

## **Sai no Kawara**

In the center of the temple precincts is a dedicated space enclosed by low stone walls called Sai no Kawara. It is a memorial site with approximately 8,000 stone grave markers that were placed throughout the Adashino area over the centuries. The markers gathered there are lined up in neat rows and include miniature five-tier pagodas, rounded headstones, and simple statues of Buddhist deities.

The Adashino area was used as a burial site as early as the Heian period (794–1185). Initially, people would leave the bodies of the deceased in the mountains, but later they began to bury them in simple graves, sometimes placing stone markers at the gravesites. As centuries passed, these markers were covered with soil and plant growth. Around 100 years ago, an organized effort began to collect the grave markers scattered throughout the area and relocate them to a safe space where they could be properly memorialized. The stone markers were assembled at Adashino Nenbutsuji Temple and carefully arranged in a dedicated spot so that respects could be paid to the souls of the departed. A tall, thirteen-tier pagoda is placed in the center, and a seated statue of Amida Buddha overlooks the site.

The name of the site comes from its resemblance to folk depictions of a Buddhist purgatory called Sai no Kawara. The souls of children sent to this limbo stack stones along the riverbank, one on top of another, building small pagodas to pray for salvation and atone for the sorrow caused to their grieving parents. However, their attempts are inevitably disrupted by demons who roam the riverbank and knock over the pagodas. In these tales, the bodhisattva Jizo appears to comfort and guide the young souls. The site at Adashino Nenbutsuji was not established to symbolize this purgatory and is not specifically associated with children, but acquired its name because of the many rows of stone markers. Please note that taking photos while inside the walls of Sai no Kawara is prohibited.

A special memorial service called Sento Kuyo is held at the Sai no Kawara site each year at the end of August. During this event, countless candles are lit as offerings to the departed, illuminating the dark summer night.