

THE EKO - ITS FUNCTION



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The function of *Fueko* and other *Eko* Verses is to 'turn around' (ekō) any merits accrued from chanting or ritual practices. So, and as a way of passing on all merit to all beings, it always the last chant in a Buddha Service. The *Fuekō* is a universal ekō. However, there are many other forms specific to other schools of Buddhism.

After a traditional chanting of the central element (normally a sutra) in a Buddha Service, the four syllables *Na Man Da Bu* are repeated six times, and this is followed by an Eko.

Eko is the Mahayana (but not the Shin) practice of transferring any merit accruing from this sutra chanting. Since Shinran abandoned this concept of the necessity of acquiring merit, and the virtue of such chanting as a means to the end of attaining Buddhahood, strictly speaking the Mahayana Eko is not compatible with Shin Buddhism.

However, the tradition of chanting Eko has persisted for centuries in Shin temples. For Rennyō Shōnin, under whose guidance Shinshū flourished in medieval Japan, the chanting of the sutra represented one's yearning to be reborn in Amida's Pure Land. The sonorous repetition of *NaManDaBu* represented being so reborn and the eko expressed the Shinshū concept of *genso bodhisattva*, returning to this world to work for the enlightenment and welfare of all.