

# Sermon from the September 2018 issue of “Konkokyo-ho: Ametsuchi”

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## The Faith That I Want to Show Others

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### The Father I hated who passed away



More than 10 years ago, when I was a student at the Konkokyo Seminary School, I was working at the First-Aid station near *Shūtokuden* (Faith Training Center) on the Sacred Grounds of Konko Faith. It was a day when the main worship hall was holding a ceremony. Back in those days, I hardly knew anything about the Konko Faith and Konko churches.

One of the Konko ministers I was working with in the First-Aid station was kind enough to tell me about the late Reverend Matsu Hasegawa, the Founding Minister of the Konko Church of Ko’ojimachi. During our conversation, I was looking at *Shūtokuden*. More than 10 years later, I am now able to give my sermon right here in *Shūtokuden*. This is something I never imagined.

I was born and raised in a local Konko church in Japan, but I hated it and intentionally stayed away from the worship hall of the church during my younger years. The reason why I detested our church was because of my relationship with my Father. He often said to me, “You must serve Kami-sama in the future

because you were born in a Konko church.” When I talked back to him or did not follow what he told me, he used to yell at me. I had no idea what he was talking about when he said

something like “How blessed we are that we are able to practice faith in Kami-sama.” or “How blessed we are that we are able to meet Kami-sama in our lives.”

When I began middle school, I openly came to resist my Father. Our church was a two-story building; The first floor was the church’s worship hall and the second floor was used as the priest’s quarters. Since there were outside stairs and a side entrance on the second floor, I used those whenever I went out. In other words, I didn’t use the stairs that went into the worship hall building; I just didn’t want to see my Father. I had no conversation with him. We didn’t eat our meals together, either. Even in the very year of his passing, all I did with my Father was have an argument with him once. Just once.

My Father was hospitalized due to tuberculosis in January 2001 and I didn’t visit the hospital to see him at all. It wasn’t until people told me that he was in a coma that I finally went to see him.

When I did go what I saw was my Father, whose body had many tubes inserted, already unconscious. When I rejected and talked back at my Father in my younger days, he was full of energy; he was loud, he was stern and red faced because of his rebellious son. I could no longer see any trace of my past Father laying on the hospital bed before me.

The doctor told us that my Father’s life would come to an end very soon. I was standing right by his side. His pulse gradually became weak, and we saw a decrease in his heart rate too. I was wondering what to do for him, and I remembered him saying often, “Let’s shake hands.” He used to suggest we shake our hands. He thought it was good to do as a man who wanted to get along or reconcile after a fight. Despite his desire, I always refused to shake hands with him. In the final moments of his life, I remembered my Father’s wish. And so I shook hands with my unconscious Father.

### **Another Aspect of My Father I Had Not Known**

My Father passed away on February 11th, 2001. He had been in the hospital for about two weeks. As soon as I returned to our church, I realized that I was the eldest son of the late Rev. Chikao Hasegawa, and the first questions I asked myself were, “Do I have to succeed this church?” and “Do I need to become an ordained Konko priest?” There was a problem, however. I had hated the Konko Faith and our Konko church all this time, and I had not practiced faith in Kami-sama at all until my Father passed away. I had an internal conflict; “I have been this way all my life. Can I really say, ‘I will become a Konko priest because of my Father’s passing’ and ‘I will therefore succeed my Father and serve Kami-sama at our church from now?’ Maybe I am in a situation where I could say this, but I seriously doubt that I have the ability to do it.”

In those days, my Grandfather was still in good health. Yet he was quite elderly by the time my Father passed away, and he clearly needed help. It was natural I began to assist my Grandfather in our church right away. This made me enter the worship hall of our church for the first time in more than ten years. And it enabled me to meet and greet those the worshipers who had been so nice to me during my childhood. Honestly speaking, I was afraid that they would say to me, “How dare you show your face after all this time!” But they all said, “We are so happy with the fact that you are serving Kami-sama like this!” That’s all I heard from them and they didn’t say anything else. For me, this was a totally unexpected reaction from them,

and I genuinely wondered, “Why on earth do these people welcome me this warmly?” Because our worshippers were so kind and gentle towards me, a curious question of “What on earth is the Konko faith like?” popped up in my mind.

This question soon inspired me to read a book about the Founder of the Konko Faith. The more pages of the book I read, the more I came to be fond of the Founder, thinking, “What great things he accomplished.” I was now a fan of Konko Daijin, *Konkokyo's* Founder. I then learned that our place of worship, called a *hiromae*, is where Konko Daijin's faith is represented. I wanted to do *goyo* (sacred tasks) and practice faith in Kami-sama. For a long, long time, the Konko Faith, a Konko church and practicing faith in *Konkokyo* meant my Father to me. And this is why I hated all of those things for many years. But my Father passed away and I then had opportunity to get to know Konko Daijin's faith on my own, which impressed me a whole lot. I no longer had reasons to hate my Konko church, and in the following year, I entered the Konkokyo Seminary School.

At that time, I had this new feeling of admiration for the Konko Faith, and I sincerely wished to practice faith in this religion. Yet I could not let go of the grudge against my Father. However, things started to change in me when people began to tell me their fond memories and praise for my Father at his funeral ceremony and beyond. They said to me, for example, “Chikao-sensei was kind enough to take good care of me” and “Chikao-sensei, offered a distinguished ceremony, in which he did...” The words from these people made me see that there was another aspect of my Father that I had never known; The late Rev. Chikao Hasegawa did *goyo* that was helpful for many people. He was loved and respected by so many people. As a Konko minister, my Father seemed to have been an eminent individual. I had believed that I would never accept my Father favorably, but I gradually came to think, “I may have been mistaken to reject my Father all this time, I didn't know this side of him as a Konko minister.” This occurred to my me because I got to know another side of my Father as a minister.

### **A Letter Father Left to us**

A few months before graduation from the Konko Seminary, we, the seminary students, entered Shūtokuden for spiritual training. During this period, I had chance to speak with a senior Konko minister serving as a spiritual advisor, and we somehow began to talk about my Father. I talked to the senior spiritual advisor about why I had made up my mind to become a Konko minister and the disagreements I'd had with my Father. While we were talking, I remembered a letter my Father had sent to my elder sister during his lifetime.

My sister married a gentleman who was not part of the Konko faith. Prior to her wedding ceremony, my sister was reluctant to have him walk her down the aisle during the ceremony. On the eve of her wedding ceremony, my sister even gave our Father a letter in which she wrote what a terrible Father he had been all her life. The letter that I remembered in Shūtokuden was the letter my Father wrote in reply to my sister. That letter had a title of “Thank You.” The content of our Father's letter to my sister was as follows:

*“The letter you gave me the other day pierced my heart. Everything you wrote about me in that letter is true, and I just cannot erase the past between us. I appreciate your kindness to walk down the aisle with me, even if you did so simply because you thought you had to. When we were walking side by side, the letter that you had given me was in the chest pocket of my*

*tuxedo. All I can do right now is to accept what you told me in that letter. I suppose that I will need 20 years in order to make up for the mistakes I did for 10 years. I am not sure if Kami-sama will enable me to keep living 20 years from now, and because of this, I know I must apologize through my lifetime, to my entire family, to Kami-sama.*

*Let me just add this, please. You had a car accident the other day. In that accident, you did not involve anybody and you were not injured either. I thanked Kami-sama for this. I cannot help but believe Kami-sama protected you. Let me use the letter you gave me from time to time from now on, so that I can give myself a chance to reform the way I am. Happy Wedding! From Chikao Hasegawa.”*

The reason why I recalled my Father’s letter to my sister at that time is because my sister had sent me a letter with the following messages a few days before my Seminary classmates and I entered Shūtokuden:

*“Dear Tokinobu,*

*I found this letter when I was cleaning my room. I have no idea what sort of feelings you have to our Father now, but I recommend you read this letter, because he wrote something about you as well as about me. I know that you have read this enclosed letter before, but read it once again and think about our Father, please. You have already spent 8 or 9 months in Konko Seminary, and if you read the letter now, you may have a different feeling toward our Father. I am enclosing this letter because I believe that this is a good occasion for you to read it once again.”*

Soon after my elder sister received that letter from my Father, she showed it to me, saying “Look, I got this from Dad.” As we were both skimming over the letter, we said to each other, “Dad says he’s sorry, but he is just saying so, he doesn’t really mean it, and this is so typical of him, you know.” We didn’t really care about our Father’s words in that letter, because we just didn’t think that he was a caring person.

During my brief stay at Shūtokuden however, I realized for the first time that the letter from my Father to my sister did in fact contain my Father’s genuine feelings. In his letter, my Father said, *“I want to make up for my mistakes even if it may take me 20 years to do so. But I am not sure if Kami-sama will enable me to keep living 20 years from now..”* At the time, Rev. Chikao Hasegawa, our Father, was still 56 years old and he was healthy. However, he passed away only two months after sending that letter to my sister.

It was clear both my sister and I hated our Father and the Konko Faith and I am sure that our Father was keenly aware of our negative feelings towards him. Now I realized for the first time what my Father had meant when he wrote, *“I cannot help but believe that Konko Daijinsama protected you and Kami-sama protected you.”* I was able to realize that my Father, in his life and last days, tried to make us realize faith in Kami-sama. I was also even half sure that he knew that he would leave this world sooner or later and because of this awareness of his, he left that letter for both of us. I thought furthermore that this letter contained not only the wish of my Father but also the wish of Kami-sama. When I thought this way, I felt sorry for my Father for the first time in my life.

I later asked my sister, “Why did you send me the letter you’d received from Dad at that time?” Then she replied, “Because Dad was standing right by my bedside that time.” Since

my sister detested our Father, she, in her dream, wondered how she could make him go away. She came up with a good idea: my sister did what our Father had loved to do, and she shook hands with him. Soon after that, she said he was gone. Right before leaving this world, my Father shook hands with me. And soon after leaving this world, he shook hands with my sister. Hearing this episode, I thought that my Father had wanted to see his daughter, even after his death.

Until then, I thought that when a child grows up, their parents are no longer their parents. However, although this is almost needless to say, a parent-child relationship cannot be severed I feel. The Konko Faith (*Konkokyo*) is a religion which teaches us the Way of the Universe. *Konkokyo* encourages us to live our lives according to the Way of the Universe. The first thing about the Way of the Universe which we, humans, need to know is that we were born because our parents were there before our births.

Even today, I consider that my Father failed to show me (and my sister) an ideal figure as a Father. I, however, have gradually come to think that I should have thanked not only my Mother but also my Father for giving birth to me. The reason why we are alive here now is because our parents and ancestors were there before we came into this world. Because of this, we all must have a sense of gratitude for our lives. And with such an appreciative heart, we can nurture a heart to accept those who are our parents little by little. I grew up, not knowing the first thing about the Way of the Universe that we as humans, must learn. And without that knowledge, I was on the verge of becoming ordained as a Konko minister. When I was at *Shūtokuden* or the Faith Training Center for our spiritual training right before graduating from the Konko Seminary, I was able to realize the importance of thanking my parents and ancestors for my life. And when I realized it, I think that I was finally qualified to become a Konko minister.

On the day of my Father's passing, I came home with his urn. At that time, I entered the church's worship hall through the church entrance; I had not entered the worship hall through the entrance for many years. I walked through the main gate of the Konko church of Ko'ojimachi, being led by my Father's deceased spirit or *mitama*. Soon after this, church members of Ko'ojimachi started to teach me what practicing faith in this religion means and how to do it. I was then allowed to get to know our dear Founder. And I was allowed to accept my Father as my Father without hesitation for the first time in my life.

Not every parent and their child is in a good relationship in this world. Almost all families have their own problems. One day, my Mother said to me, "By seeing you do *goyo* in our church, I seem to finally realize what sentiments were running in your Father's mind when he was doing *goyo*." I understood her well. It was *also* not until I engaged in various ceremonies in our church that I was allowed to realize, "Father may have had these sort of problems just as I am having one now. With these kinds of feelings, he has served Kami-sama here. I suppose I know this, because this is the sentiment I am having now." A child does not understand their parents automatically simply because they are their child. The child needs to be in their shoes before understanding them well. I began to practice faith in Kami-sama due to my extremely difficult relationship with my Father. Because of this, the chief objective of my *goyo* is to help parents and their children in bad relationships start to get along with each other.

**Is It A Faith You Really Wish to Let People Know about?**

In the past, my Father wished to share Konko Daijin's faith with me. From now, I must focus on my faith that I want to share with people around me. Today, the majority of Konko believers are second-generation or even third-generation believers in their homes. In their homes, people practice faith in the Konko Faith one generation after another. When our senior family members handed down their faith to us, we realized how wonderful this faith is. Yet, when it comes to letting people around us know our respective faiths in Konkokyo, I am afraid that not many of us are being very successful in it.

Our Founder, Konko Daijin, imparts, "People should broaden the Way of Faith. Kami will grant blessings." (GII: Kobayashi Saisaburo 13) Before, I was naive enough to think that as long as I practiced faith and avoided doing wrong things, my faith would naturally get spread towards people around me and that people would naturally be drawn to my church.

But the above-quoted teaching reads, "People should broaden the Way of Faith." If it should read, "Kami will broaden the Way of Faith, and Kami will also grant blessings," we would have only to practice faith. In reality, however, Kami did not say so. The teaching DOES say, "People should broaden the Way of Faith." This may sound a bit daunting and demanding, but in other words, as long as we strive for spreading this Way of Faith, we can fully trust that Kami will grant blessings upon our endeavors. We need to broaden the Way of Faith; we must let people around us know about our faith.

We sometimes hear people say, "I practice faith because my parents told me to," or "I come to this church to worship because doing so pleases my parents who already passed away." Of course, these people are doing good things and they are being filial to their parents. These people practice faith in Kami-sama on their own. I, however, would like to ask a question. Does practicing faith by oneself contribute enough to handing down their faith to people of the next generations? Please excuse me, but I doubt this. My hope is that they not only practice faith handed down by their parents on their own but also embrace sincere desire to "pass on their faiths to their children and grandchildren." My next hope is that their children and grandchildren come to "want to practice faith." If this ever comes true, the Konko believers practicing faith today will be most filial to their parents and ancestors, and their parents and ancestors, most of them who are now *mitama* spirits, will be tremendously delighted with it.

My wife is originally from a community outside *Konkokyo*. Because of this, my wife seemed to have been hesitant to marry me. Knowing that I was a Konko priest, my (then) girlfriend had no idea what to expect once she married me. Considering her uneasy feelings, I often said to her while we were still dating, "You are dating a man who is a priest of the Konko Faith. But this does not mean that I am hoping that you will join our religion. I may marry you upon your agreement in the future, but it will be because I want to marry YOU, not because I want you to become a housewife at a Konko church." A lot of time has passed since we got married, but my mind has not changed at all. I, however, hope and pray that my wife will understand me and my faith in Kami-sama.

Quite fortunately, while we were still dating one another, my then girlfriend would ask me "What did you speak about in your sermon after the ceremony?" every time I told her that I had just conducted a monthly ceremony at our church on that day. My wife's questions like this symbolize her efforts to study and understand *Konkokyo*. The discussions with my wife give me hints for a good way to let people know of my faith in Kami-sama. The most important and

best advice that my wife has given me so far is that it is my usual self as I practice faith every day, not my faith itself, that I need to show to people around me.

Even if I have people hear words that I am not quite convinced about, and even if I say words I just borrow from somewhere, I cannot relay *Konkokyo's* faith to anybody. In the past, my Father would tell me to do *goyo*, saying "Because you were born in a Konko church." He said so, following his "common sense." At that time, I didn't share my Father's "common sense," and I wasn't convinced with his words at all, even if he tried to push his words. However, after he passed away, I had chance to think about what sentiments and wishes he held in his heart.

When I gradually came to understand my Father, I knew that his faith was handed down to me at last. This is something I never imagined before, and I am sure that he is surprised too. When he was still alive, he would often say to my Mother, "I cannot help but wonder how I can relay my faith to my son, Tokinobu." According to my Mother, he often shed tears as he said so. During his lifetime, he may have felt sad about it, but I practice faith in Kami-sama like this today. He has successfully passed on his faith to me.

Lastly, allow me to ask you a question: Is your faith a faith you want to share with others? Is your faith being actually relayed to someone? What really reaches someone and their heart is not a faith people passed on to you. It is your own faith that reaches people and their hearts. Rather than your words, yourself as a person will be understood by people who see you.

As long as you have a faith that you want to share with others, I would like you to reflect upon yourself in order to make sure if you are a person who is favorably welcomed and accepted by people around you. I also want to ask you to make sure if you are practicing faith in a way that people will understand it with a positive mind. It may never be easy for you to communicate your faith to people around you. But neither you nor I can give up. Let us make sure if our faiths are what we truly want to share with others. Let us make sure if our faiths are something that is understood by people around us. Let us all work on these things. Let us have a boldly big dream...we will practice faith that is good and wonderful enough to inspire people around us !

(THE END)