

LOS ANGELES BETSUIN

jihō

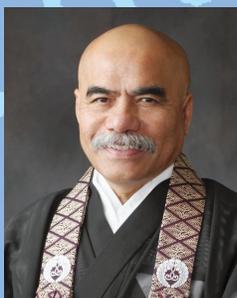
WWW

No. 471

March - April 2022

RIMBAN'S MESSAGE

JODO SHINSHU AND PRAYER



**Rimbhan William
Briones**

“As Jodo Shinshu Buddhist, we shall seek to be mindful of our words and deeds, be responsible citizens of our society and share with others the truth and reality of Jodo Shinshu. Understanding fully the principle of causality, we shall not practice petitionary prayer or magic,

nor shall we rely upon astrology or other superstitions.”

I've been serving as a Buddhist Chaplain at the Los Angeles County + USC Medical Center for several years now. Since then, I've been called perhaps twenty times to visit Buddhist patients. Sometimes patients just wanted to talk to a Buddhist priest but most of the time I was called when a loved one passed away.

I remember one of my first visits, when I was called by the chaplaincy office. There was a Vietnamese family at the hospital that just lost their father and they requested a Buddhist priest to offer prayers to their loved one. I told the chaplain on duty that I was a Jodo Shinshu minister which was a Japanese Buddhist tradition but he said they had tried several Buddhist temples and no one was willing or able to go. Hearing of the chaplain's predicament, I agreed to meet with the family.

As I drove to the hospital I thought, “What am I going to do? I don't pray”. When I met the family at the hospital, I expressed my condolences and we talked about their father. I then told them that I was a Jodo Shinshu Buddhist priest and explained that within our tradition we chant with the understanding that we are expressing our appreciation and gratitude to our loved one. However, I told them to please offer

a prayer within their own tradition while I chant. After I chanted a sutra, I remained with the family in silence as they wept. As I departed, I was touched by their expression of appreciation that I had come to chant a sutra for their father.

Among all Buddhists, Jodo Shinshu Buddhists are the only Buddhists who do not practice prayers nor do we teach that there can be benefits in this world through petitionary prayer. For most Buddhists, prayer is central in their practice.

The reading I began with above is an excerpt from *“The Essentials of Jodo Shinshu” (Kyosho)*. It can be found in the front page of any Jodo Shinshu service book, under *Tradition*: *“Understanding fully the principle of causality, we shall not practice petitionary prayer or magic, nor shall we rely upon astrology or other superstitions.”* In one sentence, Jodo Shinshu radically differentiates us from all other Buddhist traditions.

Most major religions involve prayer in one form or another. Prayer is probably the oldest form of spiritual/mystical practice in the history of mankind. It is natural for people to want to be blessed with personal benefit.

As Jodo Shinshu Buddhists, we reject this form of prayer since the basic teaching rests on the law of cause and effect. Buddhism teaches that happiness and unhappiness are the results of action. And that good fortune and misfortune are also the results of ones thoughts, words, and deeds. If we cannot understand this then for sure we will continue to be frustrated and unhappy.

For Buddhist we are to awaken or be mindful of our innate inner capacities of strength, compassion and wisdom rather to petition external
(continued on page 5)

Los Angeles
Homba Hongwanji
Buddhist Temple
815 East First Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

TEL: 213.680.9130
FAX: 213.680.2210

WEB: nishihongwanji-la.org

EMAIL: info@nishihongwanji-la.org

THUS I HAVE HEARD

by Rev. Hibiki Murakami



Rev. Hibiki
Murakami

“Though the river’s current never fails, the water passing, moment by moment, is never the same. Where the current pools, bubbles form on the surface, bursting and disappearing as others rise to replace them, none lasting long. In this world, people and their dwelling places are like that, always changing.” — The Hojoki by Kamo no chomei.

I went to an after school program nearby my home during my childhood. A couple of days a week, I rode my bicycle to get there to study arithmetic, language, and such to get some assignments. In order to be able to recite an old poem, such as the one above, by the next class I had to have it memorized. All assignments were the Japanese classic literature like *Tsurezureguza*, *Heike Monogatari*. There were times where I had to learn the seven herbs of spring or the animals of the Chinese zodiac. Some classics were difficult to comprehend by a young student. I was, however, required to recite them from memory in order to pass the teacher’s exam. I read my assignments again and again until I was able to recite the assignment out loud by memory. My teacher never allowed any excuses from me to not complete any assignments. So, I had no choice but to make every effort to get that piece in my head. As a result, even today, I still can still recite some passages.

In Japan, the students must take a Japanese class. It is common to have the Japanese instructor assign a student to read a passage from a textbook and the other students follow by reading the same passage. To my knowledge, this educational method is still very common in Japan.

As recently as the Edo period (1603-1867), there were no modern educational facilities in Japan. Instead, there were many tiny private schools. They were called *terakoya*, which means temple school. These schools were associated with the *tera* (temple) where the instructors were, mainly, Buddhist monks. We now know that students need not be taught how to read, write, or calculate by just Buddhist monks. Those who arrived in Japan from the western world during the Edo period were surprised to see that many of the Japanese were literate. The Japanese government was aware that its citizens had to be able to function so that education was encouraged. This resulted in the rise of the literacy rate in Japan. This factor was made possible by the *terakoya* stringent educational foundation. The educational foundation then is the

same as today. The difference is what was used then was the *Analects of Confucius* as their textbook. It was a routine practice for *terakoya* students to recite its passages. The students may not have understood what the passages meant but to study Confucius’ teachings nurtured their moral character. That particular study method to read and recite was meant to reinforce language.

This read and recite method is working well for my English learning. I often read a magazine aloud in my bathroom because I can hear my voice echoe against the walls. I can easily discern my pronunciation. I improve my reading skills by gathering information about good restaurants and other spots. As a result, I am getting more comfortable with reading, I am learning about interesting places, and I am increasing my vocabulary. Reading aloud is a good way to learn a new language. Reading aloud requires you to scan sentences and to listen to your reading. Reading silently to oneself only activates a single source of brain stimulation. Reading out loud, hearing oneself read, and seeing what’s being read creates multiple sources of brain stimulation and learning. An example of this is a face-to-face conversation is more impactful than one over the phone.

The early Buddhist scriptures were transmitted orally for hundred of years until they were eventually written down. Even today, there still remains as proof in that all sutras start with *“thus I have heard.”* This phrase establishes that what Shakyamuni had taught that is guaranteed. Even if one does not know what the Buddha Dharma is at the moment, eventually, the Dharma reveals itself in time. Rennyō Shonin, who is known for conveying the *nembutsu* teaching through letters, often suggested that his followers read his letters aloud in order to listen to them together. According to the *“Sayings of Rennyō Shonin”* (Goichidaiki kikigaki),

*“Throw the basket of yours into the water.
Likewise, immerse yourself in the dharma.”*

Reflecting upon what I have remembered about the passage I began this article with, it never loses its freshness. Actually, with time, it has become more meaningful. There are times when a simple message can hold a more complex meaning. In that sense, it is true as people say that being nurtured by the Name. It means those who are always with *namoamidabutsu* are constantly navigated toward the Pure Land.

**BETSUIN BOARD
PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE**



Pam Tabata

Our Dharma Center offers classes with Rev. Mas Kodani on Saturdays, I know Saturdays are a difficult day to commit for class, but I did it with Rev. Tets Unno and I never regretted giving up my Saturday mornings.

I enjoyed listening to Rev. Unno from when I was young until he deemed it was time to conclude these wonderful talks. He always spoke at a level above my head, but at the beginning I enjoyed hearing his voice. As I got older, I just kept taking a little bit more away from his talks. Now, ministers repeat their messages many times and what our parents say is true, “The older we get the smarter they get.” Each time I hear the dharma messages, they make more sense and I understand just a little bit more.

I have known Rev. Mas since I was going to LABCC Camp and I have heard his messages all these many years. During my teenage years, I thought of him as the “hippie philosophy” minister. Even now, he continues to sound like that to me. During class, I listen to him and agree with a lot of his takes on life. Then, a light bulb went off and I had a realization – Sensei has brainwashed me! The many thoughts I have about how to see life situations are what he talks about. So, when I came to that realization, I told my son that Rev. Mas has brainwashed me. He laughed and said, “...and that’s a bad thing?” So, I told him that he’s brainwashed, too. We laughed, but I’m begging to believe it’s true. His words repeat themselves in my head constantly. If you hear it enough times, you believe it, right?

Rev. Mas speaks of the one BWA member that gives without any expectation. He said there is one in every BWA. I would look around and try to figure out who that person is and that when I grew up I wanted to be that person. Now, I am at an age where I accept the fact that I am not that person and never will be. My ego is too big to ever be that person. I’m OK with that because I just resign myself to the fact that it is who I am — a human being - *shigata-ganai* (it can’t be helped). Thank you to all the many ministers that give us these talks to help us understand ourselves.

In *gassho*



CONCERT IN THE KAIKAN

Oooo, doo wop, doo wop, Ooo baby!

ABA Sonics entertained Nishi ABA family and friends on with a concert in the Nishi kaikan. Everyone brought a lunch to feast on and enjoy the captivating live music. The band played and sang two hours of musical medleys of favorite songs of the 60s as well as familiar Japanese songs. *The Slauson* and cha cha music enticed many to stand up and dance to these oldies. The atmosphere was jubilant and filled with laughter, smiles and fun!

At the conclusion of this social event, the 50/50 raffle was announced and many prizes were given. What an entertaining and enjoyable afternoon this was.

Nishi ABA always welcomes new members. ABA supports temple and community activities and celebrates camaraderie with its members.

Special thanks to Lonny Quon, ABA activity chair, who invested his time and efforts planning this successful event. He has many more exciting activities planned. Come join us in 2022!



ABA Sonic Band Members

Kenji Hatakeyama, Lonny Quon, Roy Yamatoku, Eric Quon, Thomas Mochizuki, Gerald Falla, Yoshi Ono

[Note: You can see a portion of the performance on YouTube at the 48:14 marker:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D1_A37RmiGw

**2022 MEMBERSHIP
DRIVE**

Valid from January 1 through December 31, 2022

\$250 FOR EACH ADULT FAMILY MEMBER

Payments may be made in full or by installments throughout the year of 2022

DID YOU KNOW?

by Eiko Masuyama



Eiko Masuyama

Betsuin Sports Homba Hongwanji Los Angeles Betsuin, 1905-1980, pp. 98-99

Although Mits Sakaniwa is considered the chief architect of the present sports program (1980), the post World War II athletic department started with a Sunday School teacher named Min Ota. Min rounded up a group of Sunday school boys in the late 1950s to participate in the basketball league sponsored by the newly formed Community Youth Council. Among the boys in that initial group were Norman and Wesley Ozaki, Glen Kishi, Mike Miyamoto, Barry Tambara, and Dave Nakagaki. One of that group, Norman Ozaki, was later to receive the coveted Kunitomi Memorial Trophy as the outstanding player in the Senior Basketball League. Another Wanji was the recipient of the Kunitomi Trophy. He was Don Nakanishi, who received the Trophy in 1967.

The CYC program grew rapidly, and the Betsuin athletic program grew with it. Baseball soon joined the basketball program. In time, there were several divisions in various age groups. The Betsuin teams were first known as Nishi, but later changed their name to Wanji [from Hongwanji].

Following the successes of the CYC, the Los Angeles Optimist started an athletic program for girls and the Betsuin quickly joined it. With Nob Oki as coach, the girls fielded a strong softball team in the early years. Some of the girls in the Wanjettes during that period were Linda Katase, Gail Sugimoto, Sharon Tanaka, Michi Kamei, Emi Shimizu, Irene Watanabe, Debbie Oki, Laurie Mizuno, Faith Sakaniwa, and April and Bev Aratani.

A younger group of girls called Dana was formed but eventually all the teams were called Wanjettes in both the softball and basketball leagues.

When the Buddhist Life Program was introduced, Mits Sakaniwa masterminded a Summer Buddhist Basketball League involving boys and girls from as far away as Oxnard. At present, the participating churches are Gardena, Venice, Pasadena, Sun Valley, Oxnard, Higashi Hongwanji, Hollywood, Senshin, West L.A. and Betsuin. In all, about 500 boys and girls make up the members of the various teams. It is a self-perpetuating program with the chairmanship of each year's program rotated among the participating churches.

Eventually the Sports Department grew so large that it became too unwieldy for Mits. In recent years, Mas Ogawa,

Jun Okimoto, Dr. Gene Tsuno and Walter Kunimoto were among those who helped direct the different sections of the activities. Special mention should be accorded Amy Miyakawa and Yoshiko Kishi who spent many years helping Mits.

The original Wanji teams had a slew of impressive records. Organized in the 1920s, the baseball and basketball Wanjis dominated the Japanese sports scene. Memories are dim, but among those still remembered are Butch Tamura, Zip Toyama, Yuk Miyamoto, Frank Sakamoto, Ed Kurishima, Ishizo and Benji Sano, and Squish Okazaki, Yukio Kobayashi, Yoneto Yamamoto, Yoneto Kataoka, and Minoru Ishihara. Their baseball coach was Kunizo Sawada. Jiggy Kaku was their manager, and Richard Kaku, who was later to play basketball for the Wanji Jrs, was a batboy.

Many of the Wanjis later played for the L.A. Nips, probably the first local Nisei semi pro baseball team.

Coming into the sports picture after the Wanjis were the Wanji Jrs, who continued the proud sports tradition of the Betsuin in grand fashion. They were the perennial champions of the Southern District Buddhist sports programs and were always in contention in the JAU in both baseball and basketball.



1966 Dana Basketball Team

Left to right: Linda Katase, Sharon Tanaka, Michi Kamei, Linda Aratani, Rimban Masuoka, April Aratani, Emiko Shimizu, Terrie Miyakawa, Susan Furuto, Faith Sakaniwa, Coach Amy Miyakawa, Coach Kazuo Shimizu

Some of the members of the Wanji Jrs were Mas and Tosh Nakamura, Hiro Taniyama, Shig, Nob, and Frank Masada,

(continued on page 5)

(KNOW? continued from page 4)



c. 1963 Wanji Baseball Team

Standing: Shig Sugimoto (coach), Lloyd Kaneko, Robert Hori, Gene Sugimoto, Don Nakanishi, Melvin Hara, Roy Minami, ?, Stanley Katase, Clyde Iwata, ?, Kenny Watanabe, Howard Takata (coach) Kneeling: ?, ?, Brady Aratani, Robert Oda, Miles Yamaguchi, ?, ?, Douglas Sera, Keith Sakaniwa, ?, Brian Miyakawa

Saichi Ogawa, Ken Uyesugi, George Ito, Ben Oda, Mas Miyamoto, Rio Kashiwagi, Richard Kaku, Nob Ishitani, Tosh and Ted Hozaki, and Tsutomu Kochi.

The girls were not left behind during this period of the late 1930s. They played volleyball, softball, basketball, Ping-Pong...you name it, they tried it. Not to be outdone by their counterparts of the opposite sex, they were always in the thick of the championship battle of the Buddhist leagues as well as the WAU.

Coached by Carl Sato, some of the girls were Lily Inouye, Sumiko Umeda, Toyoko Kataoka, Miyeko Nakamura, Toshiye Nagata, Haruko Fujita, Aiko Okazaki, Dorothy Horiuchi, Toshiko Yamashita, Yukimi Nishida, Teiko Sato and Ehimo Ohashi.

One of the most successful postwar softball teams in Betsuin history was the Betsuin Bucs managed by Sam Kuratomi. They won the NAU Majors championship from 1948 to 1950. They also won the Municipal "A" crown in 1947. Other championships to their credit were the YBA championship in 1947 and the All Church League championship in 1947 and 1948. Among the members of the championship Bucs were Nob Oki, Tosh Asano, Shig Goto, Ray Goto, Tee Okura, Yosh Oshiki, Harry Oka and George Ishitani.

* * * * *

Special thanks for donations of books to the Nishi Library by Terrie Itomura and binders to the Nishi Archives by Setsuko Nakahara.

(Rimban - continued from page 1)

forces. The well-being of human life is dependent upon the consequences of our actions. There are no miracles, magic or prayers that can change the course of events.

Amida Buddha is not a god, a creator of the universe, a being who watches over me and the world or that judges the action of man. Rather, Amida Buddha is ultimate truth/reality. Amida is only a symbol of wisdom and compassion, free from all limitations.

Therefore, there is no judge and no judgment. There is no wrong and there is no right. There are only the effects of our thoughts, words and deeds. These effects exist as the consequences of what we think, say and do. And, how we respond to these effects, determines what our next moment shall be. It determines what type of human being I shall become.

As Shin Buddhists, we do not consider the nembutsu a
(continued on page 7)

BETSUIN HYBRID ACTIVITIES — PRE-OMICRON SHUTDOWN

In mid-October, the Betsuin board approved the opening of the Sunday services to in-person attendance with the necessary protocols of proof of vaccination, wearing of masks, and physical distancing. Participation via Zoom was still an option. Thus, the services were labeled as “hybrid.”

Within the following two months, the omicron variant arose which required the Betsuin to, once again, shut down in-person Sunday services just before the New Year.

Hopefully, it will not be much longer before the Betsuin will be able to return to hybrid activities and eventually to total in-person ones.

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Betsuin COVID Advisory Committee has seen reports of hospitalizations and COVID cases trending down. With this information, the committee has deemed it safe enough for in-person services.

Rimban Briones announced that the February 27th Sunday service would be hybrid. Proof of full vaccination and booster and masks will be required for those who wish to attend in-person. Zoom will still be available to those who wish to participate virtually.



Front: Rev. George Matsubayashi and Rimban William Briones Back: Rev. Hibiki Murakami and Rev. Seikan Fukuma



Rev. Mas Kodani's English Dharma Center study class.



Rev. Nobuo Miyaji's Japanese Dharma Center study class.



A hybrid Sunday service.

NISHI CUB SCOUT NEWS

The Nishi Temple Cub Scouts do their best! While the pandemic has made it difficult to meet, our enthusiastic group of Cub Scouts and their parents met virtually or safely in person over the past 22 months. Some recent activities include a visit to the zoo, fun games at the park, and some community service work. An upcoming activity will be a visit to the Science Center.

Our Pack will soon begin planning for the annual Pinewood Derby, where the Cub Scouts work with their parents to design and build a wooden car to race. It's a great opportunity for parents and their children to work together on a project. The scout designs the car, learns to use some tools to shape it, decorates and races the car with the help of their parent. The family's creativity really comes through in this event. In this activity, the process and activity is the goal. The friendly competition is just icing on the cake. Everyone is invited to view this fun event.

Cub Scouting is fun for the whole family. In Scouting, boys and girls start with their best right now selves and grow into their very best future selves. It's fun, hands-on learning and achievement that puts kids in the middle of the action and prepares them for today – and for life.

Please visit our website to learn more about the Cub Scouts at Nishi. We welcome all children under 11 to participate!

<https://nishipack738.weebly.com/>



Top two rows: Nishi Scout leaders; Third row: Webelos (those transitioning from Cub Scouts to Boy Scouts); Bottom two rows: Lion and Tiger Cub Scouts (kindergarten and first grader levels)

MYSTERY STONES FOUND AT HEART MOUNTAIN



Japanese American National Museum (JANM): *Hundreds of stones, each inscribed with a kanji character that together form a Buddhist sutra, were found in a barrel buried at the Heart Mountain cemetery.*

Over 70 years ago a metal drum was discovered with over a thousand stones with a single kanji painted on each one. The stones were eventually donated to JANM from the owners of the land where the stones were found.

JANM current exhibition, *Sutra and Bible: Faith and Japanese American World War II Incarceration*, shows how religion played an important role in reestablishing a sense of community, offering comfort, and bringing people together in a time of war.

(Rimban - continued from page 5)

mantra or prayer to be used to evoke awakening or to invoke Amida. It's not even a practice or good action that helps us reach enlightenment.

The recitation of the nembutsu, *Namo Amida Butsu*, is the outward expression of appreciation and gratitude to Amida. My saying *Namo Amida Butsu* is not merely my saying it... rather it is Amida calling to me. Therefore, Amida Buddha is not the object I am calling, rather the subject who calls to me.

The wonderful thing about the nembutsu is that when we say *Namo Amida Butsu*, anywhere or anytime, it transforms the ordinary and mundane into the path of awakening. The nembutsu enriches our lives with deep spiritual connection and makes every moment special manifesting the Pure Land here and now.

Namoamidabutsu

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*

- | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------|
| November 2021 | 5 Koji Shida |
| 16 Akitaka Ohtsu | 10 Leo Ryo Hayashi |
| 23 Tadayuki Murakami | 12 Seiya Shimamoto |
| 23 Henry Mizutani | 14 Mary Yoko Hahn |
| 24 Vivien Ryoko Kawakami | 26 Yoshio Tsuji |
| 24 Junko Harada | 26 Kaoru Ray Iwami |
| 25 Steven Shoji Tanaka | 28 Tomiko Katayama |
| 28 Michiyo Uenoyama | |
| | January 2022 |
| | 2 Yoko Yanai |
| December 2021 | 7 Clive Tadahisa Sano |
| 5 Chizuko Fujihara | 2 Betty Sachiko Yumori |

IT'S TAX TIME!

LOWER YOUR TAX LIABILITY



QCD
QUALIFIED
CHARITABLE
DISTRIBUTION

STOCK
DONATION

Contact:
bshino@NishiHongwanji-LA.org

Betsuin Jiho

Editor-in-Chief: Rimban William Briones
 English Editor: Elaine Fukumoto
 Photos: Koichi Sayano

BETSUIN CALENDAR OF EVENTS

MARCH

- 05 Salmon Bowl Drive-Thru Fundraiser
- 06 Sunday Service 10:00 am
- 13 Girl Scout Sunday 10:00 am
 Eitaikyo Shotsuki Hoyo 1:00 pm

SPRING OHIGAN

- Speakers:
 English: Rev. Matt Hamasaki
 Japanese: Rev. Yuki Sugahara
- 19 Ohigan Seminar 9:30 am - 12:30 pm
 - 20 Ohigan Service
 & Rimban Memorial Service 10:00 am
 - 27 Rennyō Memorial Service 10:00 am

APRIL

- 03 Betsuin Hanamatsuri Service 10:00 am
- 10 Butsuren Hanamatsuri Service
 Eitaikyo Shotsuki Hoyo 1:00 pm
- 17 Sunday Service 10:00 am
- 24 Sunday Service 10:00 am

MAY

- 01 Sunday Service 10:00 am
- 08 Mothers' Day Service 10:00 am
 Eitaikyo Shotsuki Hoyo 1:00 pm

Wednesdays from 7 pm "Contemporary Issues and Jodo Shinshu Perspective" discussion led 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