

Good morning, everyone! Happy Sunday in this New Week of Kami's blessings! Thank you very much for joining today's service. This is our monthly service for February 2023. I hope all of you stay safe and are enjoying good health in excellent spirits.

As you know, this year Konkokyo celebrates the 140th Spiritual Birthday of our founder, Ikigami Konko Daijin and the 150th Anniversary of the birth of the Divine Reminder.

In commemorating these anniversaries, I wrote the following New Year's poems:

“What reason is it
The founder, Konko Daijin,
Has to us been sent?
Is but for to fulfilling
The Way of Kami and Man”

「何のため 金光大神 差し向けし 神人の道 栄え行くため」

“In earnest I wish
To embody and pass on
The Divine Reminder
So as to truly reveal
The Divine Parent's Glory.”

「ひたすらに 天地書附 体現し 神のヒレイと なすよしもがな」

On February 18, 1873 our founder, at the age 60, was ordered by the Meiji government to remove the altar fixtures and stop his mediation. This was the most critical moment in his ministry. He was so disappointed that Kami told him, “Take a rest without feeling disappointed.” Leaving the worship room and praying to Kami, he asked Kami if there was any other way for people to be saved and fulfill their lives with Kami, without a place for worship nor a mediator like himself. In reply, he received the *Divine Reminder*:

-Divine Parent of the Universe-

-Divine Mediator-

Pray sincerely,
With all your heart.
Be one with Kami.

Kami's blessings begin within
Hearts grateful and caring,
In harmony and joy.

Look to Kami always,
Now and forever.
On this very day, pray.

「生神金光大神 天地金乃神 一心に願え」

おかげは和賀心にあり 今月今日で頼めい」

The *Divine Reminder* has become the central teaching of the Konko Faith. It has created a core of grateful and caring hearts, united in joy and harmony. In short, demonstrating this *Divine Reminder*, or practicing our peaceful & joyful heart, is the essential foundation for human happiness.

Two days before he received the *Divine Reminder*, Kami told him, “Konko, be reborn. Take your first bath in ten years.” As this symbolizes, Kami wishes a new Konkokyo to be born through this *Divine Reminder* and all human beings to embody it to have their fulfilled lives with Kami. Amazingly anyone can do so at any time, at any place when they really intend to do it.

I now do Line Mediation once a week for about an hour with Mr. Seth Carter, one of our members who lives in Maryland. I have had one of the most wonderful & enjoyable times to deepen our understandings of not only the Konko faith but also about each other.

The other day I asked him to write his New Year’s poem with 5-7-5-7-7 syllables. He wrote his beautiful & meaningful poem:

*“Another new year
Growing pains wrack my frail heart
Seeking peace and joy...
Will I ever truly know
That I've had it all along?”*

「新玉の 年に求めん 和賀心 常にいだきて 心にあるか」

I also asked him to explain it. I believe it shows an important hint of how to embody the *Divine Reminder*. As in my New Year’s poems, I have an earnest desire to embody the *Divine Reminder* in my daily life throughout this year and beyond. So with his permission I will share his explanation.

“I wrote this poem in commemoration of the new year after having spent some time reflecting on the events of 2022.

For the most part, 2022 was a good year compared to the past few years, and I had many things to be grateful for. However, I started experiencing quite a few difficulties related to my health, work, and family, one after another starting around October of 2022.

With these difficult circumstances came many difficult feelings and I felt far from Kami-sama, and certainly far from any sense of peace and joy that I may have had in my heart before.

You know, if I were to have experienced these things ten years ago, I think that my attitude towards them would have been very self-defeating and helpless. I would have said to myself, ‘Why me?’ ‘What

did I do to deserve this?’ and I would have thought that the world was out to get me for some reason or another.

I've changed quite a bit in the last several years since I began to practice the Konko Faith, and one of those changes has been a shift in my perspective. While I sometimes still experience that negative attitude towards events in my life, I often find myself now looking at events as they are happening and making an honest effort to accept them as they are, then asking myself, ‘Where can I find the blessings in this? What is Kami's desire here?’ or ‘How can I grow from this experience?’ I try my best to deepen the peace and joy in my heart whenever I can, but there are periods of time, such as at the end of 2022, when that becomes especially difficult and I tend to look elsewhere for peace and joy, though so far I haven't been able to find it anywhere else.

The funny thing is that no matter how many times I experience that search, it always ends with the same lesson: peace and joy depends upon *one's own heart*; you'll never find it anywhere else.

It's for this reason that I wrote my poem: even though I experience painful events in life, I know that I have the potential to grow from them and deepen the peace and joy in my own heart. All I need to do is remember that I won't find that same potential for peace and joy anywhere other than from within myself; I've had it all along.”

And I, like him, intend to do my best to always look within myself, asking if I have actually had the ***Divine Reminder*** “all along.”