



The Present-day Form of Kuyō

Grandparents coming to the temple for services, families and friends gathering for a memorial ceremony, laying flowers at a gravesite, or putting their hands together in *gassho* and placing water and incense at the altar – these practices all share the precious spirit of Buddhist offerings that have been transmitted from ancient India to the present day here in North America.

We would like to pass this still-cherished tradition from the heart of Buddhism on to the next generation to uphold.



Offerings placed on the temple altar

Kuyō

供養



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What is the Meaning of Kuyō?

The Japanese word *kuyō* is a translation of the Sanskrit words *puja* or *pujana*, which means “to make heartfelt offerings of incense, flowers, candles, food” and so on to buddhas and bodhisattvas, as well as to the celestial gods who protect Buddhism. The Sanskrit word *paricariya*, which means “to give service to or to attend on someone with a respectful feeling”, is also translated as *kuyō* in Japanese.

The essential meaning of the word is an expression of respect and worship – in words, body, or mind – toward something of great importance. Long ago, offerings (*kuyō*) were also made with water, light, clothing, medicine, and entertainment, as well as simply putting one’s hands together in *gassho*. Stupas, reliquary shrines, Buddhist statues, buildings, and land were also donated as offerings.

Today, offerings of flowers, food, candles, and incense are made and priests are asked to read sutras and give Dharma talks. *Kuyō* is the form of offerings that demonstrate a feeling of respect and worship toward the Buddha’s Dharma.



Tsuizen Kuyō

In present-day Japan, the word *kuyō*, an abbreviation of the phrase *tsuizen kuyō*, refers to any offerings made to a departed person. In this case, it is often translated into English as “memorial service.”

“*Tsuizen*” of *tsuizen kuyō* means “to later-practice-good deeds” for the peace and prosperity of the departed person by someone related to that person. The practice originated in India where seven such offerings were made over the first 49 days after a person passed away, one every seven days.



Offering incense at a memorial service

When Buddhism was eventually transmitted to China, the Indian practice of *puja* merged with the Chinese custom of ancestor worship to form the practice of periodic memorial services (*nenkaiki*) that we observe today: the one hundredth day ceremony, first anniversary, and third anniversary. In Japan, this was extended to the seventh, thirteenth, seventeenth, thirty-third, fiftieth anniversaries and so forth.

The third anniversary memorial service takes place two years after death, the seventh anniversary memorial service takes place six years after death, and so on.

Periodic Memorial Services	
49th day service	49 days after death
100th day service	100 days
1st anniversary	1 year
3rd	2 years
7th	6 years
13th	12 years
17th	16 years
23rd	22 years
27th	26 years
33rd	32 years
37th	36 years
50th	49 years
Every fiftieth year thereafter	

The anniversary years noted above for these memorial services may differ according to region and temple.