

LOS ANGELES HOMPA HONGWANJI BUDDHIST TEMPLE (BETSUIN)
Jodo Shinshu (Pure Land Shin) Buddhist Temple

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Terminology

Hongwanji means "Temple of the Primal Vow." The Primal Vow is Amida Buddha's Vow to save all beings at all times and in all places without any discriminations. Betsuin is the designation given to a direct branch temple of the mother temple in Kyoto, Japan. Jodo Shinshu means True Teaching of Pure Land. Shin is one of many denominations of Mahayana Buddhism. Homba is an abbreviation for Hongwanji-ha, the headquarters organization of worldwide Jodo Shinshu.

2. The Shin Buddhist Altar (O-Naijin)

- **Object of Reverence-Amida Buddha:** The central image of reverence is Amida Buddha, represented by a statue or a scroll with a picture image or a scroll with the Name 南無阿弥陀仏 (Namo Amida Butsu). Amida Buddha is the ultimate Dharma-nature so that it has neither color nor form. For those who cannot see the perfection of true reality by our inner eyes which are always covered with blind passions, Amida Buddha manifests Universal Truth of Oneness in a form of body as the most compassionate, wise, and noble figure as the Buddha of Immeasurable Light (Wisdom) and Infinite Life (Compassion).
- **Shinran Shonin (Immediate right of Amida Buddha):** The founder of Jodo Shinshu who clarified the True Teaching of Nembutsu.
- **Rennyō Shonin (Immediate left of Amida Buddha):** The eighth spiritual head leader of Hongwanji who is regarded as the Second Founder.
- **Prince Shotoku (Right of Shinran Shonin):** The father of Buddhism who brought Buddhism into Japan.
- **Myōnyō Shonin (Right of Prince Shotoku):** The 21st spiritual head leader of Hongwanji who brought Jodo Shinshu into the USA.
- **Seven Masters (Left of Rennyō Shonin):** Top-2 masters from India, Middle-3 masters from China, and Bottom-2 masters from Japan who transmitted the True Teaching of Nembutsu to Shinran Shonin.
- **Candles:** The candle symbolizes the Wisdom of the Buddha that illuminates the darkness of our ignorance.
- **Flowers:** The flowers symbolizes the Compassion of the Buddha representing purity and beauty. In addition, flowers represent the impermanence of life.
- **Incense:** Incense is burned to praise Amida Buddha for his virtue. The rich fragrance equally reaching out to all reminds us of Amida Buddha's Primal Vow to save all beings equally.

3. Shin Buddhist Rituals/Traditions

- **Namo Amida Butsu (Nembutsu):** Reciting Buddha's Name. In Jodo Shinshu, the Nembutsu is not recited as a mantra or religious practice to gain merit, but recited in awareness, joy, and appreciation of Amida Buddha's Great Compassionate Mind. "Namo Amida Butsu" means entrusting and taking refuge in the Buddha of Immeasurable Light (Wisdom) and Infinite Life (Compassion).
- **Gassho:** By placing our palms together and bowing before the image of the Buddha, we express our deepest gratitude and appreciation to Wisdom and Compassion symbolized by the statue of Amida Buddha. The gassho is considered one of the most beautiful gestures of expressing greetings, appreciation, and reverence.
- **Nenju:** The nenju is the string of beads used in Buddhist rituals. It is held in the left hand which represents the world we live in and the right hand represents the world of awakening. It is through the use of the nenju that brings together the left hand of samsara and the right hand of nirvana into Oneness of the Gassho. In Jodo Shinshu, nenju is "mindfulness" beads versus "counting" (juzu).
- **Oshoko:** Incense is burned in gratitude for the teachings and to purify and prepare ourselves to receive and listen to the teachings.
- **Chanting of Sutra:** The sound of oneness, in which individual voices blend as one in a joyful expression of the receiving the teaching together. In Jodo Shinshu, both lay members and ministers chant together to praise the virtue of the Buddha.

