



KONKO MISSION BULLETIN

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Evolving nature of faith belief

By Yasuhiro Yano
Head Minister

After I have posted my speech script for the newsletter in the past, I have yet tried to further my thoughts about the subject of “hontoo no shinja” or true Konko believers.

To Haruo Tsugawa, Konko-Sama related, “When practicing faith, there are more blessings which cannot be seen than those which can be seen. The blessings you unknowingly receive number more than the blessings you knowingly receive. If you think about it, you will come to realize the many divine blessings that you have received. If you can do this, you are a true believer” (Gorikai II Tsugawa Haruo 14).

Actually, Konko-Sama provided a condition for the teaching. He stated that when we reflect on our past and realize the blessed nature of the eventualities we have encountered in life, it affirms the progression of our faith and involvement. If we cease to practice faith, there may not be active reflection of the heart that can identify the blessed nature of the eventualities in life.

If we cease to practice the faith, it marks the end of growth as a Konko believer. Only those who continue to practice may be able to identify the blessed nature of the encounters in life as has been stated in the teaching.

There was a church member once who came to attend the service the other day and credited his mother for the blessings he continues to enjoy. He said “Okaasan ga itsumo Konko-Sama Konko-Sama to itteita” or his mother always said Konko-Sama, Konko-Sama in her life, even for minor elements in her daily living. She passed away years ago. If he had not continued involvement in the practice of faith, his appreciation for his mother for the blessings he now enjoys as a Konko believer may not have existed. This can be an ideal form of reflection of the past involvement in the practice of faith. The second generational believer can identify blessings in life that could be attributable to his or her parents.

In my case, my grandfather, Tosuke Yano was initiated into the practice of the Konko faith. His son, my father used to credit his father for the introduction of the Konko faith tradition in the family for the well being of the family members and the prosperous number of descendants that have emerged. In reflection of the past, my father attributed the blessings he enjoyed through the practice of faith through the initiation of the faith by his father. And I credit my grandfather and my father for the generational involvement in the practice of the Konko faith. This is also an application of the format of reflecting the past, I can identify the blessings enjoyed. I feel thankful for the contributions of my parents and grandparents who preserved the Konkokyo tradition in the family.

If my father terminated his engagement in the practice of the faith, there would be no such opportunities of reflecting the past and identifying the blessings received.

Reflecting the past would serve to identify the blessed nature of the eventualities in life. Even at the very moment of an unfortunate encounter, we may have not be aware of the divine interventions encountered at the moment. The eventualities in life that can affect our personal lives could be a difficult situation we may have to deal with in distress, such as relationship issues in the family, at the work place, in the communities we belong to, financial issues, accidents, illness and any other unfortunate eventualities in life. But those seemingly dark moments in life can turn out to be blessings through continuous faith practice.

Some believers terminate their ties with the religion, saying that there were no blessings. They might have done away with the potential enjoyment of blessings. This can be sad both to Kami-Sama and for the people who terminate their engagement in the practice of faith.

Reflection of the past is based on an assumption that our faith will grow well enough to be able to identify the blessed nature of our past through advanced spiritual perspectives.

I believe it is very important to continue to exercise our heart in identifying blessed elements in life day to day, month to month, year after year, and generation after generation.

The Rev. Hidejiro Hosaka of Konko Church of Kawanoishi, my native church in Ehime used to say that if a believer cannot fully understand the true nature of the Konkokyo faith tradition, he would like to witness the next generational family members develop a much better understanding about the Konko faith tradition. If the second generation family members are not able to appreciate the true nature of the Konko faith, he would expect the third generation of the family members to be able to develop a full appreciation of the Konko faith tradition. These days, I begin to truly understand the meaning behind Rev. Hosaka's message. I would like to witness the growth of the faith in the family from generation to generation. That would be the meaning of "Hontoo no Shinja" or true believers.

Bulletin Board

Church Services for February

- 1 Mon -Monthly Service for Tenchi Kane no Kami
7:30 p.m..
- 7 Sun -Sunday Service 9:00 a.m.
- 14 Sun -Monthly Service for Ikigami Konko Daijin,
9:00 a.m.
- 21 Sun -Monthly Memorial Service 9:00 a.m.
- 28 Sun -Sunday Service 9:00 a.m.

70-Day Devotional

In commemoration of the 70th Anniversary of Konko Mission of Wahiawa, we will be observing the 70-day devotional from January 4 through March 14, 2010. This is an act of extending our thanks for the continued operation of the church in the last 70 years, through many contributing elements, such as the founding minister, the parental church support, the overall faith community support, the Divine-Mediation perpetuated by the Spiritual Head at the Headquarters Church, the church members and so forth. Let us try to extend our prayers of thanks by attending church and help influence other people toward a life of salvation. If we attend church once a year, please try to increase the number of attendance to two or three times a year. If we attend once a month, try to attend two or three times more. If we attend weekly, try making it daily. We will be holding the regular daily prayer at 5:30 a.m. 9:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m.

Volunteer Activity at Wahiawa General Hospital Long-Term Care Facility

We will make a regular monthly visit to the Wahiawa General Hospital on Friday, February 12 by means of offering entertainment for the people cared for in the facility from 10:00 a.m.

Wahiawa Church 70th Anniversary Committee Mtg.

The regular 70th Anniversary Committee meeting will be held after the monthly service on Sunday, February 7 after the Sunday Service. Details about the program will be discussed at this crucial meeting.

HCRP Meeting

The regular HCRP or Hawaii Conference of Religions for Peace meeting will be held at the Church of Perfect Liberty on Monday, February 22, 2010 at 1:30 p.m.

Beginning this year, the Church Bulletin will be announcing the names of the Mitama Spirits who are honored at Wahiawa Church during the bi-annual Memorial Services.

Honoring the Mitama Spirits for January

Ms. Umi Yasuyo 2/3/65
Mr. Ichiro Yano 2/5/06
Mr. Dennis Fujio Tamashiro 2/6/98
Mr. Thomas Tadashi Takahashi 2/9/05
Mr. Yoshiyuki Momotomi 2/10/03
Mr. Jiro Oho 2/14/37
Ms. Elisa Alabarran 2/20/77
Ms. Marilyn Olsen 2/22/09
Ms. Suetsuki Toyofuku 2/24/95

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

Kyoso-Sama Volume 2 (#10)

The following is the tenth of the series of the English translated excerpts from the second of the two volumes of "Kyoso-Sama" a biography of the Founder of the Konkokyo Religion, authored by the Reverend Shinsei Konko for young readers. The publication is a compilation of articles in series featured in the monthly publication, "Wakaba" or "Young Leaves" issued by the Administrative Office of the Konkokyo Youth Organization. The first article was published in 1950. Translation by the Rev. Yasuhiro Yano. (Reference to "Kyoso-Sama Volume 2" pages 90-100)

Rev. Jiroshiro Kataoka

Ever since the Rev. Kataoka became involved in the practice of the faith, he made a tradition of monthly pilgrimage to see Konko-Sama at Otani on foot for the distance of approximately 50 kilometers. On New Year's day, Konko-Sama informed to Jiroshiro Kataoka, "I was informed by Kami, 'This year, Konko Daijin will suffer from a critical disease' (III Naiden 13-1). You have gained much divine virtue through your extended monthly pilgrimage. Please continue to attend church and listen to me." In responding to the message, the Rev. Kataoka doubled his attendance to church for twice a month thereafter.

When the Rev. Kataoka met Konko-Sama on July 1, Konko-Sama recommended him to undergo 100-day "shugyo" training. During the period of the 100-day training, Konko-Sama recommended him by saying, "Please come to church as often as you can afford." Konko-Sama also told him, "There is so much I have to teach you." The Rev. Kataoka engaged in the intensified training at his own church at Saizaki, and also went to see Konko-Sama at Otani frequently.

On October 10, upon the completion of the 100-day training, the Rev. Kataoka intended to see Konko-Sama at Otani and wished to extend his thanks to him. But an eventuality prevented him from doing so. He extended his thanks to Kami at his church in Saizaki. He leaned back on the post in the room and extended his thought, "As of today, I have enabled to complete the 100-day training. Thank you very much." When he raised his head, his lips involuntarily uttered a peculiar message, "Konko, 'Kami agari' or Konko Daijin passed away."

Surprised at the unexpected and crucial message, the Rev. Kataoka shared his concerns with his family members and was ready to leave for Otani. But again, an inevitable development prevented him from doing so. He extended his prayer before the altar and inquired Kami about the grave message. In responding to his prayer, he heard a message, "You don't have to come today. Make a visit on the 14th of the month. We will meet you at the grave site . . ."

In respect of the divine instruction, the Rev. Kataoka made a pilgrimage to Otani on October 14, which was one day after the funeral service of Konko-Sama. When he arrived at the worship hall, no one was present. Konko-Sama, who always welcomed his warmest welcome to him just like his own son, was no longer there. Only the desk Konko-Sama used was there. The Rev. Kataoka was overwhelmed with a deep sense of loss and shed tears.

The Rev. Kataoka visited the grave site in the hill situated in the back of the church building. He sat down in front of the grave and extended his prayer, "I might be late to greet you in this manner. But I've come to extend my sincere thoughts for you." The Rev. Kataoka felt the mound of soil built up on the grave moving upward for no apparent external forces. He interpreted the unusual phenomenon as a response from Konko-Sama that his sincere thoughts forwarded was accepted.

Rev. Yonezo Akiyama

The Rev. Yonezo Akiyama, who served in Okayama, also received a divine message about the passing of Konko-Sama.

Astounded by the sad notification, he shared the message with other family members. His father, Jinkichi, fervently denied the message by saying, “How dare you ever tell such an irreverence. Ikigami-Sama (Konko-Sama) would never die. How disrespectful can you be.” The younger brother Yonezo-sensei, also responded negatively by saying, “I understand you, but (Konko-Sama) is an ikigami,” and disregarded the message. But later on, upon his acknowledgment of the fact, he became defeated by his own thoughtlessness.

There were many believers who responded to their own intuition and were surprised in finding out the fact of Konko-Sama's passing in one way or another. Some other people were surprised at the presence of a large earthen bin used as a casket in the premise and learned about the passing of Konko-Sama. In regard to the passing of Konko-Sama, some unusual phenomena were also witnessed.

Preparation for the funeral service for Konko-Sama

On October 10, when Konko-Sama passed away, messengers were sent out to the Rev. Takahashi at Rokujoin and the Rev. Norio Sato at Goryo (Geibi). Chuzaburo Furukawa acted as a messenger, and informed of the passing of Konko-Sama to the Rev. Norio Sato at Goryo. He related to the Rev. Sato, “Konko-Sama passed away this morning. Please take care of the funeral matters.” Another messenger was sent to Nishiroku. In responding to the urgent situation, the Rev. Sato promptly responded to leave for Otani with the messenger.

When the Rev. Sato arrived at Otani, the Rev. Tokichi Takahashi of Rokujoin was already there. Along with many other believers, they discussed and decided assigned roles, such as Chief Officiating Minister and many other roles for the management of the funeral functions. Before the passing of Konko-Sama, he wrote down an instruction in writing to his family members that his funeral service shall be observed on October 13, after the annual observance of Kamo Shrine, which was the village community shrine for Otani. The service days for the shrine was held in two days on October 11th and October 12th.

The festivity on October 11 was held in the evening. They enjoyed carrying a boat-shaped float and enjoyed singing out loud. The disguised costume figures of lions and demons also appeared in the crowd. Rows of lit lanterns were placed along the river banks and the main road leading to the shrine. The villagers, especially, young girls and children dressed up in fine clothes enjoyed strolling around. There were some disturbing drunken people among the crowd. Contrary to the festive mood of the whole village, the scene at the Konko-Sama's worship hall was so quiet. Only the big earthen bin prepared as a casket was placed at the corner of the room.

For the scheduled funeral service on October 13, they were kept busy for the preparations. All the funeral services in the village in the past was conducted in accordance with the Buddhist tradition. But this time, most of the service elements were different from the traditions they had, such as the ceremonial robes and funeral musical presentations. They didn't have precedents for the main prayer composition to be delivered for the deceased. But they managed to prepare them any way.

As for the main prayer composition, the Rev. Norio Sato, who once returned back to Goryo in the afternoon of October 11, asked his academic teacher, Masayoshi Kurosaka to draft the main prayer composition. Kurosaka-sensei was a scholar of Kokugaku which studies unique Japanese traditions. Kurosaka-sensei made a draft of the composition and finalized it in a formal manner with brush calligraphy. The clock showed past midnight.

They asked four musicians, headed by Ikeda from Ooe in Ibara City in Okayama Prefecture for the musical presentation. They wore “Hitatare” and “Kariginu” outfits which were exclusively used by the samurais and Shinto priests.

The Main Prayer Composition

The funeral service for Konko-Sama was conducted in such an awkward manner. None of the people involved had any expertise about the totally new way of conducting a funeral service which had no precedents. They were only familiar with the Buddhist-oriented funeral services. It was almost impossible to yield distinctive features only particular to the Konko tradition. Even the composition of the main prayer was drafted by a non-Konko believer. Distinctive Konko-oriented features in the main prayer were unidentifiable. The sole consolation was that the funeral service was conducted by the concerted efforts of all those believers who did their best in good faith. Therefore, the Rev. Norio Sato, who officiated the service expressed his thoughts in regret, “When I re-examined the main prayer composition for the funeral service, it was apparent that much more could have been done much to improve it. But at that particular stage, there were few available reference resources other than the Buddhist-oriented functions. **And there were few people who actually**

studied those hard-to-get materials.” More than 10 years has passed since the beginning of the Meiji Era, not only myself, but even Kurosaka-sensei also have never experienced the service held in such a new manner. Because of the limited available reference materials, I don't think the composition of the main prayer demonstrated deep thoughts and considerations and virtuous personality of the Founder at all. I really feel regret and feel ashamed of myself.”

Preparedness demonstrated by the Founder

Konko-Sama always said, “Don't be concerned with my body or form. When I die, you may wrap my body with straw and drop it into the river or cremate it. But since social convention may prevent you from doing so, you may give a dignified funeral worthy of a kami. Then follow the sacred lanterns to my burial place. Don't call many people when burying my body. Respect my mitama spirit” (II Sato Norio 13).

In respect of the the expressed thought of Konko-Sama, all those people who got involved in the performance of the funeral service followed the expressed thought of Konko-Sama. No public announcement of the passing of Konko-Sama was made to the believers of the faith community. Only closely related people showed up for the service.

As for the location of his own grave site, Konko-Sama had already chosen a designated place for his own grave by saying, “My grandchild guide me through the cane I hold on.” The grave site was the very place where his grandson Sakuramaru, who died in 1881, was buried. The site was in the land parcel located in Yuuzakiyama hill. The land was used for cultivation of shallots.

In this manner, Konko-Sama provided overall instructions for his own death, about the roles of the believers; and the way the funeral service shall be carried out.

The Funeral Service

October 13, the day for the observance of Konko-Sama's funeral service arrived. The overall operation of the funeral program was managed by Komajiro Fujii, former chief of the “Gonin-gumi.” In respect of the local tradition, the family members of the deceased were not directly involved in the operation of the funeral program. The neighbors and people who belonged to “Ko-uchi” local community group took care of the functions for the visitors. They were kept busy in preparation of foods to be served to the visitors. In accordance with the record kept by Konko Shijin, it showed that they used a lot of rice. “Ko” can be likened to a local town community group of today. They extended mutual support and help for each other. “Ko-uchi” referred to the members of the community group.

The dead body of Konko-Sama was placed in an “abura-game” which was a large earthen bin, and the bin was placed on a hexagonal wooden casket holder, which was shaped to mimic the hexagonal tatami-mat Konko-Sama used for his daily prayer. A carpenter named Tomigoro Takai made the wooden casket holder.

The wooden casket holder was placed on the left side of the worship hall facing the altar, where the regular Mitama altar is situated. The place was used as a closet which was covered with a sliding wooden panel. A sheet of cloth called “Kanreisha” was placed in front of the wooden panel for a decoration.

The funeral service was to begin at 2:00 p.m. on October 13. Heavy rain from the day before continued on to the following morning of October 13. The four musicians could not make it on time due to the bad weather in which they had to travel on foot the distance of approximately 20 kilometers. The scheduled time of 2:00 p.m. arrived, but the musicians did not show up. They showed some tolerance to the situation and said, “Lets wait for their arrival for a while.” Ten minutes passed. Another ten minutes passed. After half an hour late, there was no sign of the musicians. They became frustrated and began to complain, “They have delayed more than half an hour. They should have arrived already.” One person jokingly expressed, “While Konko-Sama was alive, whatever he said ended up exactly as he said. And we all enjoyed blessings. There was not a single exception for the accuracy. But it seems like his own funeral service cannot start on time and the rest of the procedures, such as funeral processions would also be affected.”

Wife of Konko-Sama, Isshi Daijin also became concerned and said, “I don't care for the musical performance. Please start the funeral service now. I don't want the 'Ko' community members in trouble.”

All of the funeral service functions were handled by the “Ko” community people. They would encounter troubles if the service became delayed. She was much concerned about the negative consequences the delayed service would result. In consideration of the circumstance, they started the service at some time after 3:00 p.m.

(To be continued.)