



Rinzai Zen Mission Newsletter

PO Box 791586, Paia, Maui, HI 96779 / (808) 579-9921
120 Alawai Rd, next to Baldwin Beach Park, Paia

Issue 21

Due to the Super Bowl on Sunday, February 9, we moved our monthly cleaning day to the previous Sunday. And we had an amazing turnout of helpers! The striker on the big bell was repaired and the bell tower received a lot of much needed attention. We painted the belly band of the temple and the apartment stairs. Later in the week, some went through the offices and shredded old documents. We also organized storage in the back of the temple. Sen and Jesse and Charlotte painted the floor outside the old columbarium. All of this AND the temple and one of the apartments got a very thorough cleaning. Reverend Yamaguchi used to tell us to "Treat the temple like your own eye." It was wonderful to see that happening. Much gratitude and deep bows to this wonderful congregation!

Susan President of Rinzai Zen Mission



Welcoming Yokota Roshi & Guests



We are honored to welcome Yokota Roshi, the master of Engakuji Temple, along with three guests from Japan next week. I trained under him, and thanks to Yokota Roshi's support, I am here today. It is a great privilege to host him.

Arrival: February 21st

Reception Dinner

Date: Saturday, February 22nd

Time: Potluck dinner starts at 6:00 PM

Join us in welcoming our guests! Please bring your favorite dish to share with our wonderful community.

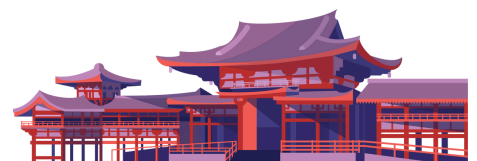
Chair Zazen, Lecture & Dharma Talk

Date: Sunday, February 23rd

Time: 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM, followed by luncheon

Luncheon provided by the temple

Reservation required (now fully booked) - Contact Sen (808-268-4216) to reserve your spot.



Hanamatsuri Festival - April 5th at 10AM

We are excited to celebrate Hanamatsuri on April 5th together with Paia Mantokuji Temple! This year, we welcome:

- Rev. Chisaka (Staying April 1st - 6th)
- Rev. Hoshi (Staying April 4th - 6th)
- Rev. Hirosawa from our neighboring Mantokuji Temple

If you have the opportunity to reach out and connect with them during their visit, it would be greatly appreciated!

Fundraiser - April 26th 8AM - 12 Noon

We are organizing a rummage, plant, and food sale on April 26th to support our temple. Donations needed! We kindly ask for rummage items for the event. More details coming soon! Thank you for your continued support!



Okinawan Corner なんくるないさー



"Nankuru naisa" is an Okinawan phrase meaning "Everything will work out somehow." However, it is not just simple optimism. Originally derived from the full saying, "Makutu sōkee nankuru naisa" (If you do the right thing, things will naturally fall into place), this phrase carries a deeper lesson--that with sincerity and effort, the future will open up. After World War II, a woman in Okinawa struggled to raise her young child alone. She had no home, barely enough food, and worked tirelessly every day. Yet, she never lost hope, always telling herself, "Nankuru naisa." Slowly, she built a life--working, farming, and ensuring her child grew up strong. Years later, her son, now a successful man, asked, "Mother, how did you stay so strong?" She smiled and replied, "Nankuru naisa. If you keep trying, the path will open." This phrase embodies the resilient spirit of Okinawa. No matter how difficult life may seem, as long as we stay sincere and keep moving forward, the future will surely brighten.



March Calligraphy

Regular Calligraphy

March 6th (Thu) - 5:00 PM - 7:00 PM

March 9th (Sun) - 2:00 PM - 4:00 PM

March 16th (Sun) - 2:00 PM - 4:00 PM

March 20th (Thu) - 5:00 PM - 7:00 PM



Shakyo (Sutra Copying)

March 9th (Sun) - 2:00 PM - 4:00 PM

Chinese Zodiac and the Nirvana Ceremony

Today, I'd like to talk about two things: the origin of the zodiac and the Nirvana Ceremony. Unlike the rest of Japan, Okinawa did not relinquish the lunar calendar. So both the solar new year and the lunar new year are observed in Okinawa. This year, the Lunar New Year was on January 29, and today is our first monthly memorial service of the new year, so we are also holding a small New Year gathering.

Also, yesterday, February 15, was the day of Nirvana, the anniversary of the Buddha's passing. In Buddhism, this is one of the three most important memorial days. (The other two memorial days are Bodhi Day, which is on December 8th, commemorating the day the Buddha attained enlightenment, and April 8th, the Buddha's birthday, generally known as Hanamatsuri.) So today I want to talk about both the zodiac and Nirvana Ceremony.

At the temple entrance, you may have seen red banners called spring couplets (春聯, shunren). These were brought from Taiwan by Jesse and Charlotte Yamaguchi, and our calligraphy students helped write them. During the Lunar New Year, people write wishes on red paper and put them on their doors to invite good fortune. Many people ask me, "What kind of wishes should I make?" I usually say, "Instead of small personal wishes, try to make a wish that benefits many people." However, for spring couplets, it's okay to write personal wishes too! A common phrase is "Gong Xi Fa Cai" (恭喜發財), which means "Wishing you wealth and prosperity." This is a typical New Year greeting, especially in China, where business is highly valued. Now, let's talk about the zodiac.

The Origins of the Chinese Zodiac

The 12 animals of the zodiac originally come from ancient Chinese astronomy and calendar systems. Later, as Buddhism spread, these animals were connected to Buddhist teachings.

However, many animals were either too far away or too slow and couldn't make it in time. In the end, only twelve animals arrived: Rat, Ox, Tiger, Rabbit, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Goat, Monkey, Rooster, Dog, and Boar.

This story was passed down in Buddhist cultures like China, Tibet, and Japan, though it is not written in Buddhist scriptures. However, in Buddhism, being present at the moment of Nirvana is considered a great blessing. The animals that arrived represent those who received the Buddha's final teachings, and as a reward, the Buddha made them the protectors of each year. This is how the 12-year zodiac cycle was born.

The Nirvana Painting (Nehanzu)

One important way to understand the zodiac's origin is by looking at Nirvana paintings (涅槃図, Nehanzu). These paintings show the Buddha's passing under the Sala trees, surrounded by disciples, animals, spirits, and bodhisattvas, all grieving. The Nirvana painting at our temple was donated by Jikyuan, a famous scroll-making shop in Japan. It was a gift through the connection with Yamaguchi Oshō, and we are very grateful for it. You are welcome to take a closer look at it later and check if you can find all 12 zodiac animals in the painting!

The Order of the Zodiac Animals

Now, why are the zodiac animals in this order? According to the legend, the Ox was actually the first to arrive. But just before reaching the Buddha, the clever Rat jumped off the Ox's back and landed first. This is why the Rat is the first in the zodiac, followed by the Ox, Tiger, Rabbit, and the rest.

The Boar in the Nirvana Painting

The last animal is the Boar (or Pig in China). The Boar is known for its strength and bravery, but in Buddhism, it also represents inner peace. In the Nirvana painting, the Boar does not act aggressively--it quietly watches over the Buddha's final moments. This teaches us that true strength is not about physical power but about having a calm and steady heart.

Why Is There No Cat in the zodiac?

One story says that the Rat tricked the Cat by giving it the wrong date for the Buddha's passing. As a result, the Cat arrived too late. That's why most Nirvana paintings do not include a Cat. However, in Japan, some later paintings do show a Cat hiding in the corner. Perhaps people started to believe that even the Cat deserved salvation. Also, if you look closely at Nirvana paintings, you might notice that some animals, like the Tiger and Snake, are not crying. One interpretation is that the Tiger represents acceptance and enlightenment--it has already understood the truth of impermanence, so it does not grieve. The Snake doesn't show tears for another reason which I will explain.



The Year of the Snake and Its Symbolism

This year is the Year of the Snake. In Buddhism, the Snake is often linked to the Dragon King (Nāga), a powerful spirit that protects the Buddha. There is a famous story of the Mucalinda Dragon King, a giant snake who shielded the Buddha from heavy rain while he was meditating under the Bodhi tree. Because of this, Snakes are sometimes seen as guardians of Buddhism.

There is also a deeper meaning: "The Snake does not shed tears, but it watches over the Buddha closely. Just because someone does not show sadness on the outside does not mean they do not feel it deeply." This reminds us that everyone expresses emotions differently, and silent grief is still real grief.

A New Perspective on the Zodiac and Nirvana

The zodiac is not just about animals--it carries deep meanings. I encourage you to learn more about your own zodiac sign and what it represents. And when you look at the Nirvana painting today, try to find your zodiac animal. Also, take a moment to check--is there a Cat in our temple's Nirvana painting? In Japan, we have the saying "Hyakubun wa ikken ni shikazu" (百聞は一見に如かず), meaning "Seeing once is better than hearing a hundred times." Or as Westerners say, "A picture is worth a thousand words." This aligns with Buddhist teachings--no matter how much we hear, true understanding comes from direct experience.

The Buddha himself taught: "Do not blindly believe others' words; verify and practice them yourself." Buddhism is not merely about knowledge but about realization through practice. Seeing the Nehanzu today is one such opportunity. I encourage you to observe it closely and seek out the Buddha's final teachings with your own eyes.

今日は、「干支の由来」と「涅槃会」についてお話ししたいと思います。

現在、沖縄では新暦の正月を祝う地域や家庭が多いですが、もともとは旧暦の正月を大切にしていました。今年の旧正月は1月29日であり、本日は旧暦の新年を迎えて初めての月例法要となるため新年会も兼ねています。そして、昨日2月15日は、涅槃会とってお釈迦様が入滅された日で、仏教では三仏忌の一つとされます。ですから今日は、干支の話と涅槃の話をしようと思うのです。

お寺の入り口には、春聯（しゅんれん）が貼られています。これは、ジェシーとシャーロットが台湾から持ってきてくれたもので、書道教室の皆さんに書いていただきました。旧正月に合わせて、赤い札に願い事を書き、玄関に貼るのです。すると福が舞い込むと言います。

お寺ではよく「どのような願い事をすればよいですか？」と尋ねられますが、私は「個人的な小さな願いではなく、広く大きな願いのために手を合わせてください」とお伝えしています。しかし、春聯には個人的な願いを書いても構いません。たとえば、「恭喜發財（きょうきはつざい）」という言葉はよく見かけます。これは「お金持ちになりますように」「今年も商売繁盛しますように」といった意味があり、新年の挨拶として使われます。こうした願いを見ると、さすがはビジネスの国・中国だなと感じます。

さて、干支はもともと中国の天文学や暦法に由来しますが、仏教が広まる過程で、お釈迦さまの伝説や守護仏の考え方と結びつきました。

お釈迦さまが涅槃（ねはん）に入られる際、その知らせは弟子たちや信者だけでなく、すべての生き物にも伝えられました。しかし、遠方にいたため、あるいは急いでいたために、多くの動物たちは間に合いませんでした。最終的に、お釈迦さまのもとへ駆けつけたのは、以下の12種類の動物だったといわれています。（実際に涅槃図には52種類の動物が描かれていることが多いです。）

十二支（子・丑・寅・卯・辰・巳・午・未・申・酉・戌・亥）

この伝説は中国やチベット、日本などの仏教圏で広まりましたが、仏典には明確な記述がなく、後世に創作された可能性が高いとされています。ただし、仏教では「涅槃に立ち会うこと」は大きな功德とされており、この物語には「お釈迦さまの最後の教えを受け取った者たちが、後の世でも人々を導く」という象徴的な意味が込められています。そのため、お釈迦さまは忠誠を称え、動物たちに一年ごとの守護神となる役割を与えられました。こうして、十二支が生まれたといわれています。

干支の由来を知る上で重要なのが、多くのお寺に飾られている「涅槃図（ねはんず）」です。これは、沙羅双樹のもとでお釈迦さまがご入滅された様子を描いた絵画で、2月15日に掛けられます。開教院にある涅槃図は、日本は京都の「自休菴（じきゅうあん）」という掛け軸専門店から寄贈いただいたものです。山口和尚さまと自休菴さまが親しい間柄にあり、寄付いただいたのでした。お寺の納骨堂に、先代のお遺骨も分骨されています。後ほど、涅槃図に本当に十二支の動物が描かれているか、ぜひご覧ください。

一般的な涅槃図では、お釈迦さまを囲むように、人間や動物、昆虫、鬼、菩薩などが嘆き悲しむ様子が描かれています。そして、すべての登場人物には、それぞれお釈迦さまとの関係を示すエピソードが込められています。今回は涅槃図の詳細な解説は省略しますが、この絵の中に描かれた動物たちが、干支の由来にもつながっているのです。

干支の順番は、お釈迦さまのご入滅に駆けつけた順番とされています。

まず、一番に駆けつけようとしたのは牛でした。しかし、後ろから追いついてきた鼠が牛の背中に飛び乗り、お釈迦さまのもとへ到着する寸前に飛び降りたため、鼠が最初に着いたとされています。その後、牛、虎、兎、龍、蛇、馬、羊、猿、鳥、犬、猪の順で駆けつけ、この並びが現在の十二支となりました。干支の最後は、イノシシです。

イノシシは、どうして涅槃の場面に登場するのでしょうか？

実は、イノシシはその強さや勇猛さから、仏教では『力強さ』や『勇気』を象徴する動物とされています。しかし、涅槃図で描かれるイノシシは、ただ力強いだけではありません。むしろ、最も重要なのは『内面的な平穏』を保つこと。感情に流されず、お釈迦さまの最後を静かに見守るその姿は、私たちにも大切な教訓を与えてくれます。イノシシが涅槃図でどんな役割を果たしているかという点、たとえ強さを持っていても、感情的に暴れず、静かにその教えを見守り続ける姿が描かれています。つまり、イノシシは『心の平安』を象徴しているんですね。



ところで、犬がいるのに猫がないのはなぜでしょうか？

広く知られている説の一つに、「鼠が猫に、わざと別の日を伝えたため、猫は間に合わなかった」という話があります。そのため、涅槃図には猫が描かれていないものが多いのです。しかし、江戸時代以降の日本の涅槃図には、猫がこっそり隅に描かれていることもあります。これは「猫も救われるべき存在」という考えが生まれたためかもしれません。また、涅槃図には悲しみに暮れて涙を流す動物たちが描かれる一方、虎や蛇などは泣いていないとされることがあります。たとえば、虎は「仏の死を受け入れ、心を乱さない」という悟りの姿勢を示しているといわれています。

さて、今年は蛇年ですが、仏教では蛇はどのような象徴なのでしょう？

蛇は感情が表に出にくい存在とされます。また、仏教には「龍王（ナーガ）」という蛇の化身の神が登場し、お釈迦さまを守護したと伝えられています。たとえば、「ムチャリダ龍王」の伝説では、お釈迦さまが菩提樹の下で瞑想していると大雨が降り始め、ムチャリダという龍王（大蛇）が現れて、お釈迦さまを自らの体で包み込み、雨から守ったとされています。このことから、インドや中国の仏教では、蛇は龍（ナーガ）として扱われ、仏法を守る存在と考えられることもあります。

「蛇は涙を流さないが、誰よりも近くでお釈迦さまの最後の時を見守っていた。悲しみを表に出さないからといって、心の中に悲しみが無いわけではない。」

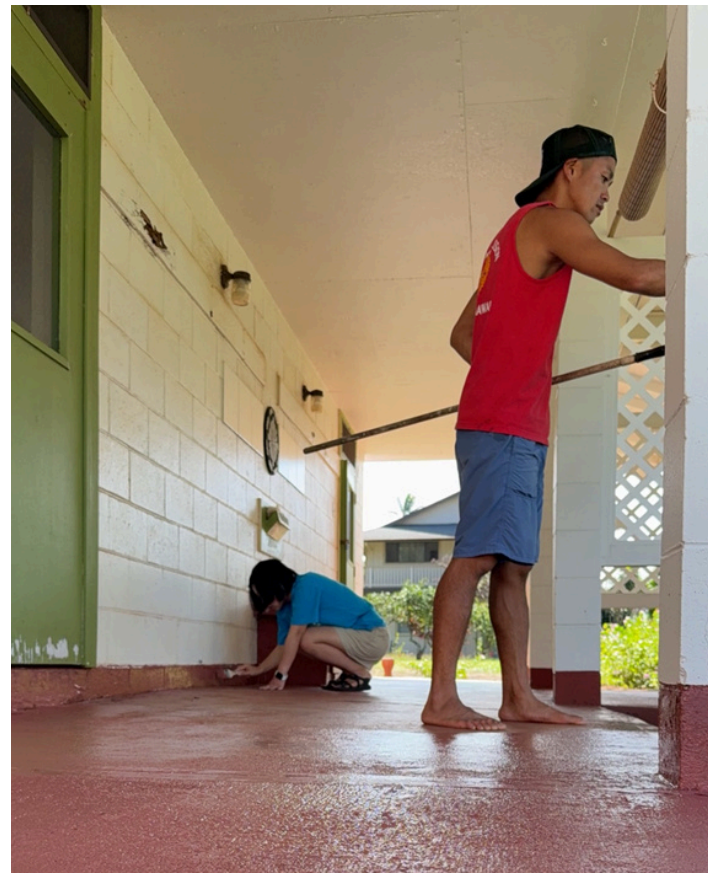
これは「悲しみの表現は人それぞれであり、表に出さないからといって、心に悲しみが無いとは限らない」という仏教の教えにも通じます。

いかがでしょうか？

干支や涅槃図の話を知ると、少し興味が湧いてきませんか？それぞれの干支には、意味が込められています。自分の干支は何か、そしてどんなことを象徴しているのか考えてみるとよいかもしれません。そして、ぜひ涅槃図をじっくりとご覧になり、ご自身の干支の動物を探してみてください。また、開教院の涅槃図には猫が描かれているのでしょうか？

日本には「百聞は一見に如かず」という諺があります。これはまさに仏教の教えと同じです。どれだけ言葉で聞いても、真に理解するには自分の目で見て、体験することが大切です。お釈迦さまも「他人の言葉をそのまま信じるのではなく、自ら確かめ、実践しなさい」と教えられました。仏教は、知識ではなく、実践を通じて気づきを得る道です。本日、皆さまが涅槃図を見たことも、一つの「一见」となるでしょう。どうぞ、じっくりとご覧になり、お釈迦さまの最後の教えを、ご自身の目で確かめてみてください。

合掌



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