

Agon Shu holds ceremonies to eliminate bad karma

Over the past few decades, the Rev. Seiyu Kiriya has worked tirelessly to assuage the souls of those who died in World War II — soldiers and civilians — as well as to pray for world peace, with the aim of eliminating the scourge of war forever.

Kiriya, now 93, is the founder of the Agon Shu Buddhist Association and he has said that for as long as he lives, he will pray for peace and work to rid Japan of the bad karma that has plagued the country since the end of the war. He's also dedicated to praying for peace throughout the world; Agon Shu has held ceremonies to pray for peace in locations as diverse as New York, Paris, Jerusalem, Auschwitz, Guadalcanal and New Guinea.

Most recently, Kiriya and members of Agon Shu conducted prayer services on the Pacific islands of Saipan and Tinian, as well as in Japan's Fukushima Prefecture.

"Agon Shu is aiming for true world peace, and two conditions are required to achieve the goal," explained Kiriya. "First, we have to create 'homo excellence,' which will have superior spiritual power and intelligence, and high levels of ethics and morals. Because humans are foolish, they plunder and kill and injure others. If they are sufficiently wise, humans can find joy in giving and helping each other. How can people develop their spiritual power?"

Spiritual power

Kiriya said that in the human brain there is a section known as the "interbrain," which is related to spiritual power. That power, he says, can be strengthened by developing the interbrain. The question, then, is how can that be done?

Inheritance of thought

"Various training methods of 'perfect' Buddhism and Agon Shu, which center on the dhar-



Rev. Seiyu Kiriya, the founder of Agon Shu AGON SHU

ma of attaining Buddhahood, are needed," said Kiriya. "The most important of them is 'the inheritance of thought,' or feeling the vibration of Buddha's thought.

"The second condition that must happen is that we must change our personal and family vicious destinies, and break 'the karma of destruction' that overshadows the country and the world," Kiriya continued. "Everyone is struggling with their own karma. Countries and the world are also influenced by the 'karma of destruction,' which causes war, terrorism and natural disasters. Only the dharma of Agon Shu's perfect Buddhism can break the karma."

To understand how Kiriya and Agon Shu are working to break that cycle of negative karma, it helps to know just what Agon Shu is and what its adherents believe.

Kiriya founded Agon Shu in 1978 after spending many years seeking spiritual truth. The answer to his quest was the Agama Sutras, the only scriptures directly taught by Buddha. Agon Shu has since grown into a community of 300,000 members in Japan and thousands more around the world. Agon Shu believers follow the spiritual path taught by Buddha.

They believe this is the only way for people to be liberated and for peace to prevail in the world.

There are three core elements in Agon Shu. First is the Lord Buddha. He is the ultimate object of worship for Agon Shu believers. Next is the dharma, comprising Buddha's teachings and training methods. Thirdly there's the sangha, the community of believers led by Kiriya. Agon Shu also draws on the best elements of the three main schools of Buddhism: Theravada, Mahayana and Tibetan Buddhism. Kiriya has mastered all three. Agon Shu calls this integrated belief system "perfect Buddhism."

Historical significance

Kiriya and Agon Shu chose Saipan and Tinian to hold ceremonies aimed at breaking the chain of bad karma because of their special historical significance. The Western Pacific island of Saipan was under Spanish and later German control until 1914, when Japan captured it in World War I.

Saipan became an important overseas protectorate of the Japanese Empire. Many people from the home islands of Japan as well as Koreans, Taiwanese and Okinawans developed sugar plantations and refineries on Saipan. By the beginning of

WWII nearly 30,000 Japanese lived on Saipan, along with nearly 4,000 Chamorro and Caroline Islanders.

As Japan's newly won empire in the Pacific crumbled in the face of the relentless American onslaught, Saipan became part of the last line of defense of the Japanese home islands. It was heavily fortified, and nearly 30,000 troops were stationed on the island.

Japanese and American forces fought fiercely on Saipan from mid-June 1944 until July 9, when Japanese resistance ended. Almost 3,500 Americans died in the fighting; nearly 30,000 Japanese soldiers — almost the entire defending force — were killed. As many as 4,000 Japanese soldiers died in a suicidal banzai charge, and hundreds of Japanese civilians committed suicide by jumping off cliffs that came to be known as "Suicide Cliff" and "Banzai Cliff," rather than be captured.

Having control of Saipan and nearby Tinian meant that, for the first time, most cities in Japan were within range of American B-29 Superfortress bombers. The strategic bombing campaign that would reduce many Japanese cities to rubble began shortly thereafter as America meted out revenge for Pearl Harbor.

"Japan is the only nation to have suffered atomic bombings," noted Kiriya. "On Aug. 6, 1945, for the first time in human history, an atomic bomb was dropped, on Hiroshima. The city was ruined in a moment by the strong heat and blast. Three days later, on Aug. 9, 1945, the second A-bomb was dropped, on Nagasaki.

"At the time, an estimated 90,000 to 120,000 people were killed in Hiroshima and about 70,000 in Nagasaki. As of 2013, the number of victims stood at 286,818 in Hiroshima and 162,083 in Nagasaki. Tinian and Saipan are the starting point of Japan's karma."

On Nov. 8, Kiriya and a delegation of Agon Shu faithful arrived in Saipan to tour historical sites and offer prayers for the dead. On Nov. 9, Kiriya officiated at a "Dai Saito Gomaku" service at a memorial at the base of "Suicide Cliff."

Prime minister message

A Japanese government official read a message from Prime Minister Shinzo Abe:

"Today on Saipan, I feel a deep meaning where all the people who sacrificed here for the last war are going to be worshipped. Today's successful, peaceful and prosperous Japan was made possible by the supreme sacrifice of these soldiers and civilians. I pray for the happiness of the people of Saipan and Japan."

A priest from Tokyo's Yasukuni Shrine, where the souls of Japan's war dead are enshrined, blessed the site of the ceremony. Two female dancers in beautifully colored costumes then performed to the sound of "gagaku" ancient court music.

A procession of Agon Shu members led by Kiriya then entered the site to the sound of booming orchestral music and conch shells blown by adherents dressed as "yamabushi" mountain priests. Some of them then held a "mondo" ritual question-and-answer exchange which elucidated the theme of the Battle of Saipan. Various Shinto-inspired purification rituals followed. As is always the case with Agon Shu, this "Dai Saito Gomaku" ceremony was conducted as a combined Buddhist-Shinto ritual.

Before the ceremony proper began, Jude Hofschneider, Lieutenant Governor of the North Mariana Islands, addressed those present: "Your trip to our island is perfect in timing, as we commemorate the 70th anniversary of the battles of Saipan and Tinian. We are grateful for your visit and share your vision of a world not

full of hate and division, but a world full of friendship and happiness."

Soon after, Agon Shu members lit torches as other members chanted invocations. They applied the torches to a modest-sized "gomadan" pyre onto which Agon Shu adherents threw wooden votive tablets inscribed with prayers for the living and the dead.

On the evening of Nov. 9, Kiriya and the rest of the Agon Shu delegation attended a banquet at which people from Agon Shu chapters all over Japan spoke about how moved they were by the ceremony and the chance to help assuage the souls of the dead.

North Field

The next day saw members of the delegation fly to nearby Tinian to conduct another "Dai Saito Gomaku" ceremony at North Field, the airstrip from where the B-29 that dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, took off. As the flames leapt from the pyre, those present offered fervent prayers at the place of karmic significance.

On Nov. 11, Kiriya and the rest of the Agon Shu delegation flew back to Japan, their mission accomplished. On Nov. 16, a ceremony was held at the organization's main temple in Kyoto to report on the successful trip to Saipan and Tinian.

Karmic connection

Kiriya sees a direct karmic connection between those two Pacific islands and the March 11, 2011, meltdown at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant. On Oct. 5, Kiriya officiated at a "Dai Saito Gomaku" service in Minamisoma, Fukushima Prefecture, to offer prayers for the souls of those who perished in the March 11, 2011, earthquake and tsunami and to pray for the recovery of the area struck by the disaster.

"During World War II, research on developing atomic bombs was conducted in Iwakawa in Fukushima because radioactive minerals were produced there," Kiriya



Agon Shu conducts a "Dai Saito Gomaku" ceremony on Nov. 9 at "Suicide Cliff" in Saipan to offer prayers for those who died in World War II.

notes. "Some say that the possible atomic bomb had been intended to attack Allied Forces-occupied Saipan. Tinian and Saipan are the starting point of Japan's karma."

At a memorial service in June, he said, "There is a close relationship between the third atomic bomb that I had predicted would drop on Japan and the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster. I also think this is closely related to Fukushima, Saipan and Tinian."

In his book "1999 Chikyu Kaimetsu" (1999 earth destruction), Kiriya asserted, "I think nuclear energy is the karma of human beings."

He also added: "Unless hu-

mans develop a totally new energy, they will follow a path of destruction. It is impossible for old homo sapiens to do that. The deadlock in the intelligence of homo sapiens has created the current situation. The superior intelligence of the new 'homo excellence' can break the deadlock in the situation."

Kiriya and Agon Shu are dedicating their spiritual and moral power to healing the wounds of the past and changing the negative karma that lingers after the tragic events of World War II. They're also using that power to help Japan and the rest of the world build a peaceful and prosperous world.