

Single-Character Sutra-Copying Experience

Visitors to Eihei-ji can participate in a unique single-character sutra-copying experience held on weekdays at the Shihi-ku Community Center, located next door to Hakuju-kan. Each participant writes one of the 266 characters of the Heart Sutra (*Hannya shingyō*), which describes the Buddhist doctrine of emptiness. Once a copy of the entire sutra has been completed, it is donated to Eihei-ji Temple and stored in a special building for copied sutras called the *nōkyōtō* (literally, “tower for storing sutras”).

The act of copying Buddhist sutras by hand, called *shakyō*, has a long history. One of the earliest historical accounts of sutra-copying is recorded in the *Nihon shoki* (Chronicles of Japan), which mentions that the imperial court requested that a sutra be copied in Nara in 673. Sutra copying is considered a form of spiritual training and a means of spreading Buddhist teachings, though it can also be performed as a prayer for the fulfillment of a particular wish.

The Heart Sutra, one of the shortest and most widely known sutras, is often used for sutra copying. Wholeheartedly copying a single character of the Heart Sutra is an excellent introduction to the practice of *shakyō*. Once the full sutra has been completed, a commemorative copy of the work is sent to all the participants. Sutra-copying sessions are generally held Monday to Friday between 2:00 p.m. and 3:00 p.m. and cost ¥2,200 to attend. Visitors who wish to try the single-character sutra copying for themselves will need to make advance reservations by contacting Mr. Ōzeki at the Eihei-ji Monzen Sightseeing Association (0776-63-3131).