

## Our Daily Prayer Is a Mirror of Our Daily Life

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Ever since I was assigned to give today's sermon, I've been thinking of what I should talk about. Some members said that young people want to learn the basic teachings of Gedatsu but in an easy-to-understand way. So I decided I will talk about the meaning of the opening prayer.

At our propagation meeting two months ago, one of the main topics was how to propagate the Gedatsu teaching to Americans. Many things in Gedatsu are based on Japanese traditions. For example, things like *Fudo-myo-o* and *Rokujizo* deities are difficult for Americans to understand and accept.

Our Gedatsu opening prayer is one of those things. Many people, when they hear the opening prayer for the first time, may feel a "foreign atmosphere" about the prayer. We may need to change the opening prayer to propagate in the United States.

Therefore, today, I would like to talk about the meaning of the prayer so that it will help you to understand what we are doing when we perform the Gedatsu prayers.

At the beginning of today's service, I led the prayer by first striking a stone to a piece of iron three times, creating sparks. This is called *Kiribi*, or purification. It is meant to purify the bad air around us before we pray to God. *Kiribi* is not only for religious purification. Long ago in Japan, during the era of the *Samurai*, a wife performed this purification when her husband left home, hoping for his safe return.

After the purification, we do *Shiho Hairei* and *Shi Hakushu*.

*Shiho* means four directions: East, South, West, and North. It means everywhere, everything, the entire universe.

*Shi Hakushu* literally means four hand claps. It shows that we unite ourselves with God. We say that the left hand is God and the right hand is ourself. So when we put both hands together by clapping, it shows that we harmonize with God and follow the Universal Law. We clap four times for the same reason we do *Shiho Hairei*. We are paying respect to every direction and the universe.

Next, we pay reverence to the Supreme Spirit of the Universe; family and personal guardian deities; and local and all deities. Some people question why we need to call out the family, personal and local deities since all gods and deities are united under the Supreme God. They may think that as long as we respect and show appreciation to the Supreme God, it is enough.

But is that true?

To answer this question, Bishop Teruo Okano uses the example of our society.

He said that even though mankind exists under a Universal God, to make society run smoothly, we need politics, police department, supermarkets, banks and so on. When everything works properly, harmony and peace come to the society. So, we should appreciate society as a whole, but we also should appreciate each function within society.

The late Archbishop Eizan Kishida used the human body as an example to explain this.

He said that when we refer to a human being, we mean a person having both a mind and a body. When we say a head, ear, nose, mouth, hand, foot and so on, we refer to only a part of a body. So, in our prayer, if we compare God to a human, the local, personal guardian and other deities are each parts of the whole body.

Our founder, Gedatsu Kongo, said that the mechanisms of the present physical world, the spiritual world, and the Divine realm are the same or at least similar. In other words, we can understand the Divine world by observing our physical world.

That's why Archbishop Kishida and Bishop Okano could explain it by the functions of our present world.

When we think about that, I hope you can see the reason we identify all gods and deities.

When I was a teenager, I questioned the giving of prayers.

Before I left home, I prayed in front of the altar at home. Then I went to the Gedatsu branch, or the church, and prayed at the church. After that, I went to Goreichi in Kitamoto and prayed. Finally, before I went to bed, I prayed again in front of the home altar.

Everywhere, the Supreme Spirit of the Universe, *Gochi Nyorai* and Gedatsu Kongo were enshrined. Why did I have to pray to them again and again during the day? At that time, I simply prayed without understanding.

Now I know why.

One reason is simply to do it – again and again like the 100-round prayer. There are countless times in our daily life when we should say “thanks,” but we do not. Therefore, it is only natural to show our appreciation again and again.

The same is true with our relationships. It is fine to say “thank you” or “I love you” to your loved ones again and again in a day. There is no limit. Actually, it is better to show your appreciation again and again to improve your relationship.

Another reason to pray throughout the day is because each time you pray is different. For example, in my case, I give my morning prayer at home as a human and husband. We pray to thank God for the life we have been given. Then, when I go to the church, I pray this time as a minister in training. I say in my mind, “Please allow us to work for the sake of the church and members’ happiness.”

Who you are changes throughout the day, depending on your different roles. You yourself do not change, but your duties are different when you are at home, when you are at work, when you are at school, and so on. This means we have different reasons to pray again and again throughout the day.

Some of you may feel that the Gedatsu prayer is too ritualistic and uncomfortable.

However, Gedatsu Kongo said, “Every morning and evening, pray to God, give thanks at your altar, and perform *Amacha* blessing to your ancestors. Even though it may seem too formal or a ritual, the good everyday habit improves yourself. This is a most precious and sacred deed.”

At the moment when we bow, pray and show appreciation to God and ancestors, our minds and souls are purified and peaceful. At that moment, we unite with God and ancestors. At that moment, there is no ego.

By continuing to pray in this way every day, you can eventually live a life without ego. You will be able to make the best decisions for yourself when it is necessary. That is because your decisions will be based on the wisdom of the Universal Life Force.

Gedatsu Kongo said, "The fastest way to achieve enlightenment, or Gedatsu, is through Gedatsu prayers, *Hannya Shingyo* sutra with *Amacha* blessing."

Performing the opening and evening prayer every day and absorbing the holy power of the prayer into yourself is the best path to true happiness.

When you become to be able to thank God whenever you face it, you may thank people in your daily life.

Today, within this one year, I got married and became a husband, and I was blessed by a baby son and became a father. My life has totally changed. Before, I had a lot of time to spend for myself. I could do whatever I wanted. I had few duties. But now, I don't have such time. When I return home after work, I take care of my son while my wife cooks the dinner, and bathe him after dinner. By the time I finish my duties, it's almost time to sleep.

Sometimes I feel it's difficult. However, I also feel that this daily duty improves me as a husband, as a father, and as a human.

I never skip the morning and evening prayer with my wife. If our son is awake, he does it together with us, too. I feel that putting our hands together in front of the altar brings our family closer together.

Lastly, Albert Einstein said, "If you can't explain it simply, you don't understand it well enough." So, I would like to finish my sermon by explaining the opening prayer in an easy and simple way.

I compare the opening prayer to having tea with friends at home.

Before we invite our friends, we have to clean up our home. This is purification.

Then, we welcome friends and say "Hi" to everybody. This is the prayer.

Third, we say to our friends, "Sorry our home is such a mess." This is Repentance.

Next, we enjoy drinking tea and chatting. This is the *Hannya Shingyo* sutra and *Amacha* blessing. This wonderful time reduces our stress just like Holy *Amacha* blessing purifies our ancestor spirits.

Lastly, we say "goodbye" as we promise to do our best from tomorrow. This is the *Hogo*.

What I want to say here is that our Gedatsu prayer is not too ritualistic... not too religious... not too far from our life. Everything we do is related or the mirror of our daily life.

You don't have to use this example, but I hope you can explain our prayers to your kids so that they can feel comfortable with it and close to it. Thank you and God bless you.