



One way to promote everyday spirituality is for an individual or family to hold services in the home. Such services can be done to complement formal services that one might attend at one's place of worship. If one's particular religious tradition offers ways to encourage religious activity at home, by all means use them. The use of already established ritual practices with familiar religious objects is to be encouraged.

The possibilities described here are meant to be only suggested options to get one started in developing one's own personal services. Expressions of individual spirituality should constantly be a work in progress. There are two aspects to be considered in developing home spiritual practices: (1) physical space and materials; and (2) activities or rituals.

Physical Space

It is helpful to designate a particular place in one's home as a special spot. The establishment of such a spot should be based on common sense and psychological pragmatism. There is no need for any kind of superstitious beliefs or any sense of worshipping a "sacred" spot. The power and value of a spot is solely due to an individual's attitude. If one is uncomfortable with the idea of having what is called a home altar, The word SPOT (Special Place of Tranquility) can be used rather than the word altar.

One's SPOT should be located in the main living area and not be tucked away in a study or bedroom. Practical concerns and personal preference are the main determinants of the exact location. The SPOT could be on a bookshelf, fireplace mantel, or on a designated table/cabinet/hutch, etc. The top of a television set is not recommended.

There is no doubt that most people spend more time in front of a television set than a home altar. This quantitative difference perhaps is balanced by the assumption that the qualitative difference of a greater depth of experience occurs when in front of one's home altar or SPOT. In any case, here is a suggestion: whenever you clean your television screen, make sure you also dust your altar/SPOT. This will alleviate any guilt that you take better care of your television set than your altar/SPOT.

Materials and Objects

Special religious objects such as bells, incense burners, candles, etc. can be gotten at specialty gift shops, bookstores, or through catalogs and internet sites. A central point of focus such as a statue, picture, or any religious object is good but is not absolutely necessary. Fresh flowers are always nice. Customize your SPOT with objects of personal meaning.

Activities and Rituals

Services could begin with the lighting of a candle and incense, if used, and ringing of a bell. Service content would depend upon the occasion; e.g. informal daily or weekly service; a special occasion like a memorial service, gratitude service on the occasion of receiving a special gift or marking an achievement, etc. The service could be as simple as just sitting quietly or the chanting of a sutra from one's preferred tradition. Participants could one by one come up and burn incense or ring the bell or make a flower offering by putting a flower in a vase. These rituals should be preceded by a respectful bow or Gassho (putting hands together).

An appropriate Dharma talk could be given or a reading done (e.g verses from the Dhammapada; articles from Rev. Gyomay Kubose’s books “Everyday Suchness” or “The Center Within.”)

A formal Opening and Closing to the service could be done. For example:

An Opening Aspiration: “With deepest reverence and compassion, we are here together in the spirit of Gautama, the Buddha, the Enlightened One. Life is One. We are one with the Buddha. We are One with the Teaching. We are One in the spirit of Universal Brotherhood. We resolve to be earnest followers of the Buddha and to dedicate our lives to the Way he has pointed out. Then, may we like him attain the noblest and most peaceful state of Nirvana.”

A Closing Benediction: “We surround all people and all forms of life with infinite love and compassion. Particularly do we send forth loving thoughts to those in suffering and sorrow; to all those in doubt and ignorance, and to all who are striving to attain truth. May the light of wisdom and compassion so shine within us that the errors and vanities of self may be dispelled; so shall we understand the changing nature of existence and awaken into spiritual peace.”

A memorial service on the annual anniversary of a loved one’s passing is a good remembrance. Use a photo of the loved one. Afterwards enjoy favorite foods of the loved one while sharing good memories.

If a pet dies, a memorial service is especially helpful for children in the family. A service could be done at a burial site too.

Instead of a bedtime prayer, children could recite The Golden Chain:

“I am a link in the Buddha’s golden chain of love that stretches around the world. I must keep my link bright and strong. I will try to be kind and gentle to every living thing, and protect all who are weaker than myself. I will try to think pure and beautiful thoughts, to say pure and beautiful words, and to do pure and beautiful deeds, knowing that on what I do now depends my happiness and misery. May every link in the Buddha’s golden chain of love become bright and strong, and may we all attain perfect peace.”

Mealtime Grace

Any or all of the following could be done: Pause with bowed head; put hands together in Gassho; recite appropriate words; for example: “As we reflect on the interdependency of all life, we are humbly grateful for the food we are about to receive. Mindful that lives are taken so that we may be nourished, may we dedicate ourselves to work for welfare of all living beings. May It Be So.”

Daily Dharma Program

This is a program to help individuals develop an everyday spiritual practice of using a home altar as a place to do daily Gassho every morning and evening.

Please access our Daily Dharma Program materials which include: Program Outline; Why Gassho?; Home Altar; Everyday Gassho; and 21-Day Program.

These materials are for individuals who find it helpful or necessary to use the structure of such external accountability measures as signing an agreement, following a definite procedure, submitting written reports, etc.

After becoming familiar with the program’s Harmony and Gratitude Gassho’s, doing Gassho can be extended or applied to many different contexts, themes and everyday activities. Examples of such Gassho’s to try are a regular feature in “Oneness” our quarterly newsletter. See YES (Your Everyday Spirituality) on the back cover. Individuals are encouraged to discover/create their own Gassho’s.