

“Oyasama and I”

Reflections on the first year of the “three years, one hundred days” season

This first year of the “three years, one hundred days” season has made an enormous revolution in my life as a fourth generation Tenrikyo follower. This is because I have strongly and significantly become closer to the faith by practising the Otefuri alone in my free time, and desired to deepen my engagement and understandings of the Teachings of Tenrikyo. These were further extended whilst participating in Oyasato Seminar as a Course three student (held July 2013), and becoming a Yoboku with my Course mates. Comparing myself before and after becoming a Yoboku, I also feel as though I am more able and confident to share the teachings with others, such as my uncle who was not deeply involved in the faith previously. He has returned to Jiba increasingly, and has engaged in helping out at our Branch Church more often. Further, my University friend has taken interest in this faith. With curiosity of not knowing why these unusual events were occurring, my grandmother hinted me; saying this is ‘Niogake’ that I have been doing. I had no clue why it was ‘me’ initiating this, though it made me reflect on what I had been doing leading up to becoming a Yoboku. This is when I realised the power of Otefuri which I have been practicing, and how much a ‘Yoboku’ can change the lives of others. If what my grandmother mentioned was true, then I am glad I made my decision to follow my dreams of becoming fluent in Otefuri. In this essay, I aim at highlighting myself becoming a Yoboku and how it has changed after becoming one, and some ideas of various actions I would like to implement, leading up to the 130th Anniversary of Oyasama.

I remember the first six months of the “three years, one hundred days” season revolved around ‘hand dance practice’ and ‘Course two’ (held in January 2013). By the end of Oyasato Seminar Course One in 2012, I have tried practicing the twelve songs of the Mikagura-Uta alone at home in my free time. I would try and pack ten minutes early every morning to fit in two songs to practice before I left for University. What lead me to build this motivation was my desire of wanting to learn the hand dance and its intentions from a young age. I never knew where to start and would try and escape from reality. The only time I engaged in Tenrikyo ‘practices’ and the Service was at the monthly services held in Sydney. Even so, I would only play musical instruments; not the hand dance. Thus, I was always embarrassed when trying to dance at other Churches; not knowing much about it. Though having Course two and three ahead where I had more opportunities to dance on a daily basis, I sought to dance with more fluency. Therefore, I would practice the Otefuri as many times as I could throughout the day at home. By doing this, I slowly observed my mother taking interest, and she would get angry if I went ahead with it as we dance together now. From a person who said “your such a strange girl, interested in dancing the Otefuri everyday”, to a person who would glare and say “why did you go ahead without me!?” is now the mother I live with. How can your own desire and dreams change yourself and another person this much? I was very surprised. At that time, I could not thank God the Parent and Oyasama for giving me a close family member become so much more closer to the faith with love and passion; just like how I feel about it.

As the months went on, I became more used to the Otefuri, and found myself laughing and smiling with my mother as we practiced at home together. The time came when it was a month away to becoming a Yoboku. As much as I was excited, there were many days where I questioned myself; “have I built a strong foundation in becoming a Yoboku and saving others?” This proved me wrong after I became one and engaged in missionary work in Japan. What mattered was the mindset you have at the time and how much of a purified mind you have in approaching and helping others. After becoming a Yoboku, various events changed my life.

After becoming a Yoboku, to be honest, I was unsure of where to go. Coming back to Australia, I lacked confidence in engaging in door-to-door Niogake due to the large Christian population in the country. I was also unsure of the people to administer the Sazuke to. Of course, you would

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administer it to individuals who have received an illness, though I had no confidence to step forward to ask if they would like me to administer the Sazuke. Having this sort of unsettling feeling in mind, I continued practicing the Otefuri with my mother. This was when I received a phone call from my grandmother. With great enthusiasm, she excitedly said "Natsu, you've been engaging in so much Niogake recently! You got your uncle and mother closer to the faith. Very impressive." This was when I realised that spreading fragrance isn't only about you directly delivering the Teachings to others. It sounds like a simple thing, and perhaps common knowledge to some. Though that was the first time I realised spreading fragrance was very broad. My grandmother furthered her explanation by saying how other family members and those from my Grand and Branch Church observed me on several occasions this year, and I was able to have them deepening their engagement with the faith as well. I could not argue the opposite, as the head minister of another Branch Church who I had never met before, bought me "Yoshi's Salvation" from Tohon Grand Church in 'English' and gave it to my Grandmother to send over to me. I was surprised as I had always been interested in the book, every time I saw it on display at Tenrikyo Oceania Centre. I still cannot believe all this was happening around me- I still cannot accept it.

Furthermore, I was able to influence my friend from University who had taken interest in the faith. I began by explaining one of the Teachings- 'The Eight Mental Dusts' and she commented on how she loved Tenrikyo and its openness for interpretation, and takes a less forceful approach. I was able to learn from the feedback she was providing me with as well. When she added that she would love to participate in a monthly service one day, it reminded me of what one of the Head Ministers in the past told me. He said, "I believe Niogake comes from trust. First, you have to build a base relationship in which there is honest trust between the two parties. After this, is when you can begin sharing the Teachings with more confidence, and it places the other person in a more comfortable position too". As much as I believe to an extent, this is true when engaging in door-to-door Niogake, it makes more sense to me that others do, take a stronger engagement and interest in the faith when there is a foundational 'trust' relationship.

As evident throughout the essay, I believe I have grown spiritually in becoming a Yoboku, and after I became one as well. Therefore, leading up to the 130th Anniversary of Oyasama, I would like to further engage in Niogake to influence those close to me to start off with, and continue practising the Otefuri. If possible, I would also like to take my University friend to the monthly services held in Sydney, and to take her to Jiba one day. As she is an International student from Singapore, and I am aware of the existence of some Churches there too, I would like to connect her to one to extend her growing interest in the faith. Further, I feel as though I did not participate in much Hinokishin activities this year. Thus, I would like to partake in more Hinokishin, perhaps by inviting other Sydney Oceania Tenrikyo Students Association members too. Lastly, I wish to administer the Sazuke with more confidence in Australia, in which I live.

In conclusion, I presented ideas of how this first year of the "three years, one hundred days" season has strongly impacted me this year. In becoming a Yoboku, there were various actions I took, and I faced many unexpected, yet exciting events and feedback from others which I treasure now. I hope I continue influencing the lives of others through the actions I take. I am very thankful for Oyasama who gave me a special gift in enabling me to take a step closer to the faith and to save others. I am very excited to face another year, leading up to the Anniversary.