

No. 4 (July 1, 2008)

SACRED WORDS

Wherever I die, please erect my tombstone in the valley of Mount Minobu. My soul will dwell at Minobu for ever.

Nichiren, "*Hakii Dono Gosho*"

My Own Family's Grief

Rev. Shokai Kanai

My first grandchild was born on May 16th but passed away two days later. His parents were under duress during the entire process. Unfortunately, I was not able to support them and lend them guidance since I was in Japan for a pilgrimage and cut off from any form of communication.

The annual Nichiren Shu World Missionary Conference was held at the Head Office of Nichiren-shu Buddhism, Tokyo in the middle of May. After the meeting, I went on a pilgrimage by myself to Mount Minobu and Mt. Shichimen. It was the first time for me to make the visit after moving to my new missionary assignment to Nevada. Minobusan Kuonji Temple is the grand center of the Nichiren Buddhist faith as Saint Nichiren's ashes are enshrined there and his spirit dwells at the mountain. I reported my new assignment in Nevada to Nichiren and vowed to lead many people who come to Las Vegas from around the world through Odaimoku chanting and to build a temple in the city.

The Deity Shichimen dwells at Mt. Shichimen. She appeared at the site when Nichiren Dai'Shonin was preaching the Lotus Sutra at Minobu. She promised to protect the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra forever. Over sixty-six years ago, my mother offered her hair to the deity and asked Shichimen to protect her unborn baby and for him to grow in good health. After I was born, my mother passed away twelve days later at the age of twenty-nine. Therefore, my mother's spirit dwells at Mt. Shichimen. I need Deity Shichimen's protection and my late mother's watchful eye while I begin my new missionary work in Nevada.

Although I told my wife, Kumiko, and my son, Douglas that I would go to Mt. Minobu and Mt. Shichimen after the conference was over, I did not tell them how to contact me because I did not expect any emergencies to occur during this pilgrimage.

On May 20th, I gave a lecture to Nichiren Shu priests at the Head Office. My talk was on "My Experiences on Caring for Sick, Aging, and Dying People and the After-

Care for Families Who Held Funerals.” In Japan, it is said that many Buddhist priests take care of only the dead people, with things like funeral services and memorial services. But now is the time for them to learn how overseas ministers take care of living people, especially for people with terminal illness, through visitations at hospitals, and special care facilities for handicapped people.

After the lecture, I opened an e-mail from my wife and son at a hotel in Tokyo, and I cried while reading my son’s and daughter-in-law’s distress during her emergency treatment, delivering their first baby, transportation to the University of Washington Hospital in order to treat their premature baby, the mental struggle to be parents and the death of their baby. I did not know anything about Randy and Kari’s grief until reading the e-mail. I felt so helpless, which was especially ironic after the lecture and pilgrimage to Mt. Shichimen.

After coming back to the states, we held the baby’s funeral service at the Seattle Nichiren Buddhist Church. Through this sad occasion I learned a lesson that I should be more humble because I was not able to take care of my own family during their time of grief. I deeply appreciate everyone who helped them and gave us sympathy.

SUMMERTIME

Rev. Shoda Douglas Kanai

Now is the time that the weather has turned for the best as the days are longer and the sun brighter. Here in Las Vegas, the temperature rarely dips below 100 degrees and the only escape is to turn on the air conditioner and sit in front of the fan. This reminds me of the summers spent in Japan when I was little. Being from Seattle, I was not used to the heat and humidity. If at all possible, I would sit in front of the electric fan or be directly under the air conditioning unit. I remember waking up at night, drenched in sweat because of the myth that I could get sick if I was exposed to cold air while sleeping and the cold air hitting my stomach. I had to wear “*haramaki*” in order not to get sick. As I am now older, I feel that this was just a story told over and over. I now sleep with the electric fan running all night and with no “*haramaki*”. I have yet to catch a cold.

These memories that I have, I cherish. It brings me back to a time when *Obon* season begins with all the festivals or *Matsuri*’s. I enjoyed the bright lights, good food and the dancing. There always seemed to be a fireworks display. In the U.S., July 4th was the only time to see fireworks in summer. It was very interesting to see the community come together. The real purpose of having this type of enjoyment is to show our excitement in knowing that our ancestors are not suffering and are on their way to the Buddha Land.

Obon, began as a tradition when one of Buddha's disciples was able to see his mother in the next realm. Unfortunately she was in the *Hell* realm. Distraught, he asked the Buddha what to do. The Buddha replied that by offering food, drink and chanting on the fifteenth day of the seventh month (the last day of their *ango* training) and by remembering all the deceased members, this act will help everyone move towards the Buddha Land. After following the Buddha's orders, the disciple's mother was able to leave the *Hell* realm, thus in excitement, danced with joy. Thus we have the *Bon Odori*.

As we dance with joy, please remember to make offerings to your deceased relatives and say a few prayers for them so that they may be released from the lower levels. Tradition has it that the deceased travels to this world and visits us for three days. We offer rice mixed with cucumber, watermelon and the use of a bamboo leaves to spread water over the mixture. Cucumbers and egg plant are symbolically used to represent horse and cow as part of the offerings. I would also suggest offering a small dish of the deceased's favorite food, dessert and/or drink. I am sure that they will be happy that you are remembering them in this special way.

We may feel a bit sad in that we cannot enjoy the festivities with our loved ones. Just remember that they are still part of us and are there to help us out in time of need. It is now our duty to show our gratitude and make sure that they are able to reach the Buddha Land, where someday we will meet again.

Summer is hot, the kids are out of school, may be at summer camp or spending summers in Japan, just as I did. There are more opportunities to enjoy barbeques with family and friends. Every now and then at these parties, chant the *Odaimoku*, silently if you do not want to disturb the guests, and pay homage to the deceased in that they too can enjoy the food, fun and festivities.

July/August, 2008