



The Buddhist Temple of Chicago

January 2024

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Happy New Year!



ADDRESS

1151 W. Leland Ave
Chicago, IL 60640-5043

TELEPHONE

(773) 334-4661

ONLINE

BuddhistTempleChicago.org

E-MAIL

Bulletin.btc@gmail.com



Swinging mallets at Mochitsuki 2023 (photo by Keith O)

A New Year's Greeting by Rev. Frederick Brenion

Growing up, New Year's Day seemed different from other holidays. It's not religious like Christmas. It's not national like the Fourth of July or Washington's Birthday. It's just itself. Sort of like our own birthdays. Only New Year's is a birthday party for the world.

I'm told that in Japan individual birthdays weren't celebrated until about 1950; everyone celebrated their birthday on New Year's Day under the notion that everyone got one year older on that day, not the actual day of birth. This is probably why New Year's Day is the most popular holiday in Japan! Also you were considered to be one year old when you were born, owing to a folk view of the length of pregnancy, and then you became two on the following New Year – even if you were born the day before! Still, New Year's in Japan is like everyone's birthday party together. It gives a message that while each of us is special, and we are, we are also all in it together. There is much Buddhism in that.

There is a custom in Japan to celebrate the New Year with a haiku commemorating something first for the year. Here is mine:

*First New Year poem,
All my words fly out crazy.
Were I silent, Truth.*

Well! Let me wish each of you a Happy New Year! I hope that you meet your deepest aspiration this coming year. This past year some of us have experienced great joys, some great sorrows. Yet each day has been a reminder of the teachings of the Dharma. We live in a world of impermanence and change. There is nothing new in this. Right now, the Sun is shining. Each of us is breathing. The flowers on our altars or at our homes smell wonderful. There is a New Year smile on your faces. Life still goes on. Always has, and always will.

A New Year's Greeting (continued)

Still, there is something about New Year's that makes us want to celebrate, plan, and hope. It's a new start. That's the great thing about calendars. While they have a last day, that last day is always followed by another first day. The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. This day we all share in our first step into this year.

On New Year's Day, many people are waking up with hangovers. Others are watching parades, or planning for the big sports games of the day. Some go to temple to hear the Dharma. Each of us is making the start we need to do. But why go hear the Dharma? We could all be sleeping in right now! I know I need to hear the Dharma to get my perspective straight. I am about to step out into the year. On New Year's Day, most of us make resolutions. What we hope to accomplish, what we want to commit ourselves to doing. We do this every year. I have seldom ever kept any of my resolutions. I have good intentions, but I soon fall flat on my face. I give up, I'll start over again the next year, and the next, never getting anything done.

The message of Jodo Shinshu is the message of New Year's Day. Many of my Christian friends describe themselves as being Christmas Christians, or Easter Christians. They identify with certain holidays as being central to their self-meaning. I think I am a New Year's Day Shinshu follower. I make resolutions and fail to follow them. I am at heart a self-power person, a jiriki person. That is why I know I will fall on my face. I need to hear this. It would be better if I would just remember this! In our central story a great Bodhisattva, Dharmakara sees reality clearly for the first time in encountering the Dharma, and makes the deepest resolutions possible. We often call them aspirations, vows. Everything is at stake for Dharmakara and for all. Unlike me, Dharmakara got the job done with the primal vow, the resolution made for all.

Maybe that's my problem. My resolutions are not deep enough. I'm not making them on behalf of others, just myself. How self-centered I am. Taylor Swift is right; "It's me, hi, I'm the problem it's me." It's always been about me. Perhaps I could make the right kind of resolution, but only because it has already been made and kept for me.

I guess I can really smile today. because whether I succeed or not, the Dharma, imaged as Dharmakara fulfilling as Amida Buddha, has already succeeded for me. I am accepted as I am, right now, every now. Each now is a new now, no matter what, because of this. Each now is always a New Year's now, even if it is at the last day of the year, and, when the time comes, at the last moment of my life. And this is as true for you as it is for me!

So I guess this really is going to be a happy New Year!

Happy New Year everyone!
Namandabu, Namu Amida Butsu!

DEEPEST SYMPATHY

To the family and friends of

Mitsu Uchimoto
Shizuko Akitomo

December 5, 2023
December 7, 2023



Scheduled activities – subject to change

Weekly services – Sundays 11am - in-person, Facebook Live January 7th

Second Sunday Children's Dharma School service – January 14th

Qigong (Chinese exercise) – Tuesdays 11am - in-person only

Sunday Meditation 9am – in-person only

Thursday Meditation 7:15pm – Jan 11th Facebook Live, other days FB Live & in-person

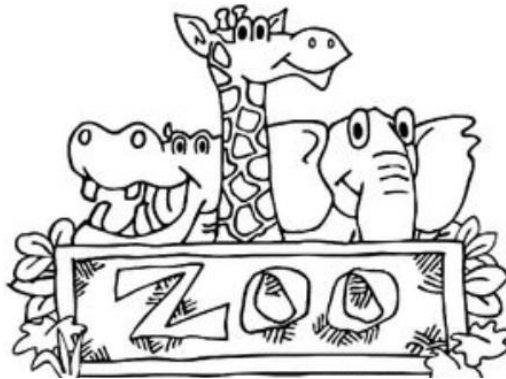
Asoka Society (social gathering) – on break until March 2024

The above activities are open to the public and free (donations appreciated).

If you are interested in the two activities below, please leave your contact information and the group will set up an appointment for you to visit them.

Iaido (martial art) – Mondays 7:00pm

Kokyo Taiko (drums) – Friday evenings, Sunday afternoons



Brookfield Zoo Tickets

Interested in visiting Brookfield Zoo? Dr. Alice Murata has FREE tickets to share! Tickets normally retail at \$30, so this is a great deal. If you're interested, please contact Dr. Murata at 773-463-4631 to claim them.

Change and Challenge by Bill Bohlman, Temple President

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the temple we want to wish you a Happy New Year. The past year was one of changes at BTC and we are faced with challenges in the future.

The biggest change was the retirement of Rev. Patti Nakai. We thank her for her years of dedicated service. Her depth of knowledge of the teachings and her ability to present them in a clear and understandable manner will be missed. As we continue our search for the next resident minister, we are grateful to Rev. Fred Brenion who has agreed to act as supervising minister. Rev. Fred is joining us each week from his home in California via the internet. These Sunday services are also available live streamed on the BTC Face book page. We are assisted in our minister search by Higashi Honganji North America District. There is a young man currently training for ordination in America who has expressed a willingness to come to Chicago once he is ordained; however, our search continues.

For the first time since 2019, we were able to have our traditional Natsu Matsuri, O-Bon Odori and mochitsuki. These events bring together the sangha and remind us of the strength of our community. The pandemic caused us to lose a lot of our connection; the hope is that we will return to the participation level of before the pandemic. We continue to attract many first time visitors and a few of them have become members. Our Dharma School in particular has been one area that has grown with the addition of some new families. In 2024, Dharma School will return to meeting on the 2nd and 4th Sunday of each month.

Among the challenges facing BTC, two stand out the most. The first is our search for a new resident minister. For almost two years the ministerial succession committee has met regularly to outline the requirements and compensation of the new minister. Our search for a willing and qualified candidate continues. The next challenge revolves around the sangha: how can we get people to return to Sunday services? Since our reopening after the pandemic, attendance at service has remained low. Some Sundays there are more visitors than members. For a new minister to commit to BTC they will want an engaged sangha. What can be done to bring people back to service? The sangha always steps up to help at all the special events, what can we do to bring them back to service?

For over 76 years, BTC has been a dynamic place in which to hear the dharma. Our hope is that in 2024 we gain regain that dynamism and fill the hondo once again. The future of BTC is in your hands.

2024-2025 Calendars

A HUGE thank you to all the volunteers that helped us mail out the 2024-2025 calendar: Noreen Enkoji, Dennis Chan, Ed Horiuchi, Susan Balsam, April Kellman, Minnie Darr, Octavio Nateras, Sadae Kasamoto, and Gene Skala.



At Mochitsuki, Chiyeko-san is recognized for being the oldest (99 years) rice pounder.

Consul General Yanagi joined in congratulating her.

(Photo by Keith O)

Mochitsuki 2023--Saturday December 23 by Nancey Epperson

In brief: Rice was pounded. Cakes were formed. Samples were nibbled. Plates of mochi were sold for folks to enjoy at home. The community gathered to have fun and create good things for each other.

But Mochitsuki is not a one-day affair. The preparations started on the previous Wednesday when glutinous rice (mochi-gome) was soaked to prepare it to be steamed. On Friday, the Usu (pounding stone) and Kine (mallets) were prepared, and the work surface on the temple floor was arranged. Early Saturday morning, the steamer (Seiro) was set up, and the first batch of soaked mochi-gome was steamed. The physical fun started at 10 AM, with steamed mochi placed in the usu, and 4 people commenced pounding. After about 15 minutes, the pounded mochi was delivered to the forming table, and the cake-makers turned a lump of sticky rice dough into individual cakes about the size of a computer mouse. Some of these cakes were filled with ahn (red bean paste). Larger cakes for New Year celebrations (Kagami Mochi, about the size of a dessert plate) were also made.

Many young people participated in making the mochi cakes, while adults did the pounding. Women of the Japanese Consulate staff were pounders (some pounding for the first time), as well as our oldest pounder for the 3rd or 4th year in a row: Chiyeko Yoshida.

After 1 PM, when all rice had been pounded and all cakes had been formed, the community helped to clean up the space, mop the floor, and return the tools to storage until next year. Thanks to Gary Nakai for leading the physical set up and preparations, thanks to Gwen Kato for leading the mochi cake forming, and thanks the Asoka Society for packaging and selling plates of mochi to take home.

The numbers: 120 pounds of glutinous rice were purchased, more than 20 people pounded mochi, more than 20 people (including many young folks) formed mochi cakes, over 130 plates of mochi were sold to 90 customers. In total \$1400 was raised.



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1151 W Leland Ave
CHICAGO, IL 60640-5043 USA
www.buddhisttemplechicago.org
Phone: (773) 334-4661

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January 2024 Calendar

Events may be canceled or moved:

Check www.facebook.com/budtempchi
for the most up-to-date changes.

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1	2	3	4 Meditation 7:15pm	5 Taiko* 7pm	6
7 9:00am Meditation 11am Monthly Memorial	8 laido* 7:00pm	9 11am Qi-Gong	10	11 Meditation 7:15pm FB only	12 Taiko* 7pm	13
14 9:00am Meditation 11am Dharma School service	15 laido* 7:00pm	16 11am Qi-Gong	17	18 Meditation 7:15pm	19 Taiko* 7pm	20
21 9:00am Meditation 11am Service	22 laido* 7:00pm	23 11am Qi-Gong	24	25 Meditation 7:15pm	26 Taiko* 7pm	27
28 9:00am Meditation 11am Service	29 laido* 7:00pm	30 11am Qi-Gong	31			

*laido and Taiko require appointments made in advance