

Cut Flowers Bloom but Never Bear Fruit

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Ohigan is a Japanese Buddhist custom that is celebrated twice a year around the spring and autumn equinoxes. During *Ohigan* week, people visit their family gravesites. *Ohigan* is a good time for us to remember the blessings we have been receiving from our parents and ancestors.

I go to the farmer's market every other week to purchase a bunch of anthurium for the altar. Yesterday, I purchased some lilies for the *Ohigan* altar. They look beautiful now, but they will wither in a week because they lack their roots.

One day, in Japan, a Gedatsu member visited a Gedatsu teacher to ask for help. "Look at the cut flowers in the vase on the table," the Gedatsu teacher said. "The cut flowers bloom but they will never bear fruit because they are separated from their roots and trunk. The trunk and roots are our ancestors."

Our founder, Gedatsu Kongo, often told members, "Your life is rootless."

Chieko Hirokawa, who was born in Tokyo, became a Gedatsu member in 1933. She learned Gedatsu directly from the founder. I would like to share an excerpt from her essay.

"I realized that I had been living a 'rootless' life. Cut flowers die within a week because they have no roots. I had been like a cut flower. I totally forgot about the blessings I received from my ancestors. Without them, I couldn't have been born. I also forgot about the blessings I receive from the society and everything around me. I realized that I had been focusing on my likes and dislikes. I had been selfish. I realized that I would eventually die like a cut flower. I felt so bad about myself, my selfish thinking. I self-reflect. Since then, I began to feel thankful to everything and everyone. I began to feel thankful to a glass of water and even a tiny piece of rice.

"Our founder said, 'Humans should know about blessings. Gedatsu teachings focus on blessings. If you can truly feel the blessings you receive from your country, parents, teachers, society and everything from nature, you have nothing to worry about. You won't go wrong mentally or physically. You will be happy for sure. So, practice feeling grateful for your blessings.'

"I remember the founder focused especially on blessings from our parents. To feel thankful to our parents is the basic thing. Next is our ancestors.

"Once we start focusing on the blessings we receive from everything around us, we begin to realize that 'our life has been supported by immeasurable blessings.'

"The blessings we receive far exceed our ability to fully return the favor. It is not as easy as returning something to someone, but we must keep trying. The founder gave me this advice: 'Just let go of your ego and your selfishness. Do what makes people happy. Work for the betterment of people and all things and help each other harmoniously. That is the way we can repay our blessings.'

"The founder also told us the importance of practicing what we learn from Gedatsu teachings. When you are moved by a sermon, you may think, 'Oh what a nice story.' But if we leave the service without

reflecting on or practicing the lessons we've learned, nothing will change. Our happiness will not last. That is why the founder always said, 'Gedatsu is not accumulating knowledge.' He also said, 'Gedatsu is easy but can be very difficult for some.'

"The founder always said, 'Gedatsu is meant to be practiced at home. Family members should put their hands together and say "thank you" to each other.'"

That is the excerpt from Chieko Hirokawa's essay.

Let's regularly check ourselves to see if we really feel thankful to our parents, ancestors and family members.