

Embracing Us All

The Great Faith of Konko Daijin

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Two.

Societal Values, Spiritual Viewpoint

I. Life Ascription

1. Members of the community

Let's begin by asking ourselves the question, "How do you define what our lives belong to?" taking into consideration the relationship between the values society holds and the values the world of faith holds. From long ago, many people have pondered this important question from both philosophical and spiritual perspectives. Let's find ways in which Konko Daijin explored and responded to this question.

We are family members in households and citizens of cities, towns, villages and districts in which we live. We belong to and are also citizens of nations. Furthermore, we each belong to a faith tradition that we believe in and are called "believers" or "followers." However, as we contemplate "How do you define what our lives belong to?" it is different from the aforementioned ways of belonging; for human life, it is a fundamental life of belonging issue.

Konko Daijin started to think about his own ascription of life at the age of forty five. He directed much attention to Konjin Faith, which began in the Bitchu District after he suffered from a life-threatening illness when he was forty-two. In 1857, his brother, Kandori Shige'emon received a divine message that allowed him to stop farming and to dedicate his life to serving at a worship hall. The following year, Konko Daijin went to his brother's worship hall and received Konjin's teachings, which triggered the desire to deepen his faith. When Konko Daijin visited Kandori Shige'emon's worship hall in 1858, he received a divine message from Kami through his brother's voice, "Kane No Kami's follower (Oboegaki 5-1-3)" which means Kami accepted Konko Daijin as a disciple. He deepened his Konjin Faith afterwards.

It took him a fair amount of time to be dedicated to his faith because he had to drastically change his way of life as a family heir and as a villager.

If we were to look at the life of villagers during the Tokugawa Period, unlike today, they were not able to live freely, but they also did not need to be concerned about their next door neighbors. Needless to say, they were controlled by the feudal system. Villagers each played roles as parishioners for the village deity. Each house was registered as a parish temple. Home dwellers' names were recorded in a book administered by temples, similar to the registration of residency today and served as official certification as villagers.

At that time, each shrine had a variety of village deities. For example, Otani village had Kamo Shrine, whose deity was Ninigi-no-Mikoto or Wakeikazuchi-no-kami. The villagers considered their village shrine a branch of the Ise Grand Shrine, which had Tensho Kotaijin. The Otani villagers also regarded themselves as parishioners of Tensho Kotaijin.

In 1830 at the age of seventeen, Konko Daijin went to worship at the Ise Shrine. According to an archival record written by the village headman, it seems that villagers of seventeen- to twenty-two-or -three years old took turns every year going to Ise Shrine. Not only Otani village, but other villages, as well, sent many of their “Wakamonogumi” (Youth Groups) to Ise Shrine who reached this age range. This was considered a formal rite of passage into adulthood to visit the Ise Shrine and upon return to their respective villages, they were officially recognized as adults and assigned roles of responsibility in the village.

Konko Daijin’s visit to Ise Shrine signified his position as an official villager and to become acknowledged as such by the village. He was dedicated to helping with not only a variety of village events, but also with village public works. These duties included such responsibilities as helping the village headman, repair of public ponds, ditches, and riverbanks, and monitoring the irrigation system, as part of the cooperative village work.

People called “Ise oshi” worked for Ise Shrine. They connected the shrine with the people such as court aristocrats, samurai, and farmers living across the nation. They also guided visitors, arranged for accommodations and distributed amulets and calendars. There were over 400 oshi in those days. Their main office was in Ise and they were in charge of each area, domain and rank. Their tasks had great influence on Ise’s propagation of faith. Each oshi had a house name such as Ryu-tayu, Kamaya-tayu, and Haraku-tayu. Ryu-tayu, one of the strongest groups, was in charge of Otani village. Its oshi went to visit Otani and handed out charms and calendars. He also collected donations for Ise Shrine.

In 1610, at the end of the Edo Period, the law “Onshi shoku shikimoku,” that ruled which oshi visited area, was very disorganized. For example, it happened that three or four oshi tayu visited the same village. In another example, two oshi arrived at Otani village.

Each household in every village played a specific role, such as storing the oshi’s baggage, and giving shelter to oshi. These roles were passed on from generation to generation. The Kawate Family (Akazawa Family), for example, was responsible for safeguarding the baggage of oshi, a duty handed down to successors by heredity. In 1837, Konko Daijin started to carry oshi’s baggage and to hand out charms, since his adoptive father died in 1836. He served for twenty-one years, until 1858. As a porter, Konko Daijin had to follow tayu when tayu left Otani village for the next one. At that time, he listened to tayu carefully and established his identity as one of the followers of Tensho Kotaijin.

2. Faith in Konjin or The Village Deity

Almost all the villagers were followers of the village deity. From much earlier, villagers thought of themselves as followers of Tensho Kotaijin, the parents of Kami in Japan. Some villagers believed in Amida, Tathagata, Amitabha; others believed temporarily in Kshitigarbha or Kami. As mentioned, influenced by his brother, Kandori Shige’emon, Konko Daijin started to practice faith in Konjin in 1857. For the first time, though his faith in Konjin was not as important as that in Tensho Kotaijin, he soon concentrated on deepening his faith in Konjin.

Just at that time, Tensho Kotaijin and Konjin held a dialogue about the ascription of Konko Daijin.

Konjin said to Tensho Kotaijin, "Tensho Kotaijin-Sama, please give Bunji to

me." Konjin wanted Konko Daijin to belong to his group. According to archival sources, Tensho Kotaijin-Sama complied, "All right, he is yours." Then, Konjin said, "Bunji, you have been given to Me and I will make you My First Disciple."

We often face a variety of situations daily involving "will" or "choice." In these situations, we are determined to do something and, thereby, we create our lives. For example, as a husband, when you witness trouble between your wife and your mother, it is hard to choose which side you should support, or whether you should just leave them alone. Another example of a situation involving choice is when you start a job. Even if you begin working at a company, you may become aware that you are not satisfied with your purpose in life, thereby worrying if you should keep working to maintain the status quo. Or you ask yourself, "Should I change jobs and become independent to pursue what really motivates me in life? As we age, we face many situations requiring us to make choices.

It was a serious dilemma for Konko Daijin, to continue to be a follower of Tensho Kotaijin or to become a follower of Konjin, forcing him to decide his ascription. In this context of Konko Daijin choosing his ascription, we should focus on the relationship between Tensho Kotaijin and Konko Daijin.

Tensho Kotaijin supervised a guardian deity. What is more, Tensho Kotaijin played a role in supporting the feudal system of villages. Tensho Kotaijin connected villagers to each other through a guardian deity so that villages and towns would not be confused and they would become attached to these communities. The people were happy and their communities were stable as long as a guardian deity supported them and the people belonged to these communities. That is why villagers, houses, domains, and the shogunate were stable, unless they became estranged from their lives that were protected by a guardian deity. Konko Daijin also belonged to Tensho Kotaijin as long as he lived as a villager.

At that point, Konjin came to Konko Daijin, and Konjin helped the Kawate Family for the thirty years since the time Konko Daijin was adopted by the family. Konjin supported Konko Daijin's life. Konjin also supported him personally, in a way that Tensho Kotaijin could not have done. Konko Daijin had to choose between believing in Konjin or believing in Tensho Kotaijin. It seems that his decision is described in the two mythical deities' dialogue.

Konko Daijin easily agreed to Konjin's request because he had already made a final decision. However, because it was difficult for anyone to easily choose one over the other without hesitation, Konko Daijin wavered a little. That is how the two deities continued to hold a dialogue.

Tensho Kotaijin-Sama asserted, "Kane No Kami-Sama, although I said he is yours, I just cannot give him to you. It is because there is no one like him."

From Konko Daijin's perspective, these words mean that Konko Daijin was determined to belong to Konjin, but he was worried about who would continue to fulfill his duties, such as carrying the Onshi's baggage, and the impact of subsequent changes on the Otani villagers. His apprehension is reflected in Tensho Kodaijin's words "I just cannot give him to you." Tensho Kodaijin did not want to give Konko Daijin to Konjin. That means Konko Daijin also thought it difficult to get away from the roles he assumed, related to the village. We often think back on or wish to reverse our own decisions that we previously made. The same holds true for Tensho Kodaijin and Konjin. Konjin said,

"Saying that you will give him and then saying that you will not, will make what you say a lie. I must definitely take him. If giving him will be a great loss, I will have his son Asakichi worship at your hiromae when Asakichi comes of age. So please, let me take him."

Konjin reiterated his request to Tensho Kotaijin. There are important messages hidden in the words, "Saying that you will give him and then saying that you will not, will make what you say a lie." Tensho Kotaijin had a reputation for honesty. Previously, people observed a tradition of placing a scroll called "Sansha No Takusen" ["Divine Revelation of Three Shrines"] in an alcove in a traditional Japanese room where art or flowers are typically displayed on the day of the shrine's ceremony. Some people hang "Sansha No Takusen" even now. It seems that this custom began with a Shinto group in the Muromachi Period (1336-1573) and then it spread as a propagation tool throughout Japan during the Edo Period (1603-1867). The "Three Shrines" noted on the scroll are Ise Jingu or Ise Shrine, Iwashimizu Hachimangū or Iwashimizu Hachiman Shrine, and Kasuga-taisha or Kasuga Grand Shrine. There were a variety of hanging scrolls at that time. Basically, each scroll was written with the name of the deities, and were written as requests for divine revelations, which the respective deities wanted people to obey. Ise Jingu featured "Honesty;" Kasuga-taisha featured "Mercy" and Iwashimizu Shrine featured "Purity." Tensho Kotaijin was the deity of "Honesty." Tensho Kotaijin was never allowed to tell a lie.

Konjin pointed out the implicit contradiction of Tensho Kotaijin's value of honesty, by using the phrase "make what you say a lie." Konjin also pointed out, "As long as you say 'You will give him,' you must keep your promise because you are the Deity of 'Honesty.' You are not worthy as the Deity of 'Honesty' if you tell a lie." These words of Konjin echoed Konko Daijin's feelings.

Konko Daijin tried to dedicate his life to Konjin, but he could not help thinking of his role in the village. That is why he was unable to immediately dissolve his relationship with Tensho Kotaijin. Then Konjin persuaded Konko Daijin to become his believer by telling Tensho Kotaijin that reneging on his promise was contradictory. We can see a magnificently described drama between two deities, as well as the drama of internal human strife when one encounters a difficult choice.

After Konjin said, "Saying that you will not, will make what you say a lie," Konjin asked Tensho Kotaijin for a compromise. Konjin said, "If giving him up will be a great loss, I will have his son Asakichi go to worship at Your hiromae when Asakichi comes of age. So please, let me take him."

Judging from his suggestion, one can see that Konko Daijin worried that it was not easy to dissolve his relationship with Tensho Kotaijin, and this exchange shows how he dealt with problems. Konko Daijin realized that as long as he lived in the village community, he would not be able to quit being a believer of the guardian deity. As long as he lived in the village with his family, one of his family members had to be in charge of the hereditary roles that he had previously fulfilled. Examples of these roles were delivering charms and carrying the oshi's baggage. His family could not live in the village if no one took over his roles. It seems that Konko Daijin felt hesitant about these problems, reflected in the dialogue between the two deities. It was not easy for Konko Daijin to be a First Disciple of Konjin and have faith without thinking of his village.

Understanding the problem might have made Konjin say, "I will have his son Asakichi go to worship at Your hiromae when Asakichi comes of age."

When we think about ascription to life, we have to face a variety of problems that we encounter in our lives. For example, if someone wants to quit his/her job, he

or she must take into consideration one's family and the company work that needs to continue and be completed. Konko Daijin was heir to his family and in charge of a variety of roles in the village, so he may have had to think deeply about his decisions.

"I will have his son Asakichi go to worship at your hiromae" means that when Asakichi became of age, Konko Daijin would have him go worship at the Ise Shrine. However, we have to realize that these words also implied that Konko Daijin would have Asakichi take on roles in farming and village obligations. This compromise allowed Tensho Kotaijin to say "Since you put it that way, I shall acquiesce." That is to say, Tensho Kotaijin allowed Konko Daijin to be a disciple of Konjin. After Tensho Kotaijin's approval, Konjin replied, "Receiving him will be a relief to me." Then Konjin determined that Konko Daijin was his first disciple (*Oboegaki 6-1*).

3. New Basis For Life

After the dialogue between Tensho Kotaijin and Konjin was finished, Konko Daijin was able to earnestly have faith in Konjin. By changing his ascription from Tensho Kotaijin into following Konjin, it meant Konko Daijin could make a clean break with the rules and values of the village where he lived. It was the dialogue which made Konko Daijin go to a new horizon, breaking away from the religious and cultural situations that Japan was in, ruled by Tensho Kotaijin, the Onshi, and the village deity, or the politically authorized place to which Konko Daijin belonged. That was a very important event in the life of Konko Daijin. In addition, the event was important not only for Konko Daijin; the event was a starting point that decided the foundation of Konkokyo and individual believers thereafter.

We often lose sight of the foundation of our lives, and instead, devote ourselves to unsupported values in daily life. This results in the influence on ourselves by unsupported rumors and of undue concern with our public images. It is important that when one has faith, even if one considers negative values, that person will not be deprived of body and soul by that experience.

We try to live according to a foundation that sustains and monitors our lives and our minds to prevent us from being out of control, even if we temporarily get lost or are confused. That is the value of faith. In other words, when the intense dialogue regarding our ascription of life as it weighs between the value of faith and that of our public obligations is done, and then the meaning of our lives deepen. This happens in the world of faith.

It is said that we live in an "Information Society." We encounter a variety of values in such a society. Our situation is almost the same as Konko Daijin's experience reflected in the dialogue between Tensho Kotaijin and Konjin.

First, let us think about children's education as an analogy for this situation. Typically, we educate children within the framework that defines education, such as studying which results in good grades. In actuality, however, teachers, children and parents seriously do not think that this educational framework meets all that is needed for education. Most of them unwillingly accept this framework, even as they devote themselves to it. Everybody seeks a better direction that can fundamentally transform this framework.

Some people criticize the present system of students attending cram schools in addition to conventional schools because they feel sorry for children who are forced to go to cram schools by their parents. Many people, including teachers and neighbors, have made critical statements about this situation that have appeared in mass media.

Fewer people, however, try to take action to solve the problem, as their own children do not know how to go out and play in nature with their friends. At any rate, people need to experience the deep thinking similar to the dialogue between Tensho Kotaijin and Konjin. They need to be able to make a decision after pursuing the meaning of the dialogue.

If we regard these circumstances as the mysterious dialogue between TenshoKotaijin and Konjin, we may be able to discern some worthy hidden values or solutions through careful scrutiny through thoughtful reasoning and dialogue.

In the dialogue, Tensho-Kotaijin and Konjin tried to come to a mutual understanding about Konko Daijin's ascription through a back-and-forth discussion, and then Konko Daijin made a decision. That process is similar to what goes on in our minds when we are at a crossroad in our lives, and look intently “left and right” for the rationale to determine which way to proceed. I think that it is important for us to accept our wavering psyche and search for our appropriate ascription.

It is not wrong for our minds to waver back and forth. When Konko Daijin had to make an important decision, his mind did waver, which was reflected in the dialogue between Tensho-Kotaijin and Konjin. Finally, he became wholeheartedly devoted to Konjin. Because of this experience, from 1859 Konko Daijin's way of life and outlook opened up. Through this dialogue, Konko Daijin draws our attention to the importance of steadily thinking about which values are a priority to us. I hope that this suggestion will help us to reaffirm what our lives mean and no matter what situations we encounter on our path going forward, we will not lose our way or who we are.

II. A Viewpoint on Living in Society

1. Society's Need for Change/Reform

Our daily lives are intertwined with political, educational, financial, international and other types of problems. “Living” also means that we need to keep dealing with these problems. “Dealing with these problems” implies that we not only oversee and manage them, but we also continue to assess and to scrutinize them. We may even become lost or confused, at times. The other day, a newspaper reported that a junior high school student killed his parents and grandmother. In addition, a newspaper article stated that a middle-aged man, who was bullied by junior high school students, attacked them in a classroom with a sickle. Children have to deal with these serious incidents when learning about them on TV or when reading about them in the newspaper, or on the internet. These situations are relevant to both children of similar age with the students in question, as well as their parents.

The ways in which each individual deals with an issue reflect their individual way of life. Let us think about how the basic mindset of the Konkokyo believers wanting to decide their ascription of life feel about the incidents in the world. Any religion, such as Christianity, Islam and Buddhism have their own precepts based on their faith. Let us think about the precepts of Konkokyo by observing how Konko Daijin dealt with situations.

In Konko Daijin's later years, Japan endured a period of disorder and unease from the end of the Edo Period to the Meiji Restoration (1868-1889). Even though the Meiji Restoration sought to bring about a new modern era, society, in general, was

very unstable. The new government adopted a package of policies and actions that were generally difficult for most people to understand.

The Meiji government broke Japan's self-imposed isolation that lasted for about 200 years. Subsequently, Japan experienced many trials and policy errors, as it attempted to make its dream of modernization come true. The government's goal was to catch up with European countries and with America. Among a variety of policies, there was one intended to "break superstition;" this impacted people's traditions and emotions regarding faith. In particular, there was a policy that cracked down on "bad" religions and that established Shinto as the national religion. Additionally, a policy "Haibutsu Kishaku" was declared. "Haibutsu Kishaku" was an anti-Buddhist movement that removed an element of Buddhism from Shinto to make Shinto the national religion. The policy was said to be extreme because it rejected Buddhism itself, but this policy was not implemented because of opposition efforts by Buddhists. From ancient times, Japan had a religion called "Syncretization of Shinto with Buddhism," which was unique, so it was almost impossible to remove aspects of Buddhism from Shinto.

In Ohtsu, Shiga Prefecture, some Buddhist Ksitigarbha statues in the town were disposed of as the result of an order from the government. Villagers were generally against this policy. Similar incidents happened in many local areas. Though statesmen sometimes had to make policies without any concern for local people, the results created deep emotional damage among the locals.

Because of the desire to develop its civilization and enlightenment, the Meiji government tried to remove any "bad religion" without any clearcut criteria. It was indeed unbearable for religious communities in Japan at that time.

Konko Daijin's worship hall was also suspected to be "a bad religion" by the government; consequently, officials often visited him. The first visit happened in 1871 (Meiji 4), due to a rumor that circulated in the village. "It is rumored that Konko Daijin committed burglaries in collusion with his followers." (Oboegaki 19-2).

It appears that not only Konko Faith, but also any faith or movement differing from the norm was criticized, especially by the government. One editorial staffer of an Osaka newspaper wrote an article about the religious situation in the Bitchu District, saying that bad religions should be removed. This article stated about Konko Daijin,

"There is a strange prayer person named Konko Daijin who lives in Otani village, Oda District (southwest area of present day Okayama Prefecture). There are also several branches which deceived a lot of people into making a great deal of donations. I am not sure who he is."

The article urged the government to crack down on Konko Daijin. In those days, there was little free exchange of information, so the news in 1873 (Meiji 6) about Otani village in the Osaka newspaper proved that there were a lot of people who visited Konko Daijin's worship hall and that he attracted many people. The fact that one editorial staffer wrote the article showed that Konko Daijin was seen to be a religious leader who had negative ideas and who disturbed those who were leaders of civilization and enlightenment.

The article was posted in January. A month later, the village chief magistrate asked Konko Daijin to clear out his worship hall, to cease propagation activities and related discussions. Konko Daijin accepted his order, clearing out the offertory box, as well as the altar furnishings. Then he moved into his private living quarters.

Konko Daijin wrote, "Summoned by Kawate Iseki, the village chief magistrate, Hagio quickly went to see him. Kawate ordered Hagio to put away the altar furnishings. Hagio returned home and informed me regarding what he was told. I

promptly cleared away the altar furnishings. This made the worship hall look dreary. It was February 18, according to the Gregorian calendar, at four in the afternoon. I then sent Ieyoshi to inform the village chief magistrate that the altar furnishings were put away. This was on January 21 (February 18), according to the lunar calendar. From January 22nd (February 19), Konko Daijin, stopped serving at the worship hall. Tenchi Kane no Kami-Sama told him, "Take a rest without feeling disappointed."(Oboegaki 21-3-1~4)"

It is unclear whether this article is related, however, during the previous year, at the Kasaoka branch worship hall of the Otani Village worship hall in Oda Prefecture, Konko Daijin's disciple Saito Juemon (1823-1895) was forced to cease his propagation activities. The movement to stop the propagation of "bad religions" was growing.

Regarding the social climate around Otani village when Konko Daijin was asked to cease all propagation, there had been a lot of riots during the Meiji Restoration there, for six years, since 1871. The civil unrest caused by farmers, which started at Mimasaka District, Okayama Prefecture, spread all over Okayama, including the eastern part of Hiroshima. The riot was called "Uchi Kowashi," a popular uprising mainly caused by farmers. It is said that about twenty-six thousand people were punished for these riots in the Mimasaka District. These incidents were brought about by several factors: "Fukenseki," a prefectural law administered in Meiji 4--; by "Jinsinkoseki"--the census registration law; as well as by the new school system; the adoption of the Gregorian calendar; Conscription Ordinance; and by the land tax law, which had a direct influence on the people's way of life. The Conscription Ordinance forced twenty-year-olds without households, as well as heirs to go to war. The new school system required children to attend school. These laws were administered without people's consent, through governmental mandates within a short timeframe. It was natural for the people to get angry and frustrated because the employers were deprived of their workers and families deprived of their wage earners.

The government sent out military troops comprised of soldiers from Osaka to Mimasaka in order to suppress the riot. Because the military force was newly formed and not well trained, the soldiers used extreme measures, causing unnecessary commotion and a lot of frustration among the people.

Some people were not able to adopt to the rapid changes and, in their frustration, they rebelled against the government; others became homeless or gamblers. Cockfighting seemed to be very popular. In response, the Oda Prefectural Office ordered people to stop cockfighting. There were many crimes committed at the time, not only in Okayama but throughout Japan. Society, as a whole, was so confused that people felt they had no prospect for the future, even though the Meiji Restoration endeavored to enhance civilization and to bring about enlightenment.

Society, in general, was unstable and in a state of confusion. Minus the thirty days when Konko Daijin was ordered to cease propagation, Konko Daijin continued his duties at the "Mediation place," as it was later called by believers, which was in front of his old desk at the worship hall. Without even stepping outside of the worship hall in his old house in a rural village, when it just became the Meiji period, he was able to grasp the essence of social problems. When I consider Konko Daijin's Oboegaki: Memoir of Konko Daijin, Oshirase-goto Oboe-cho: Record of Revelations and Gorikai: Teachings of Konko Daijin, I am deeply moved by his insight into the intricacies and problems of the world.

2. What Can Change, What Does Not Change

Nowadays, despite information being sent out not only through newspapers and TV, and through traveling and other forms of information gathering, it seems as though we cannot fully grasp the intricacies and problems of the world. Even if we can obtain larger amounts of information, it does not mean that we can understand the world well. Konko Daijin might have had much less information than we have. However, I marvel at the fact that he deeply understood the problems of the world.

Now, let us see how Konko Daijin observed the world. First, Konko Daijin always thought "The world is ever-changing." It seemed easy, but in truth, it was very difficult to tackle the problem guided by his thought that "The world is ever-changing." If we have a problem to solve, we struggle to deal with it without thinking about its context; we are desperate to solve it quickly at any cost. It is natural that we cannot see the circumstances that cause the problem to arise.

Whatever the problem may be, when the nature of the problem changes, the circumstances and society will also be transformed. The way we deal with it must also appropriately change. However, in order to clearly see change, we must first understand what can change and how it does so in order to have a clear perspective about what does not change.

Take for example you are riding in a boat on a big river, in the midst of heavy fog. You can't see either side of the river banks, nor can you discern which way the river is flowing. At that time, can you see which direction your boat is facing? At best, you can only feel the boat's motion. In other words, if we are at the center of a problem, we cannot appropriately judge how the problem is manifesting itself or how its circumstances are changing. When we launch a boat in the river, if we cannot clearly discern landmarks from the riverbanks, we will not be able to figure out where the boat is sailing.

Because Konko Daijin could see both what does not move and what cannot change, he could also see what can move and what can change. Konko Daijin left the following words as a divine message to say that the society in which humans live, the world's situation is not fixed, but changeable.

"There is the proverb, 'A deep pool becomes a rapid current, and a rapid current becomes a deep pool.' And also, 'During a flood, part of the land resembles an ocean.' These things do happen." (Oboegaki19-8-1)

"Oceans and rivers change, and even a deserted village can turn into a bustling town. The world is ever-changing." (Oboegaki20-8-1)

"These things" refer to a variety of the world circumstances that people cannot change or do not want to change. The villagers who grew up under the feudal system and who were reluctant to change, often rejected any change. The farmers rebelled against the government that instituted new measures and policies. However, such rebellion was also caused by people's rejection of change.

Konko Daijin left his role in the community. He had an experience that his way of life, rules, and values were changed as a result of his relationship with Kami, and he was dedicated to Kami. In his experience, it is not an exaggeration to say that Konko Daijin did not reject the notion of "changing himself" or "changing something" which other people did.

However, we do not necessarily see only positive aspects of change if there is something wrong with the causes of that change. If we lose understanding of what the

world and society can change and only surrender ourselves to change, we will be like foam on the surface of water, without control or direction.

On October 24, when suspension of propagation was rescinded, Konko Daijin received a revelation.

"It is not impossible for oceans, rivers, and mountains to change and for great shrines to fall into ruin. Even for your hiromae, it is not inconceivable for it to become a lively gathering place for people. When the world is in turmoil, it undergoes changes. Look forward to the future." [Oboegaki21-24-1~2]

Konko Daijin seemed to regard what changed as the world was immersed in turmoil. He also left revelations about civilization and enlightenment during the Meiji Restoration.

"Though they say the world is becoming civilized, it is not. It is collapsing. Hence, Konko has come forth to save the world."

[GI:ICHIMURA Mitsugoro:9.1]

"They say it is good for Japan to be reformed. But not all reforms are good. Take for example when land is reformed by flood or fire. Things are destroyed in the process. In such a case, it would be better without such reform."

[G II:NANBA Ko:17-2]

What was Konko Daijin's true intention or thinking in his messages "the world is in turmoil" → "changing" "breaking," when he sees the world?

In order to think about this problem, we have to look back on the social movement at the beginning of the Meiji Era. With the intention of modernizing to compete with European countries, Japan went through a cultural revolution involving changes in customs and religion. These were linked with movements toward "civilization and enlightenment." The Meiji government also strongly pushed a policy of "encouragement of new industry" by improving waterways, expanding farms and utilizing natural resources to increase productivity.

From Kami's and Konko Daijin's perspectives, humankind selfishly engaged in a battle against the Universe. In this context, although humans were basically allowed to live in the Universe, problematically, humans used the Universe for their own convenience.

Konko Daijin called the world that people formed, a "human-centered world" in "Oshirasegoto Oboecho." We will not be able to see "civilization and enlightenment" or "encouragement of new industry" make the world develop and be convenient.

We also see this approach as disturbing the relationship between humans and the Universe, resulting in turmoil. Recently, when we reflected on how modernization created environmental destruction, including the contamination and pollution of nature, we cannot help but think about Konko Daijin's deep insight into seeing modernization as the beginning of turmoil.

On February 6, Meiji 5, 1872, an earthquake hit the Sanyo and Sanin Districts. Newspapers at that time reported that the earthquake brought about serious damage in different parts of Japan. Konko Daijin, who served in his hiromae, felt the big shock of the earthquake. Then Tenchi Kane No Kami informed Konko Daijin, "The world is chaotic," regarding the earthquake.

The earthquake struck on February 6 (March14) at around six in the evening.

Konko Daijin wrote about this in “Oboegaki”. Kami-Sama said, "I, Tenchi Kane No Kami, am disturbed. The world is chaotic." [Oboegaki:16-3]

While we think of an earthquake merely as a natural phenomenon, this description tells us that an earthquake is proof of Kami’s disturbance and suggests that the human-centered world is beginning to be chaotic. This point may not be understood by those who have received scientific knowledge. However, we should not lose the keen sense of awareness that the chaos of the world is derived from an expression on Earth.

The creatures which live with the flow of the Earth unexpectedly perceived the change of the situation on Earth. It was natural for them to perceive the change on Earth in terms of whether it will rain or not since the change directly affects their lives.

It is said that catfish go wild when an earthquake is imminent. I hear that scientists draw attention to this phenomenon and keep on researching it. It seems that not only catfish but also other various creatures have sensors to help them survive their lives so they can predict the change of the situation before taking action. If living things live on Earth and are connected with it, they can perceive phenomena on Earth that are relevant to their lives.

3. Line of Vision

Remembering “the world is in turmoil” → “changing” → “breaking” → “collapsing” → “Kami is disturbed” in order to search for “what has not moved,” let us examine two or three revelations from “Gorikai: Teachings of Konko Daijin. Through this examination, we can also better understand how Konko Daijin’s eyes were able to perceive the human-centered world and we are able to better understand what Konko Daijin saw.

Once, I went to worship with the Kinugawa Noodle Shop owner and brought offerings from many believers. While humbly presenting the offerings, I gave Konko-Sama a list of the donors. He said, "Since I cannot read well, I may misread the list. So if you would read it, I will write it." I began to read it aloud, "Osaka, Higashi Ward, so-and-so street...." Konko-Sama then interrupted, "No, no --, just read the city and the year of birth." Kinugawa then said, "But Konko-Sama, Osaka is a big city. It has four wards and two counties." Konko-Sama replied, "Ha,ha, Osaka is big. But to Kami, it is no bigger than a poppy seed."

[G II: KONDO Fujimori, 6]

When I think about his words about Osaka, “it is no bigger than a poppy seed,” I doubt that Konko Daijin was unaware of the approximate size and prosperity of Osaka. But it is extraordinary that he said that the large area of Osaka was smaller than a poppy seed.

Today, satellite images of Osaka clearly show the size of the city. Konko Daijin’s view of Osaka is obviously through Kami Sama’s lens, a vision that is unwaveringly clear. Normally, we only see things at eye level and/or within our line of vision. When we see things through Kami’s eyes, we will see something completely different. There is a revelation,

"Man is smaller than a speck of ash compared to the greatness of Tenchi Kane No Kami. [G II :KONDO Fujimori12-4]

It is also a view of humans from Kami's perspective. Today, even if we boast that the metropolitan Tokyo is the best in the world, it is just like a poppy seed to Kami's eye. This is a concept that we cannot deny. We should remember that even a big planet like the earth is merely stardust seen from Kami's eyes. There is a revelation about not just width and size but also rapidity.

Once when I went to the hiromae, I mentioned, "The world is really progressing. Going to worship by the new steamboats is much faster than by the old sailing ships. And soon with the telegram, we can receive messages from Tokyo in an hour. The telephone will also allow us to talk to people faraway." Then Konko-Sama answered, "I don't know about the steamboat or the telegram, but I do know that there is a faster thing. It is the Sun, which travels from dawn to dusk, and from east to west." [G II : KONDO Fujimori14]

The revelation was received by Kondo Fujimori (1855~1917) from Osaka. During those days, when people traveled from Osaka to Otani to worship at the hiromae, they usually chartered the Kawaguchi ship located in the harbor, although there was a land route. Navigating the waves in the Seto Inland Sea, the ship arrived near Okayama and Tamashima and then people continued to walk to the hiromae. Around Meiji 14 (1881) when Kondo Fujimori started his worship, steamships went into service. They shortened the amount of time to get to destinations compared with "the old sailing ships."

Konko Daijin had never seen steamships, much less used a telephone and telegraph. Kondo Fujimori who knew about new world technologies told Konko Daijin about the speed of the new developments of modern civilization. Konko Daijin raised a question about Kondo's point of view by using the example of "the Sun," which he said was much faster than these new products. Konko Daijin presented a metric different from one that we ordinarily use to measure our experience. That is Kami's scale or metric.

When Konko Daijin measures width and speed of the world, he does with Kami's Eye and with Kami's Scale. In this way, he is mindful of Kami's thinking, and this adds an edge to his awareness of problems.

Now we live in an information era, with technologies related to space satellites and computers. Today, we can get substantial and exact knowledge from our society and the world. However, this knowledge can be used only supplementary to judge and decide on how to resolve the problems in our lives. Nothing further. Konko Daijin suggested to us that the place of judgment and decision on problems should be left up to Tenchi Kane No Kami's discretion and timeframe.

If we leave the basis of our lives and get lost, we vanish in the smoke of the informational melting pot, and finally we will lose our home. This situation is not conducive to creating the belief in "Save humanity and the world."

Now the slogan, "Express Konko Daijin to contemporary society" has become a movement among the believers. We have to put our lives in Kami's timeframe that suggests to us "the world is in turmoil"→changing→collapsing→"Kami is disturbed" and we have to think about our life's problems in contemporary society before we are able to express the way of saving people who are suffering from their problems.

4. Rest and Rebirth

The way of living for Japanese people has always been very busy and uneasy. While the Japanese are criticized for overworking by people around the world, it remains true that Japanese people tend to work much harder than others.

The Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset wrote in his article, “El Hombre y La Gente (Man and the Populace)” that a human life is impossible without a strategic retreat into oneself or a deep thought, and that one must think how much humanity owes to the great being in one’s self. He provided examples of those who took the time to retreat from, and to reflect about worldly affairs, in order to seek the being in one’s self.

Our information and economy-driven society make people too busy. They regard doing nothing as a sin, so they are constantly pressured to think about people, companies, schools and the world. Then time passes, we work hard and finally we get old and die. Don’t we each live our own lives like that?

In 1859, Ansei 6, when Konko Daijin was forty-six, he retired from his role as a villager and dedicated his life to serving Kami, sitting in the hiromae all day long. However, he touched upon human difficulties and social problems through Sacred Mediation in his work at the worship hall.

When the Meiji Era started, Konko Daijin suffered from his “retreat from the world.” There was an incident when he was ordered to suspend Sacred Mediation by an administrator of the village in 1873, Meiji 6. He had to leave the hiromae where he sat for fourteen years. Konko Daijin obeyed the order and stayed in his room for thirty days.

Nobody knows what Konko Daijin did during the thirty days because there are no records regarding this question. He obeyed the ban on propagation and spent thirty days maintaining his dialogue with Kami, deeply pondering his own way of living and his faith.

The administrator of the village allowed Konko Daijin to restart Mediation after thirty days. For the next month, Konko Daijin presented the the “Divine Reminder,” “Tenchi Kakitsuke” in Japanese, as a fundamental schema of faith. At this time, he received the revelation that the Mediation seat should be located to the side, between worshippers and the altar.

These two changes tell us that Konko Daijin absolutely broke away from the Japanese traditional way of prayer. The change made on his suspension is also a keystone of restarting propagation to express his own way of faith. “Konko Daijin Oboegaki: Memoirs of Konko Daijin” might have been produced at that time.

For the next thirty days, worshippers visited Konko Daijin, but he didn't appear in the hiromae. It is said that his wife, Tose, brought the spinning wheel to Konko Daijin and he communicated with the worshippers through its use. His complete withdrawal can be regarded as his positive attitude toward spending a substantial amount of time pondering his own faith. That is to say, he turned his negative situation into a positive one.

We should not give up the idea that it is impossible for modern people to spend time concentrating on their own world, temporarily cutting off contact with the world and society. The busier we are, the more we need to allow ourselves time for own way of life to renew our life. Even if the period is one month, one day, or only ten minutes, we need to take time to think of ourselves in the real sense of the term. Even if the time spent is just for thinking quietly, or for praying, all we have to do is to focus on

ourselves without letting in any external information and work.

Today, some schools and companies have their workers or staff take a leave for two days in a week. These people are expected to spend their leave time playing sports, such as golf, or taking care of their children and family. The assumption is that people need this time for "cleansing their heart" and "extending their lives," but it goes without saying that the time is not one of "retreat" or reflection. Konko Daijin left a revelation for his family regarding this.

"Don't go to see entertainment shows impulsively during a holiday. Think if there's enough time first, then go. People go to such diversions saying that doing so will prolong their lives. However, since you have Kami, you need not make an effort to prolong your life." [Oboegaki: 20-12-8]

"To see entertainment" relates to leisure time. The revelation also tells the family of Konko Daijin that they should not go out for leisure, chasing after fads even if others enjoy going out for entertainment. It does not say that leisure is not faithful or immoral. Rather, it warns us not to be deprived of our hearts and not to lose ourselves by forgetting our sense of purpose and meaning in our lives.

Undoubtedly, the retreat of Konko Daijin for a month beginning with Chinese New Year, February 22, had a bad effect on propagation after he was ordered to stop these activities in Meiji 6. It seemed that fewer worshippers visited Konko Daijin after the propagation ban. However, the one month he spent concentrating on deepening his faith enabled Konko Daijin to determine his view of the world. He developed his vision and understanding which enabled him to say that Osaka is smaller than a poppy seed, and to say that there is something that is faster than the telegraph or telephone between Kami and Konko Daijin.

It might have been better for Konko Daijin to keep serving at Toritsugi every day without any obstacles, but as one revelation says, "'Konko, be reborn" (Oboegaki:21-4)." The retreat for thirty days was great for Konko Daijin to renew his life of faith.

I would like to add a few comments about Konko Daijin suffering from the ban of propagation and coping with it. When we think of the problems in the world and address them, we end up sharing both sorrow and happiness

If we live on the other side of the world and dispassionately see the problems of the world, we miss the point of seeing and addressing them. It is impossible to see and deal with problems only by being influenced or informed by your surroundings. We sometimes need to leave our comfort zone. Then when we return to that zone, we sometimes come to make sense of what we could not previously understand or see.

When we are young, we do not have to rest frequently. We need some time to look at ourselves and to experience the rebirth of our lives. After a passage of time, we should look at ourselves living in the world or society. Besides, we have to ponder what our world and society are like. As a starting point, we should look for what stays constant or what is fundamental. This is where Konko Daijin interacted with Tenchi Kane No Kami. Seeing the world and society from this aspect, we are also able to see big Osaka as smaller than a poppy seed.

There is a message from such a perspective given by KONKO Ieyoshi, 2nd Konko-Sama after Konko Daijin's death, "Churches becoming popular is the beginning of declination." "Churches" does not mean "Konkokyo Organization;" rather, it refers to companies, enterprises or nations.

Increasing the number of churches and believers is proof that the Way has been conveyed to the world; a wish of the disciples who have endeavored day and

night, after Konko Daijin's death. This wish was about to come true when KONKO Ieyoshi, called Shijin-Sama, served Kami in the worship hall.

However, it is a really insightful notion that Ieyoshi was respected by believers as a core person of Konko Faith, and that Konkokyo organization warned that the situation was "the beginning of declination." Ieyoshi saw the situation in the same way as Konko Daijin, who said the period of civilization and enlightenment was in turmoil. His message to the world was a warning for the believers and reverends who forgot the way of thinking based on Kami, who easily indulged in their own ability and power, and who assumed they acted for all.

Now, Japanese society has developed and has made many achievements, and has been acknowledged as an economic world power. We are all involved in this. Sometimes we are dedicated to working hard without caring for our family or without being concerned about mental fatigue. However, the situation will definitely cause serious questions such as "What is our life purpose?" and "Is this situation really good for us?" Before we are bewildered by such questions, we would like to review the way Konko Daijin saw the Meiji Restoration and dealt with it and to incorporate his way of thinking in our lives.

III. "Social" Common Sense and a World of Faith

1. Questions about Absurdities

In our daily lives, there are situations whereby we follow various customs and traditions. Sending seasonal gifts and exchanging New Year cards are examples of such practices. Selecting the date for weddings or funerals and contemplating how to conduct them are often decided following customs derived from "social" common sense. With these formalities and rules which generally show us safe ways to do things, we can lead daily lives without worrying about trivial matters. In every civilization around the world, customs function similarly, even if the form looks differently, so that its people may follow their respective customs in most cases.

However, when one chooses a particular faith-based way of living or has thoughts which may differ from other people, in general, that person may be seen as saying things which may be different from the social customs of the majority of people. For example, the followers of a particular religious sect are known to reject blood transfusions for medical treatment. Based on their religious doctrines and values, they do what they believe is right, even if their acts are contrary to social or medical rules or norms.

Such acts may provoke a conflict between the values and ethics in society and those in a faith-based world. Whether it is right or not should be decided in accordance with one's personal faith stance. To debate whether they originate from a medical or ethical standpoint is unnecessary for those who firmly believe in their faith. If you place your standard of value or judgment in a faith-based world, you will be forced to choose between a way of living which somehow cannot conform to

conventional standards or frameworks, or a way of living which would be totally confrontational.

I am afraid that in the world of Konko Daijin's Faith, we believers tend to interpret that there has been no strong confrontational attitudes against social values or customs. But such interpretation is a way we avert a confrontation with the secular world, and may be subject to criticism for having religious indolence, the lack of sincerely examining this Faith's impact on the society in which Konko Daijin lived. Konko Daijin's faith deepened precisely because he had to squarely confront social norms and historical conditions. That is why his faith gained followers, the Way was passed down, and people were saved.

Over a span of 2-3 years, the Konkokyo Research Institute has been conducting field studies on folk beliefs and Konjin Faith. Konjin is an itinerant god from cosmology and divination. Konjin is associated with "The Days & Directions" compass directions, and said to change position with the year, lunar month and season. The purpose of this study is to learn the people's actual traditional concepts, beliefs and customs concerning Konjin. To pursue this goal, we chose the areas where the old traditional beliefs and practices seem to remain. We visited these villages and small towns as the subjects of our study, examining small shrines and household altars, and interviewing the local elderly residents. The Institute has made more than twenty field research trips, and I myself joined them a few times.

The research sites which I visited recently were mountainous villages in Soja City, two train stations north of Kurashiki on JR Hakubi Line. The Soja City area was once the cultural center of the Kibi Province which boasts a long history. Driving over steep hills for an hour from Soja City, we visited several villages. Although the villages are not far from developed cities such as Kurashiki and Soja, they are well preserved vestiges of old folkways, practices and beliefs.

For example, most residences have small shrines dedicated to Konjin in the northeast (devil's gate) and southwest (devil's back gate) areas of the plot. One house had a stone foundation, one meter high and two meters wide, on which Konjin was enshrined. In almost all of the gardens, piles of stones, big and small, were spotted here and there. These are not only remnants of the past. Some villagers continue to observe certain rituals several times a year.

Since these villagers worship Konjin, as can be expected, they consciously observe the "Days & Directions." It is probably still believed that Konjin is a god who places curses on people, so they try to avoid offending him and facing his vengeance. Konjin was not the only god believed to place curses on the villagers. O-Dokoosama (god of stove), Gunshin (god of war), and Nittenshi (Hindu sun god) or Marishiten (Marici) were also worshipped to avoid their curses. They are what folklorists call *yashiki-gami* ("estate kami").

Through these field studies, we deduced that in the late Edo and Meiji Eras in which Konko Daijin had lived, the majority of the villagers in the Bitchu, Bizen and Bingo districts were afraid of Konjin and conscious of the "Days & Directions" concerning Konjin's whereabouts. The direction Konjin was thought to momentarily reside, at any given time, is considered an unlucky direction. It seems that people led their daily lives, whatever they did, constantly feeling not only Konjin, but other evil gods at their side. They sometimes held festivals to appease these gods; at other times, they averted misfortune by consulting the itinerary rules of Konjin's whereabouts. It can be said that the contemporaries of Konko Daijin felt the gods' pressures and threats in every aspect of their lives; believing that human irreverences would be avenged, punished, and/or cursed by gods and that people had to live within the framework and rules given by the gods.

Through these field studies, learning the views on life and customs concerning gods or kamis, according to the villagers residing here and there, we could not help but feel as if the shadows of Konko Daijin's cohorts are lingering on. On the other hand, there no longer seem such threatening and incomprehensible gods or kamis looming around the lives of most people today. However, they have not entirely disappeared. Even today, there is the rhetoric that human sorrows and sufferings have resulted from neglecting memorial services for aborted fetuses or for ancestors, and it torments some people. Even in corners of urban streets, ancient gods/kamis are thought to be hiding and may haunt in various forms and disguises. There are people who wonder why they suffer from misfortunes and search for answers. On such occasions, some visit psychics/mediums or shamans to seek answers. They try to find quick fixes to change their fates. You may regard them as weak individuals and criticize them, but if you, yourself, fall into a difficult situation, you may be driven into a similar state of mind and seek similar solutions. For those who do not have a firm faith, it is difficult to endure misfortunes or a series of mishaps; they feel compelled to look for simple explanations or easy answers for their suffering. Suppose that a fire breaks out at a household that had a succession of misfortunes. The family could hardly convince themselves that the disaster was merely an accident resulting from mishandling fire. Typically, they would ask why such a careless event happened in such an untimely way. They would come to suspect that this was a trick of unseen fate. If children fell ill and died one after another, their family would not be given a reasonable medical explanation by the doctors. Their questions would focus on why they, and not others suffered this devastation. These questions could never be answered and would lie heavily on the family.

Even if you were to drive a car very, very carefully, accidents could happen at any given moment. You could be struck from behind, you could lose focus due to sleepiness, or you could encounter an unforeseen calamity such as being struck by a falling boulder. You would ask yourself, "Why me?" "Why does my family suffer such accidents?" Some logical explanations may be that the public road was not maintained properly or the other party's car was faulty. But the underlying question of why you or your family had to be involved in the accident would never be clarified.

If children in your neighborhood or around the world were killed "proportionally" by accidents, you may reluctantly accept this misfortune. But if a next door neighbor's son, who happened to be a reckless motorcyclist, continued to drive around brazenly, in good health, and your obedient son who cautiously walked on the sidewalk were to be involved in a traffic accident and died, the big question of "WHY?!" would seize the heart of each of your family members.

This kind of question unceasingly continues to be raised throughout human existence and history. Whether in the ancient Nara or Heian Periods, or in modern times, Humans are invariably forced to ask themselves inexplicable/perplexing questions, in vain. In the past, there had been claims that various phenomena were caused by the curses of vengeful spirits, the anger of evil gods/kamis, the tricks of foxes and badgers, or being possessed by evil river or mountain spirits. Even though the forms and names of evil-doing perpetrators have changed due to the development of medical and scientific findings, the same old feelings and concepts of the unexplainable spiritual power and fates remain even in the minds of people today.

There was a time, in villages and towns where individuals lived whose job was to offer answers to perplexing/puzzling questions. Today their presence is inconspicuous as their number has decreased. But during our field studies mentioned earlier, we met someone at a house in the mountains who offered answers as a side job. He said that on the first, second and third of each month, he met villagers who sought his advice. As their consultant, he examined directions, led prayers, or told fortunes.

When we happened to drop by his house, unaware of his background, we observed a few visitors there waiting to consult with him. There was a shrine of Konjin on his estate, looking down the ridge line of the Kibi mountains.

According to a report by our researcher who went to Ushimado Town, there lived an elderly woman who devoted her life exclusively praying for advice seekers. She was addressed as “Kongara-sama” and received visitors every day. She appraised the gods’/kamis’ likes and dislikes, any offenses against gods, and the curse of Konjin. The researcher reported that she then gave advice or conducted prayer services for the visiting seeker. Through these field studies, we became aware of the existence of these active practitioners today.

Judging from their existence even today, we could guess that there must have been many psychics and shamans in the region during Konko Daijin’s time. The remarks of AOI Saki (1853-1916), ISHIHARA Ginzo (1833-1910), KATAOKA Jiuroshi (1840-1899), and FUJIWARA Kazo (1833-1910) reported in *Konko Daijin Gorikai-shu* (Teachings of Konko Daijin) and *Konko Kyoten* (Sacred Scripture of Konkokyo) provide us a clue to understanding the situation in those days. These believers/disciples said that they used to depend on traditional psychics/mediums and shamans before they began to visit Konko Daijin’s Mediation Hall. It can be said that many of them visited the Mediation Hall expecting Konko Daijin to be like a shaman. Let’s look at the case of KATAOKA Jiuroshi.

“My wife and I kept losing our children, one after another. The oldest child we had ever raised was only four. Thinking that this was the curse of Konjin, I had my house and land examined and rebuilt my house many times. I even filled the ditch behind the house and dug a new one. Our family had been well-educated for generations and never had financial problems. We were a high-class family in the district. We tried everything to avoid Konjin, and even had him confined, but to no avail. I then thought that since there must be someone serving Konjin, I should go and consult this person. [GII KATAOKA Jiuroshi 1-1]

Among the villagers it was rumored that in this type of situation, the Kataokas, a powerful family of the village, might die out. Suspecting the curse of Konjin, Jiuroshi requested and followed the advice of psychics and shamans. Yet the family could not overcome misfortunes. So Jiuroshi decided to ask the help of someone exclusively worshipping Konjin. He met OOMORI Ume (1827-1902) who was a disciple of Konko Daijin. The steps that Jiuroshi took to cope with his family crisis were not unusual for the people of that time. People with concerns went to psychics and shamans who could identify the reasons for family misfortunes. As countermeasures to these misfortunes, the consultant usually advised the seekers to rebuild or renovate their houses.

This may appear strange from today’s perspective, but it was a commonly held belief in society; in other words, the customary norm of the time. People generally accepted the notion that there were no other options to solve problems.

2. House Construction under Konjin Faith

In the late Tokugawa Era social norms had a stronger influence on people’s decision-making than they do today. Subjective and individualized or unique ways of thinking were not welcomed as acceptable codes of conduct in village life.

Looking back at Konko Daijin's way of life as a villager, there was a time that he followed such social traditions. It was particularly clear in the way he followed the various folk beliefs and concepts concerning Konjin.

Now, before talking about Konko Daijin, I should explain how people conceptualized Konjin. Strictly speaking, I also should consider the teachings and theories of Taoism and the Way of Yin and Yang. But people's images of Konjin, in those days, seem to have been far apart from those theories. With some regional differences, there were terms such as *Happyakuya Konjin* (literally, or "808 konjin gods/kamis") or *Nokorazu Konjin* (literally, or "all konjin gods"), the latter name used by Konko Daijin himself. These names well depict the images which people in the Bizen and Bitchu districts held for Konjin. It can be said that contemporary people recognized all the gods that place curses in the "Konjin category." The names such as *Happyakuya Konjin* and *Nokorazu Konjin* infers the inclusive naming of all gods that place curses. It seems "Konjin" in those days was not necessarily an individual deity with specific properties, but rather, a term indicating a group of all deities that place curses.

When determining the boundary of a plot or building a house, people were strongly conscious of *Ushitora-no-Konjin* (konjin of Ox-Tiger, or konjin in the northeast) and *Hitsuji-saru-no-Konjin* (konjin of Ram-Monkey, or konjin in the southwest). They are Konjins who reside in the northeast and southeast from the center of house. These directions were generally called *Kimon* (devil's gate) and *Ura-Kimon* (devil's back gate, or unlucky quarter). Since these Konjins were said to hate uncleanness, it was believed that the kitchen, bath and toilet should not have been built in that direction. Although Konjin was generally an itinerant god, it was believed the two Konjins somehow did not move away from their particular positions.

The two-direction-related Konjins were not the only gods to be considered in building a house. People needed to be conscious of Konjins who were particular about the age of the house owner, the family structure, and the date and month of construction. There were numerous konjins, including *Tai Shogun* (who blocks a direction for three years), *Hasshojin* (who moves around in accordance with the Chinese zodiac calendar), *Mawari Konjin* (Circulating God), *Tsuki Konjin* (Month Konjin) and *Hi Konjin* (Day Konjin). Also, other gods, such as Kumaouji overseeing travels and agricultural activities, were regarded as gods that placed curses in association with Konjin. These gods, with every conceivable types of appearances and names, were thought to have influence on human lives, and were recognized sometimes individually and sometimes as a group of Konjins. In the meantime, arrangements related to appropriate responses to respective gods were decided and variations were added to standardize the customs and traditions in daily lives. Thus, people earnestly followed various formulae to escape unexpected adversities/mishaps.

Konko Daijin, in the first half of his life, lived just as his cohorts did, within the framework of so-called "folk beliefs." He shared all kinds of experiences with the average person: he visited the Ise Shrine, made a Shikoku pilgrimage, and chose how to spend his "unlucky" age. He was not only concerned with "good & bad" days and directions, but was also fearful of the curse of Konjin.

At the age of 37 (1850), Konko Daijin decided to rebuild the aging main house. Upon this big family event, he asked the village grand headman ONO Mitsuemon (1785-1858) and his eldest son Shiemon (1813-1865) to check the Days

and Directions. All of these processes were conducted and recorded in detail in *Konko Daijin Oboegaki (Memoirs of Konko Daijin, Chap. II, Sections 13-20)*. Later, this event turned out to be an opportunity for Konko Daijin to deepen his own faith.

Wanting to buy a house in the next village and relocate it to his village, Konko Daijin asked ONO Shiemon to check the Days and Directions. Receiving the response that there was no problem, he bought the house. Yet in January of the next year, Konko Daijin and Shiemon visited Mitsuemon who worked at Ide Local Office, in Soja City to extend their New Year's greetings. Listening to his son's consultation report, however, the village grand headman Mitsuemon told Konko Daijin to halt the construction plan, citing an unlucky relationship between his age and Konjin's fortune cycle.

“Being thirty-seven years old, you were born in the Year of the Dog. This year is also the Year of the Dog. Therefore you must not undertake construction.” [Oboegaki: 2, 14-2]

The results of checking on the same inquiry may often lead to contradictions, depending on the experience, viewpoints and methods of the consultants. Interestingly, in those days psychics and mediums often conducted additional consultations and should there be differing results, they would make adjustments. Actually Konko Daijin had already bought a house following his first consultation. The person receiving different results following an additional consultation must be at a loss, and thus it is necessary to find a compromise. Like others, Konko Daijin asked if there was something he could do to proceed with the construction. The grand headman then advised:

“Build a temporary shed southeast of your house and move into it on March 14 (April 25). Clear away your old house on August 3 (September 8). On the fourth, lay the foundation of your new house. And on the sixth, raise the ridgepole. Enter the new house on the twentieth (October 3).” [Oboegaki 2, 14-4]

To “build a temporary shed southeast...and move into it” means that the direction of the present house was unlucky so that the family needed to move into the temporary shed considered a lucky direction. In a way, they deceived Konjin by using *katatagae* (an expedient transition to avert bad luck). Here is another example of *katatagae* -- someone wants to travel southward. However, if Konjin is residing in a southerly direction at the moment, the person would first head westward and then turn towards the southwest, pretending not to travel south, trying to trick Konjin.

In a situation whereby action needs to be taken immediately, with little time for preparation, a person may try to temporarily manage with a makeshift compromise. I'm sure everybody has had such an experience. Some may regret it and feel sorry for having done so, even if it was inevitable. In Konko Daijin's case of *katatagae*, it was said to be done against the dreaded Konjin. How did Konko Daijin feel about the deception? Despite being told not to commence construction, he conveniently chose *katatagae*, following the second consultation. It is undeniable that he felt guilt and remorse. Years later, when he recalled the incident he wrote:

“I sought Konjin-Sama’s permission. I declared, ‘I will proceed with the construction on the Date and in the Direction that were specified by the specialist (ONO Mitsuemom). I will make the new house bigger than the old house on three sides; toward the east, south and west. However, being a man of primal ignorance, I don’t know which Direction I might be irreverent to.” (Oboegaki 2, 20-2)

From this remark that Konko Daijin asked Konjin’s permission, we can guess that he felt a certain awe and fear of Konjin at that time.

He chose an evasive way to pursue his own convenience, for which he felt guilty. This guilty conscience led him to an awakening of his own spiritual relationship with Konjin. It can be said that the instance of regret toward Kami born in his mind became deep and profound. This feeling later developed into the faith of Konko Daijin.

Many people do not put much thought into deceiving Konjin; they tend to convince themselves that it is a common practice and “everyone does it.” We humans often attribute our thoughts and deeds to social norms and thus we unconsciously evade our responsibilities.

Konko Daijin cleared out his old house and built a temporary shed to deceive Konjin regarding the house-moving direction. But misfortunes continued afterwards: his heir Makiemon, who had moved into the shed with Konko Daijin, died of illness, and two oxen died, two years apart. Five years after the completion of the new house, Konko Daijin turned 42 years old, considered a critical age.

Because Konko Daijin was concerned about his critical age, like everybody else at that age, to ward off misfortunes, he earnestly visited shrines and temples. He visited the village god, Gion-sama shrine of Tomo-no-tsu, Kibitsu Jinja (a guardian shrine of the Bitchu and Bizen districts), and Kannon-in of Saidaiji Temple, one after another, from the beginning of the year. He thus followed the same custom of praying for protection at his critical age as other people, who did so in various ways. Nevertheless, he was stricken with a severe life-threatening illness in 1855.

3. Private Prayer Rituals

When he contracted the serious illness, his worried relatives and neighbors gathered at his house and held a prayer vigil for his recovery, as was a common practice. The gist of how the ritual was conducted is recorded in *Konko Daijin Oboegaki* (Memoirs of Konko Daijin). According to this book, the prayer vigil was almost the same as a typical prayer ritual which had been frequently conducted among people in the Bitchu district. The gathering was conducted within the framework of a traditional prayer ritual. Then and there, nevertheless, for some unknown reason, Konko Daijin was guided to discover a clue to his original and reformed faith.

Here, I would like to elaborate on the traditional prayer vigil which was clarified by our research cited earlier, and by so doing, to learn Konko Daijin’s progression of moving away from the traditional framework into a new path. First of all, the prayer ritual conducted by his relatives and neighbors mostly followed

the style generally called “*Kanbara Kito* (Kanbara Prayer).”

Kanbara’s present-day name is “Soja City, Okayama.” It was once called “Kanbara Village.” The Tonbara community in the Village is said to be an area where a number of professional psychics/mediums or shamans and *onmyoji* (practitioner of the Japanese esoteric cosmology) lived. They were called “*Kanbara Tayu*” or “*Kanbara Zonin*.” They used to move around the Bizen, Bitchu and Bingo districts to perform prayer rituals, carrying *eboshi* (Shinto priest headgear) and a hanging scroll with a deity depicted. Their professional rituals or the ones villagers who were lay people copied and conducted were called “*Kanbara Kito*” or *J’insaku Kito*.” The prayer rituals included a variety of styles and actions ranging from plucking bowstrings to sword dancing. However, the basic pattern was as follows:

A person called “*maemoushi*” (representative) was chosen from the group and he helped conduct the ritual. When a conjured deity possessed a shaman performing the ritual, the deity told *maemoushi* the reason for the disease or misfortune through the shaman. The deity also heard the defense through *maemoushi*. Then the argument between the deity through the shaman and *maemoushi* about the reason gradually led to a conclusion which both sides could accept. We may look at it as a debate between a judge and defense attorney.

Then the possessed shaman could relay the cause of the disease or calamity. For example, a reason may be that a toilet was built facing the wrong direction offending Konjin, or that a client’s ancestor from generations back had broken a taboo of the gods. If *maemoushi* of the client group admitted such mistakes and apologized, the shaman, on the client’s behalf, could apologize for their irreverence toward a relevant deity and then pray for recovery or removal of the calamity. This type of process was typically performed by the client, *maemoushi*, shaman and a deity.

The deity possessing the shaman was not necessarily a specific deity that the shaman believed in. Depending on the time period, the deity can be Konjins or mythological gods such as Tensho Kotaijin (Amaterasu), Nittenshi, Kibitsu-hiko-no-mikoto, Susano-no-mikoto, local Yabu-kami, Kohjin, Miko-gami (Miko god), Mitama (spirit) or Sorei (ancestral spirit). Any deity of that time, place and occasion can possess the shaman, as if the shaman could freely invoke one or various kinds of spirits from their residence in mountains and rivers. There seems to be times when the conjured deity would convey the messages on behalf of other gods who may be indirectly related to the problem. In this way, the shaman would bring the spiritual world before the people. Inspired by the drama between gods and humans, which was shown in a ritual format, people would have gained the power to overcome illness or disasters.

Now, keeping this background knowledge in mind, let us briefly review the prayer vigil scenario when Konko Daijin suffered from a critical illness at the age of 42. The crucial moment came on April 29, 1855. A symptom developed in the afternoon of the 25th and he saw a doctor the next day. Konko Daijin himself and his family prayed to Shinto and Buddhist deities in vain. He could not utter a sound, nor drink tea or water. He was in a critical state. Among his relatives who gathered, FURUKAWA Jiro (1827-1868) was a leader of Shugendo (ascetic mountain hermits) at Mount Ishizuchi in Shikoku and had extensive experience conducting prayer rituals. So he consented to officiate the ritual as a shaman and soon he was possessed by a deity.

The deity revealed that Konko Daijin committed irreverent acts while building the new house. As I mentioned earlier, Konko Daijin, himself, had been concerned about this deep down in his heart. Though he was uncertain of the name of the deity who possessed Jiro, according to Gorikai 1: ICHIMURA Mitsugoro 3-1, it seemed to be a deity of the Kibitsu Shrine, the head shrine of Kibi Province, where Konko Daijin had made a wish in January of that year. Next came the conversation between the deity and *maemoushi*. FURUKAWA Yaozo (1793-1884), Konko Daijin's wife Tose's father, accepted the role of *maemoushi*.

Yaozo defended Konko Daijin, saying "He has not committed any offense against Konjin-Sama," and "The Directions were checked before the construction." To this, the kami responded bitterly, "If the Directions were checked before the construction, would it be all right if he dies and this family is wiped out?" (*Oboegaki 3-4-5*) Actually, the conversation must have been more detailed than the one recorded in *Konko Daijin Oboegaki 3-4-5~7*. Hearing the conversation, Konko Daijin remembered that he made his convenience the priority when planning the construction. He apologized as follows:

"Since I was born in the year of the Dog, it was my unlucky year to do construction. I had the Days and Directions checked, but since the result did not agree with my construction plans, I had the Days and Directions rechecked to maneuver around the difficulties. I then proceeded with the construction while following the Days instructed. I thereby built a house bigger than the old one. Due to my primal ignorance, I did not know which direction I was irreverent to. I do not think that just checking the Days and Directions is sufficient. I apologize for my irreverence since starting the construction." [*Oboegaki: 3-5, 3~4*]

Konko Daijin offered this apology to Kami. Kami regarded this confession as a sincere one and decided to instruct him directly regarding how to be saved, without using *maemoushi*. In the instruction, Kami pointed out three things: Firstly, Konjin and other kamis were present at that prayer ritual. In January, Konko Daijin visited a Buddhist temple and a Shinto shrine - Kibitsu Shrine, in particular. The fact that the kettle at Kibitsu Shrine made a groaning sound twice was a sign of Konko Daijin's impending illness. Furthermore, Kami notified the date of his recovery, that is, a *genbi* (day when a sign of blessing appears). Thirdly, Kami specifically instructed how Konko Daijin should thank Konjin and other kamis present at the ritual, as well as Ishizuchi Faith which kindly had sent the *Shugendo* leader FURUKAWA Jiro to officiate the ritual successfully. A divine promise "I will have you in good health and you will not be short of rice for the rest of your life" was given through the shaman FURUKAWA. People were ordered to take soy beans and rice offerings fitting with the shaman's *hei* (a sacred staff with paper streamers), and to make gruel for Konko Daijin. Then the prayer ritual was over.

Although the prayer vigil proceeded in the general framework of customary folk beliefs, Konko Daijin's way of understanding this ritual that played out before him was unique and subjective. This indicated the possibility that he would go beyond this framework. In the conventional sense, most people would think that the prayer was over, that recovery was promised, and that everybody was relieved the curse of Konjin was lifted. Konko Daijin, however, wondered how

he could be forgiven for trying to deceive Konjin. In addition to feeling at ease and gratitude, he felt greater regret for his irreverence. The awareness of his irreverence and the consequent urge to apologize to Konjin continued to grow even moreso, after this occasion.

While following the social, customary faith practices, and undergoing serious illness, Konko Daijin doubted if he could escape from irreverence that easily. He thought, “Is this truly all right?” It can be said that his inner soul’s search began and led Konko Daijin to develop the core of his later faith. As the details of the spiritual impact of that event were discussed at length in various books, I will omit it here.

4. Breaking Down Conventional Wisdom

In 1859, four years after Konko Daijin’s critical illness at age 42, he quit farming in accordance with Kami’s request and solely engaged in helping people in order to fulfill Kami’s wishes. During those four years, he stopped blindly following the conventional wisdom and customs of the world, in terms of faith, farming, a way of life, etc. He tried to seek reasonable meaning in them. At the request of Konjin, he revised all his actions based on his spiritual awakening and developed faith practices in his daily life. From the viewpoint of Kami, it was a training for him to break down customary concepts regarding Konjin, which had been within the heart of Konko Daijin so far.

We can summarize what happened, but this does not mean that Konko Daijin instantly entered into a single-hearted faith in Konjin right after recovering from his serious illness. As it was written, “The village kami and other kamis are all here watching and listening to you.” in Oboegaki 3-5-6, thus suggesting that the meeting of kamis was realized in order to save Konko Daijin who had done wrong against Konjin. At that stage, Konjin may be said to be a hidden protagonist, but superficially Konjin was still a subordinate protagonist, because it was a reflection of FURUKAWA Jiro’ religious world, the *Shugendo* leader, who officiated the ritual, and it was within the framework of customary folk beliefs of the people present there, including Konko Daijin. For awhile after the event, Konko Daijin continued to worship the village deity and other shrines, as before, with deeper devotion.

It was Konko Daijin’s younger brother KANDORI Shige’emon (1828-1889) who became a bridge to leading him from worshipper of multiple gods to worshipping a single god, Konjin. From sometime around 1856, Shige’emon had been connected to the Konjin Faith by ONO Uta, who is one of the female shamans of the widespread Konjin Faith. At Kakiwadani Village, some fifteen kilometers up from the Takashi River mouth and on its westbank there lived ONO Uta, in unfortunate circumstances with her daughter who was blind. Uta experienced a succession of deaths of family members. When she asked a shaman to drive away her bad luck, she was told that this was a curse by Konjin. Out of desperation, she became a devout believer of Konjin and began to receive his oracles. People called her “Granny of Kakiwadani.” According to folklore, not only Shige’emon but also Konko Daijin used to visit her, although there is no evidence confirming this.

Having faith in Konjin and receiving his oracles are evidenced in the following facts. The elderly woman let go of conventional wisdom, folk beliefs and

practices. Shige'emon also had suffered from many hardships at home, so he went to see her for salvation and clung to her power. Shige'emon continued to practice faith earnestly under her, and was ultimately given permission to become a shaman himself.

In 1857, at Konjin's order, KANDORI Shige'emon stopped working as a farmer, and began to serve Konjin exclusively. It happened in early winter, when Konko Daijin was 44 years old. Konko Daijin helped out Shige'emon because Shige'emon was his younger brother and he felt guilty for having committed an irreverence against Konjin. While helping his brother's services and practicing his own faith under him, Konko Daijin also began to believe Konjin solely and firmly. Then in January 1858, using Shige'emon's voice, Konjin, said "You are Kane No Kami's follower." (Oboegaki:5-1-3) This was Kami's promise that Konjin would directly converse with Konko Daijin. Now, Konko Daijin's faith was focused on Konjin. Since then, as mentioned before, Kami started to give various trainings and trials in order to break down traditional and customary concepts about Konjin which had long existed in the heart of Konko Daijin.

For instance, following the advice, encouragement and instruction of Konjin, Konko Daijin stopped spraying oil in fields to control pests as farmers generally did, or he kept the harvested raw wheat in straw bags without drying them first. These measures were unusual in the farming tradition of the day. Moreover, he resigned from his staff member position related to worshipping Tensho Kotaijin (Amaterasu); he went to the fields barefooted; he chose to retire at an early age; he ignored the detoxification ritual when his children got smallpox, and so on. He engaged in various untraditional ways which bewildered the villagers.

In retrospect, Konko Daijin deceived Konjin by learning a trick for a directional problem from the village grand headman when he had to rebuild a house. He clearly felt very guilty for being disrespectful toward Konjin. After his life-threatening illness and repenting his irreverence through Shige'emon's help, Konko Daijin began to deepen his direct relationship with Konjin, as the only Kami for him. In other words, he was guided from the customary practices and social norms to a new path led by Konjin.

In our daily lives we may experience doubt about what seems to be common sense perceptions of the world, even if we follow them. But if we reveal such doubts openly, we may face challenging consequences. At times, we may quarrel with neighbors or relatives and end up being alienated. Anticipating possible difficulties, consciously or unconsciously, we may tend to hide or forget our doubts, even though instinctively we may feel we should not follow things that we have uncertainty about. But Konko Daijin did not ignore the small doubt within him; a doubt based on following social norms. He developed his small doubt to become a true and significant thought. By so doing, he found a way to true faith. That is why Konko Daijin became Konko Daijin.

Most people do not think that doing *katatagae* is an irreverence to Kami. A tiny doubt, if any, will be forgotten by saying that they just conformed to a common practice of misleading Konjin. Few feel guilty about an irreverence to Kami. But Konko Daijin thought that deceiving Kami was disrespectful of the relationship between Kami and himself. This thought developed into his eventual self-awareness and awakening.

That was a turning point for which Konko Daijin made a revolutionary and

creative shift from traditional Konjin Faith, that had been introduced from ancient China and had been handed down from the Heian Era to date.

Reflecting on Konko Daijin's experience now, his shift is somehow similar to Jesus Christ's activities in Judaism. Judaism is said to be a religion observing Commandments. It was Jesus who converted his faith from a commandments-oriented religion to a mind-oriented one. But as a Jew, he was a believer of Judaism. He, therefore, did not intend to establish a greater religion than Judaism. Similarly, Konko Daijin initially tried to build a truthful relationship with Konjin, which resulted in reforming the folk beliefs and introducing a new way of viewing/understanding Kami in the world.

In various matters of his daily life, Konko Daijin wholeheartedly searched for a truthful and sincere relationship with Konjin, Nittennshi, Gattennshi, Tensho Kotaijin, Gion Deity, and all the other respective deities. In a way, his respect for social customs and compliance to folk traditions in his younger days may have shown his sincerity. But the more he sought truth, and the more obediently he complied with customs, the more he must have observed deception committed for the convenience of human beings. From a tiny question about justifiable deception and the selfish avoidance of customs' demands on the human's part, he began to have a bigger question about religious customs, common sense and meaningful communication with Kami. That is because Konko Daijin was guided to a direct and desirable relationship with Konjin.

How had such a way as this opened up? It was, after all, nothing short of a wondrous divine blessing. In the description of Konko Daijin's life-threatening illness, the following remarks of wonder by Kami are found: "I am overjoyed, and even overcome with emotion to see how man has been able to be saved and how Kami has been able to be realized." (Oboegaki: 3-6-3) At this point, the impossible happened --- people's misunderstanding and misconception of Kami under the name/guise of Konjin gods, which had continued a span of 1000 years or more, was dissolved. Konko Daijin, himself, did not intend to challenge the worldly rules between Konjin and people. He also had not necessarily thought that house (direction) construction consultants were wrong. He simply thought that he committed a minor deception towards Konjin. That self-reflection was associated with customary faith practices, a private place of faith to be based and grounded, which led Konko Daijin to opening the Way whereby both Kami and people can be saved, if people pray based on desirable basic ideas.

IV. The Way of Practicing Faith

1. Incantations and Shamanistic Prayers

Until now, I talked about Konko Daijin having broken away from the common societal belief that Konjin is a deity that curses. In this section, I will discuss how Konko Daijin critically overcame common faith practices such as having shamanistic prayers performed and worshipping at temples or shrines. There is a tradition below. Ishihara Ginzo (1833-1910) had been suffering because soon after being born, his children died one after another. Therefore, he asked a shaman to offer prayers, but was told this was due to Konjin's curse. Although that shaman encased Konjin in a miniature shrine, another child died soon after. Thus, Ginzo went to Konko Daijin's

Hiromae and told him about his situation. Konko Daijin said, “For humans, that is like being imprisoned with the gate closed. Kami-Sama sees everything at a glance. Practice faith with the gate open, and Kami-Sama will protect you all for many generations.” (Gorikai II: ISHIHARA, Ginzo 1-3)

The practitioner’s response exemplifies the traditional belief. How does Konko Daijin specifically explain the way to create a relationship with Kami -- that is to say, the way to practice faith -- when he says “Practice faith with the gate open?”

It can be said that when people are facing difficult problems the human tendency is for people to hope to shift the responsibility elsewhere, as much as they can, or to hope for someone else to solve the problem. It appears that if people are threatened with challenging problems or if they do not appear to be solvable, people experiencing these situations feel compelled to choose to ask for shamanistic prayers or fortune-telling and to follow resulting indications. It seems to be humans’ consistent tendencies from the past to the present.

During Konko Daijin’s era, ascetic mountain priests and shamans were active in the area of the current Konko town and neighboring Kamogata town. It was very natural to ask people to pray for them when they had problems. However, Konko Daijin gradually stopped the shamanistic prayers as he was developing a relationship with Kami. Konko Daijin still left the forms of society’s faith as shamanistic prayers when the relationship with Kami was born and he started Toritsugi. He used the sacred staff and enthusiastically recited the Rokkon Prayer or Shingyo Sutra, and addressed people’s problems.

At the beginning, the Founder used to wave the twenty-four inch sacred staff and say, “You constructed at Ushitora and that act committed irreverence. Ask for permission.” But later he stopped that kind of response. [Takahashi TOMIE]

It reminds me of a general shamanistic practitioner in the world. The first sign that Konko Daijin left the traditional forms of interaction with Kami was through incantation and shamanistic prayers that he did when Kura, his youngest daughter, had small pox at the end of May, 1859. Her illness was serious, so his wife Tose asked him to pray for Kura. When Konko Daijin directed his heart toward Kami, Kami revealed, “It will make no difference whether you pray or not. You can pray if you want to. It might be better than not doing so.” Konko Daijin recited *harai* prayers and the Singyo Sutra five or six times. This is written in Konko Daijin Oboegaki - Memoir of Konko Daijin: (Oboegaki7-7) This “praying” probably indicates “incantations and shamanistic prayers” in those days. People felt a vague anxiety if they perform some form of prayer in an emergency situation. Although Konko Daijin himself could decide to follow what Kami said would work, it was only in his heart. “Make a wish to a god when having a problem,” as the proverb goes. Because of the relationship with his family and others, Konko Daijin still conformed to the custom of making a wish to a god in order to be at ease for a while and make them feel relieved.

However, Kami gradually guided Konko Daijin to think about what incantations and shamanistic prayers represented as forms of traditional and general ways of making a wish to a god. Sensing Kami’s work in his heart, Konko Daijin realized it would not be faith if he left things to others and to kamis. Therefore, he started to examine the problem of faith practices described as incantations and shamanistic prayers and prayers only.

Incantations, shamanistic prayers and prayers only still linger today. For example, the typical practice is going to the shrine to ask the priest to pray so one would be able to pass an examination. People pay prayer donations and receive amulets. After doing these things, they feel at ease. There are a variety of other

practices. I have already discussed these in the descriptions of incantations and shamanistic prayers which were done when Konko Daijin was seriously ill of age 42. Whatever these practices are, people look at an existence of kamis out of their hearts and ask an expert, like a priest, shamanistic practitioner or fortune-teller, who they believe have contact with kamis, to ask for blessings by kamis. It is the attitude that people leave things to others and kamis.

Due to the change of the Meiji government's policy regarding religion, Konko Daijin accelerated his actions and was urged decisively to break away from the public forms of faith such as incantations and shamanistic prayers. In 1867, Konko Daijin received the priesthood application as Konjin Shrine Head Priest, Konko Kawachi, from Shirakawa Shinto Office and held an official ceremony in order to propagate his religion openly. However, when the political system changed, in May 1871, the "Shinto priest staff regulation" which was promulgated in order to eliminate negative consequences, the hereditary succession of priest and privatization of shrines, as part of meeting the constitution of the unity of religion and politics, Konko Daijin lost the qualification of shinto priest that he had had since the end of Edo period. Thus, he became totally unqualified to engage in propagation activities. At the same time, from the perspective of the cultural enlightenment, the authorities thought that incantations and shamanistic prayers would disturb medical science and medicine. Their control over the folk shamanistic practitioners became stricter. In the midst of the changing times, on July 24, 1871, Kami revealed,

"For those who come with requests for fate and fortune, building construction and renovation, Days and Directions, marriage arrangements, or house moving, just give them the teachings of this Faith." [Oboegaki19-5]

These were the typical things that shamanistic practitioners prayed for. It is possible to imagine that there were still many requests for incantations and shamanistic prayers at Konko Daijin's Hiromae as well. When you imagine so, you will understand the meaning of Kami's words, "just give them the teachings of this Faith." That is to say, it seems that Konko Daijin continued to listen to requests for these things and to pray in Kami's altar even though his prayers were not same prayers as those of the ascetic mountain priests. Because Konko Daijin lost his qualification to be a Shinto priest, Kami indicated, "just give them the teachings of this Faith. No need to pray." In 1872, Kami revealed,

"Konko Daijin, instead of saying 'I will chant a prayer for you,' say, 'I will mediate your requests to Kami-Sama.' Tell all believers that they should give their requests through their own hearts. Blessings are found in one's heart."
[Oboegaki20-7-2]

Konko Daijin received this revelation that should be told to branch churches. He would say "I will chant a prayer for you" just as shamanistic practitioners of the world did when people made requests. This response created a misunderstanding that Konko Daijin was the same type of person as a shamanistic practitioner. Moreover, there was a risk that a government source would also consider Konko Daijin to be a shamanistic practitioner. Thus Kami urged him not to say "I will chant a prayer for you."

If you are able to urge someone to pray for your wish and you wait - no matter how long or at what costs - for the protection of kami who exists out of your life, it cannot be said that this is faith. Faith depends on whether you have kami within you or not. In order to make people realize this, the words, "I will chant a prayer for you",

is a contradiction and would result in confusion and misunderstanding. Konko Daijin gradually realized this through Kami's words. Another oral tradition says, "I never tell you to chant prayers or anything else. I only tell you to practice a sincere faith. Can't you even do that?" (Gorikai:SHIMAMURA Hachitaro:29.1) Konko Daijin asks us to practice "a sincere faith"; that is to say, "Divine blessings are within your own heart," which suggests you should find Kami in your own heart.

We have to understand that the meaning of the words "chant prayers" that Konko Daijin used are closer to "incantations and shamanistic prayers" than today's terminology, "give prayers" or "pray." These words suggest that people get Kami to grant one-sided or convenient wishes for them at all costs. It is a sort of insistence on Kami. The words "chant prayers" in those days suggested that the intention of shamanistic prayers was to get Kami to act on people's behalf, and showed that the relationship between Kami and people was ultimately weak.

For Konko Daijin who had considered the relationship between Kami and people as the relationship between parents and children, "incantations and shamanistic prayers" which involved this kind of insistence on Kami were not good expressions of faith. Based on this idea, Konko Daijin had no reason to chant a prayer. However, people who were used to these customary and traditional expressions of faith could not be satisfied in his way. So Konko Daijin chanted prayers depending on each person even after 1881 although not in the same way as a shamanistic practitioner of the world would have done. An oral tradition says,

"Kami-Sama revealed to me that I needn't give prayers for now. I should just talk to people," Konko-Sama told me. "That's why I am talking to you now. But I'll keep praying for people because I don't know what they will think if I don't." [Gorikai:ICHIMURA, Mitsugoro Vol.2:72.1~2]

It is easy to imagine that most of the people in those days wanted Konko Daijin to chant prayers for them. Even Kami told Konko Daijin that he should just talk about the Way of Faith and the Way of the Universe. Setting talk aside, nine people out of ten visited the Hiromae for "incantations and shamanistic prayers." In this situation, an oral tradition says, that Konko-Sama imparted,

"Out of a thousand worshippers, it's rare to have even one that goes home with divine blessings. They all lose their blessings when they go out of the Hiromae. Even one word of Kami-Sama's teachings cannot be exchanged for a thousand ryo. Receive Kami's words in gratitude, then your gift will be divine virtue that cannot be loaded even onto a boat or cart."

[GI:ICHIMURA, Mitsugoro Vol.1:50.1]

It was not easy for most of the people of that time to be free from traditional idea that suggested that the teachings of the Way of faith were not useful; they went to the Hiromae in order to ask for "incantations and shamanistic prayers." I can understand the situation from these words. However, no matter how many troubles there were, Konko Daijin did not give up his roles: that is to open people's hearts and move them from being slaves of traditional ideas and customs, and to letting them meet Kami.

Until March of 1873 of the lunar calendar, Konko Daijin usually prayed before the altar as a Shinto priest and shamanistic practitioner would do, and then he talked to people from that point on. Soon after being released from the order of the removal of the altar fixtures and prohibition of propagation by village headman, Konko Daijin changed his sitting place to the side of the altar and worshippers as directed by Divine

Will. There were three reasons for this decision: 1) to dispel the government's misunderstanding that Konko Daijin performed the shamanistic prayers; 2) to establish a position that would facilitate easier communication with worshippers; and 3) to clarify worshippers' misunderstanding that Konko Daijin performs shamanistic prayers. Afterwards, the place where Konko Daijin had sat sideways to worshippers came to be called the Mediation place or the Mediation seat in our Way.

2. Purify your heart

People's wish is to be listened to and understood by Konko Daijin. The Way of Kami, namely the Way of the Universe, is delivered to the heart of prayer. People are satisfied and understand the Way of the Universe from bottom of their hearts. The life of prayer realizes Kami's wish. The seat is not for Konko Daijin to perform shamanistic prayers, I and fortune telling anymore. To help people to understand these concepts, Konko Daijin used various words as described in Konkokyo Kyoten. Let us read some teachings about it in Konkokyo Kyoten.

“People ask me to pray for them, but if prayers would make them well, the world would have no sick people. I will now tell you the teachings of Kami. Since you have come from afar and your legs hurt, you needn't sit so uncomfortably while you listen. Extend your legs or lie down, and listen well. Return home with your heart filled with teachings. If you follow these teachings every day, daily or monthly worship will be unnecessary in this Way of Faith, even though you may be told otherwise.”

[GorikaiII:FUJIWARA, Kazo:1.1~2]

People asked Konko Daijin to pray for them, “but if prayers would make them well, the world would have no sick people.” These are very provocative words when I think about the idea of faith in those days.

If “incantations and shamanistic prayers” would make people well and would remove misfortunes of family, the world would have no difficulties. But it actually was not so. Why? Konko Daijin wanted people to consider asking this question. It could not be faith without faith in your heart. The relationship between Kami and people was severed if they personally had left themselves outside of practicing faith. This was the core of Konko Daijin's faith; that is, preaching the teachings of Kami, telling the reasons of faith, and being committed to faith. Konko Daijin positioned it as the point.

“Ascetic priests and shamanistic practitioners just give prayers when they receive requests. They never teach faith to others. Tenchi Kane No Kami taught Konko Daijin, ‘Let people pray for anything. If one practices faith of his own will, he will feel at ease all of his life. His faith will be succeeded by his children and grandchildren, and his whole family will become prosperous.’” [GorikaiIII: KYOSO GORIKAI, SHIRAKAMI, Shin'ichiro II:50]

This teaching was written by the second Reverend Shirakami Shin'ichiro (1847-1910). The essence of Konko Daijin's faith changed fundamentally from the faith of the world in which people left things to kamis, others, and shamanistic practitioners. Without facing the problem of your way of living and the problem of your way of thinking -- namely problem of your heart --, you cannot forge a relationship with Kami and you cannot get over difficulties and suffering. So it becomes important that “let

people pray for anything. One practices faith of his own will.” The root of faith in which people ask shamanistic practitioners and ascetic priests who are expert at saving people through “incantations and shamanistic prayers,” is also currently established in people’s hearts. Offering a great deal of money for requests; letting a Buddhist monk or priest to recite the sutras or officiate in a ceremony without turning your heart to Buddha or God; not listening to the teachings; or feeling as though you have done everything you could for a memorial service for your ancestors or a funeral or a wedding without heartfelt faith -- these examples represent that the same kind of “faith” as was done in the days of shamanistic priests.

Kunieda Sangoro practiced faith through prayers, such as the harai prayer he performed ten thousand times for a week. Konko Daijin raised the question about his way of practicing faith.

“Don’t practice faith through prayers. Sincerity is essential.” “Purifying your hands and mouth before praying to Kami-Sama is meaningless unless you also purify your heart. You cannot purify your heart with fire or water. Purify it with true wholeheartedness, and practice faith.”

[GorikaiII:KUNIEDA, Sangoro:1.1~2]

Every religion would be similar in its assumptions. One assumes it is important to purify a body in order to pray to a god, particularly in Japan, because of a concept from the old days is that gods do not like impurities. So you wash your hands and mouth with water. Sometimes firewalking is performed to purify the body. When a physical act becomes tradition, the importance of an invisible heart working is missed, and you tend to think that “if even doing that, it will be faith.” Konko Daijin suggested the faith which prompts turning away from the traditional concept of faith of the world.

Konko Daijin asserted that you would not need to check the Days and Directions. It is no wonder that people took Konko Daijin’s words to represent a denial of faith or destruction of way of faith. Consequently, the general public felt Konko Daijin expressed the denial of faith.

3. Going to worship Kami

“Visiting temples and shrines” was interpreted as an expression of traditional faith. “Visiting temples and shrines” is an example of expression of faith based on the concept that kamis and Buddha are enshrined in shrines and temples. If kamis and Buddha appear where people live their everyday lives, people would always need to be purified. People are not allowed to do things in their own ways. So people made a clear distinction between the place where people live everyday and the place kamis and Buddha are. I suppose that people specified the time and place for the worship because they hoped kamis and Buddha would not usually appear.

After Konko Daijin spoke about Kami of Heaven and Earth and the Parent Kami, he pointed out the mistake that people had distinguished between the territory of Kami and the territory of people. At the same time, he taught that going to shrines and temples to meet Kamii and to pray were not truly expressions of faith.

“When there are requests, most people from afar come to worship and to have *toritsugi* performed. You need not rely on others to perform *toritsugi* for you. Practice true faith, pray by yourself, and receive divine blessings. If you think you cannot receive divine blessings without someone else performing *toritsugi*

for you, you must always be near a *toritsugi* mediator. Kami-Sama does not work this way. Pray by yourself and receive divine blessings by yourself.”

[GorikaiII:TSUGAWA, Haruo:6]

This teaching shows Konko Daijin’s attitude toward a confrontation with traditional faith acts such as going to shrines and temples to ask the priest or monk to pray. You welcome Kami every time and at every place where you live; you pray by yourself and receive blessings by yourself, and you consider your heart as shrines and temples and the Hiromae of Kami. He teaches it as acts of faith. Kami is always with you. Kami is at your home and you live your daily life with Kami. So one does not need to go to places where kamis and Buddha are enshrined. You just find Kami in your heart and around you and pray to Kami wherever you are in your daily life.

“If you think you cannot receive divine blessings without someone performing *toritsugi* for you, you must always be near a *toritsugi* mediator.” Because of these words by Konko Daijin, one can surmise that those who went to Konko Daijin’s Hiromae had done so with the traditional concept of how to worship kami. Considering the way that people asked shamanistic practitioner to pray, Konko Daijin says that if you believe that “you cannot receive divine blessings without someone performing *toritsugi*” or without Konko Daijin or someone who in a branch church, you have to live with a *toritsugi* mediator year in and year out at all times and you have to be at a Hiromae all day long. This points to a denial of what is called faith act.

There is a teaching I quoted before, “daily or monthly worship will be unnecessary in this Way of Faith, even though you may be told otherwise.” There are some practices regarding worship of kami, such as going to worship kami one hundred times in a day, going to worship kami continuously for one hundred days, and going to worship kami bare footed. Konko Daijin sharply questioned the thinking underlying these forms of practicing faith. Konko Daijin urged a change of thought and the reform of practicing faith by the people who went to Hiromae to ask *toritsugi*.

Now, we are faced with a problem, how do we confirm the meaning of today’s Hiromae of the Konko church? There are people who think that Kami and Mitama Spirits are enshrined in the church and they go to the church in order to pray. They think that the purpose of the Hiromae at the Konko Church is to pray. According to revelation of 1864, Kami revealed, “This shrine is where people can give requests and thanks.” (Oboegaki13-1-6) From Kami’s words, we understand the concept of a place where Kami is enshrined and people come to pray and appreciate the blessings they received. However, this idea will disappear later.

For example, there is a teaching:

“Here is where you come to develop your faith, so train your faith well and return home. You never know what might happen at night, so receive divine blessings at home. Those who have children or jobs cannot leave their homes to come here. When a family member is sick, you cannot leave him or her to come here. Therefore, come here to train your faith only when the whole family is healthy.” [GorikaiII:NANBA, Ko:6.1]

The Hiromae is “where you come to develop your faith;” that is to say, the Hiromae is a school or a private tutoring school where you learn the relationship between Kami and people, the way of the Heaven and Earth, and the faith life based on understanding of these things. Because of such place of learning, the words I previously indicated, “If you follow these teachings every day, daily or monthly worship will be unnecessary in this Way of Faith, even though you may be told otherwise” (GorikaiII:FUJIWARA, Kazo:1.2) have the meaning.

It is easy to imagine that Konko Daijin's teaching about Hiromae would not reach to the hearts of many people who were the most familiar with the concept of "traditional shrines and temples... where you come to worship." People had to change their manner of faith, like changing an established perception of the universe through a Copernican Revolution. Only a few people might have been able to keep up with it. However, by the change, there were Konko Daijin's disciples who opened their hearts, received divine blessings, accepted the Way and practiced faith deeply. Thanks to them, accepting the Way spread.

Those people listened to words of their faith mentor and understood the Way of Kami; besides they often went to Konko Daijin's Hiromae in order to seek profound understanding. Though those people still would have used the words "go to worship," it meant that they met a mentor of faith, "listened to the sermon and teaching", and trained their faith.

I would remind you that the Hiromae of Konkokyo is not where kamis are enshrined. It is also not where you can receive divine blessings. We have to confirm and understand again that it is like a private tutoring school of faith where teachings are told. The place where you go to worship, pray and meet Kami is the core of life and work. Ultimately, it is Hiromae born within you.

Konko Daijin largely changed and innovated the way of practicing faith that society and world consider it valuable and based on common sense. Kami moved Konko Daijin in this way. I always think that we have to reflect deeply about this more and more, and examine and compare today's shape of a faith with this idea.