

Annual Spring Memorial 2021

Sermon given at Konkko Church of Chicago March 7, 2021

Good afternoon, everyone! Thank you very much for attending the 2021 annual Spring Memorial Service of the Konkko Church of Chicago. I hope you are all in good health & excellent spirits.

Konkokyo has annual Memorial services twice a year, in spring & in autumn. They always remind me of our mortality & get me thinking about the next world. Every human being dies. No one can escape from it. The more clearly, we can understand our fate, the more we cannot help but consider what is most important in our life, and how we might live a more meaningful life during our limited lifetime.

Our founder taught us, "When people die, they are reunited with Kami. The body dies, but the soul keeps on living. The body, which was taken from Earth will return to Earth. And the spirit, which was bestowed by Heaven, returns to Heaven. Dying is when your body and soul separate."

As he has taught: our soul, which is bestowed by Kami at birth, keeps on living after we die. Therefore, those who practice faith, those who polish the gem of the heart, they will not need to fear death, but instead can enter the next world with gratitude.

I would like to talk about the importance of the memorial service. Our founder taught, "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."

I now cannot help but realize the importance of *respecting the mitama spirit*. On Dec. 22, 2010 (about ten years ago), I received a phone call from a company who asked me to conduct the funeral service for an employee, Yukihiro Haniwa. He had fallen from the roof of the factory and died. He had been clearing the snow off the roof. The fall had killed him. I performed his funeral service there with his wife and some coworkers attending.

Since then, I have prayed for his mitama spirit everyday in front of the Mitama altar at our church. And with the enthusiastic recommendation of my wife, Kanako, we have conducted an annual memorial for him on that day every year. Then, something surprising happened.

We feel our sincerity has recently been recognized by Kami. Our daughter was recruited as an accountant and given a job by that same corporation. We realize such a blessing was brought about by respecting the mitama spirit of Mr. Haniwa.

It's been nearly a year since the outbreak of the novel coronavirus pandemic. In the USA 28 million people have been infected and so far, more than five hundred-thousand people have lost their lives.

I have respected the mitama spirits of those who lost their lives because of this virus, and offered my special prayers in this year's Spring Memorial service. Those mitama spirits probably regretted dying suddenly & unexpectedly. I have prayed for

those mitama spirits with all my heart so they might have the *light of Wagakokoro (the peaceful joyful heart)*.

The more I offered my prayers for them, the more I have realized the necessity for all of us living in this world to have the *light of Wagakokoro*, as well.

All human beings are Kami's beloved children. Kami's only & earnest desire is for all humans to practice faith and have their lives fulfilled with Kami in this world and the next. Yet innumerable people have unexpectedly lost their lives due to this virus. I cannot help but consider Kami's true intention even through these circumstances.

Facing this pandemic, I think, all the people in the world now cannot help but think about what is most important in this world and what we should do for the world. Is it okay for us to continue to live our human-centered lives? Such as the attitude, 'as long as we ourselves are satisfied?' Kami really wishes we humans would change our selfish ways of living, and would live fulfilled lives with Kami to create the kami-centered world.

Our Founder received the following revelation on Nov. 24 in 1880:
'Kami-Sama revealed, 'Right now the world is human-centered. All things are done by people's own power, and many people are going against *MY* teachings. Those who do as I say become a kami. Long ago, it was a kami-centered world. Now it is a human-centered world. Because of this, I shall teach people to return to a kami-centered world.'

A Kami-centered world is for all of us to live with *Kami's wish*. If all people, Kami's beloved children, join hands together in friendship, it goes without saying, that the Parent Kami would be happy. It is also the very request Kami has for humankind. It's only natural to pray earnestly for true world peace and the well-being of all human beings.

My parent minister, Rev. Soichiro Otsubo lived an admirable life with Kami. Here are two of his quotes. They were his last words left for us:
"It is through Kami's blessings and due to this Faith, that I will be able to enter into the next world with such gratitude & delight."
"There are no other words I might leave for the world than *Wagakokoro (the peaceful, joyful heart)*. I have been seeking *Wagakokoro* in myself throughout my whole life. I seek *Wagakokoro* at every moment on each & every day. And continuously pray I'll seek *Wagakokoro* in the next world."

During his lifetime he had achieved such a bles-sed heart. He had done all this just by doing his best to accept everything that happened as *Kami's Sacred Doing*, which had deepened his heart.

Kami eagerly wishes to establish the *Wagakokoro era* in this world. *Wagakokoro* is the essential foundation for human happiness. Seeking the peaceful heart of *Wa* (harmony) and the joyous heart of *Ga* (celebration) is life's desire. *Wagakokoro* is achieved by mutual fulfillment between Kami and people.

I wish to do my best, with the same spirit as Shodai Oyasensei's, to develop peace and joy in my heart more precisely, through each happening in my daily life, so as to brighten the world with my *Wagakokoro*. Let us brighten the world. May *Wagakokoro* spread far and wide.