



The <i>Kieshiki</i> Affirmation Ceremony Buddhist Churches of America
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The Meaning of the Ceremony

In this Shin Buddhist ceremony, performed before the altar of Amida Buddha and Shinran Shonin by the Bishop of the BCA, one takes the important step of affirming one's reverence for the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, and one's determination to tread the path to Buddhahood. When the ceremony is conducted by the Monshu, spiritual head of the Jodo Shinshu Hongwanji-ha denomination, the ceremony is referred to as the *Kikyoshiki* Confirmation Ceremony.

The Three Refuges in General Buddhist Tradition

In the time of Shakyamuni Buddha, one was permitted to join the Buddhist community (sangha) upon receiving the precept of the three refuges under the guidance of a monk and shaving one's head.

To receive the precept of the three refuges means to declare before one's teacher that one takes wholehearted refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, and to vow that one will not deviate from them.

"Buddha" here refers to Sakyamuni, "Dharma" to Sakyamuni's Teaching, and "Sangha" to the community of followers who have entrusted themselves to Sakyamuni Buddha's teaching. Because these form the basis of what one values most in one's life, they are called the "three treasures."

Shaving one's head symbolizes departure from the worldly ways of life and entrance into a life devoted to the path of Buddhism, which transcends the mundane world.

The Affirmation Ceremony

The teachings of Sakyamuni Buddha are so extensive that they are said to number 84,000. It is no surprise, then, that after the Buddha's death, various schools developed based on the different aspects of his teachings. Shin Buddhism (Jodo Shinshu) is the Buddhist path of great compassion clarified by Shinran Shonin. Shinran teaches that Sakyamuni appeared in this world in order to reveal the Vow of Amida Buddha to save all beings; it is the salvation of all people by Amida Buddha that is Sakyamuni's fundamental teaching.

The Affirmation Ceremony in Shin Buddhism, therefore, shares a common meaning with the precept of the three refuges administered in the time of Sakyamuni

Buddha, but it also has a special meaning. In the Affirmation Ceremony, the Buddha of the three refuges is not simply Sakyamuni, but refers especially to Amida Buddha, who is the heart of Sakyamuni's teachings. Sakyamuni came into the world to teach the Vow of Amida Buddha, and our salvation is brought about by Amida. Thus, "Dharma" is the teaching of Amida's compassionate working to save all beings, and "Sangha" refers to people who have entrusted themselves to Amida.

Since there are no precepts in Shin Buddhism, instead of receiving the precept of the three treasures, one participates in the Affirmation Ceremony.

Also, Shin practitioners do not shave their heads, but undergo a ritual and symbolic shaving which has similar meaning. This is part of the Kikyoshiki Confirmation Ceremony. For the Kieshiki Affirmation Ceremony, the Bishop of the BCA touches the head of each recipient with a scroll inscribed with the words of the Buddha. This is referred to as "Chokyo" or "receiving the teachings" and takes on a similar meaning.

By participating in the Affirmation Ceremony, one receives a Buddhist name (homyo). These names are in the form of *Shaku* and two Buddhist terms which follow. The word "*Shaku*" means "disciple of Sakyamuni" and signifies that the person has joined the followers of the teachings of Sakyamuni Buddha, a community that transcends race or nationality.

In Shin Buddhism, as stated earlier, this ceremony is referred to as the Confirmation Kikyoshiki Ceremony when performed by the Monshu of the Jodo Shinshu Hongwanji-ha. However, depending on the circumstances, the ceremony may be performed by a representative of the Monshu, as in the case of the Affirmation Kieshiki Ceremony being conducted today by the Bishop of the BCA.

Attitude of the Participant in the Affirmation Ceremony

As a Shin Buddhist, one endeavors to hear the teaching of Amida's Primal Vow, and also to transmit it to others. Further, one clearly grasps the principle of cause and effect that is basic to the Buddhist teaching, and does not rely on superstitions and beliefs of any kind that contradict it.