

The Dead as “Personal Buddhas”:¹ Japanese Ancestral Rites as Healing Rites

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EVEN A CURSORY LOOK AT modern Japan reveals that rituals involving interaction with the dead are common. The role and dynamics of these rituals in helping Japanese Buddhist women integrate loss into their lives is the focus of this study. The rhythms and contours of the grieving and healing process are examined within the context of their worldviews and conceptions of self, suffering, and healing. The findings are based upon in-depth ethnographic data gathered about devout Japanese Buddhist women who all have some active connection with Sōtō Zen Buddhist practice.² With their collaboration, I began to see the intimate relationships they carry on with deceased loved ones. It is in the intimacy of these relationships that the healing power of the rituals are revealed.

The dominance of funerary, memorial, and ancestral³ rites in the ritual landscape of contemporary Buddhism in Japan is so pronounced that scholars and lay people commonly refer to the phenomenon as “Funeral Buddhism.” Most people even state that their primary engagement with Buddhism is when someone passes away. In addition, the biggest national summer holiday, O-bon,⁴ is a Buddhist rite of honoring ancestors. This indicates the exigency of understanding what these Buddhist rituals mean to people. Although scholars have researched the topic of Japanese ancestor worship,⁵ the question of whether funerary, memorial, and ancestral rites offer forms of transformation and healing for those living in modern Japan has not been thoroughly explored. Through this study the positive roles mortuary and ancestral rites play in contemporary Japan become clearer, especially in the lives of mature Buddhist women.

Researching home rituals offers a glimpse of the dynamics of identity cultivation and transformation in the face of loss. It also provides a rare view of how the dead can function in the healing process. In the privacy of the home, ancestral rituals are often performed at the family *butsudan* (Buddhist home altar) on a daily, monthly, and annual basis. Outside the home visiting the gravesite or *o-haka-mairi* is also done on monthly and annual intervals. A poignant rite that is not widely per-

formed is the Jizō Nagashi. Depending upon the relationship of the participant in the ritual to the deceased, it can be experienced as a memorial rite, ancestral rite, or both. It is distinctive, for it includes participants riding in a large boat on a lake. Examining a large public memorial/ancestral ritual gives insight into the role of the greater community and environment in the healing process. Although there are many more memorial and ancestral rites, large and small, local and national, home rituals and the Jizō Nagashi ritual are the focus of my analysis. They will provide the basis for illuminating how upon death one becomes a "personal buddha" to the loved ones still living.⁶ Exploring memorial and ancestral rituals from this perspective sheds new light on the power these rites have in the healing process, leading us to recognize both the centrality of the dead in Japanese Buddhist religiosity and that these ancestral rites can serve as healing rituals.

When people are in need of healing, they can find rituals that guide them through the process. There are rituals that people with a broad spectrum of pain find helpful, including in times of personal emotional crisis, in the face of serious illness, while struggling with family discord, and learning to living with loss. The concept of healing here is based on the Buddhist worldview where everything is understood to be interrelated and impermanent. Combining this context with the Sōtō Zen Buddhist development of according the deceased with the status of Hotoke-sama or Honorable Buddha,⁷ distinctive rituals have emerged and become the fabric of many Japanese Buddhist healing experiences.

Recognizing that someone has attained enlightenment upon death has had significant ramifications for the development of Japanese Buddhist rituals. Among other possibilities, this elevated status is critical to the grieving and healing process of the survivors. Intensive interviews with contemporary Japanese Buddhist laywomen reveals the nature of the relationship of the living and dead and the rituals that facilitate the transformation of their relationship. The rituals are designed to make the deceased loved one remain a part of the living people's lives, yet not in the same way as in life. The exalted status of death makes them more powerful and they are understood to have the capacity to help with their new wisdom.⁸

These new buddhas play a vital role in Japanese Buddhist rites. One of their roles is regarded as the source of healing. This is in contrast to the role of ancestors in Reiyukai where those receiving healing is reversed. Hardacre explains that in Reiyukai "healing is believed to have the soteriological function of saving the ancestors."⁹ For my Zen Buddhist collaborators, it is only in seeing how the rituals affect a person, usually over an extended period, that it becomes evident that the ritual is indeed part of their own healing process. Key factors in the

analysis of this phenomenon include the identity constructions of the dead and the seeker of healing and how this relationship bears upon the healing process.

Methodological Concerns

The primary information for this study is based on field research I did in Nagoya, Japan in 1998–1999. The research focused on the healing process of twelve women in their fifties, sixties, and seventies. They are all engaged in some form of Buddhist practice and rituals; eleven women are lay Buddhists and one is an ordained nun. Among the collaborators, eight have married and raised children. They are either currently married or are widowed. All but one of the married women have given birth to the children they raised (one adopted a sister-in-law's child). Three have spent the majority of their adulthood as mothers and housewives. Five have worked while caring for their house and family. Four are single, having never been married, given birth, or raised a child. They each have had jobs and support themselves. Each woman invested at least a dozen hours of formal question and answer time, but total interaction time with most women is hard to calculate. Several exceed eighty hours. In addition to formal interview sessions, this includes activities like attending rituals held at temples together; going to museums or visiting artists together; eating sandwiches, rice balls, and exquisitely prepared traditional Japanese cuisine (*kaiseki ryōri*); and taking walks to view autumn foliage, plums in bloom, and cherry blossoms. All relationships with my collaborators are actively ongoing. Indeed, human relationships are at the center of this project, for it is in wrestling with being human that healing is sought.

Linda Barnes' "Integrated Model of Healing and Illness"¹⁰ helps clarify how the dead participate in the healing process of Japanese Buddhists. Her model is designed to facilitate cross-cultural understanding and communication among people working and living with diverse concepts of healing. The model consists of seven foci.

1. Understandings of Ultimate Human Possibility
2. Understandings of Affliction and Suffering
3. Understandings of Self
4. Understandings of Illness/Sickness
5. Understandings of Healers

6. Understandings of Nature of Intervention
7. Understandings of Efficacy or Healing

Barnes' "Integrated Model" foregrounds the infrastructure or building blocks of a healing tradition. In other words, it asks people to be critically conscious of fundamental concepts of self and worldview and to place the various dimensions of healing and illness into their larger context. Doing so facilitates discussions with those with different understandings. It helps clarify the differences and similarities in specific ways. Although this study does not extend to comparisons with other traditions, delineating the collective understandings of my collaborators for each of these foci will illuminate important aspects of their views and practices.

Until I began doing field research, I had thought about the project in academic English. After initial conversations with collaborators, I quickly discovered that my original concepts did not resonate with them. The ideas did not translate well into conversational Japanese. Because this is an ethnographic work where I am trying to understand how *they* experience the world, I let them define the terms. The meaning of healing to them is not about finding a cure nor is it framed in terms of a direct cause and effect relationship. It is a worldview or way of living and facing all kinds of challenges of the non-bifurcated body and mind, a central factor in their "Understanding of Self."

Their "Understanding of Healing" is in part revealed in the vocabulary used to discuss the matter. It is notable that the word they all used to refer to "healing" was a different conjugation of the word I had initially tried out. My use of the equivalent of the gerund form of "heal" (*iyashi*—"Have you ever experienced a healing?") only elicited blank stares. On the contrary, using what I call the "gratitude tense"¹¹ of "to heal" (*iyasaremashita*) yielded enthusiastic nods of understanding. They could comprehend the meaning of being "a humble and grateful recipient of healing." The difference between these two ways of talking about healing is fundamental and has far-reaching implications. *Iyashi* implies that healing is a discrete phenomenon. It stands alone and apart. *Iyasaremashita*, however, sets healing in a specific relationship. For these women the relationship is with the universe. Although they do think of the universe as a vast network of interrelated phenomenon, in their daily lives, most of the women do not usually think of the universe in terms of its grand expanse. Rather, the universe is experienced in more direct and intimate ways: in the dew at dawn, ducklings swimming in their mother's wake, and the sun drying the laundry. It is something that one receives, humbly and gratefully. The source from

which healing comes is not explicitly stated in the term itself, but in its deepest meaning the source of healing is the universe.

As is indicated by the preferred verb conjugation among these women, they are oriented in a Buddhist understanding of things. This includes the assumption that we are born with a longing for good things to be permanent and seek the fulfillment of our desires. This is the primary condition from which we must be healed. Therefore, healing involves transformation of habitually deluded ways of looking at the world through the lenses of desire and aversion. For these women, then, all of life is a process of healing or transformation of the way life is viewed and experienced. This tells us something about several aspects, including their "Understanding of Affliction and Suffering," "Understanding of Ultimate Human Possibility," and "Understanding of Healers." Suffering is caused by one's own deluded thinking, but it is possible to stop suffering (though not necessarily sickness). The "Healer" of this condition is the self.

My first task, then, was to learn how these women viewed and experienced themselves. Considerations of how research methodology relates to distinctive cultural formations of self are central to this aim, so I examined the connections between the Japanese relational construction of self-identity and the ramifications for field methodology. In Japanese culture, *tatemae* (public face) and *honne* (private face) are clearly delineated,¹² especially among the generation of women I was interviewing. In this cultural context, people are adept at sincerely expressing their public face, making it difficult to discern how much their public and private faces might differ. Moreover, it is considered improper to express your private face or *honne* to someone with whom you have only a public relationship. Although I tried to make it clear that the women were collaborators in this study, at first they perceived our relationship in terms of the standard interviewer–interviewee relationship, which falls into the "public" category. Therefore, it was difficult to access their "private face" (*honne*).

Since the information I sought lies deep in their hearts, minds, and bodies, I decided that keeping an objective observer's distance would yield little about the highly personal and private dimensions of their lives. In the Japanese cultural context, it is only fair that I make myself vulnerable before I expect them to open up about their most intimate and often painful experiences. Therefore, I made the carefully considered and deliberate decision to share my own personal emotions and experiences with each of the women. In return for exposing my shortcomings and difficulties, I not only received valuable and helpful advice, but I also received a bounty of details that are essential to understanding their concepts, experiences, and feelings about the role

of the deceased in their rituals of healing. As we cultivated intimate relationships, we broke through the socially scripted facade of efficient tidiness and impeccable self-control and delved into the excruciating, infuriating, and terrifying realms where healing and transformation take place.

“Personal Buddhas” in the Home Altar

Most collaborators in this study of healing rituals tend to their Buddhist altars with care. They consider the home altar (*butsudan*) to be the anchor of their home. Its weight helps maintain stability in times of turmoil. It is a physical location for the heart (*kokoro*) of the family. Whether the altar is an elaborate gilded one in a designated Buddhist altar room (*butsuma*) or it is a picture on a bureau with just a simple cup of tea offered, it can be effective in helping the healing process.

Devoting precious space to an altar is clearly an indicator that having a designated sacred space in the home is valued. In a standard *butsudan* there is a central Buddha image, usually based on the family sect affiliation. If someone has passed away in the family, there is usually a mortuary tablet (*o-ihai*) with the Buddhist name (*kaimyō*) of the deceased written on it. The date of the death is also recorded on it. These mortuary tablets also vary in size and ornamentation, from four inches in simple black to twelve inches with gold leaf and intricate carving. A picture of the deceased is usually placed at the altar in a prominent location. This helps foster the sense that the deceased person is still part of the family and community. Having ancestors “present” provides depth to the family structure and relationships.

Aoyama Shundō, abbess of the Zen nunnery Aichi Senmon Nisōdō, has noticed in her many years of working with the bereaved that when someone passes away in a family it makes the Buddha closer and more intimate. This occurs because the deceased is now understood to be a buddha. People become more actively devout and feel the Buddha in their lives. This indicates that the deceased is not merely referred to by the appellation “Buddha,” but that many people actually experience their deceased loved one as enlightened, attaining the perfection of wisdom and compassion through death.

The home altar centered on the dead as a “personal buddha” is a physical presence that cultivates relationships and healing. Indeed, the altar’s very physicality facilitates facing difficult situations, because it helps people focus their attention in a place where they feel understood and supported. The support and understanding is experienced, according to most of my collaborators, because the Buddha in their home altar

is a family member. In many ways, understanding itself is the Buddha's healing balm. The Buddha in the home altar is not thought to be omniscient, but this buddha is thought to know all that is important to any family member. This "personal buddha" knows one's deepest level of *honne* or private self. When both were alive, it was not possible for one person to know another's *honne* in regard to all things. The vantage point of death, however, enables the deceased to know completely. Furthermore, becoming a buddha means that the deceased has become a wiser and more compassionate version of his- or herself. In life, shortcomings, idiosyncrasies, and various tensions and misunderstandings make it difficult to see another clearly. But, in death, the family member can become a "personal buddha" to the survivors. One woman even confessed—after over a dozen hours of interviews—that she gets along better with her mother now that her mother is dead!

The transformation of the relationship between the living and the dead is fostered through offerings, chanting, prayer, and conversation made at the home altar. Offerings are made by the most devout twice a day, morning and evening. The offerings typically consist of five elements as listed in the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*: light (candles), flowers, incense, water or tea, and food (rice and/or fruit). In homes where rice is made for breakfast and dinner, rice offerings to *Hotoke-sama* are made first, then rice is served to others. Some women, however, only offer a cup of tea in the morning and reserve the full compliment of offerings for special occasions. Such occasions are the annual or monthly death anniversary and O-bon. In addition, people who give the five types of offerings regularly usually give more elaborate offerings on special occasions, often including favorite foods of their "personal buddha."

After the offerings are made, those who are busy and perfunctory may just ring the bell, put their hands together in prayer, and just say, "Good morning," with a bow of the head. The fuller ritual often includes ringing the bell after the incense is lit, holding prayer beads (*juzu*), and chanting some scripture. The most commonly chanted one is the *Heart Sūtra*. *Kannon-gyō* or one of its shorter versions, *Jikku Kannon-gyō*, is chanted by those with more time. If there is something on the mind of the person, it is often during this time that they will talk about their concerns with their "personal buddha," beseeching their advice, assistance, or forgiveness. Expressing gratitude and making promises to improve on something is often articulated at this time as well.

Being able to interact with deceased loved ones in the familiarity of their own home helps them maintain a sense of intimacy and continuity. Being in the home, it facilitates transforming the relationship of the living and dead in a manner that integrates the loss in a life-affirming

manner. Family members continue to interact, so the divide between life and death is transcended.

Many women explained how in times of need they turned to their loved ones at the altar, for they are the ones who understand them most. The women added that they had an even greater expectation for help now that their loved ones are dead, because they are buddhas. Updates on developments in problems usually accompany the morning or evening greetings. Of course gratitude is duly expressed when it is clear that their "personal buddha" has helped solve the problem.

Laughter and joy are also part of this transformed relationship. Several women said they looked forward to summer so they could offer watermelons or autumn when the persimmons would be ripe, because their loved ones especially enjoyed those fruits. In this way they could continue to feel connected through the passing of time. Or, when out shopping, many women said that seeing a special sweet that a loved one favored reminded them of pleasant times together, so they would get the confection to offer on the altar in the evening "for dessert." Such simple gestures provide the living with a warm wash of fond memories that buoys them along in their lives.

At first, after the funeral, just caring for the deceased through food offerings sometimes even spurs a bereaved person to start caring for herself. If you have to make rice for the Buddha, then one is more likely to eat oneself, especially if living alone. Preparing food takes on a meaning that extends beyond oneself. Furthermore, daily offerings of food and water, or tea, are an opportunity to greet the deceased in the morning. Fresh flowers also offered on the altar bring beauty and closeness to nature into the home.

Another woman explained that she had associated the smell of incense burned at a Buddhist altar with things old and gloomy. But after her mother passed away, she found that the smell of incense reached into the interstices of her heart and connected her with her mother. The smell of incense helped her through the grieving process. She was twenty-five when her mother passed away, and now at fifty-six when she burns incense, she feels her mother's presence. The incense enables her to transcend the gap between life and death.

This woman, who I will call Ms. Honda, also weaves a ritual interaction common in nearly every home across Japan. It is a pair of words that are said as someone leaves and returns home. "*Ittekimasu*: I'm leaving and will be back" is said as one leaves. The one who remains says in a formal conjugation not used in regular conversation, "*Itterashai*: I respectfully send you off." Upon returning, the person who was away says, "*Tadaima*: I'm home now." Those who are home respond, "*Okairinasai*: Welcome home." Since these are reserved for places that

are considered home, saying them oneself and receiving the responses generates a warm sense of belonging and intimacy. Each time Ms. Honda comes back to her studio apartment, although she lives by herself, she calls out, "*Tadaima*, I'm home," to the photos on her Buddhist altar of her long deceased parents. In so doing she knows she is not alone.

This is a healing ritual. It is not commonly performed or recognized as such, but in the case of Ms. Honda, it helps her heal. If it were not for doing collaborations in the women's homes, I would never have known it had occurred. Ms. Honda did not think of using these ritualized words as a conscious part of her healing process. Nonetheless, it is a powerful way that she has integrated her loss into her everyday life. Her "personal buddhas" make her feel at home.

As the dead are transformed into "personal buddhas," they enable the healing of the survivors. Through engaging in memorial and ancestral rituals, the living can find support and understanding in a way that is not readily available through other means. For these "personal buddhas" in the home altars are specifically focused on taking care of them in a direct and intimate way. These buddhas know all the secrets and idiosyncrasies. There is nothing hidden and nothing for which to be ashamed. They allow a person to *amae*,¹³ that is, one can be purely dependent on her "personal buddha" with no need to calculate how much is being received versus how much is being offered (past, present, and future). The relationship with one's "personal buddha" is liberating, for you also do not need to consider that what you say, do, or think might have negative ramifications due to things being taken out of context and used against you in the future (a possibility when dealing with living people).

These mundane rituals belie the profound insight that grieving never ends, it just changes with the seasons. They also illustrate how healing is available in the home through the dead as "personal buddhas."

Jizō Nagashi

The second ritual is called the Jizō Nagashi. Jizō is an enlightened being (a bodhisattva) who guides people in the different realms of existence. The ritual is done annually on the seventh of July. Although participants readily recognize the beauty and power of the ritual, it is not a common ritual. Currently only Sōtō Zen nuns lead this ritual. Both men and women are invited. Usually about four hundred fifty women participate along with a few men. Fourteen chartered buses are typically needed for transporting. Busses numbered four and nine are not

included, however, for these numbers are homonyms for “death” and “suffering,” respectively. People from the greater Nagoya area ride in these luxury buses that are impeccably timed to arrive simultaneously at the designated temple and lake where the formal parts of the ritual occur. Some years they go to Lake Biwa and others to Lake Hamana. It is a one-day mini-pilgrimage where people bond together in laughter and pain. *Communitas* is fostered by the treats that are passed around the bus along with stories of new aches and pains, new babies, and new deaths.

The formal ritual involves two main parts. The first part is held in a Sōtō Zen temple. The focus of this aspect of the ritual is the reciting of posthumous Buddhist names or *kaimyō*. When one registers to participate in the ritual, the names of the dead that one would like to be remembered during the ritual are requested. The nuns then write each name with brush and ink onto a wooden tablet. In July it is always hot and humid, yet the laity sit in tight formation around the center of the worship hall. The silence as abbess Aoyama Shundō makes the incense offering conceals the presence of over four hundred fifty people. After chanting and ceremonial music of cymbals and bells, each nun receives a stack of the tablets. Raising one tablet at a time to the forehead in a gesture of respect for the buddha represented, they intone each name, some voices loud, others soft, all overlapping.

Although it is a group activity, as the nuns chant each individual deceased’s name, the women with whom I collaborated expressed that they heard the calling of the name in their hearts in a way that made the dead feel present. Furthermore, in the context of hearing the name of your loved one chanted among hundreds of others, the connection between your loss and others’ loss makes one feel that one is not alone, but in a community of people living with loss. Being part of a community of grievers is healing, because it makes it clear that you are not singled out in your pain. Death is a condition of life.

The second part of the ritual takes place at a lake with all participants riding on a large boat chanting and singing Buddhist hymns (*go-eika*). Jizō Bosatsu’s *shingon* or *darani* is chanted quietly: “*on kaka kabi sanmane sowaka*” over and over. The chant is like the musical ground over which the melancholy melodies of the pilgrimage songs ride. The beauty of the natural setting and the mixing of the sounds of chanting, singing, and the wind are conducive to experiencing a blurring of the realms of living and dead. This is a grieving ritual where people feel the connections between themselves, lost loved ones, and the natural world. Upon boarding the boat, each person is handed seven slips of rice paper about three inches by an inch and a half with an image of Jizō Bosatsu stamped in red. After the boat has reached the center of the lake, each

person finds a place—whether among close friends or off to a quiet corner—to send off the slips. With the mournful melodies as accompaniment, each slip is raised to the forehead before it is let go on its journey to flutter in the breeze and swirl into the lake. When the rice-paper Jizō that symbolizes a lost loved one dissolves into the water, the women spoke of experiencing a visceral sense of interrelatedness. In other words, in death one is transformed and liberated into the universe that supports all. In this moment many people experience a keen awareness that one and all are what constitute the universe. This experience is what heals.

The Jizō Nagashi ancestral rite brings those living with loss together as a community. It affirms the lives of the living as it honors the lives of the dead. In that affirmation the ancestral rite functions as a healing rite. Publicly honoring your “personal buddha” in a community ritual is part of the healing process of many of these women.

Conclusion

These rituals offer a glimpse of the way in which the living interact with the dead in a manner that helps the living heal. After the careful collaborative effort of the twelve women in this project, it has become clear that ancestral rites function as healing rites for them. Indeed, in their healing process several rituals are employed that are not usually recognized as healing rites. It is only in seeing how a ritual is used and how it affects someone in the context of her life story that this becomes visible.

Following Barnes’ “Integrated Model of Healing and Illness” will help further clarify the contours of these Japanese Buddhist women’s healing process. In the case of the Japanese Buddhist women who collaborated on this study, (1) their “Understandings of Ultimate Human Possibility” includes the possibility of enlightenment in daily life, but it is guaranteed in death. (2) “Affliction and Suffering” are understood to be relatives. They are not enemies. They are part of one’s life, and no matter what, they must be interacted with. *How* one interacts is the key. (3) Their “Understanding of Self” is that they do not bifurcate the mind and body. They are interrelated to everything in the universe. Therefore, the realms of life and death can interact. (4) Their “Understandings of Illness/Sickness” is that they need to take care of themselves with nutrition, exercise, and stress management, but “even if you don’t call sickness, it will come.” They do, however, see themselves as having the power to respond positively or negatively to illness. Positive and negative here do not refer to valuations of good and evil, but rather

weaving the illness into living versus trying to reject it. Weaving leads to healing and rejecting leads to greater suffering. (5) As for the category "Healers," these women consider allopathic doctors and acupuncturists as healers, but these women also stress how they see Zen Buddhist nuns as healers. The nuns are the ones who guide them in how to have better relationships with their illnesses. The most intimate healers, however, are the dead loved ones, the "personal buddhas" who know them best and who are with them everywhere all the time, no longer restricted by the forces of gravity or the limitations of space and time. (6) In regard to the "Nature of Intervention," beyond medical treatments, the nature of the care that these women turn to is a transformation of perspective. Whether it is in healing from the loss of a loved one or dealing with the residence of cancer in one's body, it is in being aware of how one is internally related to everything that helps. The "Nature of the Intervention" is to cut out the delusion that one is an isolated, independent entity. (7) "Efficacy or Healing" oftentimes is not addressed directly, because experiencing and expressing gratitude is one of the key components of healing for these women. After all, if one is related to everything, then the only reasonable response is gratitude for everything. The gratitude may or may not help arrest the development of cancer cells, but it makes each breath of air sweeter, every load of laundry lighter, and committee meetings feel like a slice of heaven.

The key to all the women's healing processes is to transform their perspective. Although the details vary, they all indicated that they try to cultivate an attitude of being grateful. This requires learning from whatever happens and seeking what goodness, wisdom, or strength can be gained, especially from the loss of a loved one. To do this requires focusing on the larger picture. The fundamental assumption is that they think that they are not living independent lives based solely upon their own power and effort. They see that they are alive because the myriad interconnections in the universe work together to generate and support life. Rituals in honor of their dead facilitate this awareness, for there is an intimacy found in their relationship to the dead who are now "Hotoke-sama" or "personal buddhas." The various ancestral rituals unleash the healing power of their "own" buddhas by creating an experience of direct interrelatedness with everything in the universe. That is why they say, "I am in humble and grateful receipt of healing [by the universe]" in the "gratitude tense" (*iyasaremashita*) and not in the "lonely" form of "I am healed" (*iyashita*).

The art of healing, like scholarly inquiry, is a creative process of transformation, one in which views of the world open a vision of everything being interrelated in a perpetual dance of change. Women use Buddhist rituals in this art of healing. These rituals facilitate a direct

experience of interrelatedness which gives rise to gratitude—a place where they can feel at peace and intimately connected. Connected to family and friends—living and dead—connected to nature and the cosmos. The rituals involving the “personal buddhas” illuminate the reality that, even in death, no one is alone.

NOTES

1. I count Nagatomi Sensei among my “personal buddhas.” I am deeply grateful for all his assistance and support.
2. I am currently working on a book manuscript, *Polishing the Heart: Japanese Buddhist Women’s Healing Rituals*, in which I will present a much fuller analysis of the material including more direct quotes from the women collaborators.
3. Traditionally a person becomes an ancestor thirty-three or fifty years after passing away. By this time few, if any, of the people continuing to perform the rituals would have actually known the deceased. At the final memorial ritual, the deceased is formally recognized as an ancestor. From thereon a person is not ritually referred to by their Buddhist name (*kaimyo*), but is an “ancestor” (*go-senzo-sama*).
4. O-bon is an annual ritual that usually takes place in August or July. It is a three-day period when ancestors return for a visit. The living also often return to their hometowns at this time.
5. See the following: Helen Hardacre, *Lay Buddhism in Contemporary Japan: Reiyukai Kyodan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); Robert J. Smith, *Ancestor Worship in Contemporary Japan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974); Yangida Kunio, *About Our Ancestors*, trans. by Fanny Mayer and Ishiwara Yasuyo (Kyoto: UNESCO, 1970).
6. Hardacre observes that in Reiyukai, “ancestors are simply a category of deities on a par roughly with Buddhas and kami” (*Lay Buddhism in Contemporary Japan*, p. 66). She adds that worship of other families’ ancestors is distinctive to Reiyukai and not typical of most Japanese ancestor worship practices.
7. For more detailed explanation of this practice, see Yanagita Kunio’s *About Our Ancestors*, p. 107.
8. Yanagita explains that a Shintō-based understanding of ancestors holds that “ancestors have the power and pleasure to help us under any circumstances” (*About Our Ancestors*, p. 146). The nature of the relationship of this Shintō-based and my Buddhist-based concept of ancestors is beyond the scope of this study. One would also need to consider the Confucian influence on ancestor worship rituals that entered Japan from China. There do seem to be distinctions among these different impulses to commemorate ancestors, but there is undoubtedly influence from and in many directions.
9. Hardacre, *Lay Buddhism in Contemporary Japan*, p. 229.

10. Linda Barnes, Vanderbilt University presentation, spring 2001.

11. This conjugation is the passive tense (here in past form), but the meaning of it as used by my collaborators includes an expression of gratitude. The gratitude is implied in that one is not alone but there is support from beyond oneself.

12. Based upon extensive anthropological field research in *Crafting Selves: Power, Gender, and Discourses of Identity in a Japanese Workplace* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990), Dorinne Kondo gives a detailed analysis of Japanese construction of identity.

13. For further elaboration of the concept of *amae*, please see Takeo Doi, *The Anatomy of Dependence*, trans. by John Bester (Tokyo, New York: Kodansha International), 1973.