

Nichiren Shu News

Published by the Head Office of Nichiren Shu & NOPPA

No. 268

Summer 2025

1

NEW YEAR'S ENCOUNTER WITH NICHIREN SHONIN THE ONENTO-E CEREMONY

A HISTORIC NEW YEAR'S RITUAL CONNECTS MODERN BELIEVERS WITH THE SOUL OF NICHIREN SHONIN

By Rev. Yuon Ito with the cooperation of Minobusan Kuonji Temple's Propagation Department



Kazuki Kumao, for the first time in this role, feeding the horse at this year's Onento-e Ceremony.



Akio Kumao, in his final appearance in this role, leading the ritual of the Onento-e Ceremony.

Every year on January 13, one of the most historically significant ceremonies among the many events at Minobusan Kuonji Temple is performed. This ritual, called "Onento-e," is a ceremony that has continued for approximately 750 years since the time of Nichiren Shonin. The Onento-e is not merely a ceremonial event but serves to spiritually connect our founder Nichiren Shonin with those of us living in the modern era. January 13 is the first monthly memorial day of Nichiren Shonin that we observe each year, and in this ceremony, Nichiren Shu priests and believers unite as one to offer New Year's greetings as if Nichiren was still present here with us.

Nichiren taught, "This mountain should be regarded as the foundation for pilgrimage; this is indeed the covenant of Eagle Peak." In adherence to this teaching, followers of Nichiren Shu from across the country undertake pilgrimages to Kuonji Temple. This practice allows them to renew their vows at the start of the year and reinforce their solidarity in faith.

HISTORICAL ORIGINS: This ceremony began in the first year of Kenji (1275), the year after Nichiren Shonin entered Minobusan. It is said that on New Year's Day, the six senior disciples and the principal lay believer Lord Sanenaga Hakii, along with many disciples, gathered at the hermitage to offer New Year's greetings to Nichiren Shonin while together offering prayers for the establishment of righteousness and peace in the nation and the conversion of all seas to the wonderful Dharma. Furthermore, on the 13th of that month,

Lord Hakii invited Nichiren Shonin to his residence to conduct memorial services for his ancestors and enjoy New Year's celebration. Nichiren Shonin gladly accepted, mounted a horse offered by Lord Hakii, and headed to his residence with Shiro Kumao, who had served him for many years, taking the bridle.

At Lord Hakii's residence, traditional ceremonies were performed, and young disciples presented celebratory dances. Nichiren was said to have greatly enjoyed this hospitality. Thus, this New Year's celebration became an annual tradition during Nichiren's time at Minobusan. Even after his passing, believers continued this New Year's gathering, choosing January 13—the first monthly memorial day of each year—to offer New Year's greetings as if he was still alive.

LIVING TRADITION — THE KUMAO FAMILY: The Onento-e Ceremony has been passed down to the present day, experiencing periods of prosperity and decline throughout the flow of time. The special ceremony continues to be held today with approximately a thousand participants. The six senior lineage families that descended from Nichiren Shonin's six senior disciples, priests from Kuonji Temple, and other priests and believers from all over the country attend.

Among the lineage families, the Kumao family deserves particular attention. Within the ceremony, there is a particularly impressive ritual called "Hikime-shiki" (Horse-leading Ceremony), in which two young horses are led in procession through the temple grounds, symbolizing the scene

of Nichiren heading to Lord Hakii's mansion with Shiro Kumao taking the bridle. Remarkably, a family from this lineage continues to play an important role in the ceremony even after 750 years by offering ritual meals to Nichiren on behalf of all participants.

Akio Kumao, the 36th head of the Kumao family, has fulfilled important roles during the ceremony for more than 30 years. In the ceremony, he wears special garments, different from ordinary Japanese clothing, maintaining the teachings and solemn spirit passed down continuously over many generations. He has participated in this ceremony in the severe cold of Minobusan winters even past the age of 70. However, this year a significant change occurred in this role. The responsibility that Akio had carried for many years was entrusted to his son, Kazuki Kumao.

Akio said, "In the mountain depths of Minobu, it is said that even securing food was difficult during Nichiren Shonin's lifetime. Within that context, Nichiren Shonin and his disciples and believers supported each other and overcame hardships together. I have treasured the ancestral roots of our family passed down through the generations, and I feel proud to be able to pass this on to the next generation. While there are different difficulties now compared to Nichiren's time, such as current trends and the weakening of faith, I hope that our family will continue to be with Nichiren Shonin here in Minobu."

Kumiko Kumao, Akio's wife, also said, "The ceremonial garments were custom made little by little over many years. The responsibility of marrying into such a

historically significant family was not light, but when I saw my son dressed in the ceremonial garments participating in this year's ceremony, I felt joy and peace of mind. There must have been many difficulties throughout this long history, but the fact that it has continued this far means there has been divine protection from the Buddha and our founder. What we can do for the future is just to maintain our faith together with a heart of gratitude as we have been doing until today."

LIVING CONNECTION WITH THE FOUNDER:

This ceremony provides insight into how Japanese Buddhist traditions maintain a living connection with their founders across centuries. The founder is not a figure from the distant past but continues to remain at the center of the faith community even now.

In this ceremony that has continued since Nichiren's time, we can realize that his thoughts and words continue to speak directly to us across time. His teachings appear as vividly before us now as when they were first expounded on Minobusan 750 years ago.



Akio Kumao with his wife, Kumiko.

TEMPLE ATTENDANT PROJECT TAKES FLIGHT: SUCCESSFUL TRIAL SEMINAR IN PENANG



OVERVIEW OF THE TRIAL SEMINAR IN PENANG

By Rev. Keiji Oshima

The Temple Attendant Project's inaugural trial seminar took place over two days at Hokkezan Ichinenji Temple in Penang, Malaysia, bringing the program's carefully developed curriculum to life for the first time. This initial implementation provided an invaluable opportunity to test the collaborative framework that had been refined over months of preparation by international trainee priests.

The seminar featured a balanced blend of lectures and interactive activities designed to address the practical realities of temple service. Participants engaged with core concepts through three main lectures covering Temple Attendant responsibilities, the Three Treasures related to Sangha relationships, and approaches to handling challenges with compassion. These theoretical foundations were reinforced through hands-on activities including team-building exercises, guided chanting practice, informal discussion sessions, and role-playing scenarios for welcoming newcomers.

The program's structure reflected careful attention to cultural sensitivity and practical application. Rather than purely academic presentations, the seminar emphasized experiential learning that participants could immediately apply in their temple



communities. The diversity of facilitators — representing different cultural backgrounds and approaches to Buddhist practice — demonstrated the universal applicability of these principles while also respecting local differences.

This trial seminar in Penang has served as a crucial testing ground for the program's effectiveness and scalability, and it has provided clear feedback on participant engagement and transformation that will inform future implementations in other international Nichiren Shu communities.

PARTICIPANT REFLECTION: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE ON BUDDHIST PRACTICE

By Chloe Neoh

The two-day Temple Attendant Retreat at Hokkezan Ichinenji Temple in Penang, offered a thoughtfully structured program that provided both theoretical understanding and practical applications for daily life.

COMPREHENSIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCE: Key topics explored included the role and responsibilities of a Temple Attendant, the significance of the Three Treasures — Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, which form the foundation of Buddhist practice — and the vital function of the temple and Sangha in supporting both individual and collective spiritual development.

INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES: A unique and enriching aspect of this workshop was the participation of international priests from Brazil, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States, who facilitated various sessions. Their diverse backgrounds brought a global perspective to the discussions, offering participants a broader understanding of how Buddhist teachings are interpreted and practiced across cultures. This diversity deepened the learning experience and highlighted the universal values of the Dharma.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION: Throughout the workshop, strong emphasis was placed on integrating Buddhist principles, such as mindfulness, compassion, and right action, into everyday life. In my personal view, one of the most impactful aspects of the workshop was the role-playing

exercise. This interactive session allowed participants to apply teachings in realistic scenarios, encouraging thoughtful and compassionate responses. It made the lessons more memorable and relevant to real-world interactions.

IMPORTANCE FOR BUDDHIST PRACTITIONERS: Workshops like these are especially important for Buddhist practitioners. As followers of the Lotus Sutra, we each have a responsibility to uphold and share its teachings. By deepening our understanding and strengthening our practice, we help ensure the Dharma continues to shine brightly in the world.

Overall, the workshop was a valuable and inspiring experience that I would highly recommend.

PARTICIPANT REFLECTION: A BRIDGE-BUILDING EXPERIENCE

By Samantha Kee Swee Ling

The Temple Attendant Retreat at Ichinenji Temple in Penang was a truly transformative experience that deepened my understanding of service, community, and the Dharma through the comprehensive teachings from our international instructors.

LEARNING THE HEART OF TEMPLE SERVICE: The workshop illuminated the principle of equality that lies at the heart of temple service, "We all share the same faith in the Buddha, and no task grants superiority or spiritual status." As attendants, our duties — maintaining cleanliness, welcoming visitors, and aiding in ceremonies — are acts of devotion, not ego. We were reminded to serve the Three Treasures with humility, letting our actions quietly reflect our Buddha nature.

I learned that true service means shedding the desire for recognition. By embodying sincerity and setting an example, we nurture a loving spirit that unites the Sangha.

UNDERSTANDING THE THREE TREASURES: The lectures emphasized the interdependence of the Three Treasures — Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. The Sangha transcends generations, uniting priests, nuns, and members to protect and propagate the Dharma. A thriving Sangha requires good priests who uphold the Lotus Sutra with compassion and wisdom, good members who foster unity and practice virtue, and good teaching through the Lotus Sutra itself.

These teachings showed me that the Dharma flourishes only when priests and active members collaborate with mutual respect. As members, our role is to support, learn, and embody the teachings in daily life.

PRACTICING HARMONY THROUGH CHALLENGE: The workshop included a dynamic exercise where we navigated a fictional survival scenario after a plane crash. This activity tested teamwork, patience, and collective decision-making — mirroring



the challenges of Sangha leadership. Through it, we practiced Buddhist principles of interconnectedness, compassion, and resilience.

This exercise helped me realize that harmony is not passive — it requires active listening, humility, and a commitment to shared goals.

PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION: This retreat reshaped my understanding of leadership. As a new leader at Ichinenji Temple in Penang, I now see my role as a bridge — uniting diverse members through service, humility, and reverence for the Lotus Sutra. Lessons on equality, interdependence, and harmony have inspired me to lead with quiet dedication, to cultivate patience and collective wisdom in decision-making, and to cherish every member's contribution to our shared Dharma path.

CONCLUSION

The enthusiastic response from the participants in the trial seminar in Penang demonstrates the genuine need and appreciation for structured Temple Attendant training. Both of these participants emphasized how the workshop transformed their understanding of service and community leadership, while also highlighting the value of international perspectives in Buddhist practice.

The success of this first trial program already confirms that the Temple Attendant Project addresses real needs within our international temple communities. The combination of theoretical understanding and practical application, delivered through diverse cultural perspectives, creates a powerful learning experience that participants can immediately put to effective use in their temple service.

As the International Section prepares to expand this program to other regions, the positive feedback and concrete examples of transformation from Penang provide a strong foundation for future development. The Temple Attendant Project is well-positioned to strengthen temple communities worldwide while preserving the essential traditions that define Nichiren Shu practice.



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



The Seven Great Parables in the Lotus Sutra (8): "An Excellent Physician"

By Rev. Kosei Uchida

There was an excellent physician who was able to cure all kinds of diseases. He was a father with many children. One day, while he was away, his children ingested poison. They all withered in agony, rolling on the ground. Some had already lost their right minds. When their father returned home, they begged him to remove their agony. The father compounded an antidote to prescribe for them and gave it to them. Those who had slight symptoms took the good medicine and recovered completely. The trouble is that those who had severe symptoms were so perverted that they did not believe it was a good medicine. The father thought that they were too poisoned that they lost control of their minds. He never gave up, though. He decided to use an expedient so that they would take the medicine. "Now I have to leave on urgent business. I will leave a medicine that I have prepared. Do not be afraid of taking it." Then he went away. A few days later his messenger told them that their father had died. Having heard of his death, the children felt extremely sorry and lonely. While in despair, they recalled the medicine he had left for them. They took it on his advice. They were finally cured. On hearing that his children had recovered their health, the father returned home. Everyone in the family was delighted to see each other again. The news that their father perished was an expedient, because the great physician thought the children would never recover themselves unless they were first shaken up so they would become able to re-awaken their right minds.

The excellent physician is the Buddha. The perverted children are us, ordinary beings. A remedy against poison is likened to the Lotus Sutra. Just like the great physician who knows many methods of treatment and remedies, the Buddha has expounded 84,000 teachings according to the capacities of all living beings. Those who have not understood the various teachings or who were misled to the wrong doctrine are likened to the children who ingested poison by mistake. The children who recovered quickly and completely did so because

they took the best medicine, which is called the Lotus Sutra. The Buddha's compassion equally permeates among all living beings. When the Buddha is always beside us, we become arrogant and licentious, depending on Him for everything. We fail to seek out the true Dharma. This is why the Buddha shows His extinction as an expedient so that He can give us an opportunity to awaken our right minds. The Buddha seemingly keeps out of sight, but He is always with us, trying to save us from suffering. His great compassion toward us has never changed from the remotest past, to the present, and it will continue in the future.

Kanjin Honzon-sho (1)

By Rev. Sensho Komukai

Kanjin Honzon-sho (A Treatise Revealing the Spiritual Contemplation and the Most Venerable One) was completed on April 25, 1273. Nichiren Shonin wrote this treatise for three main reasons: (1) **How do you practice the Lotus Sutra?** He says the treatise is "of the utmost importance." With all his strength or even at the risk of his life, he tried to show that the True Dharma is deeply rooted in his faith. It is here where how important it is to chant the *Odaimoku*, *Namu Myoho Renge Kyo*, is revealed. (2) **What do you focus on when chanting the *Odaimoku*?** It is the *honzon* (the Most Venerable One), but what kind of *honzon* you should focus on is explained. (3) **What is the valuable meaning of the *honzon*?** The *honzon*, based on Chapter 16 of the Lotus Sutra, is explained. Then, to help you better understand and clearly visualize what the *honzon* should be like, Nichiren Shonin inscribed and revealed his great mandala *honzon* for the first time on July 8, 1273.

The formal name for this treatise is, *A Treatise Revealing the Spiritual Contemplation (kanjin) and the Most Venerable One (honzon) for the First Time in the Fifth 500-year Period after the Death of Shakyamuni Buddha*.

"*Kanjin*" literally means spiritual contemplation. As you meditate on your own mind, the ten realms from Hell to the realm of the Buddha can be observed. The mind is always changing from bad to good or from good to bad. It is important to observe your mind quickly changing.

"*Honzon*" means an object of worship which is to show your devotion to the Wonderful Dharma, the Buddha and bodhisattvas. In Nichiren Shu Buddhism, the world revealed by the Eternal Buddha of the Lotus Sutra is manifested in the *honzon*.

According to the Buddhist historical periodization, how Buddhist faith and practice have changed is shown in five 500-year periods after Shakyamuni Buddha's extinction. The first 500-year period is characterized by the firm attainment of emancipation, when many people are able to attain Buddhahood. The second is a period of steadfast practice of meditation, when there are many studying Buddhism and practicing meditation. The third is a period, when people read and recite sutras extensively to increase their knowledge. The fourth period is when many people build temples and towers, trying to find happiness and virtue. The fifth 500-year period is a time of increasing disputes and quarrels within Buddhism itself, resulting in destruction of the True Dharma.

The first and second 500-year periods are called "the 1000-year Age of the True Dharma (*shobo*)," when people keep the Buddhist teaching and practice, attaining Buddhahood. The third and

fourth 500-year periods are called "the Age of the Semblance Dharma (*zobo*)," when people still keep Buddhist teaching and practice but with no chance of attainment of Buddhahood. The fifth 500-year period and next ten thousand years is the Latter Age of Degeneration (*mappo*), when the True Dharma ceases to exist with power play and false views rampant among Buddhists.

In Chapter 23 of the Lotus Sutra, it says, "Spread this sutra in the world in the fifth 500 years after the Buddha's extinction." Nichiren said, "It has been over 220 years since we entered the Latter Age of Degeneration. Now is the time to spread the Lotus Sutra throughout the world." *Kanjin Honzon-sho* was written in 1273. This was 2,222 years after Shakyamuni Buddha entered Parinirvana. It would be a necessary consequence that the treatise was revealed only in this Latter Age of Degeneration, not in the Age of the True Dharma or in the Age of the Semblance Dharma, because the Buddha expounded the Lotus Sutra, especially Chapter 16, to save all living beings in this Latter Age of Degeneration.

So perhaps now you can see how deep the meaning of the title, *Kanjin Honzon-sho*, is and how important it is to read and understand this treatise in Nichiren Shu Buddhism.

THREE AGES AFTER THE PARINIRVANA OF SHAKYAMUNI BUDDHA			Teaching	Practice	Emancipation
1,000 Years	Age of True Dharma	1st 500-year Period 2nd 500-year Period	○	○	○
1,000 Years	Age of Semblance Dharma	3rd 500-year Period 4th 500-year Period	○	○	—
10,000 Years	Latter Age of Degeneration	5th 500-year Period...	○	—	—

LOTUS JEWELS

It is preached that the Two Vehicles do not appreciate the favors they received, and therefore they are forever unable to attain Buddhahood. In short, it is because they are full of ego and unable to treat all living beings with a heart of filial piety. Convinced by the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha considers all people in the world of delusion as His parents and He is equipped with the virtue of filial piety.

—Nichiren Shonin, *Letter to Horen, Horen-sho (ST 175)*

As the troubles in our world continue to increase, the Lotus Sutra assures us of our enlightenment, shows us that we attain that enlightenment through the help of all beings, and teaches us to treat all beings with gratitude and respect. The fear of losing what we have is replaced with the appreciation for what we receive and the determination to benefit those who are dear to us.

—Rev. Shinkyō Warner

TEMPLE ATTENDANT PROJECT

BUILDING BRIDGES BETWEEN PRIESTS AND MEMBERS

By Rev. Keiji Oshima

A new initiative aims to strengthen international temples through trained community leaders. The Nichiren Shu International Section has launched an innovative program to address one of the most pressing challenges facing our overseas temples: how to better support priests in their mission while empowering members to take active roles in temple life. The Temple Attendant Project, currently in its development phase, represents a fresh approach to fostering collaboration between the priests and members in international Nichiren Shu communities.

WHAT IS A TEMPLE ATTENDANT? The Temple Attendant Project will provide opportunities for dedicated members to serve as bridges between priests and the broader community. These individuals will learn essential skills for supporting temple operations, from assisting with ceremonies to helping newcomers feel welcome, while maintaining the important distinctions between priests and members.

“Think of it like a restaurant,” explains Rev. Keisho Adami, one of the project members. “A good waiter doesn’t cook the food, but they create the atmosphere that makes the dining experience meaningful. Temple Attendants help create an environment where the Dharma can flourish.”

The concept draws inspiration from traditional Buddhist models where active members play vital supporting roles in temple communities. However, the program is specifically designed for the unique challenges of Nichiren Shu international temples, where cultural differences, language barriers, and varying levels of Buddhist knowledge require special attention.



ADDRESSING REAL CHALLENGES: The initiative emerged from listening to the experiences and aspirations of international Nichiren Shu temple communities worldwide. Many temples have expressed interest in strengthening communication between priests and congregation members, clarifying roles and responsibilities, and improving their ability to welcome newcomers from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Temple communities often seek ways to channel the enthusiasm of dedicated members into opportunities for meaningful service. Similarly, priests frequently express a desire to have more support with temple operations so that they can focus more fully on their spiritual and pastoral duties. The Temple Attendant Program creates structured pathways for member participation while also maintaining the important distinctions that preserve Buddhist tradition and ensure the proper functioning of temples.

A COLLABORATIVE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS: The program has been developed through an intensely collaborative process involving international trainee priests currently studying in Japan. Over eight months of regular meetings, these future leaders have worked together to create curriculum, activities, and materials that will form the foundation of the Temple Attendant training.

Rev. Kanse Capon, who actively participated in the development process for the Temple Attendant Program, helped to shape the program’s approach to understanding the relationship between priests and members. His contributions emphasize the concept of “two wings of a bird” — the idea that priests and active members must work together harmoniously so that the temple community can soar.

REV. KANSE CAPON REFLECTS ON HIS PARTICIPATION IN THE PROJECT: Through our collaborative development process, I’ve been deeply inspired by how this program addresses the fundamental relationship between priests and members in Buddhist practice.

In developing the curriculum around the Three Treasures — Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha — I’ve emphasized that the temple should be more than just a building; it should be a living *vihara* where people gather to practice and grow together. The Temple Attendant Program creates a beautiful framework for active members to serve not just the physical temple but also help grow the living community that makes a Sangha.

What I find most exciting about this initiative is how it honors both traditional Buddhist principles and the practical needs of our international temples. We’re not creating hierarchy, but rather building bridges that allow every member of our community to contribute meaningfully to the Dharma while also maintaining the important distinctions that help in preserving our Buddhist traditions.

VISION FOR COMPREHENSIVE TRAINING: “We envision a multi-stage training process,” explains Rev. Keiji Oshima, Manager of the International Section. “In the future, we hope to establish a system where the initial stages would be conducted locally at each temple, using standardized materials and curriculum developed by the International Section. This would allow for needed cultural adaptation while also maintaining consistent quality and standards across all international temples.”

The International Section is considering advanced training stages that would bring selected participants to Japan for intensive study and practice.

“This approach ensures that Temple Attendants learn practical skills and deepen their understanding of Nichiren Shu traditions and develop connections with the broader international Buddhist community,” Rev. Oshima notes.

The proposed curriculum would cover a wide range of topics essential for effective temple support: understanding the roles and responsibilities of different community members, welcoming newcomers with diverse backgrounds, assisting with ceremonies while respecting traditional protocols, and basic temple administration and communication skills.

A VISION FOR STRONGER COMMUNITIES: The Temple Attendant Project represents more than just training — it’s a vision for stronger, more inclusive temple communities where every member can contribute meaningfully to the spread of the Dharma. By creating clear pathways for member involvement while honoring traditional roles, the program aims to build bridges that help strengthen and define important relationships in our Buddhist communities.

As international Nichiren Shu temples continue to grow and evolve in diverse cultural settings, programs like this provide essential frameworks for maintaining both authenticity and accessibility. The Temple Attendant Project promises to be a valuable tool for building vibrant, sustainable Buddhist communities that can serve practitioners of all backgrounds and levels of experience.

The International Section plans to begin broader implementation of the program in the coming year, with additional trial seminars planned for different regions to ensure the training approach works effectively in different cultural settings.



Summer 2025

JUNE 15-17 Minobusan Kaiso-e, Commemoration Day of Nichiren Shonin Entering Minobusan

JUNE 25 Nitcho Shonin Memorial Day

JULY 13-16 Obon (Western Calendar)

AUG 13-16 Obon (Traditional Lunar Calendar)

AUG 15 Memorial Ceremony for Victims and Unknown War Dead and Prayer for World Peace at Chidorigafuchi National Cemetery, Sponsored by Nichiren Shu

AUG 27 Matsubagayatsu Persecution Memorial Day

SEP 3 Memorial for Niko Shonin

SEP 12 Tatsunokuchi Persecution Memorial Day

SEP 17 Memorial for Nisshin Shonin

SEP 18-19 Grand Ceremony at Shichimensan

SEP 20-26 Autumn Higan (Equinox) Week

Nichiren Shu News c/o The Head Office of Nichiren Shu, 1-32-15 Ikegami, Ota-ku, Tokyo 146-8544, Japan; Tel. +81-3-3751-7181. *Nichiren Shu News* is published by the Nichiren Shu Overseas Propagation Promotion Association (NOPPA) and the Head Office of Nichiren Shu.

Editorial Board Sensho Komukai, *Editor*, Shoda Kanai, *Assistant Editor*, Kosei Uchida, *Staff Writer*, Yuon Ito, *Advisor*.

Art Director Alan Rowe

If you have comments, questions or story ideas, please contact us at editor-nichirensunews@nichiren.or.jp or use the QR code.



日蓮宗
Nichiren Shu

©Copyright 2025 Nichiren Shu.
All rights reserved.