



INTRODUCTION TO  
THE

# TENRIKYO SERVICE





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In Memory of the late Reverend Jiro Morishita

Images Created by Aya Morishita

## WELCOME TO THE TENRIKYO CHURCH!

We hope that your experience here today will be meaningful and enjoyable. In order for your visit to be as informative as possible, we have produced this booklet to provide commentary on the Service. This booklet will walk you through the Service and summarize the tenets of the Tenrikyo teachings.





## THE TEACHINGS

The teachings of Tenrikyo were first revealed on October 26, 1838, in a small village in central Japan. It was by a revelation from God through Miki Nakayama that these teachings were first introduced to the world. Miki Nakayama has the soul of the original mother in human creation. As a result, we call Miki Nakayama, “Oyasama,” which means “beloved mother.” God taught us the teachings through Oyasama. For the next fifty years, Oyasama devoted Herself to spreading these teachings to those around Her in order for people to live a joyous and spirited life as we were created to lead. Through Her words, writings, and actions, Oyasama whole-heartedly applied Herself towards spreading the teachings to all humankind.

Oyasama taught us that we were all created by God. God is thus our Parent, and we humans are all equally God’s beloved children. We refer to God as “God the Parent.” It is God the Parent’s divine intent for all humans to live a life of joyousness here on Earth. Since God is our Parent, God will also become joyous through sharing in the collective joy with all humans—God’s children. This collective state of joyousness of all humans is called the “Joyous Life.” We are taught that this is the purpose of our very existence.

Why then are people having difficulty living a Joyous Life? Why is there so much conflict, despair, and suffering in our world? Oyasama taught us that we have the free use of our minds, which is the freedom to use our minds without restriction. Oyasama also taught that our bodies are borrowed from God the Parent and with the proper use of our minds, we shall live the Joyous Life.

However, we have come to misuse God the Parent’s precious gift for us to use our minds freely. We have strayed from our original purpose by allowing ourselves to think only of our own self-centered concerns. We have lost sight of our true purpose, which is to live in peace and joyous harmony with others and our environment. Some have even come to the point of hurting others. Due to the misuse of our minds, we sometimes suffer and fall into despair and are unable

to clearly perceive the parental love and blessings from God. Oyasama explains to us that it is during these times that we become susceptible to trouble and illness.



Oyasama specifically pointed out eight attitudes of the self-centered mind that we must rid from ourselves. They are miserliness, covetousness, hatred, self-love, grudge-bearing, anger, greed, and arrogance. Metaphorically, Oyasama described these as the eight dusts of the mind. Further, She mentioned falsehood and flattery as actions to avoid. Because we unknowingly accumulate dusts in our minds in our daily activities, our minds can become “dusty” or “cloudy.” In this state, one can lose sight of the Joyous Life. God only waits for such a mind to awaken and be free from self-centered usage.

How then, can we avoid accumulating dusts of the mind? Using metaphors to make such concepts understandable, Oyasama simply said to sweep the mind clear of its dusts. This sweeping can be done through the active process of deep self-reflection and pondering. In more practical terms, as a means of sweeping the mind, Oyasama urged us to help one another, think and pray for others, and donate our efforts and capabilities to the surrounding community.

As a means to help those who suffer from illness and pain, followers of these teachings are granted the *Sazuke*. The *Sazuke* is the “Divine Grant” of prayer from God the Parent bestowed upon followers of the teachings. Followers administer the *Sazuke* to those seeking relief from the anguish caused by physical and/or emotional problems. Through the sincere administration of the *Sazuke*, one’s overall health can often be restored, but more importantly, spiritual growth can be attained which is necessary for our ultimate salvation.

As a means to purify the minds of all humankind and bring about universal salvation, Oyasama painstakingly taught the Service. The Service, which you are now witnessing, is the most important element to the Tenrikyo faith. It is this very Service that forms the foundation for the effectiveness of the *Sazuke* and ultimately, the path to the Joyous Life for all.

## WHAT YOU ARE SEEING AND HEARING

There are approximately 16,000 Tenrikyo churches throughout the world. Other than each church differing in its size, the configuration of the designated Service area is the same at each church. You may have noticed that some elements of the Service—the shrines, offerings, musical instruments, and the formal attire worn by the performers, as well as the sounds of the instruments and songs—are all rooted in Japanese traditions. Whether the church is located in Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, South America, or here in this country, the Service is conducted in the same manner.

The Service has changed little since the late 19th century. The natural question that often arises is, Why does such an important element of the teachings such as the Service—one that professes to go beyond race, color, and national boundaries to save all humans worldwide—still retain 19th century Japanese traditions? It is through the explanation within this commentary that you will be able to look beyond what you see physically and begin to understand the purpose and spiritual significance of the Service. However, before proceeding further, an explanation of the visible components of the Service will be provided.

## THE SHRINES

Every Tenrikyo church displays three shrines. The large shrine in the center is dedicated to God the Parent. God the Parent's name is "Tenri-O-no-Mikoto." The shrine on the right is dedicated to Oyasama. We believe that although Oyasama is no longer with us physically, She is ever-living and continues to guide and nurture us for our spiritual growth. Therefore, this shrine symbolizes the residence of the ever-

living Oyasama. Finally, the shrine on the left is where we enshrine the memories of those who have dedicated themselves to spreading the teachings to others. This shrine is commonly referred to as the Memorial Shrine.

The shrine dedicated to God the Parent houses a sacred object called the *omedo*, which is an object of worship. We are taught that God the Parent is everywhere and everything. God provides the life and energy that permeates throughout all existence. Therefore, it may sound strange that Tenrikyo followers direct their prayers toward a shrine to worship God the Parent. If, however, we understand that humans need a tangible object to direct our prayers towards, we find that shrines are very well suited for this purpose.

The word *omedo* means "target." We can accomplish this idea of targeting our sincere prayers towards this one point through the Service. This targeted prayer allows all participants of the Service to become unified as one with each other and with God. Prayers in our faith include the clapping of the hands four times, a silent moment of prayer with head bowed, and then closing with a second clapping of the hands four times. This ritual of prayer is directed towards each of the three shrines.





## THE OFFERINGS

A variety of fruits and vegetables as well as dry goods, water, and wine are arranged systematically on plates and trays and placed in an orderly manner before each shrine. According to the size of the church, the number and size of the offerings may vary. Prior to the beginning of the Service, a ritual is conducted to offer these foods. Performers of this ritual wear white masks when handling the trays to connote and maintain purity.



The purpose is not the literal offerings of these foods to God the Parent but rather is a means by which to symbolize the sincere gratitude of humans in our appreciation for God's blessings. Each offering is truly a blessing from God the Parent. They are

brought from near and far by followers wishing to offer their sincere gratitude to God the Parent, Oyasama, and the memories of our predecessors.

## THE SONG AND DANCE

Oyasama first began composing the songs for the Service, which is called the "Mikagura-Uta," in 1866. The Service consists of three parts: 1) the seated service, 2) the first half of the sacred dance, and 3) the second half of the sacred dance. The songs are simple, yet profound. The songs reflect the core components of the teachings and the essence of the faith. The lyrics of the songs have

been translated into English. This translation can be found in the booklet entitled, "Mikagura-Uta, The Songs for the Service." Due to the fundamental grammatical differences in the sentence structure between the Japanese and English languages, it has been difficult to translate the songs into a version that is singable and danceable in English.

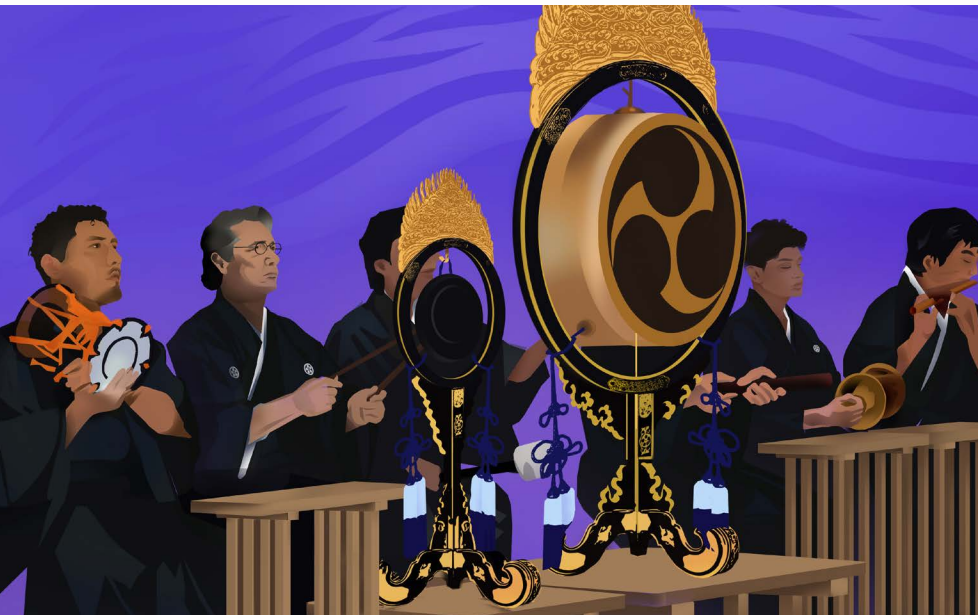
Oyasama created and taught the hand movements of the Service and composed the music as well. There are three male dancers and three female dancers. The movements of the dancers use the same motion and are synchronized according to the beat of the music and the verse being sung. The dance movements reflect the meaning of the verses being sung by the singers. Since the songs reflect the basic elements of the teachings, the teachings are being conveyed in song and in dance within the Service.

## THE MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

Accompanying the song and dance are the musical instruments. There are nine musical instruments in total—six instruments played by male performers and three instruments played by female performers. The instruments lined up on the left are played by male performers, but you may see female performers play them as well at local churches. The instruments on the right are played by female performers.



On the left side of the stage, the instrument nearest you is the *kotsuzumi*, or hand drum. The performer holds the hand drum with their left hand on their right shoulder and strikes the head of the instrument with the palm of their right hand. Next to the hand drum is the *surigane*, or small gong. This is an instrument played by hitting a metal gong with two sticks. Next is the largest instrument, the *taiko*, or large drum. It is hit sparingly but makes its presence



known. It has a resounding and forceful boom. On the other side of the large drum is the *hyoshigi*, or wooden clappers. This is the lead instrument and maintains a constant beat throughout the entire Service. Positioned next to the wooden clappers is the *chanpon*, or small cymbals. It plays on the alternate beat of the wooden clappers, never hitting on the same beat of the wooden clappers. Finally, there is the *fue*, or bamboo flute. The bamboo flute is the instrument which plays a melody. The others are percussion instruments. Sitting in front of the instrument performers are the singers, who sing the sacred songs with enthusiasm and spirit.

On the right side of the stage, the nearest instrument to you is the *kokyu*, a three-string instrument played with a bow. Next is the *shamisen*, an instrument similar to but larger than the *kokyu*. Its three strings are plucked with a plectrum. Last is the *koto*, a thirteen-string zither, played with three finger picks worn on the right hand while the left hand selectively presses the strings to alter the pitch.

How do you find the sounds of the Service thus far? It can be a confusing experience for someone who listens to these sounds for the very first time.

To illustrate the true intricacy of the interaction among the instruments, please turn your attention to the instruments on the left side of the stage. Specifically, focus on the sound generated by the wooden clappers and small cymbals. You will notice that one plays on the upbeat and the other on the downbeat. They always alternate. Add to this the small gong, which enters this interplay. Listen and you will notice that the first sound of the small gong is played together with the wooden clappers, the second sound is played with the small cymbals, and the third sound is played by itself—these three instruments are deeply intertwined with one another.

Next, let's listen to the hand drum, which is the instrument closest to you on the left side of the stage. You can hear the spirited popping sound released from the instrument. It plays in the middle of the verse whereas the large drum plays at the beginning and end of the verse. Thus, it is as if the hand drum and the large drum are playfully conversing with one another. Furthermore, the large drum, with its authoritative and booming sound, seems to spiritedly propel the Service forward.

Finally, there is the bamboo flute, the only melody-playing instrument. It provides the pitch, tone, and melody of the Service. In addition, the bamboo flute is used to tune the women's string instruments prior to the start of the Service. The bamboo flute acts as the connection that brings all of the instruments together in a symphony of unity and harmony.



The three instruments played by the female performers, *koto*, *shamisen*, and *kokyū*, must be played while carefully listening to the singers, the beat, and the melody. The strings of the *koto* must be pressed to the right pitch with the left hand and since there are no frets on the *shamisen* or *kokyū*, the players must find the correct pitch by listening to the other instruments.

Listen for a moment on how all the instruments are intricately interwoven with one another. Amidst this performance of the musical instruments there are six dancers who dance to the songs of the Service. Thus, it is important to understand the relationship among the three elements of the Service—the words to the song, the hand movements, and the music.

## THE SERVICE ATTIRE

The attire worn by the Service performers is called the *otsutome-gi*, which means “service attire.” It is a black *kimono* made of silk and other fine fabrics. In the early years of the Service, the followers of Oyasama chose this attire to wear for the Service because it was the most honorable and formal clothing of its time. This service attire has not changed and subsequently, we in this country also use it as the official clothing when conducting the Service.

When one wears the service attire in preparation for the performance of a Service, a great sense of dignity is felt. It is indeed a special apparel worn in our Service for God the Parent. Another great attribute of the service attire is that there is no distinction in status or years of dedication to the church for the Service performers. Each performer’s service attire is basically the same. Therein lies another purpose for such apparel—a tangible means to unify the hearts of the performers.



## THE ESSENCE OF THE SERVICE

The significance of the Tenrikyo Service is not only its performance, but it is the unification of the minds of all of the performers and attendees with God, for the intent to save all humankind. While there are various differences among the sounds of the instruments and the roles of the performers, the significance of this Service is to focus these differences into a harmonious unity with God the Parent.

Achieving this harmonious unity with God the Parent is the source of the power of the Service as taught to us by Oyasama. Through the performance of Service, we are able to carry this power of harmonious unity into our daily lives and pass it onto those around us.



## SALVATION THROUGH THE SERVICE AND THE SAZUKE

The Service is performed in order that our prayers for world salvation may be answered. By means of the Service, God the Parent saves us from illness, disaster, and despair.

The *Sazuke*, the Divine Grant of prayer, is bestowed upon those with the resolve to strive for the salvation of others. Anyone age seventeen or older is allowed to listen to the *Besseki* lectures, which explain the teachings. Once the teachings are settled in one's heart, the bestowal of the *Sazuke* takes place, at which point the person is recognized as a *yoboku*. *Yoboku* means “useful timber.” *Yoboku* are the core building materials for the construction of the Joyous Life.

From that day forward, the *yoboku* is reborn from one whose mind may have been concerned only with the self, to one whose sole purpose is the salvation of others. The *yoboku* now engages in the effort to help others through the administration of the *Sazuke*. By the sincere administration of the *Sazuke* to another person who is suffering, the *yoboku* can help relieve them of their suffering from physical or emotional despair. A *yoboku*, whose mind is set on helping others, is used by God in the construction of the world of the Joyous Life. Most importantly, the effectiveness of the *Sazuke* lies in the performance of the Service.



## THE LIFE OF FAITH

Since 1838, when the teachings of God the Parent were first revealed to the world, Oyasama encouraged Her followers to put into practice the concepts of the teachings and hastened their spiritual awakening. Even today, through the many events and happenings in our daily lives, God the Parent and Oyasama provide guideposts for us to first reflect upon and correct the usage of our minds and then purify our minds through the Service.

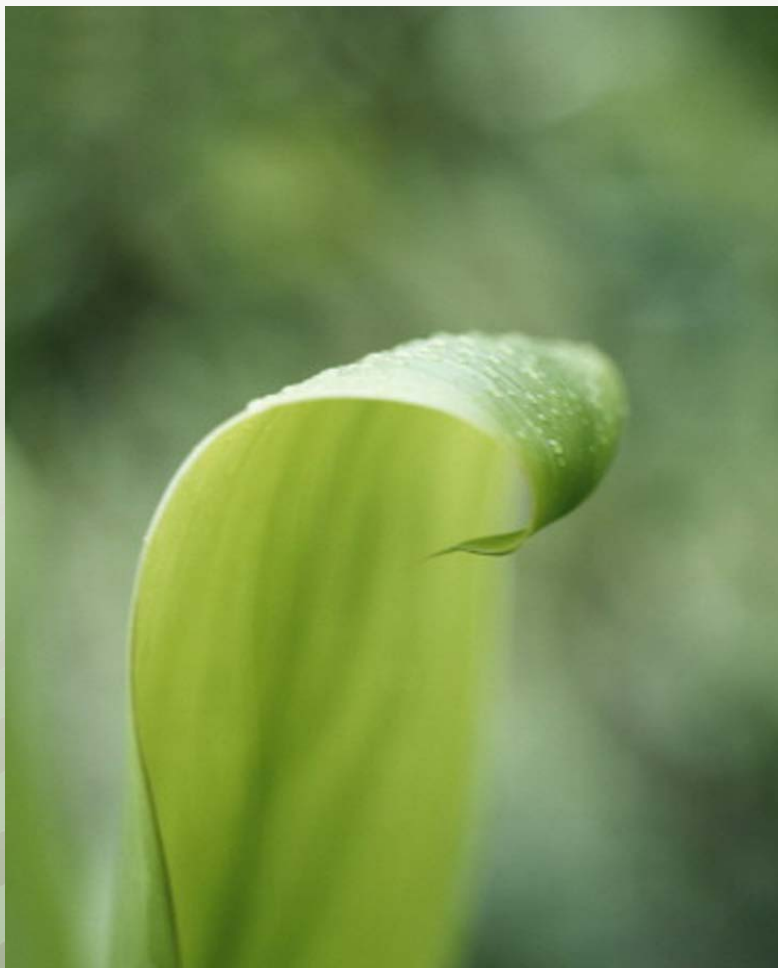
Another means to purify the mind is the constant and sincere effort to help others, especially those who are in need and suffering. By sharing with them our joy for the teachings and gratitude toward God the Parent, we become that much closer to realizing the Joyous Life—the purpose for our creation.

In our society today, we find many tragic and unsettling events that occur daily. Certainly you can name many yourselves. So what good will result from this singing, dancing, and playing of musical instruments to correct the ills of our times?

We hope that your experience of this Service may give you a hint to the answer—which is, the Service involves the participation of a group of differing individuals and orients each toward the common goal of the collective Joyous Life for all. By merely making the effort to come together as one with a common desire to do away with the self-centered mind, the first step to create a better world has already begun. World salvation is a tremendous and perhaps far-fetched ideal, but it begins with one person. It then spreads and is shared with others.

Ultimately, a life of faith is motivated by the desire to share the joys of the teachings with others. Together with Oyasama, we earnestly pursue the path of salvation, praying sincerely for the peace and happiness of all.

With this brief background on Tenrikyo and the Service, we hope that you will join us in uniting our minds in selflessness with God the Parent towards the salvation of all people.





TENRIKYO MISSION HEADQUARTERS IN AMERICA

[www.tenrikyo.com](http://www.tenrikyo.com)