



# Kodo Topics



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## **Rev. Shokan Okano, 2<sup>nd</sup> President of the Kodo Kyodan Buddhist Fellowship, Passes on September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019**

On September 15<sup>th</sup> at 2:16 p.m., the Most Reverend Shokan Okano, 2<sup>nd</sup> President of the Kodo Kyodan Buddhist Fellowship, passed at the age of 93. Over the past few years, his health had been in a gradual decline, and so it was with tremendous gratitude and a feeling of good karma that he passed as 500 Kodosan members were on their annual pilgrimage to the great Enryaku-ji Temple of the Tendai denomination on Mt Hiei along with the 2<sup>nd</sup> President's wife, Rinko, and the present President Rev. Shojun Okano and his wife Karen.

On September 19<sup>th</sup>, a wake service for close relatives, friends, and followers was held at the Main Hall of Worship in Yokohama with 600 people in attendance. At the service, the second son of Rev. Okano, Prof. Hirotaka Okano of Tokyo Jikei Medical School, spoke about his father's final moments. "He spent his final days peacefully being watched over. In the final moment, he lost consciousness as he fell into a peaceful sleep and his breathing became slower and slower until it stopped. He was exceptionally calm and at ease." On September 20<sup>th</sup>, a private funeral was hosted by his first son, Rev. Shojun Okano. Finally, on October 28, a public funeral was presided over by Rev. Koei Morikawa, the 257<sup>th</sup> Chief Priest (*Zasu*) of the Tendai school, and monks from the Enryaku-ji Temple on Mt. Hiei at the Kodo Kyodan Head Temple in Yokohama.

This issue of *Kodo Topics* is entirely dedicated to the life and legacy of Rev. Shokan Okano, without whom our lives here at Kodosan would not be possible. It is with such deep gratitude that we offer this simple dedication.

## **To Focus the Mind Steadfastly on the One Vehicle The Public Funeral of Rev. Shokan Okano 2<sup>nd</sup> President of the Kodo Kyodan Buddhist Fellowship**



On October 28, 2019, Rev. Shokan Okano, the 2<sup>nd</sup> President of the Kodo Kyodan Buddhist Fellowship, was given a highly honorable posthumous name by Rev. Koei Morikawa, the 257<sup>th</sup> Chief Priest (*Zasu*) of the Tendai school and Enryaku-ji Temple on Mt. Hiei, during a public funeral ceremony at the Kodo Kyodan Head Temple in Yokohama. The ceremony was attended by some 200 special guests from all major

denominations of Japanese Buddhism as well as persons from wider Japanese society. 700 Kodosan followers from throughout the country also journeyed to Yokohama for the ceremony. Representing the Okano family, 3<sup>rd</sup> President Rev. Shojun Okano greeted the guests by expressing a renewed determination, “The thing the 2<sup>nd</sup> President felt was very important was focusing his mind steadfastly on the teaching of the One Vehicle of the *Lotus Sutra* and sharing his devotion with our members.”

### Taking Refuge in the One Vehicle

In preparation for the main ceremony, fresh flowers of white chrysanthemum and orchid were arranged in the Main Hall that had been sent from people of the Buddhist world and from other sectors of society. More than 200 guests from inside Japan and from overseas as well as the various branch heads of Kodosan took their seats in the front of the hall. Extra seats for followers from all over the country who had come to pay their respects were set up in tents erected in the south side garden outside the Main Hall.

At 1:30 p.m., accompanied to the sound of *Etenraku*, a classical Japanese *gagaku* court music, the monks from Mt. Hiei acting as leaders of the ceremony entered the Main Hall from the center of the building followed by Zasu Morikawa. The service was based on a ritual from the Tendai esoteric tradition called the *komyo-ku-shakujo*, a secret mantra of the Buddha’s light to dispel bad karma. This was followed by the ringing of the cleansing *dora* bell. Zasu Morikawa then read the procedures for the funeral and praised the lifetime achievements of the 2<sup>nd</sup> President:

He studied the essentials of the *Lotus Sutra* tradition of the Tendai school under Doctrinal Master Koen Yamaguchi. From then, his mind of compassion deepened and his wisdom sharpened through further study. After receiving transmission from the 1<sup>st</sup> President, he engaged himself in developing the denomination and educating the members through devoting himself to the teachings of the One Vehicle. This was manifested in the construction of branch temples and related facilities on a national scale as well as the promotion of the Maitri Movement that developed the foundations of the members as lay bodhisattvas.



### A Meeting through Music

After the ritual service concluded, three close friends of the 2<sup>nd</sup> President offered words of condolence. First, the Venerable Shotoku Tanaka—Chief Priest of Senso-ji in Asakusa, Tokyo who created many of the Buddhist hymns in use at Kodosan—spoke of making his first contact with the 2<sup>nd</sup> President through music. Rev. Tanaka composed a set of hymns and performed them at the opening ceremony of Kodosan’s new Main Hall in 1980. Thinking back on this time, he noted, “I was able for the first time to get in touch with the 2<sup>nd</sup> President’s wonderful character. I have always thought that I want to learn more from him, and so it is very much regrettable that he has now passed on.”

### **Attaining the Bodhisattva Way**

Next to speak was the Venerable Gijun Sugitani—Chief Priest of the Myoho-in Monzeki temple in Kyoto. He recounted the 2<sup>nd</sup> President's early years receiving lectures on the three great commentaries on the *Lotus Sutra* by Chinese Tiantai Master Zhiyi under Rev. Koin Yamaguchi, former Chief Priest of the Manshu-in Monzeki temple in Kyoto, and then going to the United States for graduate studies in comparative religion. With the establishment of the International Buddhist Exchange Center (IBEC) and the promotion of the Maitri Movement, he recounted that, "One could see how his spirit of enterprise cultivated a foresight to develop the coming age." In this way, the forms he created realized the practice of the four modes of the bodhisattva (cooperative action, kind words, helpfulness, and generosity). Ven. Sugitani concluded, "The life that he walked is exemplified in his very name Shokan 正貫, which means 'true accomplishment'".

### **A Mind that Cared for Others**

The third speaker was Rev. Sho-on Shinomiya—the Chief of the Main Office of Kodosan—who was the 2<sup>nd</sup> President's close friend since junior high school days and then became a disciple of his. He spoke about the four biographies that he was given by the 2<sup>nd</sup> President when his own health failed and he was admitted to the hospital. These biographies were about the Buddha, his wayward disciple Devadatta, Chinese Master Xuanzang Sanzang who travelled throughout India, and Albert Schweitzer. In a letter, he explained the reason for choosing these volumes, saying, "Those who have been in very good health like yourself have a lack of consideration for the weak. The mind that cares for others, of course, is the highest and most important practice in Buddhism." Rev. Shinomiya recounted that the warmth that was transmitted while receiving this teaching soaked through his body. He then fondly remembered the 2<sup>nd</sup> President's life devoted to opening sub temples in every region of Japan, developing deep ties with Buddhists outside of Japan such as India, Sri Lanka and elsewhere, and encouraging the single-minded vow of the liberation of all beings.

### **Echoing Sounds of Songwriting**

Continuing on, followers then made offerings at the main altar in the form of flowers, incense, water, candles, grains, and fruits from various regions such as apples from Aomori and melon from Shizuoka. At this time, the choral groups from the Kodosan Women's Association and the Kodosan Chorus sang in vibrant voices two songs written by the 2<sup>nd</sup> President, "The Song of the Aomori Temple" and "The Song of the Fukushima Temple".

### **Deep Prayers for the Repose of the 2<sup>nd</sup> President**

As the sounds of the chorus lingered in the hall, the condolence letter sent by the Chief Priest of the Tendai Jimon denomination, the Most Venerable Eimei Fuke, was read aloud followed by numerous other condolence letters sent by those not in attendance. To conclude the ceremony, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice-President Rinko Okano along with the 3<sup>rd</sup> President, Shojun Okano, and 3<sup>rd</sup> Vice President, Karen Okano, made incense offerings followed by other members of the Okano family: Kensho and Ellen (the 3<sup>rd</sup> President's son and daughter), Hirotaka and Nobukatsu (the second and third sons of the 2<sup>nd</sup> President) and their relations. Finally, the various department heads of the Kodosan denomination also made their offerings. At the very end, all participants chanted the *Kannon Sutra* to pray for the repose of the 2<sup>nd</sup> President.

### **Gratitude for a Wonderful Karmic Connection**

During his opening greeting, the Master of Ceremonies, Rev. Kojitsu Kobori, President of the Enryaku-ji Temple on Mt. Hiei, explained the 70-year connection between Enryaku-ji and Kodosan that enabled the performance of this public funeral. Then, as the head of the mourning family, 3<sup>rd</sup> President Rev. Shojun Okano offered his greeting, noting, "When *Zasu* Morikawa was young, he visited Kodosan together with the father of Rev. Kobori, the Most Venerable Kosen Kobori (former Chief Priest of the Sanze-in Monseki Temple of the Tendai denomination) and Ajari Soken Enami." He then expressed his gratitude for this deep connection, "I think my father would be very happy to know that *Zasu* Morikawa could preside over his funeral and that Rev. Kobori could act as Master of Ceremonies." The 3<sup>rd</sup> President went on explain that the 2<sup>nd</sup> President always maintained a humble manner while taking on the development of the denomination, "While confronting his own limitations, he accomplished his duties as President and always give his best for the members."



## **Everyone Can Attain Enlightenment (*satori*)**

The 3<sup>rd</sup> President then explained that the 2<sup>nd</sup> President placed great importance on the teaching of the One Vehicle of the *Lotus Sutra*, “There is a teaching in the *Lotus Sutra* that confronting every issue in one’s life offers the opportunity to gain for oneself a small *satori*, and the 2nd President’s teaching was to wish for all followers to walk this path.” He then offered this vow, “Together steadfastly with all followers, may we continually fix our mind on the teaching of the One Vehicle.”

## **An Inherited Teaching**

For all the followers who came from around the country, there was an altar to make incense offerings in the large south garden facing the Main Hall. Inside a tent, a large image of the 2nd President was installed along with a monitor so everyone could view the proceedings going on inside the hall. In this way, the mourners outside could face the Main Hall and bow in reverence and mourning. Ms. Umeko Sato, the head of the Choan Branch Office, explained her experience, “This funeral gave me a wonderful feeling of karmic connection. The 2<sup>nd</sup> President’s teaching of the *Lotus Sutra* is easy to understand, and his explanations can be used in daily living. As I have received these teachings through my seniors, so I wish to pass them on to the next generation.”

## **Welcoming Comments at the Private Funeral of Rev. Shokan Okano 2<sup>nd</sup> President of the Kodo Kyodan Buddhist Fellowship**

**by 3<sup>rd</sup> President Rev. Shojun Okano**



My father was raised as the second-generation president of Kodosan. While he succeeded to this position under the guidance of his parents, the two founders of Kodosan, he applied himself assiduously in his school studies, developed a deep understanding of the Tendai teachings, and widened his view of the world by studying comparative religion as an overseas researcher in the United States. In this way, since the founding period of our denomination in his youth, he engaged in various activities together with our members to develop Kodosan.

In particular, under the auspices of the Enryaku-ji Temple on Mt. Hiei, he took ordination as a disciple of the Chief Priest of Tendai order, *Zasu* Genshu Takayama. From the time of the founding of Kodosan, deep ties were developed with Enryaku-ji, and we have much gratitude for the many ways that they supported the 2<sup>nd</sup> President in his endeavors. He benefitted greatly from the connections created by his father first with the Tendai sect and then with the Senso-ji Temple in Asakusa and the Shitenno-ji Temple in Osaka.

Furthermore, as our Kodosan denomination developed, my father and mother received much support from our section and branch heads, for which they are truly thankful. I think of how grateful we are that through everyone’s support my father was able to dedicate himself to Kodosan in a variety of ways. Naturally, it is through the support of our disciples and staff that we have come this far in our development.

In my father’s final days, I was able to keep abreast of his medical condition through my younger brother Hirotaka who is a medical doctor. However, on the day he died, September 15<sup>th</sup>, I was visiting Mt. Hiei with my wife Karen as part of our annual Kodosan pilgrimage with 500 of our members. Just at the time of attending the memorial service conducted by *Zasu* Koei Morikawa at the Great Lecture Hall of Enryaku-ji, my father passed away. In this way, I could not be at his side in his final moments. However, when *Zasu* Morikawa learned of my father’s poor condition, he performed a memorial service with reverent feeling for my father so that everyone was overjoyed to be able to send off my father in this way. We are so incredibly thankful for this series of events.

Although I could not be there in his final moments, the rest of our family could be around him, and he could pass away peacefully. For this I am very thankful. In the evening of his passing, we were able to return from Kyoto, and my father’s body was returned to Kodosan from the hospital. When I saw his face, it looked extremely peaceful as if to say, “My training is completed”. For these last years, his physical

condition was not good, and he also had some neurological issues. Despite this, I felt that in the end he had regained his original form. I believe that the peacefulness he attained at the end was an expression of his practice of years since his youth of single-mindedly confronting himself. In ancient Buddhism, it is said that it is extremely important in one's final moments to leave behind the things that have held us captive during this life and attain a peaceful mind. I am thankful that his passing away in this manner was so incredible. His mind was truly at peace. The ending of entanglements is not easy to control through thinking with the head or by mental force. I believe it is from the accumulation of years of practice that such a state is realized.

From developing such a view of practice, my father from a young age became very strict in terms of his own self. He was always confronting himself and working to overcome his own limitations. At the same time, I feel he practiced with a sense that he was advancing one step at a time along the path of the Buddha. In this way, he created a foundation to administer and develop Kodosan amidst the lifestyle of a non-monastic, never creating a lifestyle of individual ascetic training like a monk at Enryaku-ji. However, amidst this daily life, he was able to accomplish the duties of being the President of Kodosan, while also confronting his own limitations as much as anyone could. He was always engaged in doing his own best and did his best for our members. I believe it was the merit of this practice that imparted mental peace at the end and prepared him to face the next life.

My father was always very humble, honest, and frugal. He had no concern for worldly fame nor any interest in material things. Further, he never carried himself with pride, conceit, or arrogance. He would also not tolerate anyone—either myself, other family members, or his disciples—displaying such qualities. Kodosan was developed and built by my grandfather, the original president, before, during, and after the war period. Then my father, the 2<sup>nd</sup> President, succeeded him, and Kodosan reached its apex during the period of high economic growth in Japan. Our denomination has been enriched in many ways, such as the increase in membership and the establishment of various facilities. However, his attitude was very much against showing ourselves in an ostentatious manner to wider society. Rather, he absolutely wanted our members to engage in the deepening of their faith and in the treading of the Buddha's path step by step by each oneself.

Further, when things go well, it is not because of our own agency or power, but rather, I always believe, the guidance of the Buddha. As my grandmother, the first Vice-President, always said, "It is not of the power of oneself." As with all things which are under the guidance of the Buddha, we must come to accept that we must face ourselves and then proceed step by step. My father inherited this sentiment and resolutely walked this path in order that the members of Kodosan could steadily walk the path of the Buddha.

*Zasu* Morikawa gave my father his posthumous name. At the beginning of this year when my father's condition took a turn for the worse, our family decided to start making preparations for his decease, so we requested the favor of *Zasu* Morikawa who gladly created his posthumous name. My father placed great importance on the teaching of the One Vehicle according to the *Lotus Sutra*. Saicho (Great Master Dengyo), the founder of the Tendai denomination, also placed great emphasis on the One Vehicle. In sum, this means all things possess buddha-nature. All things can find salvation through the Buddha's teaching. All people can develop the mind of the Buddha in their own simple ways. My father always explained this in terms of "mini-nirvana". That is, each person can from their own standpoint and within the range of their own power become close, even just a bit, to the enlightenment of the Buddha. This is an important thing he taught. Within the large vehicle where all things can find salvation, each person has their own path, and each person has their own issues in life. By confronting those issues, one can arrive at a small enlightenment. This is the teaching of the *Lotus Sutra*, and this is the teaching that my father always wanted all the members to follow in our Kodo Kyodan denomination. In this way, *Zasu* Morikawa very appropriately attached to his posthumous name the Chinese characters 一乗専行 (*ichi-jo sengyo*), which means to steadfastly focus one's mind on the One Vehicle. I am so grateful for this, and I myself want to re-affirm in my mind this teaching of the One Vehicle.

My father was extremely strict in raising me. From my childhood, I never remember him praising me. However, thinking back on those years, I believe I could gain some strength to succeed in my duties because of this. In this way, I now think it wasn't that my father was strict, but rather that I could gain some strength through the Buddha's guidance. As we enter a new era, the forms of this denomination may change from those that my father left behind in facilities, teachings, and our community. However, I would like to diligently work in the spirit of my father so that our members can deepen their faith and walk the path of the Buddha in a way that provides meaning for their lives.

**A Man of Endeavor and Strict Self-Discipline**  
**Rev. Rinko Okano**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President of the Kodo Kyodan Buddhist Fellowship**



The other day for the first time I looked at the bookshelf of my husband's research books and found a huge volume of notes. In this volume was written in minute detail his own deep thoughts on lectures he had attended since his youth. Unexpectedly, I could stumble upon the footprints of the research that had driven him over the years.

In the early 1950s, he studied at Waseda University Graduate School, and then in 1953 he entered the Manshu-in Temple in Kyoto to study the essence of the *Lotus Sutra* and receive oral transmission in the three great commentaries of Tiantai Master Zhiyi from the then Chief Priest, the Most Venerable Koin Yamaguchi. In the latter half of that year, we were married, and I joined him in Kyoto. At this time, he had also become the Chief Editor for the Kodosan newspaper called at that time *Sho-ho (True Dharma)*, so he would spend 20 days of the month in Kyoto and 10 days at the temple in Yokohama editing the newspaper. I remember that he would distill the teachings of our denomination into easy to understand text for our members and then put together this text into the layout for the newspaper.

In 1960, our first son and the present 3<sup>rd</sup> President Shojun was born. Two years later, we moved to the United States for Shokan's research in comparative religion, and there our second son Hirotaka was born. He spent four years studying at the Graduate School of Clairmont University and greatly expanded his international field of vision. The situation and understanding about Japan at that time in the United States was very different than now. Further, as the culture as well as the manners and customs were different, our family had to make a great adjustment, so it became a very meaningful time in our lives.

After returning back to Japan, we made use of everything we had learned up to that point and poured all our energy into the development of Kodosan. Shokan and I further strengthened our resolve to work together for the denomination. Looking back on this time, my husband was always strict and hard on himself. He spared no effort in devoting himself to his duties. In this way, my trust and deep respect for him developed. Over some sixty years, in both public and private matters, we went everywhere together and discussed all kinds of issues very thoroughly. We were more comrades and companions than husband and wife.

Shokan communicated the high-level teachings of the *Lotus Sutra* acquired over many years of study in simple words that were always easy to understand for our members. It was his wish that all our members could come close, even just in small part, to the enlightenment of the Buddha.

Shokan's fundamental disposition was very tender, yet he was quite strict with his sons and our ordained disciples. Especially towards our first son, Shojun, ever since I can remember, he would never allow even the slightest mistake. Because of his will to raise him as his successor as head of the denomination, he had to control himself and give up his paternal feelings for his son.

In this way, as Shojun came to succeed him and perform the duties of president of Kodosan, I believe Shokan felt a sense of relief. As such, in his later years, he was psychologically satisfied and always had a smile on his face. I would like to express my gratitude to so many of you for your kindness in coming to mourn together the passing of the 2<sup>nd</sup> President.

**Timeline of Rev. Shokan Okano,  
2nd President of the Kodo Kyodan  
Buddhist Fellowship**

<b>1925</b>	born as the eldest son of Rev. Shodo Okano (1900-78) and Rev. Kimiko Okano (1902-76), the co-founders of the Kodo Kyodan Buddhist Fellowship	<b>1965</b>	third son Nobukatsu is born
<b>1936</b>	Kodo Kyodan Buddhist Fellowship (Kodosan) officially founded	<b>1967</b>	returns to Japan with family
<b>1947</b>	becomes Director of editing and publishing for Sho-ho (True Dharma), the Kodo Kyodan newsletter which became the Kodo News in 1950	<b>1968</b>	establishes and serves as Director of the International Buddhist Exchange Center (IBEC)
<b>1947</b>	takes full ordination under his father Rev. Shodo Okano	<b>1975</b>	inaugurated as the 2nd President of the Kodo Kyodan Buddhist Fellowship
<b>1951</b>	establishes and becomes Director of the Youth Movement for the Bell of Peace	<b>1976</b>	eldest son Shojun takes full ordination
<b>1952</b>	Buddha relics bequeathed to Kodosan from the Enryaku-ji Temple on Mt. Hiei	<b>1976</b>	Rev. Kimiko Okano, co-founder of Kodosan, passes
<b>1955</b>	takes full ordination precepts in the Tendai school at the Main Hall of Enryaku-ji on Mt. Hiei	<b>1977</b>	establishes the Shizuoka Branch Temple in Yaitsu city
<b>1955</b>	Tower for Kodosan Bell of Peace is completed	<b>1978</b>	Rev. Shodo Okano, co-founder of Kodosan, passes
<b>1956</b>	takes leadership of Kodo Kyodan Youth Association	<b>1979</b>	establishes Tohoku Branch Temple Main Hall
<b>1959</b>	marries Ms. Rinko Yoshida	<b>1980</b>	opens new Hall of Worship at Yokohama main temple
<b>1960</b>	original Main Hall of Worship is opened at Yokohama main temple	<b>1982</b>	opens Mausoleum of the Founder Presidents
<b>1960</b>	Buddha Relics Tower opening ceremony and installation of the relics and the Eternal Flame of Dharma from Mt. Hiei	<b>1985</b>	completion of the Main Hall of the Aomori Branch Temple in Tsugaru City
<b>1960</b>	3rd President Rev. Shojun Okano is born	<b>1986</b>	50th anniversary of Kodosan's founding
<b>1960</b>	establishes Tohoku Branch Temple in Yamagata Prefecture	<b>1986</b>	founds the Maitri "loving kindness" Movement
<b>1962</b>	moves to the United States with family to conduct research at Clairmont Graduate School in California	<b>1989</b>	establishes the Fukushima Branch Temple in Iwaki City
<b>1963</b>	second son Hirotaka is born	<b>1990</b>	opens the Mahakala Hall
		<b>2006</b>	Rev. Shojun Okano is inaugurated as the 3rd President of the Kodo Kyodan Buddhist Fellowship
		<b>2006</b>	70th anniversary of Kodosan's founding
		<b>2012</b>	inaugurated as abbot of the Zui-un-in Temple (also know as the Kodo Kyodan Founder's Transmission Hall) at Enryaku-ji on Mt. Hiei
		<b>2016</b>	80th anniversary of Kodosan's founding
		<b>2019</b>	passes on September 15 2:16 p.m.

## Amidst Suffering, We Make Our Lives: Searching for a Way of Life in Buddhism

Rev. Shōkan Okano  
2<sup>nd</sup> President of the Kodo Kyodan Buddhist Fellowship

I feel that we are in an unprecedented period in history where people have difficulties and suffer so much from interpersonal relationships and their inability to make human connections. I myself have had many people come to me to seek consultation and confide in me about their worries. However, the fundamental basis of the suffering of people today is that they believe life should only be about happiness and that to be uncertain and to suffer is not acceptable. In such a way, people end up mistakenly attacking people close to them with hatred, cursing the world, and getting bogged down in hopelessness. But I ask, should anxiety and suffering be something to be so despised and avoided?

We can say that a person's lifetime is a series of connected events or actions. A person's actions can be either conscious or unconscious, with purpose or without purpose. Further, there is a wide variety of both physically and psychologically based actions or behaviors. However, the extent of human life seems to be the fate of spending our days according to the constant creation of such activity. Even amidst the most static state of sleep, our consciousness does not completely return to zero, so that sleep is also considered one of the activities of life.

In this way, we humans live while being driven to incessant action. Every moment of every day, amidst carefree joys and sorrows, undergoing the results of fortune and misfortune, there are an infinite variety of human life patterns that are created. Further, all the actions that are done in the hope of living a happy life in many ways do not comply or fit with the laws of nature or the basic principles of the world, and so this brings about the mass of human suffering. In other words, the way we live our lives in confusion is in fact our reality.

Without averting our gaze from this reality, there is a way to establish the wisdom of truth amidst such confusion through the teachings of Buddhism.

Buddhism shows us a method to lead our own lives according to the wisdom of understanding the law or "Dharma of truth" that serves as a standard for our lives. Furthermore, Buddhism is extremely lucid in describing the orientation of our lives as, "Refrain from doing evil; cultivate the good; and purify the mind." (*Dhammapada* 183). This is the foundational teaching of all forms of Buddhism, and in order to manifest it in daily living, "limitless Dharma doors" have been expounded over the ages.

Therefore, in Buddhism, there is never anything that is mysterious or difficult to understand. Simply, what is evil? What is good? and What are the afflictions that need to be cleansed from the mind? In order to answer these questions sophisticated theories have sometimes been used. However, the teaching itself is not so difficult. There is one reason why Buddhism has become confusing or hard to understand for Japanese. This is, I think, the common use of specialized terms that are derived from Chinese characters. In this way, I actually think the Buddhist texts that have been translated into English are quite a bit easier to understand. My point here is that the contents are actually not difficult, but rather the ancient method of expression is what is causing the problem.

Shakyamuni Buddha in fact explained many teachings through objects and events that were close to people's everyday lives. Further, he often explained in an uncomplicated way the truths of this world and the details of more profound truths in ways that always held people's interest. For example, in clarifying one aspect of reality, he would use various stories both long and short that explained important causal relationships. There are a great number of texts that have fascinating lessons about human life and always use easy to understand expressions, such as the stories of the Buddha's previous lives called the *Jataka* that demonstrate superior human qualities. From then until now there are so many things in Buddhism that we can study together and which are never disconnected from our daily lives.

From the Introduction to the Japanese volume entitled *Amidst Suffering, We Make Our Lives* (*Mayoi-koso Jinsei-nari*) (Tokyo: Yamate Shobo Publishing, 1980) pp. 1-3.



## How My Eyes Were Opened to Buddhism - The Buddha Teaches the Dharma Just for Me Shokan Okano

My bond with Buddhism in this life could be said to have been tied from the time of my birth, as my father left secular life and received ordination from a temple of the Tendai School when he was 19 years old. I am told that he managed the temple on behalf of the abbot, who was absent. He played an important role, going from house to house of the temple members to collect donations to repair the leaky roof of the main temple hall and renovate with new roof tiles.

However, he became dissatisfied, seeing that the temples were not playing their true role to liberate sentient beings. That is why he left the temple and returned to normal life and began to engage in various businesses to support his livelihood while constantly looking for opportunities to edify the common people, always pondering what they sought from Buddhism and what Buddhism could offer them.

That was before the war. My mother also helped. During the war they built a full-fledged dharma center near Yokohama station. It was destroyed during the war, but a year after the war ended a makeshift dharma center was reestablished in a corner of the city. Six years later, the main dharma hall was built on top of a hill in Torigoe and was named Kodo-san Honbutsu-den. It became the fundamental training ground for a new approach to lay Buddhism that encouraged married couples to strive together for attainment of Buddha-hood in the midst of family life.

Growing up in such a context, I was blessed with opportunities to connect with Buddhism despite my youthful rebelliousness.

The *Mahā-prajñāpāramitā-sāstra*, the classic commentary by Nagarjuna on the perfection of wisdom, has a passage stating that “the Buddha taught the dharma for me alone, not for anyone else.” I experienced the Buddha “teaching me alone” on two occasions.

After the war and returning from compulsory military duty (in Japan), I resumed studies at Waseda No. 1 High School and was accepted into the Literature Department of Waseda University. In those days, Professor Hakuju Ui, who had retired from the University of Tokyo, was giving lectures on Buddhist philosophy at Waseda University. I audited these lectures for two years.

Professor Ui had a unique style of lecturing. He would first enter the classroom with a bundle of papers wrapped in a *furoshiki* (traditional Japanese wrapping cloth). He would untie the *furoshiki* and take a certain notebook out of it, place it on the podium, and open some page in it. He would begin to lecture so eloquently, never again touching the notebook. He wrote the important points down on the blackboard in great detail, explaining them thoroughly. Everything made perfect sense. The ninety minute classes passed so quickly. My dull eyes soon opened wide to the wonders of Buddhism.

One day, I was sitting as usual at the desk immediately in front of the podium, as my hearing was poor. The professor came in and began lecturing in his usual style, and I noticed that there were no other students in the classroom. I was alone. However, the professor did not change his facial expression at all. He began to teach the profundities of Buddhism as usual. Moved beyond words, I devoted all my attention to what he said and did my best to take down what he wrote on the blackboard. Professor Ui looked like the Buddha himself to me on that day.

My other important experience was to spend a year at Sanzen-in Temple in Ohara (Kyoto) while pondering my future direction after graduating from Waseda University and having spent a year in its graduate school. It was a stroke of great fortune to be allowed to study under Ven Koin Yamaguchi, Chief Abbot of the Manshu-in Monzeki temple of the Tendai school in Kyoto and to receive his instruction on the three great commentaries on the *Lotus Sutra* by Chinese Tiantai Master Zhiyi. Initially, it was a one-on-one tutorial in Ven Yamaguchi's residence. Later, perhaps a dozen people, hearing rumors of these lectures, started to attend them, but later the attendance dwindled down till I was the only attendee. The abbot was unable to complete the lecture series due to old age. However, I again had the profound blessing of literally of having “the dharma taught to me alone.”

( excerpt from *Searching for a “way of life” in Buddhism* )

**Condolence Message from**  
**Mr. Phallop Thaiarry**  
**Vice-President and Secretary-General of**  
**The World Fellowship of Buddhists**  
**on the Passing Away of**  
**Most Reverend Shokan Okano**  
**The 2<sup>nd</sup> President of Kodo Kyodan Buddhist Fellowship**  
**15 September B.E. 2562 (2019)**



On behalf of the World Fellowship of Buddhists (The WFB) and its subordinate organizations – the World Fellowship of Buddhist Youth, and the World Buddhist University, we have learnt the sad news of the passing away of Most Reverend Shokan Okano, the 2<sup>nd</sup> President of the Kodo Kyodan Buddhist Fellowship who passed away at the age of 93 on 15 September B.E. 2562 (2019) with deep regret and sorrow. His demise had brought about a great sadness not only to the Buddhist community in Japan, but it is also to the World Fellowship of Buddhists (The WFB) and entire international Buddhist community who came to know Most Reverend. We, all Buddhist friends including all people always regard Most Reverend as highly respectable person. Especially to The WFB, Most Reverend was the dearest senior family member of The WFB who always granted us supportive and valuable suggestion.

Most Reverend Shokan Okano was born in the family of Most Reverend Shodo Okano, the co-founder of the Kodo Kyodan Buddhist Fellowship whom his enthusiasm in Buddhism was cultivated from. After graduated from Waseda University Graduate School, Most Reverend spent eight years at the illustrious Manshu-in Monzeki Temple of Tendai Buddhist school in Kyoto. Then, Most Reverend furthered studying as a researcher in comparative religion at Clairmont Graduate School from B.E 2505-2510 (1962-1967) in California, U.S.A.

The inquisitiveness of Most Reverend Shokan Okano was shown at the age of 22 which in B.E. 2490 (1947) by being Director of editing and publishing for Sho-ho (True Dharma), the Kodo Kyodan newsletter that later became the Kodo News. Four years after that Most Reverend had established and became Director of the Youth Movement for the Bell of Peace and then taking the leadership of Kodo Kyodan Youth Association at

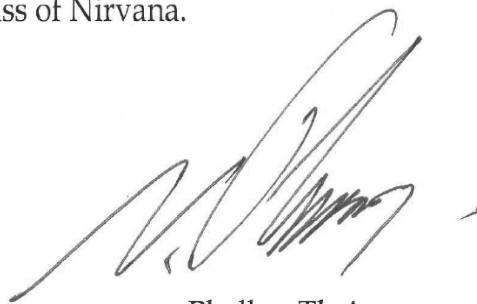
the age of 31 in B.E. (2499) 1956. Most Reverend also established and served as Director of the International Buddhist Exchange Center (IBEC) at the age of 43 years.

In B.E. 2518 (1975), Most Reverend Shokan Okano was inaugurated as the 2<sup>nd</sup> President of Kodo Kyodan Buddhist Federation. During that time Most Reverend had established branch temples in Shizuoka, Aomori, and Fukushima. In addition, Most Reverend's inexhaustible energy for the development of the denomination was ceaselessly and can be witnessed by the inauguration of the Maitri (loving-kindness) Movement which adopted the 5 Practices of Compassion that aspire to build a society in harmony with nature and the co-existence of all people.

The long term close relationship and kindness which Most Reverend Shokan Okano and Most Reverend Rinko Okano, wife of Most Reverend, have granted to all people who came to know was unveiled through the mercy and supportiveness of both Reverends, especially to The WFB and my family. We will keep this special bond and carry on to a more solid foundation combined with fond memorable.

Most Reverend Shokan Okano will be missed and we will always remember Most Reverend's dedication to the common good. May it be a solace to the family that Most Reverend led an exemplary life of service to all who came in touch with. Most Reverend left a name which we will honor with affection and esteem.

May the merit of the Triple Gem and good karma lead Most Reverend Shokan Okano to attain the bliss of Nirvana.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Phallop Thaiarry', with a stylized, flowing script.

Phallop Thaiarry  
Vice-President and Secretary-General  
The World Fellowship of Buddhists (WFB)



**Condolences from the community of the International Network of  
Engaged Buddhists (INEB) for the most Reverend Shokan Okano –  
2nd president of the Kodo Kyodan Buddhist Fellowship**

Here in Sri Lanka, we remember Rev. Shokan Okano as a great friend and admired by all the three main sectors of the Buddhist clergy. Some of the Sri Lankan senior monks have been to the Kodo Kyodan temple in Yokohama and felt it as a great place bringing spirituality, harmony, and world peace together.

Former Sri Lanka President, the late Ranasingha Premadasa, himself visited the temple and was fortunate to meet Rev. Shokan Okano. Up to this day, if any Sri Lankan VIP visits Japan, the Kodo Kyodan temple is a must visit place. It is one of the holy places in Japan, where the Buddha's holy relics are enshrined to remember the friendship between Japan and Sri Lanka.

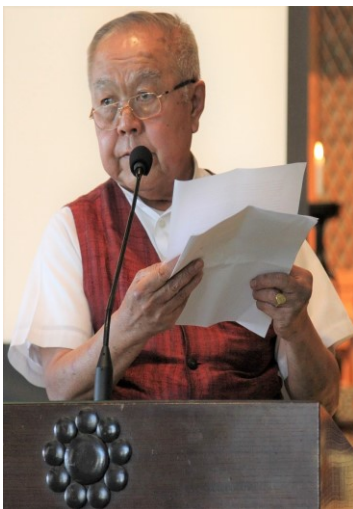
For the community of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB), the Kodo Kyodan temple has become a link between the engaged Buddhist community in Japan and the rest of the world. Also, the present 3rd President, Rev. Shojun Okano, elder son of the late senior Rev. Shokan Okano, continues as one of the most active members of our engaged Buddhist global family.

On behalf of Sri Lankan friends and members of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists let us all remember Rev. Shokan Okano's spiritual journey of life and continue his legacy by devoting ourselves to preserving his teachings and taking forward his activities and commitments towards world peace. Let us pray for Rev. Shokan Okano to attain the supreme bliss of Nirvana.

Mr. Harsha Navaratne  
Chairman of the Board

Mr. Sulak Sivaraksa  
Founder

International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB)



2012 INEB International Forum. Hosted by the Kodo Kyodan Buddhist Fellowship November 10, 2012. Theme: "The Wisdom of Interbeing & The Art of Happiness: An International Engaged Buddhist Vision for Post 3/11 Japan" Keynote Speech by Sulak Sivaraksa (Thailand, INEB Founder) with panel discussion by Buddhist leaders from Thailand, Taiwan, Sri Lanka and Japan