

# Bhutan Hall opening ceremony

The Japanese Buddhist organization Agon Shu made history recently by building the first temple in Japan in the Bhutanese Buddhist style.

Agon Shu has close connections with Bhutan. Rev. Seiyu Kiriya, founder of the Agon Shu Buddhist Association, has achieved priesthood ranks in Tibetan Buddhism and Bhutanese Buddhism, including the Buddhist name of Ngawang Gyeltshen (guardian of Buddhist teachings who gives the ultimate sermon) in 2010.

Thus, building a Bhutanese Buddhism style spiritual training facility in Japan has been Kiriya's dream, which has finally become a reality.

"I have long thought we needed a Bhutan Hall (Sangye Choeling) as a place for your training," Kiriya said in the June 14 ceremony to formally open the Bhutan Hall. "And today I'm happy because the hall has been completed, perfectly in line with my idea."

A great deal of work went into designing and building the Bhutan Hall, located at Agon Shu's headquarters in Kitakazan, Yamashina, in the hills of eastern Kyoto. That's clear from the meticulous attention to detail evident in every aspect of the building and the spectacularly colorful Bhutanese Buddhist iconography that fills the building. The focal point of the structure



**Bhutanese monks performed a lively costumed cham dance, which is meant to pray for the elimination of any spiritual obstacles.** AGON SHU

is a gleaming gilt statue of Buddha on a richly decorated altar.

The Bhutan Hall is the result of Kiriya's dream of taking the best elements from the three branches of Buddhism — Theravada, Mahayana and Tibetan Buddhism — and distilling the essence of Buddha's teachings. Kiriya has now mastered all three branches of Buddhism. In 2010, and again in 2011, he inherited from Bhutanese Buddhism (Tibetan Buddhism) various secret powers, including the special power of late-stage Vajrayana (Tantric) Buddhism.

The dedication ceremony began with a solemn proces-

sion of Bhutanese monks and Agon Shu members. The clear, bright sound of Bhutanese Gyaling six-holed oboes cut through the mountain air, bringing to mind how Buddha's teaching slashes through the veil of ignorance that prevents us from achieving enlightenment.

Then, a Japanese man wearing the robes of a priest of Japan's Shinto religion came out. He was Hideki Togi, Japan's best-known gagaku ancient Japanese court music performer. Togi played a piece he composed for the ceremony, "Daichi no Inori," or "Prayer of Mother Nature."

The next event was the lighting of a goma wooden pyre at the altar. It was much smaller than the two huge goma that form the centerpiece of Agon Shu's annual Fire Rites Festival in Kyoto, but no less spiritually powerful. As the flames grew more intense, Bhutanese monks began blowing on dungchen horns, which resemble Swiss alpenhorns. Their low, solemn tones reverberated through the Bhutan Hall compound and among the surrounding hills. Members of the faithful closed their eyes in prayer to the sound of the monks' repetitive, sonorous chanting.

Kiriya expressed his gratitude to those who built the

hall. "I offer my profound gratitude to the builders, the Bhutanese craftsmen for their work on the interior, the Bhutanese Buddhist officials who gave precious sacred treasures for the hall and Mr. Dorje Lupon and the high-ranking Bhutanese priests who have come to take part in the ceremony today."

The main focus of the event was to put all the power of the perfect Buddhism into the Bhutan Hall. High-ranking Bhutanese Buddhist priest the Dorje Lupon attended the ceremony in Kyoto and gave a speech.

He is one of the top disciples of Bhutanese Buddhist leader Tenjin Dendop, who is also the 68th Je Khenpo, and passed on the secret of Bhutanese Buddhism to Kiriya when the Agon Shu leader visited the Himalayan country last year.

"I'm very grateful that Reverend Kiriya and the other members of Agon Shu invited us, 17 priests and three government representatives, to the Bhutan Hall completion ceremony in the historic and traditional city of Kyoto on this very special day," the Dorje Lupon told those attending the ceremony.

He said that he and the other members of the delegation from Bhutan prayed the new hall would bring peace and harmony to the world, especially to Japan.

Representatives of the companies involved in the design and construction of the building then made brief addresses to the audience in which they described how honored they were to take part in such a unique and historic project.

The morning ceremony concluded with the Japanese kagami biraki ritual, in which several people use wooden mallets to break open sake casks in unison, followed by a toast.

The afternoon began with an offering of a large mandala thongdrol of Bhutanese Buddhism style. Thongdrol means "liberation by sight."

The thongdrol went through rituals to infuse it with religious power by Tenjin Dendop after it was completed and Kiriya on April 16.

A message from Tenjin Dendop was read. He said that when he learned that Agon Shu planned to build Japan's first Bhutanese Buddhism-style sacred hall, he offered some advice.

"I proposed that Shakyamuni Tathagata, Amitayus and Amitabha be enshrined in the hall. Now that the Bhutan Hall has been completed, I offer my congratulations from the bottom of my heart," he said.

Events continued with a concert in the main Agon Shu building. Ten musicians wearing ancient Japanese court costumes formed two groups on either side of the stage. As they began a gagaku piece, a bugaku (court dance and music) dancer joined them, performing a slow, dramatic dance. Togi joined them and performed bugaku called "batou." Then Bhutanese monks performed a lively costumed cham dance, which is meant to pray for the elimination of any spiritual obstacles.

Amid a solemn atmosphere and excellent music performances, Kiriya then offered "Reiseikaiken Shugyojuncho Himitsukuji" (a secret kuji nine-syllable mantra to achieve enlightenment that only the Buddha can lead to the truth and make the journey to the enlightenment smooth) to the ceremony attendees and photos sent by people from across Japan.

"Receiving kuji from Reverend Kiriya with all his power in front of the special thongdrol, I believe you will receive a very strong vibration of the enlightenment that only the Buddha can lead you to be the Buddha," Agon Shu monk Hakuho Kiyokawa, who underwent training in Bhutan for 10 years, said before Kiriya's kuji offering.

To conclude the ceremony, the Dorje Lupon then conducted the "Bhutanese Bud-



**The ceremony to open Bhutan Hall was held solemnly with Rev. Seiyu Kiriya, founder of the Agon Shu Buddhist Association, playing a leading role in the ceremony.** AGON SHU

dhism Shakyamuni Tathagata Seven Buddha Most Victory Abhisheka."

"I hope you will train yourself further to get the vibration of enlightenment power from the Buddha to your dienceph-

alon (the brain of spirituality) directly' at this temple," Kiriya said.

The construction of the Bhutan Hall signifies Agon Shu's further efforts to form one Perfect Buddhism. Kiri-

yama pointed out that Agon Shu takes in the ideals of the Theravada, Mahayana and Tibetan Buddhism, and he says that having the Bhutan Hall brings Agon Shu closer to its goal of finding the truth.

## Ancient court music lives on

Hideki Togi was born in Tokyo in 1959 to a family with a tradition of performing gagaku that dates back 1,300 years to the Nara period (A.D. 710-794).

Togi studied at the music department of the Imperial Household Agency and performed in Imperial rituals. But after 10 years he decided to leave the agency and take the risky step of starting a solo career to introduce gagaku to a wider audience.

His musical activities have taken him all over the world, and he performs in many musical events every year.

"Bhutan is a country where Buddhism is still alive," Togi says. "It's important to them; it's central to their lives."

Togi says he noticed the difference between Bhutan's liv-



**Hideki Togi**

ing Buddhism and the often-moribund Japanese version of Buddhism.

Since becoming more knowledgeable about Buddhism through his work with Agon Shu — along with his

grounding in Shintoism — he realizes "all religions look to the same place" for spiritual truth.

Togi composed a special piece for the Bhutan Hall dedication ceremony. It's called "Daichi no Inori," which translates as "Prayer of Mother Nature." It's a haunting, subtly powerful piece dominated by the high, plaintive sound of the hichiriki double-reed bamboo flute. Togi performed solo, accompanied by a recorded orchestral score. He says he blended Western and Bhutanese themes when composing "Daichi no Inori."

Togi tries to "bridge heaven and earth" in his music — very much following Shinto ethos, in which a sense of the cosmic and sacred can be found at power spots in nature.



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