



Welcome to
West Los Angeles
Buddhist Temple (WLABT)



THE BEST WAY to learn about Buddhism and our temple is to come and experience it. There are services, activities, organizations, and events for people of all ages.

The core of temple life is found in its services and in learning the Buddhist teachings (dharma). WLABT services include regular Sunday services, monthly memorial services, and special observances (e.g., the birth of Shakyamuni Buddha). For adults, there are discussions after regular Sunday services as well as study class on Thursday. For children of all ages, there is Dharma School, where boys and girls learn the Buddhist teaching in age-appropriate lessons and activities.

Religious life is enhanced and enriched by programs and events that encourage sangha members to get to know one another. Families will be interested to know that besides Dharma School, WLABT has a Sangha Teens group for junior high students, Jr. YBA (Junior Young Buddhist Association) for high school students, and YBA (Young Buddhist Association) for college students. Adults may support the temple through ABA (Adult Buddhist Association). Alternatively, women may wish to help through participation in BWA (Buddhist Women's Association).

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WEST LOS ANGELES BUDDHIST TEMPLE
OBON FESTIVAL
2016



Interested in Buddhism?

PLEASE FEEL WELCOME to join us for services, study classes, and other activities. Our resident minister, Rev. Fumiaki Usuki, not only gives dharma talks, but also teaches classes and is available to discuss questions you might have about Buddhism in your life.

If you enjoy reading, please inquire about our temple library, bookstore, and free publications. If you become a member, you will receive the *Wheel of Dharma*, the monthly publication of the Buddhist Churches of America. In addition, special seminars, lectures, and workshops are offered through WLABT and related local temples.

Saturday, July 30, 2016 4-10 pm
Sunday, July 31, 2016 3-9 pm



WLA Taiko **Bon Dancing**
5:30 pm Sat./Sun. 6:30 pm Sat./Sun.

Food & Drinks • Games • Exhibits

What is Obon?



OBON is a Buddhist observance that was originally observed in Mahayana Buddhist countries, including China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam.

Obon season is a time to express our gratitude to loved ones who have passed on before us. Without them, we would not be who we are today, due to the basic tenet of interdependence. We would not be where we are and we would not be able to do the things we do to enjoy life. Just think about the number of people involved in creating each of us. If we go back just thirty generations, we can calculate that there were over two billion parents, starting with our two parents, their four parents, and so on—and that's just the physical part.

Since we're all influenced by a countless number of beings, our interconnections, and therefore our debt of gratitude, is without bounds. Thus, temples hold an Obon memorial service to enable people to pay tribute to the departed. The service is usually held separately from the festival so that the sangha (Buddhist community) can participate in this solemn and respectful remembrance in quiet reflection.

The word "Obon" is the abbreviated name of the ancient *Ullambana Sutra*, whose Japanese pronunciation is *Urabon*. The sutra tells of the Buddhist monk, Maudgalyana (Mokuren in Japanese) who offered food to the sangha in an effort to release his mother from her hellish torments. When she became liberated, her son is said to have danced for joy.



Obon Festival and Bon Odori

IN JAPAN, Obon has been held since 657 CE. It is observed in July or August. A commonly held belief among people in Japan is that the disembodied spirits of the dead return to visit at this time of year. This belief is not supported by Jodo Shin Buddhists, who consider such a belief to be an unfounded superstition.

Most Japanese-American Buddhists belong to the Jodo Shinshu school (including the sangha of West LA Buddhist Temple), so it is important to understand the history and significance of our Obon Festival. It is not, as some mistakenly believe, to welcome back the spirits of the dead. Instead, it is a time of gratitude, giving, and joy in the Truth of Life. Hence, it is also known as *Kangi-e*, or the Gathering of Joy.

The celebration of joy first began simply with Bon odori, or dancing. It is unique to Japanese Buddhism and is thought to have evolved from the Nembutsu Odori of dancers who played instruments while chanting "Namo Amida Butsu"—I take refuge in Infinite Light and Life, Immeasurable Wisdom and Compassion—symbolized by Amida Buddha. Bon dancing was first taught in America at the San Francisco Buddhist Temple in 1931 and spread to other temples. The festival or carnival was added much later as a temple fundraising opportunity, since the dance became an annual tradition that drew such large crowds of participants and onlookers.



The dancing begins and ends with a short Buddhist reflection. Participants gather in rings around a *yagura*, a central raised platform, and dance to the accompaniment of singing and *taiko* drums. The folk dances usually tell stories of traditional occupations such as fishing and farming. Everyone is encouraged to join in with

the seasoned dancers as they circle around the *yagura*, often wearing colorful *yukata* (summer kimono) or *happi* coats representing various area temples. It doesn't matter whether you are Buddhist or not, whether you are new to Bon odori or whether you have "two left feet." The important thing is to



leave your ego behind and simply express your joy and gratitude for life through the dance.

Rev. Masao Kodani, Minister Emeritus of Senshin Buddhist Temple, points out that the memory of deceased loved ones should urge us to awaken to our deluded selves and live fully in Truth-Reality. Thus, Bon odori is a spiritual activity in which we "just dance, without fretting over how one looks, nor showing off one's ability ... dance just as you are with no conniving, no calculating, no image protecting or flaunting." But, he points out, most of us would rather practice before we feel we're ready to dance in front of others—in much the same way that we rehearse "really living" and only end up watching life go by. Just dance. Just BE, in every moment, and you will feel true fulfillment and pure, ego-less joy.

In the Southern California area, the sixteen Jodo Shinshu temples of the Buddhist Churches of America, including WLABT, take turns holding Obon Festivals and Odori every weekend from June through August, making for a joyful summer of shared experiences. No wonder it is a major temple event!

