

Memories of the First Guji

by Masato Kashiwakura, CIHS Trustee

Memories of the First Guji (Guji means ‘priest’)

When asked about my memories of the first Guji, the first thing that comes to mind is something he said during a lecture when I met him for the very first time.

I had returned to Japan in 1990 after my first assignment in the United States and encountered Dr. Hiroshi Motoyama. I read his books and attended his lectures, which were quite shocking to me.

He said casually, “If someone attained enlightenment while eating meat, and someone else attained enlightenment without eating meat, which one do you think is greater?”

The fact that there was someone who could say such things so matter-of-factly was itself astonishing — and because I heard this at my very first lecture, the memory remains vivid even now.

At all times, he naturally expressed a deep sense of awe and reverence toward the Great Deity. Even those of us who understood very little were gradually nurtured to develop that same awe and reverence through his presence.

At the same time, I remember him saying with a playful smile, while touching his eboshi headgear, “This squeezes your head so tightly — it really hurts, you know.”

His combination of human warmth and charm, together with his profound awe of the Great Deity, created a unique and compelling presence. I believe this mixture of human greatness and divine alignment was what made him so irresistibly attractive to others.

Before recounting several episodes, I would like to note that, in accordance with the current Guji’s instructions, I refer to the first Guji simply as “Guji-sama” below, to distinguish him from the present Guji.

“Is she a bit of a handful?” (October 1992)

During my first visit to the Great Festival on Shodo-shima after joining the faith, my wife Yumi introduced me to Guji-sama in front of the shrine office. As the two of us watched her walk down the path to perform misogi, he asked me, “Is she a bit of a wild one — difficult to handle?”

I first answered, “No,” but then added, “Well... yes,” after which he grinned and replied, “Mine too, you know.”

It was a lighthearted exchange between men.

His attitude while watching lobsters and rock blowholes — in Mexico (August 1999)

“Tomorrow, we’re going to Mexico to eat some delicious lobster. Why don’t you join us?”

He invited us in this way when my family visited the Motoyama residence in Encinitas. And so we accompanied him to Mexico the next day.

This was in August 1999, the year after we began our second assignment in the United States. Guji-sama had asked us to attend the CIHS graduation ceremony as a family.

The group consisted of the Motoyama family, their assistants, a CIHS student couple (the wife being of Mexican descent), and my wife and two daughters. Wanting the scenery to be more visible, he had prepared a tall van for the trip. He had us use his own car, saying it was safer because our rental car’s insurance covered only the U.S., whereas Mexico required international insurance.

Through this, we caught a glimpse of his very careful and considerate nature.

We traveled using two walkie-talkies to communicate between cars. Before long, a lively word-chain game began over the radios, turning into a heated contest between the Motoyama and Kashiwakura families.

At some point, we realized we had taken a wrong turn, but Guji-sama simply said, “Let’s have some tea,” and called for a break.

While we worried that we had not yet made it halfway and were already behind schedule, he looked out over the scenery with complete ease and said, “You have to learn to enjoy whatever happens.”

After several more hours of driving, we arrived at a coastal village in Mexico.

“These lobsters here are truly excellent,” he said with delight, but first we decided to do some sightseeing.

Along the shore were many rocks, and when large waves crashed in, seawater would shoot up through holes in the rocks like natural geysers. Guji-sama gazed down into one such blowhole intently.

I stood with him for a while, but he did not move at all. The rest of the group went ahead to other sights and later returned — only to find him still in exactly the same posture, looking down into the rock. He must have stayed there for twenty or thirty minutes without the slightest movement.

Beside him, his wife stood quietly and gently by his side.

The lobster was indeed delicious; he ordered two and ate them with great enjoyment.

But what impressed me most that day was his unwavering attitude — his determination to observe deeply and seek the truth, no matter where he was.

It was a memorable day trip, and we were very grateful for the wonderful lobster he treated us to.

CIHS Becomes a Candidate for Accreditation! (May 2018)

After a brief moment of silence, a wave of applause suddenly erupted. Everyone in the large lecture hall stood up, continuing to clap enthusiastically. Some women were even moved to tears.

This happened on May 4th, during the recent holiday week.

For the past four years, CIHS (California Institute for Human Science) had been striving to obtain federal-level accreditation as a graduate university. The greatest hurdle in this process was the on-site review conducted by WASC, the accrediting agency.

During the final evaluation on the third day of the visit, it was announced that CIHS had successfully reached the level of Candidacy. This meant that CIHS could undergo the on-site review for full Accreditation the following year — a major achievement.

Each person in the hall had their own feelings, but what we all shared was the determination to carry forward Guji-sama's vision and continue developing CIHS.

As one of the two pillars he established — alongside the Shrine — CIHS will surely help transform the future of religion, society, and academic inquiry. I felt deeply grateful to Guji-sama for allowing us to be present on such a significant turning point.

On May 2nd, the first day of the WASC visit, an important meeting was held between WASC and the Shrine. I attended this meeting with the Guji to ensure they gained a clear understanding of the Shrine's role and position.

Prior to that, there was a session between WASC and the current students and alumni. Around forty people attended — more than at some large universities — and each spoke passionately about the value of CIHS and the profound impact it had had on their lives. The WASC representatives were deeply moved by this.

Here again, I felt strongly that it was not only the excellence of Motoyama Philosophy, but also Guji-sama's human warmth and his presence as a divine-human being in union with the Great Deity that had drawn so many people to him. I became convinced that this legacy would continue to be passed on across generations.

I am also sincerely grateful for the understanding and generous support — both material and spiritual — offered by everyone at the Shrine.

Please accept my heartfelt thanks.