



## SETSUBUN

By Reverend Mimatsu



*Setsubun* refers to the day before the beginning of each season. It's literal translation in English is "seasonal division," and marks the division between the four seasons. According to the Japanese lunar calendar, *Setsubun* is a festival held on February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, or 4<sup>th</sup>. Among these dates, *Setsubun* has, in past years, fallen mostly on February 3<sup>rd</sup>. In the early days of Japan, the Japanese Lunar New Year began from February 3<sup>rd</sup> and announced the end of winter and the beginning of spring.

During *Setsubun*, the Mamemaki or bean-tossing ritual is performed to chase away the demons of misfortune. Soybeans are roasted for the bean-tossing ritual. The roasted soybeans are then thrown at someone disguised as the "oni" or demon while chanting "*oni wa soto, huku wa uchi*" (out with the demon, in with happiness and good luck). The symbolic meaning of roasting the soybeans is to keep the demon's seed from sprouting again.

The ancient Japanese people chose the soybean for its meanings and hence created the *Mamemaki* ritual. In Japanese, soybeans are called "*mame*." There are two meanings to the word "*mame*." First, "*ma*" means demon and "*me*" means to destroy. This means we hope to eliminate forever the demon or any evil in our midst. Second, "*ma*" also means demon and "*me*" means the eyes of the demon.

From the Buddhist perspective, evil or negative emotion will always be inside our heart. So, when you throw the roasted soybeans at the demon, I want you to be conscious that you are disposing of all unpleasant feelings.

When I was a kid, I was a really mischievous boy, so my mother would always get angry. When I threw soybeans at her, she finally became a real demon.

Thank you for your attention.



## **A Letter from Reverend Iwasasa**

Dear Northern California Koyasan Temple Members,

Hello everyone! I hope everyone remembers me and that you all remain healthy and well. I can't believe that 3 ½ years have passed already. The days I had spent in Sacramento were one of my best memories and precious experiences. Mifuyu and I placed many pictures that we took in California and placed them in our home and on my desk. Nowadays, we enjoy talking about the places we visited and where we ate while in Sacramento.

Unfortunately, I heard the bad news about some of our precious Koyasan members who have passed away. When I was a minister of Koyasan, I gave you these words. "People will pass away twice. The first death is when our heart stops. The second death is when the deceased people are forgotten by other people." So, we have to remember them and keep their memories and teachings in our thoughts and mind. I'm praying for their peaceful life in Buddha's world from Japan. Our prayer will reach everywhere from wherever we are. So, I always pray for a happy and healthy life for Koyasan's members.

By the way, I want to write more, but this time I have to introduce my family.



**Anna (Annah)**

She was born on October 21<sup>st</sup> 2022. Nowadays she often smiles. She's growing up well and always makes us happy. Kayna and Kyrie are taking care of her very well.



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**Kayna (Keina)**

A four-year-old kindergarten child who likes singing and dancing. She was only 5 months old when she left Sacramento. Time flies!



**Kyrie (Kairi)**

A two-year-old boy who likes chicken, beef and pork. He always says "I don't eat vegetables." Sometimes he gets in a fight with Kayna, but he always shares his snacks with her.



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Mifuyu is also doing well. She often talks about visiting Sacramento. Hopefully we can get the chance to visit soon. We are looking forward to seeing you soon.

Stay safe and healthy.

Gassho,

Kyokan , Mifuyu, Kayna, Kyrie, and  
Anna Iwasawa





## “Visiting the Mountain Whose Name I Wear”

by Greg Wada



Last month, my girlfriend Lisa and I returned from a three-week visit to Japan, and while we were there we visited Koyasan, the mountain center of Shingon Buddhism, during a trip to Wakayama to visit my family grave near Gobo-shi. Having had the opportunity to teach taiko and wear the name “Koyasan” while performing, it seemed only right to visit the head temple while we were so close. I wanted to share a few reflections from that trip with everyone here with sincere gratitude for the sangha.

Traveling inland to Koya Mountain by train, the coastal landscape gives way to majestic green valleys, lowland fields and towns surrounded by forested hills. As I tried to squeeze in some remote work on the nearly empty local train, I wished my office could be a train traveling through the mountains. As we approached the next stop, though, hundreds of young students crammed onto the train, reminding me why offices are offices and trains trains! We continued down the line and they trickled off, saying their temporary goodbyes, though a few of them stayed with us through one more train transfer and even up the cable car that climbed the side of the mountain as the last light of the sun disappeared from the sky - such a commute for these students who live atop Koyasan!

We stayed that night in the *shukubo* (temple lodging) of *Saizen-in*, which had a large tatami room, divided into a sleeping area and a main room with a *kotatsu*. It was quite comfortable, actually - far more like a hotel than what I imagined a pilgrim’s lodging to be. I think most of the other guests were also tourists, so perhaps this stay was catered as much. The temple had a *senzo*, a public bath area, and to be honest, my American sensibilities did not make the thought of bathing naked with strangers that appealing. Thankfully, Lisa convinced me to give it a try - to not let ego or habit prevent me from the experience. The mark on the white board (COVID protocol) and single pair of slippers suggested only one person was using it. I stepped into the first room, where I saw one basket for clothes flipped over. I undressed and put my clothes in another. Okay, time to face my fears. I went into the second room and - nobody. So that’s how I took a bath with a ghost on a holy mountain.

The next morning, we attended a service where monks chanted a few sutras and we offered *oshoko*. The hondo was beautiful, with dozens of small, metal lanterns covering the ceiling. For some of the other guests, this seemed to be a new type of experience, but it struck me as altogether familiar and gave me a deep appreciation that far away, in America, Buddhist music,



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teachings, and attitudes were also part of the landscape. I really recommend going to Koya Mountain if you get a chance, but I also think it's pretty special to go to the corner of U and 14<sup>th</sup> Street in Sacramento.

We had *shojin ryori* (a type of monks' vegetarian cuisine) at the temple, too. As a vegetarian, it can be easy to miss a lot of the great food Japan has to offer (at least that's what I'm told!), so it was nice to be able to have some storied Japanese cuisine of our own on our trip. For me, being a vegetarian comes with the implicit understanding of trading earthly pleasure for a sort of joy in compassion towards animals, but I still had some of the best food I've experienced on this trip, and I'm thankful for that life and the care of those who made it.

We explored some of the temples in the area, including Danjo-garan, a temple complex which included a brilliant vermilion and white pagoda that housed an enormous statue of Dainichi Nyorai, and Kongobu-ji, the head temple of Koyasan Shingon Buddhism. "Northern California Koyasan Temple Keigenji" was listed on a map of all the temples. (If you go to Google maps, you can walk through part of Kongobu-ji in "street view.") There was so much to see on Koyasan, but I'll focus my reflection on one lesson.



In *Kongobu-ji*, there are a series of masterfully painted screens that depict the life of Kobo Daishi. In these illustrations, we see depictions of his travels to China as part of a diplomatic mission, where he received teachings in Chinese Esoteric Buddhism from the master Huiguo. In the illustrations, we see that the young Kobo Daishi was studious and yet made many friends, who would gather by the river and improvise poetry. When it was time for him to return to Japan, there were many heartfelt goodbyes. In his lifetime, Kobo Daishi would contribute so much to what we know as Japanese culture, but that journey began as an open-minded "exchange student." I think, even today when the world seems more connected than ever, there is so much we still have to learn from each other. I encourage all our young students to study hard, make time for friends, and to keep an open heart and mind.



I am grateful for the name “Kongo Gumi,” that Mimatsu sensei gave our new advanced taiko class. Through this trip, I feel as if I gained a much deeper appreciation of its meaning and the connection between taiko and Buddhism. I watched quite a bit of taiko in Japan, but only played once, at a temple in Kagawa (*Doryu-ji*, temple #77 of Shikoku’s Henro Pilgrimage), where a drum was left out for pilgrims. I played and sang “*Ei Ja Nai Ka*,” a Bon Odori song about the Japanese American experience. When I stopped playing, I realized other pilgrims had come, hearing the sound of the drums. We met a wisened, old traveler then, who asked us if it was a Buddhist song, and we explained that it was, but from America. Later, at a nearby store, the shopkeeper told us that in town today was a person who has traveled the Henro Pilgrimage 100 times. I wonder if that’s who we met!

I hope that we continue to meet people and share stories through taiko. I realize it’s been over a full year since I started teaching at Koyasan. I am incredibly grateful to everyone here for making me feel at home.

In gassho,

Gregory Wada

## Karate Promotions

In December 2022 Eric Hirata (far left) and Shota Sakauye (middle) were promoted to black belt and green belt respectively. Both karatekas have been training consistently for many years.

Shota started his training in Karate at a very young age. He’s stayed committed to the art and also became a long-time member of the Koyasan Taiko Group. Shota also found success in scouting and after completing many projects achieved the rank of Eagle Scout. He is now enrolled at CA State University Sacramento as a freshman.

Eric began training with us in 1993 but stopped after two years to start his career in law enforcement in Southern CA as an investigator for the California Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control. Eric later promoted to supervisory positions in San







Francisco and Sacramento allowing him the opportunity to resume his training in Karate. Eric completed his graduate studies in 2011 and in 2020 was appointed ABC Director by Governor Newsom.

Much like his professional career Eric's commitment to the art of Karate resulted in his promotion to Shodan (black belt). Eric's dedication mirrors that of his late father Kooshi who at age 70 was promoted to *Shodan* in the art of Aikido.

The path in Okinawan *Shorin Ryu Karate* requires a determined spirit to thoroughly learn the various aspects of the art and it is considered a lifelong journey. Together with Assistant *Sensei*, Calvin Matsumoto and Dave *Sakauye*, we wish Shota and Eric continued success.

## **Fujinkai "Aji Corner"**

### **Mandarin Orange Cake**

*Contributed by Sawssan Abdelhak*

#### **Ingredients**

- 1 (15.25 ounce) package yellow cake mix
- 1 (11 ounce) can mandarin orange segments
- 4 large eggs
- 1 cup vegetable oil
- 1 (20 ounce) can crushed pineapple with juice
- 1 (8 ounce) container frozen whipped topping, thawed
- 1 (3.5 ounce) package instant vanilla pudding mix



#### **Directions**

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F. Grease and flour a 9 x13-inch baking pan (or 2 round cake pans for a layered cake).

Combine cake mix, mandarin oranges with juice, eggs, and oil in a large bowl; beat with an electric mixer until smooth. Pour batter into the prepared pan.

Bake in the preheated oven until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean, about 35 to 40 minutes. Set aside to cool for at least 30 minutes.





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Beat pineapple with juice, whipped topping, and dry pudding mix together in a large bowl until blended. Spread on cooled cake.

Enjoy 😊

### About this Recipe

This mandarin orange cake is easy to make with yellow cake mix and mandarin oranges. The frosting is made with pineapple, pudding mixture, and whipped topping.

I enjoy this cake especially in the spring and summer time when gathering with family and friends.

Sawssan Abdelhak

### ANNOUNCEMENTS

- The Fujinkai plans on a variety of workshops, activities and cooking classes during the coming year. Plan to take advantage of some fun outings too. Our last outing was to the movies where we saw “Eighty for Brady”. There was plenty of laughing and popcorn eating going on!!

Plan on taking part in our next activity. You won't be disappointed.



- Reverend Mimatsu will be offering special services monthly in the coming year. All special services offered by the Temple will be available to you such as car blessings, relationship and financial blessings etc. Please contact Reverend Mimatsu at the Temple for your special blessing.
- The Koyasan Newsletter welcomes any/all suggestions for future news articles in the Newsletter. Please contact Liz Yokoyama at the phone number above for submissions to our next Newsletter.



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- Should you wish to make donations to the Temple, donations are accepted through PayPal, Venmo or U.S. mail.

### Upcoming Taiko Performances

#### March

- 3/9** Thursday 5pm - UPROOTED exhibit at the California Museum (1020 O Street) Opening Ceremony  
**3/11** Saturday 1:45pm - UPROOTED exhibit at the California Museum (1020 O Street)

#### April

- 4/16** Sunday 1pm , CSUS Japan day, CSUS Library Quad  
**4/22** Saturday 4pm, Davis Cherry Blossom Festival, Sudwerk Brewing  
**4/27** Thursday 5:15pm, International Celebration at Encina High School (1400 Bell St, Sacramento, CA 95825)  
**4/29** Saturday Parkway Half Marathon, 8am, American River Bike Trail

#### May

- 5/6** Saturday between 10am and 2 pm - Asian Pacific CultureFest at District 56. Performance time TBA  
**5/19** Friday AAPI Night Market - Downtown Sacramento, Time TBA

#### June - Koyasan Picnic

#### July

- 7/15** Saturday 7pm - Marysville Obon



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### **Upcoming Services** (In-house & Zoom at 1:30 p.m. unless posted otherwise)

**March 19, 2023** – Spring *Higan* Memorial Service

**March 26, 2023** – Special Blessing Service (11:30 p.m.) (Zoom)

**March 26, 2023** – Special Blessing Service (1:30 p.m.) (details to be distributed by email)

**April 30, 2023** – *Shomieku* Commemoration Service

**May 21, 2023** – Monthly *Daishiku* Service

**May 29, 2023** – Memorial Day Service at Odd Fellows Cemetery (9:00 a.m.)

For more information about the Northern California Koyasan Temple, please visit our website at [www.nckoyasan.org](http://www.nckoyasan.org)

### **Activity Calendar – Mark Your Calendars!**



**March 14** (Tue) 7:00 p.m. - Meditation Class (in person)

**March 25** (Sat) 1:00 p.m. - Hands on Healing Class

**March 25** (Sat) 3:00 p.m. - Meditation Class (Zoom)

**April 11** (Tue) 7:00 p.m. - Meditation Class (in person)

**April 15** (Sat) 1:00 p.m. - Fujinkai Workshop

**April 22** (Sat) 1:00 p.m. - Hands on Healing Class

**April 22** (Sat) 3:00 p.m. - Meditation Class

**May 9** (Tue) 7:00 p.m. - Meditation Class (in person)

**May 27** (Sat) 1:00 p.m. - Hands on Healing Class

**May 27** (Sat) 3:00 p.m. - Meditation Class (Zoom)



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