

Sermon from the December 2016 issue of “Konkokyo-ho: Ametsuchi”

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Like Heaven and Earth, Practice the Mutual Reliance of Aiyo Kakeyo

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(From the December 2016 issue of Konkokyo-ho Ametsuchi)



“You Will Be Blessed If You Go to O'tani.”

In 1954, four years prior to the start of our propagation in O'tani, Tokushima Prefecture in Japan, my father seriously hurt his spinal cord, after a hard fall to the ground. This accident also temporarily deprived him of his memory. This situation was compounded when my eldest brother, whom my mother had depended upon during my father's hospitalization, suddenly passed away. These circumstances led my mother to Rev. Hikoshiro Takeda at the Konko Church of Ni'ihama, in desperation for some kind of relief and guidance.

My mother genuinely and firmly believed, “Only this Deity can save my family,” and was solely focused on this *Kami*/God to be saved. She woke up at three in the morning and upon arriving at the church, she would clean here and there and then attend the morning prayer service. Upon her return home, she fulfilled her duties as a homemaker while attending to her injured husband. In the evening, she took my elder sisters and me to the church for evening prayer service. This was the daily routine without exception for one thousand days or nearly three years. Rain, a strong wind, a storm, even snow would not deter her from attending church. Once when our neighborhood was flooded, she made her way to the church, arriving with the lower half of her clothing soaked in muddy water. Even at night, with the streets unlit, my mother overcame her fear in order to attend the evening service.

My parents were blessed with four daughters including myself. The two eldest daughters began their respective spiritual training at the Konko Church of Ni'ihama and both continued their training at the

Konko Seminary. My father would also enter the seminary, despite the doctor's warning he would never walk without his crutches. He learned to walk with a cane and became a seminary student.

My eldest sister went to the city of Naruto in Tokushima Prefecture to propagate the Konko faith and when my father graduated from the seminary, he desired to spread the faith as well. He traveled to Konko Town to seek the guidance of the third Konko-Sama and showed him locations on the railway line near Naruto. They were Itano, Ikenotani and Sho'ozui. He asked Konko-Sama to recommend a location, to which Konko-Sama circled Ikenotani and said, "You will be blessed by Kami if you go to O'tani. My father was surprised at the recommendation because he had never heard of the name, O'tani. He instinctively asked Konko-sama, "Did you say O'tani?" Then Konko-sama replied, "Yes. If you go to O'tani, you will be blessed."

My father then asked, "Should I visit my parent church before leaving for O'tani?" Konko-Sama replied, "I believe it is better for you to go straight to O'tani from now." Following these words, my father headed for Tokushima Prefecture by train and got off at Ikenotani, just as instructed. A local person told my father he would need to walk for about twenty minutes to get to O'tani. (A few years later, O'tani had a train station, and father was now one station closer to the place where his eldest daughter was performing mediation.) Father was able to find an old private house for his Konko propagation hall on the very day he arrived in O'tani. On December 22 of the same year my father had graduated from the seminary, he and my mother settled in O'tani to begin their propagation effort with enthusiastic ambition. My third eldest sister and I joined our parents in O'tani and the four of us started a new life. We all felt, "We will be allowed to make a 'repayment' to our Parent *Kami*, Konko-Sama and the Head Minister of our parent church if we tell as many people as possible about the grand blessings and salvation our Parent *Kami* has been giving us. (The Konko Church of O'tani observed its 58th anniversary in 2016.)

My parent's sincere efforts and strong faith were like a large ship which protected my sister and I from the difficulties usually associated with the beginning of a new propagation effort in a new location. Even if a big "wave" should threaten us, my parents kept my sister and myself from getting "wet."

My Marriage and Mutual Reliance

As I reached adulthood, the life I experienced in O'tani led to my decision to enter and later graduate from the seminary, just as my father and sisters had. A few years after my graduation, I met a gentleman who was not a believer of the Konko Faith. We fell in love and wished to marry. My parents prayed I would be the successor for the Konko Church of O'tani," and they had declined several marriage proposals, since it would mean moving to a new location after marriage. My parents had mixed feelings about the idea of my marriage because my fiancée was not a Konko believer.

My father sought mediation in regards to our marriage from the Fourth Konko-Sama. At the Mediation Place, my father described my fiancée's faith as "shallow and premature." Konko-Sama responded by asking my father, "Is your faith deep and mature enough?" This question overwhelmed my father with shame and awe. He humbly accepted Konko-Sama's words and since then, has never complained

about my husband or I. No matter what has happened to the both of us, my father continually accepts and prays to *Kami* for us.

After we married, my husband had dreams about starting his own electronic-related business. My husband requested and preferred I not be involved in the business, and although it started well, it soon fell on hard times resulting in a sizeable debt. In order to repay his loans, he decided to go alone to Tokyo in hopes getting a job there. My three children and I moved to the Konko Church of O'tani where my parents were located.

My husband rented an old wooden apartment in Tokyo and lived day to day desperately attempting to find ways to repay his debt. At that time, his life seemed like a long dark tunnel, yet he was able to see a light in the form of a book containing the teachings of Reverend Yasutaro Yukawa, the founding minister of the Konko Church of Tamamizu. This book was given to him by my father. Repeatedly reading the book and giving thanks for its content, my husband gradually began to feel relief and comfort. He came to understand there is truly nothing to worry about because there is a grand flow in the Universe, although not visible, and that one should go with the flow instead of trying to go against it. In time, my husband's business began to prosper and we were able to provide more positive reports to my father about the business.

These events occurred nearly 30 years ago, and since that time, my father passed away (1995), as did my eldest sister (2000) and then my mother (in 2002).

Mutual Reliance Then and Now

My mother was afflicted with dementia in the late 1980s and was dutifully cared for by my father, until his passing. During that time, my father was attentive and took good care of her, gently saying "Your mom helped and took care of me all the time. Now it's my turn to be nice to her." He also honored her by saying "She is the Isshi Daijin of the Konko Church of O'tani." (*Isshi Daijin* is the final divine title given to the wife of Konko Daijin.) These words expressed his gratitude to our Parent *Kami* and my mother. In contrast, during those years and after my father's passing, I was sad and/or angry from time to time because of my mother's condition but I learned a lot of important things through my mother's dementia. As a result, the hearts of everybody in our home gradually became more pure.

I found a notebook my father had kept, as I was going through his belongings after his passing. Written in the notebook was a passage concerning my eldest sister, Miyoko. The passage reads:

Because Miyoko (my eldest sister) says, "I cannot go on anymore and I am thinking of closing my propagation hall," I advised her to survive and endure tough times for one more year, adding that not only she but also I would survive and endure rough periods with her for one more year.

When I was a little girl, Miyoko, my eldest sister, always looked dignified. I never knew she was going through such difficult days as a missionary pioneer, and I was deeply impressed and moved to learn through my father's notebook how she persevered.

I also found a notebook belonging to my mother, used as a prayer book as well, which contained a passage that read:

I was again scolded by Rev. Bando'o (my father) today. I would like to apologize to *Kami* for my shortcomings. And I pray to improve the way I am.

My mother's written words gave me a glimpse into the early trials of propagation at our church and although I may not have realized then, I now believe the relationship between my father and mother was just like the relationship between Heaven and Earth. My father was like the heaven always willing to give. He constantly had lofty expectations upon his wife and daughters. He always prayed to *Kami* for us, and this is what he gave. My mother was like the earth, always willing to accept things from heaven. The Divine Parent of the Universe (*Tenchi Kane No Kami*) thanked our Founder, when it was revealed, "...through Konko Daijin, Tenchi Kane No Kami's blessings can now be received." (GII: Kondo Fujimori, 3) At the same time, our Founder saw himself as "a man of primal ignorance," (OG: 2-20-2) who wholeheartedly accepted everything the Divine Parent of the Universe gave him. As a result, for the first time in human history, a venerable way was revealed whereby people can be saved by our Divine Parent due to the relationship between our Parent *Kami* and our Founder. Similarly, the mutual function of praying for one another emerged between my father and mother and also between my parents and elder sisters. Such a wonderful relationship between them opened a way to save those who come to worship at our church.

When my husband and I got married, the Fourth Konko-sama taught us, "You are both supposed to express your gratitude towards everybody and everything that has taken care of you to this day. You are to thank them all, because those people and things have made your marriage possible. You should base your married life upon this holy truth from now." These words and other words of Konko-Sama my father received such as, "Is your faith deep and mature enough?" are working with my husband and I, just like Heaven and the Earth are working with one another. This is a world of praying for one another, a world of Mutual Reliance (*Aiyo Kakeyo*).

It has been twenty-five since my husband went to Tokyo to find work and although originally a non-Konko faith follower, he has come to realize there is a grand working between Heaven and Earth. Today, my husband prays to our Parent *Kami*/God, for me (his wife), our children, our church and each of our church members. He prays not just in his spare time or because doing so will profit him personally, but because he genuinely cares about each one of us and prays to our Divine Parent wholeheartedly every single day. My husband gives, and gives, and continues to give just like the Heaven. On the other hand, I have yet to become like "the Earth" our Founder describes as, "Women are like the fields of the world." (GII: Nanba Ko, 7-1) I have yet to become "the Earth" that accepts any sort of thing and nurtures it. I am here still striving to be a perfect "Earth."

The Konko Church of O'tani was made possible due to all of our pioneers, my parents and elder sister. They all revealed to me how we were mutually saved through praying for one another. In concert with my husband, we will work hard every day in order to become role models for those who follow us. The Third Konko-Sama advised my father about which town he should go and if my husband and I can fulfill our aspiration, we will also be blessed by *Kami* in O'tani.