



We pray that every one of you, having received this food of ours, offers it in turn to all the buddhas, holy ones, and sentient beings throughout all realms of empty space, that all may be satisfied. We also pray that your bodies, conveyed by this dharani-food, may leave suffering behind and gain liberation; that you may attain the joy of birth in heavens; that you may, in accordance with your wishes, be delivered to one of the pure lands in the ten directions; that you may give rise to the thought of awakening, practice the path to awakening, and in the future become buddhas; that you may never backslide; and that whoever first attains the way may vow to lead the others to liberation as well. We also pray that day and night without cease you shall protect us and completely answer our prayers. May the merit generated by giving this food be dedicated to sentient beings of the dharma realm, so that those various beings may exist in equality, and together dedicate these blessings to the dharma realm of suchness, to supreme awakening, and to omniscience, with the prayer that together with all sentient beings we may quickly attain buddhahood and not seek any other rewards. May all sentient beings of the dharma realms, conveyed by this rite, swiftly attain buddhahood.



Conclusion

Sejiki-e is conducted for the benefit of myriad spirits, which may then be extended to our families and our loved ones. And, through such rituals, we rediscover the importance of our connections with all life and significance of the teachings of inter-origination. For such reasons, *Sejiki-e* is an extremely important ritual for Buddhists to foster the richness of our religion and spirituality.



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Food Offerings to the Hungry Ghosts

施食会





Introduction

Sejiki rituals are conducted in Soto Zen temples on a daily basis throughout the year, but large, public rituals are often held close to or during *Obon* (a Japanese Buddhist event to commemorate our ancestors and all sentient beings in summer). These are referred to as “*Sejiki-e*” meaning “Food Offering Assembly”.

From ancient times Buddhists have recognized the importance of working for the liberation of all beings. One famous story involving Ananda, Shakyamuni Buddha’s cousin and closest attendant, teaches us about the connection between our own lives and the lives of other beings.

In this story, Ananda is challenged by an other-worldly being to face his own karma by attending to the suffering of others. The guidance he receives from the Buddha has been handed down to us today as the practice of *Sejiki*. It teaches us the true spirit of generosity and how it can fundamentally orient our lives.



Origin Story

While dwelling outside of Kapilavastu Castle at Nyagrodha Park the Buddha’s close attendant, Ananda, was deep in meditation. Late at night a horrifying vision appeared before him, a being with a bulging stomach, needle thin neck, wiry hair, long nails and fire puffing from his mouth. It was the king of the Hungry Ghosts, “*Enku*”



(Blazing Mouth). He announced that Ananda would lose his life after three days. Afraid, Ananda asked *Enku* why it should be that he would die so soon.

Enku told him it was due to his evil karma. Ananda knew that karma could not be eradicated, but *Enku* went on to say that there was one way he could meet his karma and avoid the awful results. He would have to feed the whole assembly of countless hungry ghosts and make offerings to the holy ones and the Three Treasures. Doing this his life would be extended and *Enku* would drop his form as a hungry ghost and be reborn in heaven. After explaining this possibility, *Enku* disappeared.

Ananda hurried to find the Buddha. He bowed at his feet and told the Honored One about his encounter with *Enku*. He then asked the Buddha if there was any way that he could gather enough

food to make such a grand offering. The Buddha told Ananda not to worry, that he should believe in and enact a method that he had learned in the past from Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva. The method did not involve gathering a huge quantity of food, it involved revealing and relying on the universal impact of every act of generosity, large or small. He then taught Ananda about this method and they practiced together with the whole assembly of monks and nuns and thus Ananda’s life and that of the suffering hungry ghosts were saved.



Gate of Sweet Nectar, *Kanromon*

The ritual the Buddha taught Ananda of making food offerings at that time is explained and encoded in the sutra called “Gate of Sweet Nectar”. It contains the core teaching on the practice of making offerings and a series of incantations that have been handed down from the Buddha. It is chanted at *Sejiki-e* and forms the basis of the ritual.

Giving rise to the thought of awakening, we present a vessel of pure food, offering it to all the hungry ghosts in every country of the innumerable lands in the dharma realm throughout all space in the ten directions. Please come and gather here, you departed long ago, and all spirits, from earth gods of mountains and rivers to demons and wraiths of barren wastes. Taking pity on you all, with this food we feed you now.