

First Time Visit Slide Shows Scripts

Slide Show 1: INTRODUCTION

Hi, I'm Gregory Gibbs, the resident minister at the Oregon Buddhist Temple. Thank you for your interest in OBT. Our temple was founded in 1903, making us the oldest Buddhist organization in Oregon. We follow Jodo Shinshu (also known as Shin) Buddhism, a sect in the Pureland stream of Mahayana Buddhism and we are affiliated with the Buddhist Churches of America. Shin has been referred to as "Blue Collar" Buddhism. Our sect is non-monastic and our practice is geared for the average person and families. OBT started as a community to service the religious and cultural needs of Portland's Japanese immigrants. While we grew up in the Japanese-American community and are proud of our heritage and traditions, happily we are growing and our sangha is becoming increasingly diverse. All people, regardless of ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, and political or religious affiliation are welcome. We invite you to peruse our website and to visit us in person.

Slide show 2: YOUR FIRST VISIT -- WELCOME

Welcome to the Oregon Buddhist Temple. We are glad that you are interested in visiting us. The uncertainty of what will happen on your first visit can be somewhat intimidating -- what is proper etiquette, what is expected of me, what do I wear? The intent of this presentation is to give you a glimpse of OBT and an idea of what your visit here will be like. We hope that your experience is both pleasant and meaningful.

Before we enter the temple, let's talk a bit about clothing. While some people do dress up somewhat, remember *this is* Portland after all. Most just come in casual clothes. Jeans (or shorts in the summer) and t-shirts are perfectly acceptable. We just ask that you are mindful that this is a temple and dress respectfully. Please make sure that any t-shirt or button message is tasteful.

So are you ready? OK then, let's enter our temple.

Slide show 3: ENTERING THE TEMPLE

When you walk in the front door, you enter the foyer. To the right is the welcome table. On the table you will find some information on our temple and Jodo Shinshu Buddhism. There are usually a couple of temple members acting as greeters at the table. They are there to greet newcomers and answer questions that you may have before the service.

We have a visitor book and invite all first time visitors to sign. This is not required, we just like to introduce all visitors to the sangha (congregation) at the end of the service and to keep a record of visitors for our temple's history. Don't worry that you will receive a phone call or visit if you sign our book. Buddhism is a non-proselytizing religion. We won't contact you unless you request it and we won't sell or give this information to anybody.

Just a note, Jodo Shinshu Buddhism originated in Japan and much of our language and forms reflect that heritage. Like most other traditions, we have certain customs we observe as a way of showing respect to our teachings. For example, we bow when entering and leaving the Hondo,

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the main temple hall. Please feel free to participate as much or as little as you feel comfortable. While we observe these customs, we do not expect or demand that others follow suit. Don't worry if you "mess up". Intent and respect are more important than form. The best way to learn about our customs is to observe the behavior of others and to ask questions of the minister or temple members.

Slide show 4: ENTERING THE HONDO

We will now go through the double doors and enter the Hondo, the main temple hall. You will see people bow when they enter the Hondo. This is done as a sign of respect. One of the first things you may notice is that the layout of the Hondo is similar to a traditional Western church or synagogue. There is a center aisle with pews on either side. At OBT we do not remove our shoes nor sit on the floor in lotus position!

Elevated in the front of the Hondo is the o-naijin, the inner sanctuary or altar. The statue of Amida Buddha is the centerpiece of the o-naijin. The statue is symbolic of Amida's wisdom and compassion, and is not an object of worship. On the right side of the statue of the Buddha is the scroll of Shinran Shonin, the founder of our sect. On the left side of the Buddha is the scroll of Rennyō Shonin, the eighth descendant of Shinran Shonin. These are placed in the o-naijin as a sign of respect and gratitude to the founders of the sect. Several items are placed in the o-naijin, such as flowers and rice. Flowers, besides adding beauty, are symbolic of the impermanence of life. Rice is an expression of thankfulness and gratitude.

Incense is burned in the Hondo on every Sunday except the first Sunday of the month. The incense free Sunday is in consideration of those who have respiratory problems or are otherwise sensitive to incense. Before or after service we o-shoko, which is the ritual offering of incense. O-shoko consists of walking to the front of the o-Naijin, bowing once, taking a pinch of incense and placing it in the Koro (incense burner), Gassho (hold hands together) and bowing a second time, stepping back, and bowing a third time. As we stated before, you can participate as much or as little as you are comfortable. We invite you to o-shoko but it is not at all required.

Slide show 5: THE SERVICE

The flow of the service will feel familiar to people from a Western tradition, whereas the content of the service will be familiar with those from an Eastern tradition. You will see the service books at the pews. All texts for the chants, songs, and readings will be found in the books. Let's look at the flow of a typical service.

- **Welcome.** The service chairperson will welcome the attendees and announce the start of the service.
- **Call of the Kansho / entrance of the minister.** The Sensei (minister) strikes a Kansho, or large bell in a traditional pattern. This signals the start of the service. When you hear the bell, please sit comfortably and quietly. All conversations should end when the Kansho sounds.
- **Vandana Ti-sarana.** The congregation chants the Vandana Ti-sarana. This is our statement of taking refuge in the Three Treasures, the Buddha (the teacher), The

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Dharma (the teachings), and the Sangha (the taught). This is chanted in Pali, an ancient Middle Indo-Aryan language used for liturgical purposes only, much like Latin is used.

- **Sutra/passage Chanting.** Chanting of a sutra is done in unison. We chant in Sino-Japanese (a Japanese reading of the Kanji or Chinese characters), so the sound, rather than the meaning of the words, is the basic experience of chanting. Transliterations in Western alphabet of the chants are below the Kanji characters as well as the translation of the text in English.
- **Gatha.** This is a song or hymn. Depending on the gatha it may be in either English or Japanese. We stand for the Gathas.
- **Reading.** This is a short passage that the congregation reads together
- **Dharma Talk.** Our resident minister or a guest speaker will give a talk on a point of the Dharma. This is a Buddhist “sermon”. Part of the Dharma Talk generally includes the minister inviting the children to come to the front of the Hondo for a story. Jodo Shinshu is very family oriented and children are not only welcome but are an integral part of our service and life of our temple. Typically the Dharma Talk is about 20 minutes long.
- **Gatha:** Another Gatha is sung
- **Ringing of the Bell and Quiet Reflection.** A single bell is rung and we sit in quiet reflection as the sound slowly fades. This signifies the end of the service.
- **Introduction of guests.** All Guests are introduced to and welcomed by the congregation
- **Announcements.** Any announcements of upcoming events or activities are made.

At this point I think we should talk a bit about the Nembutsu. At times during the service you will hear the minister say “Namo Amida Butsu” and the congregation will join in repeating the phrase several times. This is not done in unison and the number of times it is repeated is typically somewhere between 2 and 6 depending on the individual. This phrase, Namo Amida Butsu, is the Nembutsu. While there have been volumes written on the meaning of the Nembutsu, for our purposes here we will say that it means “I take refuge in Amida Buddha” and is an expression of gratitude.

The service lasts between 45 minutes and 1 hour. While most of our services follow this outline, the service you attend may be slightly different.

Slide show 6: AFTER THE SERVICE: Dharma School, Dharma Exchange and Refreshments

Once the service has ended, you will exit the Hondo. As members depart the Hondo, they turn to face the o-naijin and bow. Again, bowing is a sign of respect.

After service we have Dharma school classes for the children ages 2 - 18. These classes run for about 45 minutes and include age appropriate religious instruction and fun activities. Dharma School is held in the annex, the building to the right of the temple.

During this time we also have a Dharma Exchange for the adults to discuss Buddhist topics of

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interest. This is usually in the form of a guided informal discussion. The Dharma Exchange is held downstairs -- the staircase is located opposite the Welcome table in the foyer. There is also an elevator available for those with mobility issues. You are invited and are welcome to attend.

After Dharma Exchange we have refreshments: tea, coffee and snacks. This is a great time to see our community and meet and chat with members.

Well, that's it. You have gone through a typical Sunday at OBT. We hope this presentation was informative and gave you an idea of what you will experience when you come for your first time. Again, we extend a warm invitation to you to come visit.

In Gassho, The Members of the Oregon Buddhist Temple. Namo Amida Butsu