

prajna

REMEMBERING THE DEAD

For us, remembering the dead is a major religious activity. For the past 2554 years, Buddhists have been remembering the historical Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and death.

For our founder Shinran Shonin, this is the 750th anniversary of his death. His birth and death anniversaries are observed yearly in January and May. This acknowledgement in ritual form is a testament to their remarkable religious awakening and teaching. On a personal level too, we remember our relatives and

loved ones in a ritual form called the "Hōji - dharma affair". This is a private memorial service held in memory of a deceased family member. At Senshin, it consists of a 30 minute service and sermon usually followed by the family going out for a meal together. In Jodoshinshu tradition in America, this hoji is observed on the 7th day after death, the 49th day after death, 1st cycle, 3rd cycle, 7th cycle, 13th cycle, 17th cycle, 25th cycle, 33rd cycle, 50th cycle, and 100th cycle. The translation "cycle": is preferred over the term "year" since Japanese Buddhist tradition counts from "1" instead of "0". That is to say, the day of death called "meinichi" is "one"; the next year is the first cycle memorial, but by count is two, so that the following year is the third cycle memorial. In other words, the 3rd cycle memorial is in the second year by American count, the 7th cycle is in the 6th year by American count, etc.



The Hoji is an occasion for the extended family and sometimes invited close friends of the deceased to gather together for a ritual memorial service and eating together in the deceased's memory. This is done over a period of 99 years - in other words for the observing person's lifetime. Throughout a practicing Buddhist's life, one observes death days as one observes birthdays. The death of one thing gives rise to a new thing, and the birth of one thing begins its journey to death. In a family, it is an endless and interconnected chain of birthdeath, moment by moment, second by second. We are the sum total of our past connections in every succeeding moment, from beginningless past to endless future. Why wouldn't you have a 100th cycle memorial service if you could?

For Buddhists, death is a great subject, full of life, sorrow, joy, and great humor. Though my death is as full of fear and trembling as my life, it is still the only essential question worth considering. Way beyond the philosophy or psychology of it, I have seen more gardeners, seamstresses, bank clerks, school secretaries, teachers, and coaches deal with death as remarkably as they lived their lives - fully and deeply, leaving nothing out, rejecting nothing. And all of this with a minimum of bombast and fanfare. They got what Nembutsu was all about.

Orei moshiagemasu
Gassho, Masao Kodani

