

Sermon from the June 2017 issue of “Konkokyo-ho: Ametsuchi”

Posted on [2018/02/02](#)

Great *Kami*/God-Like Heart

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(From the June 2017 issue)



Through Great East Japan Earthquake

On behalf of the people of the *Tohoku* (northeast) Region of Japan, I would like to express my utmost gratitude for the earnest prayers and great support we received from the Spiritual Leader/Principal Mediator of the Konko Faith (*Konkokyo*) and every one of you in the *Konkokyo* community since Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011. Thank you very much once again, ladies and gentlemen, for your earnest prayers and generous support for us. Six years have passed since that enormous quake, and our recovery efforts have gradually progressed. At first, we were totally at a loss, not knowing what to do to start our reconstruction efforts. Nevertheless, we began

to work hard in order to rebuild our towns, and our efforts can be visibly confirmed today. How far we have really come!

After Great East Japan Earthquake (the 2016 Kumamoto Earthquake). the northern area of the Iwate Prefecture and Hokkaido due to Typhoon No.10 occurred, resulting in considerable flooding. One big natural disaster after another happened in Japan. However, allow me to tell you that Kami/God never forsakes us. Kami will definitely give blessings, so let us continue our faith lives cheerfully and vigorously! Through experiencing the Great East Japan Earthquake, I was allowed to deeply appreciate the greatness of our Divine Parent's heart. The Founder of the Konko Faith teaches us, "A heart that feels pity is a kami." (GII: Kondo Fujimori, 17) Our Founder also imparts, whether or not we practice faith in deities,

"The body is given by Earth. And the *mitama* soul is given by Tenchi No Kami-Sama. All the while, the child dwells in the womb of the mother, who is unaware of all this. The child later develops a complete body, and is born." (GII: Ichimura Mitsugoro, 13)

When you see an image of the earthquake- and tsunami-struck areas on TV, for instance, and if you truly feel, "What a terrible and severe situation this is! I am truly sorry for the people living there," that feeling is "*kamigokoro*" or "*kami/god-like heart*" indeed. When we see people in serious need, we are strongly encouraged and motivated to reach out to them and help those people. Why is this? Because the *kami/god-like heart* in us is activated and it resonates with the Divine Parent of the Universe. When we are down and discouraged due to severe events that befall us, we are still allowed to realize various important things and we are given inner vigor and courage. Furthermore, we are led to salvation in the end. This is because the *kami/god-like heart* in us resonates with the Divine Parent of the Universe even in the most challenging situation.

"Kami/God-Like Heart" Can Get Connected with our Parent Kami

In the disaster areas, there were many scenes where "*kami/god-like heart*" was visibly expressed. Due to the massive earthquake and the subsequent monstrous tsunami, most people lost their food and clothes. Yet, everybody in those devastated areas helped each other and literally helped each other to survive the desperate situations together. People shared a piece of bread with others; there were many similar anecdotes about situations here and there. In addition, some people even lost their dear family members, homes and jobs. Still, they sympathized with, soothed, encouraged and prayed for each other.

These facts confirm one significant thing: Right in the midst of extreme misery, people in the devastated areas had unyielding, warm and caring hearts for one another as "*kami/god-like heart*" (*kamigokoro*).

Konko Church of Kesen'numa was not damaged by the earthquake and the tsunami, so about thirty local victims evacuated their homes and came over to our church. These people lived in the church's worship hall and lounge for fifty to eighty days. Every day, I took care of these people living in our church, and I prayed to our Divine Parent for each

of the victims to be physically and mentally healthy again, and to be ready to reconstruct their normal lives as soon as possible.

Among the members of the Kesen'numa church, on the other hand, some lives were lost. Others lost their houses, businesses/shops and aquaculture fishing grounds. They were all agonized, saddened and suffering. I prayed hard to our Divine Parent for those who were in anguish. I still do so today, because I want those suffering people to receive Kami's blessing at any cost. This must be a sacred *goyo* (service) Kami has given me.

My husband, who is the Head Minister of Konko Church of Kesen'numa, became quite easily moved to tears when the Great East Japan Earthquake occurred. He shed tears when he heard a church member say that he had lost his dear family member(s) and house because of the huge tsunami. He also shed tears when he heard another church member say that his life had been saved. Whether the stories he heard were positive or negative, my husband says he was lost for words and all he could do was to shed tears with his church members. Because he shed tears so often, I ended up giving my husband a nickname, "Crybaby Head Minister."

Later on, I had a chance to hear the reason why my husband, our Head Minister, shed tears that often. Here is what he had to say.

The Founder teaches, "If people suffer and don't receive divine blessings, Kami cannot fulfill His duty." (GII: Fukushima Gihe'e 14-2) This is the heart of our Divine Parent. Because our Parent Deity is very benevolent, He cannot want to slay a lot of people by making an earthquake and a tsunami happen. The earthquake and tsunami broke out as a proof that the Universe is alive. Sadly, a lot of people died and many people are still missing. And numerous people are crying because they lost their houses and jobs due to the monstrous natural phenomena. When I saw people crying, I vividly felt that *Kami* (God) was also crying, fully wanting those people to be saved. This is why I often shed tears when our church members need to tell me their stories.

In this way, the heart of our Parent Kami and our "*kamigokoro*" or "*kami/god-like heart*" are perfectly connected with one another.

Volunteers of Prayer

A minister of the Konko Faith joined a volunteer activity with his family at a temporary housing site. At a monthly service, this minister asked his middle-school son to talk before his congregation about how he felt and what he thought of while he was taking part in the volunteer activity.

According to the teenage boy, he met an elementary school kid in the temporary housing site. The little boy said to the middle-school student, "I am going to visit a

gravesite with my dad.” “Whose grave are you going to visit?” the minister’s son asked the little boy. “We will visit the gravesite of my mom who was killed in the tsunami.” Hearing this, the son of the Konko minister said he was lost for words.

One day at the JR Konko (train) station, I met that Konko minister by chance. On that day, Grand Ceremony was held at the Konko Faith (*Konkokyo*) Headquarters. The minister said to me, “My middle-school son was fortunate enough to have an experience where he was overwhelmed and speechless.” He was totally impressed and grateful when his son related that experience.

The minister explained that the *kami*/god-like heart of his middle-school son and that of the elementary school kid in the temporary housing site met with one another, and the teenage boy had an overwhelming feeling and became wordless. I’m sure that the elementary school boy felt quite comfortable with the Konko minister’s teenage son when they met and the little boy willingly talked to his new, elder friend about his plan to visit his mother’s grave with his father, feeling totally saved.

In addition to this episode, I witnessed many other examples of the wonderful collaboration of *kami*/god-like hearts between the earthquake/tsunami victims and volunteers/relief aid workers. There was a lady who, as soon as she saw me, talked of losing her dear son to the monstrous tsunami. She spent about two hours telling me of her experience until she finished her story. While the lady was talking, I patiently listened to what she needed to tell me. If the woman had had nobody to listen to her at that time, what would have happened to her, I am now wondering. Thinking this way, I truly realize how great our *kami*/god-like heart is, because this heart enables us to feel deep compassion for people in distress.

Later on, I learned that my friends were living in temporary housing sites here and there in the city. They were very happy when I visited them. My friends are taking care of those who live in those temporary housing sites. Due to the position they were in, my friends often found it pretty hard to utter words of complaints, but at the same time, they often felt frustrated, they told me. Because of the distressful situation they were in, I started a new activity at our church. Once a month, we bring food to the lounge of our church and encourage participants to engage in lively talk about whatever we want or need to share in the room. We named this new lunch session “Club for Ladies.”

My friends took part in “Club for Ladies” several times. At first, they sat back and relaxed, feeling totally at home. However, they gradually grew dissatisfied with being passively taken care of at the church all the time, almost being “guests.” My friends began to participate in our church’s aiding activities for the local victims as volunteers. Then they became more and more lively, energetic and cheerful than before. By encouraging and helping people in need, my friends’ *kami*/god-like hearts became activated, and their *kamigokoro* encouraged and helped themselves in return.

The people here in Kesen'numa City have deep trust in *Konkokyo's* volunteer activities. The reason for it is probably because there are always prayers behind our relief efforts. During our activities, we listen to the locals while we pray to our Divine Parent. We work while we pray to our Parent Deity. Coming back to our church, we pray again, repeating these processes over and over again.

Seeking Faith with which Both Kami and People Are Rejoiced

I'd like to introduce you to the Hirata family who runs aquaculture fishery in Sanriku Town of O'funato City, Iwate Prefecture. They are very kind through their faith in our Divine Parent. At the end of 2010, one year before the Great East Japan Earthquake. Ms. Teruyo Hirata – the eldest female member of the family – had a major surgery on her duodenum. Teruyo's family and relatives had suspected that she would never leave the hospital and would not return home safely. Yet Teruyo received a divine blessing, which in fact made it possible for her to leave the hospital and return home. With a happy, grateful feeling, Teruyo spent days at home recuperating from her surgery. That was when they experienced the Great East Japan Earthquake. It was fortunate that the Hiratas' house was located on a hill. Their house, as a result, escaped the massive damage which the subsequent tsunami had brought about. But the aquaculture facility of the Hiratas was totally ruined because of the monstrous tsunami. Mr. Sakae Hirata, the "main pillar" of the family, was working on the seashore when the earthquake struck the northeastern region of Japan on March 11, 2011. Sakae nearly had one of his legs taken away by the strong tsunami, but he managed to escape the deadly sea wave.

The Head Minister of our church, my husband, often said to the Hirata family, "If you are simply happy to receive *Kami's* blessing, it is not enough. You should do *goyo* or selfless service to help people with a heart of appreciation. By helping people in need, you should practice faith in our Divine Parent (*Kami*), which *Kami* will be truly rejoiced with."

Through the advice of the Head Minister, all the family members of the Hiratas gathered their appreciative hearts together and heated the bathwater everyday. The Hirata family used the spring water of the hill for water, also using wood they could collect as fuel to heat the bath. They visited one neighbor underneath the hill after another, inviting them to take the bath they had prepared for them. A lot of people had lost everything to the tsunami, and young mothers with little kids in particular were delighted and grateful when they were invited to the bath. In addition to offering hot baths, the Hirata family also offered tea for the local victims so that they could have a sigh of relief and rest their fatigued bodies for a while. The Hiratas even listened to the stories of their neighbors in great suffering. It is still very cold in the Tohoku (northeastern) Region in early March, and we even have some snow at that time of the year. During such cold days, the local victims were invited to take a hot bath and have warm tea thanks to the Hirata family. It must have been indeed an occasion of peace and comfort for all those anguished neighbors of the Hiratas.

In this way, when we can take an action to help people in need at a critical moment, it is because we are equipped with *kami*/god-like heart. In the case of the Hiratas, it was also because not only one person but also all the family members were *Konkokyo* believers. Two years earlier, the Hirata family celebrated the 100th anniversary for becoing *Konkokyo* believers as a family. During this span, four generations of the Hiratas have received numerous blessings from our Divine Parent. Unintentionally, the entire family of the Hiratas had an opportunity to do *goyo* of appreciation for their Parent *Kami* who allowed them to practice faith for 100 years. How thankful they feel! I am also truly thankful about it too.

The Great East Japan Earthquake had a huge impact on each one of us. Every aspect of our modern-day lives was severely challenged by the earthquake and tsunami. In important ways, the earthquake and tsunami taught us a lot of things.

Likewise, our respective faiths in our Divine Parent are being challenged. “Is your faith enough quantity-wise and quality-wise?” “Is your faith sincere enough?” Our dear Founder, Konko Daijin, teaches us, “People want to use *Kami*, while not knowing how to serve *Kami*.” (GI: Shimamura Hachitaro, 5) I am afraid that many of us are too often focused upon depending on *Kami* for blessings, not really seeking anything else. Haven’t we forgotten the importance of serving *Kami*? Haven’t we forgotten the importance of doing things, for people around us to be fulfilled and saved? Now, it is important for us to ask ourselves the reason why we are given “*kami*/god-like hearts” (*kamigokoro*) right from the start of our respective lives. Then we hopefully can encourage ourselves to practice faith, with which “...*Kami*, you, and I (Konko Daijin) will all be happy.” (GII: Sato Mitsujiro, 5-2)

(THE END)