

Good afternoon, everyone! Happy New Day, Week & special “Thanks” for joining today’s service. This is our annual Autumn Memorial Service at KC Chicago for 2022.

Since this year’s Spring Memorial, there have been four *Newly Departed souls*:

Mrs. Kimie Furuya, my wife, Kanako’s mother who passed away May 6th;

Mrs. Norma Jean Sommer, passing on May 7th, is Ashton Kish’s grandmother;

Mr. Sanders Gibson, passed away May 25th, is Sarah Gibson’s brother and

Greg Lambros is a friend of hers;

Ms. Jenni Medrano, a friend of Daichi & Gaby, who passed away on July 1st.

When welcoming these Mitama spirits to today’s service, I have asked Shodai Oyasensei & Our Founder to lead them to the world of peace & joy in the next world.

The Founder taught,

When people die, they are reunited with Kami. A physical body may die, but the Mitama spirit keeps on living. The body came from the Earth, & will return to the Earth; while the Spirit, which was the energy given by Kami to sustain life on Earth, returns to Kami. Dying is the separating of your body to release your spirit back to its' eternal condition.

The earthly life of our late parent minister, Rev. Soichiro Otsubo, sought & portrayed the very essence of our Founder’s faith throughout every day of his life. He proved *by example* throughout **his** life, that true faith is a daily demonstration of this belief – that there is a “process of life,” easy or difficult, which is the active working of the Divine Parent’s Wishes to guide the path of our life toward divine fulfillment. Through constant communication & cooperation with Kami Rev. Otsubo developed his faith, step by step — respecting everything that happened in his life to the fullest. Living that kind of reality in this world sincerely & faithfully, he came to understand more clearly about Mitama spirits in the invisible world beyond.

He said, *The next world is pitch dark. Therefore, we need to polish the gem of our heart to receive divine light while we are here on this world. Thus, we can live a happy life in this world & a bright eternity in the next.*

There have been a lot of these beliefs from very ancient times. People believed whatever happened to us, especially bad happenings, were the working of Mitama spirits. Even today a lot of Japanese people believe that phenomena which cannot be explained is the working of Mitama spirits. Though, in fact, that is totally wrong; NO!... all of these incidents are Kami’s Doing. Kami uses illusive tricks of

Heaven & Earth by using appearances of Mitama spirits in order to guide humans to real happiness. Mitama spirits do not directly manipulate actions in this world.

Shodai Oyasensei also said, *This world exists for the next world.* Therefore, we should practice faith in this world to polish the gem of our heart and receive divine light. That divine light, and only that divine light, will be brought into the next world.

For that, we humans should have the absolute conviction that everything, good or bad, that happens is Kami's doing, so we can deepen the peace & joy in our hearts. In so doing, we can realize Kami is always working for us humans and bestows us with Divine arrangements for everything – and even more than we expect. When we have absolute belief in Kami and that Kami is always working for us, we can receive divine light which will be brought into the next world, because our founder taught us, ***Know that heaven & earth will be your eternal home while you are living and even after you die.***

I have received many divine arrangements in my life more than I expected. I would like to talk about one of them today. Rev. Dick Dusek is now serving Kami & people in Tacoma, Washington. Tomorrow, September 5 will be his 74th birthday. Happy Birthday, Dick Sensei! By the way, that day, September 5 is also the anniversary of our arrival in the United States for missionary work in North America.

The Divine arrangement to get to know him was tremendous beyond measure. Through the request of one of the Japanese English teachers, Rev. Otsubo allowed the auditorium of KC Airaku to be used for a 3-day seminar by Japanese English Language Teachers. This was the only time the church facility was used for such a purpose.

There were two of famous English language lecturers who came. And a few Americans were invited for the Japanese English teachers to practice English during the breaks. Dick Sensei was one of them. However, he was very interested in the church and mostly talked with us trainees in the church. He even went to the Mediation seat to pay his respects to Shodai Oyasensei. There Shodai extended his hand to him. As a sign of his respect Dick Sensei tried to kiss it. To his surprise Shodai immediately withdrew his hand. At that time, Shodai received a revelation from Kami. Kami showed him splitting a pomegranate in half, which we all heard about later for the first time at the morning prayer service two days later.

The pomegranate was likened to a thousand young Buddhist priests behind a single shoji screen (障子一重に小僧千人). During that morning service Shodai spoke as follows: *As there is a saying that one seed becomes ten thousand, Dick Sensei will become a Konko minister, return back to the USA and serve ten or ten thousand people that they may receive divine blessings.*

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Dick Sensei didn't know anything about this and left the church that morning. I wondered how he would return to our church, because he was only a guest to help at the seminar. However, through problems he encountered, he visited our church in a week with his family. Since then, Dick Sensei has been one of my best American friends.

I had had an earnest desire to serve Kami and people in the USA. Then I got to know Dick Sensei. How fantastic Kami's arrangement has been!

This is how Dick Sensei recently has written about it:

ALL BEGAN AUGUST

This August marks 40 years since finding the *Konko Faith*, and 50 years since meeting the woman who became my wife and has joined me on this faith journey. 50 years ago, I had just started living on the Japanese economy after getting out of the US Army; it was Spring 1972. 40 years ago, I was attending a 3-day seminar for Japanese English Language Teachers of secondary schools being held at a Konko Church auditorium. That is where I met the faith that became my own; that is where I met some life-long friends, and eventually became a Konko minister myself.

Our marriage of 50 years has survived through thick and thin by the blessings discovered in the Konko Church. Our faith opened a journey beyond imagination. Our faith opened the way of living with and through the natural happenings of life. It's a way of life, blessing each step along the way, keeping the heart polished for blessings to truly shine. 40 years of accumulating blessings, sharing our faith in life, opening the way for any who might hear us. It's truly been a blessing!

It was 40 years ago walking into Airaku Konko Church to attend a teachers' seminar, that I met a friend for life who introduced me to the natural way of life following the Konko faith. Ever since, Rev Masanori Takeuchi and I each have accrued blessings year after year; and each were invited to enter the States by KCNA (Konko Churches of North America), he establishing the Konko Church of Chicago; I maintain Konko Fellowship of Tacoma. We still confer on language to better interpret Konko Faith teachings. Blessings overflow! Gratitude doesn't begin to meet the mark of 40 years accumulated blessings. It's humbling.

It was 40 years ago I met the grand master himself, the Head Minister of Airaku Konko Church, Rev Soichiro Otsubo. It's amazing! I was at a teachers' seminar on the opposite side of church property. How could it happen?? I happened to walk out and somehow found the worship hall. What blessings ever brought me there?? How might I describe being ushered to the mediation area?? Speaking in broken Japanese to him – seeing him

extend a hand toward me – reaching up, taking it, and reverently placing a respectful kiss on the back of his hand. An encounter of a lifetime! Blessings galore! From 40 years ago still thriving today.

Above the bed in my room is a framed calligraphy piece: *With a single heart all is created*

心ひとつですべてをつくる 大坪縊一郎
kokoro hitotsu de subete wo tsukuru Otsubo Soichiro

It all begins within. It's a single-hearted spirit. One heart begins it all.
Konko belief develops the spirit of faith from within the heart.
It starts within and builds. It starts to shine and grow.

He concluded his writing by saying how thankful he was:

I'm thankful for the faith, amazed with the blessings, humbled beyond measure.
40 years of Konko Faith and so much to be thankful for.
Praying hands raised to head, *arigatou gozaimasu!*
There truly is so much in 40 years to be thankful for.

So, to repeat the point of the sermon today, when we clearly realize that Kami is always working for us to develop peace & joy in our heart, we can gain divine light. With divine light we live a life of happiness in this world and have a bright world in the next.

Let us each practice faith, and with gratitude respect each happening as Kami's sacred doing. And may we each accumulate much divine light.