

Nichiren Shu Buddhist Temple of UK Newsletter

January-February 2008

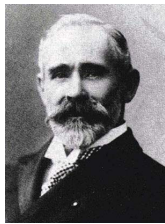
Happy New Year!

This year is the year of the Mouse (not rat). The symbol of the mouse is Prosperity and Development because they have many children and grow quickly. My wish is that troubled countries will have prosperity and develop more peacefully this year.

Every year terrorism, killing, disasters and wars often occur and this is pushing people to drop into darkness. Recently we heard the sad news of the opposition leader Benazir Bhutto. Every time we hear such news we become depressed and tired. However, although we feel depressed, we must not give up praying for world peace or lose hope. If people quit praying and lose hope a dark cloud will cover the entire world sneakily and the situation will become worse. We should maintain prayer for world prosperity and peace because the world needs the wisdom of Buddhism. In closing, I would like to pray and wish for all of you a Happy, Healthy, and Prosperous New Year.

Gassho, Rev. Kanto Tsukamoto.

“James’ Slope”



In Central Tokyo, there is a gentle slope which was named after a Western person. It is called “James’ Slope”. The name of this slope has never been changed since it was first named over 100 years ago, even during an antagonistic campaign during WWII. This name is derived from ‘John M. James’ (1839-1908) who was a British Captain and had come to Japan to teach navigation skills. His accomplishment greatly contributed to the Japanese Navy and he became known as ‘The Father of the Japanese Navy’. Surprisingly, there was something special about him; he was a devoted Nichiren Shu Buddhist. I believe he was the first European Congregation.

In 1860, as soon as Captain James came to Japan, he had a fateful passage to Britain along with two Japanese politicians. Unfortunately they encountered a storm and the ship was wrecked off the coast of Hong Kong. This incident led him to a turning point in his life. First, he made the decision to settle in Japan permanently. Second, he met Mr. Yoshiomi Seki who was a politician. Together they shared their fate from the coast of Hong Kong until they returned to Japan and became life long friends. Later, it is said that Mr. Seki taught Captain James Nichiren Shu Buddhism.

In 1868, he mediated for the Japanese Government in the purchase of battle ships from Britain. After that he advised the Japanese on the installation of arms and equipment. He also taught the skills of how to cruise a ship and how to rescue a

wrecked ship. The Japanese Government thought highly of his contributions. He was promoted to the position of Adviser of the Naval Department and improved the immature Japanese ship skills to world class level. Because of this accomplishment, he was called the 'Father of the Japanese Navy'. It is mentioned in his own notes that he really wanted to teach Japan how important marine affairs are, because he also grew up on an island country, Britain, like Japan. His contribution was not only great for the Navy but he also contributed to the development of Japanese Civil Marine Affairs. In 1890 he received a permanent annuity and the following year he received an honorary medal from the Japanese Government.

Privately, Captain James was a very gentle person. Beside his house there was a very steep slope which was called 'Sengen Zaka'. Local people were inconvenienced by this slope and had trouble getting up and down it. As soon as he knew that, he spent his own funds and had the steep slope reconstructed into a gentle slope. Since that event, people began to call this slope 'James' Slope' and it became the official name instead of the original name 'Sengen Zaka'. This name never changed even during an antagonistic campaign which expelled all Western names during WWII. He took very good care of the children even though he did not have children of his own. He donated large funds to a local elementary school to rebuild a new school building. In his neighbourhood, he gave children food or token money. Without his knowledge, he had been called 'Santa Claus'. He was very popular and respected by many people.



He grew up in a Christian family home but as he stayed in Japan longer and longer, he became devoted to Nichiren Shu Buddhism. He left some words about the devotion of Nichiren Shu. He visited Asian countries which European countries tried to make their colonies, and he met Christian missionaries but he could not endure the Christian missionary's actions; they seemed like the vanguard of European countries which expound their own colony with unscrupulous ways. And then he met a teaching of Nichiren Shu Buddhism. "All living beings have Buddha nature". He was attracted by this peaceful teaching and received more teachings from Nichiren Shu ministers and he converted to Nichiren Shu. He ordered a solid gold Shakyamuni Buddha statue and he chanted every morning and evening and deepened his faith.

In 1908 his life ended at the age of 71. His funeral was held at his home directed by the 78th Hosu; the spiritual leader of Nichiren Shu. Three days before he passed away, he left a special request in his will "to please cremate my body and store my ashes in Mt. Minobu." He chanted the Lotus Sutra before his death and he meditated for a while and past away peacefully while he was chanting the Odaimoku. According to the request of his will, his grave was erected behind the main temple. His Buddhist name was "East Seas Inn Royal Devoted Righteousness Nation Sunlight great lay Minister". One seafaring man who came from far away Europe chose a port as the final port of call, it was Mt. Minobu. This year, 2008, his 100th year Memorial Service will be held on 20th May at Mt. Minobu.

This story of Captain James does not only encourage us but also makes us peaceful. Please don't forget everyone, 100 years ago, one British ancestor believed in the Lotus Sutra and had deep faith in Nichiren Shu Buddhism. Now it is your turn; what kind of nice story will you leave for your descendents as a message of your faith? Gassho.

Thank you very much for your help and donations.