

## **Buddhist Festival Holidays**

### **Celebrated in the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives\***

(Eugene Buddhist Priory)

**January—New Year’s Eve.** Held at midnight on December 31<sup>st</sup> to observe beginning of secular New Year. Includes incense offerings at all altars, revolving of scriptures, and serving of celebratory juice. Temple bell is often rung, representing the 108 means to enlightenment.

**Maitreya.** Maitreya means “the Loving One.” He is the Buddha That is to Come and is usually portrayed seated with his feet down (Western style). In Chinese culture he appears as Hotei, the “Laughing Buddha,” a round-bellied monk carrying a sack full of the Dharma. (January 1<sup>st</sup>)

**Great Master Seck Kim Seng.** Rev. Kim Seng was Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett’s ordination master in Malaysia. Trained at a prominent monastery on the Chinese mainland before the Communist revolution, he served as the Abbot of Cheng Hoon Teng Temple in Malacca, Malaysia, and as Archbishop of that area. He remained a good friend until his death in 1981. (January 6<sup>th</sup>)

**February—Buddha’s Renunciation.** Celebrates the departure of Siddhartha Gautama from his palace in Kapilavastu as he took up the homeless life of a wandering mendicant. A picture on the altar often shows him on his horse Kanthaka leaping over the city walls. (February 8<sup>th</sup>)

**Buddha’s Parinirvana (Death).** Celebrates the entry into eternal meditation of Shakyamuni Buddha. A statue or picture usually shows Him lying on His deathbed beneath twin sala trees, surrounded by grieving disciples and a host of other beings. (February 15<sup>th</sup>)

**Avalokiteshwara.** “Regarder of the Cries of the World,” Bodhisattva of Great Compassion. Known as Kwan Yin in China and Kanzeon in Japan, She often holds a willow branch and a vase of sweet nectar (Water of the Spirit). This holiday celebrates her “birth.” (February 19<sup>th</sup>)

**Samantabhadra.** “Full of Virtue,” Bodhisattva of Great Love. Called Fugen in Japanese. He rides a six-tusked white elephant, symbol of purity in the East. (February 21<sup>st</sup>)

**March—Spring Equinox.** Also known as Ohigan, “Crossing Over to the Other Shore.” Celebrated with a Ceremony of Feeding the Hungry Ghosts (Segaki)—see below, October.

**April—Manjusri.** Bodhisattva of Wisdom. He usually rides a lion, holding a sword in one hand and the *Scripture of Great Wisdom* on a blue lotus in the other. “Monju” in Japanese. (April 4<sup>th</sup>)

**Buddha’s Birth.** In Japan, “Festival of Flowers.” Baby Buddha stands atop fountain under flower canopy upon white elephant. Often celebrated as part of Wesak (see below). (April 8<sup>th</sup>)

**Great Master Seck Sian Toh.** Memorial for Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett’s Bodhisattva Precepts ordination master from China. He was the Dharma brother of Rev. Seck Kim Seng. (April 9<sup>th</sup>)

**Great Master Keizan.** Memorial for the co-founder of Soto Zen in Japan. Living in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, he was responsible for the wide spread of Soto Zen and most of our ceremonial. (April 18<sup>th</sup>)

**May—Wesak.** Celebration of Buddha’s birth, enlightenment, and Parinirvana—His life and teaching. Same altar setup as for Buddha’s Birth (above), but more elaborate. It is customary to bring gifts to temple and monks, and for the temple to present the children with gifts. Wesak is celebrated throughout the world and is the most joyous and important festival of the year. “Wesak” was the lunar month in which the Buddha was born, was enlightened, and died. It marks the beginning of the Buddhist new year; the temple bell is often rung as for secular new year. (May 8<sup>th</sup>)

**Memorial Day.** Festival of Remembrance. Honors those who died in war. (in USA, May 30<sup>th</sup>)

**June—Avalokiteshwara Bodhisattva.** Celebrates her “enlightenment” (see above). (June 19<sup>th</sup>)

**July--Achalanatha Bodhisattva.** “The Immovable One.” A fierce “King of Light,” usually enshrined to the rear left of the main altar in Soto Zen/Serene Reflection temples. (July 10<sup>th</sup>)  
**Nagyaarajyuna Bodhisattva.** An eminent Indian master in our lineage honored by all Mahayana traditions, he is especially revered for his teachings on the *Scripture of Great Wisdom*. (July 24<sup>th</sup>)  
**Kshatigarbha Bodhisattva.** “Earth Store or Treasury” Bodhisattva. Special protector of children, expectant mothers, travelers, and animals. The children of a temple usually assist celebrant in ceremonial roles of this festival; they are also encouraged to bring special stones as an offering to Kshatigarbha to help other children. Jizo is the Japanese form of his name. (July 30<sup>th</sup>)

**September—Great Master Dogen.** Memorial for Japanese founder of Soto Zen: Dogen Transmitted Serene Reflection teachings from China in 13<sup>th</sup> century. (September 9<sup>th</sup>)  
**Avalokiteshwara Bodhisattva.** Celebrates her “Parinirvana.” (September 19<sup>th</sup>)  
**Autumn Equinox.** Ohigan: same ceremony as Spring Equinox (Segaki—see above and below).  
**Bhaisajyaguru Tathagata.** The Medicine or Healing Buddha, associated with blue-hued lapis lazuli gem and, in Zen traditions, the healing power of meditation and training. (September 30<sup>th</sup>)

**October—Great Master Bodhidharma.** Indian master who Transmitted the Dharma to China in 5<sup>th</sup> century C.E.: all Zen lineages are descended from him. He often has a special altar in Zen temples; in Soto Zen, it is usually located to the left of the Founder’s Shrine. (October 5<sup>th</sup>)  
**Feeding the Hungry Ghosts (Segaki).** Special transfer of merit for deceased friends & relatives and all those in need of merit. May include ceremonial burning of paper tombstones. All those who wish to bring varied food offerings for placing on altar are invited to do so. (October 31<sup>st</sup>)

**November—Festival of the Founder.** Traditional memorial honoring the founder of the temple—for us, Rev. Master Jiyu. At some Order temples, such as Shasta Abbey, the founder is Great Master Keido Chisan (Koho Zenji), Rev. Master Jiyu’s Transmission master in Japan. (November 1<sup>st</sup>)  
**Great Master Houn Jiyu.** Memorial for the founder of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives: Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett Transmitted our Serene Reflection lineage to the West. (November 6<sup>th</sup>)  
**Remembrance Day.** Special memorial offering merit to those killed in war. (in USA, November 11<sup>th</sup>)  
**Buddhist Martyrs.** Memorial for all those who died as a consequence of their Buddhist faith.  
**Thanksgiving.** Ceremony of gratitude to Buddhist Ancestors. Altar may be decorated as for harvest festival; food contributions for altar are welcome.

**December—Buddha’s Enlightenment.** Celebration of Shakyamuni Buddha’s enlightenment under the Bodhi tree in ancient India. In monasteries it is usually preceded by Rohatsu, the monastic winter retreat in commemoration of this important event. Altar may display a decorative tree representing the Bodhi tree, often referred to as a “jewel tree.” We often celebrate this holiday on or near December 25<sup>th</sup>; gifts for the temple’s children and monks are appropriate. (December 8<sup>th</sup>)  
**Avatamsaka Scripture.** Honors this important scripture of the Mahayana tradition, containing many essential teachings. The Scripture describes in detail the site of the Buddha’s enlightenment—what the universe looks like at the time of Awakening—including the countless beings present. Pre-eminent are Vairochana Buddha (the Dharmakaya or Cosmic Buddha), Samantabhadra, Manjusri, and other Bodhisattvas. Scriptural source for Buddhist winter holiday decorations. (December 29<sup>th</sup>)

\*See *The Liturgy of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives for the Laity* and back issues of *The Journal of the O.B.C.* for more information. Dates given represent ideal dates; holidays may be moved to a different date at the discretion of the priest of a temple. Small temples often observe only a portion of these ceremonies. In large temples and abbeys, additional days may be observed as part of the monastic liturgical calendar—see *Monastic Office*. OH/12.17.01