

How does the service go?

1> Kanshō (Call of Service)

Kanshō is the traditional bell we ring to call everyone to service.

2> Opening Meditation and Recitation of Nembutsu

Every service begins with a short meditation which provides a pause. This prepares our mind to receive the Dharma; Buddha's teaching.

3> Recitation of the Vandana Ti Sarana

Vandana Ti Sarana is the Three Treasures which are the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha; Community. We take refuge in the Three Treasures to make it the central principle of our lives as Buddhists.

4> Chanting of Sutra (Buddhist text)

Chanting is ritually done in Japanese, although English translations are provided.

5> Dharma Message

Dharma Message, known as a sermon or a homily in other traditions, provides insights into Shin Buddhism and its doctrine that we can practice in our everyday lives.

6> Singing of a Gāthā (Song)

As part of most services, we will sing a Gatha as an expression of our gratitude.

7> Dana : Selfless giving for the Three Treasures

An expression of gratitude and sharing.

8> Closing Meditation and Recitation of Nembutsu

Another short meditative period to close the service, reflect on what you have received, and prepare for the coming week.

9> Oshōko (Burning of Incense)

This is the time to contemplate on the impermanence of human life so please take your time when you burn incense.

10> Sangha Announcements

Informal time to share news about the temple.

11> Final Gassho

The service closes out with a final recitation of the Nembutsu.

What does this mean?

[Gasshō]

Gassho is a gesture of placing your palms together. The proper way to Gassho is to keep all fingers straight up as you press the palms together softly and place the whole so that your thumbs are against your chest. Gassho is not done to pray or request favors. Gassho is a gesture of welcoming into ourselves the three treasures: the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha, so that over time, this practice turns into appreciation for these gifts.

[Onenju] also are called Nenju or Ojuzu

The Onenju are religious beads. The beads are the symbol of our blind passions (selfishness, pride .etc.) and represents how we are surrounded by them. Our left hand represents ourselves and the right hand represents the Buddha. When we Gassho and pass our hands through the circle of beads, the gesture shows that even though we are surrounded by our blind passions, we are assured by Amida Buddha promise to never abandon us no matter what.

[Nembutsu] the main practice in Shin Buddhism

Nembutsu is our main practice to recite "Namo Amida Butsu". Namo means "Refuge", Amida Butsu is "Amida Buddha" which is the representation of Universal Truth that Siddhartha revealed into this world. Namo Amida Butsu literally means "I take refuge in Amida Buddha". However, the real situation is that we tend to turn our back on the Universal Truth by relying on our attachments or refusing to accept everyone and everything as a piece of our interconnection. Through the Nembutsu we recite, Amida Buddha is constantly calling on us "Please take refuge in me, the truth" so that we could awaken to the cause of the stress in our human conditions. Therefore, Nembutsu is not a magic word that fixes our problems but rather, helps us to focus and realize the source of our own problems.

[Itadaku]

Itadaku is a gesture performed before opening the service book. It is a motion of showing respect and preparing your mind to receive the Buddha teachings that we practice. The proper way to Itadaku is to place the bottom tip of the service book against your forehead before you open the service book.

[Chanting]

One of the purposes of Chanting is to accomplish harmony (practice of interconnection). Accepting the individual differences in our tones, the idea is to meld your voice with others around you. When we all chant in this way, it strengthens us as a Sangha.

[Oshōko] Burning of Incense

The proper way of burning incense is to stop about one step from the incense table and bow to the altar. Then take a step forward, place a small pinch of incense and Gassho and slightly bow. Then take a step back and bow, turn to your right and exchange bows of gratitude with the service leaders, and then return to your seat via the side aisles.

If you are new to our temple, you may feel nervous about participating in our rituals at first, but please do not hesitate to practice them. Everyone here also felt so at some time. No matter whether you make a mistake or did not perform them properly, you will not be judged because we are all under Amida Buddha's light of compassion. When you practice them over and over again with patience, gradually you and the rituals will become one and the comfort you discover in them will always remain with you.

