



# **BUDDHIST FUNERAL PROCEDURE HANDBOOK**

(2<sup>nd</sup> Edition)  
January 2015

# **Reedley Buddhist Church**

## **BUDDHIST FUNERAL PROCEDURE HANDBOOK**

This handbook is intended to serve as a practical guide when death occurs and you must begin to prepare for a funeral. The procedures outlined are customary for the Reedley Buddhist Church Sangha and may vary according to the wishes of the family. Buddhist funerals, memorial services, and the customs that accompany them are a century-old tradition. Since this handbook cannot possibly explain every detail, you may wish to consult with a family friend who is familiar with funeral procedures and practices. You may, of course, discuss any problem with a minister.

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## DEATH AND DYING

The grief felt by the loss of a loved one is among the greatest suffering in a lifetime. Yet, at the same time, there is no experience more intimate than to be with someone during his or her final days. To share that time with another, to encourage a loved one to let go gently while we ourselves draw on energy reserves which we did not know existed, can be most fulfilling. The process of dying brings hearts and minds together as no other experience does. Seeing a loved one in pain or hearing a loved one gasping for breath is indeed difficult. But it is through these experiences that we come to understand our profound helplessness to the uncontrollable nature of change. It is precisely this awareness of change which allows us to penetrate beyond our pain and touch the essential humanity which we all share.

In grief there is no hiding. We are forced to explore the depth of those feelings that lie below the threshold of our ordinary awareness. We are forced to the very core from which our life experiences arise. In grief we touch that which we share in common--the love we have for each other and the experiences we shared. These formless connections have and will always be present between you and your departed loved one. In touching this common bond, you commune with the deceased and touch one another. There is no separateness, only identity and oneness.

During this most painful time, we are thrust into planning for a funeral service of which we may have little experience. Family and friends come together to lend support and to reinforce our memories of the recently departed. While preparing for and during the funeral service, we come to understand the love we have for each other. The funeral service helps to focus our grief, encourages us to let go gently and to rededicate ourselves to the task of living.

Often grief overwhelms us and we are unable to cope with our loss. We all need support and encouragement during this difficult period. Family and friends can be of great help and the minister of the temple can offer guidance. Dharma is the reservoir of wisdom and warmth. If assistance is needed, please do not hesitate to ask.

1. **2015 Contact Numbers:**

**Funeral Committee:**

Gary Sakata  
Cell – (559) 250-9687

Ben Kubota  
Home – (559) 638-4333

**RBC President:**

Kathy Nishinaka  
Cell – (559) 905-3107

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If a death occurs in the evening, over the weekend, or at a time when the church office is not open, please contact the Funeral Committee or president at their contact numbers.

- A. When death occurs, contact the church president. If the family desires, a minister will be called to come and offer comfort and conduct a brief bedside or *makuragyo* service. This service is normally performed immediately following death. However, if death occurs at an inconvenient hour or if death occurred away from the immediate area, the family may wish to have the *makuragyo* service at a later time when all of the family can be present. If this is the case, the service can be held at home or at the mortuary at a mutually determined time. Since convalescent care homes require the immediate removal of the deceased, a *makuragyo* service may not be possible at the bedside. On these occasions the *makuragyo* service may be performed at a later time at the mortuary or at the home.
- B. When you contact the church president, please identify yourself, give your address, phone number, and the name of the person who has died. If you wish to have a *makuragyo* service, directions will be needed to the home or hospital. If the address is difficult to locate, it may be advisable for someone to meet and drive or escort him.

2. CONTACTING THE MORTUARY

Soon after contacting the church, call the mortuary and explain that a death has occurred. Give clear directions to the address where the mortuary personnel are to go. Someone from the mortuary will come immediately to care for the deceased. If a death occurs in a hospital or convalescent home, someone is available to help contact a mortuary.

3. NOTIFYING RELATIVES, CLOSE FRIENDS AND OTHERS

Relatives, friends and other persons should be notified as soon as possible.

#### 4. FUNERAL ARRANGEMENTS

Funeral arrangements are made at a mutually convenient time in a meeting called the *sodan* or *through the Funeral Committee*. Arrangements are usually made the following morning or day with family members, close relatives and friends, and a member of the Funeral Committee or the minister. Details for the service will also be made at this time.

- A. Decide on the funeral date and time with the member of the Funeral Committee or the minister and mortuary. Also, decide if the *Hondo* (sanctuary) will be large enough to seat everyone. If an overflow is expected, you may request the use of the conference room. The *Hondo* has a seating capacity of 250 and the conference room approximately 200. Viewing of the service in the conference room is via closed-circuit television.
- B. The funeral service is normally held in the morning or early afternoon. Following the funeral service, a burial service is held at the cemetery, or a cremation service at the Chapel of the Light in Fresno. Following the burial or cremation, the first seventh day memorial service (*shonanoka*) is customarily held. In recent times some families have requested to have the burial or cremation service combined with the seventh day memorial; however, when at all possible, it is encouraged to keep the two services separate.
- C. The minister will require the following information:
  1. Full name of the deceased. Also, if known, the Chinese characters of the last and first name.
  2. Buddhist name (*homyo*) if one was given at the Buddhist affirmation service.
  3. Date and place of birth.
  4. Date of and place of death.
  5. Current address and telephone number of the next of kin (*seshu*).
  6. Names of surviving children.
  7. A brief biography.
  8. Any other pertinent information that may be helpful in assisting the minister to prepare his sermon.
- D. The mortuary will assist you in preparing an obituary notice for the newspapers, should you so desire. Local papers to consider are the Fresno Bee and the Reedley Exponent. There may be an additional charge for personalized obituaries.

Japanese newspapers (Nichi Bei Times, Hokubei Mainichi, and Rafu Shimpo) require the following information.

1. Name of the deceased. Be ready to give the name in "*kanji*" (Chinese characters) if you wish to have the obituary in the Japanese section.
2. Names of surviving immediate family members.
3. Funeral arrangement details.
4. Brief biography of the deceased.
  - If the deceased is an *Issei*, give the prefecture in Japan.
  - Age.
  - Date of Death.

E. The family will select persons to serve the following positions:  
(Use full names of all participants in the printed program)

1. Pallbearers (normally 6-8)
  - Be at the funeral site one hour before the service.
  - The funeral director will instruct the pallbearers.
  - Honorary pallbearers (normally 6-8); if the family wishes, they may select honorary pallbearers. Honorary pallbearers are close friends or relatives who are unable to perform the normal duties of a pallbearer.
2. Floral Registrars (one or two)

One or two individuals record the names of the individuals or organizations who have given flowers. It is helpful if this person also takes snapshots of the floral arrangements for the family for later reference.
3. A representative to acknowledge messages

Individual will select one message, read the text, and then acknowledge other messages by name and senders only. The chairperson can also acknowledge messages if so desired.
4. Incense offering representatives

A close friend of the deceased will offer incense on behalf of the friends. In addition, representatives from the various organizations the deceased has been associated with may be asked to offer incense. The Funeral Committee can assist with selection of representatives.

5. Eulogy (*choji*)

A close friend or relative may be asked to give words of sympathy and deliver the eulogy relating personal remembrances of the deceased.

6. Words of appreciation on behalf of the family (*shaji*).

Suggested thank you's may be given to the following: minister, church and its committees (ushers, floral registrars, *choba*), chairperson, and pianist.

F. The funeral committee will select persons to serve the following positions:  
(Use full names of all participants in the printed program)

1. Chairperson for the service. The chairperson is normally selected by the family in consultation with the Funeral Committee or minister, but a friend or relative can also be called upon to serve as chairperson. The chairperson should be familiar with Buddhist customs and services, and experienced at public speaking.

2. Pianist for the service. The pianist should be proficient in music and songs (*gathas*) which will be performed during the service.

3. Reception table (*choba*)

- 2 – 4 persons to receive and record the monetary memorials (*koden*), depending on the expected size of the funeral. The mortuary will provide name sheets and pens for the receptionists. The receptionists record the names and addresses of the persons giving the *koden*, but they do not open the envelopes or record the amounts.

- Receptionists should record the names in legible handwriting.

- Be at the church 60 minutes before the service.

4. Ushers (4 or more)

The ushers will:

- Distribute the funeral programs.

- Direct people to their seats.

- Remove floral pieces from the *Hondo* after the funeral service.

- Tidy the *Hondo* by removing flower petals, litter and funeral programs. If necessary, vacuum the carpets.

- Fold the chairs from the *Hondo*, if used, and return them to the conference room.

- Straighten chairs and tidy the conference room if it was used.

- Monitor the signing of the guest sheets if they are used.

- Be at the church 60 minutes before the service.

## 5. MORTUARY ARRANGEMENTS

The funeral director will provide information and arrange for the following:

- A. Preparation of the body.
- B. Casket.
- C. Cremation or burial.
- D. Plot, urn, niche, marker or headstone.
- E. Assist with:
  1. Social security benefits.
  2. Veterans Administration benefits.
  3. Insurance claims.
  4. Placing an obituary and funeral notice in the area papers.
  5. Death certificates.

If the deceased is not a naturalized citizen, two additional copies of the death certificate are to be sent to the Japanese Consulate within seven (7) days of death. Contact the Japanese Consulate for details.

- Additional death certificates should be ordered for banks, insurance, attorney, and other legal requirements.

- F. Acknowledgement cards may also be requested from the church.

## 6. VETERANS

If the deceased is a veteran, color guard or a military tribute may be available through the local VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars).

## 7. SUGGESTED ARTICLES TO BE TAKEN TO THE MORTUARY

- A. *Ojuzu*.
- B. *Okesa*.
- C. A photograph of the deceased.
- D. Personal clothing (including eyeglasses).

## 8. ALTAR NEEDS FOR THE FUNERAL SERVICE

- A. Four floral arrangements for the altar (generally white chrysanthemums, gladioli, or other white flowers, with greenery.) These arrangements are cut flowers bundled together and then placed into the vases on the altar. In most cases, the florist will arrange for their delivery. The Funeral Committee will order.

- B. If an overflow crowd is expected, photographs of the deceased may be placed on the altar and in the conference room, if so desired. An optional black ribbon may be placed on the frame.
- C. Altar offering (*osonae*) is generally two dozen white *omanju*. The Funeral Committee will order.

The above items should be at the temple at least one hour prior to the funeral.

## 9. FUNERAL SERVICE - A typical program

- A. Processional. Everyone stands, except for the family and relatives of the deceased, when the casket is ushered in. Throughout the service, the family members and relatives remain seated.
- B. Tolling of the bell (*kansho*).
- C. Sutra (*ancient Buddhist text*) chanting in front of the casket (*kanzen dokkyo*) by the minister.
- D. Presentation of Buddhist name (*homyo*).
- E. Chanting of "Hymn of True Faith" (*Shoshinge*) by the minister.
- F. Incense offering (during the chanting of the sutra) by:
  - Family
  - Relatives
  - Pallbearers

The chairperson will direct family, relatives and pallbearers during incense offering. Please review the proper incense offering procedure illustrated on page 11.

- G. Opening remarks and personal history by the chairperson.
- H. Representative incense offering (provide seating for all participants).
  1. On behalf of friends
  2. Organizations
  3. Reedley Buddhist Church
- I. Eulogy. Family selects.
- J. Gatha (song), "*Nadame*" or "*Namu Amida Butsu*". The family members and relatives remain seated during the singing of a gatha,
- K. Messages acknowledgement.
- L. Sermon - Minister.
- M. Epistle - Minister.
- N. Words of Appreciation. Family selects.

- O. Closing Remarks and Announcements. Family selects or chairperson.
- P. Recessional/Incense offering by attendees.

(Length of the service will depend on the number of attendees and other factors. Generally, the service is approximately one hour long.)

#### 10. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND GRATUITIES/DONATIONS (*OREI*)

- A. Please contact the church president for guidance on donation (*orei*) to the church, gratuity to the minister (which is called *ofuse*), and *orei* to the service chairperson, pianist and organizations.
- B. Acknowledgement cards can be ordered through the mortuary or from the church

#### 11. FINANCES

Listed below are the usual expenses and other disbursements incurred for the funeral.

- A. Casket.
- B. Urn.
- C. Plot, niche or vault.
- D. Headstone or marker.
- E. Death certificates (usually 8 to 12 originals).
- F. Funeral home charges.
- G. Flowers for the casket, other floral pieces, and boutonnieres for those participating in the funeral program.
- H. Acknowledgement cards (available from the church) and postage.
- I. Newspaper obituary notices.
- J. Individual *orei* to the church, *ofuse* to the minister, *orei* to the service chairperson, pianist and various organizations, and any other memorial gifts.
- K. Refreshments or luncheon (*otoki*) if served.

#### 12. MEMORIAL SERVICES

- A. Traditionally a memorial service for the deceased is conducted every seventh day until the forty-ninth day. Some families follow this tradition; however, most families observe only the *shonanoka* or the first seventh day memorial, and the *shjukunichi*, or 49<sup>th</sup> Day Memorial.
- B. The first memorial service (seventh day) is held at the church immediately after the cremation or burial service has been conducted. Soon after the

seventh day service, contact the church office to schedule a 49<sup>th</sup> Day Memorial Service.

Memorial services are observed on the following anniversary dates:

- 1<sup>st</sup> year or *isshuki*
- 3<sup>rd</sup> year or *sankaiki*
- 7<sup>th</sup> year or *shichikaiki*
- 13<sup>th</sup> year or *jusankaiki*
- 17<sup>th</sup> year or *jushichikaiki*
- 25<sup>th</sup> year or *nijugokaiki*
- 33<sup>rd</sup> year or *sanjusankaiki*
- 50<sup>th</sup> year or *gojukaiki*

After the first year memorial service, the next memorial anniversary to be observed is the third year memorial service. Although the third year memorial service is in actuality the second anniversary of death, we begin the third year of mourning. This method of counting makes sense if we understand that from the day we are born we live the first year of our life. When we celebrate our first birthday we begin our second year of life; thus if death occurred in 2013, the first year memorial service is observed in 2014. The third year memorial service is observed in 2015.

C. Typical Memorial Service Program:

1. Sutra chanting (*ancient Buddhist text*).
2. Incense offering during the sutra chanting by family, relatives and friends.
3. Sermon.

D. Miscellaneous Information

1. Memorial services may be held either at the home or at the church
2. For these private memorial services, the families customarily provide offerings of flowers, *manju* or fruits.
3. Donation (*orei*) to the church.
4. Gratuity (*ofuse*) for the officiating minister.
5. If the memorial service is conducted at the home, it is still customary to extend an *orei* or donation to the church. The *orei* is an expression of gratitude to the church for making it possible for a minister to conduct the service, and for the opportunity to listen to the Dharma.

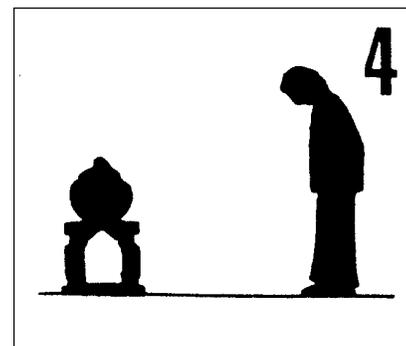
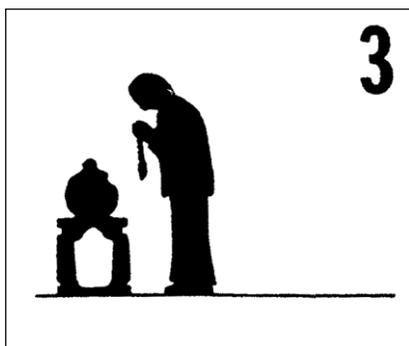
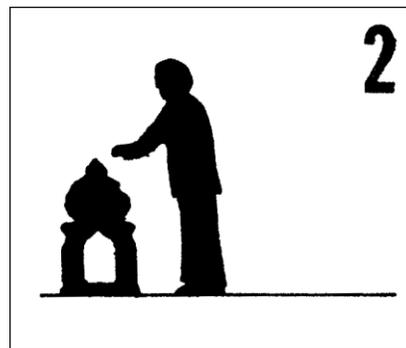
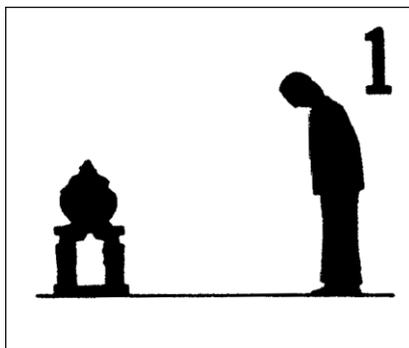
## BUDDHIST ETIQUETTE

### 1. INCENSE OFFERING (*oshoko*). See corresponding number on picture.

- (1) Walk up to the front of the altar and bow at a distance of about two steps in front of the *oshoko* table.
- (2) Step up to the table, and with the right hand, take a pinch of powdered incense and drop it into the burning incense bowl once.
- (3) *Gassho* (put hands together) and bow.
- (4) Take two or three steps backwards, bow, and return to your seat.

However, at the time of funeral, it is advisable that after dropping the powdered incense into the bowl, you step aside to do the *Gassho* and bowing so that the next person can proceed with the *Oshoko*.

Offering of incense is a way of paying respect and reverence to the Buddha and his teachings. Incense originated in India as a way of creating a “pure” or “religious” atmosphere. In a country that is very hot, foul odors were often prevalent. The burning of incense created a fragrant and pure atmosphere for a religious gathering. Incense offering in some traditions implies the meaning of purification. It is symbolic, and the incense itself does not have powers of purification. The smoke rising from the incense burner is also a vivid symbol of the transient nature of existence as the smoke quickly rises and disappears.



2. *GASSHO*

*Gassho* means to put the hands together. The palms of both hands are placed together with the fingers and thumb extended and with the *ojuzu* 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 upright position.

*Gassho* is the natural expression of reverence and gratitude. Buddhists usually *Gassho* before and after a meal in order to express their gratitude to the many sentient beings and individuals who have made that meal possible.

3. *THE OJUZU*

The *ojuzu* 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 should carry the *ojuzu* in the purse or in the coat pocket so that it will always be available. During the service, the *ojuzu* should be held in the left hand.

The *ojuzu* encircles the hands during *Gassho*, symbolizing Oneness. The beads themselves symbolize the faults, or blind passions of man.

4. SEATING

Family members and immediate relatives of the deceased should remain seated throughout the funeral service after the casket is escorted in.

5. ENTERING AND LEAVING THE *HONDO* (Sanctuary)

The *Hondo* should be entered quietly and with reverence. Upon entering, face the altar and bow.

Before leaving the *Hondo*, turn to face the altar and bow before exiting. (This may not, however, be possible during the recessional of a funeral).

# Funeral Checklist

## Mortuary

- \_\_\_\_\_ Obituary notice
- \_\_\_\_\_ Printing of funeral program (family may choose to do)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Casket
- \_\_\_\_\_ Picture
- \_\_\_\_\_ Clothing
- \_\_\_\_\_ Ojuzu, okesa
- \_\_\_\_\_ Acknowledgement cards (may be ordered from the church)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Plot, urn, niche, marker, or headstone
- \_\_\_\_\_ Cremation or burial arrangements
- \_\_\_\_\_ Order death certificates

## Funeral/Memorial Service

- \_\_\_\_\_ Floral arrangements for altar and casket
- \_\_\_\_\_ Boutonnieres for those participating in funeral
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2 dozen white omanju for osonae (altar offering)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Pictures
- \_\_\_\_\_ Meeting with minister
- \_\_\_\_\_ Meeting with Funeral Committee
- \_\_\_\_\_ Selection of participants
  - \_\_\_\_\_ pallbearers
  - \_\_\_\_\_ honorary pallbearers
  - \_\_\_\_\_ ushers
  - \_\_\_\_\_ pianist
  - \_\_\_\_\_ incense offering representatives
  - \_\_\_\_\_ floral registrars
  - \_\_\_\_\_ representative to acknowledge email messages (optional)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ representative to deliver eulogy
  - \_\_\_\_\_ chairman
  - \_\_\_\_\_ choba committee
  - \_\_\_\_\_ representative to deliver words of appreciation (may include thank you's to minister, church, funeral committees, pianist, chairman, etc.)

## Funeral (continued)

- \_\_\_\_\_ Orei (donations)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ church
  - \_\_\_\_\_ minister
  - \_\_\_\_\_ pianist
  - \_\_\_\_\_ chairperson
  - \_\_\_\_\_ organizations
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ VFW contact (if military option desired)

## Services

- \_\_\_\_\_ Makuragyo Service (immediately following death)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Burial or cremation service
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7 Day Service
- \_\_\_\_\_ 49 Day Service
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1 year
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3 year (held after 2<sup>nd</sup> year of death)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7 year (after 6<sup>th</sup> year)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13 year (after 12<sup>th</sup> year)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 17 year (after 16<sup>th</sup> year)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 25 year (after 24<sup>th</sup> year)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 33 year (after 32<sup>nd</sup> year)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 50 year (after 49 years)

## REVISIONS

Original Issue

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Reedley Buddhist Church "Buddhist Funeral Procedure Handbook" is an adaptation of the same from the Orange County Buddhist Church and the San Jose Buddhist Church Betsuin. We greatly appreciate their courtesy in providing the Handbook for our adaptation.

Revision

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