



Why Gassho?

“Gassho” is a Japanese word that means putting the hands together palm to palm. Gassho (*anjali* in Sanskrit) is considered one of the most beautiful of gestures... In ancient India, there were twelve forms of the Gassho. In the Shin sect of Japanese Mahayana Buddhism, only the first of the twelve forms is used, which is done by simply placing the palms together at chest level and at a 45 degree angle. Gassho is a symbol of the multitude of different things also being at the same time One. Among Buddhists the world over, Gassho is used as an expression of hello, goodbye, and as a gesture of highest respect and gratitude. In later centuries, Gassho was adopted by the Christians as the gesture of prayer supposedly introduced by St. Francis of Assisi when he saw the gesture in the Holy Land being used by people from the east. (From the book, "Cocktails" 1992 by Rev. Masao Kodani)

By doing Gassho you connect yourself to an ancient tradition of spirituality. The beauty of Gassho is that it is a universal way beyond words. It can be the underlying medium for any religious expression. In that sense it is more fundamental than any particular religious belief. It transcends language and culture because it is a direct physical gesture. Although Gassho may serve other functions when done as a public gesture (e.g., as a social greeting or as a means of promoting a kind of religious solidarity), as a spiritual practice, the source of its power is in its private, personal quality. Gassho practice can be developed in ways that are most effective and meaningful to oneself. For example, Gassho can be done in silence, with thoughts on certain teachings, or with recitations from one's own particular tradition (e.g. "Namu Amida Butsu" or other recitations).

Why should one do Gassho as a spiritual practice?

What is the reason to start any spiritual path?

What's in it for me?

In order to answer such questions, we need to examine what spirituality is all about. One way to look at it is like this: spirituality deals with coming to terms with questions regarding the meaning and purpose in life beyond our physical, social, and psychological needs. How can one live a satisfying, happy life knowing you and your loved ones are going to get old, become sick, and then die?

Religions offer answers but these answers must be internalized. How can you internalize the teachings so that they become part of you and really affect your life? Simple-- day-by-day, little-by-little. In terms of priority, don't worry about the teachings themselves, just concentrate on becoming a better and better receiver of them. You need to know you are on a spiritual path-- and you do this by developing some kind of spiritual practice. You do something. Your emotions and perceptions will follow your actions. That is, by following a spiritual path, you quite

naturally begin to feel like a spiritual person and begin to see the teachings that have always been around you.

The more your spiritual life becomes settled and clear, then all other concerns are put in their proper perspective and the overall quality of one's life is elevated.