



Morning Sermon

by Rev. Shohei Tsuda

Episode 1

Regardless of how well the flint and steel can produce a spark, if the tinder is wet, there will be no flame.

January 1, 2021

Good morning and Happy New Year. We have been able to welcome the New Year's Day of Reiwa Year 3.

Kami-Sama allowed me to sit in the inner sanctuary of the altar. In such short time, it's impossible for me to express my gratitude to Kami-Sama for everything for the past year. For each and every one of us who form the connection with Amagasaki church, Kami-Sama gave amazing divine blessings such as our ability to breathe, circulation of blood, and pretty much everything. We've just been continuously receiving blessings from Kami-Sama. Therefore, I have been thanking Kami-Sama on behalf of everyone. We would not be able to live for even a moment, if it were not for Kami-Sama's blessings. For this year as well, I would like to express the feeling of gratitude rather than asking for blessings. We are all imperfect, but I hope that we can grow and deepen our faith so that Kami-Sama's will and our hearts can be in sync even just a little more. We can do this by coming to worship, praying, receiving Toritsugi Mediation and using myself and my family as a faith training guidebook. Though I am an inadequate human being, please guide me." This is what I prayed to Kami-Sama.

Then to my ancestors, Rev. Kazuta Tsuda, Rev. Shinji Tsuda, Rev. Yuki Tsuda, Rev. Tamano Tsuda, and the countless Mitama No Kami and Mitama that are remembered here. I offered my greetings. I'd like to rejoice together with the founding minister and his wife, 2nd generation ministers and 3rd generation ministers who have laid the foundations of this church for

allowing us to reach this day and wish them a Happy New Year.

The Founding minister of this church dedicated his life to helping others in his position, aiming to pass on the faith to the next generation, and he has put forth all of his life into this mission of helping people who are suffering through Toritsugi Mediation. The same is true for all ministers of the past. When I think of this and the fact that the Amagasaki Church makes 124 years, this blessing is definitely something not to be taken for granted.

When I think about it, I truly feel grateful to Kami-Sama for allowing me to be here on this day. I can't help but to say "Congratulations for all these years." As I said these greetings to the spirits of the past ministers, the first, second and third, I received a feeling that they were saying it back to me as well. ¹

However, we never know what will happen in this year. Whatever happens, this worship hall is the place of solice for all people. The place for faith equals the place for life. Therefore, I will take full responsibility for this worship hall. I request Kami-Sama and the Mitama-spirits to help guide me through it all, from the

1 (Editor's note)"Mitama-Spirit of the past teachers also expressed their congratulations" to Oya sensei (Shohei Tsuda). When I asked him about it, he told me that he used the word "said" as a way of saying, "Kami also sends him a bow. He said, "Mitama-Spirits thanked me even more deeply. I remember that Kami-Sama told me that there was nothing to be afraid of," he said. He also taught me the words that he exchanged with Kami-Sama and Mitama-Spirits at that time. (For more information on the "bowing from Kami, too," please refer to the Memorandum of Understanding of Konko Daijin, 15.6, Notice Book 11.7, and the Praise and Worship Verse of Konko Daijin.)

things I miss and do not realize. I would like to ask Kami-Sama and the Mitama-spirits to protect all of us, including people's personal matters, this worship hall, the church, and the resident ministers as well. It is our responsibility to draw out the virtues of the Mitama-spirits that has accumulated for this purpose. We were able to pray together with the spirits, asking them to use us for their purposes this year at Amagasaki Church, and confirming our faith with each other.

There is a teaching that says, "A believer should not be surprised by anything that happens," and no one knows how this year will turn out. Our Founder lived in a time of great upheaval. There were times when he was not allowed to pray for others, or even to open the worship hall for the believers. Regardless, he overcame these difficulties and created the path for us, and the path continues till this day.

Well, if you say we're at peace, we are at peace, but you never know what will happen in the future. It is only a matter of time before a war can break out, or a big earthquake could happen any minute, anything can happen. But, the more something happens, the stronger we feel if we have faith in Kami-Sama. We'd rather not have earthquakes or wars in our life. However, anything can happen. No matter what happens, if you have faith, even if there is a big wave, Kami-Sama will help you. If you have a cane, you can avoid drowning. It is in such situations that the power of faith comes into play. It's like a float. No matter what kind of waves hit us, the big float will keep us from being swallowed.

As long as we firmly rely on Kami-Sama, Kami-

Sama will continue to hold on to your hand without letting it go and you will be guided. It doesn't matter how rough the seas or how high the waves are, if we pray diligently by reciting "Kami-Sama, Konko Daijin-Sama," then we will be protected. I believe that if we go in the direction of the boat, it will protect us and keep us safe. When I think about it, no matter what happens this year, I'm looking forward to it. I'm very grateful to Kami-Sama for the blessings which have been bestowed to me through my faith.

It's not that I want something terrible to happen, but if it does, I don't want to be surprised. In that case, there is no point in having faith, is there? Even if it's the same Shohei Tsuda, when I compare myself with those who practice faith and those who do not, if the path is the same, then there is no point in practicing faith. I want to walk the path as a person of faith and as a servant of Kami-Sama. Although it is important to save myself, as the guardian of this hall, I really hope that I can teach and guide the people who come to this worship hall so that Kami-Sama will help them more than I.

Nevertheless, it does not mean that I will be believing Kami-Sama on behalf of others. Tenchi Kane No Kami is the source of blessings. After all, each of you should practice faith to receive divine blessings. To some extent, there are things that I can share through my faith, since I am connected to Kami-Sama. However, the most important thing is that you must be willing to believe and receive the blessings. No matter how

much Kami-Sama, Konko Daijin Sama, works for you, if you don't have the desire to believe in Kami-Sama, you won't be able to benefit.

The Founder, Konko Daijin taught using the analogy of the steel, the flint and the tinder. Tinder are soft cotton-like fibers that catches fire from the flint that is used to first ignite a fire started with the steel. I would hold the flint in my left hand, and hold the cottony tinder in my fingers, and strike the flint with my right hand against the rock with steel. When you hit the flint, sparks would fly, and the fire sparks would be transferred to the tinder and burn, and then you would transfer it to a small pile of kindle to catch fire. Tenchi Kane No Kami Sama is the steel, Konko Daijin Sama is the flint. No matter how good the steel and flint are, if the tinder, or the heart of the people, is damp, the fire will not start.

Those who practice faith must keep this in mind. You have to constantly remind yourself that before you begin to wonder or doubt Kami-Sama of “Why doesn't Kami-Sama give me divine blessing?” we have to assess ourselves to see if our heart is in check to receive blessings—if our tinder is damp or not.

We need to receive blessings for each year. Otherwise, we will not be able to sustain ourselves. Every breath we take, the circulation of our blood, every movement of our limbs is made possible by the grace of Kami-Sama. As for receiving blessings, there are some blessings that we can accept without doing anything and there are also blessings that we can only receive if we have firm faith. And if we don't get it, we cannot

move forward in our lives. It's hard enough to live while you're struggling to stay alive. In the case of getting rid of Meguri (accumulated offenses), you may have to encounter a painful process. Even then, we will live with Kami's protection and grace. We will practice faith this year, hoping that we can live that way. Over and over again, we practice a new day every day.

“Practice means to learn from the basics and trying to develop a full understanding.” As we may advance to a full understanding of our faith, we must remember the basics. It’s a daily repetition beginning with the basics so that you can receive the blessings that Kami-Sama wants to give us.

Konko-Sama said in a teaching, “Think of Kami as your parent, and Kami-Sama will think of you as Kami’s child. When a parent stands behind you, you’ll be protected from all evil. If you had a child to take care of, and someone approaches to hit him with a stick, you would stop the person from doing so.” (Gorikai I Ichimura Mitsugoro 1-6 Excerpt)

The Founder spoke to those who visited him in this way. He said humans have something to protect, whether it's people or things. Even if someone attacked those precious people or things, they would not attempt to do so if their parents were standing behind them. There are scary incidents of children getting kidnapped, but if a parent is there with them, they would not get kidnapped. Even if there were fights or bullying between children, it is not likely that they would go out

of their way to bully each other if their parents are around.

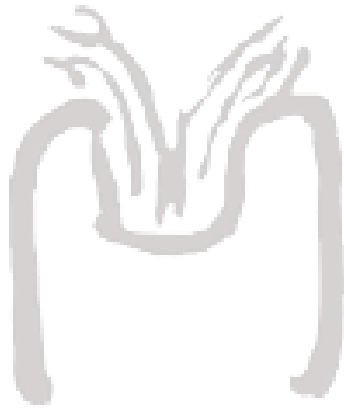
Tenchi Kane No Kami-Sama is the parent of human beings. Therefore human beings should approach and hold on to their Parent Kami. By doing so, we will be able to truly appreciate Kami-Sama as our Parent Kami. In the teachings, at the very beginning, there is the phrase, "If you think of Tenchi Kane No Kami as your parent." That's essentially what the relationship between Kami the parent and children is all about. Having said that, if we don't adore our parents and rely on them, Kami-Sama won't be able to perform the role as a parent. Even if a parent wants to do this and that, protect and nurture their children, and help them wherever necessary, if the child does not behave like his/her child, Kami-Sama cannot perform parental duties. First, as a human being, we should adore Kami-Sama, thinking of Kami-Sama as our parent. Only then can Kami-Sama perform work as Kami our Parent. It's important for humans to depend on Kami-Sama. People may say, "If you think us humans are so precious, why don't you help us properly?" As long as you are the first to say, "Kami-Sama, Kami-Sama," and stay close, Kami will always stand behind you and protect you. Otherwise, it will be challenging for Kami-Sama to protect us in an emergency. Even though we may be living with our parents under the same roof, if you start wandering around on your own, your parents won't know what's going on even if they are home. When you go to the park to play, when you go shopping, whenever and wherever you go, if you ask Kami-Sama to follow you, Kami will

not leave your side.

There is a word for "evil (Akuma)" that the Founder Konko Sama talks about. I don't know if Konko Sama expressed it that way or the person who heard it understood it that way. There is one other use of the word "evil" in the teachings. It was also recorded in other people's records in the Kyoten. Because of this, I believe that Konko Sama expressed it the way he did.

The word evil may sound scary. Evil people may attack other people. It is not limited to people doing evil things, but it can also include unfortunate events and things. A car might run into you. You never know what kind of incident might come to you. In other words, an event that may harm your life, or one that swallows your life up whole. Even in such a situation, if we always ask Kami-Sama to stay with us, you will be protected. Kami-Sama protects us by replacing significant hardships with minor ones and further reducing minor hardships to nothing. Think about it, you need to ask Kami-Sama first. That is the meaning of "Aiyo-akeyo."

I welcomed today's New Year's Day with these thoughts in mind. Each of us has been given a new, clean day or a new page, a brand-new canvas. Each of us live in various environments, situations, and settings for our bodies and minds, but let's practice faith so that we can make it a good day for ourselves, so that Kami-Sama can make it a good day for us.



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