



Kibi-mai "Ebira no ume"

The Pan-European Konkokyo Conference Participants Felt Great Joy

There are no Konko churches in Europe. Therefore the Konkokyo International Center (KIC) has been holding gatherings in various places in Europe to support a network of local believers and the propagation of Konkokyo.

This year, KIC held the Pan-European Konkokyo Conference in London on February 14 and 15, commemorating the 150th Anniversary of Konkokyo Establishment.

For this conference, a total of eighteen people traveled from Japan to London, including musicians and dancers to give a "Konkokyo Kibi-gaku Concert in London" on the second day. From KIC, Director Shinji Yamada, Reverends Masao Takahashi and Yukie Morimoto, and Harue Ochi were part of the party.



Day 1 (February 14): In the morning, a faith enrichment workshop took place at the Caesar Room, Imperial Hotel. The participants first viewed the animation "Konko-Sama, Tales of *Toritsugi* Mediation," which was produced last year. Later, they divided into English-speaking and Japanese-speaking groups, and shared and discussed their individual beliefs with group members. They engaged in lively talks and, in the English-

speaking group, a participant said, "In the animation I found Konko-Sama to be very modest. I believe modesty is a key to faith." In the Japanese-speaking group, someone brought up this question: "The animation advised not to try to change others but try to change yourself. What should I say, however, to the young people who are going to war believing they are right and the other side wrong?" This question stimulated a very thoughtful discussion among the

participants.

In the afternoon, a service accompanied by music was conducted, during which Ms. Carrie Gale made a candle light offering at the altar, and officiant minister Reverend Yamada read the *Saishi* main prayer in both English and Japanese, as well as offering flowers. Then Reverend Yamada read the Divine Call and all the participants offered flowers.



After the service, Ms. Demelza Parnell related her experience. Looking back over her life, she told how she had

come across Konkokyo:

“A few years ago, I was at difficult time in my life. I was very pregnant, and my father, for whom I spent over fifteen years caring him through his illness, died. I gave birth to my son just a few days after the funeral. I was very, very depressed, and felt spiritually empty, even though there were many friends and family to support me. So I started looking. I read many scriptures, I talked many people. Eventually I looked on the internet and I found the KIC website.



Ms. Demelza Parnell

At the time I wasn't looking for a new religion as much as I was just looking to find myself, to find some spiritual answers. I started asking questions through emailing people at KIC, and received interesting responses. I learned so many things, the most powerful of which was a new attitude toward sad things. I learned to see not problems but opportunities no matter how bad the things are. This idea was completely fresh and new for me. I changed my attitude into feeling grateful for the things I did have and for being alive. This is feeling of being grateful for blessings that I have all the time, no matter what happens, helped me carry on even though I still get ill sometimes. I have hope and I've never lost that.

To keep hope, and to keep praying and reading Founder's teachings give me an understanding of being appreciative of being human, a part of the universe.”



When a participant asked her, “What does your husband think of your belief?” She answered, “My husband isn't a very religious person. So, I was afraid he might think that I lost my mind, when he realized that I followed a Japanese religion. But, having a chance to read *Voice of the Universe (Selected Teachings of Konkokyo)*, he understood my belief. Now even my mother asks me about Konkokyo.”

After that, all the participants introduced themselves and shared their thoughts about Konkokyo over tea and coffee. Ms. Sandra Sams, who has participated in the four gatherings said, “Having moved house yesterday, I am very tired. But I've come to get sacred rice and thank Kami, because having previously given sacred rice to others, I saw that all of them felt some easing of their concerns.” Ms. Michiko Walker, who attended every gathering since 1994, enthusiastically said, “I've been believing Konko-Sama all the time. Now to help suffering people makes my life worthwhile.” Ms. Harumi Teramoto, who was introduced to Konkokyo by Ms. Walker and has since participated in this event almost every year, said, “I have a lot of hard problems and seek the help of Konko-Sama everyday. I cannot live without Konko-Sama.”

Sincere talks continued tirelessly

until the session was closed at five o'clock.

Day 2 (February 15): A *Kibi-gaku* concert was held at the University of London, which was cosponsored by KIC and the Centre for the Study of Japanese Religions, University of London.

A meticulous rehearsal started at noon, and, after the musicians and dancers were costumed and made-up, the concert began at 6 p.m. Mr. Tullio Lobetti, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, gave an opening speech. Followed by Dr. Charles Rowe, a specialist in music of Japanese religions, who presented a short lecture on the history and doctrine of Konkokyo, and *Kibi-gaku* and *Chusei-gaku*.

To introduce Konkokyo's ritual music, the concert began with a simulated ritual service, during which musicians accompanied the actions of the officiants as they took their seats, offered *tamagushi* (branch of sacred tree), and finally as they withdrawal from the alter. After that the instruments were introduced in order of *koto*, *sho*, *hichiriki*, *ryuteki*, and then *Kibi-gaku* ensemble piece “*Matsu fuku kaze*” (A breeze blowing through pines.) was played.

The *Kibi-mai* sacred dance “*Sakura-gari*” (Cherry-blossom viewing)

was performed. Two dancers, one in a pale yellow and the other in an orange costume and wearing fine make-up, elegantly walked on the stage to the song. Halfway to the center, they each danced with a twig of cherry blossoms and a folding fan in their hands, reflecting the title of the piece. Although basically a slow dance, the song and actions accelerated at the end. The splendid dance deeply engaged the audience.

After a 10-minute break, “*Ebira no ume*” (A twig of plum flowers in the quiver) was performed. The dancer appeared on the stage wearing an impressive costume similar to that of warriors in the twelfth century, with a sword at her waist and a quiver on her back. Singing and narration were alternated while the dancer gave a powerful performance of the story, holding a plum twig and a folding fan. The audience responded with a generous



Kibi-mai “*Sakura-gari*”

applause. The audience's enthusiastic appreciation was expressed with their hearty cheers when Director Yamada introduced the musicians, dancers, and other supporting staff.

After the concert Director Yamada said, “I think it is very significant that we could introduce Konkokyo to British society through *Kibi-gaku*, a Konkokyo's cultural heritage. I was overwhelmed with the fact that we could hold a service and say the Divine Title and the Divine Name, ‘Ikigami Konko Daijin, Tenchi Kane No Kami,’ at the

University of London even if it was a simulated ritual service.” A believer in UK, who came to enjoy the concert, excitedly said, “It was a wonderful event. We had only a tiny meeting at first, but, through our efforts to continue to meet, the gathering grew to include such a fine concert. I am so glad.”

This year, in addition to the KIC staff, fourteen Japanese believers joined the conference on account of the concert. Thus, the conference became an unusual opportunity where the believers living in Europe and Japan could exchange friendship. It also became a good experience that stimulated sharing of each other's belief. At the concert, believers were happy to witness a moment when Konkokyo was widely shared with British society in such a wonderful way. They said the conference gave them appreciation and pride of following this Way.

Interview with Mr. Tullio Lobetti, Teaching Fellow of School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London

KIC: What is the most interesting part about Konkokyo for you?

Mr. Lobetti: A peculiarity of Konkokyo is certainly its relationship with the ‘Shinto tradition’. Because of its active involvement in society, the development of an original doctrine and theology, and the diffusion of active centres throughout Japan, Konkokyo cannot be understood just as being a new religion influenced by Shinto, but we also need to consider how it can play an important role in the definition of modern Shinto identity as well.

KIC: How was the *Kibi-gaku* concert?

Mr. Lobetti: The *Kibi-gaku* concert performed by the Konkokyo International Centre at SOAS is a remarkable example of this ambivalent interaction between Shinto traditions and Konkokyo. Although the dance part was clearly very close to traditional *Ga-gaku*, it has been efficaciously remarked how it included elements or variations peculiar to Konkokyo. Through this performance, the audience had the possibility to enjoy a piece of Konkokyo culture and more generally of Shinto ceremonial tradition at the same time, thus enhancing

their understanding of important elements of Japanese religious culture in a wider sense.

KIC: Please give us your advice for our activities in foreign country.

Mr. Lobetti: This may be indeed also an important contribution of Konkokyo outside Japan. The various Konkokyo churches that have been founded overseas in the last decades could also become important centres for the diffusion and the better understanding of Japanese religious culture, besides introducing people to the specific teachings of Konkokyo. The present era of globalisation is often unfortunately hindered by widespread misunderstandings of each others cultures and beliefs. Overseas religious centres, such as Konkokyo's ones, can perhaps also be seen as performing the role of cultural ambassadors for their own countries. The *Kibi-gaku* performance at SOAS was certainly a valid example of such initiatives, and we hope we will be able to enjoy more in the future.



Jikishin

The Disciples of Konko Daijin X

Sadajiro Yamamoto (1855-1939)

Sadajiro Yamamoto, the second son of Tokujiro Yamamoto, was born in Kamiinagi Village, Onoda County, Bitchu Province (present-day Kamiinagi Town, Ibara, Okayama Prefecture). He was forty-one years younger than the Founder. At the age of twenty-seven, Sadajiro married Tomino from Yoshii Village and together they had five sons and three daughters. Farming was their livelihood.

During Sadajiro's childhood, his mother Shima was ill and bedridden. Although she consulted a doctor, checked the "Days and Directions" and depended on prayers, her condition worsened day-by-day. Meanwhile, his father Tokujiro heard of Konko Daijin in Otani and visited the Founder's Mediation Hall for the first time. The Founder promptly told Tokujiro facts which the Founder could not possibly have known under normal circumstances, such as the arrangement or direction of Tokujiro's house, and pointed out that Tokujiro committed irreverence to the earth and checked the "Days and Directions" to watch for Konjin's absence. Looking at the situation through the Founders eyes, Tokujiro was astonished but began to practice faith along with Konko Daijin's teachings. Shima completely recovered in three weeks. Tokujiro, however, suddenly stopped visiting the Founder entirely, due to his fear of a rumor that Konko Daijin was a phony. On the other hand, for young Sadajiro, it was quite unfathomable how Konko Daijin knew of things that occurred far away from him, and this left a permanent lasting impression on him.

Sadajiro visited the Founder's Mediation Hall for the first time, at the age of twenty-one, (twelve years after his father's first visit) to ask about his mother's long illness. The Founder suddenly said to him, "People should know what made it possible for them to be born, and what makes it possible for them to keep living."

He was surprised at the suddenness of these words and

wondered what he should say. It was quite natural for Sadajiro to think that, having worked as a farmer, he is kept alive by eating food he grew himself. To Sadajiro who believed he lived through his own efforts, Konko Daijin added, "Kami lets all humans live amid divine blessings," and "Oxen are different from humans. They can withstand the cold without anything extra. However cold it may be, even newly born calves don't catch cold. This is beyond the strength of humans raising them. Chickens, wild birds, and other animals have the same protection as oxen. Only humans can realize that all this protection is from Tenchi No Kami-Sama." (*Gorikai I: Yamamoto Sadajiro 4*) Konko Daijin allowed Sadajiro to realize that the root of life is within Kami-Sama's Workings. Kami-Sama keeps us alive. To stay alive is beyond human control. Hearing this teaching, Sadajiro was so deeply moved that his way of thinking greatly changed.

While maintaining his farm, Sadajiro still often visited Konko Daijin's Mediation Hall, listening to teachings and writing them down. The teachings Sadajiro left behind were large in number, long sentences, and featured topics such as the relationship between Kami and people, divine blessings, matters concerning couples, the family, human hardships, faith practice, etc. Konko Daijin's answers to his meek questions are concrete and easy to understand.

The usefulness of every teaching Sadajiro wrote and handed down extends beyond that period in time. They answer and support the "Why?" questions that we, who are living now, continue to ask today.

Sadajiro eventually became a minister and was appointed the head minister of Konko Church of Nyuta in Okayama Prefecture. He lived until the age of eighty-five years old.



Learning More about Konko Faith!

-First New York Area Konko Faith Gatherings for 2010-

Through Tenchi Kane No Kami's divine arrangement, we were allowed to hold the 1st New York Area Konko Faith Gatherings for 2010. Reverend Joanne Tolosa's flight from San Francisco to JFK International Airport touched down shortly before the heavy snowstorm hit the New York area, canceling flights. Despite school closures and a foot of snow, public transportation still operated, allowing us all to meet on February 26, the day of the informal gathering.

The husband of one believer seen regularly by Reverend Tolosa for individual Mediation was very supportive by leaving work to watch their children at home, due to school closure, so that his wife could meet with the minister. One couple traveled from New Jersey after work, in the harsh weather, to meet Reverend Tolosa for the first time. The young woman believer was pleased to receive English Konko prayers and information, for the first time. Previous gatherings she attended as a child with her family in New York were all conducted in Japanese.

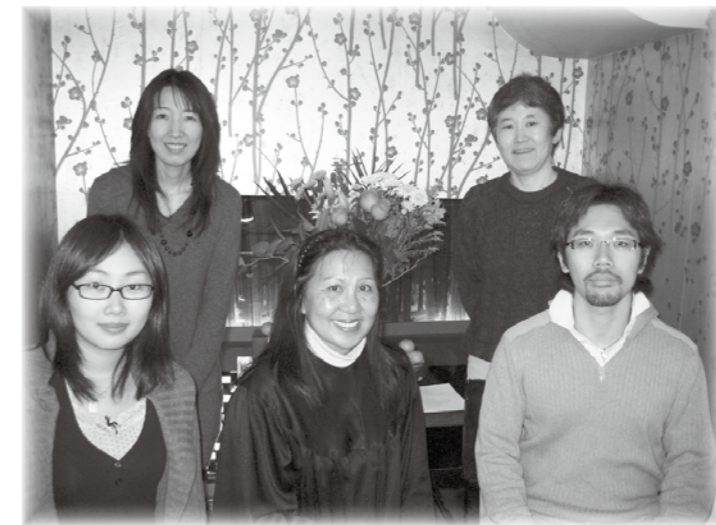
A group of us met at a local coffee shop near Union Square to renew our acquaintances and share about our lives. One believer, who could not attend last October's gathering, met the newcomers this time. It was great to see the believer from Japan who arrived in New York only two months before the October 2009 gathering, now be so at ease and comfortable, after adjusting to life here for half a year.

The next day, believers brought flowers and food offerings to adorn the makeshift altar at Menchanko Tei Restaurant in Manhattan. Around 11:30 a.m. Reverend Tolosa conducted the solemn prayer service in the upstairs private room. Following the English service and sermon, the group ate lunch before studying the reasons behind the differences between the Japanese prayer book, and old and new English prayer books.



The group's thirst for more Konko Faith teachings, information and fellowship will be quenched through the monthly group gatherings they are initiating at the end of March. Ms. Saomi Okamoto, New York Area Konko Faith Gathering Coordinator will conduct the study groups using *Voice of the Universe*, 400 selected

teachings handed down by the Founder. The believers are encouraged to attend the Joint KCNA-KMH Conference in Hawaii August 13-15, 2010, to meet the ministers and believers of North America. October 29-30, 2010, Reverend Tolosa will return to officiate the 2nd New York Area Faith Gathering Prayer Service.



From Kyoten

He who believes in Kami receives pleasure in everything he does. Serving at the hiromae is a pleasure, merchandising and farming are also pleasures. Everyone between Heaven and Earth is delightfully and gratefully receiving pleasures.

(*Gorikai II: Kondo Fujimori 22*)

Though I am not an ikigami (a living kami), people still call me an ikigami. The followers have given me the name of ikigami.

(*Gorikai II: Nanba Ko 2*)

Receive Divine Blessing for Every Single Thing

by Reverend Masao Takahashi

One day my left middle finger became swollen and I felt pain. Because I could not figure out what the cause was and could not find any injury on the finger, I did not worry about it and believed the pain would go away in a short while.

However, the next day, I still felt the pain so I re-checked my finger more carefully. I found the fingernail of my middle finger had penetrated into the skin (an ingrown condition) which was causing some bleeding and pain in my finger.

I remembered one of the Founder's teachings, which states, "You should not think that you must make a request for an important matter, or that you do not need to make

a request for a trivial matter." I then realized that I had decided by myself not to pray because I thought it was just a trivial matter. I apologized for my selfishness, put sacred sake on my wound and prayed for my finger to heal.

The next morning, I found the wound healing well and the pain was gone. I came to realize that if I confronted a more serious or fatal matter, I would probably pray more desperately and that I could never heal even a small finger wound myself without asking for the divine work.

Kami never discriminates between what we perceive as something big or small and always listens to our prayers. Therefore, let us pray for every single thing even if we think that it is insignificant or trivial!

TOPIC & INFORMATION

Page-a-Day Calendar Printed in English, French, and German



An A5 sized desktop calendar with daily teachings was recently produced in commemoration of the Pan-Europe Konkokyo Conference in London on February 14 and 15. There are English, French, or German versions, and

they have a different teaching from Konko Daijin printed on each page, along with the original Japanese underneath. We hope this calendar brings much happiness to your daily life.

To inquire about the calendar, please contact KIC.

2010 Konko Churches of North America & Konko Missions in Hawaii Joint Conference

Theme : Spiritual Investment

Dates : Friday, August 13 (Opening Ceremony at 4:30 p.m.) to Sunday, August 15

Location : Camp Erdman (Waialua, Hawaii)

English Speaker : Rev. Todd Zenji Takahashi, Konko Mission of Honolulu

Japanese Speaker : Rev. Mitsutoshi Horio, Konko Church of Hita, Oita, Japan

For further information, please feel free to contact

- **Konkokyo Hawaii Center**

URL : <http://konkomissionshawaii.org/>

phone: +1-808-536-9078

- **Konko Churches of North America office**

URL : <http://konkofaith.org/>

phone: +1-800-719-5262

