

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

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Based Upon Gratitude — 1

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Not Comfortable at Home at All



I have been serving at the Outreach Department of the Konko Faith Headquarters' Administration Office since February 2017. In that capacity, I've ministered to many people. I'd like to share with you one encounter. It took place when I was serving at the *Hiromae* (Worship Hall) two years ago. I happened to be sitting at the reception desk in the *Hiromae*. This was not my usual assignment as a staff member of the *Hiromae* Department, but due to an unexpected schedule change, I was there that day. It was a quiet time of day. An elderly gentleman entered the Hall at the main entrance. He stood tall. His back was straight. His stride was steady and sure. He appeared to be a man in his seventies. This tall, elderly gentleman looked around the large Hall, saw me, and came over to the where I sat.

“This is my first time here,” he said, “and I don’t know what to do.”

He told me his name and address, and briefly introduced himself. “What can I do with my offerings?” he asked.

I showed him how to write his name, address, and age on the envelope provided for monetary offerings. It was then that I realized that he was over 90 years old. I still remember my surprise. It was not only his appearance but also the energetic, cheerful tone of his voice as he spoke that gave me the impression that he was much younger than 90 years old.

“What brought you here today, sir?” I inquired.

“I don’t really know why, but maybe it’s because of my age, but my family treats me coldly these days. I often feel isolated at home and I just don’t feel comfortable at all.” He then proceeded to tell me what was happening in his home on a. He started with meals.

“My wife has always fixed my meals three times a day. Recently, however, it’s only twice a day. My old woman has stopped preparing my lunch. She just says, ‘Help yourself with your lunch.’ I, however, have never cooked for myself and I do not have much money either, but I have no choice but to go to the supermarket to buy my lunch. This has been my latest routine. When I try to explain this to my wife, we usually end up arguing. I’m already over 90. Why on earth do I have to feel bad like this?”

This gentleman also told me that he was a farmer with land of his own. Until a few years earlier, he worked alongside his sons. They eventually took over the farm.

“My sons recently treat me as if I were in their way. I know I can still do the work so I’ve told them, ‘Let me work with you because I have nothing to do at home.’ Then tension between us rises. My boys have said to me, ‘You’d be better off admitted to a nursing home.’”

He continued to complain. He had bought land near his home for his grandson, and even paid for the construction of a new house. “My grandson does not act grateful for what I have done for him. Recently, he does not even speak to me when we see each other, and it makes me very sad.”

The old gentleman continued, “I believe I have always done so much for my family. But what I get in return is terrible treatment. I feel pushed aside by everybody and it angers me. And yet at the same time I realize that this anger will only worsen my relationship with my family. With or without direct confrontations with my family, I feel like I may go insane. And who knows, maybe I will kill myself before I’m aware of what I am doing. When I think of this, it scares me to death. Please tell me how I should face this difficult situation. I’ve never come to a place like this, but I came up with the courage and brought myself here today.”

Kami/God Brought This Gentleman Here

As I carefully listened to this elderly gentleman, I clearly understood that he didn’t know what to do with the frustration and anger that came from his inability to accept the fact that his relationship with his family members had changed as he grew older. In addition, he had little idea of how to improve his situation as he sensed that things in his home weren’t going in his favor.

The better I understood this gentleman, however, the more unease I began feeling inside my heart. In the beginning, I simply focused on this man’s story because he was eagerly trying to make me see his miserable situation. As he spoke, he would pause as if he waiting for me to say something to him. I wanted to say something to him, and I searched for suitable words, but all I could do was sit in silence.

It dawned on me, finally, that something was wrong with me.

“Even if I try to find appropriate words for this gentleman it will be in vain. The first thing I must do is to pray to our Divine Parent for his salvation.”

I composed myself and prayed silently to Kami (Parent Deity). All the while, the aged gentleman patiently waited for me to speak to him. Through my earnest prayer, I was allowed to realize the following things: This man before me, who is not a Konko believer, came to the Konko Faith Headquarters on his own. Not only that, I am sitting here at the reception desk in the Central Worship Hall, not my usual assignment. Through unforeseen circumstances, I was assigned to sit there, at that particular time. And this was exactly when this elderly gentleman

approached me to share his sad story. It was a Divine confluence of events that brought us together. I felt that it was *Kami's intention* to use me as a conduit to help this gentleman.

Before speaking, I prayed to our Divine Parent, "Please use me to save this child of Yours." Only then did I speak to the elderly gentleman,

"We, humans, and all the other creatures are given life by *Kami* every day. We cannot even live even one single day without *Kami's* blessings. We are *allowed* to live." I continued, "It is therefore important for us to live our lives with thankfulness for *Kami* and *Kami's* workings upon us."

At that time, the old man looked somewhat puzzled. To me, he looked as if he wanted to say, "What on earth are you talking about? I think I asked you to tell me what to do with my problems."

Because of what he had previously shared with me, I knew that this man was a farmer so I told him, "We all know that farmers grow the vegetables and grains that we consume. We, as consumers, buy and eat those vegetables, never giving a thought about where they came from or who grew them. And, as important as farmers are, they are not the only factor responsible in the growing of crops. The earth, the sunshine, the rain; all these are blessings indispensable for the sound growth of plant food. It is easy for us to see if we are only observant. It is important for us, humans, to partake with gratitude, these blessings from *Kami*, and appreciate nature and its wondrous workings."

I continued, "As much as it is important for us to realize the marvelous workings of *Kami*, it is also important for us to realize that we are all being taken care of by a lot of people every day. Let us not forget to show our appreciation to those people as well. For instance, you angrily remarked that your wife cooks only two meals a day for you. But to me, your wife is kind enough to fix even two meals a day for you. By thus changing how you think, you should have a feeling of gratitude for her. As for your family business of agriculture, you are able to live each day in total comfort because your sons have already taken over the business. You are over 90 years of age and have been blessed with a long healthy life, free from illnesses. All these things are happening to you every single day, and let me tell you Sir, this is truly amazing! If you think this way, you will probably be able to see that your life is full of things that you can be thankful about."

“I Cannot Believe There Is Such a World!”

After listening to my words, the old man said, “It is true that I have recognized the workings of the nature many times, but I have never thought of expressing my gratitude for it. As for my family, I have always thought that they can live in comfort because I have worked so hard for them. Because of this notion, I have never thought to feel thankful for them. And because I have never suffered from any serious sickness, I have always taken my good health for granted. Some of my acquaintances near my age say, ‘This part of my body aches’ or ‘I’m having trouble here and there,’ and they often go to the clinic. You are right. This is also something I should be grateful about.”

The elderly gentleman looked convinced and appeared more peaceful than before. Looking at him, I gave this gentleman one suggestion: “You came here today because you believed that members in your family were being cruel to you. And you wondered why. Your question is perhaps understandable at least to some extent, but please allow me to say this. Try changing the way you respond to your family. Think about changing yourself, not about trying to change them. If you deal with your family with a feeling of gratitude, then their reaction to you and the way they treat you will change too. At the least, you will get angry with your family members less often. First, maybe you can start with saying, ‘Thank you!’ to those who are kind to you.”

Hearing my suggestion, the aged gentleman muttered, “Oh, now I realize that I have never said to my wife, ‘Thank you for cooking meals for me.’ As a matter of fact, my wife who is over 80 years old has pains here and there, but she still fixes meals for me. I have, in fact, received so much and have been in a position to thank her for all she does for me. I understand it well now.”

The man honestly understood and accepted what I tried to convey to him, and I was very happy and grateful.

He then asked me what he could or should do when he got angry, and I replied, “When I get angry, I usually direct my heart to *Kami* and pray, as if asking *Kami* to listen to me, instead of casting my wrath upon the one who was frustrating me. It calms me and I am able to look at my faults more objectively, trying to understand the other’s viewpoint. This is how I deal with my anger. If you are still unhappy after trying all these things, you can come here again and someone to listen to you. Whoever listens to you here in this Central Worship Hall, will pray to our Divine Parent for you, and we will ask *Kami* to save you and the person who offends you. We Konko believers practice this; reflect upon ourselves when we come across a problem

and not put the blame on others. We are as much to blame. We ask what *Kami* wishes us to do, for *Kami* has a deep and abiding will to help us, his children, to grow and flourish. It is important for us to know and appreciate such a heart of *Kami*. If we realize this and express our gratitude to our Divine Parent we can find success in our endeavors.

In the course of our conversation, I shared more stories and teachings of Konko-*sama* (Spiritual Leader of *Konkokyo*), Sacred Mediation and Konko Faith (*Konkokyo*), in general.

At last, the gentleman said to me, “I am happy, because today, I was able to hear stories I had never heard before.” And he added, “Can I come here and talk to you about myself again?”

I replied, “Of course you can! Please feel free to come and ask for Sacred Mediation anytime you want.”

“I will come worshipping again,” he said, as he left the Central Worship Hall of the Konko Faith Headquarters.

It was not until 90 years of age, that this gentleman was able to say, “For the first time in my life, I have come to know a religion such as this. I am very much moved. While I was listening to you, Rev. Yoshioka, I couldn’t believe there was such a religion like this. I wish I had been blessed with an opportunity to hear these things much earlier.”

This elderly gentleman was not the only one who was saved on that day. As a Konko believer of the teachings of Konko Daijin, our dear Founder, I also was saved, because through this person, I was allowed to reaffirm and appreciate again, the greatness of the Konko Faith.

This event alone may not entirely save the elderly gentleman, but I am sure that he will receive *Kami*’s blessings as long as he recognizes the workings of *Kami* and lives his life with gratitude.