

# Bodhi Day

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Bodhi (bow-dee) Day is a Buddhist holiday commemorating the day that Gautama Buddha experienced spiritual enlightenment also known as bodhi, meaning “awakening” in the Sanskrit and Pali languages. Bodhi Day is primarily celebrated by followers of Mahayana Buddhism whose adherents mainly reside in China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam in addition to communities in the United States, Canada, and Europe. The day of the holiday may vary from community to community, but Bodhi Day is commonly celebrated on **December 8<sup>th</sup>** as a fixed date every year.

## Background

The Buddha was once known as Prince Siddhartha, born into ruling aristocratic family in India around the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE. A wise sage predicted that if Siddhartha never saw the suffering of the world outside his palace, he would become a great ruler; however, if he was allowed outside the palace, he would become a great spiritual leader. After being confined in the palace for several years, Siddhartha managed to escape, and he saw the suffering of the world.

Siddhartha cast off his previous life and became a wandering ascetic. After living in extreme poverty for years, he one day came to meditate under a type of fig tree now known as a Bodhi Tree. There he reached enlightenment becoming a Buddha or “enlightened one”. Bodhi Day is when Buddhist communities commemorate the day the Buddha achieved enlightenment.

## Observance of Bodhi Day

The commemoration of the day the Buddha reached enlightenment is celebrated in a calm and commemorative manner. Buddhists may spend the day meditating, praying, and thinking about the nature of enlightenment. Others may choose to go to temple, monastery, or church to commemorate the holiday. In some Buddhist homes, people may light candles or string lights to symbolize the Buddha’s path to enlightenment. Some Buddhists eat a meal of rice and milk to symbolize the first meal that the Buddha ate after he reached enlightenment. A single candle may be light for 30 days after the holiday.

## Scheduling of Bodhi Day

During Bodhi Day, Buddhist employees may request time off work to go to a service, observe the holiday, or even to prepare for the holiday. Invite your employees to share how they personally observe Bodhi Day and what practices they have that should be respected during the holiday.

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