

MON



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*"On rainy days, we are called upon to live  
the rain-days way of life."*

Tōi Yoshio (1912–1991), educator, Jōdoshinshū priest



## INTERVIEW 06

### Miki Nakura

Reverend Nakura Miki, Shinshū Ōtani-ha priest  
Abroad in New York

Our Shinshū Ōtani-ha priest abroad in New York City is Rev. Nakura Miki. Earlier in his life he had several encounters at important turning points that brought him to take refuge in Shin Buddhism. He felt as if he were being guided by those people he met to enter this path.

Miki is from a regular household in Toyonaka City, Osaka Prefecture. In his fourth year of college, when he was supposed to be looking for job in Tokyo, his father was diagnosed with cancer and the family was informed of his life expectancy. Mother was very depressed. Father's illness created a big rift in the family. When Father passed away, Mother could not accept he was gone and strongly opposed Miki's plan to find a job in Tokyo. She insisted he look for a job locally. He had to turn down a job offer he got in Tokyo and started to work at a bank in Osaka recommended by his mother. Looking back on those days, he said he was very uncomfortable with his mother who did not respect the hopes he had for his life. The more he wondered "why" this had happened to him—why his will had been crushed, why he was forced to do what he was doing—the more he continued to suffer in regret and resentment.

At that time, Miki met an elderly woman named Mrs. Kato Tatsuko who gave him moral support. Meeting her was his first relationship to the Buddhist teaching. She was introduced to him by an older student at the university who was worried about him seeing that he was terribly depressed. Tatsuko was the landlord of his student friend's boarding house. She had a good reputation for advising young people who were troubled. Tatsuko told him, "I've lived my whole life listening to Buddhism as my first priority."—For someone like him, who was born to a regular family and who up to then had never heard of Buddhism before, his curiosity was naturally aroused as to what the Buddhist teaching was that this old auntie, whom he always consulted, cherished so much.

She handed over a book to him saying, "When you listen to someone like this, you can have absolute faith." It was a book called *The Way of the Human* by Rev. Hachiya Yoshikiyo, published in the Taishō era. Unfortunately, its author had already died by then, but his eldest son, Hachiya Norimasa, worked as a priest at Kōshōji temple in Osaka, where Miki began to attend his sermons regularly. Then, one day when Miki went to a listening

session, he had the opportunity to have a personal interview with Rev. Hachiya Norimasa. He was impressed by the way Hachiya Norimasa conducted himself, listening to his words intently as if to wrap himself around them. The thought suddenly appeared in his mind out of nowhere, "I too want to be a priest like that!"

From that time on, Miki frequently visited Tatsuko and Hachiya Norimasa of Kōshōji Temple. When Miki said, "I want to work for the salvation of the weak," Tatsuko sternly reprimanded him, saying, "First, you have to see to your own salvation. How can you save people without being saved first?"

Nor did Hachiya Norimasa easily accept Miki's ideas on entering the priesthood. He told him, "Since Shinshū is a form of lay Buddhism, you can continue your listening life even without becoming ordained." However, his desire to become a monk continued to smolder. At age 36 he made up his mind and resigned his position as bank clerk that he didn't want in the first place. After that, he visited Bodh Gaya, the enlightenment place of the Buddha in India and embarked on a journey around Japan. After that, he went to Kōshōji temple, Ōtani-ha



Namba Betsuin, Takakura Kaikan, etc. in his search for his own path.

However, at age 38, he still couldn't find what he was after and he finally got stuck mentally. He recalls that it was a very difficult day mentally, suffering from the anxiety of living a wandering life. What he was particularly worried about was his feelings for his mother. Even though he rebelled so much against her and had quit the banking job she recommended, he was still in an unstable position. His heart was damaged to such a degree that his mother thought she had destroyed his son's life.

One day, he fell into an economic predicament where he had no choice but to do any job. Then he worked on various jobs such as walk-in sales and living in an inn. At age 40, Miki decided to get away from his mother and go to Tokyo. In addition to his day jobs, he began to conduct his own listening sessions at a ward hall in Tokyo for which he also received the support of Hachiya Norimasa of Kōshōji temple.

At age 43, he finally decided to live as an ordained monk. He says that age 43 was the starting point for himself. That is the same age that Hōnen was truly awakened to the truth of the nenbutsu teaching and Rennyo inherited the eighth generation leadership of the Honganji. Since that year, he has not lost his way through life. Hachiya

Norimasa also acknowledged Miki's determination. In 2006, he received ordination at the Shinshū Ōtani-ha denomination, and after that he obtained a ministerial teaching certificate, and also obtained a certificate as an industrial counselor in order to become a minister who can advise people with problems.

Just around that time, he heard the Shinshū Ōtani-ha recruiting missionaries to go abroad to the Hawaii diocese and thought, "That's it!" He applied and was successfully hired and assigned to Hawaii for four years. During that time, Miki received a solid response from many Americans who potentially needed Buddhism and demonstrated to the Shinshū Ōtani-ha Honganji main temple his strong desire to open the way for the Shin teaching in New York.

Therefore, with the official approval of the Shinshū Ōtani-ha Honganji main temple, he was appointed as their sole overseas missionary in New York in November 2012. In New York, he was helped by meeting various people and had the opportunity to be invited to social gatherings as well as religious retreats. At that time, Miki, who had no formal western clothes, received advice from an acquaintance that his formal outfit is to wear the kasaya and Buddhist robes and when he went out dressed like that, he could hear many people commenting positively on how

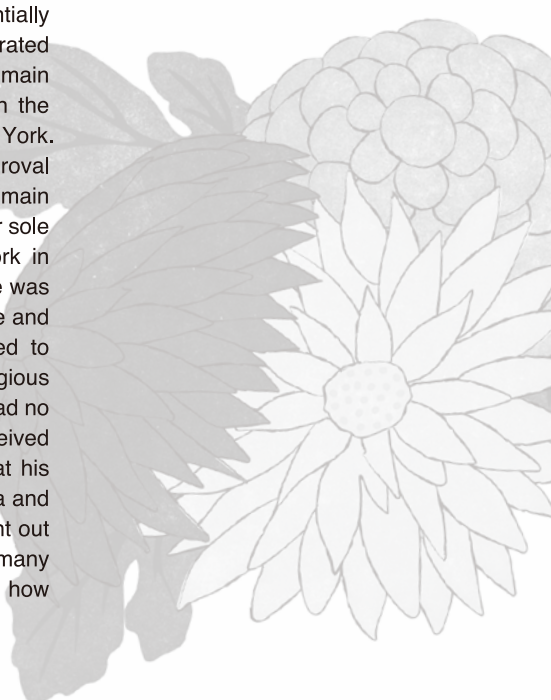
he looked.

At one gathering he had another encounter with destiny. This time it was with an elderly Japanese woman named Tsune. After that, one day when she came to hear Miki's sermons, and told him, "I want to help you to complete your job," and she gave her support for his program of missionary activities in New York free of charge. Tsune was born in Hokkaido, Japan and currently lives in New York with her American husband. Interestingly, her mother was the daughter of a Shinshū Ōtani-ha temple in Aomori. Helped by such a mysterious connection, he has been living as a guest in Tsune's home since April 2014 from which he has been continuing to conduct his missionary teaching activities.

He has met so many people living in New York that he cannot possibly discuss them all here. A film director with a friend who heard about the relationship between Miki and Tsune has a plan to release a documentary film about them.

When listening to the story of the second half of his life, we realize that it has turned out this way due to a network of inexplicable connections. It reminds us that we are being helped and our existence even saved by the various people we meet.

Miki's program of missionary activities is ongoing.





## 06 Okazaki Betsuin

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# A Pilgrimage to Historic Sites Related to Shinran's Life

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Okazaki Betsuin is on the site of the thatched hut where Shinran lived while attending Hōnen's lectures at Yoshimizu. Also, Shinran lived here for a while after returning to Kyoto from the Kantō region.

In the nearby Kurodani area is the Konkai-Kōmyōji, a temple erected on the site where Hōnen first built a thatched hut after leaving Mount Hiei. It is said that in ancient times, a stream flowing down from Kurodani filled the pond in the garden of the hut at Okazaki. Hōnen's senior disciples, including Shinkū, lived at Kurodani, so the hut downstream from there was a suitable place for Shinran, who drew from the Pure Land teachings.

Shinran went the approximately four kilometers from here to Yoshimizu every day to listen to Hōnen's lectures, and before long he became one of his disciples.


It was at this time that he engaged in a dispute with the senior disciples. There is a story in the epilogue to the Tannishō (On the Differences in Faith) that when Shinran said to the other disciples, "My faith is the same as

Hōnen's," he was reproached by them. When they asked Hōnen to decide the matter, he said, "My faith was granted by Amida Buddha, and Shinran's faith also was granted by Amida Buddha," showing that Shinran was correct. This anecdote, called the "argument over the same or different faith," is important for understanding the Pure Land faith.

Afterwards, Okazaki Betsuin continued a long history as a place of teaching and learning, being the site of the Gogakkan school, the Kagamiike-kai (a students' study group), the Shinshū Ōtani-ha Senshū Gakuin seminary (formerly the Okazaki Gakusha), and others. The Kagamiike (Mirror Pond) remains even today in the Betsuin garden. Tradition has it that when Shinran was exiled to Echigo Province (present-day Niigata Prefecture), he expressed his sorrow at leaving as his form was reflected in this pond.

### Okazaki Betsuin

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