



While traveling, he sensed that his death was approaching. Surrounded by his followers, he left a final teaching, "After my death, you must rely upon yourselves, continuing to cast the light of my teachings on the darkness of delusion." Shakyamuni Buddha encouraged his disciples to stand firmly on their own feet as they live out

the life of Dharma. The legend says he then passed away peacefully at Kushinagara leaving a final word that all existence is subject to change and thus everyone should strive to endeavor to realize their true nature. On the Day of Buddha's Entry into Perfect Nirvana, a ceremony to commemorate his virtue is held, at which time a painting depicting the scene of his passing (*Nehan-zu*) is displayed.

The Three Special Days of Shakyamuni Buddha are an important way to express our gratitude for the blessings we receive from the Buddha we enjoy today. Through these three commemorations of the Buddha's life, we celebrate his birth, praise his enlightenment, and commemorate his passing. The teachings of the Buddha have been passed down generation to generation. In this way, we continue to renew our gratitude for the connection that transcends 2500 years and ties our life today with the Buddha.



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THE BUDDHIST SERVICE SERIES No.8

The Three Special Days of Shakyamuni Buddha

三仏忌



The Three Special Days of Shakyamuni Buddha (*Sanbukki*) refer to the three important occasions in his life.

Soto Zen Buddhist temples observe:

April 8th

The Day of Buddha's Birth (*Gōtan-e*), also known as Baby Buddha's Bathing Ceremony (*Kanbutsu-e*) or Flower festival (*Hanamatsuri*);

December 8th

The Day of Buddha's enlightenment (*Jodo-e*)

February 15th

The Day of Buddha's Entry into Perfect Nirvana (*Nehan-e*) when Buddha passed away.

Buddha's Birthday, Gōtan-e

Shakyamuni Buddha is believed to have been born on April 8th approximately 2,500 years ago. The celebration of his birth is also called the "Flower Festival" since he was born near the flower garden of Lumbini in Nepal, close to the Indian border.

The legend says that following his birth, Shakyamuni Buddha took seven steps, pointed to heaven with his right hand and to the earth with his left, and said, "Above and below the heavens, I alone am the honored one." Then, the Dragon King brought down a rain of sweet nectar to celebrate the birth. Although this may sound like Shakyamuni Buddha is only praising himself, it is actually a declaration that every sentient being has the same indispensable life as the Buddha, thus expressing the Buddhist view of the value of all beings.



The Flower Festival is celebrated at most Buddhist temples and schools where a small shrine decorated with flowers (*Hanamido*) is displayed which depicts the Buddha's birthplace of Lumbini Garden. The birth of the Buddha is celebrated by pouring sweet tea (representing the rain of sweet nectar) on the statue of the Baby Buddha, placed in the center of the shrine, pointing to heaven and earth with his fingers.

Buddha's Enlightenment Day, Jōdō-e

This is a Buddhist event held each year on December 8th, the day on which Shakyamuni Buddha attained enlightenment. After Shakyamuni Buddha renounced the world by abandoning the title of a prince, he did ascetic practice for six years, but he could not truly attain peace. Thus, he finally sat zazen under the Bodhi tree leaving behind asceticism and allowing his body to heal. Sitting upright under the Bodhi tree day and night, before the dawn of the eighth day, as he looked to the Eastern sky, he saw the

morning star. Coming to great awakening, he exclaimed "I, all beings and great earth attain to the way together at the same time." The most important matter of all for Shakyamuni Buddha was how to resolve the fundamental suffering of life caused by birth, aging, illness, and death. He attained deep insight into the truth that these sufferings are the products of our mind and no one can avoid encountering them. Therefore, we can be freed from our suffering by accepting the truth that all things are beyond our wishes and desires.



In the Soto Zen school, Zen temples and centers have an intensive practice period called "*Rohatsu Sesshin*" from December 1st through 8th to praise and practice the Buddha's enlightenment.

Nirvana, Nehan-e

Buddha's Entry into Perfect Nirvana is a Buddhist observance to commemorate and express gratitude to the virtue of Shakyamuni Buddha who passed away on February 15th. After Shakyamuni Buddha attained enlightenment, he continued for 45 years on a journey to spread the teachings. Many people became his followers.