?”

Seeking the answer, he entered Enryaku-ji Temple at Mount Hiei to study in 1242. Enryaku-ji was the head temple of the Tendai Sect and also the supreme center of Buddhist study at that time in Japan.

Finally at the age of 31 in 1253, he reached the conclusion that the Lotus Sutra was indeed the only true teaching. He was convinced that it was his duty to carry out the will of Sakyamuni Buddha by spreading the teaching of this sutra.

Sakyamuni Buddha, during his 40 and odd years of propagation, had preached many sutras before the Lotus Sutra; however, he taught these different sutras to adjust the teachings to the level of understanding of his listeners. As people's nature and desires were not equal, he preached the Dharma or universal laws at various levels. On the contrary, the Lotus Sutra reveals the principal and deepest teachings of the Buddha. He taught it no matter whether people understood or not. He also says in a sutra preceding the Lotus Sutra; “In forty years and more, the truth has not yet been revealed.”

Returning to his mother monastery, Seicho-ji Temple, he firmly declared the righteousness of his faith in the Lotus Sutra by chanting “Namu Myoho Renge Kyo.” It was April 28, 1253. He chanted it several times facing toward the rising sun from the

Pacific Ocean. “Namu Myoho Renge Kyo” or O’Daimoku is the sacred title of the Lotus Sutra. Chanting the O’Daimoku is the simplest way of practicing the true teaching of the Buddha.

In the year 2002, the Nichiren Sect will celebrate its 750<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in Japan and here in the United States.

How we can celebrate this once-in-a-life-time event will be on the agenda in the upcoming convention of the Nichiren Order of North America (NONA). The convention will be held at our temple on August 23<sup>rd</sup> through 25<sup>th</sup>, 1996.

Please participate in othis convention and make suggestions as to what we can do to mark the 750<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in the year of 2002.

## Statues of Nichiren Shonin

(LOTUS #19, July/August, 1997)

At this temple, we always keep the doors of the shrine open; however, in Japan, the doors to the shrine are opened only during services or at the time of *Okaicho* or the Opening the Door. When you visit temples in Japan and want to worship the *Gohonzon*, you must request *Okaicho* for the unveiling of the image of St. Nichiren.

During our pilgrimage from Oct. 9th to 13th, 1997, we visited four major temples of the Nichiren Sect. Each statue of St. Nichiren has significant records and many important memories behind them. I would like to explain some of them.

Tanjo-ji Temple is the birthplace of Nichiren Dai'Shonin. The original temple was built six years before his death, but he never was able to see the temple because he was at Mt. Minobu. The temple, in the past, was relocated a few times due to being washed away by tidal waves or being destroyed by earthquakes and fire. Although the present temple is rather new, a temple priest found out recently that the statue of Nichiren Shonin was over 600 years old.

Six years ago, when the head priest of the temple tried to repair the statue, he found, inside the statue, six hundred year old medicines, grains of rice, and documents concerning the statue. According to these documents, the statue itself was erected at the time of the fourth head priest of the temple, Nichijo. So the image of St. Nichiren is several hundred years older than the temple building. The medicine and grains of rice kept the statue alive for over six hundred years even though the temple was washed away by tidal waves or destroyed by earthquakes.

When we visited Ikegami Honmon-ji Temple in Tokyo, we worshiped a 710 year old statue of Nichiren Dai'Shonin. It was engraved by one of Nichiren's disciples, Nippo, seven years after St. Nichiren's death. So the face must be a close resemblance to Nichiren Shonin at the time when he was alive. The right hand of the statue holds a *hossu* which was made from his mother's real hair. A *hossu* is used only by an officiant of a big service. When Nichiren converted his parents, his mother cut her hair off and presented it to her son who then always kept it with him for the rest of his life.

Among the many statues and portraits of Nichiren Shonin, the Hakii Portrait at Minobu-san Kuonji Temple is the most authentic. The portrait was drawn by Fujiwara-no-Chikayasu, a famous artist from Kyoto. To draw a picture of the saint by directly looking at the face of Nichiren was considered to be disrespectful; therefore, the artist drew the portrait from Nichiren's reflection on surface of the water. The Hakii Portrait is also known as the "portrait of water reflection."

St. Nichiren's statue at the Los Angeles temple is only 27 years old. However, when I was installed at this temple, I saw big cracks on the side of the statue's face. We then repaired the head and face of the Nichiren's statue two years ago. There was an empty space in the body of the statue after removing the head portion. I could not find any

time-capsule in there, but I placed a record of the donor' names for the repair work and a few copies of the temple newsletters.

As we found many important messages hidden in the St. Nichiren's statue at the Tanjo-ji Temple, a historian may also find important history of our temple many hundreds of years later. Some of your names may also be revealed at that time.

## Nichiren Shonin and His Relationship with the Seicho-ji Temple

(LOTUS #37, September/October, 2000)

Nichiren Shonin received the *shami* (the first step to become a priest) and formally entered the priesthood at Seicho-ji Temple at the age of 15 in 1237. This is also the temple where he declared the establishment of his teachings which is based on the Lotus Sutra. Seicho-ji is located on Mt. Kiyosumi overlooking the town of Kominato in Chiba Prefecture.

Seicho-ji Temple was originally founded by a priest called Fushigi (Wondrous) in 771. He suddenly appeared and engraved a statue of Bodhisattva Kokuzo (Bodhisattva of Wisdom) out of an oak tree. He enshrined the statue in a small hut. He prayed to the statue, which resulted in many miraculous occurrences, that saved many people from suffering. He then suddenly disappeared. Therefore, the people called the strange priest "Wondrous". The hut was restored by the Great Master of the Dharma, Jikaku Enjin, during the Jowa Period (838-847).

Nichiren Shonin first entered the temple in 1233 receiving his instructions under the direction of Master Dozen. It was thought that at the time, Seicho-ji Temple was a temple directly connected to the Tendai Sect of Buddhism on Mt. Hiei. At the age sixteen, he received the tonsure under the auspices of his master, Dozen-Bo. He then entered the Buddhist priesthood receiving the name of Zesho-Bo Rencho. At age seventeen, he left the temple for the city of Kamakura to study the doctrines of the Zen and Pure Land schools. After returning to Seicho-ji at the age of twenty, he departed for Kyoto for further research. He visited all the major temples in Kyoto, Osaka, and other cities thoroughly studying the doctrines of all eight Buddhist sects. In 1253, he returned once again to Seicho-ji Temple.

On April 28, 1253 he stood facing the rising sun on top of Mt. Kiyosumi and chanted for the first time the O'Daimoku, "Namu Myoho Renge Kyo." At noon on the same day he faced an audience of people to announce the pure faith of the doctrine of the Lotus Sutra as the real essence of the Sakyamuni Buddha's enlightenment.

This day has been designated as the day of the proclamation of the teachings of Nichiren Shonin, and thus is considered to be the official beginning of Nichiren Shu.

The 750th Anniversary of the O'Daimoku's Propagation has, is, and will always be celebrated around the world during the next several years. We would like to celebrate the anniversary by having our members and friends copy the O'Daimoku as well as to also build an O'Daimoku monument. This should be accomplished during the 90th anniversary of our temple. Please help us in this most important event of our temple's history.

## Izu Exile

(LOTUS #10, May/June, 1996)

Nichiren Dai'Shonin was exiled to Izu, Kawana, which is a few hours boat ride from Kamakura by sea. The charge was that he disturbed people in the city of Kamakura by criticizing the Kamakura Government, the Nembutsu, and other denominations of Buddhism.

The Kamakura Shogunate was established when Minamoto Yoritomo was appointed by the Emperor in 1292. At that time, political power transferred from the nobles to the *samurai*. The political capital was then moved from Kyoto to Kamakura, a boom town with no traditions of its own, unlike historical Kyoto or Nara. The rulers and people were proud of their 30-foot high statue of Amida Buddha, their new temples, and their vigorous new sects: Zen, Nembutsu, and Shingon-Ritsu.

On the other hand, the people of Japan were suffering from earthquakes, epidemics, droughts, and famines. Looking at these suffering people, Nichiren Dai'Shonin wrote this *Rissho Ankoku Ron* and appealed to the government. He said, "These sufferings are caused by the wrong practices of the prevailing Nembutsu and Zen Sects. The government should immediately stop the practice of worshipping Amida Buddha, and should go back to respecting the Sakyamuni Buddha." St. Nichiren was calling for restoring a return to traditional values, for the harmony which had existed between Emperor and Buddhism in the days of Saicho, who was the preacher of the Lotus Sutra in Heian Era; however, the government ignored the appeal. The devoted Nembutsu followers tried to kill Nichiren and set fire to his hermitage in the Pine Forest, located in the suburbs of Kamakura.

A year later, Nichiren came back from hiding and was again preaching on a street of Kamakura. He criticized the government who did not investigate the arson of his house. Such talk was disturbing and perhaps even dangerous for the military dictatorship. Regent Hojo Nagatoki ordered that Nichiren should be exiled to Izu.

It was on May 12, 1262, when a boatman dropped off the prisoner on a lonely reef ("Butcher's Block") off the coast of Izu. With high tide approaching, the waters were rising around the rock causing it to soon be submerged. A fisherman maneuvered his small craft close to the reef and took the exiled monk on his boat. He not only took him ashore, but he and his wife hid him in a cave and fed him secretly for a month.

Nichiren Daishonin never forgot the kindness of this humble couple. The people of the village hated the exiled monk more than the people of Kamakura. If they hid the criminal, they must be executed. However, the fisherman and his wife helped him for a month. There might not have been enough rice left over, but they still fed Nichiren. Therefore St. Nichiren says, "Did my parents reappear at Kawana in the Province of Izu in the forms of you, two?"

The Lotus Sutra says, "I will manifest the four kinds of devotees and dispatch them to him, so that they may make offerings to him." There is no doubt that various deities will manifest in the form of man or woman, child or adult, and protect us who practice the O'Daimoku.



## Pine Forest Ambush

(LOTUS #13, Nov/December, 1996)

When you enter the temple after Nov. 11, please note that the statue of St. Nichiren is wearing a red and white head cover. This is in commemoration of an incident involving Nichiren Dai'Shonin during the fall of 1264.

Nichiren Shonin had been preaching on the streets of Kamakura for about ten years following his proclamation of the O'Daimoku when he suddenly received a letter indicating that his mother was very ill.

He immediately went to Tojo Manor where his mother lived and prayed for her recovery. His mother was delighted to see him and subsequently recovered from her illness.

Nichiren couldn't stay long in the Tojo Manor because the lord of the manor, Kagenobu Tojo, considered Nichiren and his followers enemies. He often criticized and threatened anyone who expressed their belief in Nichiren and his propagation.

Nichiren received an invitation to visit Lord Yoshitaka Kudo in Amatsu located west of Tojo Manor. Unfortunately, the route to Amatsu required that Nichiren pass through Kagenobu's territory. Upon learning of Nichiren's pending trip, Kagenobu became very angry. He couldn't allow Nichiren's group to enter his territory and travel through it alive. He planned an ambush with the intent of killing the entire group. The ambush was set up along Nichiren's path and was timed to occur at twilight on the evening of November 11th. The ambush site would be concealed by the thicket of trees in a pine forest known as "Komatsu-bara." Nichiren and his followers approached the ambush site completely unaware of the pending assault. Suddenly and without warning, arrows began flying into the group, followed by heavily armed men who attacked the defenseless group. Nichiren and his followers, unable to defend themselves suffered many casualties, including the death of one of his most trusted and faithful disciples, "Kyonin-Bo."

Hearing of the ambush, Lord Kudo and some of his warriors rushed to the rescue. Lord Kudo encountering a stronger force was defeated. Lord Kudo was killed in the fighting.

During the confusion of the battle, St. Nichiren became separated from the rest of his group. Upon seeing Nichiren isolated from his followers, Kagenobu gave a menacing cry, raised his flashing sword and charged him. Nichiren stood calmly in the path of the charging horse and raised his left hand, holding his Ju-zu. These sudden actions frightened the horse, which reared up throwing Kagenobu to the ground. He struck his head on a rock and was knocked unconscious. He died a few weeks later.

In the confusion that followed, Nichiren and his followers managed to escape the fighting and took refuge in a nearby small cave. A village woman who was in the area observed the men entering the cave - noticing that one man was injured. Nichiren had cut his forehead during the battle and was bleeding profusely. The woman immediately ripped a piece of cotton material from the sleeve of her *kimono* and placed it on Nichiren's

forehead in an attempt to stop the bleeding.

It is this incident that we commemorate today by covering Nichiren's statue during the fall and winter season.

Nichiren Dai'Shonin describing the attack in a letter to Lord Nanjo, wondered why he was able to survive the ambush and the fierce, savage fighting. This served only to strengthen his belief in the Lotus Sutra. "I am the true practitioner of the Lotus Sutra," he declared to all who believed in him.

## Tatsu-no-Kuchi Execution

(LOTUS #42, September/October, 2001)

UTB, Channel 56, is broadcasting a drama series, "HOJO TOKIMUNE," the regent Tokimune Hojo from the Kamakura Era, at 7 PM every Saturday. It helps us to understand the social aspect during the time of Nichiren Dai'Shonin. Nichiren appears here and there through this drama.

Nichiren's narrow escape from the Tatsu-no-kuchi Execution was the most miraculous event in his life. It impressed him so deeply that he regarded his life after the incident as a resurrection.

Even before the execution, Nichiren was often persecuted. He had been exiled, ambushed, beaten, and harassed. His home was destroyed by arson. His criticism of the Kamakura Government and its religious authorities aroused the anger of the officials. In 1260, he issued *Rissho Ankoku Ron*, Establishment of Righteousness and Security of the Nation in which he predicted that:

"Natural calamities will visit this nation when gods leave the nation because people believe in wrong doctrines. . . . The Lotus Sutra is the essential teaching of Buddha Sakyamuni. Turn away from your wrong faith and trust at once in the unique truth of the Lotus Sutra. . . . If it did not change at once, the country would experience more disastrous calamities -- especially from foreign invasion and rebellion."

Eight years later, Mongol envoys arrived in Japan and demanded an annual tribute be made or else suffer an invasion. The following year, another envoy came with the same request.

What Nichiren Shonin had predicted came true; therefore, Nichiren wrote eleven letters to the government-authorities and high priests in Kamakura City reminding them of his prophetic warnings. However, his actions resulted in his arrest. During the evening of September 12, 1271, Yoritsuna Taira led his warriors in an attack on Nichiren's hut where he was preaching to his followers. The head of the warriors took a scroll of the Lotus Sutra and beat Nichiren with it. Nichiren said, "The fifth volume states that a propagator of the Lotus Sutra will be beaten. The volume with which you beat me is also the fifth volume." Yoritsuna ordered Nichiren to be arrested. He was placed on the back of an unsaddled horse flanked by soldiers with halberds. He was led through the streets of Kamakura like a criminal until they came to the entrance of the Hachiman Shrine. There Nichiren got off the horse, fixed his gaze on the shrine, and spoke out loud:

"Oh, Hachiman! Are you really a divine being? . . . I, Nichiren, am the one who lives the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. There is no fault in me, but I am proclaiming the Truth in order to save all the people of this country from falling down to hell because they are degrading the teaching of the sutra. . . . When the Lord Buddha revealed the Lotus Sutra, all the Buddhas and innumerable deities who were present in the congregation, each took an oath to guard those who would work to perpetuate the Truth. Now you should come

here and fulfill the oath, and why do you not do it? . . . When tonight, I, Nichiren, shall be beheaded and go to Mount Sacred Eagle, I shall declare before the Buddha that Hachiman has not fulfilled his oath. Are you not afraid of that?"

The warriors and the people there were amazed with his shouting to the deity. They questioned whether Nichiren had lost his senses, because he was accusing the deity.

As Nichiren rode by, many of his believers wept. Nichiren soothed them by saying that he wished to be beheaded because the sutra predicted the execution, too. He would fulfill the prediction that night. It was a joy for him, and he advised his followers to smile. Faithful Kingo Shijo, who wished to immolate himself, accompanied his master to the execution ground. Nichiren expressed his gratitude but refused to let him sacrifice himself.

Sometime after midnight, Nichiren arrived at the Tatsu-no-kuchi execution ground. Warriors surrounded the place and the official witness, Yoritsuna Taira, was sitting on a chair with the executioner standing behind him.

Nichiren sat down on a straw mat and joined his palms in worship. He chanted "Namu Myo Ho Re Ge Kyo" with his followers while he stretched out his neck waiting for the strike of the executioner's sword. The executioner tried to convince Nichiren to recant: "Listen Nichiren! You are not a criminal. You have just criticized other sects because you wanted to preach your belief. If you change your mind and put your faith in Buddha Amitaba, I will have you pardoned."

Nichiren replied, "I have always wished to preach the teaching of the Lotus Sutra even at the cost of my life."

The sky darkened. A gust of wind almost blew out the torches. Suddenly and miraculously, the sky was ablaze with a light like a ball of fire which seemed to fly from Enoshima Island toward the northwest. In the light, everyone's face was clearly visible. The executioner became dizzy and fell. The soldiers were panic stricken. Some of them ran away while others fainted. Everything was in confusion. The execution was no longer possible.

Since this peril, Nichiren believed himself to be Bodhisattva Jogyo predicted by Buddha Sakyamuni in the sutra. St. Nichiren was the real propagator of the Lotus Sutra in the Age of Degeneration of the Dharma. One month later, he was exiled to Sado Island located in the Japan Sea.

The Los Angeles Nichiren Buddhist Temple will observe the Tatsu-no-kuchi Peril by holding a service at 10 a.m. on Sunday, September 9, 2001. Everyone is welcome to attend this service.

## Sacred Mountain, Mt. Minobu

(LOTUS #28, May/June, 1999)

Minobu-san, Kuon-ji Temple, has been the core of faith for all Nichiren Buddhists as the head temple of Nichiren Shu.

Mt. Minobu was the place where Nichiren Dai'Shonin lived, chanted, and preached the Lotus Sutra for his disciples and followers during the last nine years prior to his death. He said, "Mt. Minobu is no different than Mt. Sacred Eagle where Sakyamuni Buddha lived and expounded the Lotus Sutra."

All Nichiren Shu priests must receive the 35 day basic training at the monastery in the West Valley of the mountain. Some of you may wonder why only 35 days is enough to become a priest. All priests get basic training like chanting O'Daimoku, reading the sutra, priest manners, and so forth directly under their masters before they enter the monastery as well as after the completion of the 35 day training. The 35 day training in Minobu is for official recognition and spiritual heritage as a Nichiren Shu priest.

All people who visited Minobu-san Kuon-ji Temple experienced its high spiritual energy. Why is that? It is because Nichiren Dai'Shonin's soul dwells at the mountain and because the people can hear the voice of chanting the O'Daimoku and the sutra all day long. He said, "Sakyamuni Buddha, Many-Treasure Buddha, all other Buddhas in the worlds of the ten quarters and Bodhisattvas revealed in the Lotus Sutra, the Brahman-Heavenly-King, King Sakra, a dragon, and ten female Raksasa Deities - all are gathering in this mountain." He also said that because he had chanted the Lotus Sutra on this mountain for nine years and because Mt. Minobu is the world of the Great-Mandala, the mountain is sacred.

In this place even a refreshing breeze, shaking plants and grasses, or the sound of the flowing water are reciting 'Namu Myoho Renge Kyo. He made a poem as follows, "*Tachiwataru mino ukikumo mo Harenu beshi, Taenu minorino Washino yama kaze.*" Or "Even the clouds of sadness that spread over me, would be blown clear away by the winds of Mt. Sacred Eagle filled with the sound of the Lotus Sutra."

The Los Angeles Nichiren Buddhist Temple received the title of being Minobusan Branch in the United States in 1940. We must have strong faith worthy of this title. If you have not visited Minobusan yet, please make a pilgrimage at least once in your life time.

## Pilgrimage to Nichiren Shonin Memorial Sites

(LOTUS #43, November/December, 2001)

The Nichiren Order of North America held its Pilgrimage to Nichiren Shonin's Memorial Sites in Japan from October 7 through 13th. It was one of the events held to commemorate the 750th Anniversary of Propagating the O'Daimoku, "Namu Myoho Renge Kyo." There were 36 participants, consisting of members and priests of the Nichiren Order of North America temples in Los Angeles, Seattle, Sacramento, San Jose, and Toronto, and also Shintokai in Long Beach.

Since the participants came from various locations, the tour groups left from Seattle, San Francisco, and Los Angeles on October 7 and met at Narita Airport in Japan on the next day. However, October 7th was the day that America began attacks on the terrorists in Afghanistan. There were many armed soldiers guarding the Los Angeles International Airport, and all check-in baggage and carry-in luggage were strictly checked.

The real pilgrimage started with a morning call at 5:30 a.m. on October 9. The first temple we visited was Tanjo-ji, Nichiren Daishonin's birthplace. Zen-nichi-marō (Nichiren's childhood name) was born on February 16, 1222. According to the history of the temple, his actual birthplace fell into the sea during an earthquake in 1498. It is a part of Tai-no-ura Bay where a lot of sea-breams are mysteriously living in the shallow bay. The fish are supposed to live in the deeper ocean. Tai-no-ura is also called Tae-no-ura, which means, "mysterious bay." "*Tae*" comes from another Japanese way of reading the word, "*Myo*."

The next stop was Seicho-ji Temple. Zen-nichi-marō entered the temple for studying at the age of 12 and took the vows of priesthood four years later, changing his name to Rencho. The temple is the place where Nichiren also chanted "Namu Myoho Renge Kyo" for the first time on April 28, 1253. All of us stood at the same place where he chanted the Sacred Title, O'Daimoku. We felt oneness with Nichiren Dai'Shonin.

Our tour bus crossed the Tokyo Bay halfway by bridge and halfway by the under ocean tunnel that goes to Kamakura through Kawasaki. It is called Tokyo Aqua Line. At the time of Nichiren, people had to cross the bay by small boats on a trip that took many hours, but we crossed the bay in a comfortable motor vehicle today taking in less than 30 minutes.

Kamakura was the military government's capital during Nichiren's time in the thirteenth century. He preached on the streets and at his hermitage for salvation of all human beings. Although some people became devoted followers, others tried to kill him by means of fire, swords, and through exiles. We stopped by Hachiman-gu where Nichiren, on the way to his execution ground, dismounted from the back of a horse in front of the Hachiman Shrine and shouted out in a loud voice: "Great Bodhisattva Hachiman! Are you really a god? I am going to be beheaded tonight. I will declare before Buddha Sakyamuni that you did not keep your vow to protect the practitioner of the Lotus Sutra." We also stopped at the execution ground, Tatsu-no-kuchi, where Nichiren's execution

was miraculously canceled.

The two-day bus trip covered 50 of the 60 years of Nichiren Shonin's life. We could not go to Sado Island, where he was exiled and revealed the *Mandala Gohonzon*. However, we went to Mount Minobu, where he spent the time to educate his disciples and followers during the last nine years before his death.

Archbishop Nichiko Fujii kindly invited us to his living quarters and gave us special greetings. At the end of his long talk, he became speechless and was about to burst into cry and tears of joy for welcoming us from the United States. During my interpretation of the 93 year-old archbishop's speech, I could not understand why he was so emotional. However, I realized that it was a time of the insecurity around the world because of the terrorist attacks. Most people were afraid to travel. He explained: "How brave you are! How strong your faith is! How enthusiastic you are to meet Nichiren Dai'Shonin!"

The tour ended with a visit to Ikegami Honmon-ji Temple, where Nichiren Dai'Shonin passed away at the age of 60 in 1282. The main hall was packed with devotees from all over Japan and us from America. Rev. Shoryo Tarabini, my Italian-American disciple, was one of the priests who conducted the *O'E-shiki* memorial service at Honmon-ji.

Later in the evening, we enjoyed watching the *Mando* Parade progressing from Ikegami Station to the main hall of the temple. Both sides of the streets were filled with hundreds of open-air stalls, and tens of thousands of people packed the streets to watch the parade. I had a hard time not losing anyone in our tour group among the sardine-packed crowd of people. At the end of the parade, we joined the *Shodai-gyo* in front of the statue of Nichiren Dai'Shonin in the main hall. The *Shodai-gyo* was held from 3:30 p.m. to 8:00 a.m. the next morning. Of course we left there before midnight. At eight o'clock in the morning of October 13, 1282, Nichiren Daishonin entered Nirvana while his disciples and followers chanted, "Namu Myoho Renge Kyo."

Some of the people from our tour group are still enjoying their stay in Japan. Others went home safely. It was a very meaningful trip. You may not be able to have such an informational and welcomed trip if you go there by yourself. During the entire seven day trip, a twenty-year experienced English speaking guide explained the whole route of our trip, and I added more information on the temples and the life of Nichiren Daishonin. The guide also happened to be a Nichiren Shu member. She also enjoyed her experience with us.

We sincerely appreciated the protection of Nichiren Shonin and the Wonderful Dharma during this pilgrimage.

## ***O'E-Shiki and Mando***

(LOTUS #24, September/October, 1998)

St. Nichiren passed away at the age of 60 on October 13, 1282 at 8 AM in Ikegami, Japan while his disciples and followers chanted O'Daimoku. His first disciple, Nissho Shonin, struck a gong to notify the death of their master. It is said that at that time, unseasonable cherry blossoms bloomed on the hill of Ikegami. St. Nichiren's body was cremated on the 15th day of the month and his remains were buried at Mt. Minobu, accordingly to his instructions. His ashes are still enshrined at Kuonji Temple, Minobu. Since his death, memorial services and events have been held every year during October and November depending on the district. This event is called the *O'Eshiki*.

During *O'Eshiki*, the cherry blossoms and *mando* are always displayed together. These cherry blossoms originated with the unseasonable blooming at the time of the saint's death. Last year, when our tour group made pilgrimages to Mt. Minobu and Ikegami, we saw small sized flowers here and there. At our temple here in Los Angeles, we are currently making artificial paper cherry blossoms. Please join us in making these flowers to decorate the sanctuary.

The *mando* literally means ten thousand lanterns. These lanterns are decorated with numerous cherry blossoms draping down from the top. The lanterns are also decorated with pictures of Nichiren Shonin or his sacred words. The lights of the lanterns illuminate in the dark sky. *Mando* parades are very beautiful.

These decorated lanterns originated in the early Edo Era during the fourteenth century in Japan. Priests from Minobusan Kuonji Temple and Ikegami Honmonji Temple carried pictures and writings of the founder with them as they visited local temples. At that time, devoted followers welcomed these visits by carrying lanterns with the names of their temple or organization on them. Today, instead of the priests carrying these pictures and writings outside of the temple, lay followers led by their temple priests make pilgrimages to the temples of Ikegami Honmonji and Minobusan Kuonji carrying *mandos* while beating drums and bells.

At the time of the pilgrimage last year, we were very fortunate to participate in the *mando* parade courtesy of Rev. and Mrs. Shosen Seki of the Jokyo-ji Temple where I received my ordination and training.

The Los Angeles Nichiren Buddhist Temple will hold the *O'Eshiki* Service at 1 PM on October 11th. Preceding the service, there will be a *mando* parade around the block of the temple. Please join the parade and service with your family and friends.





Nichiren Buddhist Kannon Temple of Las Vegas  
3920 Spencer Street  
Las Vegas, Nevada 89119-5201  
phone/fax (702) 396-6276  
email [revkanai@gmail.com](mailto:revkanai@gmail.com)

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