



GEDATSU COMPANION

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Gedatsu Kongo's Thought for the Month

"Gedatsu is realized only through sincere practice. Religious faith without practice is wasted."

In general, people think of faith as worshipping a higher power to receive divine guidance and blessings.

Gedatsu, however, teaches us how to create a world filled with love and sincerity by living daily lives that walk with, rather than pray toward, the Universal Spirit.

To live such a life, we should practice every day:

- to be thankful for being alive,
- to fulfill our duties, such as work, school, parenthood, etc.
- to create harmony among our family, friends, and all those around us, and
- to end each day by expressing appreciation for all the blessings we receive from the Universal Spirit and our ancestors.

When we practice these in our daily life, we will be naturally blessed with true happiness.

JUNE 2024

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

Sun	2	10:00 am	"Never Forgotten" Memorial Service
Sun	9	10:00 am	Appreciation and Father's Day Service Mother Kiyota Memorial Service
Tue	11	7:00 pm	Regional Board Meeting via Google Meet
Sun	23	10:00 am	Appreciation Service

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Sun	2	10:00 am	Hiho Meditation Practice
Sun	9	10:00 am	"Never Forgotten" Memorial Service
Sun	16	10:00 am	Appreciation and Father's Day Service
Thu	20	5:00 pm	Regional Board Meeting via Zoom
Sun	23	10:00 am	Ajikan Meditation Practice

JULY 2024

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

Thu	4		Church Closed (Independence Day)
Sun	7	10:00 am	"Never Forgotten" Memorial Service
Tue	9	7:00 pm	Regional Board Meeting via Google Meet
Sun	14	10:00 am	Appreciation / Obon Service
Sun	28	10:00 am	Appreciation Service / Graduates Honored

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Thu	4		Church Closed (Independence Day)
Sun	7	10:00 am	Hiho Meditation Practice
Sun	14	10:00 am	"Never Forgotten" Memorial Service
Thu	18	5:00 pm	Regional Board Meeting via Zoom
Sun	21	10:00 am	Appreciation / Obon Service Graduates Honored
Sun	28	10:00 am	Ajikan Meditation Practice

CHURCHWIDE

Sat	27	12 noon	Steering Team Meeting via Zoom
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June “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, June 2, at 10 a.m.**, honoring the souls of **Mine Kino Hirose, Motokichi Ide, Kinuyo Nakatani, Suyeko Hada Takemura, Minoko Tanaka, Jane Keiko Thorne, Isamu Yamada, Bettie Yamamura, and Masaru Yamamura.**

The Los Angeles Church will hold its “Never Forgotten” Memorial Service on **Sunday, June 9, at 10 a.m.**, honoring the souls of **Harry Hidejin Arakawa, Kimiko Hirano, Mitsuko Kaku, Masa Kikuta, Tsuchinojo Kimura, Edward Yutaka Kuritani, Kazumi Matsunami, Kameyoshi Michiuye, Manabu Mukai, Fusako Murakami, Phillip Nakamura, Robert Nakamura, Mary Anne Nolan, Ai Okada, Hideyo Okada, Masakichi Okada, Yoshiko Mary Otera, Lawrence Sasano, Roy S. Shiba, Hidekichi Shiroishi, Tsuna Shiroishi, Yoshimasa Taninaka, Hironobu George Terakawa, Ben Seiroku Toguchi, Carolyn Wong, June Tsuyoko Yamamisaka, and Russell Yamamisaka**



Let’s Celebrate Our 2024 Graduates!

It’s time for our annual celebration of graduating students and their parents. The Los Angeles and Sacramento churches will be honoring graduates at their annual recognition programs in July.

If you have a student in the family who will be graduating this year from elementary, middle or high school, college, or graduate school, submit their name to be honored. Application forms (electronic and paper) are available from your branch office. **Completed forms are due by June 16.**



Let’s
Celebrate
Together!

This year, at our Grand Fall Festival on Sunday, September 1, we will celebrate the 75th anniversary of our Gedatsu Church in America. Make plans now to attend with family and friends.

We are honored to welcome to our Fall Festival **Bishop Teruo Okano**, chairman of *Gedatsu-kai* Japan, and **Takayuki Okano**, the newly installed *Yotsugi*, the successor to the Abbot. They will be joined by several other *Gedatsu-kai* leaders and HQ staff. In their honor, a dinner party is being planned for the Saturday evening before the Festival. Cost and venue to be announced.

On the Festival Sunday, a free festive catered Mexican luncheon of tasty foods and beverages will be served.

More information on the Festival activities will be announced in the coming weeks at your local church services and in church communications.

Memorial Tower Enshrinements – Fall 2024

Enshrinements in the Gedatsu Memorial Tower are scheduled for the Fall Grand Festival in September.

Memorial Tower plaques are sacred objects that forever identify the spiritual entities, who have been enshrined in the tower. **The price for an enshrinement plaque has been increased to \$500. Applications for enshrinement will be accepted until June 16.** Application forms are available at your church office. (Read more about the significance of the Memorial Tower on page 3.)

Minister Schedules

Reverend Naoya Okano and his family will vacation in Japan this summer. Rev. Naoya will depart for Japan on July 9 and return on July 29.

From Japan, we welcome the return of **Reverend Hisakazu Taki**, who will serve as guest minister at the L.A. Church from July 6 through July 31.

Senior Reverend Akira Sebe and his family will vacation in Japan. He will depart on July 15 and return on July 30.

The Promise of the Memorial Tower: “You Will Never Be Forgotten”

At the Fall Grand Festival this year, the souls of recently deceased church members and friends will be enshrined in the Gedatsu Memorial Tower on the *Goreichi* grounds in Sacramento. This will mark the 55th year of the annual enshrinement and memorial ceremony, which has been conducted each fall since the Tower was dedicated in 1969.

The Memorial Tower has a profound, and personal, significance for Gedatsu members and their families. The Tower is, in essence, a memorial vault where the souls of all who are enshrined within can rest and receive the continuing prayers and blessings of their families, church members, and friends.

A Family Cemetery for All

Senior Reverend Akira Sebe attributes the concept and construction of the Memorial Tower to the benevolent vision of the late **Archbishop Eizan Kishida**.

“Archbishop Kishida thought compassionately of the many people whose loved ones were buried far away or in unknown locations, and were, thus, unable to visit their gravesites,” says Reverend Sebe. “He envisioned the Memorial Tower as serving as a family cemetery, where anyone could visit the souls of their loved ones and offer them prayers. The Tower ensures that these souls will never be forgotten.”

Today, the Tower enshrines more than 500 souls. The name of each soul is inscribed on a glass-like tablet and displayed within the Tower chamber (see photos at right).

Reverend Mica Rodriguez, together with Reverend Sebe, serve as the dedicated caretakers of the enshrined souls, faithfully tending to them on an almost-daily basis. They recite the name of each soul on his or her memorial date and offer *amacha* blessing and prayers, giving thanks on the soul’s behalf to the Universal Life Force, or God.

Helping Souls to Become “Helping Spirits”

“Usually, souls are unaware of the blessings they have received from the Universal Life Force while they were alive,” says Reverend Sebe. “They recognize this fact, with great regret, only after they have died. Therefore, it is important for family members to not only give blessing for their deceased loved ones, but to show appreciation to the Universal Life Force on their behalf.

“By doing so, the souls are able to rest peacefully,” he says. “More importantly, the souls are then liberated to become active, helping spirits, who can protect and benefit their living descendants.”



Brief Biography of Gedatsu Kongo

Chapter 7 House Number 6

In the early 1930s, President Okano began formulating the foundational religious elements and activities of the Gedatsu Church. In 1933, he prepared the wording for the prayer, using simple, ordinary language. At the same time, he urged members to enshrine altars within their homes. He did not prescribe any fixed form for enshrinement, except for *Tenjinchigi*, or the Universal Life Force, as the central object of prayer. Otherwise, members could enshrine objects related to their personal family and ancestors.

That same year, President Okano purchased a two-story building at Araki-cho 6, Yotsuya, Tokyo. Called “House Number 6” by members, this facility became the teaching center where members went to learn from President Okano.



President Okano at House Number 6 in Tokyo.

In May, President Okano enshrined *Tenjinchigi*, or the Universal Life Force, in a small shrine at the solitary pine tree on the *Goreichi* grounds in Kitamotojuku. Here, the Gedatsu Spring Festival was held for the first time.



In the early years of the Gedatsu Church, the Grand Festivals were held on the grounds of the Tamonji Temple (shown above) in Kitamotojuku. Members would visit the various shrines, then attend the celebration at the temple. The image inset in the upper left is the temple’s *Hokyo-in-to Stupa*, in which Gedatsu Kongo found the sacred *Dharani* scroll of the Holy *Goho*.

In September, President Okano received good news that the Daigo-ji Temple would allow him to be a resident teacher of a branch church under the Daigo school of Shingon Buddhism. He purchased a house in Kitamotojuku and applied to the Saitama Prefecture government to establish it as a branch church. It was officially approved as the Gedatsu Branch Church of the Daigo School of Shingon Buddhism.

Branches flourish, monthly services begin

New Gedatsu branches were established one after another throughout Tokyo. President Okano decided to divide the branches in Tokyo into five districts: central, eastern, southern, western, and northern. They subsequently developed their activities as a group of each district. Each branch had a gathering once a month on a certain date. Their gatherings were called *Kanshakai*, or the monthly appreciation service. On the first and 15th of each month, all branch managers and other leaders gathered at House Number 6 to learn from President Okano.

At the Spring Festival in May 1934, President Okano announced the Five Laws – the essence of the Gedatsu teaching. He recorded it on a disk and published it widely.

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With the announcement of the Five Laws, the foundation for the Gedatsu teaching was now established. The Gedatsu Church had the Five Laws as its nucleus, the prayer book, *Goho* study, *Amacha Kuyo* blessing, repentance, and other practices.

Propagating within hometowns

President Okano now believed that it was time to propagate Gedatsu widely. He developed a strategy that involved members sharing the Gedatsu teaching with as many people as possible within their hometowns.

He believed that the hometown was the place where we should appreciate our ancestors' efforts, inherit the spirit and traditions of our native land, and endeavor to work for the betterment of society. President Okano felt that without this love for our home, we could not work for the benefit of our country.

Thus, by the latter half of 1934, Gedatsu was propagated to various parts of Japan, and the teaching spread through the establishment of home-based branches, led primarily by the heads of households. In this way, following President Okano's plan, branch leaders guided people to Gedatsu in their hometowns.

Manbu Kuyo blessing established

One day, a branch leader came to see President Okano. She related the following story.

While she mediated a member's *Goho* study, the member received a message from her ancestor, who had been a Buddhist monk. The spirit was anxious to receive *Manbu Kuyo* blessing. The branch leader was not familiar with this term, so she asked the spirit, "Do you mean *Amacha Kuyo* blessing?"

The spirit answered, "No. I want *Manbu Kuyo*." He explained that, after he entered the spiritual world, he realized the holiness of *Manbu Kuyo* blessing.

President Okano was aware of the sacredness of this blessing. So, upon learning of the request from the monk's spirit, he readily agreed. He immediately prepared for the first performance of *Manbu Kuyo* blessing and urged members to apply for the service. In this way, the *Manbu Kuyo* service became an important spiritual tradition of the Grand Festival celebrations.

Publication of monthly bulletin

In 1935, Takeo Kishida, who was a printer by trade, asked President Okano's permission to publish a Gedatsu bulletin for his rapidly growing branch. He reasoned that new members could learn Gedatsu through President Okano's writings, share their experiences and keep current with the branch schedule.

President Okano replied, "That's a good idea, but instead of a branch bulletin, why don't you publish the monthly bulletin for the entire Gedatsu Church? I will write something for the bulletin each month."

Thus, the Gedatsu monthly bulletin began publication under Takeo Kishida. The first issue, which included the Five Laws, was published that same month. After that, President Okano serialized the "Gedatsu Teaching" in the bulletin every month.

Although he was very busy, President Okano never forgot to visit Kitamotojuku on the eighth and 25th each month, usually taking some members with him. After visiting shrines in *Goreichi* to pray, he went to the Okano home and spoke before the villagers.

Cherishing the mother-child bond

In those days, his 83-years-old mother, Kise, always sat beside him smilingly. Because President Okano had troubled her in his youth, he wanted to do whatever he could do for her. On his visits, he always brought something for her. Once, he brought a set of silk futon bedding for her. Although she was pleased and thanked him, he later learned that she could not sleep well on the soft silk, so he replaced it with her old bedding. Because she felt bad about that, he apologized to her, saying, "My thoughtlessness caused you to worry about it. Please forgive me, Mother." He continued to regret the trouble he had caused her.

In 1936, the Gedatsu teaching was introduced to Manchuria and Korea.

One day, around that time, President Okano was teaching some members at House Number 6, when a man suddenly came into the room and stabbed him in the throat. He was a member's husband, who thought that his wife was seduced by a heretical religion. Despite his wound, President Okano never blamed the man for the attack.

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Also, in 1936, the All Souls Monument was established in *Goreichi*. Its unveiling ceremony was held at the Fall Festival on November 10.

The founder's writing preserved in stone

The monument was made of granite from Ibaraki Prefecture. It was very hard work to transport the massive stone, which measured 18 feet high, five feet wide and a foot thick.

After the stone reached the appointed place safely, the stone masons worked to finish the surface of the stone. President Okano then prepared to write the name of the monument on the stone face.

He first made a huge writing brush like a broom, using a bamboo pole and fresh new straw. He then told the trainees to make a bucketful of ink.

When the ink was prepared, President Okano, dressed in formal Japanese attire, stood erect on the face of the stone. He closed his eyes for a while. Then, after soaking the huge writing brush in the ink bucket, he placed the bamboo pole of the writing brush on his right shoulder, pressed it lightly with his left hand, and held the pole firmly with his right hand.



The stone masons who engraved the All Souls Monument

President Okano wrote the characters "All Souls Monument" in one breath. He then requested the master masons to engrave the characters into the stone as deeply as possible.

After they finished engraving the characters onto the stone, the stone masons lifted the stone with wire cable. Everyone watched with bated breath as the monument was erected onto its stone foundation.

A lasting monument to world peace

Thus, the All Souls Monument was established. President Okano called the monument the great symbol of world peace. By establishing the monument, he hoped members would thank all spirits for their immeasurable blessings and, to demonstrate their appreciation, work for world peace.

When the unveiling ceremony of the All Souls Monument was held, President Okano regretted one thing. His 84-years-old mother could not attend the ceremony because she was ill in bed. A few days later, she passed away peacefully in the presence of her family and relatives. Sorrow beyond words flowed from the bottom of President Okano's heart. However, it was a sorrow enveloped in the warmth of hearts.

(Next month: "Building the Gedatsu Pathway")



APRIL 2024 OFFERINGS

Northern California Total: \$9,884

General Donations: M/M D. Ide, J. Detwiler / J. Sebe, M/M D. Tsuboi, Kev. Kuritani, M. Lumpkin, No Name, R. Ide. R. Nakatani, M/M S. Sekikawa, S. Taketa, M/M S. Shaklan, T. Hirami, T. Murakami, Y. Oishi

Special Acknowledgments

Spring Festival M/M Ken Kuritani, De. Shiroishi, A. Tsujimura, T. Hirami, Y. Oishi, M/M N. Okano,
Appreciation T. Murakami, V. Miyamoto / G. Roberts, M/M Ho. Tsujimura, A. Akashi / P. Tomita,
C. Tsujimura, K. Fujii, J. Tanaka, A. Sebe. T. Okimura, M/M D. Ide, M/M R. Ito, Do. Shiroishi,
M/M K. Chinen, M/M D. Tsuboi, M/M S. Mukai (\$500), *Gedatsu-kai* Japan (\$1,000),
J. Ito (\$1,000)
M/M J. Horner Spring Festival Appreciation for *Saitogoma* Service
M/M D. Tsuboi Gratitude for April "Never Forgotten" Memorial Service
J. Tanaka "Never Forgotten" Memorial Service for Masashi Russell Ota and Toshio Tateishi
M/M P. Tateishi April "Never Forgotten" Memorial Service
K. Ota Schubert "Never Forgotten" Memorial service for Masashi Russell Ota
R. Nakatani In memory of Sueko Matsumoto
M/M J. Horner *Goreichi* Maintenance Fund
A. Sebe *Goreichi* Maintenance Fund (\$2,000)

Southern California Total: \$4,018

General: A. Tsujimura, D. Shiroishi, I. Long, J. Hamamoto, J. Ito, J. Kaku, M/M A. Shiroishi, M/M F. Barthel, M/M H. Tsujimura, M/M K. Chinen, M/M K. Kuritani, M/M N. Chodor, M/M N. Okano, M/M S. Mukai, Y. Oishi, M/M V. Mizokami, N. Takara, No Name, P. Muronaka, P. Nakamura, S. Kaku, T. Ishida, T. Murakami, T. Okimura

Special Acknowledgments

J. Ito In memory of Kazuye Ito and Tomoyo Ogura
M. Banker In memory of Larry Nakamura
M/M Ho. Tsujimura In memory of Shigiro Tomita, Henry Tsujimura, and Loly Padilla
Kaku/Mahoney Families In memory of Thomas Mahoney
K. Nakamura In memory of Larry Katsuichi Nakamura
M/M Ho. Tsujimura Birthday of first great-granddaughter
M/M S. Mukai Appreciation and gratitude to Gedatsu Kongo
T. Ishida Appreciation for Spring Grand Festival
Schwab Charitable In memory of George and Matsuko Miyasako

Online Donations: Total: \$942

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

Special Acknowledgments

M/M P. Reid "Never Forgotten" in memory of Tomoyo Ogura
M/M P. Reid Appreciation for Spring Grand Festival
M/M A. Kishida Appreciation for Spring Grand Festival
Anonymous In memory of Yozo Tsujimura

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

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Hard Work. Hard Workers.

Maintaining the 20-acre *Goreichi* grounds in Sacramento requires year-round tending by members, friends and ministers alike. Chores, ranging from cleaning ponds, repairing pipes, mowing lawns, trimming trees and shrubs, pulling weeds, and watering plants, are all do-it-yourself and hands-on.

Add to those chores the clean-up after the destructive storms that wreaked havoc during the past couple of years, uprooting and toppling giant trees. Also, a huge project was undertaken last year to provide an automated sprinkler system to irrigate the vast arid areas of the church grounds. Photos at right show member, John Horner, sawing and removing felled trees and contractors installing the irrigation pipes.

