

NIPPONZAN MYOHOJI: WALKING FOR PEACE

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*At the age of ninety-eight
I attend the disarmament session
Beating the drum,
Proclaiming to the world
That all military, all nuclear weapons
Must disappear.
One sky, four oceans
Entirely at peace.
Nichidatsu Fujii, 1983*

In Japan, one's 60th birthday is honored as a significant milestone, marking a passage toward the respected elder years. August 6, 1945, the day the United States unleashed the devastating fires of nuclear weapons on Hiroshima, the Venerable Nichidatsu Fujii turned 60. From that day of conflagration, Venerable Fujii determined to devote his life to the abolition of nuclear weapons and the manifestation of Peace Pagodas. A monk since 1916, a disciple of the 13th century prophet Nichiren and a Japanese Buddhist with a profound spiritual tie to Mahatma Gandhi, Venerable Fujii held an unwavering commitment to nonviolence and peace. This catastrophic 60th birthday intensified and reinforced his certainty that human survival depends on the ability to turn away from materialistic civilizations which have caused so much destruction, war and misery:

Civilization has nothing to do with having electric lights, airplanes, or manufacturing nuclear bombs. It has nothing to do with killing human beings, destroying things or waging war. Civilization is to hold one another in mutual affection and respect. What constitutes its foundation is not the establishment of a judicial system but religious faith that seeks gentleness, peace, simplicity and uprighteousness. (1)

The Lineage and the Chant

Nichidatsu Fujii's spiritual ancestor and mentor was Nichiren, who lived under the Japanese Kamakura Shogunate 600 years before Fujii's birth. Fujii and Nichiren each perceived their own era as a time of "*mappo*," or "*Dharma in decline*." They shared a belief that only true spiritual teachings could "release all sentient beings from the evil forces of the prevailing order"(2) and overcome the rampant chaos and terror characteristic of *mappo*. Nichiren and Fujii's unique Buddhism and ardent social Dharma evolved from the Lotus Sutra, which inspired in both monks an unfaltering mission to lead society from aggression and militarism to spiritual harmony. In the 20th century, Fujii would bring the Lotus Sutra to India, honoring his mentor's prediction. Fujii believed that the acceptance of the Lotus Sutra chant by Gandhi fulfilled the prediction of Nichiren that the Lotus Sutra would root itself once again in Indian soil. The chant, "*Na Mu Myo Ho Ren Ge Kyo*," literally may be translated as "*Homage to the Lotus Sutra*" or "*Praise to the Wonderful Dharma of the Lotus Sutra*," but followers of Nipponzan Myohoji say that the chant cannot be fully translated; its ineffable meaning reveals itself to devotees through time. (3) Recitation of this chant *Na Mu Myo Ho Ren Ge Kyo* forms the core daily practice of Nipponzan Myohoji. Nichiren's fervent social conscience and the chant of the Lotus Sutra would come alive again in the person of Nichidatsu Fujii, and later spring forth in the United States through the lineage of Nipponzan Myohoji monks and nuns ordained by Fujii. In the US today, the chant can be heard at anti-nuclear demonstrations, at vigils for social justice and on walks for peace across the length and breadth of the land. The chant unites Nipponzan Myohoji, from Nichiren to Nichidatsu Fujii to the disciples in the US.

NICHIREN

Thirteenth century Japan, the time of Nichiren, was a period of political instability and natural disasters. Born to a family of fishermen in 1222, the young boy who would become Nichiren revealed an unusual childhood zest for spiritual learning and at twelve prayed to the Bodhisattva Kokuzo, asking to become the wisest man in Japan. (4) Drawn to the study of Buddhism, Nichiren entered the temple at Mt. Kiyosumi and ordained there at age 16. In order to ascertain the crucial teachings of the Buddha, he immersed himself in systematic study of all 10 schools of Buddhism then existing in Japan: Tendai, Shingon, Pure Land, Zen, and the 6 schools of the Nara Period. Known as an exceptional young monk, Nichiren yearned for the pure essence of Buddhism, its central and ethical truth. Experiencing grave doubts about all the Buddhist Schools, Nichiren persisted in his quest to encounter a devotional practice that would engage his heart, uplift his countrymen and unify his vision.

Nichiren believed that the true teachings of the Buddha should address both the purification of the mind and the purification of society, which for him were inseparable.

Religious teachings, Nichiren proclaimed, must respond to society as a whole and to people trapped in the raging violence of man and nature. He struggled over the paucity of relevant teachings available to help the suffering people. He blamed Pure Land Buddhism for promising happiness in the next life rather than offering meaningful answers to the political strife and natural disasters of this life. As he labored to grasp a

unifying doctrine for a Buddhist spiritual life that would dispel his doubts, conditions worsened in Mediaeval Japan:

There were problems to vex the wisest philosopher-king confusing 13th century Japan. The imperial regime had broken down, its divided remnants fought each other while the new feudal organization really ruled the country from the north; the civilian population besides enduring a civil war suffered from fires and plagues and all sorts of natural and unnatural calamities; while the nobles sought escape from responsibility in the aestheticism of a degenerate court life and a ritualistic cult of Buddhism.(5)

Prolonged anguish and deep quest brought Nichiren to the Lotus Sutra, which revealed itself to him as the scripture appropriate for this time of decline and ruin. In 1253 he returned to Mt. Kiyosumi and there, facing the rising sun, Nichiren first chanted *Na Mu Myo Ho Ren Ge Kyo*, devoting himself to the entire Lotus Sutra. He changed his name to Nichiren; *nichi* means the sun which eliminates darkness, and *ren* is the lotus, which brings forth a pure white blossom from the mire of the swamp. (6) Embracing the Sutra that culminated his search for a Buddhist truth that responded to his grave concerns, Nichiren took *Na Mu Myo Ho Ren Ge Kyo* to the people. Nichiren described himself as a lone individual sent by the Buddha “to bring peace to this land that has been laid waste by continual warfare.” (7) Nichiren challenged the state, the religious establishment and the mighty Shogunate Empire with his faith and zeal. He believed absolutely that only adherence to the teachings of the Lotus Sutra would prevent adversity. He predicted further disasters, and as calamities such as the wars of rebellion appeared, Nichiren grew even more tenacious and demanding.

Nichiren developed a missionary fire: persistent, determined, driven and uncompromising. He implored the state and the Buddhists leaders to adopt what he ardently believed were the only correct teachings. He suffered moral anguish at the

misguided direction of those who governed and attempted to awaken them to righteousness and deeper understanding. His extreme criticisms of the regime and harsh judgments of Pure Land Buddhism infuriated the ruling class, earning him several extended periods of punishment by exile and an attempted beheading. Despite his perilous circumstances, Nichiren persevered without reservation in his efforts to reform the corrupt political administrations, establish a righteous way among the people and promote the ascendancy of the Lotus Sutra.

Rissh Ankoku Ron (Establishing Righteousness to Secure the Peace of Nations), a treatise written by Nichiren urging the government to follow a true moral and ethical path, was three times rebuked by the Kamakura Shogunate. *Rissho Ankoku Ron* asserted that misguided religion turned the human mind and the entire nation in a chaotic and destructive direction. (8) Those who resort to violence, he wrote, will be destroyed by violence. Corrupt politics must be abandoned, Nichiren predicted, or internal contention and foreign invasion will further ruin the country. The text preached that “when those who disparage the Dharma are dismissed and those who follow the right way are honored, there will be tranquility in the entire land.” (9) With characteristic fervor, this treatise and Nichiren’s five other texts implored the populace and those who ruled to follow a life of righteousness. Only through righteousness and the elimination of a debased realm, Nichiren believed, would people experience a spiritual and true state of security and peace. He longed for redemption in the hearts and minds of people, but instead received rebuke, persecution and banishment.

Nichiren felt that his duty as a faithful Buddhist was to confront evil and protest against unjust laws that contradict the Dharma. To fulfill one’s obligation to the rulers

required that he and other believers admonish the leaders, present them with the authentic Buddhist laws, and sacrifice everything, including one's life, if necessary to propagate the true Dharma:

If you would be free from the offense committed by the country as a whole, make remonstrance to the rulers and be yourself prepared for death or exile. Is it not said in the Scripture, 'never shrink from sacrificing the body for the sake of the Incomparable Way'...that we have, from the remotest past down to the present, not attained Buddhahood is simply due to our cowardice, in that we have always been afraid of these perils and have not dared to stand up publicly for the Truth. The future will never be otherwise so long as we remain cowards.(10)

Lotus Sutra

It was within the Lotus Sutra that Nichiren found unqualified inspiration.

Nichiren asserted that the Lotus Sutra is the sole source of human salvation: the only religious expression capable of responding to *mappo*, the One Truth, and the singular prevention of further strife and calamity. To bring forth the true teachings of the Lotus Sutra for the salvation of all people, and to protect the leaders and the population from what he experienced as their own blindness, he pleaded, implored and harangued them to adhere to the Sutra.

The 28 chapters of the Hokekyo, the Chinese translation of the Lotus Sutra, are divided in two. The first 14 chapters describe the path and the laws of the historical Buddha Shakyamuni, while the latter half of the Sutra concerns itself with the Eternal Buddha who exists in all time. Aware of the complexity of the Lotus Sutra, Nichiren declared that wholeheartedly chanting *Na Mu Myo Ho Ren Ge Kyo* would develop faith and purify the mind of the devotee, because the chant itself contains the essence of the Sutra. Chanting with devotion and respect, he believed, would bring spiritual benefit to the believer.

When the entire nation converted to accept the Lotus Sutra, Nichiren proclaimed, the suffering of the *mappo* age would be replaced with the realization of our true nature and would usher in a realm of peace and tranquillity. The Heavenly Paradise would then exist on earth.(11) The Sutra includes passages praising those who, like Nichiren, live its truths and fulfill its prophecies. Nichiren ardently embraced these passages, which he devotedly chanted and which sustained his difficult life: (12)

This sutra so difficult to keep.
If anyone keeps it a short time, I shall be pleased,
And so will all the Buddhas.
Such a one as this will be praised by all the Buddhas;
Such a one is brave; such a one is zealous;
Such a one is named precept-keeper and dhuta-observer;
Speedily shall one attain the supreme Buddha-way.
One who, in coming generations
Can read and keep this Sutra
Is truly a child of the Buddha
Dwelling in the stage of pure goodness,
After the Buddha's extinction,
One who can expound its meaning
Will be the eye of the world
For Gods and humans.
One who, in the final age of fear,
Can preach it even for a moment
By all Gods and humans
Will be worshipped. (13)

Nichiren the Prophet

With characteristic zeal, in his later years Nichiren came to identify himself with the Bodhisattva Eminent Conduct prophesized by Shakyamuni Buddha in the Lotus Sutra. (the other three Bodhisattvas are Boundless Conduct, Pure Conduct and Steadfast Conduct). Nichiren himself believed, but did not insist, that he was the spiritual reincarnation of Bodhisattva Eminent Conduct and thus had received the transmission of the Lotus Sutra directly from Shakyamuni Buddha. In Chapter 21 of the Lotus Sutra

there is reference to a messenger from the Tathagata. Nichiren felt himself to be this messenger and a servant of the Buddha, which produced in him unbounded joy that he described as “tears of ambrosia.” (14) Nichiren wrote of his destiny: “Common mortal that I am, I am not well aware of the past, yet in the present I am unmistakably the one who is realizing the Lotus of Truth...I, Nichiren, a native of Awa, am most probably the man whose mission it is...to propagate the doctrines of the Lotus of Truth.” (15)

Contemporary followers of Nichiren in the traditional Nichiren Schools consider him a prophet and the reincarnation of the Bodhisattva Eminent Conduct. In Nipponzan Myohoji, the likeness of Maha (Great) Bodhisattva Nichiren occupies a prominent place on the altar, just beneath the Buddha. Persecuted and criminalized by the state, Nichiren was clearly a visionary. His concern for the common welfare and the promotion of spiritual righteousness, vocal opposition to militarism and warfare, and unremitting attempts to awaken the populace to the social and political causes of suffering, place him as a singular figure in Japanese Buddhist history:

If Japan ever produced a prophet or a religious man of prophetic zeal, Nichiren was the man. He stands almost a unique figure in the history of Buddhism, not alone because of his persistence through hardship and persecution, but for his unshaken conviction that he himself was the messenger of Buddha....Not only one of the most learned men of his time, but most earnest in his prophetic aspirations, he was a strong man, a powerful writer, and a man of tender heart. He was born in 1222, the son of a fisherman, and died in 1282, a saint and a prophet. (16)

NICHIDATSU FUJII

A young Japanese monk named Gyosho Fujii, himself living in an age of declining Dharma and catastrophe, revived the teachings of Nichiren for the 20th century and became the founder and preceptor of Nipponzan Myohoji. Fujii found

inspiration in the passionate spiritual yearnings and radical social vision of Nichiren. Echoing Nichiren's devotion and penetrating the wisdom of the Lotus Sutra, Fujii brought the teachings forward for our own time.

Like his mentor, Fujii began life in rural Japan, where he was born in 1885. In 1903, when he was 19, Fujii ordained as a monk in the Nichiren tradition. Spending his twenties exploring the many streams of thought and practice in Japanese Buddhism, Fujii studied in the various schools of Buddhism investigated by Nichiren 6 centuries earlier. Legendary stories describe his genius as a student and meditator, including a two year practice period with Rinzai Zen that astounded the monks and masters, who urged Fujii to remain with them. (17) Many offers of scholarship or temple leadership were bestowed on this gifted young man. Fujii realized, however, that his teachers and mentors could neither anticipate nor describe the meaning of his life. He would have to find guidance and determine the journey for himself. Thus Fujii left monastic study to strengthen his own Buddhist path and ascertain his relationship to Nichiren and the Lotus Sutra. As Nichiren had been 32 when he began his true teaching, Fujii waited until he was 33 to begin his own mission, thereby demonstrating his respect and humility. (18)

Fujii's studies of Nichiren, a prophetic dream about Nichiren, plus experiments with long periods of fasting and severe self-disciplines confirmed Fujii's decision to follow the teachings of Nichiren and to propagate the chant *Na Mu Myo Ho Ren Ge Kyo* to the accompaniment of a hand-held prayer drum. A rather extraordinary experience clarified his mind. The second time Fujii fasted under a freezing waterfall near the ancient Buddhist city of Nara he was 33 years old and undertaking a final effort to

determine his destiny. In search of resolution for his spiritual questions, for seven days he took neither food nor drink, slept little and endured the intense cold of a winter waterfall. At the completion of his fast, Fujii heard a drum and then watched as a figure of an old man wearing shabby clothes appeared, beating a prayer drum and carrying a baby on his back. The stranger climbed the hill near the waterfall. Fujii, astounded by the apparition, inquired about the identity of the man, who announced himself as the Bodhisattva Eminent Conduct and identified the baby as Shakyamuni Buddha. Fujii insisted the encounter was not a dream or a metaphor, but a physical experience that manifested from “total openness, spiritual vulnerability, and intense consciousness which placed him on a different realm.” (19) Because this encounter confirmed a prophecy of Chapter 15 in the Lotus Sutra, at that moment Fujii realized the completion of his search and knew irrevocably that his path would be to bring the Lotus Sutra and *Na Mu Myo Ho Ren Ge Kyo* to the world. He ordained himself as a direct disciple of Shakyamuni Buddha and Nichiren.

Fujii understood the *Rissho Ankoku Ron* written by Nichiren to be a book of prophecy that would establish true enlightened Dharma for all peoples. He also believed that escaping from the tasks of this world through focusing attention on rebirth in the Pure Land is an erroneous interpretation of Buddhism. Nichiren observed that Buddhism in Japan had become “isolated from and indifferent to the happenings in the world because it tends to be occupied in seeking solutions of one’s own spiritual matters, such as one’s own anxiety, suffering and grief.” (20) Fujii noted that “if we fail to prevent (war), one’s

desire to secure himself is nothing but a dream.” (21) The ethical and social dimensions of *Rissho Ankoku Ron* further affirmed Fujii’s discipleship:

Rissho Ankoku Ron is a great book of prophecy of the world with its grounds thoroughly and systematically delivered....Nichiren applied the words expounded by the Buddha to a larger unit of human life, the nation...He urged the nation to profess faith in the genuine and correct teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha....who is the Preceptor of this actual world rather than the world to come. (22)

Nichidatsu Fujii adapted, expanded and developed *Risshon Ankoku Ron* for international application, clarifying the connections between religion and society and amplifying the relationships between thought and deed. He wrote: “It is thought that religion is a question of an individual’s mind and that there is no harm for him to believe whatever he likes. This is wrong. What a person believes and thinks is manifested in society. A mistaken thought will become a social problem.” (23)

Nichidatsu Fujii began to practice the Lotus Sutra publicly in 1918, traveling first in remote and austere regions of Manchuria, Korea and China. Identified by some scholars as an “Asianist” rather than a pacifist, the young monk harbored grave doubt about European and US presence in Asia, which he feared would spread dominant values of materialism, colonialism, and secular life. He hoped that Japan and other Asian countries would preserve their more spiritually oriented civilizations. However, as he observed Japan’s behavior toward his neighbors, he recognized the evils of dominance and colonial exploitation by his own government, and criticized Japanese ambitions for war against China. Walking and beating the prayer drum while chanting *Na Mu Myo Ho Ren Ge Kyo* throughout Japan, he warned of the dangers of the growing militancy of Japanese thinking. As a monk, Fujii took responsibility and made efforts to subdue Japanese aggression toward its neighbors, feeling that warfare would harm

victims and warriors alike. “Earnest devotion to killing and depriving of life is the accepted glory. When our country comes to admire soldiers and find pleasure in killing people, the country will immediately lose Buddha’s love and become vanquished and ruined.” (24) Commencing with these experiences in his youth and lasting throughout his extraordinarily long life, Fujii consistently focused his concerns on militarism and the devastation of warfare, balancing these passions with an equally committed spiritual and moral discipline. His conversion to absolute pacifism realized its maturity after World War II, but in the years building up to the war, Fujii increased his denunciation of the Japanese authorities and their military ambitions. He attempted to convert as well as criticize, to “awaken the submerged mind away from killing.” (25)

Attracted by his strength of character and radical ethical views, followers and devotees began to gather around Nichidatsu Fujii. He and the disciples whom he ordained opened several temples in Japan in the 1920’s, after which Fujii left for India. His decision to go to India, which would bring him to Gandhi and thus profoundly influence him and the moral direction of Nipponzan Myohoji, arose to fulfill a prophecy made by Nichiren. Fujii wrote: “Seven hundred years have elapsed and not a single one has propagated even a chant of *Na Mu Myo Ho Ren Ge Kyo* to India. If this Dharma does not return to the Western Heaven (India), the prediction of our great master Maha Bodhisattva Nichiren will not be realized. Therefore I decided to go to India, even alone, to walk about chanting.” (26)

India and the War Years

During his extensive travels in India (1931-1938) to regenerate Buddhism there in the land of its birth, he met and soon became closely associated with Mahatma Gandhi. It was Gandhi who first called him Guruji (spiritual teacher), a title by which his disciples and the lay public have affectionately called him ever since. Guruji joined Gandhi at his ashram in Wardha, where Gandhi actively took up the practice of the chant and drum as part of his daily prayer. A deep recognition transpired between these two spiritual seekers who were so nourished by their Hindu or Buddhist faiths. Guruji delighted at Gandhi's embrace of the drum and his attempts to learn the chant of *Na Mu Myo Ho Ren Ge Kyo*, which is still used at the Gandhi Ashram in Wardha during daily prayer. Gandhi later wrote to Guruji that "...the subtle and profound sound of your drum resonates in my ear." (27) Guruji, much discouraged by the Japanese consuls in India, celebrated Gandhi's acceptance: "Ah, my long and cherished desire...has finally found its time. The voice of the 30 million people rejoicing in the sound of Dharma was now heard through the melting voice of joy that passed Gandhi-ji's lips here at the Ashram of Wardha." (28)

Already committed to the realization of a spiritually based civilization, Guruji's deep ties with Gandhi further developed his mind and enlarged his vision. Through the inspiration of Gandhi and his remarkable social, political and spiritual experiments, Guruji extended active spiritual support toward the nonviolent independence movement of the Indian people. Profoundly moved and influenced by Gandhi, Guruji later reflected that "Nonviolent resistance, a gentle movement through which people are spiritually united and raise their voices of protest, is the only way to extinguish the violent fire that would result in human annihilation." (29) Guruji did propagate *Na Mu Myo Ho Ren Ge Kyo* in India, establishing temples, making

pilgrimages to Buddhist holy sites and firming a commitment to re-establish Buddhism in Rajgir, where the Buddha had first preached the Lotus Sutra on Vulture Peak.

Deeply concerned during his India years about Japan's expansion of military power, Guruji returned from India in 1938. He presented the Defense Ministers with ashes of the Buddha that he had received in Sri Lanka, and proposed the adoption of peaceful national and international policies. Guruji suffered as he watched the false gods of militarism dominate the Japanese people. During the war years of 1939-45, Guruji and his followers moved actively within and beyond Japan, chanting and beating the prayer drum, crying out for the early termination of war and the establishment of righteousness. Preaching Nichiren's *Rissho Ankoku Ron* for Japan and for the world, Guruji called for "...a radical change in man's religious consciousness and at the same time a new kind of human community and civilization." He condemned "...modern Western civilization itself, in as much as it is materialistic-- as devoid of moral and religious faith." "True civilization," he wrote, "is necessarily spiritual." (30)

In the waning days of World War II, on the 60th birthday of Nichidatsu Fujii, the atomic bomb fell on Hiroshima and the US launched the world into the nuclear age. For forty more years, until his death in 1985 at age 100, Guruji and his disciples would build Peace Pagodas, initiate long peacewalks, and seek to rid the human community of the scourge of nuclear weapons.

Peace Pagodas

The history of Peace Pagodas, known as Shanti Stupas in India and much of Asia, stretches back in our own present calculation of time 2500 years to the first stupas, which enshrined the relics of Shakyamuni Buddha. However, according to Nipponzan

Myohoji, a previous history of stupas and Buddhas prefigure the historical records. (31)
Chapter 11 of the Lotus Sutra preached by the Buddha already mentioned the Stupa of the Buddha of Abundant Treasures, who existed since “no beginning,” kalpas and eons ago, in time beyond our comprehension. The Buddha of Abundant Treasures appears wherever the Lotus Sutra is taught and is depicted by the Nichiren School alongside Shakyamuni Buddha, with a stupa arising between them. The manifestation of these two Buddhas and the stupa represent a vast span of time and universality, both encompassing and exceeding the historical Shakyamuni Buddha of 2500 years ago.

Na Mu Myo Ho Ren Ge Kyo is also understood as the name of the eternal Buddha. Thus the construction of Peace Pagodas is directly related to the Lotus Sutra and intimately connected to the practice of Nichiren and Nichidatsu Fujii. The arising of the stupa was predicted by Nichiren and foretold in the Lotus Sutra, whose 11th chapter is translated from the Chinese as “*Beholding the Precious Stupa.*” The chapter depicts an exquisite stupa that sprang up in front of the Buddha:

It was decorated with all kinds of precious things, splendidly adorned with 5000 parapets ...countless banners and flags; hung with jeweled garlands...gems... bells...fragrance of sandalwood...streamers of gold, silver, lapis lazuli...flowers...perfumes...reaching up to the palaces of the four heavenly kings.
(32)

After the cremation of the body of Shakyamuni Buddha, his ashes were distributed to his closest disciples. All who had obtained a portion of the relics created stupas in their respective villages, each stupa to be venerated as a symbol of the living Buddha. Legend records that Emperor Asoka, 3rd century BCE, further divided the relics of the Buddha, causing 84,000 stupas to be built in India and beyond. Over time additional subdivisions were made and relics taken to various lands where additional

stupas arose. When visiting the holy mountain of Sri Pada in Sri Lanka, Guruji had unexpectedly received the gift of Buddha relics from the head monk of a Sri Lankan temple. “I considered it to be a result of the grace of the Buddha and graciously accepted his favor.” (33) Taking this offering as an auspicious sign for the future arising of Peace Pagodas, Guruji wore the relics in a silver box around his neck while in India. When he returned to Japan in 1938-39, he presented this treasure to the Japanese government.

Nichidatsu Fujii revived the ancient tradition of stupas after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, building the order’s first Peace Pagoda in Japan. Fujii believed that out of the ravages of World War II, people’s pure desire for peace could be awakened:

The appearing of a Pagoda touches the hearts and minds of all people. Those who venerate this Pagoda absolutely reject nuclear warfare and firmly believe that a peaceful world will be manifested. The vision of a Pagoda has the power to bring about a spiritual transformation. It illumines the dawn of a spiritual civilization.
(34)

Today there are approximately 80 Nipponzan Myohoji Peace Pagodas worldwide, in Asian countries as well as Europe and the US, with construction currently underway for Africa’s first Peace Pagoda in Zambia. Striking in form and design, usually constructed with a large concrete dome that might stand 100 feet tall, the gleaming white Peace Pagodas often contain niches in the dome with carvings depicting the life of Shakyamuni Buddha, decorative concrete lotus petals, carved walkways, and elaborate pinnacles. Sacred Buddha relics are enshrined within each Pagoda. Many are surrounded by lovingly crafted Japanese gardens, presenting altogether a tranquil and prayerful environment. “It appears to rise, as a prayer, from the

very elements surrounding it--the earth, air, water and sky. All people, regardless of their creed, may feel its appeal to the inviolable sacredness of life.” (35)

Developing Fortitude and Virtue

As a child in late 19th century Japan, Nichidatsu Fujii suffered from weakness, for which his mother proscribed long walks; as her son’s strength increased, she made offerings in thankfulness. This provided the future monk with warm memories of both walking and spiritual practice, each of which would become pivotal in his life. Guruji adapted the custom of long walks for peace early in his career as a monk, taking his inspiration from Nichiren who walked the streets of Kamakura chanting for righteousness and peace. Shakyamuni Buddha walked through what is now the Indian state of Bihar in order to expound the Dharma, making pilgrimages, mingling freely with the populace, teaching and meditating. Nipponzan Myohoji monks consider walking with spiritual intention as natural medicine that yields patience, fortitude and virtue. (36) Walking is non-exploitive, preserves natural resources and allows contemplation of an entire materialistic and mechanical way of life. From his earliest positive experiences with walking in Manchuria and Korea, through his observation of Gandhi’s walks with tens of thousands of disciples, and until his life ended, Guruji advocated and participated in walks.

Guruji also felt that “At a time when all sentient beings are about to fall into the abyss of unrelievable suffering, recitation of sutras in temples or sitting on mountains in meditation is of no use.” (37) He believed that in times of *mappo*, minds and hearts are too crude to benefit from refined practices such as sitting meditation, and that perhaps walking would be better “medicine.” For as long as he could walk, Guruji led

his disciples in walking practice throughout Japan, India, Sri Lanka and later the West. Each year on the August anniversary of the nuclear bombing, Guroji and members of the order walked from Tokyo to Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Confined to a wheel chair in his 90's, Guroji still participated in walks, believing deeply in the power of visible prayer among the people. He reminded his monks and nuns not to be concerned about their own comfort or welfare, but to sacrifice themselves for the sake of chanting *Na Mu Myo Ho Ren Ge Kyo* and "uniting the minds and hearts of all people."
(38)

One Hundred Years of Life

Two significant and intertwined practices most deeply convey the Dharma teachings of the Venerable Nichidatsu Fujii. Guroji disciplined his life in faithfulness to *Rissho Ankoku Ron*, wanting to establish among the populace the "True Law of Righteousness to Secure the Peace of Nations." He devoted himself to the realization of a spiritual civilization and to raising awareness about the delusions of militarism and materialism, first in his native Japan and later as a world citizen. Guroji called for a radical change in religious consciousness and a human community based on fundamental spiritual truths. He called for this social transformation now, not in the eternal life but in the midst of our soiled human condition and decaying circumstances. He believed that the work of religion included the purification of the debased minds and occluded views of human beings, who fail to see the essential Bodhisattva nature in each other, thus causing undue harm and suffering.

This practice complements the spiritual discipline of "*tangyo-raihai*," which translates from the Japanese as "practice only reverence to others." (39) *Tangyo-raihai*

is expressed through the custom of humble bowing and genuine obsequiousness that Gururji showed to each and every person without exception. Gururji felt that if all people embraced the practice of putting palms together and bowing deeply in authentic respect, the consciousness of reverence would develop and thoughts of violence would cease to arise in the human mind, thus purifying both the individual and the society. Gururji also believed that chanting *Na Mu Myo Ho Ren Ge Kyo* in all greeting and parting demonstrates profound reverence to others. The bowing gesture as a sign of humility and an acknowledgment of the Buddha-nature within each being originated with a Bodhisattva described in the Lotus Sutra as Sadaparibhuta, the Bodhisattva Who Never Despises. The discipline of “never despising” requires “absolute nonresistance and absolute nonviolence.” (40) Taken together, *Rissho Ankoku Ron* and *tangyo-raihai* demonstrate Gururji’s consistency between reflection and action, weaving the inner refinement of self-transformation with the outer task of social transformation. Inseparable, they represent the essence of the teachings of Venerable Fujii: the peace of nations secured through the practice of respect and mutual veneration.

The contributions of Venerable Fujii toward the abolition of nuclear weapons and the awakening of humankind to a new civilization span his extraordinarily long life. In addition to the construction of Peace Pagodas and the undertaking of peacewalks, Gururji faithfully nurtured his vision of a harmonious and nonviolent world community. His energy unflinching and his spirit strong until the very end, Gururji traveled worldwide to participate in the great events of the times, including the UN Second Special Session on Disarmament, world conferences on religion and peace, ceremonies, pilgrimages and other gatherings where his chanting and drumming the

Odaimoku, (daimoku literally means title but symbolizes the chant *Na Mu Myo Ho Ren Ge Kyo* and the prefix “O” is an honorific) his eloquent speeches and his humble practice of bowing with palms together touched a deep spiritual longing for peace in a war-weary world. Among his special honors, the Venerable Nichidatsu Fujii received the renowned Jawaharlal Nehru Award for International Understanding in 1979 for his “untiring struggle against violence and for the establishment of peace in the world.”

(41)

Before his death, land had been consecrated for the first Peace Pagoda in the US and 3 Peace Pagodas were dedicated in Europe. Guruji had unified the fractured disarmament movement in Japan, spoken out against the US war in Vietnam, established connections with Native Americans and African Americans struggling for justice, and left a small order of monks and nuns devoted to him and dedicated to carry forth his vision.

In January of 1985, at the age of 100, the Venerable Nichidatsu Fujii died in Japan.

*Head and eyebrows white with snowy age,
A monk of ninety-nine years
Worships the power of the great mercy of Buddha
Entreating the conversion of the world
--When everyone feels the terror of final conflagrations--
To peace and tranquillity.*

Nichidatsu Fujii, 1984

NIPPONZAN MYOHOKI IN AMERICA

By the 1970's, when the Sangha first established itself in the US, there were approximately 250 monks and nuns ordained by Guruji in the Nipponzan Myohoji order, disciplined in the strict and self-sacrificing practices of the order and committed to the Bodhisattva path of liberating all beings. In addition to the more traditional monastic

vows of obedience, poverty and celibacy, these monks and nuns undertook a further commitment to rid the world of nuclear weapons. Guruji was demanding of his disciples, admonishing them not to grow lazy or self-satisfied, never to wear “gold brocaded satin damask” (42) and always to place the needs of others before their own. Guruji taught them to be tolerant regarding the beliefs of others but uncompromising in the maintenance of their own. Like their mentor, the monks and nuns follow the teaching of *Rissho Ankoku Ron* and the discipline of bowing humbly to all persons. He encouraged “these young disciples who depart on a journey to unknown lands, chanting the *Odaimoku*, where they have nothing to depend on, where people speak tongues unknown to them. These young disciples are spreading the Buddha Dharma in Europe and the United States.” (43)

Practice and Tradition

Nipponzan Myohoji practices differ from the rituals of Dharma common to most American practitioners. Nipponzan Myohoji monks and nuns do not engage in the silent meditation familiar to American Buddhists. The chanting of *Na Mu Myo Ho Ren Ge Kyo* is their daily practice, both while walking and while seated at the altar. Their temples, quite elaborate in Japan and generally less embellished in the US and Europe, contain altars with images of the Buddha and Nichiren, loving photos of their Guruji, incense pots, flowers, miniature peace pagodas and whatever gifts of food have been offered to the temple. The altar is abundant and the temple decorative and colorful, all in rather startling contrast to the severe austerity of the more well-known Japanese Zen temple. In their daily practice in America or Japan, the monks and nuns chant with a hand drum or a large floor drum, recite chapters of the Lotus Sutra, light incense, offer

food to the Buddha on the altar, bow to each other and to the images of their teachers, and leave the temple to circumambulate the Peace Pagoda, chanting and bowing to the statues of the Buddha. Each ritual aspect of their worship is precisely choreographed and carefully obeyed. Every month the monks and nuns fast, chant and pray steadily for 3 days. To commemorate the enlightenment of Shakyamuni Buddha, they fast for 8 days in December, observing a tradition borrowed from Japanese Zen. (44) A significant aspect of Nipponzan Myohoji Buddhism in the US involves walking practice that often extends for months, covering 15-20 miles daily in all conditions of weather. They work laboriously under challenging circumstances building Peace Pagodas and temples, maintain strict discipline, practice faithfully and seem to sleep little. On the other hand, they maintain solid friendships within and beyond the order, celebrate intensely, laugh, joke and enjoy life zestfully. Ordination in Nipponzan Myohoji requires heartiness of body and spirit.

Important decisions are taken by members of the worldwide order with respectful consultation among the hierarchy of elder monks in Japan. Spiritual inspiration to undertake a year-long walk, practice in a particular region of the world, or manifest a Peace Pagoda, arises within the heart and mind of the individual disciple. To clearly discern a spiritual calling, the disciple seeks advice from the elders and guidance from the Sangha. Guruji taught the monks and nuns to “avoid the arrogance” of solitary decision making and to seek collective wisdom. Following Buddha’s teaching, he encouraged harmony, respect and veneration within the ordained Sangha, especially toward the elders. Nipponzan Myohoji monks remain in dialogue with each other across the continents, supporting and guiding each vision. (45)

Neither a successor to Venerable Fujii nor a head temple in Japan exists in the order. A senior monk, who is honored and who will intervene if necessary, holds special status but has no formally empowered authority. Monks or nuns in their early years of ordination receive guidance and nurturance by a senior member of the order. Within this understanding of consultation and collaboration, each monk and nun discerns direction and obeys inner faith.

Financial decisions, like spiritual direction, are made in consultation. Guruji forbade his monks and nuns to raise money through direct requests or solicitations. He believed that lay devotees would support the Sangha if the monks and nuns remained pure and practiced faithfully. Members of the order survive on whatever donations are offered, living simply as renunciates. Peace Pagodas, temples and walks arise as funds manifest spontaneously, without request, through the attraction of lay people to the spiritual values and social commitments of Nipponzan Myohoji.

In the order today, there are approximately 150 monks and nuns worldwide, including approximately 10 in the US and 10 in Europe. Mostly Japanese, there are currently two American and two European ordained nuns in the order, and two South Asian monks. The monks, nuns and lay sangha who support this very small order both in Japan and throughout the world are Guruji's legacy and serve as a living tribute to his leadership.

Arrival in the US

Although Guruji had been in the US as early as 1968, when he denounced US involvement in Vietnam, the first established Sangha in the US arose in Washington DC,

where a Nipponzan Myohoji temple opened its doors in 1974. The monk Shionin Shonin (Shonin is a Japanese honorific for monks, equivalent to Reverend or Brother) selected Washington DC in order to bring the spirit of *Rissho Ankoku Ron* to the nation's rulers. Then in 1976 the War Resisters League planned "*The Continental Walk for Disarmament and Social Justice.*" From their connections in Japan through the annual Hiroshima anti-nuclear conference, members of WRL had met Nipponzan Myohoji and invited them to participate in this US cross-country walk. Among those who arrived was Kato Shonin, who would later create the first Peace Pagoda in the US. Two years later, Guruji sent Sangha members to support a walk developed by Native Americans, "*The Longest Walk: From Alcatraz to Washington DC.*" A Japanese nun named Jun Yasuda joined this walk, developing a lasting spiritual bond with Native Americans. The second Peace Pagoda in the US would later arise under the direction of Sister Jun Yasuda and with the blessing and support of the Native peoples.

These early connections with the US peace movement and with Native Americans became sustaining and mutually nourishing relationships. The great faith that Nipponzan Myohoji placed in the value of walks bestowed new life on this long-established form of advocacy in the US. With their prayer drums and chants, yellow robes and shaved heads, these first Nipponzan Myohoji monks in the US gained favor especially with anti-nuclear activists, who recognized them as allies despite their national and religious differences. The monks and nuns added a deep spiritual and calming presence to demonstrations, and offered firm commitments to nonviolence, a clear social analysis of injustice and consistent self-discipline and stamina. The

friendships later became pivotal to Nipponzan Myohoji, when a few intrepid monks and nuns began to establish themselves in the US. Their relationships with the newly emerging American Buddhist communities remain friendly but more marginal, as different agendas provide less opportunity for interface and collaboration.

With the Native American community, the connection to Nipponzan Myohoji began during *The Longest Walk*, in 1978. From his earliest years in the US, Guruji recognized the Native Americans as “...people with whom we can unite through our religious beliefs of peace....as they lead their daily life in religious prayers and hearts of thankfulness and gratitude.” (46) Guruji felt that the Native peoples of the US had a special mission to heal the “defilements” in America and to “mend the mistaken ways of the United States.” (47) He resonated with the Native American emphasis on a spiritual society that did not rely on materialism or consumerism and encouraged his monks and nuns to nurture these friendships.

Beginnings in Massachusetts

After participating in the Boston to Washington DC branch of the “*Continental Walk for Disarmament and Social Justice*,” Kato Shonin, a Nipponzan Myohoji monk, returned to Boston to bring *Na Mu Myo Ho Ren Ge Kyo* and the teachings of Guruji to the region. Then 36 years old, with few possessions other than a prayer drum and a copy of the Lotus Sutra, the monk spent several years chanting the *Odaimoku* on the streets of Boston and Cambridge. In 1978 he walked the 20 mile route from Boston to Walden Pond consecutively for 50 days in the New England winter, in honor of Thoreau. For Kato Shonin, Thoreau’s exemplary life of simplicity, nonviolence and resistance to unjust laws made Walden Pond a perfect pilgrimage spot to affirm this direction in the

American spirit. Additionally, Kato Shonin felt intrigued by the history of Concord, not only the site of Walden Pond but also a village noted for its involvement in the Revolutionary War. On his daily pilgrimage, Kato Shonin contemplated the contrast between Thoreau's nonviolence and the fire-power of the War of Independence, expressing his concern about the necessity of force and its continued use in US history.

(48) Kato Shonin participated in vigils and anti-nuclear actions with the peace and justice communities of Boston. He maintained his strict vows and daily Buddhist practices: chanting in his small temple (a room in the well-known Arlington Street Church), walking, fasting, venerating his teachers and living very simply.

Resonating to the sound of the prayer drum, an American woman named Clare Carter, whose roots were in the Boston peace movement, experienced a profound spiritual call to join Kato Shonin in walking and chanting *Na Mu Myo Ho Ren Ge Kyo*. After several years of intense practice and study with Kato Shonin in the US, Clare left for Japan to deepen her understanding of Nipponzan Myohoji, where she ordained as a Buddhist nun in 1981 before returning to Boston. She re-joined Kato Shonin, who by late 1983 had moved to Western Massachusetts.

The New England Peace Pagoda

Kato Shonin felt that a Peace Pagoda would benefit Americans, but that the desire essentially had to manifest from the wishes and intentions of the American people. Although Kato Shonin moved to Western Massachusetts in the hopes that land for a Peace Pagoda would appear, he later discovered an important karmic tie to Amherst. Dr. William S. Clark, the first President of the former Massachusetts Agricultural School in Amherst, (now the University of Massachusetts) had founded a

famous agricultural school in Japan. His student Dr. Kanzu Chimura, an eminent Christian thinker, wrote a biography of Nichiren as a prophetic figure that had strongly motivated Guruji to study Nichiren when he was a young man exploring his spiritual path. Learning this history, Kato Shonin felt affirmed in his commitment to the region.

Kato Shonin and Sister Clare continued their prayers for land and made contacts with the peace community in Western Massachusetts. In 1984 a young follower who had walked with the monks on the *1982 World Peace March*, donated a 35 acre hilltop in nearby Leverett, Massachusetts to the order. Slow Turtle, the Supreme Medicine Man of the Wampanoag Nation, blessed its presence on former Indian land. The first Peace Pagoda in America would soon rise on that hill, to be dedicated ten months after the death of Venerable Nichidatsu Fujii.

The town of Leverett, population approximately 2000, calls itself home to both progressive newcomers and more traditional longtime resident Yankees. As befits New England democracy, Leverett citizens organized a Town Meeting to present the Nipponzan Myohoji order to the townspeople, who found themselves divided in opinion over the desirability of a strange Buddhist order in their midst. Kato Shonin, speaking for Nipponzan, presented his case with great dignity, compassion and characteristic equanimity, revealing his long years of spiritual discipline. Through his presence and that of Sister Clare and another remarkable monk named Sasamori Shonin, Leverett agreed to grant a building permit to the order, and a lay sangha gathered in Leverett to erect the Peace Pagoda. This fluid community attracted participants from other areas of the US and throughout the world, including young Japanese laypeople, European peace activists, American Buddhist practitioners, students and faculty from the nearby

academic institutions, and an assortment of dedicated Peace Pagoda builders and onlookers. Many Nipponzan monks joined the community during the year and a half of land clearing and construction. This interface and fusion of cultures, beliefs, practices and social norms created a brew of learning, challenge and change for all who participated.

For the lay community, the practice of chanting the *Odaimoku* both as formal meditation and as generic greeting, the *tangyo raihai* custom of bowing with palms together, the discipline of respect for elders, the apparent hierarchy, the traditional Japanese gender relations, the Lotus Sutra recitations, the altar and incense, the strict rituals and etiquette of practice in a Japanese temple, the veneration of Guruji and much more challenged the established behaviors of many of the Western participants. And for the Japanese monks and nuns, the Western sangha and its mix of Christians and Jews, New Age spiritual seekers, Buddhist explorers, feminists, hippies, lesbians and gays, and so many others in various nontraditional life styles and living arrangements must have been not only challenging but often staggering. Nonetheless, a warm, congenial and happy atmosphere ensued and the New England Peace Pagoda was erected in an astounding 1 1/2 years by this highly eclectic, constantly changing sangha. For the inauguration of the Peace Pagoda in 1985, an event attended by more than 3000 people on a cold and rainy October Sunday, the American friends and supporters wrote to the monks and nuns of Nipponzan Myohoji:

Your lives are an inspiration for us. You represent the highest ideals of spiritual service, loving devotion and unfailing dedication to the realization of true peace, both within the self and in the world. Your presence in the West, and most especially in this community, is a gift of enormous magnitude...We bow reverently and wholeheartedly to each of you.

And the monks and nuns of Nipponzan Myohoji wrote to the American sangha:

We are astounded by your response for the Peace Pagoda. We never dreamed of your generosity, dedication and faith...Only because the potential seed of the Peace Pagoda has been within you has it blossomed so quickly...When people come together and are tuned in truthful work, the divine power of the universe immediately cooperates...We monks and nuns bow down a thousand times before you, deeply and with reverence. (49)

Temples and Other Peace Pagodas

Following the inauguration of the New England Peace Pagoda, which is a sealed dome that cannot be entered, the monks and lay community erected a temple on the same grounds to be used for daily chanting and prayer. Unfortunately a fire of unknown origin destroyed the beautiful structure just a month after its 1987 dedication. Currently another temple is under construction on the site, this one made of concrete after the style of temples in India. Kato Shonin and Sister Clare maintain close connections with local people, residing and practicing in a modest structure on the grounds. Each October a larger community gathers for a commemoration of the inauguration of the Peace Pagoda, listening to domestic and international speakers rooted in their own faiths and in the movements for peace and justice. As the years progress, increasing numbers of people visit the Peace Pagoda and the Japanese gardens surrounding the Pagoda, appreciating the tranquillity and the pervasive spirit of peace. The land, now shared by a Cambodian Temple built by followers of Maha Ghosananda, has affectionately become known as Buddha Hill.

The Nipponzan Myohoji sangha has grown in other areas of the US as well. The second Peace Pagoda in America arose in Grafton NY, a small town near Albany, under the guidance of the nun Sister Jun Yasuda. The only Japanese nun of the order living in the US to undertake the development of her own community, Peace Pagoda and temple, Sister Jun transcends the traditional gender norms embedded in Japanese

society and reflected in Nipponzan Myohoji. She has attracted a loyal following and developed significant relationships with Native American communities, with whom she participates in arduous peacewalks and engages in movements for Native American rights. At the same time she upholds her commitment to the abolition of militarism and nuclear weapons through long pilgrimages, vigils and public witness.

In Atlanta, Georgia, another Nipponzan Myohoji sangha is emerging, this time in connection with a newly developing relationship with the African American community of Atlanta and with strong on-going ties to the peace constituency of the South East US. The monk Utsumi Shonin and the only other American nun, Sister Denise, renovated an old crack house in an African-American neighborhood of Atlanta and converted it into a Nipponzan Temple. Through their connection with the Reverend Timothy McDonald, an African American Baptist Church leader whose life was touched by Guruji, Utsumi Shonin and Sister Denise offer themselves to a community not usually associated with American Buddhism, encouraging new alliances and bringing their own strengths as Mahayana Buddhists concerned with social liberation. Their presence in Atlanta has the potential to invigorate local movements for justice and cross-fertilize African American activists with anti-nuclear peace movement constituencies who might not otherwise create partnerships. Utsumi Shonin and Sister Denise enjoy a warm relationship with the African American Baptist congregation who housed them for many years; the Buddhist monk and nun attend Sunday church services and participate in the life of the community.

In the Western area of the US, Jungi Shonin moved to Big Mountain to bear witness with Navajo and Hopi Native Americans struggling for land and human rights. In

keeping with the community, he built a small temple in the fashion of the Navajo hogan. And in Washington State in the 1980's, a community of anti-nuclear activists known as Ground Zero welcomed the Nipponzan Myohoji monks to join them in protesting the Trident Submarine at the Naval Base and to establish a temple on nearby land. A leader of that community writes:

Their chants are the backdrop for many conversions to peace; their drums help to keep people centered in times of danger; their smiles and gassho open many hearts closed to the messages of peace. All this happens now because Guruji refused to quit when he was one person praying by himself. That teaches me that we must continue in spite of adversity, and that we must never underestimate the power of prayer....Guruji's face teaches me not to be afraid to pray and to love and to suffer, because on the other side of prayer and love and suffering he has found joy. (50)

A Strong Witness

There are probably few Buddhist groups in America experiencing the diverse level of acceptance afforded to Nipponzan Myohoji. As engaged Buddhists, they are connected to circles of progressive political and social change that include Native Americans and African Americans as well as many of the major movements for peace and justice in the US. Their presence offers a spiritual perspective and discipline to lay activist groups, and an activist passion and commitment to Buddhists and others unfamiliar with the worlds of social activists. Their absolute commitment to nonviolence and to the abolition of war and militarism, and their personal disciplines of simplicity and spiritual steadfastness, inspires and uplifts those whose lives they touch.

Sasamori Shonin, who dedicated himself to the construction of the Leverett Peace Pagoda and first temple, moved to Managua, Nicaragua to support the efforts of the Nicaraguan people to freely develop their society. Sasamori Shonin was attracted both by the liberation theology developed in Latin America and by the spirit of the North

Americans assisting the Nicaraguan liberation movement, who guided and supported his Nicaraguan witness. In cooperation with the US movements for justice in Central America, Sasamori Shonin lived among the poor and, with the support of the local churches in Managua, prayed and fasted for peace. He went to Nicaragua as he had come to Leverett, with language skills not yet acquired, with no protection or possessions, but with enormous faith in the power of his prayer drum and chant. Sasamori Shonin remained in Nicaragua for several years, developing very significant contacts with the grassroots and religious leadership in Managua, with North American activists and with the movement for liberation theology. To pray for peace and an end to the total destruction of the Nicaraguan movement for self-determination, he undertook a 40 day fast and prayer vigil in front of the church on the main plaza in Managua. Slight in stature under normal circumstances, his body was skeletal after 40 days of fasting and chanting, but his mind was clear and his resolve strengthened.

Walking for Peace

Undertaking pilgrimages for peace, an ancient and honored tradition, acquired new life under the guidance of contemporary spiritual leaders. Gandhi marched throughout India with tens of thousands of followers in a campaign to declare independence from Britain. Martin Luther King Jr. walked with his followers throughout the south of the US protesting the laws of segregation. Nichidatsu Fujii established walking practice to bear witness for a spiritual civilization, both in Japan and abroad. The monks and nuns of Nipponzan Myohoji residing in the US continue that tradition, walking ceaselessly across the length and breadth of the US and beyond, walking for peace, to end nuclearism, to support justice and minority rights, to end

violence and to proclaim the need for a new relationship to each other and to the earth. In every year since their arrival in the US there have been walks led by or accompanied by Nipponzan Myohoji, to military bases or weapons production facilities, to seats of government or the United Nations, or on behalf of particular communities or individuals suffering discrimination and injustice.

The *World Peace March* 1982 exemplified the logistical and physical efforts made by Nipponzan Myohoji to awaken the public to the issues of nuclear war. Simultaneous walks were organized by the monks and nuns in Europe, Asia and North America, all to convene on the United Nations in June 1982 for the beginning of the Second Special Session on Disarmament. Walks in the US began both from San Francisco and Los Angeles to New York, with other walks originating in New Orleans, Maine and Canada. Religious leaders invited by Nipponzan Myohoji arrived in New York to lend their moral authority to the New York gathering of one million people, including walkers and demonstrators. Guruji, then aged 97, spoke at this public event, where over one million people plus a televised audience, convening to protest the manufacture and proliferation of nuclear weapons, heard the aged monk Guruji chant *Na Mu Myo Ho Ren Ge Kyo*.

Sasamori Shonin organized the *Quincentennial Peacewalk* in 1992 from Panama City through Central America and the south of the US to Washington DC, to chronicle the history of the European conquest and the 500 years of oppression of the indigenous and marginalized poor of the Americas. Sister Clare helped organize the international outreach for a pilgrimage in Sri Lanka. The purpose of that pilgrimage was “to seek a way for neighboring groups divided by fear and strife to live together in trust

and amity, transcending differences of thought and creed.” (51) Thus while a small group of Nipponzan Myohoji nuns and monks live and practice Buddhism in the US, their reach is global and their focus encompasses interfaith commitments to world peace. Each walk arises from very strong vision, prayer and spiritual guidance, initiated only after deep searching and collaborative advice from the Sangha.

In 1980 Sasamori Shonin prayed and fasted at the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camps in Oswiecim, Poland, profoundly experiencing the horrors of the Holocaust. These memories remained in his heart and provided the inspiration for the *Convocation at Auschwitz* and the *Interfaith Pilgrimage for Peace and Life 1995*.

In 1994-95 Sasamori Shonin organized and led an eight month peace walk from Auschwitz to Hiroshima in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the termination of the Second World War and the liberation of the concentration camps. He wanted to encourage moral reflection on the crimes against humanity committed during and since World War II, to offer repentance, especially as a Japanese in those Asian countries occupied by his own government, and to contemplate the current ethical and moral issues facing the world community. Two hundred people gathered in Auschwitz for a week long convocation and prayer vigil, during which Sasamori Shonin and many other Nipponzan monks and nuns chanted and fasted on the platform of the railroad tracks at Birkenau, at the final destination point for prisoners fated for the gas ovens. For a week in Polish December weather they endured cold and hunger while praying for the victims of the camps, the sound of their prayer drum echoing in the vast and eerie emptiness of Birkenau. While the monks and devotees prayed on the tracks, most of the 200 international participants plumbed the

depths of their own grief and rage, reflecting on the rise of intolerance and hatred and its ultimate manifestation in Auschwitz. Mixing intercommunal dialogue with vigils at the two concentration camps, sharing sorrow and tears, meditation and prayer, the interfaith gathering allowed people from many nations to bridge their differences, express their compassion and intensify their commitments to ethnic healing.

At the close of the *Convocation at Auschwitz*, Sasamori Shonin, took his place before the long line of peace marchers, lifted his drum and chanted *Na Mu Myo Ho Ren Ge Kyo*. With this more than 100 peace pilgrims took the first step of the walk to Hiroshima that would take them through Bosnia, the Middle East, Iraq, Cambodia and many other lands suffering the effects of war and ethnic hatred. “*The Interfaith Pilgrimage for Peace and Life 1995*” included daily interfaith prayers and dialogues on peace with citizens in cities and villages visited by the walkers. A peace pilgrim who walked the entire eight months of this journey wrote that “Sasamori helped shape the pilgrimage into an event that would touch thousands of lives through contact and prayer and would change the lives of the pilgrims forever.” (52) In August 1995, the walkers arrived in Hiroshima for the solemn 50th anniversary commemoration of the destruction of Hiroshima by nuclear bomb. Sasamori Shonin reflected on their 8 month pilgrimage and the lessons of compassion and understanding learned by the walkers:

I believe that if we face the painful facts of history unflinchingly and convey the lessons drawn from them to future generations, we will be able to bring peace to the souls of those who died in anguish in time of war. From the loss of their precious lives, we can establish new values today and for the future. (53)

In 1998-99 Sister Clare will walk for justice and an end to racism as she undertakes a pilgrimage that she envisioned for years and has worked steadily to organize. An American of European heritage concerned with issues of injustice and discrimination toward Americans of African descent, Sister Clare's contribution to heal the wounds of slavery and racism takes the form of the *Interfaith Pilgrimage of the Middle Passage*, a 12 month peacewalk that will retrace the journey of slavery through the US, the Caribbean and West Africa. Sister Clare believes that "The Pilgrimage will be a living prayer of the heart, mind and body for the sons and daughters of the African diaspora...It is hoped the journey will be...a purification of the heart of all those connected, intimately or distantly, with this history."(54)

When we walk together, our feet touch the same earth, we walk beneath the same sun and soak the same rain. As we journey together with a common purpose, we realize that joys and difficulties need not stop us. In walking, we begin to restore the spiritual strength of humanity, the strength to reverse the vicious repercussions of our history and to move toward a genuinely peaceful society nourished by the innate generosity of human beings and the natural world. (55)

Influence in the US

In the annals of engaged Buddhism in the West, the voice of Nipponzan Myohoji is unique. Beloved by the US peace community, the religious left, and many Native Americans, African Americans, Central Americans and others, Nipponzan Myohoji has established itself as a faithful and serious partner in the process of building a new civilization based on spiritual values. Kato Shonin serves as an Advisory Board member of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship; Sister Clare contributes as a member of the Amherst Interfaith Council. All of them lead interfaith walks and participate in the development of multi-religious dialogues in this country and abroad. They embrace people of all

faiths and no faith, carrying their own disciplines and beliefs while accepting all others without contradiction or with any instincts toward proselytizing. Their commitment to Nichidatsu Fujii and their own spiritual path remains profound and unwavering; despite the years since Guruji's death they are connected to him every day of their lives. They experience no discrepancy between activism for the sake of changing the world and a life of devotion and prayer. The life of each monk and nun, firmly grounded in their world peace work, is anchored in many hours of chanting practice each day. The Nipponzan Myohoji monks and nuns walk the Bodhisattva path, dedicated to the liberation of all beings, with great commitment and purity.

In reflecting on Buddhism and social engagement, Kato Shonin believes that since the Buddha turned the Wheel of Dharma on this earth, this earth is where we obtain his teachings and reach enlightenment. "The Buddha expounds the Dharma eternally because of the yearning in people's minds." If individuals practice the Lotus Sutra correctly, Kato Shonin says, "life itself is engagement and we do not need to separate into engaged or not-engaged Buddhism. The Buddha's teaching is not a tool or an ornament, but exists to bring peace to the world. We follow the teaching because it leads to peace."(56) Like his mentor and preceptor Guruji, Kato Shonin disciplines and purifies his mind through the practices of *Rissho Ankoku Ron* and *tangyo-raihai*, bowing reverently to all beings and bringing righteousness into prayer, work and relationships. Every moment of life is engagement; every moment of life is Buddhist.

The Nipponzan Myohoji order may not survive beyond the lives of this current Sangha, as there are few young monks and nuns. The arduous path of Nipponzan Myohoji and the prevailing values of materialism in Japan and the US discourage

ordination. However, it may be too early to predict the future of Nipponzan Myohoji. For the present, the approximately 150 ordained members of the Sangha throughout the world uphold the traditions, spreading their light and ethical concerns with influence and visibility beyond their small numbers. Nipponzan Myohoji monks and nuns living in the US have certainly been changed by their contacts with this culture, evidence of which appears in their greater understanding of feminist issues and the empowerment of women, increased tolerance for participatory decision making and ever-increasing interfaith and intercommunal engagement with America's moral dilemmas.

But the real beneficiaries may be the Americans who are touched by the reverence, generosity and kindness that the monks and nuns of Nipponzan Myohoji bestow on all people, by their radical social vision, and by their inspiring and dedicated lives as Buddhists committed to bring forth a world filled with peace, compassion and spiritual harmony. Through their peacewalks, building of Peace Pagodas, and religious practices, they steadfastly continue their "...single task to deliver humanity from its present suffering,"(57) planting seeds of peace with every step and messages of love and consciousness, tolerance and respect, courage and hope, with every bow.

Acknowledgment

I wish to express my enduring appreciation to Kato Shonin and Sister Clare of the Leverett Peace Pagoda, not only for their essential contributions to this chapter and for their patient readings of the text in progress, but for the blessings of their presence in my life, their years in the community of Leverett, Massachusetts which is my home, and their commitment to the ethical issues in the United States. I bow deeply with thanks

and gratitude for the moral vision of all the monks and nuns of Nipponzan Myohoji, both in the US and abroad.

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Notes

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10. Teresina Rowell. p. 766
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Paula Green founded and directs the Karuna Center for Peacebuilding, which provides education and training in intercommunal dialogue and conflict transformation worldwide. In recent years she has led educational seminars in Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe and the Mid East, as well as in the US and Canada. Paula serves on the faculty of the School for International Training in Vermont, lectures and publishes internationally, and is the co-editor of *Psychology and Social Responsibility: Facing Global Challenges* (NYU Press). She holds graduate degrees in Counseling Psychology and Intergroup Relations from Boston University and New York University. Her Buddhist activities include membership on the Boards of Directors of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship, the Insight Meditation Society, and the International Network of Engaged Buddhists, as well as close affiliation with the Nipponzan Myohoji community in Leverett, MA.

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