

GEDATSU COMPANION

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 2 News and Announcements
- 3 The *Saito Goma* Fire Ceremony – a comprehensive overview
- 6 Gedatsu Q&A – Part 39
- 8 August Offerings

Gedatsu Kongo's

Thought for the Month

"Parents love their children with a gracious smile. Children love their parents with respect. Married couples love each other with genuine affection. This is life."

The fundamental unit of society is the family, consisting of the parents and their children.

Children grow in a healthy manner by being nurtured by their parents' tender love. Children's love and respect for their parents, and a couple's mutual sincere love, make the home a place filled with peace, warmth, and caring.

SEPTEMBER 2023

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

Sun	3	9:30 am	Grand Fall Festival
Tue	5		Church Closed (in lieu of Labor Day)
Sun	10	10:00 am	"Never Forgotten" Memorial Service
Tue	12	7:00 pm	Regional Board Meeting via Google Meet
Sun	24	10:00 am	Appreciation and <i>Higan</i> Service

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Sun	3		Grand Fall Festival (in Sacramento)
Tue	5		Church Closed (in lieu of Labor Day)
Sun	10	10:00 am	"Never Forgotten" Memorial Service
Sun	17	10:00 am	Appreciation and <i>Higan</i> Service
			Grandparents Recognition
Thu	22	5:00 pm	Regional Board Meeting via Zoom

OCTOBER 2023

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

Sun	1	10:00 am	"Never Forgotten" Memorial Service
Sun	8	10:00 am	Appreciation Service
Tue	10		Church Closed (in lieu of Indigenous Peoples Day)
		7:00 pm	Regional Board Meeting via Google Meet
Sun	22	10:00 am	Appreciation and All Souls Service

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Sun	1		No Service
Sun	8	10:00 am	"Never Forgotten" Memorial Service
Tue	10		Church Closed (in lieu of Indigenous Peoples Day)
Sun	15	10:00 am	Appreciation and <i>Ujigami</i> Service / Luncheon / Children's Halloween Costume Parade
Thu	26	5:00 pm	Regional Board Meeting via Zoom



September “Never Forgotten” 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.

People of all faiths are welcome, so invite your friends and family members to attend. Even if you are unable to attend, you may still honor the soul of a loved one.

The Sacramento Spiritual Center will hold its “Never Forgotten” Memorial Service on **Sunday, September 10, at 10 a.m.**, honoring the souls of **Robert Katsumi Fukushima, Glenn Shuji Hatae, Linda Carol Kashiwagi, Shigetaro Kino, Teruko Kino, Soichi Nakatani, Masako Sakamoto Tagawa, and Tetsuo Yomogida.**

The Los Angeles Church will hold its “Never Forgotten” Memorial Service on **Sunday, September 10, at 10 a.m.**, honoring the souls of **David H. Dyson Jr., Kazuko Endo, Melanie Yosa Garion, Ann M. Ghazarians, Nancy Kikuchi, Misako Kobata, Liam Mikael Kowal, Hitoshi Matsumoto, Yasuko Matsumoto, Frank S. Miyamura, Nancy Mizuki, Hajimu Murakami, Charles Migiwa Nishi, Arlene Okimura, Tomoki Oyanagi, Jacobus Johannes Reckers, Ruth Muriel Reckers, Kiyoshi George Sakuma, John Takeshi Sangen, Yuri T. Sangen, Setsu Shiroishi, Yoshio Fred Shoga, Himeko Tanji, Itsuya Frank Tanji, Moto Tanji, and Atsuko Watanabe.**

Reminder: New P.O. Box for Sacramento Church

To avoid mail theft and ensure the security of mail deliveries to the Sacramento Spiritual Center – especially mail containing checks or sensitive/important information – please address mail to the following postal box address:

Gedatsu Church USA
P.O. Box 278391
Sacramento, CA 95827



Fall Grand Festival

Sunday, September 3 – 9:30 a.m.

Gedatsu Spiritual Center, Sacramento

Program I – *Gochi* Sanctuary Service
Program II – Memorial Tower Enshrinement Ceremony
Program III – *Saito Goma* Fire Ceremony

- Guest speaker: **Reverend Shigehiro Kizaki**, director of propagation, *Gedatsu-kai* Japan
- *Saito Goma* plaques for the Fire Ceremony must be ordered by August 20.
- Free sandwich/chip lunches will be available. Sandwich choices: teriyaki chicken, BBQ pork, vegetarian. Contact your local church to reserve a lunch.
- A chartered bus from L.A. will be provided. Contact the L.A. Church office to reserve a seat. Once again, through the generosity of **Senior Deacon Jackson Ito**, bus riders will be able to ride free of charge.

Memorial Tower Enshrinements

The following souls will be enshrined in the Memorial Tower at the *Goreichi* in Sacramento in a special enshrinement ceremony in conjunction with the Grand Fall Festival in September: **Kiyoe Ishida, Louis Kiyoshi Ito, Chiyoko Kamei, Frank Miyamura, Katsuyo Nagao, Teruko Nakamura, Roger Setsuo Nishida, Arlene Okimura, Lily Yuriko Shiba, and Rudy Koichiro Tsujimura.**

Saito Goma Fire Ceremony

An Ancient Eastern Tradition Burns Brightly on American Soil

Several years after establishing the Gedatsu Church in America in the early 1950s, **Archbishop Kishida** realized that the Gedatsu teaching in America required different ways of propagating than the approaches used in Japan.

He found, for example, that American members tended to be more pragmatic than their counterparts in Japan, and more likely to value immediate results from the teaching. Also, in those early years after World War II, Archbishop Kishida found an overwhelming number of Japanese and Japanese-Americans among his U.S. congregation who were still suffering from their difficult post-war circumstances and loss of hope.

Moved by their plight, and eager to respond to their needs, Archbishop Kishida turned to his religious education in esoteric Buddhism for a solution. He found an answer in the *Saito Goma* fire ritual. He believed that the symbolism and power of the fire service would appeal to members and give them hope through the simple, inspiring way it addressed practical concerns.

Thus, in April 1955, Archbishop Kishida performed the *Saito Goma* fire ceremony for the first time on the *Goreichi* grounds in Sacramento. Since then, the fire ritual has been conducted each spring and fall and is today a central feature of the Grand Festivals of Gedatsu Church USA.

Tapping into an Ancient Spiritual Practice

The *Saito Goma* fire ritual originates from Shugendo, a religion that mixes esoteric Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism and Shintoism. In Shugendo, *Saito Goma* is a way of expressing appreciation to nature and the wisdom that fire represents. The term “*Goma*” is derived from the Sanskrit word “*homa*,” the act of offering a prayer by burning.

The principal object of the *Saito Goma* ceremony is the *Fudo* deity, which we see on the *Goreichi* grounds as the imposing wrathful-faced stone figure. Surrounded by flames, he holds a sword in one hand and a coiled rope in the other – symbolically



battling evil with immovable faith and compassion and cutting the ties of negative feelings and demons to liberate us from suffering. The *Saito Goma* ceremony functions to invoke the power of the *Fudo* deity to burn away all impediments and defilements within us and purify all souls.

During the service, the officiant – **Senior Reverend Akira Sebe**, who has performed this role for the past 35 years – sits on the ground facing the *Fudo* deity. A bonfire blazes between them. Rev. Sebe, in a deep, prayerful state, then executes a series of ancient ritual gestures and steps to invoke the deity’s power and wisdom. [See “Fire Ritual – Step by Step,” page 4.]



The *Fudo*’s power is concentrated on fulfilling the prayers and supplications inscribed on the wood plaques that the congregation offers to the fire – such as family protection, traffic safety and recovery from illness. At the same time, the officiant harnesses the power of *Fudo* and channels this power to the people gathered at the ceremony. The effect of the fire eradicates their illusions and negative elements.

For Gedatsu members, the *Saito Goma* ceremony holds a special spiritual significance. Beyond its practical purpose of fulfilling prayers and offering hope, the fire ceremony’s ultimate goal is to express appreciation for the blessings we receive from the Universal Life Force. It is also to pray for people’s happiness in all aspects of their life, for world peace and the salvation of unrested spirits.

“Appreciation is the key,” says Rev. Sebe. “When you express sincere appreciation to *Fudo*, you will spiritually enter the fire where *Fudo* presides and receive its wisdom and unconditional love in return.”

(Continued on page 4)

The Fire Ritual – Step by Step

By Senior Reverend Akira Sebe

As part of the Saito Goma fire ceremony, a series of prayers, gestures and actions are performed. Those rituals are explained here.

In the beginning of the ceremony, I throw 12 sticks into the fire as an offering to the *Fudo* deity. I acknowledge and thank the deity, asking it to grant us wisdom and guidance during the ceremony, and pray for world peace. Once we engage the *Fudo*'s wisdom, we can express sincere appreciation and pray for



peace. I then throw into the fire 12 more sticks, one by one, thanking the *Fudo* deity specifically. Deep in prayer, I spiritually “enter the fire” – or the wisdom of *Fudo* – with each stick that I throw.

At the end of the ceremony, I throw half the number of sticks –12 instead of 24 – because my prayer has fewer purposes. Instead of focusing on peace and requesting the *Fudo* deity's guidance, I am thanking the *Fudo* deity for allowing us to have the *Saito Goma* ceremony.

At another point in the ceremony, I hit the stone tablets set before me with wooden sticks. This is to express appreciation to fire and water. Fire represents the burning of worldly desires, illusions and conflicts, which are sources of negative karma. Through the practice of appreciation, we transcend the sources of negative karma in our lives. We pay respect to water because it represents a separation from judgmental thoughts. Water is without ego because it has no fixed shape and follows the contour of the land. If it encounters an obstacle, it flows by it without creating conflict.

Although I ask for the *Fudo* deity's guidance and wisdom, my focus is on thanking the deity for allowing us to have the *Saito Goma* ceremony. These prayers of appreciation begin weeks before the ceremony is even held. [See page 5.] The most important aspect of the *Saito Goma* service is that we are starting and ending the ceremony by expressing appreciation.



The Proper Attitude and Purpose for Praying

By Senior Reverend Akira Sebe

Some wise words of advice are offered on having the proper attitude and purpose in mind when participating in the Saito Goma ceremony.

Years ago, Archbishop Kishida designed many of the *Saito Goma* plaques in the form of a request, such as “Traffic Safety” or “To Do Well in School,” to give people hope and make the ceremony accessible to newcomers. However, the primary purpose of *Saito Goma* is not to make or grant requests. The purpose is to express appreciation for our blessings and cultivate our faith in the Supreme Spirit of the Universe and its love.

So, before you throw your “Family Protection” plaque into the fire, express appreciation that you have a family and that you are able to love your family.

Before you throw your “Traffic Safety” plaque, express appreciation for your car and your ability to drive.

Before you throw your “To Do Well in School” plaque, express appreciation that you are able to attend school.

Think of the plaques that you requested and what blessings they represent in your life. When you stand in front of the fire holding your plaques, bow your head and express appreciation for those blessings. If, instead, you use the *Saito Goma* service to make requests without expressing gratitude for what you already have, then the ceremony becomes fruitless.

After the *Saito Goma* service has ended, continue expressing and developing your appreciation for the blessings in your life and you will enjoy greater peace and happiness.

(Continued on page 5)

The Saito Goma Fire Ceremony – Before and After

A great deal of activity – largely unseen by members and the public – precedes and follows the Saito Goma fire ceremony and is critical to the successful outcome of the fire ritual. These activities are explained here.

Rigorous Spiritual Training

Weeks prior to the Grand Festivals, **Senior Reverend Akira Sebe**, who officiates the fire ceremony, goes into “training” for the spiritual event before him. Each morning for three weeks, he sits before the statue of the *Fudo* deity, touching his forehead to the concrete in concentrated prayer.

“I focus my mind and soul on only two things,” says Rev. Sebe. “First, I engage the wisdom of the *Fudo* deity, thanking it for its guidance and for blessing us with the *Saito Goma* ceremony.

“Secondly, I pray for the happiness of the people. I humbly express my gratitude for being allowed to perform this role. Without these preparations,” he explains, “other thoughts intrude, and I cannot concentrate and focus my feelings effectively.”



Building the Fire

At the center of the ceremony is the sacred fire, which is lit to engage the wisdom and power of *Fudo* and burn away negative thoughts. The wooden structure itself is a carefully constructed wooden tower that is designed in accord with ancient Buddhist practices.

The structure is built of 108 wood slats – each cut 2-inch x 2-inch x 24-inch.

“The number 108 is significant in Buddhism,” explains Rev. Sebe. “It represents the 108 negative thoughts, or worldly illusions, of greed, anger and ignorance within us from the past, present and future.”

The 108 wooden slats are arranged in a series of squares, one stacked on top of the other, with each tier offset 45 degrees, forming a tower. Bamboo shoots are placed in the corners and junipers around the base and top. Four sets of Shinto *shide* – white zig-zag paper streamers – are tied to a string that surrounds the tower, denoting its sacredness. It takes about three hours for member-volunteers to construct the tower.



(Continued on back page)

Gedatsu Q&A - Part 39

By Rev. Hisakazu Taki

Q *I have been studying Gedatsu for many years, but frankly speaking, I still do not have a clear understanding of the teaching. Can you explain it to me?*

A I believe that our prayer book illustrates the main point of Gedatsu. By carefully reading and understanding the contents of the prayer book, you will be able to grasp the essentials of Gedatsu. Let me explain them one by one.

In our prayers, we begin by saying:

"We join in giving reverence to the Universal Life Force, all guardian angels, and the souls of our ancestors. We give thanks for the infinite blessing we receive. We resolve to live each day with appreciation and gratitude."

This part explains that our current existence is possible because of the infinite blessing from the Universal Life Force, our ancestors, and all guardian spirits.

Who makes your heart beat within your body? It's not your own will that makes your heart beat. The Universal Life Force makes it beat constantly.

Everyone has parents and ancestors. We all have received infinite blessings from our parents and ancestors, and all guardian spirits. Therefore, we pay respect to them and thank them for their infinite blessing.

We then try to benefit the world through our daily duties as a token of appreciation. This is the way we should always be as human beings.

Q *What is the meaning of "Aspiration" in the second part of our Gedatsu prayer book?*

A In the prayer book, we recite "Aspiration" by saying the following:

"May peace reign over the world and all people enjoy prosperity and happiness. May we unite and cooperate in the salvation of mankind. May we pray for the peaceful rest of all spirits. And may divine grace bless all things equally."

These are the ultimate aspirations that we Gedatsu members should have. Our goal to study Gedatsu is to become individuals who can sincerely pray for other people's happiness and world peace. This is the path toward true happiness for everyone.

Q *Please explain the third part of our prayer book, "Appreciation and Gratitude."*

A In the third part of the prayer book, "Appreciation and Gratitude," we say:

"I shall reciprocate the profound and immeasurable blessings I receive from my country.... my parents.... my teachers.... society.... and all creation in the universe."

As I explained, our existence is possible because of many people and all elements in the universe. Knowingly or unknowingly, we all have received infinite blessings from our country, parents, teachers, society, and all creation in the universe. Without those blessings, no one can survive, even for a second. Therefore, we should be aware of these immeasurable blessings that we receive and be thankful for them all.

This awareness and the sense of appreciation become the foundation of our true happiness.



JULY 2023 OFFERINGS

Northern California Total: \$3,325

General Donations: J. Tanaka, A. Sebe, M/M A. Akashi, M/M C. Tanaka, M/M D. Tsuboi (\$550), J. Detwiler/J. Sebe, M/M J. Horner, M. Lumpkin, No Name, R. Ide, R. Nakatani, S. McSwain, M/M S. Sekikawa, S. Taketa

Special Acknowledgments

M/M D. Ide	Appreciation for Obon Service
J. Tanaka	"Never Forgotten" for Keisuke Tateishi, Yukio Tateishi, Yukie Ota, and Susie Tateishi
P. Tateishi	In memory of Susie Tateishi
K. Ota/Schubert	"Never Forgotten" for Yukie Ota
R. Morimoto	"Never Forgotten" for Shizue Kodani (\$500)

Southern California Total: \$5,965

General: A. Dewitt, A. Tsujimura, Anonymous, De. Shiroishi, Do. Shiroishi, H. Taki, J. Hamamoto, J. Ito, J. Kaku, J. Shiroishi, K. Fujii, K. Kuritani, K. Nakamura, M. Nakamura, M./M N. Okano, M/M A. Shiroishi, M/M C. Morioka, M/M D. Mah, M/M F. Barthel, M/M G. Wood, M/M H. Tsujimura, M/M K. Kuritani, M/M M. Choy, M/M M. Garcia-Locheo, M/M M. Hamada, M/M P. Reid, M/M P. Young, M/M T. Matsumoto, M/M V. Mizokami, N. Takara, P. Muronaka, T. Ishida, T. Murakami, T. Okimura, Y. Oishi.

Special Acknowledgments

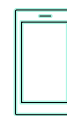
M/M G. Wood	In memory of Tameharu Nagao
T. Ishida	In memory of Michiye and Nobuyoshi Shimohira
M/M S. Shaklan	Rudy Tsujimura memorial
J. Ito	2023 Fall Festival Memorial Tower Enshrinement of Louis Kiyoshi Ito
M/M Ho. Tsujimura	In memory of Rudy and Yoko Tsujimura
M/M K. Chinen	Haruko memorial service
N. Okano	Sightseeing travel with Rev. Nishiwaki
M/M H. Tsujimura	One-year memorial service for Rudy Tsujimura
M/M K. Kuritani	Grandson Caden's graduation from high school and acceptance to University of Wisconsin
M/M V. Mizokami	Appreciation for grandsons' graduation
Yokota Family	Appreciation for <i>Obon</i> service
M/M Ho. Tsujimura	Russell Yamamisaka celebration of life service (\$500)
M. & E. Mizokami	Graduation appreciation
J. Akashi	College graduation appreciation

Online Donations: Total: \$326

General: G. Iwata, S. Shiroishi, H. Tsujimura, J. Reid, G. Hass

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

DONATE ONLINE



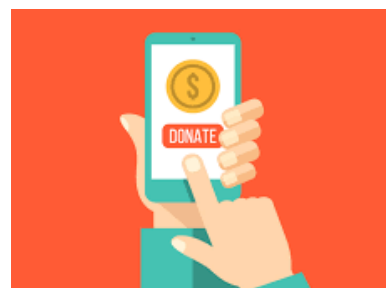
Convenient + Easy + Secure

Gedatsu Church encourages you to make your donations online. It's a convenient, easy and secure way to contribute to the church – from your home or workplace, on your laptop, tablet or cellphone.

You have the option of donating by credit card or ACH/bank payments, making one-time gifts or recurring payments, designating general or special offerings and lots more. Email and printable receipts are automatically generated.

You can also pay your membership dues, too, by going to the Members page on the site.

Just go to the Give page on the church website at www.gedatsu-usa.org to get started.



GEDATSU CHURCH USA
www.gedatsu-usa.org



Gedatsu Church USA
Los Angeles Branch
7850 Hill Drive
Rosemead, CA 91770

NON-PROFIT
ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
ONTARIO, CA
PERMIT NO. 574



The *Gedatsu Companion* is published monthly for members like **Fukuko Rico** of the L.A. Gedatsu Church. A long-time resident of Monterey Park, Fukuko was introduced to the Gedatsu Church by her daughter, **Anna Rico**. She likes the family-like atmosphere of the church, she says,

which makes her feel spiritually connected with her late father and ancestors.

Fukuko is the mother of three daughters, five grandchildren, and four great-grandchildren. Now retired from her job as a quality-control employee, she enjoys her hobbies, which include beading, making jewelry, and watching old TV westerns like “Gunsmoke,” “Wagon Train,” and “Rawhide.”

Editorial Staff

Joyce Reid, Editor

Reverend Naoya Okano, adviser

Reverend Mica Rodriguez, adviser

Editorial contributors to this issue:

Allison Horner, Dave Ide, Mark Ishida, Mariko Locheo, Fukuko Rico, Senior Reverend Akira Sebe, Deacon Jo Ann Shiroishi, Reverend Hisakazu Taki

(Fire Ceremony – continued from page 5)



“The arrangement of the 108 wooden slats reflects the philosophy of *Shugendo*, the religion from which the fire ritual originated,” says Rev. Sebe. “Even though the slats are linear, they are arranged, as much as possible, to create a circular pattern, which promotes a peaceful, non-violent nature. This is the state of mind we are trying to achieve.”

Sacred Ashes

After the *Saito Goma* ceremony has ended and the Festival participants have departed, the burning embers are water-cooled to create charcoal-like pieces and prevent them from turning completely to ash. Later, the residue is put into a grinder to create a powder, which is painstakingly packaged by Sacramento ministers and members and given to plaque requesters. Because the powder is imbued with the power of *Fudo* and contains the ashes of the members’ plaques, members are encouraged to sprinkle the powder around their property and garden with appreciation for *Fudo*’s protection.

