

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

Posted on [2017/10/13](#)

Directing My Heart to *Kami*

By Rev. Shunsuke Ishi'i
Konko Church of O'okuma

Reprinted from Konkokyo-ho: Ametsuchi, March 2017



I am a child of a Konko minister, born in O'okuma, a once prosperous coal mining area and now a peaceful town, surrounded by mountains, and located in the central Fukuoka Prefecture area. At the age of twenty-eight, I entered the Konko Seminary and was ordained a year later and am currently working at the Konko Seminary. As we are gathered here in the Central Worship Hall at the Konko Faith Headquarters, I am confident we all feel a connection with *Kami*, our Parent Deity, but this was not always the case for me. Although I was born at a local Konko Church and grew up in a church environment and should feel connected to *Kami*, in actuality, I took for granted the convenience of a Konko church. I had no idea how appreciative I should be for the presence of a worship hall (*hiromae*) and the presence of *Kami*,

This lack of awareness began to change from the age of twenty. I was away from home, attending the university, when I was stricken with a high fever one day. I consulted with a doctor and was given some medication and began to feel better. A short time later, the fever returned, I was prescribed additional medication and once again felt better. The fever returned several more times and each time, the fever lasted longer and thus my recovery time was extended as well. Even when admitted to the hospital and given antipyretics, antibiotics and an intravenous drip injection, the staff seemed unable to determine the precise cause for the recurring fever. Without a precise cure and unable to function normally, I found it next to impossible to continue my university studies and decided to return to where I was born.

Most of the following year was spent being confined to my bed, unable to even get up, despite my youthful age. I agonized and thought to myself, "What a useless man I am!" One day, feeling better than usual, I came out of my room and saw my father cleaning the worship hall. My father noticed me and asked to join him with the cleaning. He said, "Why don't we clean for a while?" My father's words made me think, "It may be a good idea to move my body from time to time." He and I cleaned the worship hall together and unlike the past, when I tired rather quickly, this time, I felt good after the cleaning was completed. At that point, I realized the comfort provided by the worship hall and *Kami* being a part of this hall and its function. I thought to myself, "This must be the reason I am feeling good right now." Although I was raised in a Konko church, this was the first time I truly felt thankful to *Kami*. Although I cleaned the worship hall with my father and felt good, my overall health condition did not dramatically improve. When I felt good, I came out of my room and went to the worship hall, where I gave prayers to *Kami* and read books about the *Konko* Faith, while enjoying the warmth of the sun. One day, I was reading and came across the following passages:

...Konko Daijin, what will happen to this Faith after you are gone?" He answered, "You need not worry. Only my physical form will be gone. Having a physical body makes it difficult for me to see people's suffering in the world. When my body is gone, I can go to where I am requested and save people. (GII: Karahi Tsunezo, 4-2)

When I read these lines, I was suddenly jolted and experienced a deeper realization. The Founder of the Konko Faith, who had saved so many people, felt having a physical body was limiting his ability to save all people in the world. He understood that when his physical body was gone, he could be requested by anyone, anywhere to be saved, including myself. I felt an uplifting confidence the Founder's spirit would express his concern for my difficult and painful situation and save me, along with many others in the world.

I believed more fully and understood the Founder was going to save people, including me, which moved me to tears. Since then, I began to pray to and depend upon *Kami*, our Divine Parent. As soon as I incorporated this new outlook, my health gradually improved. With each passing day, I came to spend less and less time in bed and spend more and more time being active and doing a variety of things. I also became more cheerful as well. During that period, I felt my improving health to be a wondrous development. With the passing of months and then years, I came to realize all this occurred because of the divine blessings from *Kami*.

Another development occurred during my period of recovery, which I would like to share. I received a phone call from a friend of mine who operates a private school providing supplemental instruction (*Gakushu Juku* in Japanese), asking if I could teach since he could not find enough instructors. I replied with some hesitation that although I am not fully qualified as a teacher and unsure how effective I would be, perhaps there would be a way to be helpful. I accepted the offer since it required only a few hours of instruction per day and would not cause a strain my health.

My physical and mental health condition continued to improve which led to my father asking me one day if I was familiar with the term Minister's Assistant (*Hokyo* in Japanese) and what it meant. I replied affirmatively, whereupon he suggested I become a Minister's Assistant. I was delighted, honored and grateful by the offer to serve *Kami* in this capacity and thus became a Minister's Assistant.

A Minister's Assistant should pray to *Kami* for the betterment of people around you and also help them as much as possible. A Minister's Assistant is also expected to

speak to people about one's faith and religion, Some of the young students who were enrolled at the private school had issues about various things and being a part time teacher, I had the opportunity to listen to their issues. I then began to pray to *Kami* for these students.

Several months passed and the students were about to take their entrance examination for admission to senior high school. One student I worked with had consistent good scores on trial tests which should have enabled him to gain acceptance to his first choice high school. A second student seeking admission to his desired high school was not scoring high enough on his trial tests, so I began to pay especially close attention to him.

When the high schools announced their admission results, I was surprised to learn the student who had performed well did not gain admission to his selected school, while the second student, whom I had focused on more, was admitted to his selected high school. The student who was not admitted to his first choice school was obviously very disappointed as were others not accepted to their selected schools. At the same time, this student did score well enough to be accepted to his second choice school. I tried to give comfort and encouragement by saying, "Stop grieving over the examination result and look ahead to a new start." After this student began attending high school, and also continuing his private lessons, I noticed a sadness and negativity in his behavior when we met. When greeting and asking if anything was wrong, his usual response was "Nothing really." This same student, who always wore his school uniform was now wearing casual clothing when attending his private school lessons. Out of concern, I asked his parents about his changed mood and behavior and was told their son had stopped attending high school and did not even reveal his reasons to them. Before long, this student stopped attending his high school and discontinued attending the private school as well.

When I think about this boy, it reminds me of when I was in low spirits and I wondered about his current situation. I felt so sorry for this student that I even began to pray to *Kami* on his behalf all the time. I also apologized to *Kami* for not knowing how to do more to help this young man. One year later, in a totally

unexpected development, I met the same student at the private school and he told me that although he was no longer attending high school, he was once again seeking private lessons to prepare for the university entrance eligibility test in an effort to attend college. I was no doubt happy and felt relief and said to myself, "This boy has just been given a new chance to rebuild his life. Thank you very much, *Kami!*"

Through this experience, I came to realize that as long as we continue to pray for people, *Kami* will answer our prayers and show us visible blessings. When the student said he would work hard again, his words saved me too, since those words meant I had another chance to help him pursue a brighter future. Until this experience, I had simply been appreciative of *Kami*, but now wanted to know more about *Kami*. This was my primary motivation to enter the Konko Seminary and become a Konko minister.

I learned a number of new things at the Konko Seminary. One of the things was how a human being is changed into a new one every three months. When I heard this, it occurred to me I had already changed twice since coming to the seminary six months ago.

Accepting the idea of changing every three months, the before and after meal prayers began to take on more meaning and I began to eat each meal with a feeling of gratitude. The three meals served at the seminary each day were being provided through the earnest prayers of all Konko believers. The lessons and blessings received at the seminary were also reflected in an improvement in my physical condition. When I entered the seminary, my weight was only about 94 pounds, but at the time of my graduation, my weight was a more suitable and normal 139 pounds.

Another important lesson learned at the seminary was the idea that although it is important to be appreciative of *Kami*, it is equally or perhaps more important to reform one's heart and state of mind and pursue a *Kami* centered life, so one can realize divine blessings.

After being ordained as a minister, I was initially given an assignment at the Administrative Office, where all the materials handled were religious in nature, but my tasks were primarily administrative, similar to those performed in a secular environment. As a result, there were times when I did not think in *Kami* centered ways. This was in contrast to my days at the seminary, where every day was filled with lessons and topics related to *Kami* and the Founder.

The Founder revealed to us, “Don’t ever forget the longtime pain you have suffered and the divine blessings you have received. As long as you don’t forget these two things, your illness won’t recur. Hereafter, when people come to you in pain, give prayers for them while recalling your own suffering and the divine blessings you have received. If you don’t care about others because you yourself are already cured, your illness will return. Keep receiving divine blessings with the heart you have now, then your illness won’t recur, and future generations of your family will also receive blessings.” (GI: Ogihara Sugi, 6-5, 6, 7)

From this teaching, I concluded not to continue as before and have become more earnest and sincere in thanking *Kami* at each mealtime prayer for the blessings received, remembering my past suffering and to pray for those currently suffering as well. I do this as a means of remembering the blessings received from *Kami*. Moreover, I have renewed spiritual confidence of not becoming melancholy should a cold or illness befall me, and that the illness will pass quickly. In directing my heart to Konko Daijin and the Founder, my heart and way of living has changed and I have been given a whole new way to live my life.

Finally, I would like to share another teaching of Konko Daijin which state, “A metal cane will get bent, and a bamboo or wooden cane will break. Therefore, use *Kami* as your cane. *Kami* can never be bent, can never break, and can never die.” (GI: Kondo Fujimori, 4)

During the period of my life when I was continually stricken with a fever, I primarily relied on medicine and doctors. When I came to rely on *Kami*, I was awakened to a whole new world. I became more able to understand *Kami*’s message and accept *Kami*’s sound guidance for each situation I confronted. I thank *Kami* every day for

the blessings bestowed on me, and express my gratitude for the truth that *Kami* takes care of me. I also would like to continue practicing faith in *Kami* and live each day joyfully and thankfully, always striving to become a person who contributes to society as much as possible.

(THE END)