

LOS ANGELES BETSUIN

jihō

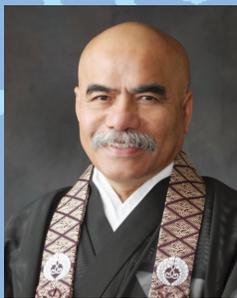
WWW

No. 466

May - June 2021

RIMBAN'S MESSAGE

THOUGHTS ON MEMORIAL DAY



**Rimban William
Briones**

If we calculate the length of human life, the allotted span at this time is 56 years. At the present, however, it is indeed noteworthy for a person to have lived to 56. Given this, at 63, I am already well into the years of decline. By my count, my life has already been extended by

seven years. I feel uneasy on this point as to what sort of illness I may encounter in meeting the conditions leading to death.

The way of the world is, above all, that we continue on as if unaware of the uncertainty of life for young and old alike. Existence is as fleeting as a flash of lightning or the morning dew, and the wind of impermanence may come even now. Yet we think only of prolonging this life for as long as possible, without ever aspiring to born into the Pureland. This is inexpressibly deplorable.

The month of May is quickly approaching and with its arrival means yet another birthday for me. As with all birthdays, at least for me, it is a time to reflect on my life — Where I am... Where I've been and ...Where I'm going. As I reflect upon this dubious occasion, I can't help but think of Rennyō Shonin's *Gobunshō*, *Letters on "On the Allotted Span of Life"*.

Rennyō writes, ".... I am already well into the years of decline. By my count, my life has already been extended by seven years." In Rennyō's time, one rarely lived beyond 56 years. I am reminded that my father passed away at the age of 57 and that my life has been extended so far, by 15 years.

When Rennyō did pass away at the age of 85

years, he had out lived four wives and seven children (Rennyō had a total of 27 children). It is with this sense of profound sense of loss that Rennyō must have contemplated the transience of life and the importance of memorial services for our loved ones.

The month of May is also a time when many Americans gather in their neighboring cemetery to pay tribute to their loved ones who sacrificed their lives. It is a day to remember those soldiers who so bravely made the ultimate sacrifice for our country to preserve this land's hopes and dreams.

Memorial Day is also a time for family and friends to remember their loved ones who have passed on. Hopefully, this year we will be able to gather, unlike last year where most cemeteries were closed due to the COVID-19 restrictions.

In many traditions of Buddhism, especially Jodo Shin Buddhists, place a great deal of emphasis on memorial services. However, it wasn't always like that. When Shakyamuni Buddha passed away he asked his disciples not to perform a funeral for him. He told them to continue their practices. During Shakyamuni's time and until the late 600 CE, funerals were simply chanting sutras during the cremation.

Funerals and memorial services that are conducted within our temples today were greatly influenced from Chinese Confucianism. The Confucian ideals of filial piety also know as ancestral worship was one of the virtues to be held above all else, even after death. Therefore, family members of the deceased believed by accumulating merit through virtuous deeds such as offering food, drink, flowers and chanting sutras, could then transfer their merit to

(continued on page 4)

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WRITINGS

by Rev. Hibiki Murakami



Rev. Hibiki
Murakami

In every issue of the Japanese section of the Betsuin Jiho, there is a column called, “*Ichigenkoji*.” *Ichigenkoji* is a four-character idiomatic compound as *kanji*. This column is not a “minister’s message” or about temple things. It’s an editorial where the writer comments about current news and events mainly taking place in the US or Japan with an occasional bit of trivia. In the column, the writer’s name is usually included at

the bottom but my *Ichigenkoji* column will not include my name. I began writing this column in the Jiho last summer. *Ichigenkoji* is modeled after the column, *Henshu Techo* (editorial notes), which is published in one of Japan’s top five newspapers, *Yomiuri Shimbun*. *Henshu Techo* does not include the writer’s name so I am following this policy.

The *Yomiuri Shimbun* is credited with having the largest newspaper circulation in the world as of 2019 for reporting the daily news. Every morning,



Henshu Techo can be found on the front page. *Ichigenkoji* can also be found on the first page of the Jiho. *Henshu Techo*, however, is written in a very refined and elegant language that I can not emulate. I do recommend reading it for someone who wants to study the Japanese language. Meanwhile, I have to confess that I do imitate the structure of the *Henshu Techo* when writing the *Ichigenkoji* column. Interestingly, The *Yomiuri Shimbun* is not the only newspaper putting such columns on the front page. There are columns similar to *Henshu Techo*, such as *Yoroku* in *The Mainichi*, *Tenseijingo* in *The Asahi Shimbun*, and *Shunju* in *The Nikkei*. These newspapers assign their best writers for their columns. It is known how well written these columns are when they are used as writing lessons for students in Japan. These columns are aimed at the office workers on their busy morning commute on the trains. How impressive these columns are, however, when they can reach school children on up to adult readers. In addition, each column is worthy of reading to gain knowledge, thoughts, and ideas about a variety of subject matters like literature, politics, economy, science, medical, biology, etc.

This brings to my mind of how an automotive engineer can design a car for competitive purposes because the

goal is very specific and clear. Developing a commuter car, however, is more of a challenge because the car has to be easy to handle by anyone, anywhere, and at any time. When a writer thinks in these terms, a column should not be written for someone. The written material has to be written in such a way as to be able to reach everyone. Additionally, to write a column like *Henshu Techo*, the content has to be consistently compelling. It goes to show just how brilliant these writers are in order to create such written material.

Back to my *Ichigenkoji*, I always hope to compose good material for my column like *Henshu Techo*, but as I said, as I review what I’ve written, I’m usually disappointed as to how messy my sentences and words are. Yet, when it’s finally done, I am confident with what I’ve written thinking, “this is the best.” I hope, with time and experience, that my writing skills will gradually improve.

I have discovered while trying to compose something to write, I often end up moving one step forward and then two steps. Composing is stressful. I will continue to write *Ichigenkoji*. In spite of the difficulties in writing, it is beginning to be enjoyable. Every topic is totally up to me and the length is only about 486 characters, which is the almost equivalent length to *Henshu Techo*. (The Japanese characters are counted by letters, not words.) Deciding on how to create a story in a small space is challenging. But, I do have another motivation for this column.

Along with my *Ichigenkoji* column, but I do also edit the Japanese section of Jiho. I’ve been the editing since last summer. I recall, at that time, the COVID restrictions were very strict. In order to follow the safety protocols, the Betsuin had to remain closed. With that, there were no events, social activities or anything of the like. As the editor, I was concerned about having enough material to fill the pages. One day, I was reading a book written by Masaaki Takeuchi who was a former writer of *Henshu Techo* for over a decade. In his book, he talked about his formula when writing his column. For each of his *Henshu Techo* columns he would conclude with a final thought that would evoke the readers’ emotions. His role was not to report the news. He did want the readers to have some emotional reaction to what was reported in the rest of the newspaper. When I read about Takeuchi’s method in his *Henshu Techo* column, I thought about how this might work for the readers of Jiho. That is why I started to write my *Ichigenkoji* column.

Takeuchi always concluded his *Henshu Techo* with his
(continued on page 3)

BETSUIN BOARD PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Pam Tabata

Greetings,

You receive this Jiho because you or someone in your family felt it was important to be a member of this temple. If it is you, then this message is just a mere reminder of the importance to being a member. If it was a loved one from the past, then let me give you some thoughts.

A few of you may know that my mom's parents were very devout Jodo Shinshu Buddhists. My grandmother became blind when she was in her 30s. Growing up, I remember thinking that it was pretty amazing that she was able to raise nine children, never seeing her last child, and all of them became productive members of society. She loved coming to service and her children would bring her to the temple so she could hear the *dharma*. At the time, I personally didn't get it, but there must have been something to it. Maybe because she was my grandmother, but I never saw her angry and I think she had plenty to be angry about, with the cards she was dealt. But she would dress up on Sunday and one of her children had to bring her and my grandfather. Occasionally, my Uncle James, who lived in Torrance, had to come up to East LA to take them to the temple.

Now, as I get older and am able to listen to the *dharma*, I don't have the struggles of my grandmother, but I can hear it and am more at peace than 10 or 20 years ago. I want to continue listening and hoping to "get it." Pre-pandemic, when I would come into the temple on Sundays, I was constantly putting out fires and working on one project or another. My solace was walking into the *hondo* and leaving all the other stuff outside the *hondo* doors. I could just hear the *dharma* and reflect.

The word "mindfulness" is bantered around a lot. Many people are trying to find the calming effect and a more positive outlook at life. All this searching and I can tell you it's here and your past loved ones knew it. They wanted it for us, as well. During this quarantine, we don't have to do anything but hear it.

Your membership helps sustain this temple's existence and we should be grateful for our past loved ones who gave us this wonderful gift. We should then feel the passion of passing it on to our future loved ones.

I am asking you to please submit your membership and give your gift of the future.

In *gassho*

MEMORIAL AND FUNERAL SERVICES UPDATE

by Rimban William Briones

While government officials deemed "houses of worship" safe to open at 25% of their capacity sometime last year, and more recently 50%, the Betsuin has remained cautious in opening the *hondo* for Sunday services and memorial services. With the recent decrease of cases of COVID-19, however, and the number of hospitalization and deaths in Los Angeles and more people getting vaccinated, our COVID-19 Advisory Committee (CAC), is allowing Betsuin to conduct memorial services in the **Wisteria Chapel** with a maximum of 10 people and inurnment services in the **Nokotsudo** with a maximum of 6 people. In addition, funerals in the west parking lot has increased from 20 to 50 attendees. Of course, temperature checks, face masks, physical distancing and contact tracing is still required when coming into the temple.

The Nokotsudo is open for visitation during office hours (Monday – Friday, 9 AM to 5PM) and Saturday from 10 AM to 3 PM. Please call the office for an appointment.

(*Murakami* - continued from page 2)

thoughts. He didn't add any frills or easy words. For example, perhaps this is a Japanese language cultural thing. There are many set phrases, which is a kind of universal word adapting to any situation. It's convenient if you remember them, but these phrases can work even if the speaker doesn't think so. Takeuchi avoided such phrases to express his thoughts because they were too easy. Instead, he chose words that were direct which left no question in his readers' minds. Now, I recall the phrase, "Words have meaning." The words that have been used by a lot of people eventually create an emotional response because they have history.

The name, *na-mo-a-mi-da-bu-tsu*, which is composed of the six *kanji*, can create an emotional response. There are beings who were admired by the Amida Buddha's wish overlapped their hearts by the name, and it has been taken over to today by reciting the name. Some people say language is a tool. I agree with that, but also I think they have humanity, too. Do we think *namoamidabutsu* is just words? Maybe, we can say, "yes," but rather than just a language, there should be a thing. For being passed over many generations, I think *namoamidabutsu* has significance.

GOTAN-E

Gotan-e is the name of the service that is held to celebrate the birth of Shinran Shonin, the Founder of Jodo Shinshu Buddhism. Shinran Shonin's birth is given as May 21, 1173. He was given the name **Matsuwakamaro** and was born in the Hino area near Kyoto. His father was Hino, Arinori. At the age of 4, Shinran and his siblings are separated from their father. Not much is known about his mother except that records indicate that she died when Shinran Shonin was eight years old.

At the age of nine Shinran Shonin was taken to Mount Hiei, the center of the Tendai tradition of Buddhism, where he would spend the next 20 years of his life. As the story is told within the tradition, the young Matsuwakamaro was taken to Mount Hiei by his uncle Noritsuna. He would be taken to Shouren-in or one of the many temples on Mount Hiei to be admitted as a child monk. Unfortunately, because it was already late in the day when Shinran Shonin went to Mount Hiei, Jien, who was the head of Shouren-in at the time, recommended that the party return home and come back the next day. At that time, Shinran Shonin is said to have composed the following poem:

The heart of the frivolous cherry (blossom) that believes in a tomorrow, will not the gale blow in the middle of the night

Moved by this poem, it is said that Jien allowed Matsuwakamaro's entrance into Mount Hiei and gave him his tonsure (tokudo, ceremony where one becomes a priest) and the name Hannen immediately. He would later enter into Honen Shonin's group and was originally given the name Shakku. He would later be given the name Zenshin. After his exile and having his priestly status removed by the government, he chooses the name Shinran. Shonin is a title and is often translated as, "Sage."

* * *

The above article is from the Gardena Buddhist Church website: <https://www.gardenabuddhistchurch.org/gotane>

* * *

The Betsuin will hold a virtual **Gotan-e Service on Sunday, May 16th.**

(Rimban - continued from page 1)

their loved one.

When Buddhism arrived in Japan, it kept many of the memorial traditions from China. Buddhist devotees continued to hold memorial service for the benefit of the deceased. In Japan, prior to Shinran, Buddhist memorial services were held for the benefit of the deceased in their afterlife. It was thought through conducting services, chanting, making offerings ... money or food it would appease the souls of the deceased and they would more or less protect you from harm (*bach*) or bring you good fortune. So this was about our relationship with the deceased in the afterlife and our fortune or misfortune.

Of course Shinran Shonin rejected this belief. Unfortunately, many Jodo Shinshu Buddhists still have this misconception of why we do memorial services. You can imagine if we're unclear about memorial services and the afterlife, just imagine what our non-Buddhist friends think about these issues.

As Jodo Shinshu Buddhist, family memorial services are a time to reflect upon our lives and how we are continually being influenced by our loved ones and how we have benefited by their existence.

Our chanting, burning incense, bringing flowers and *os-onae* is nothing more than an acknowledgement of the fact that we are able to enjoy the benefits of the lives of those who have passed before us. To truly acknowledge this fact and express our gratitude is a true manifestation of the memorial service.

So as we observe Memorial Day or conduct our loved ones memorial service, let us reflect upon the Truth of our existence. Let us reflect upon the countless causes and conditions that enabled us to be who we are and the numerous lives that are responsible for our existence. To truly understand this, we are able to inwardly realize the wisdom and compassion of Amida Buddha and outwardly live with gratitude for the life made possible for us by loved ones. The realization of this truth moves us forward to the future knowing that the thoughts, words, deeds of our loved ones continue to embrace us.

Namo Amida Butsu



*Matsuwakamaro
Nagano Betsuin Jpn*



DID YOU KNOW?

by Eiko Masuyama



Eiko Masuyama

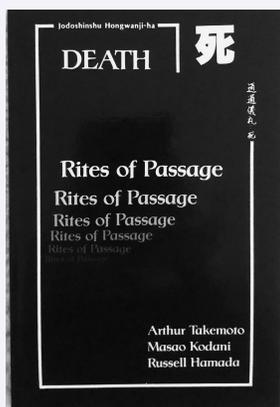
The Makuragyo (Pillow Sutra) is a short service immediately after the death of a person. It is chanted at a person's deathbed, hence the term "pillow-sutra."

—Traditions of Jodoshinshu Hongwanji-ha

Rites of Passage: DEATH

by Arthur Takemoto, Masao Kodani, Russell Hamada, 1986

The first service for the deceased is called *makuragyo*. Throughout the history of Buddha-dharma, there has never been a designated deathbed service. There may have been some form of ritual service. However, it was not until the Edo Period (1603 – 1867 also called the Tokugawa Period) that the name *makuragyo* and its mandatory practice came into being.



It was during this time that the Tokugawa Bafuku (Shogunate) had begun its official ban against Christianity. In an effort to control all aspects of economic and social life in Japan, isolationist policies were established and foreign influences were discouraged. In order to eliminate the spread of Christianity and to control its influence, the Shogunate initiated its own religious action. Immediately upon a death, the district Buddhist temple had to be contacted prior to securing permission for burial. The body was examined, a report filed, and a sutra (*makuragyo*) was read. Buddhists had conducted traditional *Rinju Gongyo* services at the time of death, but uniformity and universality were served by the Tokugawa Shogunate with the *makuragyo* (in the effort to limit the spread of Christian belief). The general practice of *makuragyo* continues to this day (although there is no longer a ban against Christianity).

Today, *makuragyo* is conducted to convey a feeling of Compassion that soothes the pain of losing someone whom we love and cherish. In this way, it is a return to the true spirit of Bud-dha's teaching. Often times, when we experience the death of someone very close, matters within the household become very tense and chaotic. Throughout our lives, modern society has taught us to be

pragmatic and scientific in interpreting logic and ethics. However, at such times, all sense of logic, ethics, scientific approach and technology all become meaningless. They all fail to satisfy the questions and emotions of the human heart. Therefore, the *makuragyo* like the funeral service is not a "last rite" or "farewell," but is a beginning. Amongst this chaos and emotional confusion, the *makuragyo* becomes a focal point of stability and peace of mind for the grieving family. It is an intimate moment when everyone may listen and hear the very profound and compassionate teachings of Buddha; which is meant as an instruction of how to continue living for the grieving family members and friends.

In the United States, the *makuragyo* is conducted immediately after death, or even up until the next day. The service may be held in the hospital, at home, in the temple, or even at the mortuary. The *makuragyo* consists of sutra chanting, the burning of incense, and a sermon by the minister. In many hospitals, however, the burning of incense is prohibited. The *makuragyo* is often followed by the funeral discussion (*Soshiko Sodan*) where arrangements are discussed with family, friends, temple representatives, the minister, and mortuary's funeral counselors.

Following a death at home, and during the *makuragyo*, the decoration of the family *obutsudan* (family Buddhist altar) may be kept as it usually is. It is customary, however, to change the flowers. If at possible, tree branches should be used and if these are not available, the use of evergreens is recommended in place of flowers. If the *makuragyo* is held immediately after death, the face of the deceased should be covered with a small white cloth or shroud. Constant burning of candles and incense is not necessary. Candles and incense should be burned only during a service, or if individuals wish to express their respect in front of an *obutsudan*.

* * * * *

As time marches on... situations change... adjust, we must... impermanence...

In 1961, when Baachan passed away at home (around noon), in her bed. Rev Shoki Mohri came and conducted a *makuragyo* service by her bedside with the family at her side. Her face was covered with a white handkerchief.

In 1988, when Dad passed away at the hospital (late at night), Rimban Shoki Mohri and Rev Russell Hamada came to the house the next day and conducted a service

(continued on page 8)

BETSUIN CALENDAR OF EVENTS

MAY

- 09 Mothers' Day Service 10:00 am
Eitaikyo Shotsuki Hoyo 1:00 pm
- 16 Gotan-E Service 10:00 am
- 23 Regular Service 10:00 am
- 30 Memorial Day Sunday Service 10:00 am

JUNE

- 06 Regular Service 10:00 am
- 13 Regular Service 10:00 am
Eitaikyo Shotsuki Hoyo 1:00 pm
- 20 Fathers' Day Service 10:00 am
- 27 Regular Service 10:00 am
Graduation/Attendance Awards

JULY

- 04 Independence Day - Betsuin closed
- 11 Obon Drive-Thru

Wednesdays "Contemporary Issues and Jodo Shinshu Perspective" discussion by Rimban Briones

In order to access or register for any of these events contact the Betsuin for information:

213-680-9130 or

NishiDharmaCenter@gmail.com

BETSUIN MEMORIAL DAY SERVICE

SUNDAY, MAY 30th @ 10 am

LOS ANGELES BUDDHIST TEMPLE FEDERATION SERVICES

SATURDAY, MAY 29th

Riverside Cemetery 10:00 am
JACCC All Wars Memorial Monument 11:00 am

MONDAY, MAY 30th

Pacific Crest Cemetery 9:00 am
Pacific View Memorial Park 10:00 am
Green Hills Memorial Park 11:00 am

MONDAY, MAY 31st

Evergreen Cemetery
MUEN-TO 9:30 am
IREI-TO 10:00 am
KUYO-TO (Hiroshima Kenjinkai) 10:30 am
NISEI VETERANS 11:00 am

Rose Hills Memorial Park
NISEI VETERANS 9:00 am
IREI-TO 10:00 am

Woodlawn Memorial Cemetery 9:00 am

Angeles Memorial Cemetery 12:30 pm

Inglewood Park Cemetery 2:00 pm

SAVE THE DATE

JULY 11

**OBON
DRIVE-THRU**

2021 MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

Valid from January 1 through December 31, 2021

\$250 FOR EACH ADULT FAMILY MEMBER

CHECKS ARE PAYABLE TO:
L.A. HONPA HONGWANJI BUDDHIST TEMPLE

Payments may be made in full or by installments throughout the year of 2021

SALMON BOWL FUNDRAISER

The Betsuin's Salmon Bowl Fundraiser was a success. There were comments about how delicious the food was and how plentiful the portions were. Having learned from the Obon Drive-Thru fundraiser last summer, everything was well organized and well-timed where there was no congestion or traffic jams.

Chairperson, Chris Furusawa's comment: "I want to thank those of you who purchased a dinner and helped to make the fundraiser a success. We appreciate your generous support!"



Salmon Bowl ...and there was taiyaki for dessert!



...Checking in...



Sherry Watanabe filling order bags.



Michi Chavez (left) and Junie Obi making sure the process is moving along.



Bradford Hirahara and Michelle Obi "delivering" orders to the cars.

Rev. Murakami thanking everyone as they drove away with their Salmon Bowl dinners.



IN MEMORIAM

The *Nishi Betsuin* extends its deepest condolences to the families of the following members who have recently passed away. May the family members find solace and comfort in the *Nembutsu*.

--*Namo Amida Butsu*

January 2021

- 14 Himeji Sakaniwa
- 19 Yukiko Sameshima
- 20 Takuya Suzuki
- 23 Marie Hamamoto
- 24 Eiko Louise Onishi

- 5 Henry Hiroshi Mukai
- 12 Hitoshi Shimabukuro
- 23 Noboru Michael* Kaku
- 28 Yoshihiko Sugii

March 2021

February 2021

- 1 June Tomoko Kawaharada
- 1 Lea Miwako Hayashi
- 3 Noriko Minamizono

- 2 Gerald Hiroshi Niimi
- 5 Hideo Yoshino
- 11 Stanley Yukio Oda
- 13 Mitsue Ohsawa
- 15 Ann Shizuko Murata

(KNOW? continued from page 5)

in front of our family *obutsudan*.

In 2001, when Mom passed away at home, in her bed, late at night, the *makuragyo* service was conducted by Rev Gregory Gibbs at the mortuary chapel the next day or so.

In 2021, when Auntie passed away at a nursing facility, Friday night, Labor Day weekend, during the pandemic, the *makuragyo* service was conducted by Rimban Briones the following Tuesday at the mortuary (outside patio in back).

BETSUIN VEHICLE DONATION



Donate any vehicle:
car, truck, motorcycle, or boat

The vehicle need not be operational.

Funds received will go to the Betsuin general fund and donors can get full amount credit towards income tax.

Contact the Betsuin office: 213-680-9130

OBON MEMORIAL CHOCHIN

Lanterns will be suspended in the parking lot during the weekend of July 11-12.

The tassel of each lantern is personalized with the name of the deceased loved one along with the given Buddhist name.

Orders can be made through the temple office @ 213-680-9130



Betsuin Jiho

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 Japanese Editor: Rev. Hibiki Murakami
 Photos: Glen Tao

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