

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

## Let's Open Up Our Inner Eyes!

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### My Feelings toward My Father in Coma

We, the residents of the Kumamoto Prefecture, were struck with two huge earthquakes in April this year and soon received kind words of condolence and encouragement from many people both inside and outside Japan. On behalf of the Konko

churches in Kumamoto, I would like to express my deep gratefulness to all of you for your warmth and kindness. We are still on our way towards a full reconstruction of the devastated areas, but we would like to continue to receive blessings from our Divine Parent by relying upon our Parent Deity (*Kami*) more than ever. Please continue to pray for us from now too. Thank you so much. A series of unexpected incidents can happen to our lives. Events such as earthquakes, tsunamis, typhoons, sicknesses, traffic accidents, injuries, troubles about human relationships, financial difficulties are just a few calamities that can occur. Fortunately enough, we, the believers of the Konko Faith, can receive *Kami's* blessings, no matter what sorts of sufferings we may encounter, by going to the church, asking for Sacred Mediation there and striving to live our lives in a way that our Divine Parent will joyfully approve. I was allowed to learn an important

thing about the Konko Faith by observing my father's way of life in the last years of his life.

It was the morning of February 3, 2012. On that day, all of Japan suffered severe cold weather and many water pipes in Kumamoto burst due to the extremely cold temperature. As usual, I went to my father's room and said to him, "Good morning, father!" Father, however, did not reply, something that was quite unusual for him. I touched my father and his body was as cold as ice. He was unconscious too. I panicked and had my wife call an ambulance right away. Desperately, I caressed the cold body of my father and said aloud "Konko-sama! Konko-sama!" in my urgent prayers to *Kami*.

As soon as the ambulance crew came and saw my father, they said, "The body temperature of your father is only 23 degrees Centigrade (about 73 degrees Fahrenheit), compared to an ordinary level of 36.5 degrees C (about 98 degrees Fahrenheit). His heart and lungs are working quite poorly too. The patient is fairly aged and he is in a critical condition now. We therefore will take your father to a large hospital in the City of Kumamoto." I asked my wife to accompany our father in the ambulance, and I followed the emergency vehicle in my car. It took us about an hour to get to the hospital. On my way to our destination, I prayed and prayed to *Kami*. Tears ran down my cheeks because I was saying to myself, "If father passed away without recovering at all, I would surely remain unsaved for the rest of my life. My life would be full of regrets, and I would be so sorry for my mother who passed away eight years ago."

### **"You First Need to Express Your Appreciation to Your Parents"**

When my father was 77 years old, his eyesight became extremely bad. An ophthalmologist examined my father's eyes and told us that it was too late for treatments. Cataracts and glaucoma were confirmed as the diagnosis for father's eyes, and it was found that his optic nerves were severely damaged. About one year later, my father went totally blind. When my father was over 90 years old, his physical fitness and cognition saw a sharp decline. He began to say and do strange things from time to time. Father had difficulty going to the restroom, which made us ask him to use disposable diapers. We put a portable toilet right beside

his bed, but sometimes, these arrangements were still not good enough to prevent our father from “making a mistake.”

Every time father “made an error,” my wife and I helped him change his clothes and we cleaned up the subsequent mess. The more time passed by, the frequent these incidents occurred. Gradually, a complaint emerged inside my heart: “How long will we have to take care of our father? I’m sorry for my wife who kindly takes care of our father without complaints. I’m totally fed up with this feeling. If possible, I want father to enter some elderly care facilities as soon as he can.” I did not voice my frustrations to my father, but the ugly aspect of my heart seemed to have been revealed and known to *Kami*. This is probably the reason why my father was suddenly put in coma. I just didn’t find any other cause for my father to be put in such a critical condition.

I then remembered one more thing. It was the teaching my wife, daughter and I received from the former, Fourth *Konko-sama* or the Spiritual Leader of the Konko Faith at the Mediation Place of the Konko Faith Headquarters’ Central Worship Hall more than thirty years ago. Back in those days, our daughter was a newborn baby, and we should have been the happiest of married couples. We, however, were more miserable than happy because the relationship between my parents and the two of us was anything but peaceful and harmonious. Our home reflected a dark and harsh atmosphere at that time. Deep inside my heart, I almost cursed my parents, “I’d rather not have these people as my parents, because they lack understanding and are unsupportive of us. If they would leave, I’d never mind being in this house.”

Yet, I was also trying to say to myself, “This is not a good notion to harbor. We never should be this way as a family living in a Konko church.” At the Mediation Place of the Headquarters’ Worship Hall, I spoke to the Fourth *Konko-sama*, “We are not getting along with our parents very well, and I request that our relationship with them will get better.” As soon as I said so, the Fourth *Konko-sama* glared at me with a stern look and said, “That’s not something you should worry about. What you should be doing now is to be grateful for your father and mother, your parents. You have parents and your wife also has parents. Both of you grew up because your respective parents took good care of you with parental affection and responsibilities. You got married through earnest prayers by your respective

parents. In this sense, what you need to do first is to thank your parents, not to blame them. As long as you continue to hold grudge against your parents, you will never receive *Kami's* blessings no matter how much time may pass.”

Hearing *Konko-sama's* words, we regretted the way we had been. My wife and I agreed to try to communicate and interact with our parents with respect and a sense of gratitude as part of our religious training. We soon started to turn our intention into concrete actions, and our training with our parents lasted for a while. Gradually, we experienced a better atmosphere in our home as our relationship with our parents improved. But it is difficult for one to keep up a good job all the time. Days, weeks and months went by, and I had unconsciously taken a distance from “faith based upon gratitude for my parents.” Father’s sudden, unexpected coma that morning made me realize the distance I had carelessly been taking from ideal faith. On my way to the hospital following the ambulance, I expressed my most sincere words of apology to *Konko-sama*, our Divine Parent of the Universe, my unconscious father and my deceased mother.

### **Father Kept His Promise with *Kami***

Father was taken into a big hospital in Kumamoto City. The doctor who saw my father in a critical condition said to me, “Please call all the members of your family and relatives just in case.” I contacted my elder sister living in the Kanto Region, and she soon joined us. The six of us including my siblings and my father’s grandchildren watched father attentively.

The doctor in charge of my father told us, “Even if your father survives coma and stays alive, please be prepared for him becoming a comatose person or ending up needing dialysis.” Actually, father received a grand blessing from *Kami* and he regained his consciousness little by little from the next day on. Father’s body temperature gradually rose up, and his heart, lungs and kidneys miraculously resumed their normal functions. Due to the dull function of his brain, father was on the verge of suffering from dementia. But his brain resumed working normally. Because he was as elderly as 98 years old, my father was going to enter a care-giving health facility for the elderly after being released from the hospital.

Because my father was admitted into a facility which is just a ten-minute drive from our church, I was able to go to see him almost every single day. Visiting him on a daily basis, I now feel that I am being allowed to be truly filial to my father. Through the grave situation of my father's sudden coma, I was allowed to deal with my father with a warm heart. I believed that my father's coma happened in *Kami's* arrangement from the bottom of my heart, and I expressed my feelings of gratitude to *Kami*.

After being admitted to the facility for the elderly, father talked to me one day. He said to me, "I am very old and I usually lie on my bed these days. My presence bothers you all and I'm sure that I am a big burden for you. I, however, still can pray to *Kami* for people, although I can no longer move my body freely at my will. If it is possible, I would like to remain to be the Head Minister of our church and continue to serve *Kami* until I take the last breath in this world. This is in fact my promise with *Kami*. Do you think it is all right?" When my father uttered these words, he was polite to me, his son, enough to take a bow. I was moved with my father's strong desire, "I'd like *Kami* to use me until I leave this world." I held the hands of my father and happily answered him, "Thank you, dad. I will continue to expect and rely on your prayers to *Kami* for us."

Although father was totally blind, he always smiled and replied, "Thank you very much. I appreciate your kindness and care" when someone talked to him. Father also scored perfectly in every dementia test administered to him. At one time, the doctor praised my father, saying "It is unusual that a one-hundred-year-old person like Mr. Taniguchi still retains ability to recognize things clearly."

### **Living Life with Gratitude and Joy**

Right before going totally blind, my father wrote down the things in a notebook that I will later quote. He wrote those texts with very poor eyesight. He wrote: "On my seventy-seventh birthday, I took a surgery on my eyes at a clinic of ophthalmology. My optic nerves were so badly damaged that the surgery did not enable me to see. I felt as if *Kami* gave me a test. I thought *Kami* wanted to know how I would understand and accept this severe ordeal. Oh, yes! I find it important to thank *Kami* for having given me blessings to this day. I need to thank *Kami* for giving me life on each morning for 77 years. I must find things about which I am still

blessed in my current situation and say 'Thank You!' to *Kami*. Even though I am severely handicapped in my eyes, I am still allowed to enjoy meals. I am still allowed to enjoy sake that I love every night. I am allowed to sleep well in the night and I am allowed to have smooth bowel movements. Gee, I have so many things to be happy and thankful about!

“Fortunately enough, I have come to realize that it is important to live positively and cheerfully and live the “life of appreciation’ every day, no matter what may happen. I want to believe that I will be given a true blessing from *Kami* when those who observe the way I live day to day will be saved and fulfilled. Hoping that it will happen someday, I want to live the rest of my life in joy.”

I happened to find my father’s notebook in the drawer of the desk at our church’s Mediation Place. I read my father’s words on the notebook for the first time after father was admitted into the elders’ home. Father gradually lost his vision at the age of 77 and he was blind for 23 years afterwards. Because of blindness, my father must have had enormous obstacles to overcome on a constant basis, but he never said words of complaint. No, not even once. Instead, father took a bow and said aloud, “Thank you very much for your kindness and care” whatever he did — when he woke up, when he went to the restroom, when he ate a meal, and so forth.

On his one hundredth birthday, my father suddenly said to me, “I have a question for you, Norio. Do you know how a Japanese adjective, ‘*yasashi*’ (to be kind) with a Chinese character is spelled? The Chinese character used for this word is pronounced ‘*yu’u*,’ and this character consists of two elements; ‘*ninben*,’ the radical, and another *kanji* (Chinese character) of ‘*yu’u*’ which stands for ‘to worry about’ or ‘to grieve over.’ If you have a kind heart, you will worry about people. You will pray to *Kami* for people so that they will be saved. You will do your best for people’s wellbeing. The *kanji* used for the adjective ‘*yasashi*’ has such positive meanings. This *kanji* is also a part of the words such as ‘*yu’usho’o*’ (championship), ‘*yu’ushu’u*’ (excellence) and ‘*yu’uto’osei*’ (honor-roll student). But you don’t necessarily have to be the best. What I want you to be, Norio, is a person with a kind heart. I say this, because our Founder lived his life as a kind, merciful person.”

Four months passed, and in July 2014, my father concluded his life that lasted for 100 years and four months, fulfilling his important role as the Head Minister of our church. Father smiled all the time, and when he finally left this world, he looked as if he was asleep in peace.

When he was young, my father experienced a war as a career soldier. This may explain why father was a “scary man.” Outside our home, my father enjoyed a reputation as a “kind minister.” Inside it, however, he was a stern and violent father, and I hated him accordingly. At one time, I even said to myself, “I don’t even want to see his face, and I don’t even want to hear his voice.”

My father is gone for good now. I look back upon his life from time to time, and I realize that father was able to live a “life of gratitude and joy” by directing his heart to our Divine Parent till he took his last breath and opening up his inner eye. Father did so after he went totally blind. My father’s way of life allowed me to re-appreciate the wonderfulness and preciousness of the Konko Faith. And it also allowed me to respect my father from the bottom of my heart.

### **The Absence of Family Discord Is the Foundation**

Our Founder teaches us, “If you follow true faith, you should put aside your physical eyes and open up your spiritual eyes.” (GIII: Shinkun II -8) The Founder constantly sought the “true Way” that allows “parents and their children, people and people and *Kami*/Divine Parent and people to become mutually fulfilled and saved through *Aiyo Kakeyo*/Mutual Reliance.” Konko Daijin, our dear Founder, passed away in October 1883 at the age of 70, and it took place 133 years ago.

The Founder encountered various sufferings throughout his life. No matter what kind of difficulties he came across, the Founder always directed his heart to *Kami*, prayed in serenity, opening up his spiritual eyes, sought *Kami*’s guidance and did his best to live up to *Kami*’s expectations and wishes. In other words, the Founder practiced “sincere faith in *Kami*” through his entire life.

We are now being blessed with an occasion to worship the Grand Ceremony for Ikigami Konko Daijin, and so please allow me to say this to you: “Let us all share our dear Founder’s wish, ‘May as many people of this world be saved as possible’ with

the Founder!” The Founder embraced this wish throughout his life, and we, as his followers, would also like to hold his wish as long as we are kept alive.

As long as we are alive, we are all subject to face various sorts of problems. As we grow old, we tend to have more difficulties than before. If you become elderly, you cannot really move your body at your will and you will often feel inconvenience whatever you do. In such a severe circumstance, you may say “I can no longer do anything because I am fairly old,” giving up many things. Or you may say “Even if I am alive, all I get is misfortune,” letting yourself down.

None of us is perfectly sure if we will be alive tomorrow. Because of this truth, because you know you are being alive now, you can direct your heart to our Divine Parent of the Universe and our dear Founder today. You can visit your Konko church today as long as you are able to move from one place to another without too much trouble. You can earnestly ask for and receive Sacred Mediation at the Mediation Place of your church today. And by doing these things, you can try to open up your inner, spiritual eyes today. If you succeed in doing these things, you will surely be able to find something you willingly thank about even when you are in a tremendous difficulty.

If you can truly feel, “Oh, my! I thought I was in a deep, stinking swamp, but I was still given blessings I ought to be thankful about,” through this sort of efforts, you will hear your inner voice, “I’m so happy and fortunate to be kept alive to this very moment,” and you will discover a heart of gratitude and joy in yourself. If you work hard, trying to nurture and develop such a positive mindset, your sincerity will reach *Kami* and you will surely be invited to grand blessings. Those grand blessings will surely help you overcome your difficulties, no matter how big and serious those problems may be. I say this with full confidence, because I was allowed to witness how my father lived the very last part of his life.

There is one thing I have recently been working on, and it is a spiritual training for myself. What I in fact am trying to do at present is to put the teaching, “The foundation of faith begins with the home” (GI: Saito Sojiro 17) into practice. We have our respective families. Take myself, for example. Each of my family members and I are connected with one another as a family through the wondrous arrangement by our Divine Parent. Because of this sacred truth, we are supposed



to get along with each other in peace in our home, accepting, respecting and caring about one another. I, as well as my family members, however, fail to live peacefully in our home too often due to the fact that we are so close and intimate with each other, being a family. The more close and intimate you are to a person, the more clearly you discover that person's inner virtues and shortcomings. Here, we need to know and understand one simple truth: Every human being has both virtues and faults. When I look at someone, I should see myself in that person. If you blame and/or are angry with someone, you will have stress, damage your mental health and it will eventually lead to a damage onto your physical health. On the other hand, if you have a cheerful, lively heart and say "Thank you!" with a smile to *Kami* and anybody you meet everyday, the quality of your physical health will get enhanced little by little, and you will also find joy to live your life. Our bodies are created this way (by *Kami*).

Recalling how my father lived his last days in this world, I am allowed to recognize the secret to longevity. Remember, my father lived for 100 years! First, a circle of salvation that is attained via practicing faith in the Konko Faith should be born in our respective homes. Next, this circle of salvation will hopefully be enlarged and it will include the people around us. It will happen when those people consider the Konko Faith wonderful and precious and give credit to our religion. And when this really takes place, it means that a "life of gratitude and joy" will be shared not only by our family members but also by the people around us. By achieving this goal, I am sure that we will be allowed to recompense for the grand favors our Founder and the successive *Konko-samas* (Principal Mediators of the Konko Faith) have given us. Our dear Founder will be pleased to see us do this, because he is the one who earnestly prayed to our Divine Parent about the "true peace of the world."

In order to answer for my father's will, "Become a person with a kind heart, my son," I am now doing a spiritual self-training of "dealing with people I meet with a smile as often as possible." I did this training yesterday, I am doing this today and I know I will do this training from tomorrow on as well. Sometimes I fail to treat people with a smile, and I reflect upon my error. Yet I do not criticize myself too much and I am enjoying this spiritual self-training day in day out.

(THE END)