



Symphony of Peace Prayers 2013

HIGHLIGHTS FROM FUJI SANCTUARY

ON MAY 19, 2013, over 6,000 participants and guests gathered in the outdoor Prayer Field at Fuji Sanctuary to join in the ninth annual Symphony of Peace Prayers, a celebration of both humanity's cultural and religious diversity, and its oneness. From across Japan and around the world, people came to pray for the peace and happiness of humanity, to celebrate harmony among nations and religions, and to urge a transformation in human consciousness. In addition, for the first time, the SOPP ceremony was broadcast to the world on the internet (details on p. 4).

Opening remarks by Masami Saionji



In her welcoming address, Byakko Chairperson Masami Saionji noted the remarkable achievement that was made in February 2013 of bringing the SOPP to the United Nations, at the special event *United for a Culture of Peace through Interfaith Harmony*. She attributed the success to the powerful energy that has been generated by SOPP events over the years, and she thanked all the organizers, guests, participants, and supporters around the world for their hard work in making this a reality. She remarked: "When we commune...to offer interfaith prayers

of various faith traditions with united hearts, the negative thought forms and karma that encircle the world – negative energies such as anger, jealousy, struggle, conflict, discrimination, doubt, confusion and resentment – are embraced by the energies of love and mercy, and vanish in the energy field of light." She also looked forward to the SOPP that is being planned at Fuji Sanctuary in 2015, when people of elevated consciousness from a wide range of fields will gather to establish a new charter for the rebirth of divine consciousness.

Divinity IN with Calm Breathing

A large group of presenters gathered on stage to offer a silent prayer for all humanity. This *IN*, or *mudra*, is a prayer without words, attuned through the breath to the universal source, calling forth the inner divinity of each and every human being. The sounds of deep, spiritualized breathing called forth a sense of peace and connectedness, laying a vibrational foundation for the ceremony.

Praying with the Religions of the World

Prayer leaders from seven different faiths led participants in prayers for peace from their respective traditions, followed by a prayer from Byakko Shinko Kai. Participants followed along with the prayers in their program booklets, joining in at appropriate points. This simple act of religious and spiritual leaders praying the prayers of other faiths, joined in unison by all participants, sends a powerful message of tolerance and harmony.



*Mr. Ichiyu Shaku
(Nichiren Buddhism)*



*Mr. Humayun A. Mughal
(Islam—Sufism)*



*Dato J. Jegathesan
(Hinduism)*



*Rev. Fumihiko Katayama
(Shintoism)*



*Ms. Neshama Carlebach and
Mr. Josh Nelson (Judaism)*



*Ambassador Mussie Hailu
(Christianity)*



*S.S. Sada Anand Singh Khalsa
(Sikhism)*



Mr. Moshe Garelik



Ven. Chung Ohun Lee

Messages of Oneness

After the interfaith prayers, two distinguished guests offered their own messages to participants. Mr. Moshe Garelick, an activist for international relations in the European Union, spoke about how all living beings are both unique and, at the same time, one. Our connection, he said, is eternal, through past, present and future. He asked participants to 'listen' to one another during two minutes of silence. Ven. Chung Ohun Lee, Chairperson of Won Buddhism America, spoke about the need for us human beings to overcome our greed, anger, and hatred, and to strengthen our love and wisdom. She then led participants in a prayer for all humanity and all life on Earth.

Youth Participants

A group of six young people from different countries participate in this year's SOPP ceremony. Each of them is working in their own way to create a better future for humanity, and as they greeted participants from the stage, their youthful, forward-thinking energy provided a source of inspiration and motivation.



Youth participants at the SOPP

Prayers for Peace in Each Country

To begin the prayer ceremony for peace in each country, flag bearers carrying the flags of 193 nations and an Earth Flag representing 'all other regions of the world' entered the Prayer Field, accompanied by original music composed by Mr. Kenichi Yamamoto. Participants prayed, *May peace be in (name of country)* in each country's official language(s) as the country's flag was presented on stage. Their prayers resonated throughout the world, sending waves of peace and love to the people in each country and region, in the hope that all humanity can live in harmony even one day sooner.



Closing



To close the ceremony, Byakko Deputy Chairperson Yuka Saionji offered her deep gratitude to the prayer leaders, guests, participants, and to all the staff and volunteers who made the event possible. "Without each one of you," she remarked, "the SOPP would not have been possible. The pure heart and mind that accepted the idea of praying together with each religion and faith tradition have created a shift, even at the United Nations. The heart and mind that had no doubts and no fear, and accepted that all prayers are beautiful, have made the SOPP possible. Because every one of you has believed in and brought life to these prayers, the SOPP became the SOPP. When we let go of the idea that only my religion, my belief, or my way is pure, right, and true, then something bigger, something deeper, goes through our bodies, and the experience of oneness manifests."

The flags of the world filled the Prayer Field again, and were hoisted high in the air to close the ninth annual Symphony of Peace Prayers. Once again, the hearts of all those gathered at Fuji Sanctuary had joined as one to send out vibrations of peace, love, and harmony.

Post-Ceremony Discussion

The following day, May 20, the prayer leaders, youth participants, several of the guests, and some staff members of Byakko Shinko Kai gathered at Fuji Sanctuary for a post-ceremony discussion. Dr. Bob Stilger, Co-president of New Stories in the United States, returned to facilitate the discussion again this year. They met in one large group and then split up into smaller groups for more intimate discussions. The theme they explored was, *How is it that we come into deeper connection with each other, rather than separating from each other?* At the end, Ms. Neshama Carlebach and Mr. Josh Nelson led the participants in a closing song.



GIFT Symposium

On May 23, the six youth participants, joined by four guest performers and speakers from Japan, gave presentations before an audience in central Tokyo. They talked about the work they are doing and shared personal experiences that transformed their lives. Their inspiring words encouraged audience members to discover and make use of the ‘gift’ that they each hold within themselves.

SOPP Around the World

This year, the SOPP was celebrated in more places than ever before! SOPP ceremonies and prayer gatherings took place in over 60 locations on or near May 19, with thousands of people taking part and connecting with the energy sent out from Fuji Sanctuary to envelop the planet in waves of peace and harmony. Infinite gratitude to everyone for their time, energy, and support!

Internet Broadcast

This year, for the first time, the SOPP ceremony at Fuji Sanctuary was broadcast throughout the world over the internet. Hundreds of people across the globe tuned in to the live stream, and many more have watched the recorded videos, which will remain available until at least the end of August 2013. The video of the ceremony is in three parts, and can be accessed with the following URLs:

Part 1 (Japanese original): <http://www.ustream.tv/recorded/33018809>

Part 1 (English translation): <http://www.ustream.tv/recorded/33256215>

Part 2: <http://www.ustream.tv/recorded/33132883>

Part 3: <http://www.ustream.tv/recorded/33128025>

MAY PEACE PREVAIL ON EARTH

(More information on the events at Fuji Sanctuary and around the world will be published in the upcoming SOPP issue of *Byakko Magazine*.)