

Hokke Hakko and Hokke Zanmai Rituals

Date: Hokke Hakko is held once every 10 years in summer; Hokke Zanmai takes place in the years between

The Hokke Hakko and Hokke Zanmai are Buddhist rituals with a focus on the Lotus Sutra and its interpretation that are held at the [Jogu \(Upper Shrine\)](#) of [Usa Jingu Shrine](#). The performance of Buddhist rituals at a Shinto shrine reflects the syncretic roots of Usa Jingu as a shrine-temple complex where a fusion of Shinto and Buddhist worship was once practiced. It also demonstrates the strong historic connection between Usa Jingu and the Tendai school of Buddhism.

Throughout history, many prominent Buddhist monks made pilgrimages to Usa to pray to the deity Hachiman, including Saicho (Dengyo Daishi, 767–822), the founder of the Tendai school. In 803, Saicho departed for China to study esoteric Buddhism, but his ship was damaged and he had to spend a year in Kyushu, waiting for the next opportunity to set sail. Saicho prayed to Hachiman for a safe voyage and arrived in China in 804, returning in 805. He revisited Usa to thank Hachiman for the divine protection and gave a sermon on the Lotus Sutra to the deity. According to legend, Hachiman bestowed the purple robes of an elite monk on Saicho as a reward.

To honor the connection between Saicho and Hachiman, the head of the Tendai school and high-ranking monks make a summer pilgrimage to Usa Jingu once every 10 years for a special service called Hokke Hakko (“eight lectures on the Lotus Sutra”) at the main sanctuary area of the Jogu. A prayer by Shinto priests is followed by *sanmon itto* (“three questions and one answer”), a ritual dialog where three monks ask questions about Buddhist doctrine to a master, who replies with a sermon. Though the Hokke Hakko is largely conducted out of sight, visitors can observe the procession through the grounds and listen to the service from outside.

In the years between Hokke Hakko rituals, a smaller-scale version called Hokke Zanmai (“meditations on the Lotus Sutra”) is led by monks from Rokugo Manzan temples, who come to Usa Jingu from the neighboring Kunisaki Peninsula.

During the period when Usa Jingu was a shrine-temple complex, rituals such as these were held far more often. However, they were suspended after the Meiji government

ordered the separation of Shinto and Buddhism in 1868. The tradition was revived in 1978, and Shinto priests have welcomed Buddhist monks back to Usa Jingu ever since.