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Sowing Seeds of Joy

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In Order to Reap Joy

Have you ever grown vegetables? Some of you are growing vegetables professionally, and some of you are growing them in your home gardens, I suppose. Take tomatoes, for example. If you sow a tomato seed, you will soon see tomato buds. After the buds grow, you will see tomato flowers, and finally you will see the fruit, a tomato. If you sow a cucumber seed, you will soon see cucumber plant buds. After the buds grow, you will see cucumber flowers, and finally you will get its fruit, a cucumber. These things

may sound a bit too natural to you, but this is the Principle/Law of the Universe.

Likewise, if you have a desire, “I want to reap joy,” I suggest you sow a seed of joy. Then you will see buds of joy. When the buds grow, you will see flowers of joy, and you will finally get to see the fruit of joy. If you, on the other hand, sow seeds of complaints and dissatisfaction here and there, and if you still want to reap joy, you will be contradicting yourself. It is not going to work.

Both the former Fourth Konko-*sama* (Spiritual Leader of the Konko Faith) and the present Fifth Konko-*sama* teach us the importance of expressing gratitude using the phrases, “Let us base our lives upon gratitude” and “the heart to express one’s thankfulness for everyone and everything that takes care of him or her.” If you are pleased with something from the bottom of your heart, that’s exactly when you can express your gratitude from the bottom of your heart.

Today, I would like to discuss “joy” in my sermon.

Conflict in Blessings

I had a husband, whom I refer to as “Isao *Sensei*.” (*Sensei* means “teacher” or “mentor” in English.)

On October 2nd, 1997, Isao *Sensei* fell gravely ill due to intra-cerebral bleeding on the right-side of the brain. Because of this, Isao *Sensei's* left side of his body was paralyzed. In that year, we planned to hold a ceremony to celebrate the 70th anniversary of Konko Church of Ko'oroen on November 24. We were still preparing for this big event when Isao *sensei*, the biggest "mainstay" of our church, fell sick and was hospitalized. My husband, however, received a tremendous blessing from our Divine Parent. Our son was a university student back in those days, and he accepted a request from his father, Isao *Sensei* to assume the position of the Vice Chief Officiant (*Fuku Saishu* in Japanese) for the 70th anniversary of Konko Church of Ko'oroen on November 24. My son's decision really encouraged and motivated our church members, as they passionately prepared for the commemorative ceremony in high spirits. On November 24, we were allowed to hold the commemorative ceremony for the 70th anniversary of our church, where everybody was truly thankful. We reported how the ceremony went to Isao *Sensei* in the hospital afterwards, and he shed tears of joy as he listened to us. Fulfilling the duty as the Vice Chief Officiant in the commemorative ceremony for our church seems to have been a great opportunity for our son. After he graduated from university, our son voluntarily entered the Konko Seminary for his ordainment as a Konko minister.

Isao *Sensei* spent three months in the hospital before being released. After leaving the hospital, Isao *Sensei* worked very hard on his rehabilitation. Four years nearly passed since the bleeding in the right-side brain, and Isao *Sensei* was able to sit at *Okekkai* or the Mediation Seat for Sacred Mediation. He was also able to deliver a sermon after a monthly service at our church. Although he needed a cane, Isao *Sensei* regained his normal health at a smooth, steady pace.

Just as he was about to make a full recovery, Isao *Sensei* had his second intra-cerebral bleeding incident on October 2001. The second brain bleeding occurred when Isao *Sensei* was at the hospital for his monthly medical examination.

As soon as we received the phone call from the doctor, I rushed to the hospital. The doctor said to me, "Mrs. Takebe, I must inform you that your husband bled in the left-side brain this time. Because of this, the right side of your husband's body is paralyzed. Because of the bleeding in the left-side brain, he may most likely also suffer from language impairments. Your husband is not able to speak at this time, but you can see him at this time." I was escorted to the ICU (Intensive Cure Unit) room.

I just could not accept reality I was facing. Isao *Sensei* was clearly conscious when I saw him, and he gave me a bright smile when he saw me. But he could not speak; I could not hear his voice at all. Besides, not only the right side but also the left side of Isao *Sensei's* body was paralyzed, even though he had regained a little mobility of his left hand and leg through rehabilitation efforts he'd made after his last incident four years before. From that date on, in short, my husband began to live with a handicap called "general paralysis."

In the past, I had been saved with the Fourth Konko-*sama's* words, "(Troubles/sufferings) right amidst blessings." As I had done in the past, I tried to focus upon our Divine Parent's

blessings right amidst my family's suffering. My mind understood the importance of doing so, but my emotions did not follow my mind. All I could do was to try to understand and accept reality facing our entire family, and we were obviously in a very severe circumstance.

In such a challenging situation, Isao *Sensei* received our Parent Deity's blessings. Isao *Sensei* was released from the ICU room and transferred to a general ward of the hospital after the swelling of his brain was healed. But Isao *Sensei*, who was almost completely paralyzed, could not enjoy any entertainment. I knew that Isao *Sensei* had enjoyed listening to radio programs, so I brought him a radio. Isao *Sensei* was in a six-bed room, so the noise from his radio would disturb his five roommates in the room. Because of this, I made arrangements so that my husband could hear radio programs through earphones.

Isao *Sensei's* troubles did not end here. While I was with him in the hospital room, I could give him a hand whenever necessary. But the hospital's visiting hours were limited. With the inevitable end of visiting hours, I would leave my husband and go home to our church. Afterwards, a nurse would come to Isao *Sensei's* room every two to three hours to change his body position to avoid development of bed sores. Unfortunately, the earphone placed at the opening of his ear would frequent fall off when the nurse changed the position of his body.

When the earphone fell from his ear, Isao *Sensei* was not able to reinsert it in his ear by himself. He also could not ask someone to put the device into his ear, because he was unable to speak.

One day, I fixed the earphone in Isao *Sensei's* ear, using an adhesive tape. I did so in order not to let the earphone come off my husband's ear. "This will solve the issue," I believed and I went home with a feeling of relief and comfort. This time, however, another problem rose. Because the earphone was firmly connected to Isao *Sensei's* ear, the radio moved when the nurse moved my husband's body. What happened was that the radio receiver began to make unpleasant noises because the receiver itself moved and the radio's tuning changed. Even if the noise of the radio disturbed him badly, Isao *Sensei* could neither take off the earphone by himself nor ask someone to take it off for him. Once the earphone was firmly connected to his ear, it fall out on its own. Isao *Sensei* must have needed to be tremendously patient with these unpleasant situations.

Time Passes in the Workings of our Divine Parent

Time went by, and my husband, Isao *Sensei*, had a problem with the staff of the hospital. It eventually led to his transfer to another hospital. I believe that this transfer was good for Isao *Sensei*. At the next hospital, Isao *Sensei* was cured in total comfort. He was also given thorough rehabilitative treatments. Earlier, my husband was almost constantly bedridden. At the new hospital, Isao *Sensei* was able to move around freely in a wheelchair.

As soon as I was relieved to see Isao *sensei's* mental comfort and his health improvements, I lost balance of my heart and body. Isao *Sensei* and I were once driven to almost falling together. Water, Sacred Rice or *Goshinmai* and Sacred Sake or *Omiki* helped me restore my physical health and I managed to do what I was supposed to do.

On one of those days, I was asked to write an article, and the deadline for me to submit the article was imminent. But my health condition hardly allowed me to fulfill this job. "Maybe I should decline their request about this," I said to myself. Yet I assembled all my physical and mental might and sat before the Japanese writing paper on the desk, encouraging myself to assume the writing task. I reflected upon the time since Isao *Sensei* bled in his brain for the second time. Seven months had passed since that incident happened. At that very time, I spontaneously thought, "Oh, I can reflect upon things like this." For me to be able to reflect upon things meant that both time and my life have been continuing without a single interruption. I deeply thought, "Oh, time passing constantly is equal to my being given life constantly." Time never stops, and time never goes backward. We all move towards future. We never move backwards to the past. "It's true that we can never go back to the time when Isao *Sensei* was healthy, but it is also true that we will never go back to the time when Isao *Sensei* could not move and talk at all in that Intensive Cure Unit room." When I was allowed to think this way, I felt comfortable from the bottom of my heart for the first time during those seven months.

Although I still felt that we were all in serious hardship, now I knew that we weren't standing still at the moment Isao *Sensei* fell due to his second brain bleeding. When I realized that Isao *Sensei* and I were allowed to live our lives and spend time that flows on a constant basis, I thought, "How thankful I can feel with the fact that time is passing without a single pause!" — not superficially, but from the bottom of my heart. I truly thanked the wondrous workings of our Divine Parent.

The Ways of Kami Are Mysterious and Wondrous

Since then, various things went so well that our hearts were filled with great joy. My husband, Isao *Sensei*, was able to leave the hospital at the end of August, 2002. It was ten and a half months after his second brain bleeding. In 2003, my son got married. In October 2004, we were allowed to go to the Konko Faith (*Konkokyo*) Headquarters for worship. My daughter suggested, "Let's be courageous and go to the Headquarters by car." Isao *Sensei*, however, was certified as a First-Degree Physically Disabled individual in those days. His Nursing Care Level was ranked as 4, which indicated that my husband was seriously handicapped. The condition of Isao *Sensei's* physical handicap was close to the most serious one. When such a heavily handicapped person makes a long-distance travel, nothing is going to be easy.

First of all, Isao *Sensei* simply could not spend a day without eating and drinking. Since he left the hospital and returned to our home/church, he ate exactly what we ate. Isao *Sensei's* meal needed to be broken into pieces with a food crusher. His food needed to be thickened with yam and raw egg. And the processed foods designed especially for Isao *Sensei* were served in a special container for people with disabilities. We helped him hold a special

spoon with his numb right hand. We put a mirror before Isao *Sensei* so he could look at himself. Looking into the mirror, Isao *Sensei* confirmed where his mouth was and he carried his food to his numb mouth. He prayed hard, and we prayed hard as Isao *Sensei* chewed the food in his mouth several times and swallowed it. We, as “normal” people, spent about 15 minutes to finish our meal. In the case of Isao *Sensei*, on the other hand, 60 minutes were usually necessary. Because of this, just for Isao *sensei*'s meals, we already had a ton of things to carry. We loaded all those things into our car and we traveled from Nishinomiya City to the *Konkokyo* Headquarters.

At my request, our car stopped at the foot of the long, gentle slope to the Central Worship Hall. Isao *Sensei* used a wheelchair and entered the worship hall, going through the main entrance. We were now inside the worship hall. We faced one another. Isao *Sensei* put his hands onto my shoulders and my hands supported his waist. We orally counted “One, two, one two...” so we could move with a good tempo. We slowly approached the Mediation Seat of the Central Worship Hall of the *Konkokyo* Headquarters.

We put a chair right in front of the Mediation Seat and Isao *Sensei* sat on it. As soon as he did so, Isao *Sensei* was moved so much that he abruptly cried with a very loud voice. His crying voice must have been heard from one edge of the big worship hall to the other. I also cried. Our hearts were truly filled with enormous gratitude.

When I met my husband in that Intensive Cure Unit room and saw that he couldn't move and talk at all, I never imagined that we would be able to worship at the *Konkokyo* Headquarters three years later. Now, although Isao *Sensei* needed someone's support, he was able to walk on the *tatami* mats of the Worship Hall and see *Konko-sama* kindly sitting right in front of him. We were so moved that we were totally lost for words.

Konko-sama said to Isao *Sensei*, “You have been allowed to come here for worship. I am very happy for you!” over and over again. Now, I truly realize that going to the *Konkokyo* Headquarters for worship is anything but a child's play. When we are allowed to do so, we should be deeply thankful about it.

In 2005, the following year, our daughter got married and we, as a husband and a wife, drove to a *Konko* church in Tokyo where Isao *Sensei* was born and raised. It was a “two-nights-three-days” trip by car. The fact that Isao *Sensei* was able to go to Tokyo seems to have given him a lot of confidence, allowing him to believe, “I can go to a little far place with my wife as long as we use an automobile!” The experience of this trip gave my husband confidence in his physical strength, and from the next year on, we gave ourselves a promise to make an annual “two-nights-three-days” trip by car.

This automobile trip took us to Shinshu, the Noto Peninsula, Ko'ochi, Izumo, Nara, Shirahama and Tokyo (for the second time). We were also able to visit the *Konko* Faith Headquarters two more times.

When Isao *Sensei* was previously healthy, we rarely traveled. However, after my husband was put in a situation where “he needs nursing care in almost every aspect of his daily life,” we, as a husband and a wife, came to make a trip every year. “The ways of Kami are mysterious and wondrous, beyond our understanding,” indeed...!!

The Thing that Came Out of One Seed

There is a care manager who is in charge of Isao *Sensei*. This manager visits my husband once a month. Soon after Isao *Sensei* and I were allowed to go to the *Konkokyo* Headquarters for worship after a long absence, Isao *Sensei's* care manager began to say, “When I come over here, I sense a scent of happiness. A person who truly knows whom to rely on is strong indeed.” And he said this every time he visited my husband.

What the two of us were in fact doing day to day was that we depended upon our Divine Parent as our “cane” and were totally focused upon what lay right ahead of us. This was the honest actuality of our daily life, and yet we seem to have appeared to be a married couple who were being saved via divine blessings we received from our Parent Deity to the eyes of the care manager. Whenever I heard the caretaker of my husband give us words of admiration, I was made to realize, “we are being allowed to receive such a wonderful blessing everyday.”

When I reflected on the path we had tread upon, I was allowed to recognize that we were given a successor who would take over the two of us in this church. Each of our children got married. We were awarded three grandchildren. Surrounded with these dear people, Isao *Sensei* was able to take care of his own health in a cheerful environment and with a peaceful heart, although we went through some hardships after Isao *Sensei* had fallen gravely sick.

On December 16 of 2013, my husband, Isao *Sensei*, passed away. For sixteen years since Isao *Sensei's* first brain bleeding, we were allowed to live a relatively normal, peaceful domestic life despite some troubles and pain. Each of the family members in our home was blessed with happiness and fulfillment on a daily basis. Had we not met the Konko Faith as a family, we would never be us today.

No matter what kind of situations we may find ourselves in, the affection, workings, arrangements and blessings of our Divine Parent for us are far beyond our wisdom and humble calculations. Because *Kami/Deity* gave us such a big blessing, I am deeply thankful. I would like to sow as many seeds of joy as possible in order to express my thankfulness to our Parent Deity. The more people accept the seeds that I sow, the happier and more grateful I will truly feel.