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At Konkokyo Headquarters on March 11

# One Year after the Great East Japan Earthquake

**O**n March 11 of last year, a devastating earthquake of magnitude 9.0 and a destructive tsunami hit the Tohoku district of northeastern Japan and caused serious damage to a huge area of the Pacific Coast. One year has passed since this disaster. The number of deaths and missing people total 19,009 as of March 14. Even now, many people are worried about the side effects and dangers that may result from the Fukushima nuclear power plant accident.

Konkokyo Headquarters collected a heartfelt 155,286,615 yen of “the Great East Japan Earthquake donations” by October 31, 2011. The contributions were sent to the affected areas and to Konko Churches that have suffered, and subsidized the Konkokyo believer volunteer groups and their work.

A special service was held at Konkokyo Headquarters on March 11 to pray for the earthquake recovery and for the comfort of the victims’ spirits. Mr. Mikio Shimizu, who has constantly been working on support activity in Kesennuma, Miyagi Prefecture, made a speech before the service. About 2,500 people participated in the prayers.

Also, the first Konkokyo Great East Japan Earthquake Memorial Service was conducted at the Kesennuma Plaza Hotel on March 17. In the first part of the event, three believers who survived the disaster made a speech entitled “One Year After the Earthquake: At the Time of the Disaster and Now”. In the second part, Reverend Shiro Okuhara, Head Minister of Konko Church of Kesennuma, served as officiant minister in the memorial service. Following that, Konko Toin High School students performed on *wadaiko* (Japanese

drums). Orchestra bands of Konko Osaka and Konko Toin High Schools also played music. About 520 people attended the service.

Various Konkokyo groups are continuing support activities. The Konkokyo Tokyo Metropolitan Supporting Organization for Volunteers of Disaster is cleaning and digitizing pictures from the disaster and distributing relief supplies from its base at the Kesennuma Church. Moreover, they have held a tea meeting and a concert in order to gather everyone at the makeshift house, providing opportunities for all to communicate with each other, preventing feelings of isolation.



Makeshift house

The Konkokyo Osaka Disaster Relief Team visited isolated settlements, distributing relief supplies and meals in communities of small-scale makeshift houses within Sendai City, Miyagi Prefecture. They also held a summer festival to promote communication opportunities among the local people.

Konkokyo Youth Association of the Headquarters based in Ishinomaki City, Miyagi Prefecture, is distributing flyers to surrounding residences and visiting them to investigate their needs. Volunteers of the association are mainly working on clearing sludge and disaster debris, dismantling and clearing away houses, and distributing supplies for relief. Meanwhile, other groups are also conducting support activities.

We introduce Mr. Mikio Shimizu, a volunteer in Kesennuma City, and Reverend Naofumi Inoue, Head Minister of Ishinomaki Church which is located in an affected disaster area. Here are their thoughts one year after the Great East Japan Earthquake (See page 2).

# Encounter with The Big Earthquake and Tsunami

By Reverend Naofumi Inoue, Konko Church of Ishinomaki

**A**fter March 11 of last year, I have been praying for the comfort of victims' spirits and recovery of towns. I have also been giving thanks for Parent Kami, Konko-Sama, and everyone who has



Ishinomaki worship hall damage

helped, while making efforts towards my faith growth after encountering these matters.

I have to accept the fact that this is not a nightmare or lie. As a Konkoyo believer who is allowed to live in the Universe, I must see the perspective that Ishinomaki was not ruined by a big tsunami, but that I am allowed to live in the town of Ishinomaki, a part of the Universe where it is possible to have big earthquakes, tsunamis, typhoons, and days too hot or too cold. It was like that before March 11 and will be after it too. From now on, all I can do is to receive divine blessings of faith in the work of the Universe and be allowed to live in the town of



Rev. Inoue (Second from right)

Ishinomaki, where these events could happen. So I am not a victim. I am a person who encountered a big earthquake and tsunami. I always keep this thought in my mind.

I will not forget the feelings of comforting the deceased spirits and I hope to help in the recovery here as I treasure my relationship with the Universe.

## Outcry of the Spirits

By Mr. Mikio Shimizu, Konko Church of Ube-higashi

**I**arrived at Kesenuma on April 22, 2011 and all the towns along the seaside had been totally damaged. When I saw such a miserable and extremely distressed scene, I pressed for an answer; "My Founder, Ikigami Konko Daijin! Tenchi Kane No Kami! What do you want us to learn from this tragedy? This is so dreadful, especially with the sacrifice of so many children!"

It took a long time to get a response. In the beginning, in order to hear the

sorrowful voices of the Mitama Spirits of those many deceased people and to mourn them, I woke up at four o'clock every morning and walked around to pray for them. I asked why Kami would allow something so cruel and sometimes, a ghost of a child came out (although it may have been a hallucination). When I asked who he was, he disappeared with a smile. I felt so sad and my body felt as heavy as lead.

This continued for about three months and then I attended a child's funeral. When I saw the corpse, I remembered the divine teaching "Know that Heaven and Earth will be your eternal home while you are living and even after you die." I felt that we can live by the grace of Heaven and Earth



and still will even after we die.

To my understanding, a natural disaster like an earthquake occurs when the Earth itself comes to a point whether it will live or die. I think it is the workings of nature which makes this happen to prevent the Earth from dying. There may be no alternative but to sacrifice some human beings to some extent then, but many Mitama Spirits are deeply grieving. We are allowed to live because of the sacrifice of so many, so we must pray for the sake of their happiness.

I am thinking this way now, but I will continue to ask these questions in my mind.



Community event preparation

# Philosophy on Life, Faith on Life 2

Lectured by Reverend Yoshitsugu Fukushima

The following is a summary of a chapter from his book *Inochi no Shiso, Inochi no Shinko*.



## Retreat from Life

We, in contemporary society, seem to constantly feel the need to work and think it is a sin to be idle without continually working hard. However, whatever occupation people are engaged in, people need to retreat from the realities of life, take a step back, and find a serene place to contemplate and reflect.

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, to take a step back and to reflect from worldly affairs to seek the being in one’s self. Buddha contemplated under a pipal tree, Jesus in the wilderness, and Muhammad shut himself up in a tent. Ortega says that those who have retreated from the world would find the truth and rationale during such times, thus, concluding that we could never make new discoveries nor establish new principles if we simply continued to align and conform ourselves to the existing trends of the world.

At this point, let us consider the latter part of Konko Daijin’s life, during the early years of the Meiji Period, a period of great social upheaval. At that time the new Meiji Government tried to delegitimize folk religions and traditional customs as superstitions, in order to emulate the modernization traits of Western Societies. The impact of Meiji Government policies would eventually affect small communities such as Otani Village (now Konko Town, Asakuchi City, Okayama Prefecture) where Konko Daijin lived. In the *Konko Daijin Oboegaki (Memoirs of Konko Daijin)* we find the following account:

Summoned by Kawate Iseki, the village chief magistrate, Hagio quickly went to see him. Kawate ordered Hagio to put away the altar fixtures. Hagio returned home and informed me on what he was told.

I promptly cleared away the altar fixtures. This made the Hiromae 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 fixtures were put away. This was February 18.

From the next day February 19, I, Konko Daijin, stopped serving the Hiromae. Tenchi Kane No Kami-Sama told me, “Take a rest without feeling disappointed.”

That afternoon, I took down the *torii* at the front gate.

Most people would have tried to continue engaging in their daily activities and practices, however, Konko Daijin simply cleared away everything including the altar fixtures at the worship hall, just as he was told by the village chief magistrate, and took a rest completely retreating from the world. Konko Daijin did not meet anyone nor sit at his prayer seat during this thirty day withdrawal period.

The fact that some fundamental doctrines and methods of propagation, such as the Meditation Place and the Divine Reminder, were born after this period shows how indispensable and important this thirty day period of retreat, withdrawal and rest was to Konko Daijin. We can also see how this rest helped Konko Daijin observe the society around him more clearly. For example, Konko Daijin was critical of the society that had been carried away by the euphoria of civilization and enlightenment, when he stated, “Though they say the world is becoming civilized, it is not. It is collapsing. Hence, Konko has come forth to save the world.” He was calling the public’s attention to the deviation developing in society.

Other observations made by Konko Daijin reveal his gaining of a broader perspective of the world. The statements “Osaka is big. But to Kami, it is no bigger than a poppy seed,” and “Man is smaller than a speck of ash,” show that Konko Daijin had acquired the same vision as Kami and saw our world from a higher place. He also teaches us about a person’s ability to acquire a broader mind that can embrace the world. Konko Daijin’s revelations that “The world is in your own heart,” and “Kami is in your own heart,” show his attitude toward faith greatly changed during his period of retreat. He teaches that you should pray positively with your own heart and be blessed yourself, unlike the dependent faith (*ogami-shinjin*) in which one asks others such as shamans to pray in order to be blessed.

Due to Konko Daijin taking the time to rest, and retreat from the world, he was able to understand and reveal teachings of a deeper meaning and nature, which would overturn old religions and traditions, surprise and attract people, and lead to the propagation of the Konko Faith.

## KIC Invites Some Help

**M**s. Yuri Amari is a resident of Paraguay and worked intensively at KIC translating English text into Spanish. She is a very modest, charming and intelligent woman. We enjoyed the opportunity to get to know her and to learn about the Paraguayan culture through her.



During her staying at KIC in February, she was translating "Shine from Within", which is an introductory book of Konkokyo written in English, into Spanish.

She has returned Paraguay safely and we have received a warm-hearted thank you letter from her!

We are now working with Mr. Scott Wong, who is a member of the Vancouver Church. His time at KIC is scheduled to be from February 29 to April 30. He is also very smart, has a sense of humor, is eager to volunteer at KIC and enjoys the activities of Konkokyo.

His mission while at KIC and when he returns to his job as a staff member with the Konko Churches of North America is to expand the visibility of the Konko Faith (and teachings); increasing the relevancy and accessibility of the faith to believers and non-believers in North America while maintaining the resonance and traditions of Konkokyo in Japan.

At KIC he is playing a great role in supporting KIC's translation projects. Translation is one of the most important

tasks of KIC. We have to be careful during our translation activities as not only are there literal translation challenges, but we also need to be sensitive to the different cultural influences. Some of the Japanese sayings when translated literally might not make sense to foreign people from a linguistic standpoint as well as from a cultural perspective. So it is necessary to understand different cultural backgrounds thoroughly to produce more understandable and relevant translations. We are enjoying our many ongoing cultural and linguistic discussions.



## Faith Life Sketch<sub>4</sub>



by Tama Hyoroku

## From Kyoten

*There are people who claim that the Universe works this way and that, but they really don't understand it. If they did, they would be able to stop the rise and fall of tides. (Gorikai I ; Kondo Fujimori 9)*

*The present is the same as the past. The past is the same as the present. Regardless of how many millenniums pass, the world will not change. People and the grains they eat will not disappear. The seeds will keep growing. (Gorikai II ; Goka keishun 8)*



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