



"Mediation Place" by Higuchi Ichiro

A Farmer Who Encountered Kami

A farmer started Konko faith. He was born on August 16, 1814 of the Lunar Calendar in Urami village. Given the name Genshichi, he was the fourth child and second son of Kandori Juhei and Shimo. Kandori Juhei and Shimo had eight children. Genshichi was born on the same day as the annual festival of the Oomiya Shrine. His parents, who were struggling farmers, believed Genshichi's birth was a good omen. Most people in Urami farmed in small parcels of land and grew a variety of products in addition to rice.

Juhei was an honest and gentle person. He was deeply religious and always thankful. Juhei would visit shrines or temples in his spare time, often carrying Genshichi on his back. Shimo was a sensible and warm-hearted woman.

Genshichi had more health problems than the average child. Each time he fell ill, Genshichi managed to regain his health due to the care and devotion of his parents. The character and per-



"Omiya Shrine" by Higuchi Ichiro



"Jakkoin Zenshojin Temple" by Higuchi Ichiro

sonality of his parents influenced Genshichi to become a person of quiet strength and thoughtfulness.

Genshichi would spend his entire adult life in the neighboring village of Otani. While Kamo Shrine was the guardian shrine of Otani Village, the majority of the villagers were members of the Jakkoin Zenshojin Temple of Zen Buddhism. This temple, in addition to performing religious services, kept governmental records of local families.

The 1816 records for Otani Village Registration documents 115 households with a total population of 475, encompassing approximately 112 acres with an annual rice yield of 1,260 bushels. Although most of the villagers were farmers, one villager was listed as a carpenter, another as a sake brewer, and another as a roof tile maker.

Kawate Kumejiro of Otani Village married Nishimoto Iwa of Masusaka Village. Iwa was 20

years younger than Kumejiro. Kumejiro became a relatively wealthy landowner. He owned a little more than an acre of land, which made him one of the successful farmers in the village. However, despite years of marriage, they were childless. Likely due to their ages, 55 and 35 respectively, Kumejiro and Iwa decided to seek a male heir through adoption. By coincidence, the Kandori Family had decided that Genshichi, not being the eldest son and consequently ineligible to inherit their property, should be given an opportunity for a better future through adoption. They proceeded with adoption upon learning from a relative that the Kawate Family was seeking a son.

The adoption ceremony was formalized on an auspicious day of November 26, 1825. Utilizing the adoption as an opportunity to rename him, Genshichi was given the name Bunjiro, after Kumejiro's grandfather. His neighbors, however, simply called him "Bunji."

Through Kumejiro's arrangement, Bunji started receiving education from Ono Mitsuemon, a Village Headman, when he turned 13 years old. Bunji was fortunate to have Mitsuemon as his mentor. Mitsuemon was knowledgeable in areas such as astrology, navigation, Days and Directions, surveying, fortune telling, and mathematics. Through Mitsuemon, Bunji learned to read, write, and perform calculations using the abacus. He also gained considerable knowledge of history and proverbs. Although Bunji's education lasted less than two years, Mitsuemon helped shape Bunji's personality and character. Bunji's writings as an adult reflect Mitsuemon's logic and insight.

Bunji worked diligently as a farmer. He found that the deeper the land was tilled and the more the crops were taken care of, the better the harvest would be. He also learned that, although unexpected natural calamities occurred from time to time, diligent human efforts would be rewarded.

Bunji began to understand the relationship

between heaven and earth through farming. The more he engaged in farming, the more sensitive he became to the workings of nature. Bunji would be grateful for the rain after a drought and thankful for a scorching sun after a long rain. He expressed his gratitude for the blessings of nature when he experienced an abundant crop and realized the devastation of drought and famine. Through his experiences, Bunji realized the existence of something beyond human power. These insights formed the basis of how he would continue to live his life.

When Bunji turned 17, he took part in a pilgrimage to the Ise Shrine with ten other villagers, includ-

ing Ono Shiemon, the son of the Village Headman. One year after his return from his memorable pilgrimage to Ise, his adoptive mother, Iwa, at the age of 41, gave birth to a son, Tsurutaro. Tsurutaro received his parents' affections and grew steadily. However, when Bunji was 23 years old, Tsurutaro suffered abdominal cramps and suddenly died. He was only six years old. His parents grieved at the sudden loss of their beloved child. About three weeks later, his adoptive father, Kumejiro, contracted a disease which caused severe diarrhea. Ultimately, Kumejiro passed away at the age of 66. Some people believed that his death was due in part to the loss he felt for his son. The Kawate house suddenly felt deserted. Bunji realized the fragility of life when he experienced the deaths of his stepbrother and adoptive father. Bunji succeeded Kumejiro as the head of the family in 1836.

Iwa, concerned about Bunji and the future of the family, encouraged marriage. She asked her relatives to arrange a marriage between her son and Tose, the eldest daughter of their neighbor Furukawa Yaozo. They were married in December of 1836 when Bunji was 23 and Tose was 18.

In March of the following year, Bunji began to build both a bathroom and a toilet on the east side of his house. Bunji put considerable forethought into this project. The water drawn into the bath



"Ono's Former Mansion" by Higuruchi Ichiro

would be routed into the toilet and then used for fertilizer. This ensured the maximum utilization of all available resources.

In June of 1839, the first son, Kametaro, was born. However, in August 1842, when Kametaro was four years old, both Bunji and Kametaro became ill and suffered from diarrhea. Although Bunji recovered, Kametaro succumbed to his illness and passed away.

Although replacing the life of one's child is impossible, a second son, Makiemon, was born two months after the passing of Kametaro.

About a year after Makiemon's birth, Bunji, then thirty years old, determined that adding a separate structure on his existing property would make his farm work more convenient. The walk-in storehouse he envisioned would divide a work-room and warehouse with sliding doors and an adjoining entry gate. The entry gate held a special significance, as it reflected the level of prosperity and recognition Bunji had achieved.

This building project brought back memories of his earlier project: the addition of a toilet and bathroom. Concerned with the outcome, Bunji sought a specialist in the Days and Directions. The specialist told him to start construction in December and finish by January 26. He followed the instructions.

In February of 1845, a pregnant Tose had a relatively easy time delivering their third son. They named him Nobujiro (Later he was named Asakichi).

The following year, Bunji would enter his thirty-third year. In general, the thirty-third year of a woman's life was considered unlucky. But, in the area where Bunji lived, this ominous age also applied to men. Traditionally, in an effort to avoid any misfortunes associated with this ominous age, a person would hold a party and invite their relatives to share any forthcoming hardship. However, Bunji said, "It will be of no value to throw a party with food and drink just for my unlucky age. Those invited to the party will feel obligated to spend money, and we, too, will have to spend money. Therefore, I will go on a pilgrimage to the 88 Temples of Shikoku Island rather than throw a party."

Making a pilgrimage in lieu of holding a party

was not a unique concept and was actually a very popular option for many in this area. The trip was quite strenuous and involved traversing steep mountain paths and deep valleys. Bunji had set out on this pilgrimage in February of 1846 and returned home after thirty-four days.

Upon his return, he related the following observation to his family. "Some people only go on a pilgrimage to Shikoku for pleasure, not for their faith. Rather than standing before a temple to offer prayers, they worshiped from a distance. If that was the extent of their devotion, they should not have gone in the first place. They should have stayed and worshiped from home instead." This was in sharp contrast to Bunji's pilgrimage, which was motivated by his pure heart of faith and his earnest desire to clear away misfortunes.

On September 17, 1847, a little over a year after Bunji's pilgrimage, Tose gave birth to their first daughter. They named her Chise. However, as her first birthday neared, Chise fell ill. Despite medical attention provided by two physicians and prayers by relatives and friends, Chise succumbed to her illness. However, with the passage of time, their sadness was replaced with a renewed sense of joy. Their fourth son, Mohei (Hagio), was born on April 25, 1849, and their daughter, Kura, was born on December 15, 1851.

On the last day of 1849, Bunji learned from his cousin, Morita Hachiemon, that a larger house was for sale in a neighboring village. This larger home interested him. However, he had not forgotten that he lost two children within the last few years after other home improvement projects. This uncertainty led Bunji to seek out Ono Shiemon, the Village Headman. After consulting the Days and Directions, Shiemon responded favorably to the purchase. Bunji was at ease in his decision to purchase the house.

However, in 1850, Bunji found himself facing a dilemma. He had accompanied Shiemon to the municipal office in Ide (current Soja City) to offer New Year's greetings. While there, Shiemon met with his father, who held the position of Chief of Village Headmen. He discussed again the merits of the home purchase and construction plans. Mitsuemon told Bunji, "This is the Year of the Dog. As you were also born in the Year of the Dog,

this is your unlucky year. You should not pursue the construction this year.” Bunji was at a loss since the purchase of the house had already been scheduled, but misfortune was unavoidable. Bunji pleaded, “Can you please pray again to see whether there is some way to work this out?” Mitsuemon reexamined his sources and offered an alternative plan. Mitsuemon told Bunji, “If that is the case, you must build a temporary house on March 14, dismantle the old house on August 3, and start the foundation work on the fourth. Finally, set up the framework for the new house by the sixth and move in by the twenty-eight.” Bunji followed Mitsuemon’s instructions.

Once again, a construction project undertaken by Bunji was accompanied by another tragedy. This time, in May, Makiemon fell ill. The physician Bunji sought to treat his son told him, “He is all right. You do not need to worry about him.” Two days later, Makiemon developed a fever. When the physician returned to re-examine the nine-year-old, he was unable to prescribe a solution. Relatives and neighbors gathered and prayed to kamis and buddhas. They practiced purification rituals with cold water for Makiemon, but they were all to no avail. It is believed that Makiemon died from smallpox at the tender age of nine.

On the same day as Makiemon’s passing, a visitor noticed that Asakichi had contracted smallpox. In addition, Hagio also had a skin rash. Preoccupied with Makiemon’s deteriorating condition, Bunji did not see the oncoming symptoms of Asakichi and Hagio. As custom dictated, once Bunji and Tose became aware of their sons’ conditions, they performed the “Shimeoroshi” rite which symbolically sealed the house with purification ropes, and they prayed for the recovery of their sons. While this was taking place, Makiemon’s body was temporarily placed in the storehouse. Their attention diverted to the new crisis. Bunji and Tose became so immersed in saving Asakichi and Hagio that Makiemon’s funeral had to be conducted by relatives.

Fortunately, Asakichi and Hagio recovered from their respective ailments. While Bunji was very happy with their recovery, his sorrow for Makiemon still remained. As a gesture of appreciation, he invited relatives and the Shinto priests

who had conducted the religious service for his two surviving children to a celebration. Bunji handed out gifts as an additional expression of his appreciation which surprised the Shinto priests in attendance. Bunji tried not to worry about the difficulties in his life and instead tried to always think positively. However, Makiemon’s death still weighed heavily on his mind.

Bunji realized that each time he began one of his construction projects, he lost a child. In addition, both his stepbrother and adoptive father had also passed away. In the last fourteen years, Bunji had buried five beloved family members. These multiple deaths led villagers to spread ominous rumors. They feared the consequences of Bunji’s continuing construction project. Even Bunji was apprehensive and concerned that his insistence with the construction angered the deities.

Bunji’s concern heightened even more in July when his ox became ill. While Bunji left for the neighboring town of Tamashima to purchase materials for the construction project, the ox had died.

Despite being troubled by these successive misfortunes, Bunji continued preparing for the construction. On the day he was ordered to dismantle his old house, he offered a prayer to Konjin before beginning the task. In his prayer, he defended his actions by stating that he had been advised regarding the proper Days and Directions for the construction. However, he admitted that being a humble and ordinary person, he could not know if this would still incur the displeasure of Konjin. Bunji also described enlarging the house in three directions and asked permission for completing the work. Upon completion, he pledged to dedicate an altar in the new house to honor Konjin. He promised to recite both the Rokkon-Shojo and Hannya-Shingyo Prayers 50 times.

Bunji did not attempt to avoid or shy away from Konjin, but he instead exhibited a respect for Konjin as a kami. Even though he consulted specialists regarding the Days and Directions and followed their instructions, he realized that he was an ordinary person who did not understand the irreverence that he might have committed. Bunji started to gain more insight into his own nature through these repeated encounters with difficulties and experiences.

He had carefully completed each task of the project as instructed and was ready to move into the new house. Despite seven to eight days of rain, the construction project was completed as directed. This brought Bunji a sense of relief. However, in July of the following year, Bunji's second ox became ill. Similar to the previous year, a veterinarian came, but the second ox died. The second ox died exactly one year after the first ox.

Some people referred to these deaths as the "Seven Deaths of Konjin," and these deaths were caused by some irreverence to Konjin. Bunji felt he had diligently followed the Days and Directions, and he even added other practices. However, despite the efforts and his best intentions, Bunji was still unable to avoid tragedy. Without knowing the causes of these misfortunes, Bunji became increasingly concerned about what else he could do, or be aware of, to avoid them in the future. This increased his anxiety as he looked to the future.

In December of 1851, a second daughter was born. Iwa, Bunji's adoptive mother, said since the baby has the same zodiac sign as herself, she would name the child Kura. On December 25, 1854, when Bunji was 41 years old, a fifth son was born. While this would seem like a happy occasion, this actually caused Bunji and his family much anxiety. Bunji would be forty-two years old at the beginning of the next year when his newborn son would turn two. From traditional belief, with Bunji being forty-two and his son they named Unojo (Ieyoshi) being two, Bunji and his family feared misfortune unless they took action.

Concerned family members, recalling the history of misfortune experienced by Bunji's household, encouraged Bunji to not raise Ieyoshi. Iwa, Bunji's adoptive mother and Ieyoshi's grandmother, said, "I will raise him, so do not worry." Thus, Iwa became the parent raising the child. As an additional precaution, since the child was born near the end of the year, the family decided

to change the date of his birth to January 2, 1855 and reported the new date to the local Shinto priest.

On the morning of New Year's Day, 1855,

Bunji worshiped at home to the deity, Toshitokujin. People believed that Toshitokujin brought blessings for the year. He then went to the Kamo Shrine, and he prayed to dispel the bad luck of his forty-second year and requested a Shinto priest to change his fifth son's birth year to 1855.

A few days later, Bunji walked through the snow to visit Gion Shrine in To-

monotsu (Fukuyama City, Hiroshima Prefecture). There, he offered prayers at the shrine, made a request, and received a sacred wooden amulet to purify against misfortune. He then trekked twenty miles back to his home.

On January 14, he went to Bichu Province to worship at the Kibitsu Shrine and requested a sacred ritual prayer called Narikama. One part of this ritual involved placing a small amount of rice into a cauldron of boiling water. One of two things would happen when the rice was placed into the cauldron. The cauldron would either make a sound like a groan, which people believed indicated good luck, or the cauldron would remain silent, which people interpreted as an unlucky sign. When Bunji placed his portion of rice into the cauldron, the cauldron groaned twice. This was not an expected outcome, and Bunji pondered what this might mean.

From Kibitsu Shrine, Bunji went directly to Saidaiji Kannon Temple, where coincidentally, the Eyo Ceremony was being observed. This ceremony, where individuals tried to grab sacred items thrown into the crowd by the priests, took place throughout the day and into the evening. Bunji participated in the ceremony, spent the night, and returned home the next day. This pilgrimage included visits to the main shrines and temples in the adjacent districts of Bingo, Bichu, and Bizen, which required walking for more than sixty miles. People believed that pilgrimage would dispel fu-



"Saidaiji Kannon Temple" by Higuchi Ichiro

ture misfortunes. However, some considered Bunji's approach excessive and unusual when compared to others facing similar circumstances.

Despite his precautions, on the evening of April 25, Bunji became bedridden with a high fever and a swollen throat. The affliction was so severe that he was unable to speak or even drink water. A

doctor was summoned to Bunji's bedside where he diagnosed Bunji as having a "throat ailment." Although treatment was provided, the doctor concluded there was little hope for recovery.

On the night of April 29, a number of people gathered and prayed to the kamis for Bunji's recovery. At that time, they received Konjin's revelation, "Irreverence to the deities has been committed during the construction and move."

In response, Bunji's father-in-law, Furukawa Yaozo, argued in Bunji's defense that offenses were not committed. Then, an even more severe warning was given by Konjin "Does nothing else concern you as long as you checked the Days and Directions? Would it be permissible if he dies, and the family is wiped out?"

Bunji, who was listening to the conversation, began to realize the answer he had been asking for many years. Bunji realized the construction project had been irreverent and that he had committed an inexcusable offense. He apologized for being rude and said, "My father-in-law believes what he says to be the truth. Regarding the construction, I was told not to build at that time. However, I forced the issue and had the Days and Directions rechecked in order to permit me to build. I do



"Gion Shrine" by Higuchi Ichiro

not think checking the Days and Directions is enough. I apologize for my selfishness and irreverence." As soon as Bunji apologized in this way, Konjin said, "Bunji, you are correct."

Bunji finally understood Kami's thoughts when he experienced a personal encounter with Kami during a near-fatal illness. This encounter

was the beginning of Mediation, a connection that was established between humans and Kami.

Thus, today, we are given the opportunity to understand Kami's Wish and free ourselves from our suffering.

Through his Mediation, he taught, "People, while living between Heaven and Earth, are unaware of Kami's blessings. Shrines, temples, and houses all stand on Kami's land. Without realizing this, people consult the Days and Directions and are disrespectful to Kami. They suffer hardships due to these past offenses." Kami revealed, "Right now the world is a human-centered world. All things are done by people's own strength, and many people are going against my teachings. Those who do as Kami states will become kami. Long ago, there was a Kami-centered world. Now it is a human-centered world. Because of this, I will teach people how to return to a Kami-centered world. Difficulties and suffering are caused by people's own hearts. Whether or not they can live in a peaceful world also depends upon their own heart."

Humans suffer and pray to be saved. They can be truly saved only when humans understand what Kami's Wishes are.

Higuchi Ichiro's paintings are all the Konko Library collections.

He established a friendship with Konko Kagamitaro since his late 20s.

Higuchi Ichiro (1908~1971)

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His first award winning painting, "Shoshu" ("Early Autumn") won the 14th Imperial Exhibition. He often painted bright landscapes with vivid colors.



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