

## **Nichiren Shu Buddhist Temple of UK Newsletter**

**August-September 2007**

**Hello, how is everyone?**

This is Rev. Tsukamoto. At last I am pleased to send you the first newsletter. I would like to send you the newsletter every other month. Please enjoy.

Four months have already passed since I came to London. During this time I have met some of the congregation, but there are still some I have not yet had the pleasure to meet. Service is held every Sunday followed by a Study Class. In the Study Class, I instruct you on the original Nichiren Shu Buddhism and tradition which you will not be able to hear or learn from books. Unfortunately, there are no Nichiren Shu temples in Britain except for London. Won't you come over to our Temple and enjoy sharing the source of energy of life? Let us share Nichiren Shonin's teachings. I look forward to seeing you soon. Gassho Rev. Tsukamoto.

**'O-Bon'**

Every year, we have important events in Nichiren Shu. O-bon is one of those big events. According to tradition, it is said around O-Bon time the lid opens for the pot of hell which means the door of the spiritual world opens; and it is a time when our ancestors return to their home in this world. To Prepare for O-Bon members or relatives of the family gather and decorate their family altar in their home with flowers, incense and lanterns as well as fruits, vegetables, confectionary, noodles, sake and wine. They also visit the Temple and the cemetery to pray and offer gratitude to the deceased spirits or ancestors. Nichiren Shonin often mentions O-bon in his writings.

The formal name of O-Bon is 'Urabon-e'. This comes from the Sanskrit 'Ullambana' meaning 'Extreme suffering like hanging upside down'. There is a well known story about one of the Buddha's disciples telling us how and why O-Bon originated.

2,500 years ago, when the Buddha was still alive, there was a disciple who had supernatural powers. It is said that he was the top disciple of supernatural powers and that he could see the future or the past, even all spiritual worlds, as well as Hell. His name was Mokuren. His mother died when he was young. Since he obtained his supernatural powers under the Buddha's training, he was concerned about his mother and tried to check where his mother was located. First he searched the top level, the Enlightened World but he could not find her. Then he searched the middle level and still he could not find her. Finally he found his mother in the lower level which is the Gaki suffering world, just before Hell. He was so upset, because his mother was hanging upside-down and suffering. She looked miserable; her stomach was swollen, her face was dark and her muscles had dropped, her eyes were sunken because of starvation and thirst. He tried to feed her some food with his supernatural powers. First he tried to give her some food but when she tried to approach her mouth with the food, it turned into fire and she got burnt. He was terribly upset and he tried to give her cold water, but as before when she tried putting the water to her mouth it turned to fire again and she was burned very badly. Mokuren rushed to the Buddha to consult

Him about his mother and then the Buddha asked him, "Did you offer food or water to anyone else?". Mokuren replied, "No, just my mother". The Buddha explained, "your mother dropped into the Gaki suffering world because she was very stingy and did not share with others. If you want to save your mother, you must feed not only your mother but all suffering spirits."

The Buddha advised Mokuren to invite as many monks as he could and prepare as much food and water as he could, and then hold a service for all suffering spirits. Mokuren invited the monks when their summer training was completed on August 15th. Once Mokuren followed the Buddha's advice, his mother was able to have water and food and she also moved up to a better level of the spiritual world. Since that episode, August 15th became an important day to save all suffering spirits and became known as O-Bon. In Buddhism we are able to save all suffering spirits- even spirits who have dropped into hell.

## **PRAYER**

O-Bon is a spiritual event to respect and give gratitude to our ancestors and to pray for all spirits. Why should we respect our ancestors? There is no complicated reason; all we require is a respect and sense of gratitude for our ancestors and we should realize how wonderful and precious our life is. If there were no parents, grandparents and great grandparents or ancestors, you would not be here. Also, we should realize that our nature and characteristics have come from the genes of our parents, grandparents and great grandparents or ancestors. In other words, we should accept our genes as messages from our ancestors and know that we are located at the end of the message. This means you are also the messenger for the next new generation.

Actually, the closest ancestors that we know of are our great grandparents; we don't know the older ancestors who came before them. However, just because they are unknown ancestors, does not mean that we should not have respect for them. Although we don't know our ancestors individually, they know us very well. Therefore, as a mother is concerned for her children, your ancestors are concerned about you. In regards to the ancestors, if their children, or great grandchildren or descendents ignore them and do not take care of them by holding a Memorial Service, how sad they are. Nichiren shonin said,

"Even though we take our body from our parents, after your parents death if you do not take care of them and your ancestors - no memorial service, no prayers, no respect; do you think that your deceased parents cannot say anything? They will become malevolent spirits and curse not only you but also your children, grandchildren as well as future descendents."

Cursing means they will punish you with bad things. In fact, it is not a rare case where malevolent spirits have cursed a descendent, for example, meeting with a mishap, accident, sickness, domestic discord, human relations troubles, etc. We tend to see and think of everything based on only visible things, but we never think of spiritual influences. However, you might not believe that unexpectedly there are many cases; most of the happenings that happen around us are affected by spirits.

Praying for our ancestors is an important and wonderful thing, however without respect and a sense of humbleness it is difficult to pray for our ancestors. Please try to think about your ancestors and raise within you this sense of respect. As in the story of the Buddha's disciple, when we pray for our ancestors we need to show more compassion not only to save our ancestors but all suffering spirits too, and then we will be able to save and make peace for our parents, great grandparents, ancestors and others. Buddhism teaches us about entire happiness rather than partial happiness. Therefore, we should think of a way to make all beings happy rather than only our own happiness. This is a faithful way of life as a Nichiren Shu Buddhist. The O-Bon Segaki Service will be observed on August 19th at 11:00am. Around that time, together with compassion, please pray for your ancestors as well as all suffering spirits with Toba. This Segaki Service holds special merits for everyone. If you are able to, please attend this Service. Gassho.

## **AUTUMN O-HIGAN**

The world that is filled with worldly desire is called 'Higan'. The enlightened world beyond the ocean of worldly desire is called 'Shigan' and 'O' is honorific. O-Higan is held twice every year, during the equinox weeks of Spring and Autumn. It is said that when daytime is the same length as night time, a human beings' mind tends to be induced into a more religious mind. It is a time to emphasize practicing and studying Buddhism. During this time, we reflect on our daily life and refresh our heart by practicing and studying Buddha's teachings. There are six important precepts, "The Six Paramitas" to practice for enlightenment:

1. Fuse (Donation without any expectation of return)

Wealth: Offering money, wealth or time.

Labour: offering time or labour

Relief: Removing other's fear to make person peaceful.

Teaching: Offering the Buddha's teachings to others as a guide.

2. Jikai (Keeping the Five Precepts)

No killing

No stealing

No adultery

No lying

No pointing others faults

No slander

No greed

No anger

No drinking

No slandering the Buddha and priests

3. Endurance: being patient, keeping calm and don't be angry.

4. Endeavour: making steady efforts and doing your best always.

5. Meditation: keeping calm constantly to observe everything as it is.

6. Wisdom: considering what is the truth.

O-Higan week begins on Thursday, September 20th until Wednesday, September 26th.  
Please practice the Six Paramitas for your meaningful life.

Gassho

Thank you very much for your donations and support.