

III. BUDDHIST RITUALS AND ETIQUETTE

A. To be able to give thanks and show gratitude.

Do the following:

- _____ 1. Properly perform gassho (palms together) and oshoko (offering of incense) and explain their meaning. (Pages III-1, III-2)
- _____ 2. Show teacher how you Oshoko (Pages III-3, III-4)
- _____ 3. Oshoko every Sunday at the Temple.
- _____ 4. Carry a nenju and learn how it is used. (CS-2b). (Pages III-5, III-6, III-7, III-8)
Draw a picture of a nenju. (CS-1c). Know its significance. (B-1c)
- _____ 5. Learn the meaning of the Nembutsu and recite NAMO AMIDA BUTSU clearly, in a strong voice. (Pages III-9, III-10, III-11)
- _____ 6. Chant "Gassho to Amida" (Page III-12)

B. Practice proper Temple etiquette (Pages III-13, III-14, III-15, III-16, III-17, III-18)

Do the following:

- _____ 1. Bow when you enter and leave the temple.
- _____ 2. Bow when passing in front of the altar.
- _____ 3. Draw or make a nenju.
- _____ 4. Learn the pattern of the kansho (ringing of the bell).

B. To identify the six special services and other significant Buddhist services.

(Pages III-19, III-20, III-21)

Do the following:

- _____ Attend at least 4 of the special services
- _____ Hoonko (Shinran's Memorial Service) (Pages III-22, III-23, III-24, III-25)
 - _____ Hanamatsuri (Buddha Day) (Pages III-26, III-27, III-28, III-29)
 - _____ Gotan - E (Shinran's Birthday) (Pages III-30, III-31, III-32)
 - _____ O-Higan (Spring and Autumn Equinox) (Pages III-33, III-34, III-35, III-36)
 - _____ Eitaikyo (Perpetual Memorial Service) (Pages III-37, III-38)
 - _____ Bodhi Day/Jodo E (Buddha's Enlightenment) (Pages III-39)

_____ Complete the Special Services worksheet

Do one of the following:

- _____ 1. Participate in a major service and explain the significance of the service to your classmates in a brief talk (2 - 3 minutes). Special Service _____
- _____ 2. Tell about a special service in a short written piece (1/2 page) to be submitted into the temple newsletter.
- _____ 3. Observe or participate in a temple's Bon dance. Explain why we have Bon dance. Place: _____ Date: _____ (Pages III-40, III-41, III-42)
- _____ 4. Read about Buddhist observances; discuss them with the minister; write an about your favorite observance. (CS-3abc).

REFLECTION: Explain how your Buddhist practices (rituals and etiquette) affect you and the Sangha at your temple.

Gassho

Purpose:

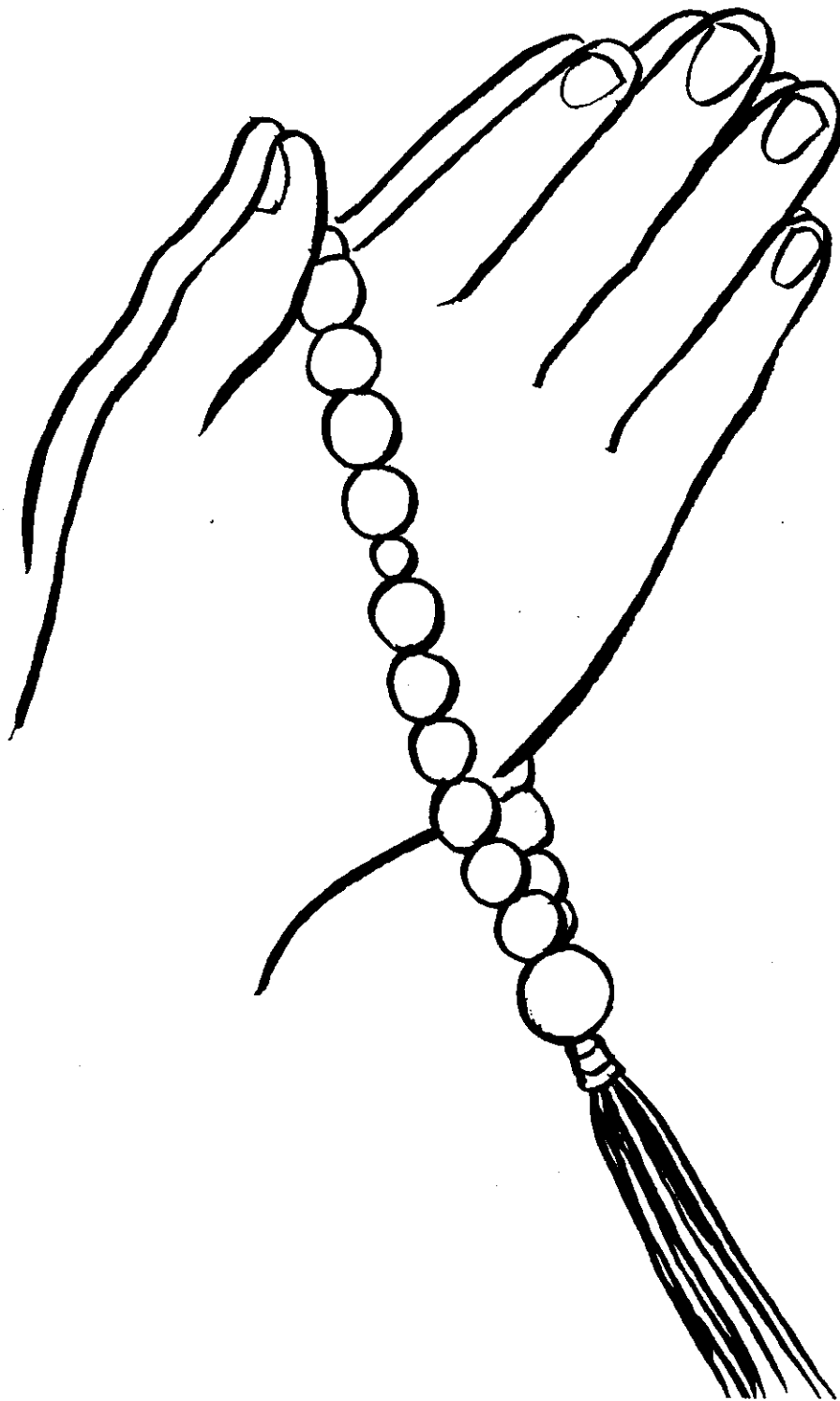
Teach the meaning of Gassho.
To teach why it is important to us.
Teach how to gassho.

Materials:

1. Nenju
2. Incense burner and incense
3. Magazines
4. Paper, paste and scissors

Procedures:

1. Open class with gassho. Recite the pledge and Nembutsu.
Good morning, Amida
I will try to follow your teaching,
At home, in school, and at play.
Namu Amida Butsu
2. Motivation: Ask various questions.
 - a. What is gassho?
 - b. What are some things that we should be thankful for?
 - c. Why and how do we gassho?
 - d. What do we say and who do we gassho to?
3. **Presentation:**
 - a. Tell and illustrate the meaning of gassho.
 - (1) Show by putting your hands together in gassho
 - (2) Pass out picture to each child and discuss.
 - b. Tell a story about the **nenju**
 - c. Color the picture that was handed out.
 - d. Hand out magazine to each child.
 - e. Tell them to cut out anything that shows gratitude (anything we are thankful for).
 - f. Have them paste their cut-outs on paper.
 - g. Let each child have a turn to illustrate and tell about his/her work.
 - h. Teach how to gassho.
 - (1) Show the proper way to gassho in front of the shrine.
 - (2) Let each child have an opportunity to go in front of the shrine to gassho.
 - i. Close class with gassho.



When we Gassho, we hold our hands this way.
Gassho means to fold our hands and think of
Amida Buddha.

It means to say thank you to Amida Buddha.
Amida Buddha loves everyone and everything.
You should Gassho everyday.

Gassho

Purpose:

To learn the significance of gassho. To teach children to understand that gassho may be done freely on their own at any time.

However, children need to be taught that in the temple, according to custom, there are set times when people ordinarily put their hands together in gassho. Children should know this temple etiquette so they feel confident and at ease during the service.

Gassho and Oshoko

Purpose

To teach the students proper method of Gassho and Oshoko.

Material:

Picture of "hands in gassho."

Procedures:

Explain the following:

1. Gassho

Gassho means to put the hands together. The palms of both hands are placed together with the fingers and thumbs extended and with the *nenju* encircling both hands and held lightly between the thumb and the fingers. Both elbows should be fairly close to the body and the hands should be mid-chest level. To bow during gassho, the hands should be held steady, while the body is bent forward from the hips and then back to upright position.

Gassho is the natural expression of reverence and gratitude.

Children should be encouraged to bring *ojuzu* to Dharma School.

(illustration of hands in gassho)

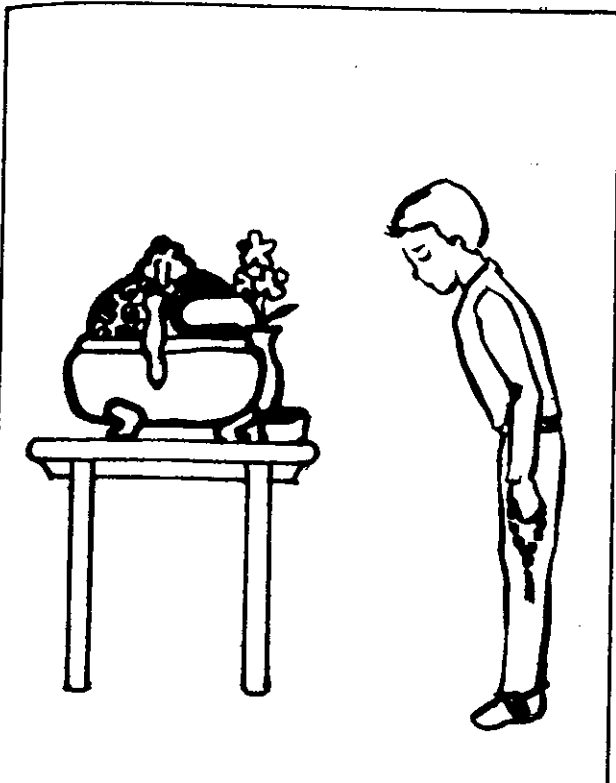
2. Oshoko (Burning of Incense)

Oshoko is the acceptance of transiency and fulfillment in life.

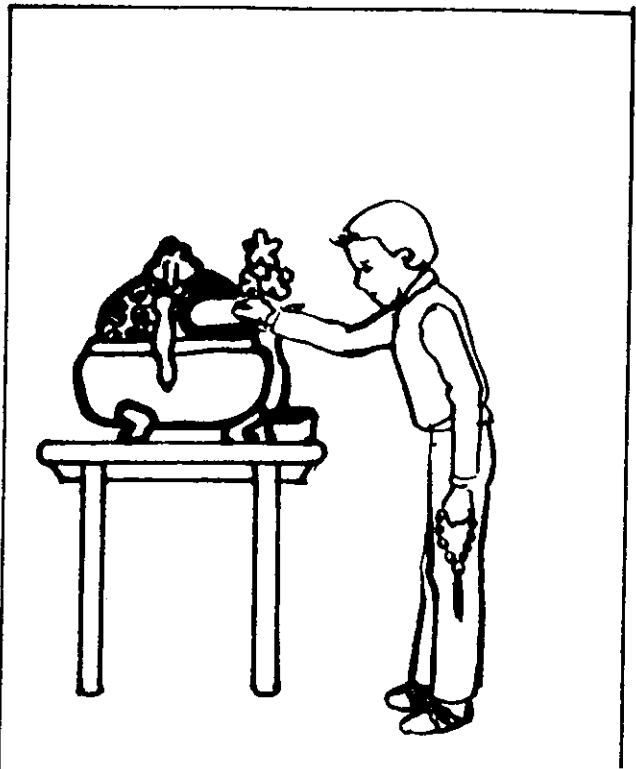
In the offering of incense:

- a. Walk up to the front of the shrine and bow at a distance of about two steps in front of the oshoko table.
- b. Step up to the table and with the right hand take a pinch of powdered incense and drop it into the burning incense bowl.
- c. Gassho.
- d. Take two or three steps backward, bow and return to your seat.
- e. Practice it.
- f. Draw hands in Gassho.

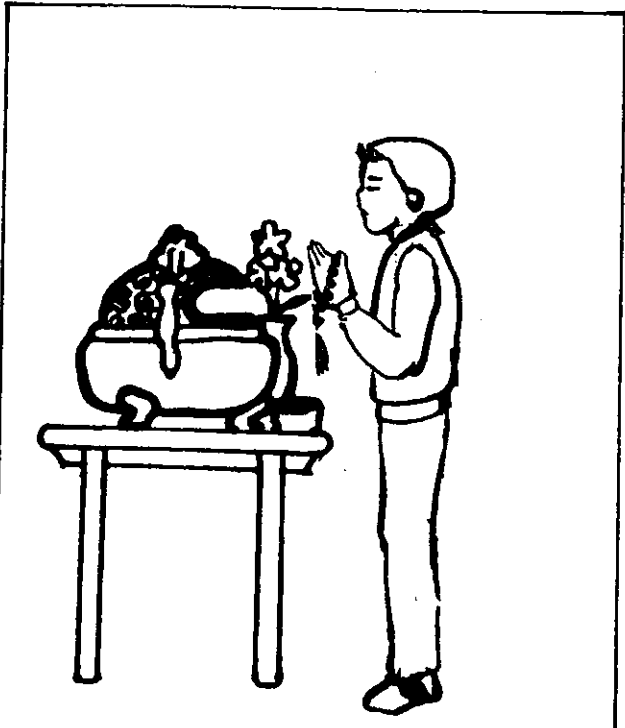
Let's Gassho



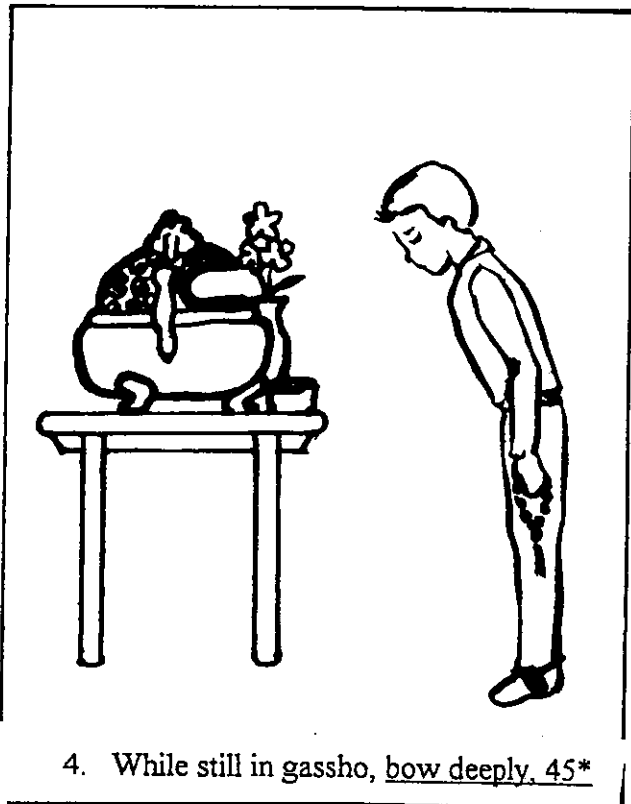
1. Walk up to the incense table, stop 2-3 steps before the table, look at Amida Buddha, and bow with your face down.



2. Step to the incense bowl, take a pinch of incense, and scatter it over the burning senko without raising it to your forehead



Gassho (put your hands together), look at Amida Buddha, and say, "Namo Amida Butsu."



4. While still in gassho, bow deeply, 45*

5. Step back 2-3 steps, look at Amida Buddha, and bow again.

Symbols - Nenju

Purpose:

To instill in students the history, symbolic significance and care and use of the Nenju.

Materials:

Ojuzu
Picture of Nenju
Flannel Board
Story - Nenju

Procedures:

1. Give a simple explanation of the following:

Nenju (Buddhist Meditation Beads)

- a. **History:** It is said that the original Buddhist meditation beads contained 108 beads reminding us of the 108 basic passions that we have. When the beads are used during meditation, it reminds us that in front of the Buddha we are but a bundle of passions and through Buddha's Light and Love we become One with the Buddha. The number of beads have been reduced so that the full 108 beads are not used at the present time by lay people. The single strand contains 54 beads.
 - b. **Symbolic Significance:**
 1. The large bead represents the Buddha.
 2. The two smaller right and left central beads represent the Dharma and the Sangha.
 3. The Tassel represents the spreading of the dharma.
 4. The strand running through all the beads signifies Oneness of all things.
 - c. **Care of the Nenju :** The nenju should be treated with the utmost respect at all times.
 1. At home it should be kept in a special place, such as in a drawer near the family shrine.
 2. At other times, The Buddhist should carry the nenju in a purse or in a coat pocket so that it will always be available. An nenju bag would be the ideal thing to have.
 3. During the service, the nenju should be held in the left hand.
2. Color the drawing of the Nenju
 3. Make a Nenju out of glass beads, wooden beads, macaroni, seeds and aluminum embossing.
 4. Make Nenju bag.

BAKER'S DOUGH NENJU

Have each child contribute one bead to a class Nenju. The Nenju can be used at the Classroom Obutsudan.

Baker's Dough Recipe

Mix 1 cup flour to 1 cup salt. Add just a little water until the dough feels like modeling clay. You can color small amounts of dough with food coloring – or after baking, paint it with poster paint.

Have each child roll a small piece of clay into a round ball. Poke a large hole through the center. If necessary insert a toothpick or small wooden dowel (tinker toy) to keep the hole open during baking.

The teacher needs to make two smaller beads and one larger bead that has three holes.

Bake at 200 degrees in the oven until hard.

String the beads together with yarn.

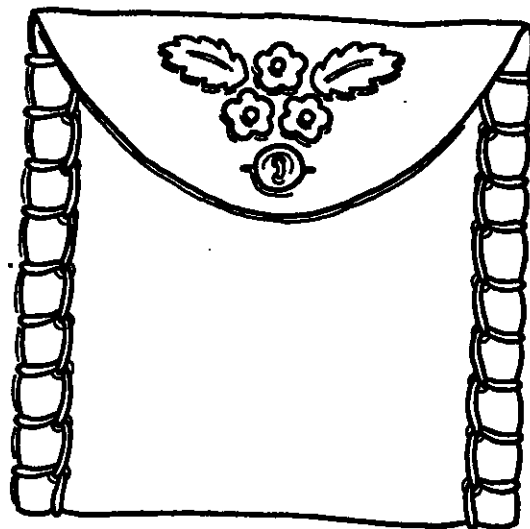
NENJU BAG

Materials needed:

- Purple felt fabric
- Assorted colored felt scraps for decoration
- Large yarn needles
- Large hole puncher to punch holes in the felt
- Colored yarn
- Buttons
- Note paper and pencils to write an enclosure note.

Students' Activity:

- Make the Nenju bag by:
1. Stitch yarn around the holes.
 2. Glue on the felt decorations.
 3. Cut a slit in the top flap.
 4. Sew on buttons.



Write a note of appreciation to someone special and enclose it with this gift.

THE ONENJU

Yoshio had lost his parents at an early age and was raised by his kind grandfather. One day, with the ambition of becoming a great merchant, he begged his grandfather to let him leave the village for the big city. The grandfather was pained by the thought of being separated from his loved one, but thinking of Yoshio's future, he gave his permission.

Finally, the day arrived. Yoshio arose from his bed early, cleaned the obutsudan, lit the candle, offered incense, put his hands together and quietly repeated the Nembutsu. And, to his parent's Buddhist names, he spoke his parting words, "Already, six years have passed since you departed. I am now twelve years old. Grandfather has taken good care of me, but I have decided to go to the city to become a great man. Please watch over me."

Grandfather busily prepared the lunch. Then he said to Yoshio, "Dear Yoshio, keep your body and mind healthy. And, now, I have something to give to you. Your mother wished you to have it when she died." From a compartment in the obutsudan, he took out a small bag.

"This is your mother's onenju. Always keep it with you...and whenever you are sad, or happy, or suffering, whenever you think of your parents, or when you are in doubt, remember Amida's compassion."

Yoshio received the onenju and promised that he would always keep it close to his heart.

"Farewell Grandfather. I will soon become a great man and come after you. Please take care of yourself." Thus he left his home in the village.

He walked on and on until he reached the foot of a mountain. It was getting dark. He tried to get across the mountain but soon, the sun went down and he could not make his way further. He was troubled, but since there was nothing else he could do, he decided to sleep that night under a tree. The stars began to shine in the sky. All sorts of noise began to bother Yoshio. Roars and cries of animals filled the mountain, and seemed to be coming close. Yoshio held his breath and strained his eyes in the dark. What he saw sent chills up and down his spine.

Wolves! Not one, but many! They came closer. Finally, one attacked Yoshio. Yoshio grabbed a stick beside him and hit the wolf with all his strength. But poor Yoshio was out-numbered. He thought to himself, that the end had come. Suddenly, he remembered grandfather's words. He took out his mother's onenju, took it in his hands and trembled in fear. He closed his eyes and wished with all his heart that something would happen. He rubbed his onenju. Then a strange thing happened. One by one, the wolves began to disappear into the darkness.

It became so quiet that Yoshio slowly opened his eyes. What met his eyes were not the fierce wolves, but the beads of the onenju reflecting the moonlight and twinkling in the most fascinating way. The shining onenju had scared the wolves away. He was relieved and at the same time wondered at the strange happening. "Mother and Father surely must have been watching over me," he thought.

Next morning, he descended the mountain, arrived in the city and went straight to a jeweler. Through the jeweler, Yoshio found out that the onenju was made of priceless diamonds. The jeweler was amazed by the size and the brightness of the diamonds and offered to buy them for one hundred thousand dollars. But to Yoshio the onenju was a precious gift from his parents and no amount of money could replace it.

Ten years passed. The time came for Yoshio to start his business. In time, Yoshio fulfilled his wish and became a great merchant. He sent for his grandfather so they could live together. Throughout the rest of his life, he did not forget to thank the Buddha with his valuable onenju in hand.

1. List some of the things Yoshio did that showed he was a Buddhist.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

2. What did Grandfather ask him to do with the onenju? What does that symbolize?

Utterance of the Name (Nembutsu)— Expression of Gratitude

If someone we truly trust is the source of our gratitude, our hearts will spontaneously utter that person's name. For example, if a friend sacrifices his time to help us in a crisis, it is only natural that we identify that person and all that he did through speaking his name. With that experience, whenever we think of that name a number of very important thoughts will flood our minds and hearts.

First, we will feel that the sacrifice took a lot of time and effort.

Second, without that person we would not have been able to get through the crisis. In fact, it is because of that person that we were able to get through the crisis.

Third, we will feel humble with the realization that we have such a friend.

Fourth, we will feel the inconceivable nature of the relationship. That is, from within the vast human race we were able to meet with such a person.

The above are but a few of the thoughts that we will have. However, because of these, the friend's name becomes a natural utterance of gratitude for us.

In Jodo Shinshu, the realization of the above feelings in relation to Amida Buddha's Compassion is called Shinjin. The natural utterance of the Name in gratitude is called Nembutsu. Shinran Shonin says: "The True Shinjin is necessarily accomplished by the utterance of the Name."

In Jodo Shinshu, the utterance of the Name spontaneously follows the awakening to Shinjin. Generally, the utterance is termed our expression of gratitude for being endowed with Shinjin and being assured of Birth in the Pure Land of Enlightenment.

Even with the endowed attainment of Shinjin and the Utterance of the Name, we often times think that the utterance is our own practice. We feel the need to do something. Yet, it must be remembered that with our awakening to Shinjin we are assured of Birth; therefore, we need no other practice. Shinjin is the true cause for Birth and Enlightenment; therefore, our utterance is termed an expression of gratitude, that is, Nembutsu of gratitude.

Also, we may think that by uttering the Name we attain virtues; however, this is not the case. One of the unique features about uttering the Nembutsu is that we do not think we attain virtues. Actually, with Shinjin all the virtues are already attained through the Compassion of Amida Buddha. In truth, the virtues are embodied in the Name that is uttered and not in the utterance by us. Yet, because the virtues are embodied in the Name, the Name, coming through our grateful utterance, has the power to embrace other beings still caught in delusion.

Thus we see that the utterance of the Name is the result of the awakened Shinjin endowed upon us by the Compassionate Buddha through the fulfilled Eighteenth Vow.

Previously, it has been said that with the awakening to Shinjin we are assured the Birth in the Pure Land of Enlightenment. Then, what is meant by Birth in the Pure Land of the Jodo Shinshu?

南
无
阿
弥
陀
佛

“Our Life of Nembutsu”

The way of the Nembutsu was introduced in the following manner—

After attaining His Enlightenment, Sakyamuni Buddha returned one day to His former home to tell His father about the Nembutsu.

When told by the Buddha that he was merely to repeat the name, *Namu Amida Butsu*, the father asked, “Why do you teach me this easy way of the Nembutsu? Why do you not tell me the other methods which you preach to your disciples?”

Sakyamuni replied, “In order to go through all the numerous practices, you would have to leave your home and your work. The way of the Nembutsu is the easiest way to become Buddha because you can say it at home or wherever you are.”

Sakyamuni Buddha was trying to tell His father that He showed the monks the way to become a Buddha, by encouraging them to practice what He Himself had done. But to the ordinary people for whom it is impossible to leave their homes forsaking worldly desires, He taught the way of the Nembutsu.

Sakyamuni Buddha, during the latter part of His life, voluntarily started a discourse with one of His disciples which began:

O, Sariputra, after you
have passed from here over
a hundred thousand kotis
of Buddha countries, there
is in the western part a
Buddha country, a world
called *Sukhavati* (Pure
Land). And there a
Tathagata, called *Amitayus*,
fully enlightened, dwells
now, and teaches the law—

and so told the story of *Amida Buddha* and His Pure Land.

This sermon, compiled in one sutra, is called the *Amida-kyo*. The meaning of this sermon is that no matter how much the wisdom and intellect of human beings may develop, the problems concerning birth, death, old age, and sickness can only be solved by Faith in *Amida Buddha* through the recitation of the Nembutsu.

As time passed on after the death of Sakyamuni Buddha, the disciples began to have interest in sutras mentioning *Amida Buddha* and the Pure Land which led to the development of a religion practicing the Nembutsu.

Of all the teachings of Sakyamuni Buddha, the ultimate teaching that enables men to be liberated from one of man's greatest fears—death, is His teaching concerning Faith in *Amida Buddha*. With this Faith, parents and children, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, can live peacefully with quiet understanding and assurance that reunion in the Pure Land with their loved ones is possible even after death.

FOUR EXPRESSIONS OF GRATITUDE

Morning

Good morning, Amida Buddha -

I will try to follow your teachings,

At home, in school, and at play.

Namu Amida Butsu

At Night

Thank you Buddha for this day

In guiding me in work or play.

Thank you for your shining Light

To make our world so good and bright.

Namu Amida Butsu

* *

Thank you Buddha for this day

In guiding me in work or play.

Thank you for your loving care

To keep us all happy and safe.

Namu Amida Butsu

Mealtime

Thank you Buddha for this food,

And all the things that make it good -

For my health and wisdom too.

Namu Amida Butsu

Dear Parents,

These are special sayings of gratitude that

your child may learn at home.

Namu Amida Butsu is pronounced:

" Na-mu-a-mi-da-butsu "

THANK YOU, BUDDHA

Thank you, Buddha,
For my little toys,
'Cause they're such fun
For little boys and girls.

Thank you, Buddha,
For my mother true,
She cheers me so,
When I am sad and blue.

Thank you, Buddha,
For my father dear,
He's oh! So strong!
He never sheds a tear.

Thank you, Buddha,
I come to your shrine
Each day, each night,
I'll gassho rain or shine.

Yumi Hojo

Gassho to Amida

Gassho to Amida is a simple gatha written for our Dharma School that shows the spirit of reverence for Amida Buddha's Infinite Wisdom and Compassion. This gatha can be chanted to the tune of Junirai.

Reverend Kenryu Tsuji

- Bell
- _ Leader only

••

Namo Amida Butsu

I recite Amida's Name.
With deep joy and gratitude
I gassho to Amida.

Trees and grasses and flowers
All grow in His Compassion.
His light shines throughout the world.
I gassho to Amida.

Flowers bloom and flowers fall;
From the seeds sprout new flowers;
This is the Truth unchanging.
I gassho to Amida.

Springtime brings the happy birds,
Their songs all praise Amida;
I join them in Nembutsu.
I gassho to Amida.

When I call Amida's Name
It's Amida calling me;
His voice and my voice are one.
I gassho to Amida.

When I'm lonely I recite
Namo Amida Butsu,
Then I feel Him take my hand.
I gassho to Amida.

Nembutsu in work and play,
Every day with Amida,
Every moment filled with light.
I gassho to Amida.

Remember the Golden Chain
"Kindness to all living things."
I will follow this Teaching.
I gassho to Amida.

In the clear bright morning sun
In the fading light of day,
In the darkness of the night,
I gassho to Amida.

Namo Amida Butsu
I live in His Compassion.
His great power guides my life.
I gassho to Amida. •

NA MAN DA BU •
NA MAN DA BU
NA MAN DA BU
NA MAN DA BU
NA MAN DA BU
NA MAN DA • BU

May we share these virtues.
E-qually with one and all –
And to-geth-er at-tain-ing;
Birth, in the Land -- of Bliss. •••

What is Etiquette

The whole concept of etiquette in general is concerned with the refinement of human behavior in its relationship with other human beings. Common courtesy, cordiality, grace and beauty, along with tradition, are all involved.

Buddhist Etiquette takes into consideration this concept of etiquette, but it is more concerned with the refinement of our behavior in its relationship with the Buddha, His Teaching and His Brotherhood.

Thus, while it is necessary for the Buddhist to observe the ordinary rules of good conduct toward his fellow men, it is more important that he move with reverence and gratitude toward all things which are related to the Buddha.

Reverence and gratitude for the Compassion and Wisdom of the Buddha form the basis of Buddhist Etiquette. Without this basis, the learning and practice of the outward forms become empty and meaningless. Gassho is meaningful only when it is the Nembutsu in action—when it is the expression of our gratitude and reverence. Therefore, in teaching the forms of Buddhist Etiquette, or in practicing them oneself, it must be to express the spirit of gratitude and reverence.

When Shinran spoke of “Shomyo Nembutsu”—the actual utterance of the Nembutsu—he was saying that it is not enough for man to think about noble thoughts and deeds; they must be expressed in words and action.

In light of this, the purpose of etiquette in the lives of Buddhists becomes clear: we must put into action the reverence and gratitude which we feel for the Buddha. In teaching small children, then, it should be enough to convey this feeling of reverence and gratitude, and the bare basic forms of etiquette. Children will learn through the examples set by their teachers.

For the teachers, however, it is necessary that the details of etiquette are learned and observed so that they may set the proper example.

While it is true that Buddhists in America cannot adopt some of the rules of etiquette as conceived and practiced in Japan, there is still much to be said for the perpetuation of the others. Of these, the more common are included in this guide. With the passing of time, more changes will probably be made necessary, but until such changes are made and adopted, the following is presented to the Dharma School teacher as a guide on etiquette as it is practiced today in Buddhist Churches of America.

TEMPLE ETIQUETTE

1. HOW TO ENTER THE TEMPLE:

Before entering the temple, be sure to take any food (including candy or chewing gum) out of your mouth. Upon entering the door of the temple: stop, face the altar, and bow. This is your greeting to Amida Buddha.

2. OFFERTORY

It is customary to offer osaisen (money offering) when you attend the temple service. This offering signifies your desire to express gratitude in being able to listen to the profound teachings of the Buddha. The osaisen box is located at the main entrance of the temple.

3. HOW TO ENTER THE HONDO (CHURCH HALL)

The Hondo should be entered quietly and with due reverence. Take your seat and wait quietly for the service to begin.

Avoid being late, but when you must enter the Hondo after the service has started, be especially careful not to disturb the others. If you enter during a period of meditation, wait until it is over before moving toward the pews.

4. HOW TO HOLD THE ONENJU

The onenju should be treated with the utmost respect at all times. At home, it should be kept in a special place such as in a drawer near the family altar. When you enter the temple, hold the onenju in your left hand. Whenever you gassho, place the onenju over your hands with the tassel hanging down directly in the center; then place your thumbs lightly on the beads.

During the service, when not in gassho, either hold the onenju in your left hand or place it around your left wrist.

5. HOW TO GASSHO

Gassho means to put the hands together in an expression of reverence and gratitude. Place the palm of your hands and the fingers squarely against each other with the onenju encircling both hands. The hands should be at chest level. Bow slightly.

The onenju encircling the hands during gassho symbolizes Oneness with the Buddha.

6. HOW TO OSHOKO (OFFERING OF INCENSE)

Walk up to the front of the altar and bow at a distance of about two steps in front of the oshoko table. Step up to the table, take a pinch of incense, and offer it once into the burning incense bowl. Take a step back; Gassho; take another step back, bow and return to your seat. During Oshoko, it is expected of those in their seats to be in Gassho for that entire period.

7. HOW TO LISTEN TO THE READING OF SACRED WRITINGS

When a minister reads a short excerpt from the scriptures before his sermon or from the Gobunsho (sacred writings of St. Rennyo) after he finishes his sermon, bow your head in gassho, and listen to the sacred words. This act shows that you are paying respect to, and putting faith in the Buddha and his teachings.

8. HOW TO BEHAVE DURING THE SERVICE

The service period in church is time given only to Amida Buddha. Therefore, one should not talk or play with each other while in the temple. If your mind wanders, look at the figure of Amida Buddha and keep your mind thinking only of Amida Buddha and of his teachings. Also, this is a good time to quietly reflect upon yourself.

9. HOW TO SING GATHAS, RECITING FROM GATHA BOOKS, AND RECITING THE NEMBUTSU

Gatha singing - Sing clearly and loudly with feeling. Gathas are meaningful "mini-sermons."

Recitation from the Gatha Books - Follow the leader in reciting (reading) the Eightfold Path, Golden Chain, or other sayings with clarity. Do not "race" as you recite.

Reciting the Nembutsu - As Shinshu is based on the realization of the Nembutsu, the importance of reciting it correctly cannot be over-emphasized. "Namu-Amida-Butsu" should be recited clearly.

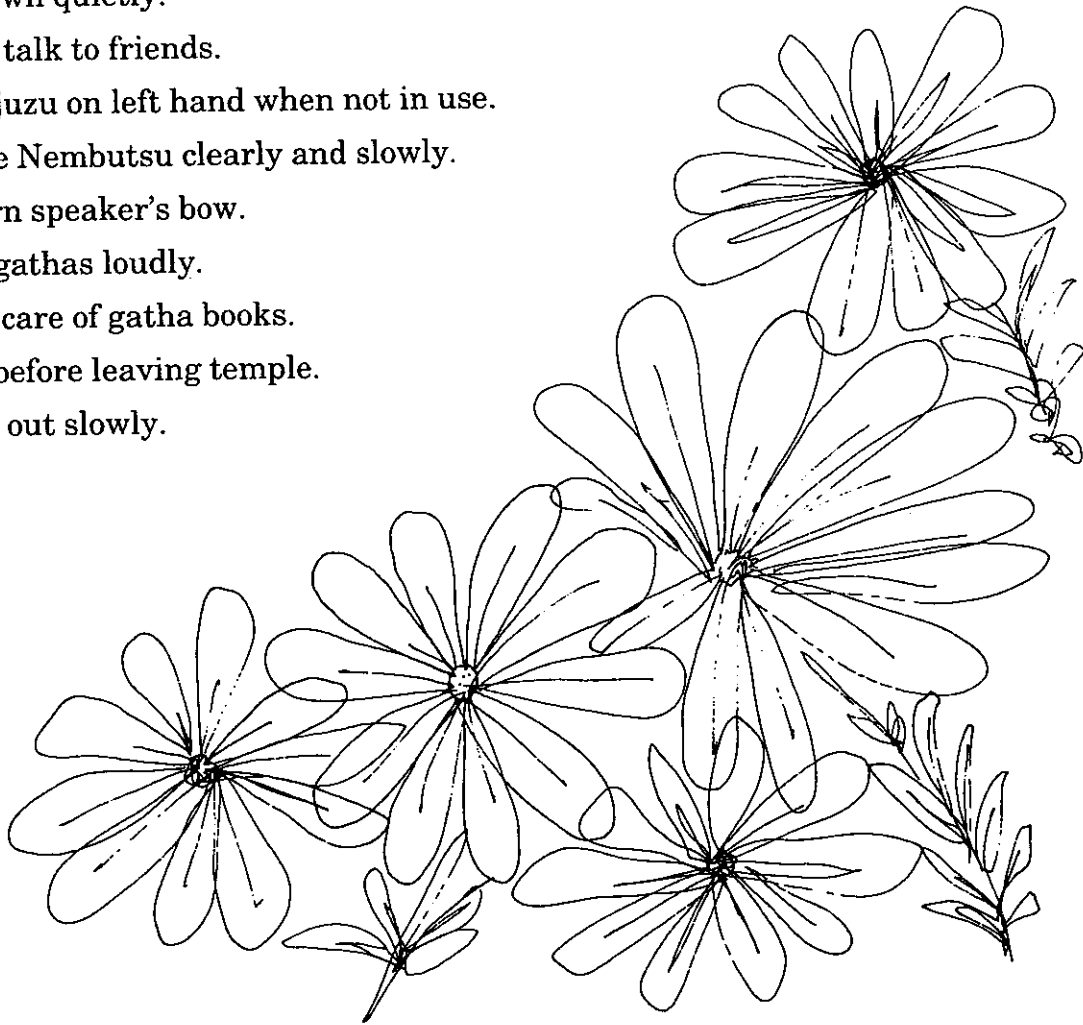
10. HOW TO LEAVE THE TEMPLE

Leave the pews quietly, step at the door of the temple, face the altar, bow, and quietly leave the temple. Refrain from shouting, yelling, loud talking, or playing until you reach ground level.

TEMPLE ETIQUETTE

AMIDA AND I ARE ONE

1. Gassho at shrine.
2. Sit down quietly.
3. Don't talk to friends.
4. Put ojuzu on left hand when not in use.
5. Recite Nembutsu clearly and slowly.
6. Return speaker's bow.
7. Sing gathas loudly.
8. Take care of gatha books.
9. Bow before leaving temple.
10. Walk out slowly.



When the service starts, we put our hands together with the Ojuzu around them. The tassel is hanging down, of course. We stand very quietly and say to ourselves . . .

I PUT MY FAITH IN THE BUDDHA
I PUT MY FAITH IN THE DHARMA
I PUT MY FAITH IN THE SANGHA
NAMU AMIDA BUTSU

We do the same thing when the incense is being offered and at the end of the service.

Sensei and Mother said that we should keep our Ojuzu in a little case so that it won't get soiled or broken. Buddhist children keep their Ojuzus with them every day. Each morning and night, Mother, Daddy, and I stand in front of our obutsudan. We put our Ojuzus about our hands and say. . .

NAMU AMIDA BUTSU

BUDDHIST RITUALS

Draw a line from each sentence to the matching illustration.



Gassho •



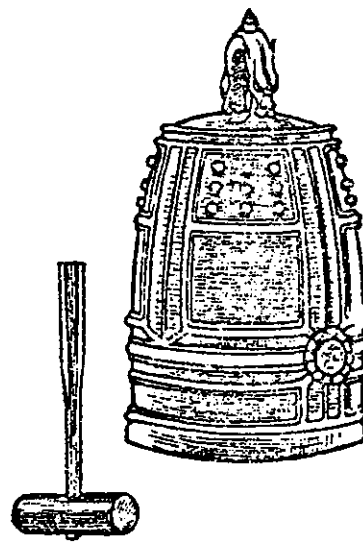
Nenju •



Oshoko •

- The tassel represents Buddha's teachings spreading out to all.
- Parents are represented by 2 different beads. The large one is Amida Buddha. We are the others.
- Putting my hands together to show that Amida and I are one.
- Act of purification
- When I say "Namu Amida Butsu," I put my hands in _____
- It is held in your left hand when not in use.
- Take 2-3 steps backward, bow, and return to your seat after you gassho and bow.
- Bow before offering incense. Gassho and bow after offering incense.
- Expression of gratitude

KANSHŌ - 喚鐘 - "calling-bell": The Kanshō is a medium sized bell 2 to 3 feet in length which is hung near the Naijin area of the Hondō. It is rung immediately before the start of a ritual or service to call the members of the Sangha. For regular services, the Kanshō is struck with a wooden mallet in a pattern of 7-5-3. The Kanshō is struck 7 times, then followed by a series of fast, soft beats which crescendo to fast, soft beats. The pattern then de-crescendos from slow, loud beats to fast, soft beats. The Kanshō is then struck 5 times followed by another de-crescendo pattern and finally struck 3 times. For funeral services, the pattern is 2-5-3. The numbers 7,5, and 3 are pivotal numbers in Japanese Buddhist culture. They are of such ancient origin that their exact meaning has been lost. The Kansho was not used in Jodoshinshu temples until the 17th century, the first use of it being recorded as the year 1688.



In Japanese culture, the numbers 3,5,7, and 9 are preferred over even numbers. Aesthetically, the Japanese are partial to asymmetry while the Chinese are partial to symmetry. In Buddhist temples, both systems are preserved. In altar objects, flower arrangements, offerings, etc., the odd numbers show a Japanese preference while the even numbers show a Chinese preference. The even or symmetrical arrangements are considered the more formal by the Japanese.

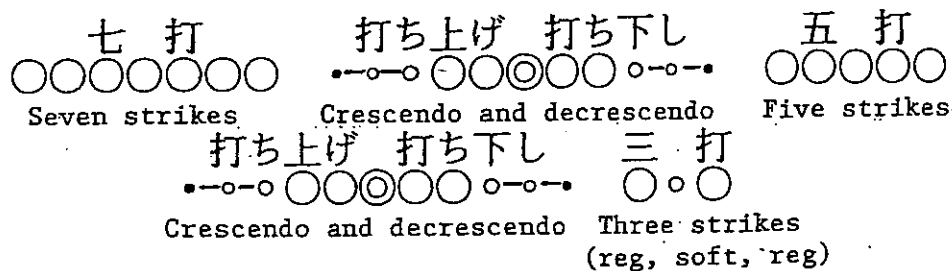
Bonsbō 梵鐘 (lit. "Indian-bell"), *Kanshō* 呼鐘 (lit. "calling-bell")

The *bonsbō* is also known as *shūeshō* 集会鐘 (lit. "gathering-bell")

It is hit to inform people of all regular services and the time of day (6am and 5pm). Normally, it is struck either half an hour or an hour before daily services depending on the time of year. At Honzan, during the winter months of December through February, it is struck at 6:30. During the rest of the year, it is struck at 6:00 am.

The *kanshō* is also known as *gyōjishō* 行事鐘 (lit. "event-bell"). It is struck to mark the start of a service or ceremony.

Hitting instructions: DIAGRAM



BUDDHIST RITUALS: SERVICES AND OBSERVANCES

Buddhist special observances are held every year to show our gratitude and thankfulness to Amida Buddha for his Wisdom and Compassion.

SEPTEMBER 21 Autumn Higan Service	MARCH 21 Spring Higan Service
<p>Twice a year when the days and nights are equal length, and nights are still warm, Buddhists gather to listen to the teachings. The goal of Buddhism is to reach Nirvana, or "the other shore."</p>	
OCTOBER Eitaikyo Sangha Memorial Day	APRIL 8 Hanamatsuri
<p>A memorial day service for those who have died.</p>	<p>Birth of Shakyamuni Buddha in Lumbini Garden, in India.</p>
NOVEMBER	MAY 21 Gotan-E Birthday of Shinran Shonin
DECEMBER 8 Bodhi Day	JUNE
<p>Shakyamuni Buddha was enlightened under the Bodhi tree.</p>	
JANUARY 16 Hoonko Service Shinran Shonin's Memorial Day	JULY Obon Service
	<p>Memorial service for those who have died. Food and paper lanterns complete the decorations. Dances are held.</p>
FEBRUARY 15 Nirvana Day Shakyamuni Buddha's Memorial Day	AUGUST

Find a partner, the first person gives the date. The second person gives the name of the special day or the reason for the special day. Then change roles. See if you can give the answer without looking at this page. Then get a checker to check you.

ANNUAL OBSERVANCES TIC-TAC-TOE

You'll need a partner for this game. The first player thinks of the name of the annual observance that goes with the date. He writes in the name under the date. The second player thinks of another observance in some other square. He writes his word in that square. The game continues until one player completes a row of 3 dates. Players should try to "block" other players.

May 21	Nov.	Sept. 21
April 8	July	Feb. 15
March 21	Dec. 8	Jan. 16

Write the date of the names of the special Observance.

Rules for Matching Fish Game

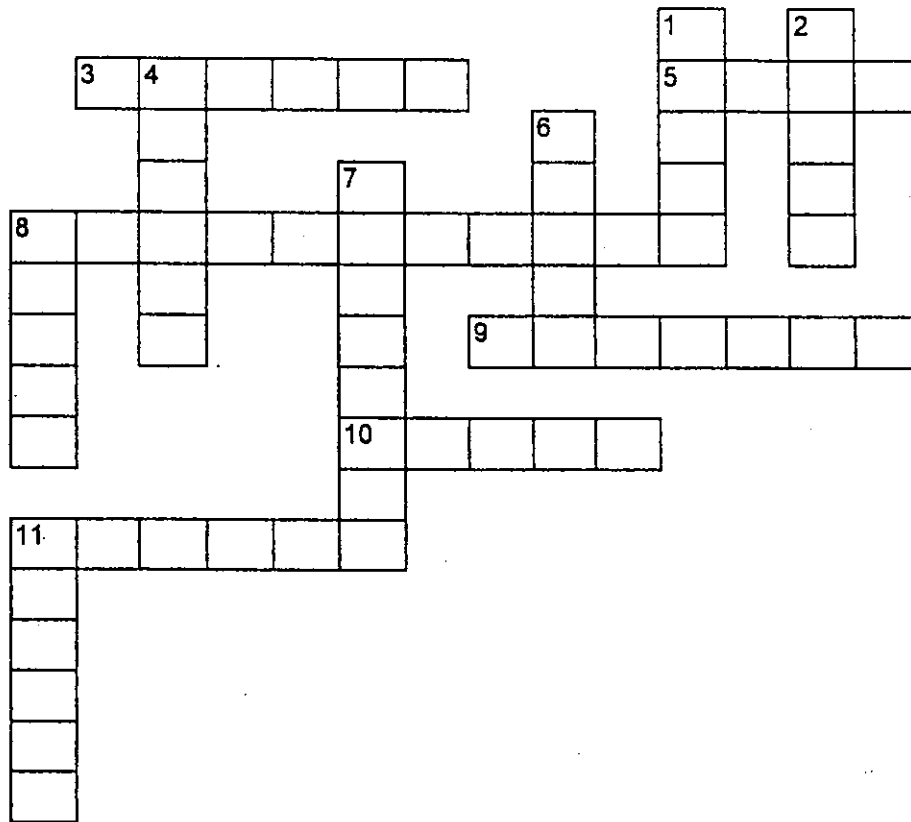
Object of game: Match the dates and the names of the special Buddhist observances.

1. Dealer shuffles cards and deals 4 cards to each player.
2. Match any date and special observance in your hand and lay down in pairs.
3. First player on right of dealer asks for a match card. If player has it, he hands it over, if he doesn't, he says, "Go fish" and the player fishes.
4. A turn lasts as long as a player can keep on making pairs.
5. Winner is the first one to get rid of his cards or winner is the one with most pairs. For the winner, decide which rule to use before the game starts.

Sangha Memorial Day	Hanamatsuri	Ho-on-ko
Obon	Bodhi Day	Spring Higan-e
Gotan-E	Autumn Higan-e	Memorial Day of Shyamuni Buddha

Note: Necessary for this game are two sets of cards—
 1 set with the dates of the special observances.
 1 set with the names of the special observances.
 Several sets would be needed if there are several players.

CROSSWORD PUZZLE OF SPECIAL SERVICES



Words

Bodhi	Hoonko
Dharma	India
Gassho	Lumbini
Gotan-e	Obon
Hanamatsuri	Ojuzu
Hanamido	Lotus
Higan	

Across

- 3. Teachings of the Buddha
- 5. Observance in July
- 8. Birthday of Gautama Buddha
- 9. Garden in India
- 10. Country where Shakyamuni Buddha was born
- 11. Act of meditation with hands together.

Down

- 1. Tree of wisdom
- 2. Flower important in our Teaching
- 4. Shinran Shonin's Memorial Day
- 6. Buddhist Rosary, used to join Amida Buddha in worship
- 7. Flower Shrine
- 8. Celebrated during the Spring and Fall Equinox
- 11. Name of observance in May

HO-ONKO (A BUDDHIST THANKSGIVING AND MEMORIAL SERVICE)

Definition:

Literally, the Japanese characters "Ho-On" means "return of gratitude" and "Ko" means "to clarify the meaning of." "Ho-onko" is a day set aside to pay tribute to the founder of the Jodo Shinshu sect of Buddhism, Shinran Shonin. It is observed on about the date of his decease. Hence, Ho-onko is a service to express our gratitude and thanksgiving to Shinran Shonin.

Significance of Ho-onko:

Ho-onko is the most important for the Jodo Shinshu Buddhists because it is a day to pay our respects to the founder of the sect, Shinran Shonin. It was he who interpreted Buddhism on the level of understanding of the common people. In the pre-Shinran era, only the upper class people with ample leisure were able to pursue the profound teachings of the Buddha. To become a Buddhist in those days meant to forsake temporal life; to leave the home and family and enter a life of strict practice and study of Buddhism. However, Shinran, professing the doctrine of Faith in Amida Buddha's power, enabled the common man to fully appreciate the teaching of the Buddha. For this, the followers of the Shin sect extend their deepest appreciation to Shinran Shonin in memorial of his passing on January 16, 1262.

Thanksgiving Aspect of Ho-onko:

The Buddhist form of Thanksgiving is broader in scope than the common concept of thanksgiving. Commonly, Thanksgiving is a day set aside for the people to express gratitude for the successful completion of harvest and for the turkey on the table, gratitude to our country, and gratitude for freedom of religion, etc. In Buddhism, we do express our thanksgiving to these things, too, but we go further and extend our thanks to every living and non-living thing that goes into making life possible.

HO-ONKO — JANUARY 16

(DAY OF THANKSGIVING)

Shinran Shonin devoted his ninety long years for the spiritual welfare of millions.

Even though he was born into the family of nobility, he tasted bitter human tragedy as he lost both of his parents at an early age. Thereafter, life was a continuous chain of constant struggle with suffering and sacrifice. If he craved fame and power, he could have easily become either a high ranking knight or an officer in the Imperial court, since he had many influential uncles in both fields. But he paid no heed to these more glamorous callings and, instead, he shaved his hair at the age of nine which only promised a long life of poverty, hardship and constant wandering.

In the long history of Buddhism we have many saints whose ardent desires were to save people from suffering and confusion, but Shinran Shonin really stands out among all of these saints in one particular—he was truly the friend of the ordinary man. In fact, he was really one of us as he was beset and confused in the maze of human love, hate and contradiction.

In Buddhism, priests were barred from leading a normal family life. Yet Shinran Shonin boldly entered into married life. This unprecedented act provoked not only bitter criticism, accusation and insults from the priest group, but from men in all walks of life as well. He faced such accusation and persecution courageously. Why did he dare to go against convention? He wanted to prove to the skeptical people that the Teaching promises the salvation of Amida Buddha for all, be they priest or laymen. The universal salvation of

Amida Buddha was propagated by outstanding saints like Honen Shonin, but they led a life of monks. The followers, therefore, felt doubt as to whether they might be saved through the Teachings because the master did not lead an ordinary life of a layman.

Shinran Shonin was fearless in his determination to prove that the Teachings were for the millions, even though he could foresee the wrath of the tradition bound priests and the public.

Shinran Shonin was extremely sensitive to human weaknesses. Tortured in the struggle with human passions and emotional conflicts, he confessed courageously of the human frailty and weaknesses in the writing, *Kyo Gyo Shin Sho*.

A word of caution is needed as we read these painful confessions of Shinran Shonin. These words of Shinran Shonin do not indicate that he was more sinful and of weaker character than we. On the contrary, these words indicate only his humble and deep inner reflection and his sincere effort to be bound by the highly rigid standard of religious practice.

His deep and unshakable faith in Amida Buddha was the result of overcoming these human weaknesses. Shinran Shonin walked over more than half of Japan, preaching to weedsmen, fishermen, farmers and merchants who did not have access to the blessed Teachings of the Buddha at that time.

It is indeed fortunate that we have such a great saint as our founder. At this time of Ho-on-ko we should once again trace his footsteps with deep appreciation in our hearts and resolve to consecrate ourselves in the service of others.

SHINRAN SHONIN MEMORIAL DAY

Shinran Shonin Memorial Day (Ho-onko) commemorates the anniversary of the death of Shinran Shonin, the patron founder of the Jodo Shinshu sect. Each year, on the 16th of January, faithful followers of Shinran Shonin assemble together to pay homage to his memory and to Amida Buddha for having awakened man to the existence of life's supreme debt of gratitude.

Confronted by his own blind waywardness and, moreover, rendered helpless by his own inability to free himself of his ignorance and self-centered ways, mortal man has no alternative but to rely on the grace of the power of salvation of the Nembutsu which is none other than the manifestation of Amida Buddha's great wisdom and compassion graciously bestowed upon mankind in the form of His Primal Vow, assuring salvation and happiness for all sentient beings. The realization of this fundamental fact of life turns, in other words, into an awareness on the part of man to the supreme debt of gratitude he owes.

This gives rise to the question of whether or not we of the Jodo Shinshu faith are truly concerned and grateful to Amida Buddha and to Shinran Shonin for having shown us the way of the Nembutsu.

Shinran Shonin Memorial Day is currently being observed by the respective temples, but it appears to be carried out in a very superficial manner devoid of any sense of gratitude. Or can one be wrong and that, in reality, it is being observed out of a deep feeling of gratitude and pious propriety. Should one become aware that he has been merely going through the motions of observing Ho-onko, it is never too late to change. He must first strive to condition himself towards attaining a true sense of appreciation and gratitude.

Let us pause and reflect for a moment.

Why is it that despite the long hours we spend listening to the teachings on Nembutsu, we continue to remain unmoved and indifferent without any deep feeling of profound gratitude? Is it that we do not possess any sense of gratefulness? Why is this so? What is the underlying source of this problem?

Shinran Shonin interpreted the acknowledgement of gratitude to mean any reciprocal thought or act motivated by a profound feeling of gratitude for Amida Buddha's invocation of his power to enable us to attain faith. Reciprocal acknowledgement is not, therefore, merely giving donations or attending religious services. In other words, it is not just a duty or responsibility. It is, rather, an opportunity—a privilege and blessing which comes naturally as one becomes more deeply aware that all things, including one's faith, comes from Amida Buddha. Our faith and manner of living which are the very essence of life are bestowed upon us through the grace of Amida's compassion and merciful benevolence.

Man is by nature, from the time of his birth, self-centered and, therefore, does not feel any sense of gratitude unless his greed and selfish desires are satisfied. For example, the absence of any feeling of gratitude towards one's parents is because it is obstructed by selfish interests and a false sense of self-importance. There is the ever-present feeling that one's parents will not do as one wishes and that a person exists of his own accord—separate and individual.

The awareness of one's debt of gratitude means that one realizes the reason and purpose for this own existence. To be grateful towards one's parents is the awareness that one owes his existence to his parents. Gratitude towards the sun stems from the realization that one owes his existence to the sun's light and heat. We can also say for the same reason, that we owe our lives to our country and fellow beings.

Therefore, as long as one remains self-centered, any thought or sense of gratefulness will remain dormant and hidden within. Should we desire otherwise, we must change our attitude toward life from a self-centered one to that molded around Amida Buddha as its center. This change is called the attainment of faith.

As stated in the Hymns of Praise (Wasan), "To enter within the wisdom of faith is to become one who acts out of gratefulness to the Buddha." Faith and acts motivated by gratitude are not two separate aspects of life but are one and the same. Therefore, one cannot possibly say that he has faith but does not feel any sense of gratitude.

In the light of this principle, then, can it be said that people are imbued with a sense of gratitude in their daily conduct? The answer is emphatically, "No!" It is quite apparent that in reality mankind is floundering in the ocean of the three cardinal evils and living in a state of ingratitude and disillusionment without the necessary understanding of the true meaning of life. For this reason, it is imperative that man takes immediate steps, not only to understand the true meaning, but moreover, assimilate the spirit of the reciprocal return of one's debt of gratitude by following the words of Amida Buddha, which teach us to persevere with forbearance and act with conviction of purpose.

By so doing, we shall come to the realization that the significance of Ho-on-ko lies in the assemblage of the faithful followers of Amida in the expression of their gratitude for having been graciously blessed with the means and opportunity of following the path of Nembutsu. From this awareness will rise a deep sense of the gratitude which each person must reply during the course of his life.

"Though I, my life having run its course,
Return to the Pure Land of Eternal Rest,
Come back shall I to earth again and again
Even as the waves of Wakano-ura Bays.

"When alone you rejoice in the Sacred Teachings
Believe that there are two.
And when there are two to rejoice
Believe that there are three.
And that other shall be Shinran."

Hoonko

a b u t s u b c h u r c h
d u c y h o p g a s s h o
j d h a r m a h o o n k o
n d k c o m p a s s i o n
d h a r m a m m t w x y n
s a i n t s h i n r a n k
a o q i a m i d a z a o o
c p u r e t n a m i d a n
n i r v a n a m u s o b e
p x t a t a n o m a j d m
i s o n e m b u t s u p b
t a n a m u t c h s z o u
o b e p p u r e i h u m t
x c n f l a n d e o a e s
y h o n e n f g i n a m u

Find these words in the puzzle:

saint shinran	nirvana
dharma	nembutsu
buddha	temple
hoonko	ojuzu
namu	gassho
amida	church
butsu	pure
compassion	land
honen	mt hiei

April 8
Hanamatsuri

This service is held to commemorate the birth of Gautama in Lumbini Garden. Amida, the Buddha of Infinite Wisdom and Compassion, manifested Himself among men in the person Gautama.

During the service a flower shrine known as Hanamido is set up in front of the main shrine as a symbol of Lumbini Garden. In this shrine is placed a statuette of the infant Buddha and the congregation offers flowers and pours sweet tea over the image. According to the ancient legend, the universe was filled with joyful music, flowers bloomed in full glory and sweet rain fell from the heavens to make this a joyful event.

HANAMATSURI

This is the birthday of Sakyamuni Buddha. He was born about 2500 years ago in India on the eighth day of the fourth month. According to our tradition and calendar, this glorious event occurred on April 8th. His given name was Siddhartha and he was the crown prince of the Kingdom of Kapilavastu, on the Nepalese border, one hundred miles north of the present city of Benares. The legends tell us that at the time of his birth in the beautiful Lumbini Garden, sweet rain came down from the heaven to wash the baby Buddha and all the flowers in the yard turned into full bloom. This is why we call the Buddha's birthday Hanamatsuri. We decorate the Hanamido (flower chapel) and perform the ceremony of bathing the Buddha. Other episodes or symbols in association with his birth are almost too familiar to re-introduce here.

Later literature sometimes tend to employ poetical or mythical methods of presentation. However, when we look at the intention of these authors or biographers, we are surprised to notice the abundant teachings of the Buddha in his birth narrative itself. The first is the unique emphasis on humanity. We know that the Buddha had not only his mother, Queen Maya but also his father, Suddhodana. Under the agricultural climate it is very natural that his father, the King, bore the name, Suddhodana (Pure Rice) and his family name was Best or Sacred Cow as analysed in Gau (cow) and -tama (superlative suffix). His mothers' name Maya has been translated into "illusion" by the Chinese and Tibetan Buddhists and some of the new Sanskrit literatures interpret it in the same way. As for this feminine name which is a very common and popular name among our ministers' daughters, I have entertained a hypothesis for a long time in suggesting that the term Maya might not be either Sanskrit or Pali. Of dialects which are supposed to be close to the Buddha's vernacular, the ancient Jainistic Ardha Magadhi language possesses a noun "ma-u" which stands for "mother" and of which the nominative case is "Maya."

What Gautama Buddha's language was is still unconfirmed, but there is a possibility that it resembled a dialect or dialects infused in the life stories of the Buddha. The founder of Jainism, Mahavira, was a man contemporaneous with Gautama Buddha. Because of the common territory of activity and resembling doctrines of these two teachers, some savants are very quick to regard these two as being identical. Furthermore, in the popular Buddhist literatures such as Gandavyuhasutra, Mahavastu, Latitavistara, etc., the proper noun Maya is always used as "mother" of emperors or "mother" of all Bodhisattvas and Buddhas (Sarvajinajetri)—past and future. The Buddha's father was Suddhodana but mother might be just mother without a name. A name is man-made and convenient for identifying the person, but it will convey sometimes a discrimination or separation. Even we common men very rarely call our own mothers by name. This warmest humanity is profusely demonstrated in the Buddha's birth.

Secondly, the name Buddha is a title and not a proper noun. Through numerous presentations of the Buddha's teaching, we are shown two fundamental attitudes in studying Buddhism; the privilege of being insured of limitless exertion of wisdom; and the responsibility of studying or believing in this teaching. In other words, there is an absolute autonomy in our intelligence, morality and faith. The highest wisdom is symbolized in the boundless light of Amitabha and its function is the infinite compassion attributed in eternal time or Amitayus. Both are the projections of our highest goal and the very qualifications of Amida Buddha. Buddhism is the only religion in which the object of worship and goal of attainment are one. Our aspiration towards a higher step is secured and commended.

Now, the occidental counterparts as following are quoted for the purpose of comparison. These are not strictly historical but at least the voices of civilization in the respective stages of development.

For example, we question why the original man and wife were expelled from the garden of Eden in the Old Testament. This story was later dramatized by John Milton in his *Paradise Lost*. A son of Titans, Prometheus, in the Greek myth stole the fire from Mt. Olympus and taught the use of it to his fellow men. In punishment for this conduct, the fable says, he was chained by the order of the chief god, Zeus, to a rock in the Caucasus, where his liver was munched daily by a vulture. Aeschylus, one of the greatest tragedy writers in Greece, exaggerated this story, replacing the liver with the heart which grows by night as fast as the vulture consumes it by day. Prometheus' affliction, therefore, lasted as long as thirteen human generations until Hercules slew the bird. Aeschylus had Prometheus utter, "I sooth all gods I hate (pantas ekhthairo theos)." Another god-detester, Karl Marx, loved Prometheus and concluded his preface to this doctorate thesis, "*The Difference Between the Natural Philosophy of Democritus and the Natural Philosophy of Epicurus; 1841*," with Aeschylus version of Prometheus' words, "I shall never exchange my fetters for slavish servility. It is better to be chained to the rock than bound to the service of God, Zeus." The founder of communism lauded Prometheus as the noblest of saints and martyrs in the calendar of philosophy. According to the beginning verses of Genesis II in the Old Testament, human folks tried to build a tower whose top may reach the heaven, the abode of god. Eventually, this being the cause of divine resentment, the tower of Babel was demolished and in punishment human beings have suffered from many languages and were scattered all over the earth.

The motive or philosophy implied in these fables makes a clear distinction from a Buddhistic one. In spite of our sympathy for these ill-fated heroes or heroines, we witness now human exertion towards the highest goal has been impeded as symbolized in the forbidden fruit, stolen fire or ambitious tower. While the betterment of virtues is highly recommended, the final attainment of oneness with the absolute one has been interpreted as the most offensive arrogance. One may attain 99.9999 . . . percent proximity to God, but the last minimum point will never be bridged. Even if it might be an infinitesimal width, the gap is an absolute abyss. In the Buddhist legends sincere seekers of truth such as Zenzaidoji (sudhana-sresthidaraka) under 53 teachers or Sessendojo who dared to trade the truth with his own physical life have been told and retold as being the ideal students of Buddha's teaching. Shinran Shonin's followers regard the truth as Amida Buddha and listen to his interpretation of Sakyamuni Buddha's birth; "His arrival in this world was solely to show the way of Amida Buddha and save all beings, thereby blessing them with true benefit."

Now, regarding the Buddha's birth date and calendar, we may have an impression that Buddhists are a little slothful with "about 2500 years ago," especially in comparison with western religions. However, for example, Christmas has no biblical foundation at all, while there are innumerable references to the founder's chronology in the Buddhist literature. If Sakyamuni Buddha were a mythological hero, it would be as easy as the other to pick an

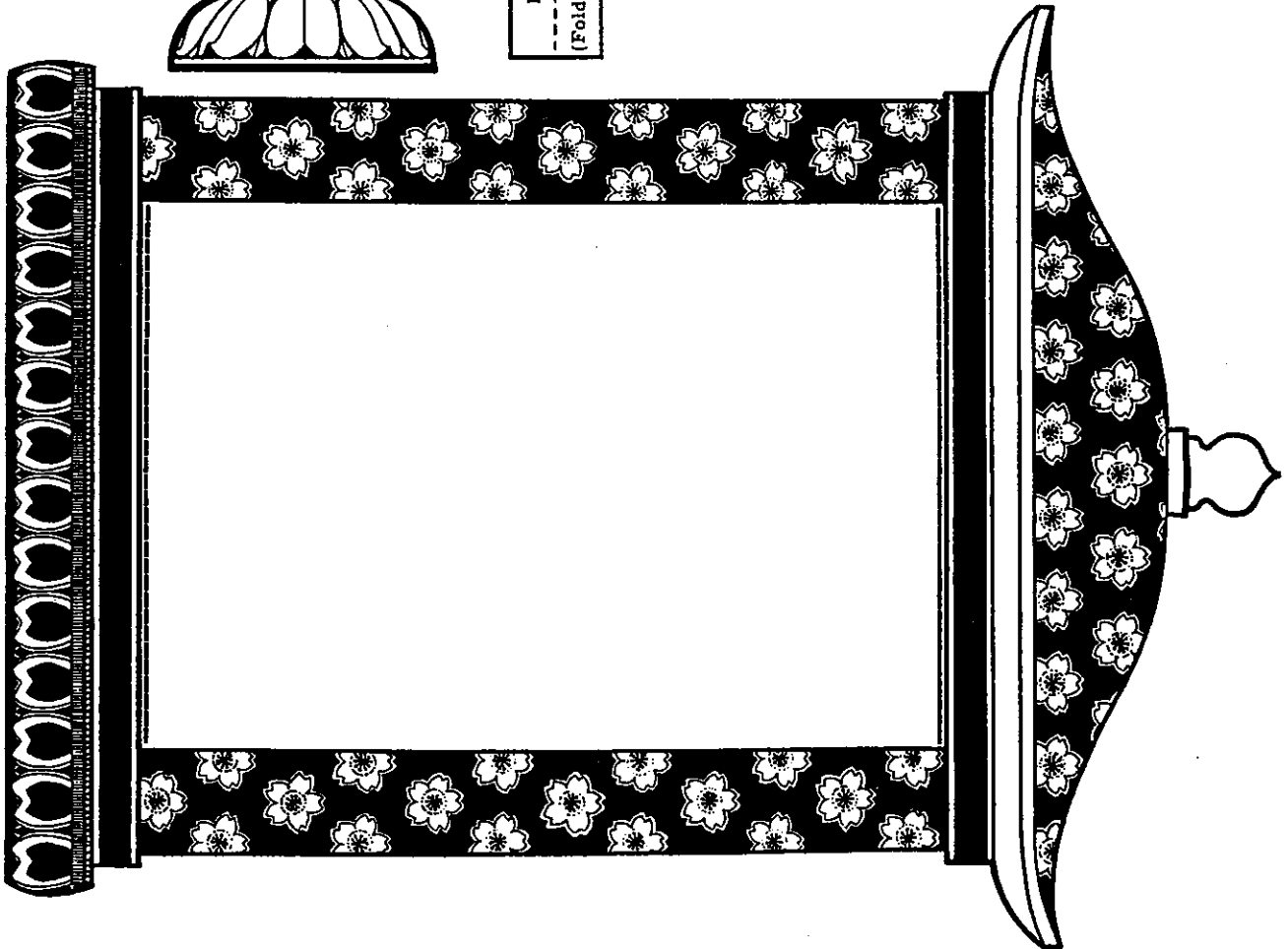
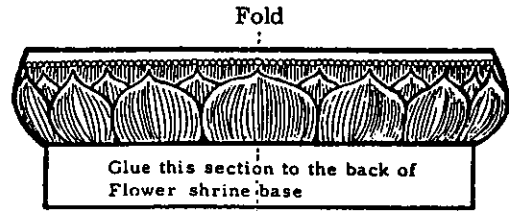
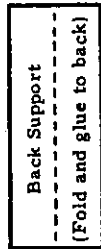
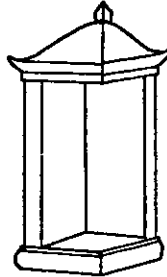
arbitrary date and year. Paradoxically, because of his firm historicity, it has been necessary for constant assessment via new data and discoveries. Of course there is a movement to set a uniform calendar among Buddhists. For example, most of the Southern Buddhists have proposed the Buddha's birth to be in the year 624 B.C. From an academic standpoint, Dr. Hajime Nakamura has given the year 463 B.C.

On this occasion of Buddha Day, we are reminded of an episode told by Asvaghosa in his *Buddhacarita* (Life of Buddha); a great seer Asita nearing the nurse-bed of the infant prince, prophesied, "... having attained the highest truth by strenuous efforts, he will shine forth as a sun of knowledge to destroy the darkness of illusions in the world." And Asita bitterly wept knowing that he was too old to see the prince grown up. This prophesy was fulfilled. Today hundreds of millions of people are the followers of Buddha and the world witnesses the prosperity of his eternal Dharma. With this title, Buddha Day, our sister Sangha, the Buddhists of Hawaii were successful in establishing a state holiday. We Buddhists, being over proud of our religious heritage, should celebrate this holiday in deep sincerity and express our thankfulness to Buddha for the founding of the wonderful teaching.

Flower Shrine, "Hanamido"



INSTRUCTION: Fold in half and cut along the space between the solid & the broken lines at top & bottom. Do not cut posts. Unfold and cut around outside of shrine. Score the inside posts and push back blank section as you pull toward you the center-fold of roof and base



SHINRAN SHONIN DAY

Shinran Shonin, I admire your firm faith,
Everpresent in your writing;
It is the expression of your kind, sincere heart.

Shinran Shonin, I accept your messages,
Telling me to examine the value of being born;
I trust your words.

Shinran Shonin, I will try to follow the way of life,
That you have shown me;
And I will always recite the Numbutsu,
With courage, gratitude, and reflection.

The month of May is noted for the observance of Mother's Day on the second Sunday; and Memorial Day, a national holiday, at the end of the month. There is another very important day for all Buddhists and we call this day SHINRAN SHONIN DAY. The observance of this day may be more familiar to some as Shinran Shonin Go-Tan-E or Fuji Matsuri.

SHINRAN SHONIN DAY is observed to commemorate the birth of Shinran Shonin (1173-1262), the founder of Jodo Shinshu. He lived in Japan more than seven hundred years ago and taught the true meaning of the Nembutsu, Namu Amida Butsu, until his passing at the age of 90. We observe this day to arouse awareness in the Nembutsu teaching, to pay tribute to our great founder, to take pride in the Buddhist heritage.

Shinran Shonin was born in the village of Hinro near the capital city of Kyoto on the first day of the fourth month of the lunar calendar 1173. This day falls on May 21 of our Gregorian calendar. In 1873 the Meiji Government abolished the lunar calendar system and was adopted the Gregorian calendar now in use. Until then the birthday of Shinran Shonin was known to the Japanese people as April 1. Higashi Hongwanji still maintains this earlier date, whereas the Honpa Hongwanji adopted the change according to the modern calendar.

When Shinran Shonin was born, the two major clans—Genji and Heike—were in a struggle for power to rule the country. It was a period of hard intensive battles and unrest. So intense was the civil strife that a famous author of the period of hard intensive battles and unrest.

The flow of the river is ceaseless and its water is never the same. The bubbles that float in the pools, now vanishing, now forming, are not of long duration; so in the world are man and his dwellings. They die in the morning, they are born in the evening, like foam of water . . . Whence does he come, where does he go, man that is born and dies.

From the fact that Matsuwaka-Marō, Shinran Shonin's childhood name, entered priesthood at the early age of nine, we can easily surmise that he too was caught in the bitter turbulence of the social times. A sensitive child, he was prompted to seek a way of life that promised peace to mankind. We are well acquainted with the poem that Matsuwaka-Marō recited when the venerable Jichin Kashō, chief abbot of a monastery, urged him to postpone the ordination until morning:

“Like cherry blossoms are the minds
That think there is a tomorrow,
But who can tell, there may be
A tempest in the night.”

This determination of Matsuwaka-Marō so impressed the chief abbot that he performed the ordination at once. The name Hannen-Shonagon-No-Kimi was bestowed upon Matsuwaka-Marō. It was such a strong motivation that led Shinran Shonin into a religious life that he continuously sought the answer to life in the Buddha-Dharma.

It is mentioned in his master work, *Kyo-Gyo-Shin-Sho (Analects Concerning Teaching, Practice, Faith, and Attainment)*, that under the guidance of Honen Shonin (1133-1212), his master, he discovered the unretrogressive path by having faith in the teaching of Nembutsu at the age of twenty-nine.

The growth and popularity of the Nembutsu teaching agitated a few. Jealousy led to malice and complaint was lodged against the proponents of the Nembutsu and they were brought to court. As a result, Honen Shonin and Shinran Shonin, together with other prominent followers, were sentenced to exile in 1207. Honen Shonin was exiled to Tosa (Shikoku) province and Shinran Shonin to Echigo (Niigata). Separated from the aging master, Honen Shonin, 75, the young Shinran Shonin, 35, looked upon his exile as a golden opportunity to introduce the teaching among the common people in the remote area. Shinran Shonin ascribed this good turn to the grace of the teaching of his master.

They were pardoned four years later in 1211 and the ban was removed. When Shinran Shonin heard of the passing of his master Honen Shonin in 1212, he decided not to return to Kyoto and instead turned his direction to the Kanto area. It was here in the village of Inada in Hitachi province (Ibaragi Ken) when Shinran Shonin was 52 years of age that he completed his masterpiece, *Kyo-Gyo-Shin-Sho*.

Leaving his wife, Eshin Ni, and his family in Kanto, Shinran Shonin returned to Kyoto in 1232 for the first time since his exile. Shinran Shonin spent his remaining years in Kyoto. He lived not in luxury but in thrift and moderation, he wrote many books and numerous letters to his family and friends, and he never wavered in his determination to expound the teaching of Nembutsu.

Reviewing Shinran Shonin's life, he did not live a fortunate life filled with happy environmental conditions. Both his parents were gone at an early age and he encountered many hardships throughout his life. But his spiritual experiences which evolved under many trying conditions and in many places, have given the many followers of the Buddha's Teaching an answer to the purpose of life in this world.

Shinran Shonin spent his simple and modest life of ninety years with no thought of making himself spectacularly prominent and impressive among the people. But millions of Nembutsu followers are rejoicing over his way of life through the guidance of Amida Dharma.

Shinran Shonin lived among the common people, he felt for them from this very heart, and communicated the message of true salvation with sincerity. He discovered peace and happiness with utmost confidence in the faith of Nembutsu.

During the years 1804 through 1809, Honnyo Shonin, the 19th Abbot of Jodo Shinshu, built the Hino-Tanjo-In Temple on the compounds of Hokkaiji Temple in the village of Hino. A statuette of Amida Buddha and a figure of Shinran Shonin at the age of five were enshrined.

The Hino Tanjo-In has then become a historical sanctuary marking the site of Shinran Shonin's birth.

In the early Meiji era Myonyo Shonin, the 21st Abbot and grandfather of the Abbot Kosho Ohtani, paid his respect at this temple. On this occasion, official records of the Hongwanji Temple reveal that the first Go-Tan-E, the Shinran Shonin Day Service, took place. It was on May 21, 1874.

It was not until 1882 that the commemoration of Shinran Shonin's birth flourished. Services are held on May 3 at the Hino Tanjo-In Temple and on May 21 at our mother temple, Honpa Hongwanji today. Various activities are scheduled, such as, oratorical contests, Gagaku and Noh, Hongwanji Open House, and many other events. A special music service was added to the traditional service in 1952 when over two thousand elected students from Ryukoku University, Kyoto Women's College, Soai Women's College, and Heian High School, and affiliates of the Hongwanji, took part in this special service.

In 1973, the 800th birthday of Shinran Shonin was observed. Today, we commemorate Shinran Shonin Day, let us see the true aspect of Shinran Shonin's faith. Through the teaching of the Nembutsu, let us live the life of Oneness with strength and conviction.

MAY

May 21

SHUSO GO-TAN-E

Shinran Shonin Day

Shuso Go-Tan-E (Fujimatsuri—the wisteria festival) commemorates the birth of Shinran Shonin and is one of the most important observances for Shin Buddhists. For it was Shinran who realized the uselessness of ascetic religious practices unless they sprang from a spontaneous and natural outgrowth of a life based on "tariki-shinjin, or "the pure heart free from self-generated intensions," and established the doctrinal basis for the Shin Buddhist tradition.

Autumn Higan

Purpose:

To learn about O-Higan

Material:

Need a picture of a peaceful scene

Procedure:

Begin class with gassho.

Motivation: What do you see in this picture? Can you tell me what you would be doing if you were in this picture? How would you feel in a place like this? This picture gives a very peaceful and relaxed feeling. It looks very calm and pleasing much like the weather is today — not too hot and not too cold. It is just right. If I gave you a book to read, where would you like to read it? At the North Pole where it is 50° below the freezing point? In the middle of a desert where it is 125°? Or under the shade of a tree where it is warm? Sure, you would like to read where it is just the right weather to be outdoors. You could read the book and not think about how cold or how hot you are. Then can really read and think about what you are reading.

Presentation: O-Higan is a service conducted during the spring equinox. At this time the weather is neither too warm nor too cold. It is just right. The days and the nights are the same in length. The number of hours we have daylight equals the number of hours we have no sunlight. Peace or harmony can be seen throughout the universe. We gather before the sacred shrine of Amida Buddha and think about or meditate on the peace we can see among all the things around us. Nature is at peace. We should then take advantage of this peaceful time to think about the peace and harmony in our inner lives — the peace we can make within us. Just like reading the book, you can best do your thinking when you are in a peaceful and comfortable place.

Note: Be sure that the children understand why we observe O-Higan.

MARCH

March 21 HIGAN E

Higan, meaning Other Shore, is a service conducted during the spring equinox. At this time the weather is neither too warm nor too cold; the days and nights are of equal length. Harmony pervades throughout the universe. Therefore, we gather before the sacred shrine of Amida Buddha and meditate on the harmony of nature and devote ourselves to the realization of this harmony in our inner lives.

HIGAN SERVICES

The Higan services are observed twice a year, i.e., once in spring and once in autumn. The word "higan" means "that shore" or "other shore" denoting Nirvana, the goal of Buddhism, as in contrast with "shigan" or "this shore" by which is implied the mundane world or the world of transmigration.

The Higan is an abbreviation of "to-higan" or "to reach that shore" which is the Chinese translation of the Sanskrit term "paramita." Although the concept of Higan is of Buddhist origin, its observance was originated in Japan with first recorded observance going back as far as 806 A.D. when Emperor Kanmu issued an edict ordering priests throughout the Empire to read the Kongo Hannya Kyo in the vernal and autumnal equinox weeks.

During these Higan weeks, when the days and nights are of equal length and the weather is neither too warm nor cold, Buddhists gathered before the shrine of Amida Buddha and listened to the teachings. As these unique observances became so popular among the people, they have eventually been made important entries in the Japanese calendar.

In 1878, the Meiji Government designated the two equinox days as national holidays. Among the existing national holidays of present-day Japan, only these two holidays have religious significance (as of January 1, 1969).

Why the equinox observance was expanded to seven days is explained by some as in accordance with the word of Buddha in the *Amida Kyo* or the *Smaller Sutra* that, "Those who call on the Buddha's Name for seven days will attain birth in the Pure Land."

However, as the name Higan denotes, this is the time to remind within each and every one of us the Bodhisattva practice of Six Paramitas or the Six Perfections, i.e., dana-paramita (offering, or charity), sila-paramita (observance of Buddhist precepts), ksanti-paramita (forbearance, perseverance), virya-paramita (effort, assiduity), dhyana-paramita (meditation), and prajna-paramita (wisdom). It is the Bodhisattva's practice to accomplish these paramitas and thereby cross the ocean of birth and death in the Six realms, and reach nirvana. The Six Realms are as follows: naraka-gati (hells), preta-gati (the realm of hungry ghosts), tiryagyonigati (the realm of animals), asura-gati (the realm of Asuras, or spirits of demons), manusya-gati (the human realm) and deva-gati (the heavenly realm). The number seven, therefore, symbolizes crossing over of the Six Realms.

In Shin Buddhism, our crossing over the Six Realms of birth and death is assured in the moment of Faith. Through the Vow Power of Amida Buddha we will be "carried" across from this shore to the other shore. The Nembutsu or the recitation of Buddha's Name is the expression of gratitude for the Buddha's Infinite Wisdom and Boundless Compassion, and at the same time our determination to fully do our best in contributing whatever we can to mankind. The Nembutsu is the realization of our true self, and from this realization, can we truly endeavor to do the best of our ability to accomplish the Six Paramitas.

HIGAN

Higan services are conducted twice a year in the spring and fall. These devotions last one week with the middle day of this seven day period being the spring and autumn equinoxes. Although it differs slightly from year to year, this middle day, known as "chunichi," is considered to be significant because the length of the day and night is equal. Generally, the "middle day" falls on about March 21 and September 22.

It is said that the first Higan service was conducted about 1200 years ago in the year 806 A.D.

The spring Higan, especially, is that time of the year when the sun begins to warm the cold winter soil. Grasses and trees, human beings and animals, and even insects feel the pulse of growth and experience the joy of living. Thus, there is an ancient saying, "Heat and cold last only until Higan."

Higan is an abbreviation of "to-higan"—literally meaning "to arrive at the other shore." In the original Sanskrit, it is "paramita" which has the same meaning. In Buddhism the world of illusion is referred to as this shore and the world of enlightenment is called the other shore. Transcending the life of birth and death and crossing over the sea of worldly passions means to reach the other shore of enlightenment. Buddhism, indeed, is dedicated to turning illusion into enlightenment and all the Buddhist practices are directed essentially to this noble purpose.

The various sutras teach the Six Paramitas as the way of reaching the other shore from this shore. The Six Paramitas consist of the following: Giving - action of love and compassion; Morality - actions based on Buddhist morality; Perseverance - perseverance in truth; Effort - directing one's efforts towards Buddhist practices; Concentration - pacifying our minds in meditation; Wisdom - gaining insight into truth.

Any person who faithfully practices the Six Paramitas can reach the other shore and attain enlightenment. However, the searching question is, "Can we really practice this difficult path of self-power?"

This is the most important question in our religious life. A flower blooming on a precipice may be desirable but may also be out of our reach. So too is a lofty ideal that is unattainable in the practical world. We live a life that is beset on the one hand by the busy hours of daily work and on the other by the pursuit of recreation in order to seek respite from the daily stress. Even the regular weekly worship at temple is a difficult practice to follow. How much more difficult is the complete practice of the Six Paramitas.

That is why Shinran Shonin taught the teaching of Nembutsu. According to Shinran Shonin, Amida Buddha manifested himself as Bodhisattva Dharmakara and meditated and practiced for infinite number of kalpas in order to fulfill all the virtues embodied in Namu Amida Butsu. Namu Amida Butsu is the crystallization of the practice of the Six Paramitas and all the other good practices. This name is given to all sentient beings as a gift.

Therefore, when we understand Amida's great labor of love that is inherent in the Nembutsu and awaken faith in Amida Buddha, the Six Paramitas and the other practices are transferred to us and become our spiritual treasure. We are thus given the true cause for our enlightenment in the pure Land through the grace of Amida Buddha. This religious experience is known as the awakening of faith.

When we truly realize Amida's infinite compassion, there arises within our hearts a natural expression of gratitude for salvation that is assured. Because of this feeling of gratitude, those, who follow Shinran Shonin, gave the Higan service a special name—"Sanbutsu E," meaning, "a service to praise the virtues of Amida Buddha." The Higan services, then, achieve a new significance as a dedication to the practice of Six Paramitas in gratitude.

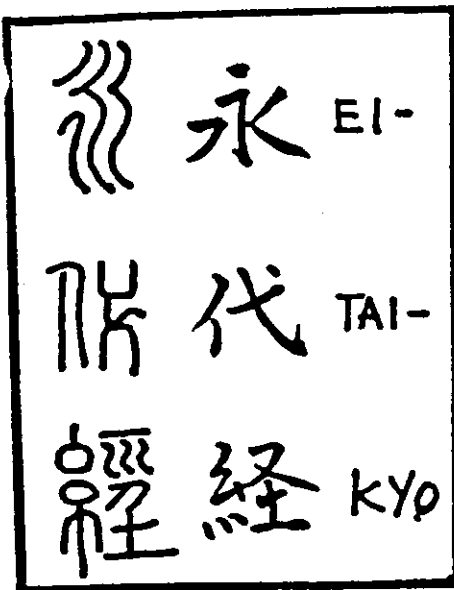
It would be most fitting to practice all the Six Paramitas in gratitude, but if that is impossible, at least we would like to practice the first—giving. The act of giving can be demonstrated in three ways—the gift of faith, the gift of material objects, and the gift of a peaceful mind. Furthermore, there are the seven gifts of the poor. These are gifts which anyone can give even without power and material possessions. The seven gifts are: gentle eyes, a smiling face, gentle words, a gentle attitude, a kind heart, sharing our possessions, cooperative living. In other words the giving of the seven gifts does not mean merely to show a smiling face but actually practice deeds based on warm-heartedness and compassion.

I believe that of all the countless words in the world, there is none so beautiful as “arigato—Thank you.” I once heard that a man travelled around the world with the words “Thank you,” written in various languages on a piece of paper pinned to his chest.

In this manner with a friendly smile on his face this man had a most enjoyable trip. Indeed, the expression “Thank you” warms the hearts of people and brightens the world.

“Thank you” is truly an expression that pours out from the lips of a person who awakens to Amida’s compassion and joyfully embraces faith in Amida Buddha.

As we observe the Higan services, let us gather around the shrine of Amida Buddha, morning and night, and express our deep feeling of “Thank you” in the recitation of the Nembutsu. With the Nembutsu as the moving power of our lives, let us start with the practice of the “seven gifts of the poor” and from there proceed to expand and deepen our spirit of thanksgiving to embrace all the practices of the Six Paramitas.



EITAIKYO SERVICE

(Perpetual Memorial Service)

Meaning of the Characters

In the word "Eitaikyo," the Chinese origin of the Japanese character "Ei" contains the ideograph for a river with many tributaries that flows on interminably. "Dai" pronounced "Tai" in this context means generations. It is composed of two radicals, meaning person and, meaning stake or post. It means a place or period in history. "Kyo" means a sutra or words of the Buddha, strung together by the threads of the Dharma as illustrated by the ideograph.

Thus "Eitai" means generations upon endless generations. We thus imagine a river that has flowed without stopping for countless centuries, sometimes rushing in torrents, sometimes trickling like a little creek but always flowing on and gaining momentum as little tributaries feed into it, finally reaching the mighty ocean.

Honoring the Pioneers

How appropriate that we should apply these characters to memorialize the pioneering ministers and laypersons and chant sutras to honor their revered memory. As we sit here we cannot help but identify ourselves with the faith, the dedication, the sacrifice and the vision of our forefathers who struggled against overwhelming odds to lay the foundation of the Nembutsu Dharma in America.

Physically, these pioneers are not with us anymore. But death is neither the end of life nor the termination of life's activity.

River of Life

The waters of the river all flow on to reach the wide expanse of the sea. In time the water evaporates and becomes clouds and when cumulus clouds are saturated with moisture, it is released to return to the surface of the earth as rain. The raindrops that fall from the skies sustain the life of all living things from the tallest redwoods to the tiniest insects that crawl on the ground. In various parts of the world the water in the river is dammed and when it is released through an opening to turn the huge turbines, electricity is produced to light a single light bulb in a small unknown farmhouse as well as all the lights in the Empire State Building. I believe that this analogy can be applied to the dynamic cycle of human life. The waters flowing to the sea may be called "oso eko", the going phase of the movement and the raindrops falling on the earth may be called "genso eko", the return to the place of its origin. Shinran Shonin said, just before his death, "When my life has run its course, I shall return to the Pure Land. But I shall return again and again to earth, just as the waves of Wakanoura Bay, keep coming back to the shore... When one of you rejoice in the Nembutsu, remember that there are two. And when two of you rejoice, remember that there are three, for Shinran will always be with you..."

Every human life is a source of the energy of compassion stored in the depth of its innate Buddhahood. It may be only a microscopic part of the Cosmic Compassion of the Universe, which we religiously call Amida Buddha, but once the part becomes immersed in the Cosmic Compassion, it flows in harmony with its mighty current.

Interaction in the Universe

However, human beings are so attached to the body that we think that the death of the body is the absolute end. In reality it is the beginning of a great interaction with the whole universe. When the body is buried in the ground, it becomes the soil in which other living things grow. Shinran Shonin said, "When I die, throw my body into the Kamo River so that the fish can feed on it." Thus he was actualizing his oneness with all life. When the body is cremated, the smoke rises to the heavens and the molecules of gas enter the atmosphere which all living things breathe. This is the ongoing influence of physical energy. But human life is more than physical energy; it is also moral and spiritual energy and it releases this energy upon the whole world. Often this intangible influence is difficult to perceive but nonetheless it continues to operate throughout the universe. How many times have we read the words of the Buddha and other masters and found an unending source of inspiration, comfort, strength and a practical guide to living. How many times have you picked up an old letter written by your long departed mother or father, wife or husband, and quietly contemplated its contents.

Cosmic Compassion

Just as the waters of the river return from the surface of the ocean to quench the thirsty surface of our planet, so does the human energy, now purified in Buddhahood, which we call the Pure Land, return to this world to continue its perpetual work of compassion. This is "Genso Eko." All too often, the Pure Land is considered to be a static place of eternal rest, far removed from the affairs of men. Contrary to this belief, the True Pure Land is where Cosmic Compassion is generated and regenerated perpetually. Professor Kenko Futaba, the renowned Buddhist historian and philosopher and President of the Kyoto Buddhist Women's College writes in his article entitled, "The Lost Pure Land":

That the Pure Land Teaching is stumbling over its concept of the Pure Land is an honest assessment of its present condition. Because this condition has alienated the Jodo Teaching from modern life, it has made it extremely difficult for the Jodo teachers to formulate a viable social doctrine. Moreover, it has contributed to the loss of the Kyodan's (Sangha's) meaning for its existence in the modern society...

Seeking the Pure Land means to reject this bonno-ridden life of greed, anger and folly. A Sangha that has forgotten all about seeking the Pure Land, has also forgotten how to reject this life. Such a Sangha has not awakened to its own bonno and blindly affirms the bonno-ridden life. Unless the Sangha rejects this ego-centered life, how can it possibly work to improve the world? Even if human effort to do our best to transform evil into good is empty, finite, relative and incomplete, a genuine human effort is the only proof of the reality of the Pure Land. To reawaken a true desire for the realization of the ideals of the Pure Land in history and in the world is the challenge before modern Pure Land followers.

Rededication in Nembutsu

These are stirring words, indeed. In taking the words of this teacher of the Dharma to heart, we must sensitize our optic and auditory nerves with the Light of Cosmic Wisdom so that we can actually see the contributions made by our forefathers and hear their voices clearly. Therefore, the Eitai-kyo Service is not only a formality to honor those who have preceded us but also a rededication to weld their past achievements with our present accomplishments and forge them into our future BCA world vision in the hot flame of our Nembutsu faith. We must with our whole being join the power of Cosmic Compassion to enlighten ourselves and our Sangha and work throughout all eternity, for that is what "EITAI" means, for the betterment of the world and humankind. This is the Unbounded Way of the Nembutsu so powerfully demonstrated by Shinran Shonin.

Message presented by Rev. Kenryu T. Tsuji at the Eitai-kyo Service on February 21, 1988, in Seattle, Washington, for the BCA National Council Meeting.

BODHI DAY

(Jodo E)

The number eight (8) when thought of in Buddhism brings to our minds April 8th or Hanamatsuri, the day on which Siddhartha Gautama, who was to become the historical Sakyamuni Buddha was born. The eighth is also significant because it was on December 8th that Gautama was "born" as Sakyamuni Buddha. It was while sitting in meditation beneath a Pippala tree (*Ficus religiosa*) that Gautama made a firm resolution to not move from his sitting position until he attained Enlightenment. Since Enlightenment is known as Bodhi in Sanskrit, December 8 is called Bodhi Day and the Pippala tree is sometimes referred to as Bodhi tree.

The word Buddha means "the Enlightened" or "the Enlightened One". Buddhism teaches that all things have Buddha-nature or the potentiality to become Buddhas. Yet to our knowledge there has been no one outside of Gautama in the 2,500 plus years of Buddhism to have attained the state of Enlightenment or Buddhahood.

A Buddha is one who has realized the Universal Truth and can see the true nature of all existence and phenomena as they are. Until this state has been reached or attained, we are leading a blind life filled with suffering and sorrow.

In reading the biography of many of the more well-known followers of Buddhism, especially in Jodo Shinshu, it is possible to see that it was not at an early age that they were firmly established in their Faith in Buddhism. Gautama was twenty-nine years old when he set out in his search for the Truth. Among the Seven Masters or Patriarchs of Jodo Shinshu, Doran or T'an-luan became converted to the Pure Land teaching when he was about fifty-two, Doshaku or Tao-ch'o when he was forty-eight years old, and Genku or Honen Shonin was forty-three years old. Although Shinran Shonin was nine years old when he entered the priesthood at Shoren-in, he practiced on Mt. Hiei for twenty years before he realized that the self-power practice was not the way in which he could attain Enlightenment. At the age of twenty-nine, Shinran joined Honen Shonin who taught that the essential practice for Birth in the Pure Land is Nembutsu. Shinran in developing the Nembutsu thought, placed a special emphasis on Faith. According to Shinran, Faith is the cause for Birth and the Nembutsu is the accompaniment of Faith and the expression of innermost gratitude.

We should be most grateful that as Sakyamuni Buddha, He did not keep the reason for His seeking Enlightenment as well as His teaching a secret. Realizing the universal Truth or the nature of all existence, He sought to spread the teaching which would enable human beings to cross over the ocean of birth and death, because He attained the Wisdom and Compassion of a Buddha. We as Buddhists should look upon December 8th as the day on which an infinite number of human beings were begun to be saved as the number eight laid on its sides symbolizes infinity.

JUNE-JULY

June-July Obon

An ancient legend tells us that during the time of the Buddha, one of the disciples, Moggallana, saw with his superhuman sight the agony of his mother as she suffered in the lowest hell. When this fact was brought to the attention of the Blessed One, his heart was moved to great compassion. Through the grace of his all embracing compassion the woman was saved. Moggallana and the other disciples clapped their hands in joy. The legend says this was the origin of the Bon odori. Bon, therefore, being an occasion for rejoicing in the enlightenment offered by the Buddha, is often referred to as the "Gathering of Joy."

OBON

Meaning of the Term "Obon"

The Japanese term "Obon" is an abbreviation of "Ura bon" which in turn is the phonetic translation of the Sanskrit terms "Ullambana" and "Ullampana." According to "Tetsugaku Daijiten" (Dictionary of Philosophical Terms - Iwanami Bunko) the root form of "Ullambana" is "Avalambana" which literally means to be "hung upside down." It denotes extreme pain and suffering, both physically and spiritually. "Urabon" is also a translation of the term "Ullampana" meaning salvation or relief. In conclusion, "Obon" then means relief or salvation from extreme pain or suffering.

Origin of Obon

The origin of "Obon" stems from the "Ullambana Sutra." In this very short sutra, the now well know story of Mokuren Sonja (Maudgalyayana) is related. According to the "Ullambana Sutra" Mokuren Sonja, one of the ten great disciples of the Buddha, saw with his superhuman sight the agony of his beloved mother as she suffered in the "Hell of Hunger" (Gaki-do). Mokuren Sonja was stunned to see his once beautiful mother so emaciated and reduced to a condition of being literally skin and bones. His now witchlike mother's anguished cries for food and water felt like piercing arrows of icicles in Mokuren's heart which sent a cold fear of guilt coursing through his entire being. With an indescribable feeling of guilt, pity and compassion, Mokuren Sonja placed some food in a "Bon" or bowl and offered it to his mother, who greedily grasped the bowl and immediately tried to devour its contents. Unfortunately the food burst into flames and she could not eat it. The astonished son hurried to Sakyamuni Buddha to request His aid in saving his mother. The Buddha then stated as follows:

Dear Mokuren, your mother's sin (selfishness) was so great that you alone will not be able to save her. Only the combined powers of your fellow monks of the ten quarters will be able to accomplish this feat. on July 15th, your fellow monks will end their 90 days of training and studies. Make an offering of Dana (in this case food) to these monks for the sake of your mother and all other parents for the past seven generations.

Mokuren did as taught by the Buddha. The Buddha then commanded his disciples to commence the worship service. After the service as the monks accepted the food offered by Mokuren, they saw his mother and all other beings saved from the agonies of Hell. Great was the joy of all present. Mokuren thanked the Buddha and his fellow monks and posed his question of the Buddha.

Would it be possible for any Buddhist in the future generations to save his parents and others by observing "Ullambana"? The Buddha replied, "Yes, "Ullambana" should be held on July 15th (lunar calendar) and offerings should be made to the Tree Treasures. The merits of this dana and services shall enable their parents, if still alive, to enjoy health, happiness and longevity in life; if deceased, for seven generations back they shall be saved from the agonies of hell and be reborn into the human world and heaven.

This last passage of the Ullambana Sutra is then the direct origin of the Obon Services.

Note: Some Buddhist scholars claim that Ullambana Sutra was written in China rather than in India. Hence, Obon probably originated in China.

History of Obon

In India, even before the advent of Buddhism, ancestor worship was generally practiced by the people. The early Indians believed that those who departed without any children would suffer the agonies of Hell and therefore, the Brahmans returned to their homes after training period was over, married, and produced offsprings and trained them to worship their ancestors. It is safe to assume that this belief did influence the early Buddhists. The Buddhist disciples, on the other hand, were not permitted to get married like their Hindu counterparts and without any children to do as Mokuren did, these Buddhist disciples were doomed to suffer the agonies of Hell. Perhaps as a means of salvation from this fate the early Buddhists originated the "Ullambana Service" which was held on the last day of their training period (July 15th) and taught the lay members to make offerings to the Three Treasures and hold a worship service.

Note: The above information is contained in the Gen no ongi.

In the Hoonjirin Vol. 77 it states that King Prasenajit and others made 500 bowls of gold and silver and placed foods of various tastes and offered it to the Buddha and His disciples.

In China in 538 A.D. Obon services were first observed on July 15th during the reign of Emperor Butei (This information is contained in the Busso so toki, Vol. 37) In China it seems almost certain that Obon service was observed not only by the ruling class but also by the common people (Ganshi Kakun). July 15 was sometimes referred to as "Chugen" and food offerings were made to the spirits of the dead.

In Japan, according to Nihonshoki during the reign of Emperor Suiko (600-620 A.D.), Obon Service was held in the palaces and temples of the nobility on April 8th and July 15th. During the reign of Emperor Saimyo, Obon Service was held at the Asuka Temple in Nara during the month of July. During the Heian period (900-1200), Obon was widely observed by the masses. Until this time it was only among the upper class that Obon services were held. In the Muromachi era (1400-1430), the Nembutsu Odori (dance) was first introduced during the service. Prior to this, as far as I could check there are no records, of dances being performed during the Obon Service. The popular legend that Mokuren Sonja and the other disciples clapped their hands and began dancing in joy and that this is the origin of the Bon Dance is now refuted by scholars. In the "Ullambana Sutra" it simply states that Mokuren sonja cried in joy.

Rituals and Customs

The rituals and customs among the various Buddhist denominations differ only slightly, with the exception of our denomination. Let me briefly explain the customs among the other sects.

Obon is unusually observed from July 13 to 15. July 13th is called "Mukae Bon" or "Welcoming Day." The "souls" of the deceased members are welcomed back by the family. A "Shoryo Dana" (shelf for the souls") is prepared for the returning souls. "Mukae Dango" (welcoming rice cake), noodles, vegetables and fruits are placed on this shelf and paper

lanterns complete the decorations. The members of the family then go to their family cemetery which is again gaily decorated with flowers, food and lanterns. Also horses and bullocks of cucumbers and egg plants with legs of dried grass stems are placed before the tombstones for the "spirits" to mount on. Ministers are invited to perform services both at the home and at the cemetery. July 15th is known as the "Okuri Bon" or farewell day. "Okuri dango" and other foods are offered on this last day. "Shoryo bune" or miniature boats are built and filled with various foods and lighted candle and set adrift on rivers and lakes. It is said that these boats will reach the other shore and until next Obon the "spirits" will not go hungry or be lonesome. During these three nights, memorial services are held for the deceased and young and old participate in the Bon dances held around the "yagura" or high platform.

In our Shinshu denomination we do not have elaborate preparations as mentioned above. Both the decoration and the offerings are done simply and a memorial service is held on August 15th. At "Honzan," Obon is oftentimes called "Kangi E" or "Gathering of Joy." At the various temples, services are held from July 15th to August 15th. It is held on August 15th at "Honzan" at our mother church in Kyoto because August 15th is the last day of the "Summer Seminar" or "Kaki ango" and it coincides with July 15th, the last day of studies and training for the Buddha's disciples. During the time of Myonjo Shonin an edict was issued, officially proclaiming that "Obon" shall henceforth be known as "Kangi E" (Gathering of Joy). The reasons advanced for this change in terminology were as follows:

1. The Shinshu interpretation of "Obon" services is drastically different from those of other Buddhist sects and to avoid any misunderstanding among the lay membership on this matter, the title of this service was changed to "Kangi E."
2. In the "Ullambana Sutra" the following words are found; such as "Buddha's Day of Joy," "To do in joy," etc. Certainly it was a day of joy for Mokuren Sonja and the other disciples as they were instrumental in the salvation of Mokuren's mother and other beings. Therefore, despite the fact that "Obon" is a memorial service, a festive mood rather than sorrow prevades the gathering. Hence, "Kangi E" would be an appropriate title for this service.
3. We feel that the "Kangi" (Joy) as it appears in the "Ullambana Sutra" should be nurtured and developed to a state where it will be synonymous with the "Shinjin Kangi" of the 18th Vow. (Blissfully trust in me with the most sincere mind). It is for this purpose that we observe and participate in the "Obon" service.

Obon Dance (Bon Odori)

As mentioned previously, Bon Dance seems to have originated during the Muromachi period (1400-1430) as numerous passages on this matter appear in a book known as "Kanmongoki." It started with a simple form of dancing known as "Nembutsu hayashi mono." To this simple form of dancing, masks denoting devils and saints were used by the early dancers. As the years went by, "Ise Odori" and other Shinto dances were incorporated (Mikawaki). Thus, it developed into what we have today. There are essentially two methods of dancing Bon Dance. These are dancing in a circle around the "yagura" or platform as we do today and dancing while marching in a straight line. In certain districts in Japan, on July 13th, the dancers would gather at the village cemetery and after a graveside service they would dance back to the temple. The dancers would be preceded by a group holding lighted lanterns. This is called the "Mukae Odori" or welcoming dance. It was to welcome the "souls" of the deceased to this festive occasion. Upon reaching the temple, the dancers danced in a circle around the "yagura" to the accompaniment of drums and flutes. This dance was interpreted as a form of entertainment for the souls." Again on July 15th, "Okuri Odori" or farewell dance commenced from the temple to the cemetery. Usually the "Awa Odori" of Tokushima prefecture was used for the "Mukae and Okuri Odoris."