



Osonaye (Honorific Offerings)

The meaning behind the act of offering food, flowers, incense, etc., on or in front of the Buddhist altar, is to express our gratitude to the many causes and conditions which ripened to allow us the opportunity to meet with the Teachings of the Buddha. Through the ages Buddhists have made offerings to the Buddha in this spirit of thanksgiving.

Rice has become the traditional main offering. As it was the staple food in China and Japan, it became the practice to offer the first portion of each day's rice to the Buddha.

Flowers for the Altar

Those with abundant flowers in their gardens should be encouraged to bring them to the temple so that they may be arranged for Sunday Services.

For the flower festival of *Hanamatsuri*, every child should be encouraged to bring at least a few blossoms to offer at the *Hanamido* (flower altar).

Giving of One's Service

Along with the giving of material goods, giving of labor and love for the temple should also be encouraged. The unselfish concern for the welfare of the temple, which is necessary for all Buddhists, young and old, must be taught from an early age. Cleaning the temple building and grounds, helping with bulletins, volunteering for child care, lining up chairs or distributing Gatha Books can help us acquire this unselfish concern.

Receiving with Gratitude

Receiving with gratitude is as important as giving with a pure heart. In this land of abundance, it is not difficult for a child to think little of a small gift. The teacher must somehow convey to their students the feeling of special appreciation for gifts from the temple.

If the Dharma School pupils can understand this feeling, they will treat the gifts with appreciation.

Daily Expressions of Gratitude

Morning and Evening Gassho

Morning and evening services should be observed, however short or simple, in one's home. This may take the form of gassho alone or the recitation of some words of thanksgiving in gassho. The words one may choose to recite before the home altar is of personal preference. They are usually determined by the guidance one receives from their minister and temple leaders. The important point is that the morning and evening expression of gratitude to the Buddha becomes a regular and important part of one's daily life.

At the Dinner Table

Let us encourage the practice of reflecting before and after meals, on the inter-connectedness and inter-dependency of all life, through which we receive nourishment so that we may continue to listen to the Dharma.

"Itadakimasu" means to receive gratefully with appreciation. *"Gochiso Sama Deshita"* expresses acknowledgment and gratitude for all the effort expended for one's own benefit. The utterance of *"Itadakimasu"* before the meal and *"Gochiso Sama Deshita"* after the meal could be of real meaning if expressed with thanksgiving and humility in gassho.

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- Buddhist Church of Santa Barbara
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A Guide to

Buddhist Etiquette

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Buddhist Etiquette is concerned with the refinement of our behavior in its relationship with the Buddha, his Teachings and his community of followers.

Thus, while it is necessary for the Buddhist to observe the ordinary rules of good conduct toward one's fellow human beings, it is more important that we move with reverence and gratitude toward all things which are related to the Buddha.

Reverence and gratitude for the Compassion and Wisdom of the Buddha form the basis of Buddhist etiquette. Without this basis, the learning and practice of the outward forms become empty and meaningless. Placing our hands together in *Gassho* is meaningful only when it is the Nembutsu in action — when it is the expression of our gratitude and reverence. Therefore, in teaching the forms of Buddhist Etiquette, or in practicing them oneself, it must be to express the spirit of gratitude and reverence.

When Shinran Shonin spoke of “*Shomyo Nembutsu*” — the actual utterance of the Nembutsu — he was saying that it is not enough for a person to think about noble thoughts and deeds: they must be expressed in words and action.

In light of this, the purpose of etiquette in the lives of Buddhists becomes clear: we must put into action the reverence and gratitude which we feel for the Buddha.

Gassho

Gassho means to put the hands together. The palms of both hands are placed together with the fingers and thumbs extended and with the onenju (beads) encircling both hands and held lightly between the thumbs and the fingers. Both elbows should be fairly close to the body and the hands should be at mid-chest level. To bow during gassho, the hands should be held steady, while the body is bent forward from the hips and then back to an upright position.

Gassho is the natural expression of reverence and gratitude.

The Onenju (Religious Beads)

The onenju should be treated with the utmost respect at all times. At home it should be kept in a special place, such as in a drawer near the family altar. At other times, the Buddhist follower should carry the onenju in the purse or in the coat pocket so that it will always be available. During the service, the onenju should be held in the left hand when carrying and encircle the hands during gassho, symbolizing Oneness.

Oshoko (Burning of Incense)

Walk up to the front of the altar and bow at a distance of about two steps in front of the Oshoko table. Step up to the table (starting with your left foot), and with the right hand take a pinch of powdered incense. Drop it into the incense burner, on top of the lit sticks of incense or charcoal. Gassho and bow. Take a step backward (beginning with the right foot), bow and return to your seat.

Oshoko represents the acceptance of transiency and fulfillment in life.

Use of the Service Book (Seiten) and Gatha Books

Since the Service Book contains the Teachings of the Buddha, it should be handled with proper care. Before opening, reverently hold the Seiten with both hands and raise it to your forehead while slightly bowing your head in a gesture of gratitude. This attitude of reverence for what we have received is known in Japanese as “*itadakimasu*”.

The Service Book should never be placed directly on the seat cushion or floor. To show proper respect for the Teachings contained within the Seiten, it should always be returned to its proper bookshelf or rack when not in use.

Entering and Leaving the Hondo (Temple Hall)

The Hondo should be entered quietly and with due re-

spect. Upon entering, gassho facing the altar. Take your seat and wait quietly for the service to begin.

Avoid being late, but when you must enter the Hondo after the service has started, be especially careful not to disturb the others. Try to find a seat in the back rows. If you enter during a period of meditation (reading of a Buddhist passage), wait until it is over before moving toward the seats.

Before leaving the Hondo, turn to face the altar and gassho.

Recitation of the Nembutsu

Shin Buddhism is based on the realization of the Nembutsu, the dynamic movement of Amida Buddha's Wisdom and Compassion as it is manifested in our daily lives. The Nembutsu, *Namo Amida Butsu*, is not a meditation or practice which leads to Enlightenment, but rather is an expression of gratitude for having received the True Entrusting Mind of Buddha. It should be uttered spontaneously as the working of Buddha's Heart and Mind.

Listening to the Reading of Buddhist Passages

The minister often reads excerpts from the *Letters of Rennyo Shonin (Gobunsho)* or other Buddhist texts before or after delivering a Dharma Message. The sangha should sit quietly with heads bowed and listen respectfully to the words.

Responding to the Speaker's Bow

When the speaker bows in greeting or upon conclusion of the Dharma Message, the sangha should return the bow in mutual gratitude and respect.

Leading the Sangha in Reading

Leading the sangha in reading, whether it is the “Golden Chain” or excerpts from the *Dhammapada*, is an honor and therefore should be performed in that spirit. Before beginning the reading, gassho and bow toward the altar. Hold the book you are reading from with both hands. Read slowly

and distinctly so that the sangha can follow together.

After the reading, gassho.

General Behavior in the Temple

Proper Buddhist etiquette requires us to refrain from talking out of turn, from whispering and chit-chatting when in the temple. Try to direct your attention to the part of the service being conducted once the temple bell has sounded.

Emphasis is placed on the need to do everything quietly and reverently; turn the pages of the Gatha Book quietly, close the book quietly upon completion, etc.

Practice of the Teachings

As the first of the Six Paramitas, and a major virtue in the Buddhist Teachings, the practice and understanding of *dana* (giving selflessly) should be constantly taught to the Dharma School students. The Dharma School and other temple activities afford various opportunities in which *dana*, along with the other paramitas, may be practiced.

Osaisen (Offeritory)

It has long been the practice of Dharma School children to make small contributions each Sunday to the temple. The teachers may help their pupils grasp the importance of their acts of *dana* through stories showing the merits of this act. Money given boastfully is not true osaisen.

Teach the difference so that they may appreciate the true meaning of giving.

The method of accepting the contributions varies with the different temples. The majority of the temples have “*osaisen bako*” (box for offerings) near the entrance of the Hondo. The children drop their osaisen in this box as they enter the temple. Some temples have the system of collecting the osaisen in the separate classes.