the same lives that have helped to enrichen our lives. The memorial service becomes a celebration of not just the lives of the past, but the lives of the present as well. It also becomes another opportunity to hear the Dharma and in particular the calling voice of Namo Amida Butsu. It is the voice that those we are remembering help us to hear.

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## **Southern District Temples**

- Arizona Buddhist Temple
- Buddhist Church of Santa Barbara
- Buddhist Temple of San Diego
- · Gardena Buddhist Church
- Los Angeles Hompa Hongwanji Buddhist Temple
- Orange County Buddhist Church
- Oxnard Buddhist Temple
- Pasadena Buddhist Temple
- San Fernando Valley Hongwanji Buddhist Temple
- Senshin Buddhist Temple
- Venice Hongwanji Buddhist Temple
- Vista Buddhist Temple
- West Los Angeles Buddhist Temple



## **Buddhist Churches of America**

http://buddhistchurchesofamerica.org



# Memorial Service Observances



By Rev. John Iwohara Gardena Buddhist Church

#### Introduction

Death is a topic we prefer to avoid. It is, however, according to Jodo Shinshu "the single most important matter" that we need to resolve in our lives. To better understand the relationship death has with our lives, and through this understanding help us to transcend death and better live our lives, Jodo Shinshu observes various memorial services following the funeral service.

Through these memorial services we are asked and then given the answer to the question, "How is a life celebrated?" How is this question answered in our daily lives? Must we wait until a person is no longer with us?

Put another way, when do we feel most like celebrating? When do we feel celebrated? What do we feel when we celebrate? In answering these questions we discover that we tend to celebrate accomplishments such as anniversaries and graduations. These are the times when we feel like saying, "I did it!" but when do we actually celebrate life? Every day is special and unique. Every day, every moment is worthy of its own celebration. Unfortunately, we tend not to do this because we have learned to take these moments for granted. When we stop taking life and all of its moments for granted, that is when we feel appreciation and gratitude; it is when we feel joy. When we fear or ignore death we do not allow ourselves to fully accept and receive the totality of life. It is something that we refuse to look at and because of that we never allow ourselves to see the whole picture.

Through the memorial service we are helped to understand the impermanent nature of our physical existence, to examine how it is the single most important matter in our lives. Through this we understand how precious and rare life really is. We take the time to see how many lives—those of the past, present and future—support this existence of ours: the past lays the

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The memorial services help us to celebrate life by helping us to appreciate and honor life. It helps us to say, "Thank you."

It helps us to say,
"Namo Amida Butsu."

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foundation, the present is what is shared, and the future continues to give meaning to the past and present. The memorial services help us to celebrate life by helping us to appreciate and honor life. It helps us to say, "Thank you." It helps us to say, "Namo Amida Butsu."

#### **The Observances**

#### Chuin: Seven Day (Forty-Nine Day) Services

Following the funeral service, the 49 day services or the chuin (中陰) can be held. In other Buddhist traditions it is often taught that it takes 49 days for the karma of the deceased to settle before moving onto the next realm of existence. Because Jodo Shinshu teaches that the karmic condition for rebirth in the Pure Land is established in this lifetime there is no need to try to create merit during this intermediate period of time. Instead, the chuin services are held and prepared for us as an opportunity to hear about the Vow of Amida Buddha that allows us to transcend this unresolved aspect of life.

Although seven separate services for the chuin can be

held, at BCA temples it is common practice to hold the first seventh day (shonanoka) and the seventh, seventh day or 49th day (shijuukunichi) service.

#### Nenki: Annual Memorial Services

The observance of "cyclical" memorial services comes from both Buddhist and Confucian influences. Although Buddhists did have a custom of observing annual memorial events, called meinichi (命日), the Confucian schools taught that one should not think of anything other than one's late parent on their date of death or the kijitsu (忌日). Combining these two customs resulted in the nenki (年忌) observances. Typically, these special observances are held on the 100th day, the first "anniversary" or isshuuki (一周 忌), the third "cycle" or sankaiki (三回忌), the seventh cycle or nanakaiki (七回忌), the thirteenth cycle or juusankaiki (十三回忌), the seventeenth cycle or juunanakaiki (十七回忌), the 25th cycle or nijuugokaiki (二十五回忌), the thirty-third cycle or sanjuusankaiki (三十三回忌), the fiftieth cycle or gojuukaiki (五十回 忌), and then in 50 year intervals. The services called kaiki (回忌) are observed in the "previous" year. In other words if the year of death is 2000, then the isshuuki is held in 2001, and the sankaiki in 2002. This style of counting is similar to how we count centuries.

#### **Afterword**

Through the memorial services we discover that those we are remembering, those whose lives we continue to celebrate, through helping us to approach, hear and receive the Dharma as expressed by the Nenbutsu—Namo Amida Butsu—help us to appreciate the depth and rarity of life. It is not something to take for granted. When we do not take our lives for granted, that is when we become mindful of how much we receive each and every moment of our lives. The lives of those we are remembering are also