



JIKŌJI

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Holidays

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Holidays

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New Year's Day Service (Shusho-e) - January 1

This is a gathering to reflect upon and learn from past mistakes, and with renewed resolution, endeavor to live a life in the Nembutsu.

Hoonko (Memorial Honoring Shinran Shonin) - January 16

As the most important Jodo Shinshu observance, this is the date chosen to commemorate Shinran Shonin's passing. Traditionally, seven days of services are conducted at Honzan, culminating on January 16. During that period, numerous activities are held, recalling the legacy that the Founder has left. This gives practitioners a chance to "hear the light" through listening to sermons, talks, ritual, and sangha fellowship. Generally, temples conduct their own Hoonko observances in the fall so that members can attend the services at Honzan.

Nirvana Day (Nehan-e) - February 15

Although Sakyamuni Buddha had already attained liberation under the Bodhi tree long before his death, this is the day he passed into complete Nirvana, leaving his earthly form behind. Jodo Shinshu followers revere Sakyamuni Buddha because he is the manifestation of Amida Buddha on this earth, so this is an opportunity to show gratitude for the noble teachings that were communicated to humanity through him.

Spring and Autumn Equinox (Higan-e) - March 21 and September 23

"Higan" means "the other shore." It is an abbreviation for "*to higan*" meaning "reaching the other shore (of nirvana)." Conducted during the vernal and autumnal equinoxes when days and nights are of equal length, it is a service of reflection when

practicers should meditate on the harmony of nature and devote themselves to the realization of this harmony in our inner lives. During the week-long observances, emphasis is placed on observance of the Six Paramitas (precepts) which lead to "the other shore," *Paramita* is the Sanskrit for "gone to other shore."

Birthday of the Buddha (Kambutsu-e/Hanamatsuri) - April 8

Hanamatsuri, or "Flower Festival," is held to commemorate the birth of Siddhartha Gautama in Lumbini Garden. He was the manifestation of Amida, the Buddha of Infinite Higher Wisdom and Compassion. During the service, a flower shrine known as *hanamido*, is set up in front of the main altar as a symbol of Lumbini Garden. In this shrine is placed a statuette of the infant Buddha, pointing his right hand toward the heavens and his left hand towards the earth. The sangha offers flowers and pours sweet tea over the image. *Kambutsu* is the rite of "bathing the body of the Buddha." This simplified reenactment of the Buddha's birth signifies glory and joy that filled the world at this event.

Birthday of Shinran Shonin (Gotan-e) - May 21

This is the celebration of Shinran Shonin's birth. In addition to special services, various events such as gagaku, noh, and rakugo performances (traditional entertainment), and tea ceremony, are held at Honzan and the affiliated schools.

Obon (Kangi-e/Ullambana-gathering) - July or August 15

The origins of Obon can be traced to the *Ullambana Sutra*, which relates the story of Mahamaudgalyayana (Mogallana in Pali), the most gifted of Sakyamuni Buddha's disciples in the area of

extraordinary sense perceptions. The story teaches the importance of hearing the Buddha's teaching and observing the precepts. In realizing the compassion of the Buddha, Mahamaudgalyayana was so overjoyed that he clapped his hands and danced about. This is said to have been the beginning of the Bon Odori (traditional Japanese dances on Obon Day).

Obon, therefore, being an occasion for rejoicing in the awakening offered by the Buddha, is an opportunity to express gratitude not only to ancestors, but to all who have passed on. Therefore, it is often referred to as *Kangi-e*, "Gathering of Joy."

Perpetual Memorial Service (Eitai-kyo) - usually in November

The Perpetual Memorial Service, or *Eitai-kyo*, is a Japanese Buddhist observance. It is a memorial service to pay tribute to predecessors. This service is dedicated to all those who lived and died as Buddhists in due respect of their contribution to the growth of the local sangha. It is an opportunity to express gratitude to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha.

Bodhi Day (Jodo-e) - December 8

This is the day to commemorate Sakyamuni Buddha's attainment of Awakening. According to legend, the historic event took place on December 8, as the first faint light of day began to glow in the eastern sky. By his example, Sakyamuni demonstrated that it was possible for man to become a Buddha - a fully Awakened Person. All human beings, therefore, are in possession of this potentiality - Buddha-Nature - which, when awakened and cultivated, enables them to achieve supreme wisdom and compassion. This day signifies the dawn of humanity's universal emancipation from suffering and unawareness.

Year End Service (Joya-e) - December 31

This service is held at all temples on New Year's Eve to express gratitude for the past year and to reflect on the interdependency of all life, and on all things that have made it possible for one to live through the year.

Though not an activity at Honzan, temples with a large bell called bonsho will toll the bell 108 times on New Year's Eve. This is called *joya no kane* or "bell of the last night." It is the symbolic ringing away of the 108 passions that afflict human beings and bind them to the world of delusion. It is a reminder of the need to free oneself from the entanglements of self-centeredness as one faces the New Year. There is no way to know whether the coming year will be fortunate or unfortunate, but in the Nembutsu, whichever it is, everything will be all right.