

# Agon Shu One Peace Live

(Advertisement)

## Agon Shu, Maya tradition unite with spiritual festival

Different religious cultures come together to pray for world peace

It is hard to think of two religious traditions as different as Agon Shu Buddhism and the ancient spirituality of Central America's Maya people. But despite being separated by distance, history and language, they share a deep awareness of and reverence for the eternal sacred truths that all faiths hold in common. And Agon Shu believers and followers of the Maya spiritual tradition are also united in their fervent desire for world peace.

To express their common hope for peace in this troubled world and to lead the people of the Earth in a prayer for an end to war and strife, Rev. Seiyu Kiriyaama, the founder and president of Agon Shu, and Maya Grand Elder Alejandro Cirilo Perez Oxlaj presided over a unique and historic ceremony in Kyoto on Nov. 7 that blended elements of both religious traditions.

The ceremony, called the One Peace Live Aura Festival, was attended by thousands of Agon Shu members, a Maya delegation from Guatemala and guests from Japan and overseas in an amphitheater in the wooded hills east of Kyoto, where Agon Shu has its main temple. Joining them in their prayer for global peace were people all over the world, who were able to watch the ceremony live via a streaming Internet broadcast.

The word "aura" in the name of the event refers to the spiritual light emanating from those who walk and reach the Buddhist path of liberation. The Nov. 7 ceremony was the second Aura Festival for world peace held by Agon Shu. The first took place in 1984 and saw His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama join Rev. Kiriyaama in a historic ceremony at Tokyo's Budokan hall.

### Visions

Both Rev. Kiriyaama and Don Alejandro received visions in the past that a time would come when humanity would reach a critical crossroads, with one path leading to destruction and another

Today, Agon Shu is a community of Buddhist followers with 73 institutes in Japan, 35 ordained priests, and nearly 400,000 followers in Japan and thousands more overseas. In Buddhist terms, Agon Shu's believers and their spiritual leaders comprise a community called a "sangha," which is one of the three main elements found in all forms of Buddhism. The other two are the Buddha and the dharma. In the Agon Shu Buddhist faith, the Lord Buddha is the ultimate object of worship. The dharma comprises the teachings and discipline or training methods of the Buddha. In its teachings and rituals, Agon Shu draws on the best elements from Mahayana, Theravada and Tibetan Buddhism, as well as incorporating elements from other spiritual traditions such as Japan's indigenous Shinto religion and Taoism from China, while centering on the training methods taught in the Agama Sutras. In contrast to Agon Shu's annual "Hoshi Matsuri" Fire Festival events, which feature two "gomadan" pyres, the One Peace ceremony included just one, much smaller "gomadan" on one side of the amphitheater's central enclosure, and a Maya circle several meters in diameter in which four small pyres of sticks and other material had been prepared. Behind the "gomadan" were colorful images of Buddhas and a special canopied seat for Rev. Kiriyaama, while a large photo of a Maya pyramid formed the backdrop for the Maya circle.

### Colorful performance

The ceremony began under a bright autumn sky with a lively and colorful performance by a troupe of dancers and musicians from Sri Lanka. As three male drummers pounded out a relentlessly hypnotic beat, a female vocalist sang a hauntingly beautiful melody while holding a tray of ritual offerings. Four female dancers performed a slow and elegant dance, and then four flashily attired male dancers entered the central stage area and amazed the crowd with a

we can strengthen our connections and that we shall be able to contribute our modest efforts to strive for world peace. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts."

The international theme continued as a group of musicians and dancers from the Himalayan nation of Bhutan took the stage. In contrast to the lively Sri Lankan performance, the Bhutanese danced in a stately and restrained style, as the gentle strains of a flute, a hammer dulcimer and a traditional seven-stringed "dramyin" lute. Gembu Dorji, of the Central Monastic Body of Bhutan, also sent a message wishing the festival success:

"I would like to felicitate all patrons, members and participants attending the Aura Festival of Agon-Maya Fire Ceremony scheduled on 7th Nov. 2010. I would also like to pay my respects to Rev. Seiyu Kiriyaama and Hon. Grand Elder Don Alejandro Cirilo Perez Oxlaj for presiding over this grand ceremony, destined to bring world peace and foster good relationships between religious organizations."

### Dragon dancers

The pace of the ceremony picked up again with a rousing performance by a troupe of "Ja-odori" dragon dancers from Nagasaki. Amid the vapors of dry ice and the sound of clashing cymbals and gongs, the dancers paraded their dragon around the stage. Adding to the excitement was the sharp, sudden sound of exploding firecrackers.

After a video that profiled Rev. Kiriyaama and highlighted his search for the ultimate truth and the history of Agon Shu, three members of the Maya delegation blew long, low notes on ritual conch shells. They were answered by Agon Shu members blowing on their own conch shells, in a unique exchange of sounds from different religious traditions, which symbolized their common sense of spirituality. Next was a brief musical interlude featuring the ethereal New Age sounds by a group led by Hiroki Okano, a Japanese composer, instrumentalist and producer.

All of this was a prelude to the entrance of several Agon Shu devotees carrying Rev. Kiriyaama on a wooden palanquin on the stage. They were followed by the brightly costumed Maya delegation, led by Don Alejandro, who wore a spectacular headdress made of peacock feathers.

He carried the Maya Staff of Authority, which is said to have the power of unifying people's souls and energy. In the Maya calendar, Nov. 7 was 9 Kan, which has the energy of Kukulkan the Feathered Serpent, making it a particularly good day to fulfill the ceremony's purpose.

### Humanity's future

Rev. Kiriyaama then delivered a speech in which he explained his vision of humanity's future and the choices we face:

"Some ethnic groups in the world say that the human race is on the verge of extinction. Some say that mankind will be wiped out by water and fire.

"But I don't think so. The human race will not be extinguished. I believe humans will continue to exist. There is only one ethnic group with the same idea. They are the Maya people. That's why I support the Maya people.

"We are here to pray and celebrate our survival."

Don Alejandro then gave a speech in which he thanked Rev. Kiriyaama and Agon Shu for making the day's events possible. He also stressed the need for people of all faiths to join hands together in a prayer for peace as the world finds itself on the cusp of a new era in history. His speech was accompanied by a gentle melody played on a large marimba and drums.

"To the spirits of heaven, earth, this ground filled with wisdom and water. We are here to carry out our crucial mission. We are always following the way our ancestors have walked.

"There are two paths in front of us. One leads to destruction and ruin. The other way is the path followed by our ancestors. On the path, we respect our nature and pursue coexistence with it. The Earth is our mother and we are her children. Why don't we take the way to live together with nature without polluting the precious Earth?"

"We, the Maya people, have come here today to become united with you all through the ritual of fire to be performed now. I believe in the eternal prosperity of Buddhism, to which you belong, and the Maya people."

Don Alejandro then walked over to where Rev. Kiriyaama was sitting and embraced and shook hands with him. The Maya spiritual leader then returned to his circle and paced around it in a unique half-walking, half-hopping dance.

The eerie, hauntingly beautiful sound of "gagaku" ancient Japanese court music suddenly filled the air and two



In unison: Flames leap skyward from Agon Shu's "gomadan" pyre while Agon Shu members chant sutras to the beat of "taiko" drums at the One Peace Live Aura Festival, jointly held by Agon Shu and a Maya delegation from Guatemala, in Kyoto in November.

beautifully dressed Agon Shu dancers performed a solemn "bugaku" dance to the sound of ancient Japanese "gagaku" court music. As the dancers entranced the audience, Rev. Kiriyaama moved to his special Lion's Seat chair under a cloth canopy.

### Prayers for peace

This was followed by the lighting of Agon Shu's "gomadan" pyre. Agon Shu members threw into the leaping flames "gomagi" votive wooden tablets, onto which believers had inscribed their names and prayers for peace. Other Agon Shu members then began chanting sutras vigorously to the beat of "taiko" drums.

As Agon Shu's fire rites reached a crescendo of activity, with flames leaping skyward from the "gomadan," the Maya celebrants stood at the edge of the circle around their four pyres, waiting for the most auspicious moment to set them alight. Brandishing a long torch, Don Alejandro lit candles in the center of each pyre, which represented the four basic elements of the world. The Maya then knelt in front of the four pyres as they gradually merged into a single blaze. As some celebrants carefully tended the flames, others threw flower petals of many colors into the audience from baskets they carried around their waists.

"It's very spectacular," said American lawyer Matt Digby. "I'm very impressed by their (the Maya's) rituals. And the music is wonderful. It's a unique and interesting combination of faiths and rituals."

The Agon Shu and Maya pyres burning in tandem was an apt symbol of the coming together of the two spiritual traditions' auras. To cement the ties between the two faiths, Rev. Kiriyaama and Don Alejandro signed the Joint Declaration for World Peace by the Living Maya and Agon Shu:

"Friends, once again humanity has reached a fork in the road, a time of critical choice. Which way do we choose? The blocked and crumbling road of material civilization? Or, the road of spirituality and wisdom, leading to a bright and shining future?"

"Humankind, right now, for each and every one of you, the most essential thing is to awaken your innate spirituality, and thus enable the wisdom of divine beings and the insight of the Buddha to realize



Reverence: Rev. Seiyu Kiriyaama, the founder and president of Agon Shu, watches the ceremony from his special Lion's Seat chair under a cloth canopy.

Peace on Earth.

"Friends, now is the time to rouse your spirit! Then, with greater insight, we can open the path to a bright and promising 21st century."

### Work of the spirit

Asked how Agon Shu and representatives of the Maya spiritual tradition came into contact, Don Alejandro's wife, Elizabeth Araujo, said simply, "It's the work of the spirit."

Araujo added: "You see the big audience here — it's a full house. And they have all come here looking for strength

and spirituality, and that's proof that there is a big call for people to work together for world peace. The essence (of Agon Shu and the Maya tradition) is the same."

The ceremony ended on a happy, celebratory note as the performers from Sri Lanka and Bhutan, as well as others attending the festival, joined the Maya in a circle dance around the pyre. It was a wonderful and literally heartwarming illustration of how people of different faiths and backgrounds are coming together at the dawn of a new era in the planet's history.



Alight: Maya Grand Elder Alejandro Cirilo Perez Oxlaj, with the Maya Staff of Authority, lights four Maya pyres representing the four basic elements of the world.

leading to the fulfillment of humanity's greater destiny. The Maya spiritual tradition prophesizes that the current world era, which has lasted some 5,000 years, will end soon, to be replaced by a new era. The prophecy says it's up to us as members of the human race to ensure this new era is one of peace and harmony. Rev. Kiriyaama and Don Alejandro share the goal of helping humanity choose wisely and mindfully in the critical stage of world history we are now entering. Their hope was that by holding the One Peace festival together the two auras of Buddhism and the Maya spiritual tradition would combine to create a single miracle: a new era of peace on Earth.

For those who aren't familiar with the group, Agon Shu is a Buddhist organization that provides spiritual aid and comfort to the souls of the departed and to help the living progress on the path to self-realization in accordance with Buddhist precepts and beliefs. The organization is based on the Agama Sutras, which are the most ancient and the only Buddhist teachings directly by the Buddha, and it is from them Agon Shu derives its name.

Agon Shu was founded in 1978 by Rev. Kiriyaama, who had spent several years looking for the ultimate truth with no success. He finally realized that he needed to get back to the source of Buddhism and it dawned on him that the Agama Sutras, which tells of practices to achieve enlightenment as the Buddha had done, were what he was looking for.

spectacular display of acrobatics, including a series of standing back-flips that caused jaws to drop in the audience.

A message from Sri Lankan Prime Minister D.M. Jayaratne was then displayed on the big video screen behind the "gomadan" pyre and the Maya circle:

"I consider it a great privilege to issue a felicitation message on the invaluable offering performed by Chief Monk of Japan's Agon Shu Nikaya Rev. Seiyu Kiriyaama together with Tribe Leader of Guatemala for the promotion of world peace.

"On behalf of the government of Sri Lanka, I wish Rev. Seiyu Kiriyaama excellent health and hope he will be able to spread the sacred Dhamma of Lord Buddha and be able to build a harmonious society throughout the world."

Among the various messages of support for the cause of world peace sent to the festival was one from Yigal Amedi, head of the Israeli Center of Local Government Studies, Ramat Gan College, Jerusalem, and former acting mayor of Jerusalem:

"Seek peace and pursue it," says the Jewish commandment from the Bible. Seek, meaning want it with all your heart. Pursue, means you need to work hard in order to achieve it and endow it to others. I wish to convey my deepest congratulations to Agon Shu for this special occasion — One Peace Live.

"My heart and the heart of my Israeli friends are filled with joy and pride being part of the Agon Shu family. I pray that



Joining hands: Rev. Kiriyaama and Don Alejandro sign the Joint Declaration for World Peace by the Living Maya and Agon Shu, cementing the ties between the two faiths.