



GEDATSU COMPANION

GEDATSU CHURCH USA
www.gedatsu-usa.org

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Gedatsu Kongo's Thought for the Month

"When the world undergoes grave and critical changes, humans should awaken spiritually . . . or likely forfeit the opportunity forever."

It's been almost a year since the COVID-19 pandemic began to spread throughout the world. Who could have anticipated the present world situation a year ago?

Many people have suffered – and continue to suffer. Our everyday life is restricted in various ways. In this grave situation, we now realize the miracle of normal daily life. We took that normality for granted, didn't we?

Now is the time when we must realize that we are allowed to live by the grace of God and through the immeasurable blessings from many people and things in the universe. With this spiritual awakening, we can start to live a hopeful and appreciative new life.



UPDATE ON GEDATSU CHURCH ACTIVITIES

As we begin the new year, COVID-19 transmission rates remain high in our communities. As a result, all regularly scheduled in-person services and activities in our churches continue to be suspended for the foreseeable months ahead.



New Year's Homage

Our churches will be open on New Year's morning for visitors who wish to pay their respects.

- **Sacramento Spiritual Center: 9:00 am to noon**
- **Los Angeles Gedatsu Church: 7:30 am to noon**

Visitors must follow health protocols (facemasks, social distancing, sanitation, etc.). No refreshments will be served.

Visit Virtually. The L.A. Church will set up a live stream camera in front of the altar so members can pay their respects remotely on New Year's morning. The live-stream transmission will be accessible on the Gedatsu Church YouTube site. (See page 7 for more information.)

Our ministers are always available to support members and friends by phone, videoconferencing and other means for private consultations, family blessings and memorial services. To arrange a service or consultation, contact your local church:

- Los Angeles Church: **Rev. Naoya Okano** (626) 288-1212
naoya_okano@gedatsu-usa.org
- Sacramento Spiritual Center: **Ms. Mica Rodriguez**
(916) 363-6054 gedatsuchurchsac@gmail.com

See back page for explanation of New Year symbols



January “Never Forgotten” Online Memorial Services

“Never Forgotten” Memorial Services are held monthly at the Gedatsu Church to honor the memory of those who have passed away during that particular month.

Because our churches are currently closed, our “Never Forgotten” services are video recorded and viewable at the time of each service on the Gedatsu YouTube site. A digital link to the video is emailed to members on the morning of the service.



The Sacramento Spiritual Center will hold its “Never Forgotten” Memorial Service on **Sunday, January 3, at 10 a.m.**, honoring the souls of **Leopoldo Zendejas, Machi Takagi, Teru Nakayama, Tsuneko Sekikawa, Genkichi Sekikawa, Fudeyo Sekikawa, Yoshiko Sekikawa, Rose Yamamoto, Bernard Sakamoto, Natsuko Furukawa, Teichiro Noritake, Taro Tekemura, Hatsuko Mishima, Jane Kaoru Ide, Richard Aadland and Kenneth Kenichiro Yasuda.**

The Los Angeles Church will hold its “Never Forgotten” Memorial Service on **Sunday, January 10, at 10 a.m.**, honoring the souls of **David H. Dyson III, Aileen T. Hirayama, Elaine Rose Kaproff, Takako Karplus, Walter Karplus, Yoshihiko Kitagawa, Chu Ly, Tadashi Thomas Matsumoto, Kazuko Matsuura, Kiyoko Michiuye, Konami Miyakawa, Asaye Mizuki, Fumi Murakami, Hisano Nakamura, Mohei Nakamura, Hiroko Notoya, Chika Okimura, Motoichi Okimura, Leah O'Leary, Chiyoko Sato, Grace Yuko Sato, Moto Tanji, Saburo Tanji, Dennis Koichi Toguchi, Masako Tokashiki, Nobuko Tsujimura, Sumiko Tsujimura, Frank Itaru Tsukamaki, Kenneth Kenichiro Yasuda, Noriko Yoshihara and Frank Young.**

Renew Your Church Membership for 2021

Now is the time to renew your 2021 membership dues.

Annual Membership: Renewable annually

Individual	\$45
Family	\$70

Lifetime Membership: Pay your membership dues just once, instead of paying annually

Individual	\$450
Family	\$600

Pay Online or by Mail

- To pay online – by credit card or ACH/bank payment – go to the Members page on the church website at www.gedatsu-usa.
- Or mail your check – made payable to Gedatsu Church USA – to your nearest church branch.



Serve Others as a Gedatsu Minister

If you have a sincere desire to serve the Gedatsu Church and its members and aspire to be trained in the Gedatsu ministry, we encourage you to become a minister.

Gedatsu Church offers full- and part-time salaried positions with flexible ministerial pathways tailored to fit individual goals, experience, life situations and schedules.

To determine candidates' suitability for training as a minister, the review process requires recommendations and endorsements by the regional board, Board of Directors of Gedatsu USA and the ministerial staff.

The minister-training course is composed of a six-to-12-month program under the supervision of U.S. ministers and includes doctrinal study and basic instruction in Gedatsu practices, services, prayer, etiquette, etc. Training is completed at *Goreichi Gedatsu-kai* Japan, leading to ordination upon Bishop and ministerial approval.

If you are interested in learning more about the Gedatsu ministry, please contact your local church minister and/or regional board.



Families Celebrate and Give Thanks for Children in Joyful *Shichi Go San* (7-5-3) Festival

In November, the Los Angeles Gedatsu Church observed the traditional Japanese festival of *Shichi Go San* (7-5-3) that joyfully celebrates the well-being and healthy futures of children ages seven, five and three.

To safeguard the safety and health of participants, the prayer service and ceremony were held outdoors before the *Ujigami* shrine (with facemasks, social distancing, etc.), and the children being celebrated and their families were recognized in separate ceremonies conducted by **Rev. Naoya Okano**.

In a YouTube video, Rev. Naoya explains the 300-year history and purpose of the *Shichi Go San* Festival. He expresses his belief that the ceremony “helps to strengthen the emotional growth and development of children.” He hopes that the ceremony will one day be widely held in the U.S. for all children, who, he says, are “precious gifts from the universe.” [To view the video, go Gedatsu Church USA YouTube site.]



At the L.A. Church, *Shichi Go San* ceremonies were held for three children and their families.

In upper left photo, Aria Perez (5), her mother, Nicole, and brothers Landon and Tanyr. Above, Hiro Ishida (7) with grandparents, Mark and Marie Ishida. At left, Koyuki Haishima (3), with mother Sayaka, and brothers Yuki and Kotaro.

Photos taken by Mark Ishida.



Following the Japanese *Shichi Go San* tradition, children are given *chitose-ame* candy – *chitose* literally meaning a thousand years. The candy and ornamental bag are both expressions of the parents’ wish that their children live long and prosperous lives.



At the conclusion of the ceremony, Rev. Naoya gave each child *chitose-ame* and special gifts from the church, including a McDonald’s gift card, courtesy of the L.A. Church Sunday School.

SHINKO (Sincere Practice)

By Gedatsu Kongo

Translated by Rev. Hisakazu Taki



Eternal Life

It is very inspirational to be able to realize the eternal life while living in this ever-changing phenomenal world.

It is natural to be attached to physical life, but there is a vast difference between knowing and not knowing that after death, the individual soul exists together with the Divine Spirit. Moreover, the existence of soul and spirit transcends time and space and is immortal. If one feels certain that spirit is the real substance of life, one is able to believe that one does return to the true spiritual home after death. Just to conceive of an eternal life after death is exhilarating.

For those who believe that everything is over when they die, death is the greatest agony. I can sympathize with those who are on the verge of death. By contrast, those who are aware that the flowers of Truth, Goodness and Beauty do bloom even after death are the blessed ones.

If one sincerely wants to search for the true path of life, they must be aware of life after death.

To renounce egoism in one's physical life is to live a spiritual life without physical attachment. It is likened to communicating with the spiritual world while living.

Those who entirely live a spiritual life can always go and come back freely between the present world and the spiritual world while living. One's sincerity actually reaches through to Heaven.

Renouncing one's ego while living and physical death are different objectively but are subjectively identical. This is because the subjective self is immortal.

Even those who do not believe in life after death, when they actually die, will discover that they exist as spiritual entities. They will then realize their ignorance and, as a rule, regret it. Knowing or not knowing of the eternal life, in all probability, will make a big difference in one's present life.



Gedatsu Q&A - Part 7

By Rev. Hisakazu Taki

Q *I am grateful to God and my ancestors for everything I have in my life. Isn't that enough? Why do I need to go to church, perform Amacha blessing, recite prayers, etc.?*

A People in today's society have a strong tendency to think that when they believe in something, it is real. This is our usual way of thinking, but it is problematic. You may believe you are grateful enough to God and your ancestors, but how do you know your beliefs are real?

We have strong habitual tendencies within us, which have been formed through many generations. But it is hard for us to transform these habitual tendencies. For example, everyone knows that being overweight is not good for one's health, but it is actually very hard for a big eater to lose weight. We need actual daily practice to transform these habitual tendencies. This is why all religions emphasize practice and discipline, such as prayer, meditation, etc.

Thomas A. Edison said, "Genius is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration." In line with this, many Olympic athletes, who are obviously blessed with natural ability, are, at the same time, known to be hard workers. They train diligently every day. We ordinary people actually may downplay training and practice.

So, the next time you are advised by your minister to attend church, perform prayers, etc., do so without complaint or excuses. Consider these as your practice or discipline to correct your habitual tendencies. Over time, you will find that you have become a new person who is truly grateful for everything.

Q *Sometimes, I feel overwhelmed thinking about resolving my ancestors' negative karma, as well as my own karmic obligations. How can I lighten my burden and outlook?*

A When you hear the word "karma," you may probably have negative feelings about that and feel burdened. I understand your feeling, but why don't you look at karma from another point of view?

Karma actually means "connection with the past." We were born from our parents. Our parents were born from their parents, and so on and on. Our existence is not possible without parents and ancestors. We inherit many qualities from ancestors, good or bad. That's why we can be here today. You may focus on negative qualities inherited from ancestors only, but don't forget the many good qualities you are blessed with.

No one is perfect. You may have some negative qualities physically or mentally, which you inherit from your ancestors. But you should remember you have many good qualities you inherit from your ancestors, too. You should be grateful for them.

Master Gedatsu Kongo stated: "Why don't you thank your ancestors for the karma you inherited from them, and make good use of it?"

You can change your life through your self-reflection and self-improvement. Every morning when you wake up, say thank you to God and ancestors for your existence today. And try your best in your works and duties each day. This daily practice will lead to your better future.

(Continued on back page)

Entertaining Virtual Services Keep Members Engaged and Connected

Even though the Coronavirus pandemic has forced our Gedatsu Church to close its doors, the loss of in-person services has an upside. It has unleashed the creative talents of **Rev. Naoya Okano** in L.A. and **Mica Rodriguez**, minister-trainee in Sacramento, who are reimagining the way we address the spiritual needs of our members.

Both Rev. Naoya and Mica are avid proponents of social and digital media as propagation tools. They produce YouTube videos each month of their branch's respective "Never Forgotten" memorial service and other virtual services.

In addition, Rev. Naoya has honed his technical skills in computer-generated presentations and has introduced a host of inventive and well-crafted virtual options: live-stream prayers and sermons, YouTube videos, online services and programs and Zoom consultations and services. They have proven so successful, they may likely remain and coexist with in-person services even after our churches reopen.



YouTube videos produced by Rev. Naoya show him cleverly superimposed in front of various scenes, images and PowerPoint slides. How does he do it? Read on.



Rev. Naoya uses a variety of equipment – including several video cameras, two voice recorders, mics, a switcher, iPad and two laptops – to create dramatic camera angles and optimal sound and to ease production. "It's about all I can do by myself," he says.



Rev. Naoya video-records himself in front of a green screen, which enables him to delete the background and superimpose his image onto other screens, as shown at top.



Live-streaming events – like recent services conducted by both Rev. Naoya and Mica – require camera set-ups for real-time transmission of the prayer service, switching to pre-recorded videos of the sermons, then back to live remarks.

Comments from Members

Ken, Kari and I watched the live streamed Ujigami service. Rev. Naoya did a great job in officiating the service and setting up the live stream video. We know it must have been very difficult and time-consuming preparing for this service. – Ikuko Kuritani

The live stream was awesome. I felt like I was actually there in L.A. at the Ujigami service. – Dave Ide

What a wonderful service! Rev. Naoya, your sermon is what all people look for in attending any religious service. Your personal interpretation of the "meaning of life" and reference to Pascal is one that I will never forget. Thank you. – Hisato Tsujimura

Rev. Naoya, I enjoyed Bishop Kishida's video and your sermon on the Meaning of Life in this morning's live stream. I enjoyed seeing Rev. Mica participate and look forward to seeing future services where you both officiate. – Arlene Okimura

NOVEMBER 2020 OFFERINGS

Northern California Total: \$1,800

General Donations: J. Ito, M/M J. Horner, M/M D. Tsuboi, S. Nishino, J. Detwiler/J.Sebe, M. Rodriguez

Special Acknowledgments

Kendra Ota Schubert In memory of Masashi/Yukie Ota
Linda Tomita In memory of Shizuye Kodani

Southern California Total: \$10,845

General: M/M R. Allum, M/M K. Chinen, S. Haishima, J. Kaku, M. Kimura, M/M K. Kuritani, M/M T. Matsumoto, M. Nakamura, T. Nakamura, M. Okada, M/M N. Okano, M/M A. Shiroishi, D. Shiroishi, M/M R. Tsujimura, A. Wood

Special Acknowledgments

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Julie Mah 49-day and burial services for Tomoki and Margaret Oyanagi (\$500)
Julie Mah In memory of Tomoki and Margaret Oyanagi (\$7,000)
Toyoko Murakami Ancestor blessing
Tadao Ishida 7th-year memorial service for Fumio Ishida
Tadao Ishida "Never Forgotten" for Fumio Ishida
Do. Shiroishi 7th-year memorial service for Fumio Ishida
Victor Mizokami "Never Forgotten" for Masao R. Mizokami
Mark/Marie Ishida 7-5-3 service and special thanks (\$500)

Online Donations: Total: \$779

General: T. Palelek, N. Tsuboi, M/M P. Reid, H. Tsujimura, R. Pang, M/K. Naimoi, D. Ide

Special Acknowledgments

D. Ide Appreciation for Archbishop Kishida

Note: Special Acknowledgments are listed for gifts \$100+. Dollar amounts are shown for gifts \$500+.

GEDATSU DIGITAL RESOURCES



What is "live stream"?

Recently, the Gedatsu Church began live streaming its prayer services and programs. What is "live streaming?" It means that when the church announces that a live stream program begins at a certain time, it is being broadcast live over the internet in real time. Viewers can watch it on their computer, tablet or smart phone at the actual time it is being broadcast – like a live TV transmission. The program is simultaneously being video-recorded, so it can be watched later as a video on YouTube.



Where to find Gedatsu videos

Dozens of videos of Gedatsu prayer services, sermons, Sunday programs and member reflections – in English and Japanese – are posted on our Gedatsu YouTube site at <https://www.youtube.com/c/GedatsuChurchUSA>.

To access any of these videos:

- Type or copy the above web address in your internet browser, or
- Google "YouTube" and look for Gedatsu Church
- Best option: Subscribe to the Gedatsu Church USA channel on YouTube. As a subscriber, you are notified of live stream when you go to the site.



DVDs of Gedatsu videos

If you, or someone you know, don't have access to a computer or internet or have no email address, you can still stay connected with Gedatsu and informed on church activities.

DVDs containing church videos and other online communications are available from your local church. To request DVDs, just contact:

- Los Angeles Church: **Rev. Naoya Okano**
(626) 288-1212 naoya_okano@gedatsu-usa.org
- Sacramento Spiritual Center: **Mica Rodriguez**
(916) 363-6054 gedatsuchurchsac@gmail.com

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The *Gedatsu Companion* is published monthly for members like **Debbie Shiroishi** of the Los Angeles Gedatsu Church. Debbie is the daughter of the **late Terry** and **Shizuye Shiroishi** and was born into the Gedatsu study.

Debbie retired from the Southern California Gas Company after 36 years of service. She now spends her leisure time watching dramas online and listening to music. Also, she walks daily for her health and exercise. She is grateful for the Gedatsu teaching and knows her ancestors and guardian angels are always guiding and watching over her each day.

Editorial Staff

Joyce Reid, Editor

Rev. Naoya Okano, adviser

Mica Rodriguez, minister-in-training, adviser

Editorial contributors to this issue:

Dave Ide, **Mark Ishida**, **Ikuko Kuritani**, **Arlene Okimura**,
Debbie Shiroishi, **Rev. Hisakazu Taki**, **Hisato Tsujimura**

Explanation of New Year's symbols on cover page



According to the Chinese calendar,

2021 is the Year of the Ox, symbolizing diligence, persistence and honesty.



In Japan, New Year's, or *Sho-gatsu*, is celebrated with

traditions like *Kadomatsu*, a decoration of pine and bamboo that is placed in front of homes to welcome ancestral spirits and gods. Pine symbolizes "youth" because it is evergreen, and bamboo symbolizes "health" because of its ability to withstand harsh conditions.

(Gedatsu Q&A – Continued from page 5)

Q *If we accept the principle of karma, what's the use of self-improvement? Aren't our fates preordained?*

A Our fates are not preordained. No matter what difficulties you may have now, you can change your life in a positive way. This is entirely dependent on your attitude in life. You may feel burdened by many negative qualities you inherit from ancestors. But don't forget you inherit many good qualities too. All the qualities you inherit from ancestors, good or bad, are indispensable for your present existence.

Be aware that your present existence is possible because of your parents and ancestors, many people who have helped you and many things you have consumed, etc. You will then naturally be grateful for them all.

This will be the beginning of your new life. Appreciation and self-improvement are the keys to create a positive life.

