

Monthly Service

S e r m o n D e c e m b e r 1 3 , 2 0 2 0

Good morning! 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 December 2020.

I have recently received questions on Mitama spirits from Massimo Clause in Italy. They were each important. So, I would like to talk about his questions in my sermon today.

He wrote to me:

Dear Sensei,

Finally, here are my questions on the Mitama spirits I told you about. I'm sorry if it takes a lot of your time. But, please take your time answering them. I'm in no hurry.

- 1. Does Kami judge our life when we die?***
- 2. After our death when we reach Kami, what do we do next?***
- 3. How do we pay for the evil we made in our life?***
- 4. In the after-life, are the people who in their lives tried to practice the faith equal to the people who never met Konkokyo?***
- 5. How do our prayers help Mitama spirits?***
- 6. Do Mitama spirits have any kind of limits?***
- 7. Why do we change the altar when we pray to the Mitama spirits?***

Thank you from the bottom of my heart for helping me deepen my faith. That is a great blessing.

I liked that you talk about LGBT people in your sermon. Please, give them all the attention you can, they need more love than other people.

Everything is divine love, always!

My answer began: "I would first like to tell you our founder's teachings about the Mitama spirits, and what I have learned about them from Rev. Soichiro Otsubo.

The Konko Faith emphasizes the importance of living this day, single heartedly in this very moment. As ***The Divine Reminder*** teaches:

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.

We humans, as all other living things on this earth, really only exist in this life, one day at a time... one precious moment at a time. We cannot live in the past... nor in the future, that's not the nature of time & space, it's not the way the universe works. No one can return

to the past to do, or maybe more importantly, undo an event, choice or action. Nor can we be absolutely sure of even being alive tomorrow. That is why the Konko Faith teaches that the only realistic way to live the life we are given fully is to delight & live in the joy of this one day — this very moment.

When we really achieve delight and enjoy this blessed, single moment from the bottom of our heart, we can honor & value the meaning of our past, no matter how miserable it may have been at the time & look forward with hope & delight to our future, no matter how hard the circumstances we might foresee ahead. This miracle moment of life is the accumulation of the past that defines us & gives focus to our future in a single instance.

The world around us is only a continuation of this single moment of our self. Therefore, the Konko Faith does not accept a vision that the end of the world is necessary. Our Founder did not teach of Paradise, Heaven or Hell as the destination of our spirit in the next world. He did not teach of the sorrow of death or punishment after death. He believed that the totality of this Great Universe was & is complete and perfect. As such, he taught that this world is filled with the infinite benevolence of the Divine Parent of the Universe.

One of his worshippers once asked our founder, “They say that after death, one will either go to hell or to heaven. Tell me, where will we actually end up after death?”

Our founder answered, “Since I am still in training, I don’t know what is beyond death. But while you are living in this world, be at peace everyday and follow the right Way. Then you needn’t worry about what is beyond death.”

Our Founder taught us, “Practice faith. Receive divine blessings by practicing faith. Then, not only you, but also your grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and even further generations can receive divine blessings. Even the spirits of your ancestors will be able to rest in peace because you receive divine blessings through your practice of faith. The blessings you have received stay with you forever. Therefore, you should build as large a foundation of blessings as possible during your life.”

Ancestors are the foundation of our lives’ inheritance. If we separate ourselves from these roots through neglect, the branches of our personal tree-of-life suffer & wither. Our Founder taught us, “Place fertilizer at the roots of a tree, then its branches will grow lush. Respect your ancestors & parents, then you will prosper.”

Our Founder says in his teachings, “When people die, they are reunited with Kami. The physical body dies, but the Mitama spirit keeps on living. The body, which came from Earth, will return to Earth. & the Spirit, which was the energy given by Kami that sustained our life on Earth; returns to Kami. Dying is the separation of your body & spirit back to its’ eternal condition.”

If, after death our body returns to Earth with our spirit returning to Kami we still keep on living. It is, of course important to work hard just for food & clothing in this world,

but it is not the most important. We no longer have to work for food & clothing in the next world. Therefore, the most important in both worlds is to deepen our peace & joy in the heart of Kami. It is to fill our entire life with gratitude. Gratitude is the very gift from our earthly lives that we can bring into the next world.

Our parent minister, the late Rev. Soichiro Otsubo, pursued the very essence of our Founder's faith throughout his life. He proved by example that his life was a daily demonstration of the belief that there is a "process of life" which is the active working of the Divine Parent in each & everything that happens in our daily life. Through constant communication & cooperation with Kami he developed his faith step by step — respecting everything that happened in his life to the fullest. Living that reality in this world sincerely & faithfully, he came to understand clearly the Mitama spirits in the invisible world beyond.

He taught, "The next world is pitch dark. Therefore, we should polish the gem of our heart & receive divine light while we are here in this world. Then we can live a happy life in this world & in the bright world in the next." He also said, "Mitama spirits do not do direct actions to this world. Up to now there have been a lot of phenomena that people think of as the workings of the Mitama spirits. In fact, all of them are Kami's doing, Kami's tricks, illusions of Heaven & Earth by using the appearance of the Mitama spirits in order to guide humans to real happiness." He also taught, "When descendants revere their ancestors, those hearts are pleasing to Kami. As Kami can accept those hearts, both descendants & ancestors will be protected by Kami & can receive blessings from Kami."

Compared with many other religions this is the epoch-making discovery about the life of spirits in the beyond, which we call in Japanese, *Mitama*. The Konko Faith makes very clear; the relationships between Kami, Mitama spirits & living humans. Our founder taught us, "Divine Virtue will be with you even after death & passed down to future generations. It can be received by anyone who practices faith. Divine virtue is never exhausted."

Divine Virtue is surely to be brought with us into the next world. In this world we can supposedly buy anything we want to live a happy life when we have enough money. In the same way, when we bring Divine Virtue into the next world, we can live free, active lives in the next world as relieved & delightful Mitama spirits in a world of mutual reliance with Kami. But we cannot send our Divine Virtue to the human world. Therefore, we have to acquire Divine Virtue & bring it into the next world for our own.

On the other hand, descendants should accumulate Divine Virtue through practicing true faith & take good care of their ancestors' spirits. Then their ancestors' spirits will be blessed & more delighted in the next world as they are remembered & appreciated in this world.

Through Konko Daijin's Mediation we should offer our sincere prayers as faithfully as possible in order for our Mitama spirits to deepen their peaceful & joyful hearts & live happy & prosperous lives in the next blessed world.

1. Does Kami judge our life when we die?

Never! Kami only wishes each human being to practice faith, develop peace & joy in their hearts and receive divine blessings.

2. After our death when we reach Kami, what do we do next?

It is limitless to deepen our peaceful & joyful heart. The life of Rev. Otsubo was a wonderful example of faith. He died in 1994, the same year my family came as missionaries to the US. Rev. Otsubo told about a dream he'd had a few days before he died.

He told us he'd dreamed Kami seemed to ask him what words he wanted to leave in this world. He replied, "There are no other words for me to leave to this world than Peaceful & Joyful heart (Wa-Ga Kokoro). I have been seeking Peace & Joy in myself throughout my whole life. I still seek Peace & Joy within, every day, at each & every moment, & wish to continuously seek Peace & Joy in the next world." He added, "It is due to Kami's blessings & this Faith that I will be able to enter the next world with this kind of gratitude & delight."

3. How do we pay for the evil we made in our life?

Tenchi Kane No Kami is the Divine Parent and has such a parental heart that forgives anyone when apologizing. This Kami wishes only to bestow divine blessings like, "I'll give blessings, instead of taking the time to punish."

Any sin or Karma disappears in front of Wagakokoro (peaceful joyful heart), as if frost would disappear by sprinkling boiling water over it. We should direct our heart toward Kami even through our evil actions. Then we can realize our powerlessness more through them and then even evil may stimulate us to practice faith to develop peace & joy in our heart.

4. In the after-life, are the people who in their lives tried to practice the faith equal to the people who never met Konkokyo?

As I mentioned above, the next world is pitch dark. All people live in such a world of pitch dark in the next world like maggots and give up everything, thinking this is such a world of pitch dark and just wriggling.

Those who practice true faith and have a light of faith can bring that divine light to the next world and live in the bright world and limitlessly deepen their spirits to aim toward the brightest world.

Those who dedicate themselves to our founder can live in the world of our founder's in the next world which of course includes the world of Rev. Soichiro Otsubo's.

5. How do our prayers help Mitama spirits?

I have already mentioned this. Our prayers encourage the Mitama spirits to deepen their spirits toward becoming peaceful joyful ones.

6. Do Mitama spirits have any kind of limits?

There is no limit to deepen their peaceful joyful spirits/hearts.

7. Why do we change the altar when we pray to the Mitama spirits?

Everything, humans & Mitama spirits, etc., is under Kami. So, we don't need to have two altars. Actually, some churches in Japan have only one altar. They hang Tenchi Kakitsuke on the wall above and under it place a stand on the top-center of which has a box for the Mitama spirits. It is definitely OK.

However, people have feelings, and some can focus more on praying to the Mitama spirits when they have a Mitama altar besides the Kami altar.

At first in Chicago I had a single altar. I thought two altars could not be accommodated space-wise. A few years later I got to know Rev. Harold Lindberg who belonged to another religion and had opened a religious Dojo in his basement. He attended our grand ceremonies with his religious friends several times. He kindly sent me a photo of our Kyoshu Konko-sama with a flame, and a copy of altars at Konkokyo Korea. He then suggested I have a Mitama altar like Konkokyo Korea. So, I put a Mitama altar beside Kami's altar and they fit just fine. Soon after that, 911 events happened. I could, therefore, offer my prayers to those who had been killed by these terrorists' attacks more directly & sincerely in front of my Mitama altar.

Massimo wrote advising me:

Dear Sensei,

From the bottom of my heart thanks for your answers. I believe you should use this writing of yours for your next sermon. The words you have written can be deeply helpful to all people, and not only to Konkokyo believers. In this pandemic time, many of our loved ones died, and this writing has the power to help many people. It would draw them to Konko Faith.

Since the beginning of this pandemic 4 of my relatives died, and your writing taught me how to help them.

I believe that all the Konko believes around the world should dedicate part of their silent prayer to express gratitude to Kami for having met the religion that has the power to heal the fear of living that every human being holds inside.

I'm deeply grateful to you for this and I embrace you.

This advice of his came to me just before I asked his permission to use our above writings on Mitama spirits for this December sermon. Through his message I cannot help but feel we are spiritually connected, and that Kami keenly wishes to have this sermon be a

reality to help people in the world who are suffering in the midst of this coronavirus pandemic.