



Appreciation of being able to fulfill a pilgrimage to Japan during the pandemic

*By Rev. Yasuhiro Yano
Head Minister*

I am truly grateful to be back to Hawaii on November 11, 2021 as scheduled. I have shared some of my trip to Japan under the restriction in dealing with the effects of COVID-19 in the November issue of the Church Bulletin. This is my continuation of what I have experienced in more detail.

I talked about the process to get out of the Narita Airport undergoing rigorous inspections under the corona virus pandemic. The first day when I arrived at the airport, I waited for the shuttle bus to the designated hotel. I had to present my papers that showed I was negative of the infection. Soon after, I was required to install an app on my smartphone for a governmental surveillance program for my stay at the hotel. For some reason, the wifi in my room would not connect with my smart phone and my laptop. So I had to inform the front desk to fix the problem.

Two men came to help connect the internet. But the time was after 8:00 p.m. Finally, being able to connect to the wifi, my smart phone rang and I responded. The message showed I missed the call. In a sense I could not response to the program called "My SOS" that ensured I was in my confined space. The message showed that I was in violation of their covid isolation standards and mentioned that if I do not respond to the call, they will send in the authorities to contact me in person. That message was rather authoritarian and scared me a bit. From the next day, I had to babysit my smart phone from 9:00 a.m. to around 5:00 p.m. because I had no clue when they would call me. The Japanese government was surveilling my whereabouts throughout the day. Soon, I found out I was free from their calls between before 7:00 a.m. and after 5:00 p.m. And it was

only at that time that I could get out of the hotel to take a stroll outside for some fresh air and purchase some of the needed items such as food and drinks at the nearby convenience store.

Fifteen days of confinement at a hotel was rather strict, but I still enjoyed the fact that I was in Japan. I especially enjoyed the eggs they sold in Japan. The eggs had no strange odor and tasted better than any egg I ever had. I used the hot water kettle in my room to boil the eggs. I also purchased a small rice cooker for cooking rice and heating some food items. I had taken my laptop with me, so I was able to join the ZOOM conference and committee meetings with the people of Hawaii from time to time.

The strict quarantine requirements of Japan were really there to test our vigilance—that's what I came to realize. The date showed the program would end on November 3. They count the day of stay from one day after I checked into the hotel. I also found that my name was wrongly registered on the program and tried to correct it. But there was no way I could communicate with a live person for this surveillance program. It was all through AI (Artificial Intelligence). I just sent my message through a channel. There was not response for my inquiry. My name was registered by one of the agents at the airport and they had misspelled it.

November 3 arrived and I had waited for some message to pop up to inform me of my end of quarantine. I already scheduled my check out from the hotel in the morning regardless of the message for the ending of the program. When I arrived at the airport to travel to the Tokyo area, I checked the My SOS app. The home page of the app had changed, and that kind of indicated to me that I am free to go anywhere in Japan now. So from that point, I did not open up the app.

On November 5, I was able to arrive at the Headquarters Church at Konko Town and stayed overnight at an inn near Gohonbu. I really wanted to go there in person to appreciate the fact that the Wahiawa Church was able to commemorate our 80th Anniversary on March 15, 2020. I could see Konko-Sama VI. I attended the morning procession of Konko Sama, aka: "Odemashi" where Konko-Sama proceeds to the main worship hall with his Hiromae attendants at 3:45 a.m. About 15 people showed up to greet the procession of Konko-Sama. It was the coldest at 5 degrees Celsius. I also joined the morning service that began at 4:00 a.m. which lasted just one hour.

The following day, November 6, I arrived at the Konko Church of Iwatani in Hiroshima and stayed overnight there. My brother, Rev. Seijiro Inagaki serves as the head minister there

with his family. On November 7, the 100th year anniversary of the church was held. Four ministers served at the altar and the Hiromae worship hall was prepared for the service with the chairs spaced out in considerations of the pandemic regulations. The room was filled with about 40 people, all wearing masks. In Japan there were no strict regulations set forth by the government in regards to social distancing. I was really grateful that I could be there in person, regardless of my family's initial rejection of my idea to go to Japan during the pandemic. It was a divinely guided trip for sure.

I moved on to a hotel at Fukuyama for my visit to the Konko Church of Amagi early in the morning to give thanks for being able to hold our church 80th Anniversary. I could meet with the Oyasensei, the Rev. Michiyoshi Yasutake and his wife. They came to our church anniversary at the start of the pandemic—amidst the uncertainty and looming lockdowns. After my visit to Amagi Church, I raced to the train station and got on board the Nozomi Express Shinkansen for the first time at Hakata station, since I had to reach to Tokyo in the evening.

I made a reservation to take my COVID nasal swab PCR test at Narita airport. The regulation was changed to take the test on the day of departure. The airport was almost empty. I just showed my passport and the documentation of my negative PCR test. Thereafter, it was easy to get on board the plane to fly back to Hawaii. I was able to get out of the Honolulu International Airport smoothly.

One thing I noticed throughout the trip in Japan was a cultural difference. The people I met in Japan were all courteous and considerate. The hotel staff, the housekeeping staff, the attendees at the train stations were all very nice. I simply enjoyed my stay in Japan. The customer service displayed by the people in Japan have been trained so well. They literally treat every customer as if they were a VIP. Although, I did witness the train incident on the news when I was in Tokyo at that time—those kinds of incidents are extremely rare. I enjoyed the safe and peaceful environment in Japan.

All the people were wearing masks. I didn't see any exceptions. The Tokyo station, the Sky Tree in Oshigome, crowded commuter trains were full of people. But on reserved trains, the carriage was almost empty.

There has not been an imposition of orders under the corona virus pandemic. The government asks the people to abide by the restrictions and they respond to the situation unanimously. While in America, mandates are forced on people to get them to comply. There are also protests. The difference between Japan and America is obvious. The Japanese people extend their thoughts for others and comply without questioning, while the people in America treasure their own individuality and stand up, speak up and talk back. All in all, my solo trip to Japan during the pandemic has been an amazing experience in which Kami-Sama has guided me every step of the way. As of

December 1st, Japan has stopped all incoming flights due to the Omicron variant. That was close!

Bulletin Board

Church Services for December 2021

- 1 Wed -Monthly Svc for Tenchi Kane No Kami (7:30 pm)
- 5 Sun -Sunday Service (9 am)
- 12 Sun -Monthly Svc for Ikigami Konko Daijin (9 am)
- 19 Sun -49th Mem. Svc for the Late Rev. Haruko Takahashi and Monthly Service (10 am)
*light naorai lunch to follow
- 26 Sun -End of the Year Service (9 am)
- 30 Thr -Mochitsuki from 8 am till finish

January 2022

- 1 Sat -Ganjitsu-sai New Year's Day Service (9 am)
- 2 Sun -No Sunday Service

49th Memorial Service for the Late Rev. Haruko Takahashi

We will hold the annual 49th Memorial Service for the founding minister of Konko Mission of Wahiawa on Sunday, December 19 in conjunction with the regular monthly Memorial Service at 10 a.m. Please join the service in person or through Facebook live streaming. Light naorai lunch will be served.

The Church Doors are Open

We welcome you to make a visit to our church and church services. But please continue to wear your face mask for Covid-19 precautionary measures. You also can make an appointment for your personal visit to church anytime of the day. All services will also be recorded via Facebook Live and uploaded on YouTube as well.

KMH

- The Community Engagement and Outreach Committee initiated the bi-monthly KMH Kyoten study group via Zoom. The main reference book will be "Voice of the Universe." Please join the study session and deepen your understanding about the messages of the Founder.
 - December 8 (Wed at 5 pm)
 - December 22 (Wed at 5 pm)
- Community Engagement and Outreach Committee meeting will be held on Friday, December 17, 2021 at 5 pm (ZOOM)
- Head Ministers Meeting Zoom or in person at Honolulu Church on Sat, 12/11 at 10:30 am

The Konkokyo Non-violence Peace Net-Japan

The organization will hold a live streaming on YouTube the 20th Konkokyo Prayer for Peace Gathering on Friday, December 17, 2021 at 3:30 p.m. through 4:30 p.m. (Hawaii Time)

Home page: <https://konko-nonwar-peace.jimdosite.com>

1. Peace prayer
2. Peace Messages: Rev. Yasuhiro Yano from Hawaii and Rev. Joanne Tolosa from San Francisco will be featured speakers in commemorating the 80th Anniversary of the Pearl Harbor Attack and 20th Anniversary of the 9.11 Terrorist Attacks
3. Closing

Honoring the Mitama Spirits

December

Frederick Michael Conti	12/6/2015
Francisco Bareng	12/12/2017
Hilda Kazuno Yamamoto	12/14/2007
Fumitake Yoshiiwa	12/15/2012
Lillian Tanigawa	12/16/2010
Isamu Iwasa	12/17/1943
Shizuko Takayama	12/21/2006
Rev. Fumio Yasutake	12/23/1995
Rev. Haruko Takahashi	12/24/1972
Hitoyo Higuchi	12/25/1969



If you wish to have a name added to the church Mitama listing or removed, please contact Rev. Yasuhiro Yano.

The Life of the Founder

金光教祖の生涯 瀬戸三喜雄 金光教学研究所 紀要別冊教学叢書 2

The following is an English translation of a book titled, "Konko Kyoso no Shougai" or "The Life of the Founder Konko Daijin" authored by the Rev. Mikio Seto, and was published by Konkokyo Theological Research Center. The publication was made in 1980. There are many biographies about the life of the Founder Konko Daijin. I would like to introduce this article for your reference in your pursuit of faith. An English translation was provided by Rev. Yasuhiro Yano.

No. 12. Page 35 to 38

Changed the name to Bunji

After the construction of the storage gatehouse in 1844, the name was changed to Bunji again from Kunitaro. The name Kunitaro was the choice under the circumstance in which the landlord of the region had the same part of the name "jiro." The name Bunjiro could not be allowed in respect of the landlord. Although the name was changed to Kunitaro, the people in the village community referred to him as Bun-sa. The official documents of the village Head also used the name Bunji from the year 1837. In consideration of the everyday use of the name Bunji, the name was restored eventually. But they avoided to include the part of the name "jiro". The following year, 1845, the third son Nobujiro (changed later as Asakichi and Kaneyoshi) was born. The family became consisted of six members including the adoptive mother and an uncle.

Pilgrimage to the 88 Temples in Shikoku

In 1848, Bunji turned to 33 years old. He joined a pilgrimage tour to the 88 Temples of Shikoku in following the village tradition of erasing out the bad luck of 33 years of old. The

group was made up of five people. They started off the pilgrimage on February 22 and spent about a month for the travel of visiting 88 temples in Shikoku. The age 33 was believed as the ominous year for both men and women in this region. Eighty-eight temple pilgrimage became a popular tradition. They visited 88 temples that were related to the faith practice initiated by Kobo-Daishi. At each temple, they offered plates, inscribed their names and extended their prayers. There were some other popular pilgrim tours to Ise Shrine and the Saigoku (referred to the region from the Kinki to Gifu Prefecture). Those pilgrim tours were referred to as "Date Pilgrimage Tour" and "Eiyou Saigoku Pilgrimage Tour." Those people preferred the tours were somewhat wealthy people who enjoyed sightseeing along with the visitations to the temples and shrines. On the contrary, Shikoku 88 Temple Pilgrimage Tour was nicknamed as "Shokotonashi no Shikoku Travel" or "Unavoidable Travel in Shikoku." They looked down on those people who go on the Shikoku 88 Temples Pilgrimage. The pilgrimage was initiated by those who were truly sincere and pure in pursuit of the faith of Kobo-Daishi. As time passed by, the people who put a burden on their families were forced to go the Shikoku 88 Temple Pilgrimage Tour. The family that had to endure and suffer in hardship in taking care of those burdensome family members tried to expel them from the family to reduce their scarce food supplies. The burdensome family members with incurable illnesses, the elderly people who could not work and those who could not work to earn an income were all driven out of the family. This cruel custom was called "*kuchi berashi*." It was literally meant to cut down the mouths of people to feed. Some of those who joined the pilgrimage in Shikoku had to rely on others for food and shelters. Some of them died during their travel. The pilgrimage in Shikoku 88 Temples was labeled as the "Waste basket of useless people in the society."

One of the reasons why Bunji joined the pilgrimage tour was to dispel the so-called "bad luck" associated with turning 33 years of age. In the village community, when one of the family members was at the age of "yakudoshi" or the age of calamity, they invited their relatives and held a party of eating and drinking so that the people who joined the party would share some of the burdens and help the people at "yakudoshi." Bunji thought differently from others. Holding parties for yakudoshi forces the others to spend extra and the family members also had to spend extra money. There were no benefits for the people involved in the party by just eating and drinking. Bunji asked the family members to give money to him instead of spending it for drinking and eating and wanted to make a pilgrimage to the 88 Temples in Shikoku instead. Bunji's expressed thought sounded noble and brave enough to join the pilgrimage to Shikoku. But the real intent of Bunji was in search of how well he could dispel the expected calamity. He was motivated to make a decision based on his ethical and

religiously inclined self discipline. Bunji's attitude could be identical in the way he made the tour of the pilgrimage. Many people refrained from making the extra effort to visit the remotely located and hard to reach temples and just mimicked the gesture of praying from afar. But Bunji sincerely and meticulously visited each and every temple and offered prayers. Bunji directly experienced some signs of divine responses during the travel. He told other people that he would be back to the village if he had witnessed divine signs of getting blessed. He also said if he did not get any signs of getting blessed, he shall not return home. In accordance with the story, Bunji may have had some vivid encounters of getting blessed through divine work. Bunji also made the remark, "Those who make the pilgrimage could get blessed quickly, at the same time there are some people who get punishments quickly." Bunji might have witnessed the people who have received reward or punishment during the pilgrimage tour with others. He also made a visit to the legendary house of the Village Head that was known as "To Tatezu no Shoya" or the house of the Village Head House that had not closed the doors. That Village Head house was a legendary spot being manifested the working of the religious faith of Kobo-Daishi. Through the virtuous power of Kobo-Daishi, the house was never broken with thieves, no need for mosquito nets during the summer. The presence of the house worked as proof of getting blessed through their belief in Kobo-Daishi. Later on Bunji also followed the legendary episode of the Village Head house, and tried to open the gate door all the time and did not use the mosquito net.

Bunji experienced both the sacred world as well as the secular world throughout the pilgrimage tour. He could have recited the song in praise of the Buddha, reflected on his life in the past, prayed for his future and prayed for the deceased family members, and returned home on March 26.

When Bunji reached the age of 34, in September of that year, his first daughter was born. She was named Chise. The following year, in June, 9-month old child became afflicted with a serious illness. He asked two doctors in the village to treat her, the family relatives and the faith community people also responded to pray for her recovery. But in just a half day of suffering, she passed away. Bunji pondered about the sudden death of his daughter. Two of his children passed away soon after the construction of the gate-house. He felt a ray of hope after he joined the pilgrimage and his heart was inclined toward deities. Because of the sadness he experienced through the loss of two children, Bunji experienced a deep sadness again. But those unavoidable deaths in the family directed Bunji to the issues of sincerity and diligence and the way of getting engaged in pursuit of faith. Bunji was driven to the edge of his own identity. In 1849, Bunji turned to 36 years old. In April of that year, his fourth son Mohei (later changed to Ishinojo and Hagio) was born.

Japan trip Snap-shots



The Konkokyo Headquarters daily 4 am prayer



The Konkokyo Headquarters from outside



The Konko Church of Iwatani in Hiroshima



The Konko Church of Amagi in Fukuoka