

Discover Opportunities Behind Crises

7Message by Rev. Watanabe, President of SKK

Annual Ancestor Service, July 1 & 2, 2008,

Hall of Worship, Atami, Japan

Good morning and welcome to our Annual Ancestor Service. Today, it is hot and humid, but I hope that you are doing well

We have just completed the Annual Ancestor Service, and I sincerely prayed that our ancestors would be with Meishu-sama. Together with our ancestors, we can be used as effective instruments for Meishu-sama and the Divine Light Program.

We have just received Johrei from Kyoshu-sama, and also heard his detailed guidance about how we are supposed to think, act and speak in order to be in harmony with Meishu-sama's Will. I would like to further study his words with you, and promise to do my best to implement what was outlined for us today.

First, I would like to introduce to you those from overseas who are attending the Service.

30 from Angola, Africa

4 from South Africa

3 from Sao Tome Principe

2 from the Congo

1 from Mozambique

1 from Nigeria

49 from Brazil

23 from our neighbors in Korea

7 from Taiwan

14 from Sri Lanka

2 from Australia

52 from the United States

11 from Portugal

6 from Spain

5 from France

1 from the UK

1 from Canada

And, 121 from Thailand

333 people from 18 different countries! Please welcome them with a big applause.

Wow..., three hundred thirty three people from eighteen countries! As stated in Meishu-sama's Teaching, we have become truly "International!"

How Can You Best Prepare For Death?

In July, some regions of Japan celebrate Obon. It is a Buddhist tradition to honor the deceased spirits of one's ancestors. I wonder if many of you have had time to reflect upon your connection to your ancestors and the spiritual realm at this time.

By the way, have you heard of a Japanese Haiku poet named Kobayashi Issa? Of his many published works, I heard that this one was one of Meishu-sama's favorites:

“Give me that moon!”
Cries the crying child.

I remember more of his famous Haiku poems.....

Scrawny frog, hang tough!
Issa is here.

Baby sparrows,
Move aside!
Sir Horse passes.

Come play with me...
Orphan sparrow.

Which Haiku poem is your favorite? When you hear the poetry, you might imagine the author being a very happy and warm-hearted man.

Contrary to his happy demeanor projected through his Haiku, Issa had a difficult life. He was born into a poor farming family. His mother died when he was a little boy, and he had a challenging relationship with his stepmother. Issa left home permanently to support his family financially at the age of fifteen.

After his father passed away, Issa had a long enduring battle with his stepmother over his father's inheritance.

Issa was married after the age of fifty for the first time, but he tragically lost four newborn children in succession and lost his wife as well. He later remarried, but his wife left him after only two months of marriage. Issa again married, but he himself passed away before being able to see his first living baby being born.

Issa lead such a difficult life, and he was labeled as being an unfortunate person who lived a difficult life. He also gained a reputation for having a strong attachment to money.

In spite of enduring a difficult life, Issa wrote amazingly peaceful and beautiful swan songs. In honor of the upcoming Japanese Star Festival on July 7th, Tanabata, he wrote a special poem.

Looking beautiful
In a hole in the shoji paper door
The Milky Way.

The phrase, “In a hole” expands our imagination on what a poor life Issa lived, but even in such a difficult situation, he was able to find wonderment of the universe through inquisitive, compassionate eyes.

Before he wrote the above poem, he wrote other poems relating to the topic of his preparation for death.

Flowers falling like rain
Teach me
How to die.

“Get ready, get ready
For death!”
Cherry blossoms.

I assume what he wanted to convey through these poems was his intention of accepting his life as it was, and ending his life beautifully as possible instead of ending it with misery.

I think the meaning of preparation for death is to live in the present moment. In other words, how we can live lives that are focused in this moment. We cannot avoid death. It is our destiny. We will die some day in the future. It is a matter of time.

We do not know when our time of passing will come. A person may say, “I am already 70 years of age,” but he may live until 100 years old. On the other hand, a person may say, “I am still 30 years old”, and he may die early only in her 40’s. Since we do not know when we will die, we had better think about and focus on how we live our lives now.

How can you best prepare for death? My opinion is that it is through Sonen Jissen—practicing faith through daily reflection and prayer. Through this practice, we can understand the spiritual connection between the present physical world and the spiritual realm. We can also understand and accept our past mistakes of ignoring God and spiritual principles in our past, most likely done unconsciously. We can learn to develop

perfect trust in God, and accept that God oversees all aspects of life. It is through our commitment to the Supreme God that we can remove our ego and attachment to outcomes and give of ourselves in sincere service to people and to society. The ultimate goal is that all people we may encounter will be connected to Meishu-sama so they too can find true happiness.

Meishu-sama wrote about love for others in one of his poems. He writes:

Know that the happiness
We feel when we bring
Joy and happiness to people
Is the greatest happiness in the world. (p41 or 43 in the prayer book)

As Meishu-sama wrote in the above poem, I think that the best preparation for death is to bring about and feel this “greatest happiness in the world” by bringing joy and fulfillment to those around us.

No Distinction Between The Negative And The Positive

In Japan, we will soon have our annual high school baseball tournament. I am always excited and touched by the player’s attitudes of playing each game with much determination and passion.

Last year, I remember that Saga-kita High School from the island of Kyushu won the tournament. I was very impressed with the way that they always came from behind to win their games. This showed their strong mental attitude in clutch situations. I heard that this team posted an inspirational message on the wall of their clubhouse that gave them a strong spiritual lift and kept them focused. The poem was called, “What is Behind a Crisis,” and it was written by Yosiki Yamamoto.

“What is Behind a Crisis”

God never gives you only a crisis;
A big opportunity equal to the crisis
Is always being prepared for you ahead.

If you become desperate, or complain
You will lose the possibility of finding
The opportunity behind the “pinch”
And even worse, lose your confidence to overcome.

The “pinch” is a chance
To discover the opportunity behind the crisis
Only by being accepting, self-confident and dignified.

This poem makes a lot of sense, doesn't it?

I think that this poem reflects exactly what Meishu-sama taught us in his Teachings. We encounter many crises in our long journey of life, and we tend to complain and ask why we have to experience this. We also may become unbalanced and become reckless in our decisions when going through a difficult process. This is the perfect moment, however, to remind ourselves that everything is taken care of by God and is in His Hands.

From the human standpoint, there exist both positive and negative situations being presented to us. From God's viewpoint, however, there is no such distinction. Seemingly negative situations are a great opportunity that God has prepared for us to grow, remove our spiritual clouds, and to attain true happiness.

In human eyes, present negative situations will eventually turn out to be positive building blocks toward creating a great future. Accepting these difficult situations with gratitude is the key. This is what Meishu-sama meant when he said that purification is God's Love. It is important to understand that God gives us both a "pinch" and a chance to polish our souls and grow spiritually at the same time.

A New Advancement in the World Wide Expansion

Thanks to your sincere Hoshi, the Kyoto Sacred Grounds beautification project is going very well. As Meishu-sama wrote in his Teachings, we can see a new advancement in our worldwide Johrei expansion as the beautification and construction of the Sacred Grounds makes progress.

In Africa, according to a report from Rev. Francisco, Johrei activities are now rooted in five different countries over the past two years. We have also, however, seen new developments in the African countries of Nigeria, Namibia, Zambia, Swaziland, Ethiopia and Cape Verde.

In Russia, previous attempts for Johrei expansion work were made by Greek members from the European side and the Japanese from the Vladivostok region of the East Coast. According to Rev. Francisco's report, the African members are now becoming involved in the expansion work in Russia.

You may wonder how this is possible, but there is an explanation. It all started with a woman who immigrated from Russia to Mozambique. Her name is Ira Fomino. She received her Ohikari five years ago. One of the blessings she received initially was that she was able to reacquaint herself with her family in Russia after 15 years of separation. In fact, she has been able to return to her hometown and reunite with her family on two separate occasions now.

There, Ira was able to give Johrei to her family and her friends, and she also shared with them the principle of Sonen Jissen. It was her deep prayer that Meishu-sama, the Messiah, would use her as an instrument in order to help every fellow country person she encountered during her stay.

People suffering from fibroid cysts, chronic headaches, asthma, degenerative spondylitis, domestic violence and other personal and medical issues came to Ira to receive Johrei. They received many blessings from Meishu-sama through Johrei. The miracles that occurred created a stir amongst her neighbors, and many people were attracted to Ira and her newfound positive reputation. More and more people began to ask for Johrei. It was not unusual for Ira to give Johrei from eight o'clock in the morning to two o'clock in the following morning.

Ira was able to receive many blessings one of which was when her sister was injured in a car accident and was taken to the hospital. Her sister's diagnosis was critical, in fact so critical that the doctors did not intervene. The physicians even ridiculed Ira for giving Johrei to her sister thinking, "How could she do something for her while medical science cannot do anything?" After a week, however, Ira's sister made a miraculous recovery. After seeing this experience and studying the circumstances of healing, the doctors changed their attitude toward Johrei and Ira completely. They even asked Ira to give Johrei to other patients in the Intensive Care Unit.

Due to these miracles, sixteen people are now waiting to receive their Ohikari with a strong desire to be an effective instrument of Meishu-sama to help and save many people.

Ancestors Help World Expansion

In addition to the experiences I mentioned earlier, I received good news that we may have an opportunity to open the door for expansion work in Israel. This is due to some talented and passionate Jewish members who are hoping to do something for the expansion of the Divine Light Program in the Middle East.

While listening to these incidents, I felt that the miracles are occurring beyond our wildest expectations. I can see Meishu-sama's presence behind all of this. He must be happily advancing the worldwide Johrei expansion work from the spiritual realm. I strongly believe that from now on, the Light will extend to many countries via many different routes, not just from Brazil, Africa or Japan, but also from Korea, the United States and the European countries.

I acknowledge that you, members in Japan, have contributed to this worldwide expansion. I say this because the progress we made in the world is the proof we received from Meishu-sama through His Teachings, that your efforts in participating in the Kyoto Sacred Grounds Beautification Project has made a difference.

The members not only in Japan, but other countries as well are making a difference and contributing to the results. Sonen Jissen is now practiced in many countries around the world with members praying to become one of the 100,000 committed people who put their trust in Meishu-sama as the Messiah. As Kyoshu-sama previously stated, the spiritual realm in the world is significantly changing in a positive way.

I feel that many of our ancestors are also being purified, forgiven, saved and revived by the practice of Sonen Jissen which is strengthening their connection to Meishu-sama. These ancestors are the ones who helped to facilitate the world expansion through various countries. They want to help the Divine Light Program spread Meishu-sama's Light.

I think this significant world expansion happened also because of Sandai-sama's daily prayers and Kyoshu-sama's guidance. Together, let us convey our sincerest gratitude to them.

In conclusion, I would like to promise that we become useful instruments of God and Meishu-sama, together with our ancestors, and to develop a strong belief that the wonderful Johrei work will be successful and spread around the world.

Thank you