

Enma and the Buddhist Cycle of Rebirth

The underworld in Japanese Buddhist mythology is the dominion of the deity Enma. After people die, they are judged over a period of 49 days by the Ten Kings of Hell, who are led by Enma. The judgment is based on their life's actions and determines into which of the Six Realms of Existence they will be reborn.

The Ten Kings of Hell pass judgment in turn, considering sins such as killing, theft, and lying. Each judge determines a different aspect of an individual's rebirth, beginning with where they will cross the Sanzu River into the underworld; a bridge, a ford, or a serpent-infested section of deep water. Enma decides the realm into which the soul will be reborn. In ascending order, these are the realms of hell, hungry ghosts, animals, Asuras, humans, and celestial beings.

Suffering pervades all six realms to differing degrees. Hungry ghosts, for example, are tormented by insatiable hunger. When they try to eat, food turns to ash in their mouths. Even divine beings in the celestial realm can suffer from excessive pride and are not guaranteed to be reborn in the same realm. Until a person attains enlightenment or, according to the Tateyama faith, is reborn in the Pure Land through faith in Amida Buddha, the Buddha of infinite light and life, they are trapped in this cycle of birth, death, and rebirth.

The Tateyama pilgrimage was popular in the Edo period (1603–1867) as a means of attaining salvation. People traveled here from all over the country to climb Mt.

Tate and purify themselves. They viewed the mountain peaks as a representation of the Pure Land, and believed that by making the pilgrimage, they would be reborn in the realm of Amida Buddha.

At the Tateyama Mandala Yuen, an outdoor facility operated by the Tateyama Museum of Toyama, light and sound installations recreate the pilgrimage experience and the soul's journey through the Buddhist underworld. The Tateyama Mandala Yuen is a 10-minute walk from the Enmado Hall.