



A blessed life and death

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Hawaii recently joined the six other states that legalized the medically assisted dignified death this year. The first time I was exposed to the idea of a doctor assisted suicide bill was when I attended an interfaith community meeting held over 10 years ago. We exchanged thoughts over the bill. My spontaneous response was the remembrance of the legendary episode which took place at the Konko Church of Amagi in Fukuoka. My daughter, Edna also mentions about it in her Children's Newsletter. While I was under spiritual training at the church over 40 years ago, I learned about an inspiring episode that took place while the founding minister of the church, the late Rev. Matsutaro Yasutake was still alive. One day in autumn, one of the student ministers were sweeping the church yard in the morning. It was the season for the leaves of the giant ginkgo trees in the yard to turn yellow and fall to the ground and created a yellow carpet effect around the trees. The student minister thought it would be practical to help the leaves to fall down by swinging the bamboo sweeper to hit the branches so he didn't have to sweep the ground that much the following day. The Head Minister happened to witness the scene and responded to the situation. He chided the student minister to stop shaking the branches to forcefully make the leaves fall to the ground. He said to let the leaves fall down naturally.

I felt distinctly that the episode of the ginkgo leaves could be related to the doctor-assisted suicide practice. There can be so many different manners how we depart from our physical existence ever since we are conceived in the womb of our mother. In the Konko faith, we perceive that the moment of conception is the time when we are given a "Wakemitama" or the soul seed of Kami is designated to the body. Some of them will die prematurely before being born into this world through miscarriages, abortions and any other causes. Even after we are born, we are susceptible to many forms of termination of life through encountering involuntary causes of death, such as infanticide, illnesses, accidents, homicides, terror attacks, domestic abuses and so forth.

Some people commit suicide. This is a voluntary killing of not only the physical bodies, but the killing of the

"Wakemitama," or the soul given by Kami. This can be a grave offense against Kami. The Founder related to Mitsujiro Sato, "Though people say that they do not kill others, they do so with their hearts. This is a grave offense. They think killing someone means to shoot with a gun or to stab with a sword, but this is only physical, and the obvious. People often kill with their hearts, an offense invisible to the eye. Kami-Sama's heart cannot bear such offenses. When one kills physically, the government punishes. When one kills with his heart, Kami-Sama punishes," said Konko-Sama. Explaining how one kills with his heart, he said, 'Saying that a person's illness is so serious that it cannot be cured, is killing with one's heart. You really don't know if the sick person can be cured or not. People also say that so-and-so should die. These people are all killing with their hearts. They should instead pray to Kami-Sama so the people they are killing will reform their hearts'" (II Sato Mitsujiro 27).

The physician-assisted suicide is a controlled killing of a person who also wishes to control his own death in his preference, namely a dignified death. The societies in the world have been moving in that direction and it would be difficult to change the movement as the human civilization would constantly evolve.

Many people might have experienced a practice run of physician-assisted suicide when we are temporarily put to sleep before we go under the knife for surgeries. Two years ago, when I removed my gallbladder, in half a year, I was put to sleep six times for the procedures due to a few complications. Jokingly I say I had a near death experience six times at that occasion. If we are not assured of our revival from the anesthesia procedure, we could die involuntarily. Only because we believe we would wake up from anesthesia, we feel less anxious. I felt no pains, no worries when I was put to sleep. When I woke up from the sleep, each time I experienced a different type of condition similar to over-drinking or a hangover. But if you think about it, every time someone is put to sleep for a procedure, there is always a risk that they may not wake up if things go wrong. The physician-assisted suicide could be painless and peaceful if all the people involved reassured the patient, and all family and friends are supportive of their decision.

The way to terminate our own lives through medically assisted suicide is a foreign manner to depart from our physical body in the Konko faith community. The Founder always encouraged the ways to continue to live

under any circumstances. The Founder related to Hachitaro Shimamura, “Don’t think about dying. Think about living. When you die, you will only return to the ground.” One Konko minister, the Rev. Takayuki Kunito, the Head Minister of Konko Church of Yao in Osaka has been advocating the concept of “Kami-agari” that means divinely blessed departure from physical existence. Kami-Sama foretells the date of departure to those believers who live the faith in the same manner as the Founder Konko Daijin lived. Keishun Goka went to see the Founder in 1876, seven years before his passing. At that time, the Founder related to Hachiemon discreetly, “There are the lunar calendar and the solar calendar. There will be a time when the 9th and 10th day of both calendars will fall on the same day. On that day, I will leave this world” (II Goka Keishun 21). The Founder got a divine message about his departure. On August 21, 1883, Kami gave a message for his departure, “For the sake of all people and to save those who give Me requests, I shall sacrifice you” (Oshirasegoko Oboecho27-15). As has been informed by Kami, the Founder departed from his physical existence on October 10, 1883. The Rev. Kunito referred to this divinely blessed departure as “Kami-agari.” He says that any believer who follow the teachings of the Founder would be able to attain such a peaceful blessed departure from this physical existence.

Soon after I started my missionary work with my wife at the Konko Mission of Wahiawa over 40 years ago, I received a magazine from the Konkokyo Headquarters. The book of the magazine was “Tokushin.” In the book, I found an interesting episode about the founding minister of Konko Church of Soeda in Fukuoka, the late Rev. Kitaro Nakamura. One day, he was informed of the day of his passing through a divine message. He prepared his own funeral pastoral messages to be read for his own funeral service. He summoned his family members and informed them of his departure. The message had left a deep impression in my heart, and I was amazed that there could be such a blessed way to depart through the practice of the Konko faith. I wish to attain such a life in blessedness. I wish to witness the emergence of such believers one after another in the Konko faith communities and in the society we belong.

I have a conviction that we could live and die in blessedness through the practice of faith rather than depending on physician-assisted suicide. In a sense, the manner we depart could be the reflection of how we lived. The message may sound cruel to people who have experienced unreasonable deaths. But it would be worthwhile if we could live and die in blessedness as demonstrated by the Founder Konko Daijin and some of the Konko believers.

Konko-Sama Says . . .

Although people live between heaven and earth, they are unaware of Kami’s blessings. Shrines, temples, and houses all stand on Kami’s land. Without realizing this, people consult the Days and Directions and are disrespectful to Kami. They suffer hardships due to these offenses. Tenchi Kane no Kami has sent Ikigami Konko Daijin to provide blessings and teachings so that mankind may prosper. Kami is Kami because of man, and man is man because of Kami. Both are fulfilled through this mutual relationship (Konko Kyoso Gorikai No. 3 in Kyoten Gorikai III).

Although Kami cannot be seen, you are constantly walking within and through the midst of Kami. Even while fertilizing a field or walking along a path, you are in Tenchi Kane No Kami’s hiromae. The whole world is Tenchi Kane No Kami’s hiromae (III Konko Kyoso Gorikai 6).

Bulletin Board

Monthly Services for May 2018

- 1 Tue -Monthly Svc for Tenchi Kane No Kami (7:30 pm)
- 6 Sun -Sunday Service (9 am)
-Wailuku Church Grand Service (11 am)
- 13 Sun -Monthly Svc for Ikigami Konko Daijin (6:30 pm)
-Hilo Church Grand Service (11 am)
- 20 Sun -Monthly Memorial Service (9 am)
- 27 Sun -Sunday Service (9 am)
- 28 Mon -Memorial Day visit to Punchbowl (8 am)

June 2018

- 1 Fri -Monthly Svc for Tenchi Kane No Kami (7:30 pm)

Hawaii Conference of Religions for Peace

The regular monthly meeting will be held on Monday, May 21, 2018 at Gedatsu Church at 1:30 p.m.

Volunteer Activity

The regular monthly visit to the Wahiawa General Hospital Long-Term Care Facility will be made on Friday, May 11, 2018 at 10:00 a.m.

8th Summer Ohana Camp

The 8th Summer Ohana Camp organized by Konko Mission of Wahiawa will be held on July 7 & 8 (Saturday & Sunday) at HR Camp Erdman, Mokuleia. This year’s theme is “Ancestors.” The Rev. Dr. Todd Zenji Takahashi, associate minister of Konko Mission of Honolulu will make a presentation. The first 16 people who will stay overnight will be accepted. The registration fees: \$20 for ages over 19, \$10 for 5-18, free for 4 and under. If you are interested as a participant for the workshop on Ancestors, special arrangements will be made. The deadline for the registration is

Friday, June 1, 2018. The registration form is available at church. Thank you very much for your support for the fund-raising through Zippy's. The tickets were all sold out. The proceeds will be deposited to the Educational Fund.

Memorial Day Visit to Punchbowl and Mililani Cemetery

As has been initiated by the first generation of local ministers, we will continue to make a courtesy visit to the National Cemetery of the Pacific at Punchbowl. We will make a visit to over 30 grave sites of the people connected to the Konko faith at the cemetery and offer a prayer in appreciation of their dedication to our country, to the Konko faith communities in Hawaii. We will meet at the Honolulu Church at 8:00 am and visit the site. We will also make a visit to the Mililani Memorial Park and visit the graves of the people who have been believers at the Wahiawa Konko Mission.

Honoring the Mitama Spirits

May

Toshiko Yogo	5/2/2010
Kiyoka Takahashi	5/5/1999
Avelino Roldan	5/7/2017
Rev. Masahiko Yoshino	5/9/2013
Saichi Eguchi	5/9/1997
Rev. Hidejiro Hosaka	5/16/1972
Fernie Furusho	5/26/2001
Hideo Fujimoto	5/26/2005
Hiroshi Katsura	5/26/1959
Takahiko Yano	5/28/2016

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

Insight into the teachings in “Tenchi wa Kataru” or “Voice of the Universe”

The following are excerpts of series of an English translation of “Tenchi wa Kataru—Kanwa-shu” or “Compilation of Insight into the teachings in the Voice of the Universe” which contains 400 selected teachings from the original “Konkokyo Kyoten” or the “Konkokyo Scriptures.” Three authors, namely, the Revs. Mikio Seto, Yasushi Hata and Matsutarō Kōsaka contributed the insightful articles. The translation is provided by Yasuhiro Yano. (Reference pages 341,342 and 343)

No. 341: When doing construction work, it is unnecessary to consult the Days and Directions. Even on an “auspicious” day it may rain and make lifting heavy lumber difficult, causing you to worry. Therefore, rely on Kami and let any day be auspicious to free yourself from worry.

(II Shiota Mohachi 3 Kyoten page 585)

Let any day auspicious

In the Konko faith tradition, we do not have any restrictions on the Days and Directions. But this does not mean we could behave recklessly in ignoring the commonly practice traditions in the society. If we act in such a manner, we would not be called Konko believers.

The reason why we do not follow the ordinary observances of the Days and Directions is based on the religious conviction that we try to show our gratitude to all days in appreciation of blessings between Heaven and Earth and try to live accordingly. Everybody may show gratitude for a fine sunny day. But even the rain can be a blessing. One of our church believers expressed for the rainy day by saying, “Thank you very much for the blessed rainfall.”

The same could be said to the Directions. A Konko believer would never take light of the tradition of observance of the Directions. The Founder admonished the people who tried to avoid the presence of the fearful deity through the observance of the Days and Directions. He taught the believers that all directions are governed by Kami and take care of the earth accordingly. The traditional Shinto-oriented “jichinsai” or ground-breaking ceremony is held in such a manner to purify the construction site and pacify the deity that governs the ground. But the Konko-oriented “jichinsai” or ground-breaking ceremony is based on the perception that the entire earth is the manifestation of the virtuous work of Tenchi Kane No Kami. There would be no space on the ground that does not belong to Tenchi Kane No Kami. Therefore, we try to extend our wholehearted gratitude to Tenchi Kane No Kami and ask permission for the use of the construction site through the ceremony.

Those Konko believers who live the faith in acknowledgment of the virtuous nature of the Days and Directions in gratitude, regard every day as a blessed day and even the bad-luck days could be turned into a good day.

We can enjoy a peaceful life if we live in keeping Tenchi Kane No Kami centered in our daily livings and by extending gratitude to each and every day in appreciation of the virtuous work of Tenchi Kane No Kami.

No. 342: If you have any doubt, try and build your house in the *kimon* (Demon’s Gate) direction. If I say that Kami won’t punish, He won’t. Let go of all fears. You will receive divine blessings. *(I Ichimura Mitsugoro 1-40-3 Kyoten page 212)*

Let go of all fears

The Founder learned to overcome the superstitious tradition of the Days and Directions and lived the faith to influence countless numbers of people. But for ordinary people can hardly be liberated from the persistent binding nature of old traditions. There could be many of those people who once listened to the Founder, yet adhered to the restrictive traditions prevailed in that given circumstance.

The Founder related to Ginzo Ishihara, “People don’t construct houses facing the northeast because they say it is the Demon’s Gate. But if they pray to Kami-Sama first, they can even build a hundred-unit longhouse in that direction” (*II Ishihara Ginzo 4*).

To Mitsugoro Ishihara, the Founder firmly stated, “If you have any doubt, try and build your house in the *kimon* (Demon’s Gate) direction. If I say that Kami won’t punish, He won’t. Let go of all fears. You will receive divine blessings.” To practice faith means to believe in the message of the Founder. If we try to depend on the Founder or test Kami, we are not practicing faith. If we do not develop a solid belief in the message given by the Founder, we will always feel insecure. The Founder identified the insecure condition of Mitsugoro and helped him to get rid of the fear by saying, “Let go of all fears.”

Mitsugoro responded to the Founder and got rid of fears he held and got blessed. At the closing of the original message, Mitsugoro expressed his awe, “Kami’s virtue is boundless.”

We could visualize the Founder’s resolved attitude when he shared the message to Mitsugoro.

No. 343: When selecting a spouse, do not be concerned about superficial qualities, but be sure of the sincerity of the heart. (*III Shinkun 2-36 Kyoten page 776*)

Identify the sincerity of the heart in getting married

As for finding prospective marriage partners, it is said people should be extremely cautious in identifying good compatibilities of partners for life. Even popular weekly magazines always feature the pages of horoscopes and fortune-telling to attract attentions of young readers. Some couples blindly believe in the horoscopes and end up in getting married only because the horoscope showed they are a good match.

One of the common practices of horoscopes is based on the theory of the five elements of Onmyodo tradition. They analyze the submitted birth day data of the couple. They say they can identify the personal elements of the couple and find out if they could be a good match for marriage or not. Strangely enough, even those couples who have enjoyed being together end their relationships only because the fortune teller pronounced their relationship is not a good match for marriage.

The Founder firmly denied those persisting social traditions. Instead, the Founder expressed, “When selecting a spouse, do not be concerned about superficial qualities, but be sure of the sincerity of the heart.” One of the important elements of getting engaged in the practice of faith is to direct our true and sincere hearts towards Kami. It is this pure and sincere heart that can reach Kami. The same could be said for prospective marriage partners who would extend their pure and sincere hearts to each other.

Here is an interesting episode shared by one of the believers. A woman raised her only son alone. As her son reached maturity, she had no one she could consult with regarding a prospective

marriage partner for her son. As a result, she chose to find the answer through fortune-telling. She consulted with several fortune-tellers. She was informed of many results yielded through meticulous fortune telling formulas. She became confused by the messages given by fortune tellers. She felt anxiety over the future life of her son who worked hard to get academic achievements. She also wondered what would be the meaning of her contribution in bringing up her son. In confusion, she was guided to visit a Konko church in search of answers.

I introduced the quoted message to her, “When selecting a spouse, do not be concerned about superficial qualities, but be sure of the sincerity of the heart.” She learned to appreciate the message and felt relieved and got engaged in the practice of faith thereafter.



Mochitsuki at Leeward Community College

On April 26, 2018, we have been requested to pound two batches of mochi at the University of Hawaii—Leeward Community College through connections with Nicholas Furusho. 2 Japanese language classes participated in this traditional Japanese cultural experience.

