

Spring Memorial, Konko Church of Chicago, March 5, 2023

Good Afternoon, Everyone! Thank you very much for attending the 2023 annual Spring Memorial Service of the Konko Church of Chicago. I hope you are all in good health & in excellent spirits.

The Konko Faith has annual Memorial services twice a year, in spring & in autumn. They always remind me of our mortality & the next world. Death shall come to every human being. No one can escape from it. The more clearly we understand this fate, the more we cannot help but think of what is most important in our life, and how we might live a more meaningful life during our limited lifespan.

Our founder taught, *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 our founder taught, our soul, bestowed by Kami at birth, keeps on living after death. Therefore, those who practice faith and polish the gem of their heart, do not have to be afraid of death, and can enter the next world with gratitude.

Today – I would like to talk about the importance of the memorial service. Our founder is quoted as saying, *“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.”*

As our founder explained above, we cannot help but realize the importance of respecting the Mitama spirit. This year happens to be greatly important not only for Konkokyo, but also for KC Airaku & the Takeuchi & Furuya families. They each have anniversary memorials for some important Mitama spirits.

Konkokyo will have
the 140th anniversary memorial for our founder, **Ikigami Konko Daijin**;
the 130th anniversary memorial for the second successor, **Shijin Konko-sama**; &
the 60th anniversary memorial for the third successor, **Sandai Konko-sama**.

At KC Airaku there will be
the 20th anniversary memorial for Shodai’s wife, **Isoe Ookusama**;
the 3rd anniversary memorial for the second successor, **Rev. Katsuhiko Otsubo**;

the 5th anniversary memorial for **Rev. Mitsuaki Otsubo**; &
the 1st anniversary memorial for **Rev. Mikisaburo Otsubo**.

In the Takeuchi & Furuya families, we will have
the 50th anniversary memorial for my grandmother, **Mrs. Yaeno Takeuchi**; &
the 15th anniversary memorial for my **father**;
the 10th anniversary memorial for my **mother**; &
the 1st anniversary memorial for my wife's mother.

There is a saying: *Those who take care of the chapters in their life will grow.* This was the motto of Shodai Oyasensei when he was an apprentice at a famous sake brewery in his teens. Just as bamboo grows from a node, those who take care of these points in their life can grow. The anniversary memorial of Mitama spirits is just such an opportunity for us to develop faith in Kami.

Personally, when feeling this year would be a great opportunity for me to deepen the peace & joy in my heart, I was divinely led to listen to a speech given at the *Virtue-Rewarding Grand Ceremony* of Dec. 16, 2017 delivered by Rev. Mikisaburo Otsubo. In the last few minutes, when talking about a divine dream he had received at Konko Headquarters, I felt a powerful divine message for me.

In his dream, after the grand ceremony at Headquarters, the best *Omiki-san* (*Kikusui* sake) is served by me to worshippers. When *Mikisaburo Sensei* had some, it tasted strange. It didn't seem to either be sake, nor water. He thought he could never get drunk on it. "So what am I serving?" I thought.

Let me explain. I have been devoting myself only with the desire to live up to *Shodai Oyasensei's* long-cherished wish. My own testimony for it is *The opening of this Way lies in my Wagakokoro*. However, I wonder how much I have developed my Wagakokoro, or a sense of 'thankfulness, humbleness, and awesomeness.' Japanese sake is called, 'Miki.' And in Japanese, these three words have 'ki' as their suffix, thankfulness – arigata-ki, humbleness – mottaina-ki, awesomeness – osoreoo-ki. So, I wonder if I have been serving my *strange tasting Wagakokoro* so far? And if the three ingredients were served in sufficient quantity?

I know it is the spiritual basis for faith to eliminate one's selfish desires. So I have done my best to eliminate them through respecting each & every happening as Kami's doing to develop an unbreakable peaceful, joyful heart. Through Mikisaburo Sensei's divine dream I keenly realized Kami was teaching me whether I would successfully get rid of my selfish desires or not. I was made to consider whether my selfish desires were still lurking in my heart, and if that was causing the *strange tasting miki*.

From that point on, I have returned to the starting point and began redoing my piety. I will practice faith to redo the ‘morning as life, and the course of events as life.’ I will do my best to treasure my morning prayer and respect each happening with gratitude in order to have the *miki* or my pure Wagakokoro overflowing from me.

Lately, each night (since February 13) I have listened to at least one speech of *Shodai Oyasensei*'s in front of the Mitama altar, wishing the Mitama spirits would find the path to deeper peace & joy within. Then, last night at midnight I called up the names of all the Mitama spirits related to KC Chicago & to us, and offered my sincere prayers to Kami for their eternal peace & happiness.

My parent minister, Rev. Soichiro Otsubo lived an admirable life with Kami. Here are two quotes from him. They were the last words he 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 is eagerly wishing to establish the Wagakokoro era in this world, in order to attain true world peace and well-being for all humans. 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 through mutual fulfillment between Kami and people.

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