

Gedatsu Teaching 1
By Seiken Okano (Gedatsu Kongo)

***Gedatsu-kyo* monthly newsletter, March 18, 1935**
Translation and Commentary by Rev. H. Taki

Gedatsu is to self-reflect and abandon selfishness.

While you are familiar with the term “self-reflection,” its meaning in this context is profound and difficult for most people to fully understand. To understand its meaning, you must begin by knowing yourself – by being honestly aware of who you are.

To do this, you must scrutinize your past and examine your present self. By comparing your present and past selves, you then can create a complete picture of yourself. Your present nature is the result of what you have done in the past. Thus, you must be aware of your past and present selves in order to improve yourself now. A self-admiring or inflated sense of yourself definitely will not allow you to know yourself completely. I tell you emphatically: you must see yourself honestly.

If you completely recognize and rectify your character, and earnestly endeavor in your life, you will, as a result, not only be happy, satisfied and healthy, but you and your descendants will enjoy long and prosperous lives. By contrast, if you are selfish, inconsiderate and unprincipled, and continually complain of inconveniences and insufficiencies, you will be troubled with anxieties and sufferings. Eventually, you will be fearful, unhappy and sickly – destroying your family and yourself. You will make a shambles of your status, circumstances and wealth.

If you discard all self-serving, egoistic feelings and selfish desires, and endeavor to fulfill your vocation and duties in life with all earnestness, you can serve the Universal God through your work. Your vocation serves to sustain yourself, but, moreover, is a duty assigned by God. Your vocation is very sacred, but all too few realize the sacredness of their vocations. They often disrespect and scorn their vocations. As a result, their progress is thwarted. In the end, they face extreme hardships, which force them to give up the very vocations and duties they disdain – receiving the justice of the Universal God. In short, they disregarded the blessings of God. If they absolutely discard their selfish desires and earnestly endeavor to fulfill their duties and obligations, they will be blessed with harmony, peace of mind, happiness and good health.

Therefore, correct your character by assessing yourself honestly. This is the total basis for your self-awareness – the first step of Gedatsu teaching. As I stated in the Five Laws, the highest moral conduct, self-reflection, self-renunciation, and the great path of God form the basis of humanity. Those who cannot comprehend this cannot see things as they really are because their vision is biased and prejudiced.

Commentary:

Gedatsu Kongo established Gedatsu-kai, or Gedatsu Church, in Japan in 1929. In its early stages, Gedatsu Kongo personally taught people who asked him for guidance, or visited branches and home meetings to teach. But as membership grew rapidly, it became hard for him to teach everyone personally. This led him to

publish the *Gedatsu-kyo* monthly newsletter in 1935 as a vehicle to convey his teaching to all members across the country. The Founder published “Gedatsu Teaching” – writing down his essential teachings for the first time – in serial form each month for two years, beginning with the publication’s first issue.

The Founder was born Seiken Okano. Gedatsu Kongo is the name posthumously bestowed on him by the Daigo Buddhist Temple after his passing. Gedatsu members call him Gedatsu Kongo, but during his lifetime, he was called “Kaicho-sensei,” or “Mr. President,” by members.

The inward focus of “Gedatsu”

The word “Gedatsu” is originally among the most significant of Buddhist terminologies. It means the enlightened supreme state of mind the Buddha attained, or perfect freedom from all delusions and attachments. Our mind is usually bound by our self-centeredness. This prevents us from seeing things as they are, and causes numerous problems and sufferings in life. The Buddha deeply realized man’s self-centeredness, and taught that freedom from egoism allows us to see things justly and brings us happiness.

Gedatsu Kongo used the term “Gedatsu” in its wider sense. He stated that our mind has been formed by the spiritual and mental stream of generations of ancestors from the beginning, and it is very selfish. However, it is difficult to be aware of our own selfishness, which is the cause of many problems in our lives.

Gedatsu is to look deeply into ourselves and be aware of our self-centeredness, which was inherited from our ancestors. By correcting our self-centered mind, we can attain freedom to see things as they are. This will lead us to peace and happiness. This is the core teaching of Gedatsu.

The very first sentence of “Gedatsu Teaching 1” is one of Gedatsu Kongo’s most important messages: “Gedatsu is to self-reflect and abandon selfishness.” Gedatsu is to examine ourselves, become aware of our selfishness and free ourselves from it. Everyone may agree about its importance, but it is another thing to put it into practice. While we may be good critics of other people, we are apt to justify our own defects. Such a selfish attitude will never lead us to happiness.

Freedom from ego through self-renunciation

It is important to understand the difference between self-renunciation and self-restraint. Self-restraint means to conform to morality, restraining desires with your will power. In this case, your desires

still remain unchanged within yourself. They are simply checked by morality. Therefore, even if you give the appearance of morality in your daily life, there may be conflicts among various desires within yourself. If your will power weakens, the restrained desires may be released and get out of control.

“Self-renunciation,” as Gedatsu Kongo taught us, is completely different. The Founder did not regard human desires as evil. He thought all desires are the expression of human vitality, and each desire performs an important role in our life. When all desires operate in harmony according to the natural law, they lead us to a healthy and happy life. However, through our selfishness, we often lose the harmony of desires, leading to troubles and conflicts. We must see ourselves as we are and be aware of our self-centered way of thinking and living. This is the way to be free from egoism.

When you are honestly aware of your negative attitudes, your mind is already transformed. Then, all desires within you will be working in harmony according to the law of the universe. This is the self-renunciation Gedatsu Kongo taught us.

You may think this is quite simple. However, it is very hard to actually practice, because our thinking is very selfish. Our mind has been formed not only through the experiences we have accumulated after birth, but also through our ancestors’ experiences.

Honesty the key in self-appraisal

What we usually call “mind” is only a superficial, tiny part of the entirety of our mind. We normally are not aware of the deeper, subconscious layer of our mind, which motivates us to act, feel and think. Our attitude is governed by this subconscious mind, which is the spiritual and mental heritage from generations of ancestors.

This is why Gedatsu Kongo stated, “You must scrutinize your past and examine your present self.” You have to understand that “your past” in this context includes generations of your ancestors.

You may think you know yourself better than anyone, but this is not true. You are probably the least able to understand yourself. This is why Gedatsu Kongo emphasized the importance of being honestly aware of yourself.

Our mind creates our future

Gedatsu Kongo stated, "Your speech and behavior are but expressions of your innermost self. Your words and actions speak eloquently about what you are. Therefore, your behavior must be consistent with your speech." Only our mind will make us happy or unhappy. As Gedatsu Kongo stated, "The vicissitudes of your life are controlled by your mind. In other words, you alone can improve yourself, destroy yourself and nurture yourself."

Our daily attitude will form the whole of our life. But you have to remember that our conscious mind is just the tip of the iceberg. There exists a huge layer of subconscious mind below the conscious mind. This deeper subconscious mind manifests itself as our daily speech, actions and so on. This is our personality. The problem is, it is very hard for us to be aware of this deeper self. Therefore, it is important to practice the *Hiho*-meditation and *Goho-shugyo* practice, which are the holy methods Gedatsu Kongo gave us for our self-awareness and transformation.

Gedatsu is to be deeply aware of ourselves and transform our selfish way of life into the life of appreciation. Gedatsu Kongo emphatically stated that this is the only way to happiness.