

"Daily Word" Echoes

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MAY 30, 1993 Number 42 ¥200

(Essays submitted by listeners on themes of "Daily Word" telephone messages between February 2 and March 9, 1993 and other "echoes" of this telephone service. Corrected and edited by Clark Offner.)

February 2 Message (Subject #236)

In the folklore of certain sections of the United States, especially where there are many descendants of German settlers, February 2nd, known as Groundhog Day, is a kind of weather forecasting day. A groundhog is a common American rodent, also known as a woodchuck or a marmot. According to the legend, on this day, the groundhog emerges from its winter hibernation. If it is a sunny day, it will see its shadow, become frightened and return to its burrow. Then there will be six more weeks of winter weather. If it is a cloudy day, however, it will not return to its winter home and winter weather will soon turn to spring. In Japan, tomorrow is setsubun and there are various traditional customs related to that "season-divider" day. Setsubun is the suggested theme for essays. What is the origin and history of the setsubun customs? What did you think of them when you were a child? What is your opinion about them now? Does your family continue to follow them? Why or why not?

The meaning of *setsubun* is season-divider. We have *risshun*, *rikka*, *risshû* and *rittô* in a year. *Risshun* is the setting in of spring, *rikka* of summer, *risshû* of autumn and *rittô* of winter.

On the day before *risshun*, we have some traditional customs. Many Japanese attach a branch of holly and the head of a sardine at the entrance of their home and scatter roasted beans to expel a demon. Many people go to worship at a temple where Kannon, the goddess of mercy, is enshrined on this day. In Nagoya, there are four Kannon temples in the east, west, south and north. The temple in the direction determined by the almanac is lively and bustling on this day because a *saitokujin* god is said to be there on that day of that year.

There is a Kannon temple near my house which is called Kasadera Kannon. About thirty years ago, I received a ticket to scatter beans there. I wore a long outer garment and men put on long trousers at that time. Many people crowded around and hoped to have their bodies hit by a bean because then a demon would be expelled and they would consider that a good omen.

I read in the newspaper that the Kasadera Kannon is the temple in the designated direction this year. If the weather is fine, I shall go there to prepare to compose a Japanese poem which is my hobby.

How we welcome the coming of spring! Our customs have not been changed from the past until now nor will they be changed in the future. I presume the *setsubun* customs originated in the hope in people's hearts. (MICHIKO SANO, Minami, Nagoya)

As I wrote much about *setsubun* and *risshun* on subject #210 one year ago, here I will write on other related matters.

From of old, nature has always been a familiar and valued blessing to the Japanese. Since early Shinto times, there has been the Japanese indigenous belief in superior and mysterious forces of nature, the sacred, called *kami*, which reside in natural elements. To the rice-cultivating people, the mild environment was the source of all growth and fertility. A sense of oneness with nature underlies Japanese ethos, philosophy, thought and religion. The need of an agricultural society to know when to plant, cultivate and harvest its crops has sharpened the Japanese sensitivity to seasonal changes, heightening their awareness of the minutiae of nature. During my visit to China last year, while traveling in the boundless expanse of the Gobi Desert, I realized its severe nature and imagined the hard life of people living there. One could not perceive seasons there.

Severely cold days continue even after *risshun* has passed. I recollect a phrase of the famous song *Soshunfu*: "Unless we're told it is spring, we'd never know it." Hard times still continue for areas with heavy snowfall. But sunlight gradually becomes longer. Sunset in Gifu was at 4:40 p.m. at the beginning of December but it is at 5:25 on the day of *risshun*. Blossoms of a plum tree in my garden are now blooming. The sunlight penetrated through fallen leaves and permeated deep into the earth. The life of spring flows from the roots to the trunk to the branches and finally to the buds. The flowers of *fukuju-sô*, an Amur adonis, are also lovely. Through the severe cold of winter, being stepped on over and over again under the ground, it has patiently stored up energy for the coming spring. By the way, the late Mr. Taguchi, president of Seino Unyu, loved this flower very much saying it reflected his own life, which was tempered by adversity and poverty in his boyhood. *Ha-botan*, an ornamental kale, pansy and *jinchô-*

ge, a sweet-smelling daphne, are also valuable plants, putting forth flowers in this season of severe adversity. The slightly bitter taste of *fuki-no-tô*, a butterbur stalk, gives us a strong sense of spring really having come.

We Japanese often count certain days of the year from *risshun*. The 88th day (tea-picking season) and the 210th day (typhoon season) are examples of this custom. I think the lunar calendar was very relevant for Japanese who entrusted nature with their own lives. Another consequence of this is the great value we have set on the 24 *sekk* or seasonal periods (*risshun* is one of them) as guides for farming. We can also accept as its natural result that some of our holidays such as the vernal and autumnal equinox days and Labor Thanksgiving Day (when emperors made offerings of newly-harvested rice to *kami*) are based on nature. Anyhow, spring has started, at least according to the calendar. As a Japanese word, *haru* means, in general, the most flourishing time of anything. I also must exert a great effort, forgetting my advanced age.

(MIKIHICO YOSHIMOTO, Gifu)

About 80 years ago when I was a young boy (1910-1920), I used to visit my grandparents' home with my mother and elder brother on *setsubun*. It was a holiday and school was not in session. I remember that at my grandparents' home a small sardine with a twig of holly was hung on the door near my uncle's name plate every *setsubun*. Strange to say, I never saw such traditional objects in my home or in my village. Any way, the holly tree (*osmanthus aquifolius*) provided a plaything for me who had no friends there to play with. When I picked up a holly leaf under the tall pine tree in my grandparents' garden, I put it between my thumb and index finger, then blew on it slowly with a soft breath. The leaf would

merrily spin round and round. Oh dear, I'm sorry I forgot to mention that those leaves have small thorn-like projections around them and one was on my thumb and another on my index finger.

For me, finding the fish's head on the door was stranger than finding the holly twig there because we often offered a *sa-kaki* branch on the altar. Out of curiosity, I often asked, "Grandma, why do you hang the fish's head on the door?" She always answered with a smile, "It's been one of our traditional customs ever since I was a young girl." Every time I visited them, I asked the reason for this custom. Finally, my grandpa answered, "Among the many Japanese proverbs, you must know this one, *Iwashi no atama mo shinjin*, don't you?" He continued to say that "although these sardines are small, they have more of a religious value than sea breams."

I will also mention that the evening before *setsubun*, there was a bean-scattering ceremony to drive out the evil spirits. This custom was taught me by one of my friends whose grandparents lived in his home when I was a 2nd grade pupil at Sugiharadami Elementary School. Without hesitation, I scattered parched beans around all our rooms shouting loudly, "All evil, go out! Happiness, come in!" I got a lot of fun out of following this custom. After it was over, father said to us, "Eating those beans isn't good for your health because they are very, very dirty, aren't they?" As soon as we heard his words, we immediately stopped following that custom.

Now, at 88 years of age, these are my only memories, but they were very interesting times for me.

(HYOWAY OHWAY, Kami, Hyôgo)

When I was a child, my family lived in Tochigi Prefecture where my father was born. We lived with his mother, that is to

say, with our grandmother. She was a merry old lady who loved children. On *setsubun*, the day before the first day of spring according to the lunar calendar, she roasted many soybeans. In the evening, she called her grandchildren to her and instructed us how to scatter the beans. First we went to the entrance of the house and threw beans outside shouting, *oni wa soto, oni wa soto* ("out with demons!"). She told us to "shout more loudly and throw harder if you really want to drive away the demons. But don't throw too many beans. You can't eat beans picked up from the ground." We did as she told us.

Then she said, "Now the demons are gone. Let's call good luck into our home." We turned around and scattered beans into the house, shouting, *fuku wa uchi, fuku wa uchi!* ("in with good luck!"). She said, "speak more softly so that the god of happiness is willing to come into our house. This time, you can throw as many beans as want," We scattered plenty of beans everywhere in the house. Then she said, "Let's pick up the scattered beans." We picked up the beans and ate the number of beans corresponding to our ages.

Roasted beans were very hard. We had to chew them patiently. I wonder now if she was able to eat more than 70 beans at one time on that evening. Beans seemed to generate gas in the stomach, so everybody discharged gas on the following day and the noise our grandmother made was the loudest of all.

The first thing she did on that following morning was to prepare a special dish of Tochigi using the leftover roasted beans. This dish was called *shimotsukare*, derived from *shimotsuke*, the old name of Tochigi Prefecture. For this dish, she used the heads of the salted salmon whose meat we had eaten at New Year's. The salmon heads had been kept in the storeroom for one

month. It was so cold in Tochigi and the salmon were so strongly salted that they were still edible in February. She cooked the salmon heads on a ²⁸⁻¹⁹ *briquette* stove all day long. When they became soft enough, she added the roasted beans we had scattered and gathered the previous evening. She cooked it another couple of hours and then put in radishes roughly grated with a special big bamboo grater called *oni oroshi*. As a final touch, she added some *sakekasu*, the ^{11:2} ~~lees~~ remaining after *sake* is brewed. *Shimotsukare* was made, so to speak, completely of leftovers or remainders, but it tasted pretty good. Since it was seasoned with *sakekasu*, containing a little bit of alcohol, it made one's body warm. This traditional local dish was really suitable fare during the cold season. It had the wisdom of the old Japanese of that area condensed in it. Because of the alcohol, my little brother and I got red faces after we ate it and we wanted to sleep.

My mother received the recipe of *shimotsukare* from my grandmother and passed it on to us. I cook *shimotsukare* sometimes. Then I remember my childhood days in the village of Tochigi and our merry, kind grandmother who laughed and passed gas loudly. (NAOMI KONDO, Handa)

Setsubun is the day before *risshun*. It falls on the third or fourth day of February, according to the Gregorian calendar. Spring begins at *risshun*, so *setsubun* seems to have been considered the last day of the year. Formerly, many customs were followed on that day. People expelled evil by scattering beans and prayed for happiness.

Bean-throwing, which is done even now, has its origin in the *tsuina* which had been performed in the Court on New Year's Eve in the Heian period. I understand *tsuina* as driving demons away and blinding them by throwing beans into their eyes. My family

enjoyed bean-throwing when our children were young, but now that they are older, we are indifferent to it.

(AKIKO TAMAKI, Higashiura, Aichi)

Setsubun is the time when certain traditional customs are held in Japan on February 2nd or 3rd. *Setsubun* customs originated in ancient China and were transmitted to Japan near the end of the 7th century during the reign of the 42nd emperor, Mommu, about 1220 years ago. *Setsubun* is the dividing day between the end of winter according to the old (lunar) calendar and the beginning of spring, called *risshun* in Japanese.

When I was a child, I did not know the meaning of *setsubun*, but I recall that I once enjoyed throwing some beans with my family at home. Since the end of the war, as a *setsubun* ritual, famous personalities scatter beans from stands at temples and shrines to many people who want to get some of them.

In my opinion, even though the *setsubun* customs are traditional in Japan, they should be abolished in the near future for they are nothing but absurd superstitions. Furthermore, many beans are imported from the U. S. It is a waste of the world's resources. My family never performs *setsubun* rituals because we believe in the eternal God, our Savior.

(TAMAKO MORIMOTO, Tsuyama)

Setsubun is a "season divider" day. I still remember that stormy, snowing *setsubun* several years ago when I accompanied Mr. and Mrs. Van Cottem to view the bean-throwing ceremony at Kasadera Temple in the Minami Ward of Nagoya where I live.

Fortunately, this year it was a fine, mild spring day. Being designated this year's temple of the lucky direction, Kasadera Temple was particularly crowded

with people who seemed to go there to rid their house of the evil effect of the bursting of the bubble economy!! Policemen directed the heavy traffic. Many stalls along both sides made the pathway narrower so the crowds of people had to walk ahead slowly. Small branches of holly, paper bags of roasted beans, festive decorations and *masu* were on sale at a temple building. People bought these festive articles as the wished and carried them in their hands. They looked happy, as though good fortune had shone upon them!

As you know, holly is used as a charm against demons and we drive *on/away* from our homes by throwing roasted beans while shouting, "Out with demons, in with good fortune." Beans are called *mame*, which is pronounced the same as a word meaning healthy. So we eat roasted beans with the wish to be healthy and to live long. In old times, a *masu* was used to measure rice and beans. At Kasadera Temple, a *masu* is the gift given to those who participated in the bean-throwing ceremony.

I enjoyed my *setsubun* visit to Kasadera Temple and observed that people still continue to follow traditional customs, harmonizing them with their own life styles.

(SADAE HASHIMOTO, Minami, Nagoya)

February 9 Message (Subject #237)

Some of us older folk can recall the days long ago before there was such a thing as television. Young people today find it difficult to imagine such a time because the TV set has become such a central part of their lives. They wonder what on earth people did without TV games, cartoons, movies, variety shows and other pro-

grams. Television has a pervasive influence in industrialized countries. Obviously, its influence may be both beneficial and harmful. It may be used as an effective educational device, a transmitter of useful information and a means of relaxation. It may also be used as an escape into a world of fantasy, a powerful salesman for both useful and unnecessary products, a temptation to avoid irksome tasks and a stimulant to immorality. The programs on television, the treatment given to certain news stories and the overlooking or minimizing of other events have a dominant influence on the thinking of viewers. What particular television program do you enjoy and why do you enjoy it?

The first television stations in our country were started in the 1950s. Since then, television quickly found its way into nearly every home and the diffusion rate is now 99 percent. Today, a home having two or three sets is not an exception. Television is now indispensable for cultural enrichment and entertainment in our daily lives. I myself spend much time watching television every day. All of the stations start early in the morning and continue until midnight (or the next morning), providing a wide variety of news and information, dramas, songs, quiz programs and other entertainment. NHK's educational network also offers educational and other cultural programs.

What is my connection with television? First of all, television is a basic source of news and information for me. On Sunday mornings, in particular, I can enjoy several such programs. Many people seem to derive their knowledge from these programs and share it elsewhere second hand. The Na-

tional Diet Round Table broadcast is one of the most instructive examples. I also owe very much to NHK's foreign language courses. I have studied Chinese, Korean and Russian in those courses, to say nothing of English conversation. I can say with certainty that these courses are enough to provide a basic understanding of foreign languages if we put heart and soul into such study. I intend to be in the Spanish course in April.

A live broadcast of sumo is my favorite program. In the latest tournament, Akebono and Takahanada, confronting each other, held the audience spellbound. The spread of television has played an important part in the popularization of sumo. I remember the first period of television when I frequented a coffee shop to watch the broadcast.

There are many entertainment programs throughout the day, especially on Saturday evenings. Watching them while having a drink at suppertime is a treat for me. In addition to their entertainment value, quiz programs provide us with new information and stimulate our minds and thus are useful for preventing us from getting senile. I dislike so-called "wide show" programs, programs which focus on gossip of public entertainers, etc. which are repeated over and over again every day. The gossip relating to the breaking off of the engagement of Takahanada and Rie is a typical example. Weekday mornings I often observe that every television station picks up the same reports. I sympathized with the Crown Prince and his fiancée who were treated in that way. I think I can say that excessive reporting is nothing other than the manifestation of excessive curiosity.

Recently I equipped my home with the means for receiving satellite broadcasts. Using that system I can enjoy live broadcasts of news from all over the world. It gives me a good chance to train my ears to

understand foreign languages. Besides, my wife enjoys the midnight movie programs. I think the investment for that equipment was not expensive compared to the satisfaction it has provided.

(MIKIHICO YOSHIMOTO, Gifu)

My favorite television programs are classical music, orchestra concerts or operas because my heart is refreshed, cheered or stimulated when I hear such music and I feel better.

Next, I like to watch news broadcasts about Japan, Western Europe, the United States or elsewhere. Whether or not it is my favorite program, I watch the news on NHK. From my experience, NHK programs have a universal outlook and provide trustworthy opinions or positions. Of course, I have my own opinions, but I want to examine them to see if they are right or not so I refer to NHK telecasts. My attitude may be quite similar. It forces me to think deeply. It is useful to keep me from making mistakes and from going to an extreme because I am foolish.

(MICHICO SANO, Minami, Nagoya)

Although I'd like to say that my favorite programs are "Morning Show" or news programs, as a matter of fact, I'm very busy and don't have time to watch such programs in the morning. As I mentioned before, I make it a habit to watch television from 8:10 to 8:40 (or less than that) in the evening as a reward for the work I did during the day. Actually, I look for programs which provoke laughter and naturally I enjoy Ken Shimura's *Daijôbuda*, meaning "It's All Right", on Mondays. On Tuesdays, I still enjoy Japanese popular songs on "NHK Hit Stage". On Thursdays, viewing *Doubt o Sagase*, meaning "Let's Look for Doubts", I enjoy gaining a little bit of knowledge of interesting facts. In that program, I like

to see the famous persons' expressions or reactions when they answer questions.

Although I also like programs about the lives of people in foreign countries or about peculiar animals in Japan or other lands, it is a fact that I cannot take the time to watch them. Anyway, I like "black humor" or "pathos" in comedies, talk shows and so forth as well as to obtain new knowledge. (YASUKO IZUMI, Seto)

Every morning about 6 o'clock, I turn on the television to the NHK channel to watch and listen to news events in Japan and other countries that sometimes make me happy and sometimes sad or angry. I also watch the weather forecast for the day. I try not to miss watching these programs every time news is on the screen. If a foreigner speaks in English, I try to catch the meaning without reading the captions on the screen in Japanese. The other day, I happened to see a face that resembled Dr. Offner's but, alas, it was not him. It was Mr. Ajiro, the prime minister of Iraq.

At 8:15, I enjoy the serial drama. In the present one, Hirari is the heroine. However, if I begin to watch a portion of these serial dramas, I want to continue to watch every day at the same time until they come to an end, perhaps after a whole year, to learn how the story develops.

Then, I like programs for children. Watching male and female youths playing with the children, I feel as if I myself were a kindergarten child and moving as they do. Moreover, I like very much those animal dolls, Jajamaru, Pikkoro and Porori which have not been appearing recently.

Another favorite program of mine is about many kinds of wild creatures in the world. I especially like animals and birds in Australia, Africa, southeast Asia and the North and South poles. However, I shut my eyes when the ferocious ones attack

the weak ones. I also like colorful fish in the very deep sea. They are shown on the TV program called *Chikyû Ikimono Kikô*, "Creatures on the Earth". Of course, I like the pet shows, parrots speaking as human beings do, performances of dogs and cats in fine clothes. We should come to know those creatures better and keep them from becoming extinct.

And how happy I am to know how people live in foreign places I have never visited. I shall never forget the program on the lives of the Amish in Pennsylvania. I also like television programs related to the history of Japan and other countries. I especially like to know about the events of the Meiji, Taishô and Shôwa eras because these are the periods when my parents were born and lived and the events on the screen remind me of what they said. I also learn about events unknown to us before.

I often learn how to cook delicious food by watching cooking programs. Although I cannot do exactly as the instructors teach, I get the knack of measuring quantities and seasoning ingredients. Even if I cannot watch my favorite programs on NHK's general channel, I am happy when I happen to find them on the NHK educational channel some days or months later.

On the Fukushima television channel, I watch the TV comedy, "Sazae San with Katsuo and Wakame". It makes me feel good every Sunday evening even when I am tired. I am very sorry that the original writer of this comedy, Ms. Machiko Hasegawa, passed away. Several years ago, I used to watch the comedy, "Tom and Jerry", the black and white cat and the naughty mouse. I enjoyed it very much. They had very friendly fights.

That's all that comes to mind regarding this theme.

(KAZUKO TAGUCHI, Fukushima)

Regarding television programs, I like music when I want to relax. Next, I like documentaries, which impart some knowledge or information to me. My mind can travel anywhere while I sit in my room, to places, for instance, that I can never visit in my lifetime. They create deep impressions of joy and sorrow or stimulate reflection. I was disappointed, however, when the NHK documentary team transmitted misleading film of fabricated events. Even so, I shall continue to watch NHK channels 3 or 9 and satellite broadcasts in the future. (MICHIKO SANO, Minami, Nagoya)

I almost never watch television except for news or documentaries on NHK. Sometimes, I watch sports events or special programs and News Station at 10:00 p. m. on channel 11. This is because I am very busy with home chores and study on weekday mornings and evenings. But there are some programs which I never fail to watch. They are the English Conversation and Mini English Conversation education programs at 19:30 and 22:15 on channel 9.

As for other programs, I enjoy the animated old tales of Japan, or as we call it in Japanese, *Manga Nihon Mukashi-banashi*, and *Sazae-san* as one of the cartoons. I also like documentaries of animals or plants in their natural environments. On Tuesday at 10:00 p. m., sometimes I watch "Doctorland" which depicts the life of someone who has overcome a serious illness and tells of fine medical treatment. It has made a deep impression on me.

There are other ways to make use of a television set: to play computer games or to record or view video tapes. Sometimes I videotape a program that I cannot watch because I am not at home. These days, television is one of the necessities of our lives. (MIEKO OKUMURA, Tenpaku, Nagoya)

In regard to favorable television programs, I will attempt to express what I think, although it is quite difficult for me to do so.

I love watching television. However, I do not watch it very often. On channel 11, I like the program called "Discovery of Wonders in the World". I watch it whenever I can take the time to do so. For me, this program is very beneficial and informative. It contains many new things that are new to me. I expand my knowledge about different countries, their customs, histories and geography. Through this program, I understand the many foreign visitors to Japan better.

In addition to this, I love action movies, such as "Zero-Zero-Seven" and those related to combat or conflict. They provide a good diversion because my job is very demanding, dealing with problems related to legal matters. In addition, the legal aspect of my volunteer activities can be quite stressful. (JAMES IWAI, Owariasahi)

As I have no particular favorite television programs, I was puzzled about what to write about on this theme. Finally, I decided to write about "gardening programs" rather than "cooking programs". "Gardening programs" teach me much about plants and how to care for them. Plants are silent, but alive, and each has a certain character so it is difficult to treat them properly.

Bouquets are given for congratulations or condolences, to cheer up the sick or to adorn rooms. Perfumes and scented bags are made from fragrant plants. It is a recent fad to float lovely flowers on soup or to decorate the top of a salad. Fried flowers are good to eat. However, I have never enjoyed them yet. At the time when room coolers were not yet developed, flowers were put on a block of ice and set at the center of a hall to cool it in summer.

I enjoy making dried or pressed flowers, leaves, stems, etc. Plants are used for various purposes in every area. It is sure that no one who gazes at flowers will get angry. These are the reasons why I like "gardening programs" particularly.

(TAMAKO MORIMOTO, Tsuyama)

② A variety program titled "Comic Mini-Encyclopedia on Life" is broadcast every Saturday. It deals with legal aspects of problems people face in daily life and are at a loss about what to do. I have made it a habit to watch that program.

The program usually proceeds like this: First, a pair of cross-talk comedians pose a question regarding legal affairs raised by some TV viewers in their short talks. Then, each member of a panel composed of two regular panelists and a guest is asked to give an opinion on the matter. Of course, they have to base their opinion on some seemingly reasonable grounds. In rare cases, their opinions straddle the issue, apparently due to a lack of legal knowledge, but in most cases their opinions hit the mark. In exceptional cases, their opinions are irrelevant, deviating from the main point and only invite laughter. The pros and cons on the issue stimulate my interest. I become eager to side with one or the other panelist's position. My response to their opinions varies from time to time. At last, one of three lawyers takes turns in giving a conclusive argument from a professional point of view. With relevant knowledge on the issue, they argue so cogently that I cannot help admiring the expertise shown in their reasoning. Thus, I enjoy the program very much.

(SHOJI SUGIMOTO, Suginami, Tokyo)

The drama, *Ryūkyū no Kaze*, produced by NHK is one of my family's favorite television programs. Every Sunday evening, my

son's family, which lives next door, comes and joins us in watching this super Sunday program. This is the most enjoyable, relaxing time in the week when the whole family gathers in our living room. Interested in this drama, my husband and I went to Okinawa in January and had a great time there.

The quiz program, *100 ten man-ten*, which precedes *Ryūkyū no Kaze* is also an attractive one for us. Our little granddaughter jumps up for joy when her answer is correct by beginner's luck. Last Sunday, it provided us a useful lesson about pork being more nutritious than beef.

We're happy to be able to use television programs as a means of relaxation and useful information related to our daily lives as well. But I'm concerned about the harmful influence and the effect of powerful commercials on children.

(SADAE HASHIMOTO, Minami, Nagoya)

February 16 Message (Subject #238)

The English verb "reform" literally means to "form again". When spelled with a capital R, the noun "Reformation" denotes the 16th century religious movement which aimed at reforming the Roman Catholic Church but which resulted in the establishment of separated Protestant churches. In recent months, the words "reform" and "reformation" have become commonly used in articles or discussions about the political situation in Japan. Political reform and constitutional reformation are controversial subjects these days. As citizens of this nation whose own lives and those of future generations are and will be affected by such reforms, what are your opinions on these subjects. Do you think the political

system in Japan should be reformed? Why or why not? If you think it should be changed, do you have practical suggestions to make regarding desired changes? What about the Constitution? Should it be amended, completely recast or remain as is? Composing an essay on either one or both of these topics will help you to think seriously about them and will be of interest to me and the readers of "Daily Word" Echoes.

The problem of "political reform" is very controversial these days. Reflecting on its responsibility for a chain of scandals, including the Lockheed and Recruit cases, the Liberal Democratic Party itself has established a Political Reform Committee and is tackling the problem in order to regain people's confidence. It was disgraceful that *The Times*, a British newspaper, criticized the lack of ethics in the Japanese political world, calling Japan a backward country in regard to political ethics.

So-called "political reform" includes reforms related to political ethics, the Diet, the election system, money contributed for political activities and political parties themselves. Four years ago, the leaders of Japan's five major business groups represented in Keidanren put forth a set of proposals focusing on political funding as the issue of primary importance in political reform. The proposals called for a total disclosure of all books kept by political parties and support groups and demanded that every politician reveal his or her income and expenditures to the last yen. The public disclosure of Cabinet members' assets, which is the present practice, was initiated to comply with that proposal. Reform of the present election system

is explained as a means to lower the high cost of politics. It is said that introducing single-member constituencies will serve the purpose by eliminating the circumstances where candidates belonging to the same party compete with each other. Political party reform, especially the dissolution of factions within the LDP, has also been regularly called for because the factions tend to exacerbate political infighting within the party, but it has not yet been achieved. The reason is that factions are a necessary evil caused by the above-mentioned plural constituency system.

Today, controversies are heated about the election of the prime minister by popular vote. The argument develops as follows. Under the present Constitution, the prime minister is selected by the Diet from among its membership. Since the LDP has consistently had a majority ever since its formation, LDP presidents have regularly been named prime minister. Candidates from the same party end up competing with each other for votes and influential politicians vying for the party presidency cultivate their own followers with the aim of receiving their votes. In short, our electoral system is responsible for the factions' existence. If the prime minister is elected by popular vote, the harmful influence of factions is excluded. In order to renovate they system, however, the Constitution must be amended. Moreover, this renovation of the system is in danger of conflicting with another part of the Constitution, the emperor system, because it is possible to regard the prime minister, elected by popular vote, as the head of state though I myself do not support the view. I do not think that the Constitution is a code that should be in effect forever without any amendment, but at the same time, we should proceed with caution in amending the Constitution only in consid-

eration of the above-mentioned political reform. (MIKIHiko YOSHIMOTO, Gifu)

I use the word "want" in my first sentence because it has a strong meaning which expresses my will. I want the Japanese Constitution to be reformed. The reason is that Japanese statesmen lay the blame on one another. Even if they hold a high political office, they have no morality. Some of them use political donations for themselves. But we cannot say anything about it. Even if we have good ideas, they do not reach the politicians. I gave up and endured these situations until now, but recently I have come to think that the Constitution should be changed in some way. I feel that I myself see weaknesses and sinfulness when I hear dirty news, but my problem is how to use my thoughts or power to reform it. Can anyone tell me?

(MICHIKO SANO, Minami, Nagoya)

Of course, the political system in Japan should be reformed because many politicians seek to get money for themselves and to satisfy their selfish aims, they pursue the party's interests. They tell lies without shame to keep their political fame and to hide their scandals. Politics has degenerated nowadays in Japan. Such immoral acts exert a harmful influence on children, youth and the whole nation. Even though the political system should be reformed, unless the politicians' moral sense (heart, spirit) is corrected, it would be difficult to reform it.

The Japanese Constitution, which was promulgated in 1947, is worthy to be read. Especially the preamble and the 9th article are so important that they should not be amended nor reworded forever. Owing to the Constitution, we are able to live peacefully every day. We must be very thankful for it. On the other hand, Japan is concerned

about various difficulties in its relations with other countries with political or economic problems. It is very regretful and shameful that politicians in Japan have a lack of political morality. I fear that if politics in Japan continue as is, Japan may go to ruin in the future.

(TAMAKO MORIMOTO, Tsuyama)

First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Offner for giving us an opportunity to think seriously about the Constitution. To begin with, I consider it very crucial to deal with the matter in perspective, taking into account not only the current situation in Japan and the world but considering our descendants and the years to come.

Should the Constitution be amended? People's answers vary depending upon how they see the world. There are differences of opinion. In my opinion, no amendment should be made in the current situation. It is true that some people urge that the Constitution be revised, especially Article 9 that stipulates the renunciation of war as a sovereign right of the nation in view of the world situation in which the U.N. needs armed forces to curb the increasingly rampant international disputes among nations or races across the whole globe. But I cannot agree with such a hasty opinion. Here I would like to mention that I am well aware that the far-fetched interpretations of what Article 9 stipulates by successive Japanese governments have been a problem to Japanese people.

When we look at the world from another standpoint, however, I do not think that the Constitution should remain as is. With its growing national strength, Japan is expected to take responsibility for global peace which is, and will be, getting more precarious with the mounting animosity between various groups. Parallel to plan-

ning to form a future, ideal frame of reference or a radically innovative paradigm for what a new Japan should be like, every article as well as the fundamental spirit of the current Constitution should naturally undergo careful scrutiny. The Diet must tackle this grave issue sooner or later.

(SHOJI SUGIMOTO, Suginami, Tokyo)

February 23 Message (Subject #239)

These days, people use convenient calculators for solving arithmetic problems or doing mathematical calculations. In the old days in Japan, a more primitive but also very convenient counting device was used. This device had been introduced from China and, like many other products entering Japan from abroad, had been improved and rationalized for Japanese use. The irregular pronunciation given the Chinese characters identifying this device is soroban. The English word for it, abacus, is found at the very beginning of English dictionaries. Many people mistakenly think that the abacus is a peculiar Oriental device, but it was used in ancient Greece and Rome as well as in China. The English word, in fact, is derived from a Greek word meaning "counting board". "Abacus" or soroban is the suggested theme for an English essay. Do you ever use a soroban these days? Do your children or grandchildren? What are its advantages? What memories do you have regarding this device and how do you compare it with modern calculators? What do you think about its future use?

I know how to use the abacus but I am not very good at it because I did not learn to use it at school. I wonder why so many people in Nagoya are so good at it. My husband is a C. P. A. so people in his office use the abacus well. Now they have changed, however, to using electric calculators or computers. They are very convenient to keep accounts. They make no mistakes, but a person who was skillful with the abacus took less time than a calculator in a contest. I was deeply impressed with that man's ability when I heard that news.

My ability is always poor for everything, but I shall put forth a determined effort to improve and not give up. This will be my motto to the end of my life.

(MICHIKO SANO, Minami, Nagoya)

The *soroban* was introduced into our country from China during the Muromachi era. The Japanese improved on it and created its present form. The origin of the English word "abacus" is said to be a Greek word, *abax*. The *Pocket Oxford Dictionary* gives its meaning as a "device, esp. frame with balls sliding on wires, used for calculating." It uses "wires" in this explanation, while we use the word "rods" for our *soroban*. I wonder if that abacus differed from ours in its setup.

It was a little before I entered the elementary school that the *soroban* used in school education was changed from *itsutsu-dama* to *yotsu-dama*. Today, there are four beads on each rod that represent one unit, while there were five until that time. I asked my brother the reason and was satisfied with his explanation that even in the *itsutsu-dama* days, they did not actually use the fifth bead. On my visit to China last year, I found a curious *soroban* with two beads that represent units of five and surmised that the second one would, similarly, not be used.

From of old, in our country the *soroban* was an indispensable part of elementary education. As the existence of the phrase, *yomi-kaki, soroban*, itself implies, the *soroban* was placed alongside reading and writing in *terakoya* (temple school) education in the Edo era. As my brother entered a commercial school, he belonged to a higher class in *soroban*. I was very poor in it as I entered an ordinary middle school which did not teach *soroban* in mathematics courses. Once after I entered the public service arena, I was engaged in taxation business and had to manage numbers of many figures. I asked my colleagues to help me in the calculations. If I were placed in the same position today, I could use an electric calculator, but still I would be inferior to a *soroban* expert. *Soroban* are used less now than before because pocket-sized calculators have become very popular, but they are still very handy especially for adding and subtracting. Private schools for *soroban* instruction are prospering even now. Once we become proficient in using the *soroban*, we will also become adept at mental arithmetic. We often see amazing geniuses of mental arithmetic on television. In most cases, they acquired their ability through the use of *soroban*. A *soroban* tournament is held annually to choose a national champion. This champion of *soroban* will gain the better of a champion of electric calculators if they have a chance to compete with each other. It is also believed that manual operation of *soroban* operation will stimulate general brain capacity.

There are many Japanese expressions which include *soroban*, such as *soroban ga au* (to be profitable) and *soroban-zuku* (calculative, commercial-minded). They indicate that *soroban*s have been rooted in common people's lives for a long time. I do not doubt its popularity will continue in the

future. I think it is natural that the *soroban* is accepted as a teaching tool in Western countries also.

(MIKIHICO YOSHIMOTO, Gifu)

Abacus vs. calculators may be an interesting topic for discussion. I can use both of them. As for the abacus, I learned how to use it at my elementary school at the age of ten or eleven. I think it was a part of the math curriculum. The teacher taught us pupils how to do addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. He spoke out loudly and slowly at first. Gradually, he increased his speed. Sometimes he told us not to use the abacus but to use our heads to make mental calculations. At that time, there were no *juku* for other subjects, only *soroban juku*, but I didn't go. After school, we went outdoors and played and played with friends until dark.

When we went to the girls' high school, we learned algebra and geometry as math. As for the abacus, we were taught just before graduation as a finishing lesson. I remember my best friend, who did everything perfectly and elegantly, made noise shaking her abacus and interrupting the class. It seemed she couldn't use it. I had my own abacus but seldom used it at home until I became a school teacher. To make grades for my students, it was necessary. Especially at the entrance examination, it was needed to make up a list of all applicants' grades quickly and precisely. This was a team effort by the teachers.

Now, a modern calculator has taken its place. Where are the *soroban juku*? In the future, abacuses will be kept in museums.

(KIMI KONDO, Miura)

The suggested theme for today is *soroban*. Now, I'll answer the questions posed one by one.

No. 1: "Do you ever use a *soroban* these

days?" No, I don't, for I have become too old to use it. I'm 88 years old and have retired.

No. 2: "Do your children or grandchildren?" No, they don't. My son finds a calculator--like a push-button phone--useful. My grandchildren, who are senior high school students, use their father's calculator.

No. 3: "What are its advantages?" It is not advantageous today because machines are more accurate.

No. 4: "What memories do you have regarding this device and how do you compare it with modern calculators?" My answer is that, of course, machines are better.

No. 5: "What do you think about its future use?" It will go out of use before long and I'm sure it will become a relic of the past. (HYOWAY OHWAY, Kami, Hyôgo)

A few days ago, I used a small, pocket-sized calculator for making my final income tax return and submitting it to the tax office in Fukushima. Until I got this convenient calculator, I did mathematical calculations on a *soroban* which I learned how to use 50 years ago in my elementary school days. Our teacher, Mr. Omine told us, "The Japanese *soroban* is a very fine calculator. When an international contest of calculation was held, a Japanese champion using a *soroban* came in first, both in speed and accuracy, ahead of the champions of all the other countries in the world." He also said that the four operations of arithmetic can be done, although it is complicated. Indeed, he was an excellent *soroban* manipulator. When he rapidly called out various numbers for us to add or subtract on the *soroban*, he closed his eyes, imagining a *soroban* in his mind and moving the fingers of his right hand in the air as if he were really moving counting beads on the aba-

cus. His answers used to be the same as most of ours after we made progress and were more reliable.

Since we could not practice multiplication and division on the abacus, I did these calculations with figures on paper until the calculators came into use. When I was a teacher, I used an abacus to obtain the average marks in each subject for classes of 47 to 50 pupils. After all, it was very good for us to memorize the multiplication table in our elementary school days. And I am sure that the multiplication table is indispensable for multiplying or dividing big numbers whether with written figures or on an abacus.

Now modern calculators work very well even if we cannot do the four operations of arithmetic. However, if we make use of calculators only, we cannot understand mathematics and we could not find correct answers by closing our eyes and trying to push the imaginary buttons of a calculator in the air. The skill of manipulating a *soroban* is one's own skill, even if one does not have a *soroban* on hand.

I knew that the abacus had been introduced into Japan from China in the old days. Now, I understand that they also had this device in ancient Greece and Rome. "Where there is a civilization, there is an abacus." I think that wise parents give their children a counting frame as a toy. I also think that the *soroban* had a remarkable development in Japan.

When I began to learn how to use it, my father had an abacus which had one bead on the upper part and five beads on the lower part of each vertical row to count to 10. But we have abacuses having four beads instead of five on the lower part of each vertical row, to count to 9. The former is called *itsutsu-dama* and the latter *yotsu-dama*, which is more reasonable and easier to use, although my eldest sister insists

that *itsutsu-dama* are better than *yotsu-dama* abacuses.

Anyway, some children attend *soroban juku* even though calculators are popular now. Many Japanese people love *soroban* and send their children to *juku*. I hope it won't become a curio at the end of the 21st century.

(KAZUKO TAGUCHI, Fukushima)

An abacus is a kind of calculating tool having wooden beads and operated by one's right finger for addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. When I attended a private abacus school with mostly fourth or fifth grade pupils, we used to practice hard.

I have participated in the national selection contest to achieve the third degree. There, I was surprised to see a one-armed person with superhuman speed. He was the winner on the first degree team. I had hopes to become such a person and, at that time, both other students and my teachers had high expectations for me.

Simple calculations can be made more speedily than by machine. Furthermore, mental arithmetic is still faster without using anything. During student days, we practiced everyday and saw an abacus in our imagination, doing calculations of numbers with three or four figures. But suddenly, I had to stop abacus training to prepare for entrance examinations for high school and then university.

Nowadays, sometimes the abacus is useful, but I have become less confident and slower after a long time away from it. In the old days, we were told by our parents that the most important subjects were reading, writing and abacus to become a mature person. In modern Japan, the education system has changed completely and television and computers are being used, so all courses are more technical and interna-

tional. But sometimes, I have fond memories when I see a private abacus school or students.

(MIEKO OKUMURA, Tenpaku, Nagoya)

I do not use a *soroban* these days so I had completely forgotten about it until I read the message of February 23rd. Neither our sons nor grandsons make use of it. Using a *soroban*, moving only two fingers (thumb and first finger) has a good effect on our brains. *Soroban* experts are experts of mental arithmetic. They can tally long figures in fifteen seconds, using the four arithmetic operations (addition, subtraction, multiplication and division).

Long ago, I added some numbers using a *soroban* but I noticed that it was faster for me to add them on paper than on the *soroban*, for I am very poor at it. In the old days, *soroban* were indispensable devices, especially for merchants. Modern calculators are more suitable than *soroban* in this busy society in the world today. Pocket calculators can reckon with billions or even trillions. *Soroban* are no match for modern calculators. On the other hand, I found two *soroban* rooms listed in the telephone directory in the Tsuyama area. According to recent news, the *soroban* is apt to be faddish, little by little. The *soroban* mania will remain long in the future. Moreover, *soroban* are exported to America and other foreign countries.

(TAMAKO MORIMOTO, Tsuyama)

When I was a primary school girl, my family lived in a downtown area of Osaka. Many of my classmates lived in the shopping area. They had abacus lessons everyday after school. They were good at arithmetic and calculated very fast. Some of them were able to calculate even in their minds. When they did this, they closed their eyes and moved the fingers of their

right hands as if they were calculating on the abacus. I gaped at them and admired and envied their ability for I was very poor at arithmetic.

My friend, Akiko, was a merchant's daughter. Her father had a small clothing shop at the end of the shopping street. She began to learn the abacus when she was ten. She took a special liking to abacus lessons since a television set had been installed in the waiting room of her abacus school. Television was an item that everybody wanted to have in their home, but nobody could afford to buy it.

Akiko and I went to different junior high schools. Since then we rarely met each other. More than ten years later when I went by her father's shop, I saw her sitting inside with a baby on her knees. I entered the shop. She was glad to see me again. She told me that she lived in the next town and ran an abacus school with her husband. We talked and talked. Sometimes her father interrupted us and asked her to calculate the amount of the goods a customer bought. Then she said, "Go ahead father," but she did not stop talking with me. She calculated while talking. Her father repeated many numbers one after another. He had hardly finished with them when she gave him the answer. I was immensely surprised and asked her how she managed to do these two different things, talking and calculating, at the same time. She answered, "I don't know, but when I calculate in my mind, I visualize some images, as if I were looking at pictures." "But you hear two different voices at the same time and understand both of them. I don't see how you can do that," I replied. Then she said, "I don't know how to explain it to you, but I might say that my father's voice is maybe something like music which does not have any linguistic meaning. As you can talk while listening to music, I can

calculate and talk while listening to his voice." I was not able to clearly understand her explanation.

Recently I saw on television the female winner of the nationwide abacus contest undergo a brain test. This test showed how the right side of her brain was active while she was calculating many numbers of more than ten figures at an incredible speed. I know that the left side of the brain is used for such intellectual functions as thinking or calculating and that artistic appreciation, such as listening to music or looking at pictures, utilizes the right side of the brain, but this test indicated that calculating on the abacus was done with the right side of the brain.

According to the commentator, people usually calculate with the left sides of their brains, but those who constantly practice on the abacus become able to calculate in their minds. When their powers of concentration are well trained, then the right side of their brains also begin to function. Apparently, the numbers become like images. However, they must begin this training at the age of about ten.

This reminded me of Akiko and gave me a clearer answer to how she managed to calculate and talk at the same time. But I think it must have been a long and hard struggle for her to get to such a place.

(NAOMI KONDO, Handa)

In the old days, people, especially those engaged in business, used *soroban* as a very important tool for calculations. We have not a few idioms relating to business transactions which are related to *soroban*. *Soroban ga motenai* (which literally means one cannot hold a *soroban*) means being put out of business. This is only one example. Indeed *soroban* is a symbol of business calculations.

Some time ago, I heard that in a cer-

tain elementary school of the U.S.A. teachers introduced *soroban* into an arithmetic class saying that using it was very helpful in teaching their pupils how to count. The teachers said that the *soroban* was very useful as an intermediary between concrete objects and abstract figures. I was happy to learn that the *soroban* was used to cultivate counting ability among young children living in a faraway land.

Last year, I was surprised to learn that almost all people who can manipulate *soroban* exceptionally well used the musical side of the brain more than the linguistic side of the brain when using a *soroban*. Before that, I thought that *soroban* manipulation was related to the linguistic side of the brain alone because it deals with digital information. In fact, however, my supposition turned out to be incorrect. The *soroban* experts seem to have another *soroban* in their heads beside those in their hands. No wonder all of them are extremely good at doing mental arithmetic.

As for me, I take out an old, dusty *soroban* and clean it once a year in February. I unsteadily use it only to verify amounts I have calculated by doing the sums on a piece of paper when I have to get accurate figures to make out my annual tax return.

(SHOJI SUGIMOTO, Suginami, Tokyo)

My parents used to run a fabric wholesale store. They used abacuses when they did business with customers. They didn't tell the price of goods verbally but showed them on the abacus when buying or selling. So there were many abacuses here and there in my house. After the store was closed, we children, mainly the three little children out of the six, often played with abacuses, riding on them like roller skates or skateboards since the store had a *tatami* mat floor.

Growing up in such circumstances, it

was natural and necessary for us children to learn how to use an abacus and to improve our calculating ability by using it. When I became eight or nine years old and learned the *ku-ku* multiplication table, I began to go to a *soroban-jukuto* to learn it.

Even now, I use an abacus almost every day in helping with my husband's job and in keeping my housekeeping records. An abacus is more convenient and simpler for me when doing simple addition and subtraction than a handy calculator but for more complicated multiplication and division, the opposite is true. However, I use an abacus more often than a calculator in my daily life, believing that using an abacus stimulates my brain.

(MICHIKO NIWA, Shōwa, Nagoya)

March 2 Message (Subject #240)

There is an increasing emphasis these days on recycling or reusing products rather than just throwing them away. What are your thoughts about recycling and why it is important? Do you make an effort to recycle goods? If so, in what way?

The "recycle movement" originated as a result of seriously considering the throw-away consumption tendency during the so-called "oil-shock" period. It was connected with other citizens' campaigns related to environmental pollution, health problems, etc. in the late 70s. "Recycling" means reusing useful substances found in waste matter. It aims at saving resources and energy through trade or exchange of dis-

used articles. At the same time, it is useful for protecting the environment and reducing garbage. Many local self-governing bodies, which are worried about the rapid increase of garbage, are beginning to give positive support to these movements.

We are disposing of things which can be reused. There may be no need to increase the number of incineration plants if we recycle resources. We need a policy of vigorously pushing for the recycling of resources rather than constructing incinerators. We should take a new look at the administrative policy of producing, burning and burying huge amounts of garbage. Years ago, we Japanese used to take good care of things. Old clothes were mended and umbrellas were repaired. Holes in kitchen pans were closed by a strolling craftsman. From a certain time, people began to think that it was cheaper and faster to buy new things than to repair old ones. Now people immediately throw things away when something goes wrong. We are spoiled by an abundance of goods. Our garbage is more than enough to reclaim a big piece of land from the sea. We used to make more economical use of things. For instance, we used to keep used paper or strings for recycling. A used envelope was turned inside out for reuse. In a way, surely, waste is a necessary evil for economic growth, but our natural resources are limited. In former times, we often uttered the word *mottainai* (sheer waste or uneconomical), but today it has almost become an obsolete word.

In many areas, cans, bottles, old newspapers and electric appliances are collected. Compost is created by garbage instead of throwing it away. Recently I saw on a television news report that new technology has been developed to make a new construction material by mixing concrete and plastic scrap that is much lighter and stronger. In some cities, discarded furni-

ture and electric appliances are collected and repaired and the money obtained from selling the repaired items is used for welfare programs. "Garage sales" are popular now here and there throughout the country at which disused articles are sold in a garden or a gathering place. Such sales are said to have been started in the early 70s in the United States, where articles were offered for sale literally in garages. They say that in big cities, such as Tokyo and Yokohama, "flea markets" (where old articles are sold) in parks are also popular because sales there are not liable to consumption tax. It seems certain that a change is taking place from a use-and-dispose culture to a culture of taking better care of things.

(MIKIHICO YOSHIMOTO, Gifu)

About a week ago I happened to watch a television program about recycling paper used in powder rooms. The shopkeeper said that there is much recycled paper on sale in his shop. Although the price is a little lower than new paper, most people do not buy it. I heard the answer of one customer when he was asked why he bought the new paper. He said that there was not much difference in price, that he preferred the new paper and was not interested in saving such a small amount of money.

We often hear the word "recycle" but I presume we have not thought deeply about it. Recycling should not be considered only in terms of money. I fear that Japanese, including me, may be only concerned about money. If recycling is important, it should not be left to private enterprises alone. The government, using government funds, should be involved. This is a very important problem for the world. I hope to leave a good environment for human descendants, animals and plants. I must keep this in mind. (MICHICO SANO, Minami, Nagoya)

Most elderly Japanese disapprove of the "throwaway" tendency of the present day and the chorus for "recycling" is growing louder and louder. But we must take care not to have an easygoing attitude regarding the recycling problem. People tend to consider the technology of recycling as a remedy for excessive consumption. But another essential way to prevent the depletion of resources is to prolong or extend the life of products. Anyway, we really must think about the "efficiency of recycling". For instance, at the present time, the cost of paper recycling is very high. Consequently, the price of recycled paper is sometimes higher than that of new paper. (It depends on the required paper quality. In the case of paper for printing or writing, recycled paper is about ten percent higher and still the quality is not acceptable.) It may be because the paper-producing process at present is not suitable for the recycling process. So if we really want economical recycled paper, probably we must first alter the paper-producing and supply systems themselves.

As you already know, the idea of recycling is partly realized in the area of automobile parts. The parts are manufactured according to a finely calculated program on the assumption of recycled usage. Recycling is useless without systematic and organized planning.

We should reconsider recycling from another point of view: the effective "natural recycling system". Generally speaking, all natural phenomena have the ability to regenerate. For instance, rivers have great purification ability and purify contaminated water as it flows downstream. (This is effected by exposure to the air in combination with biological reactions, but it is basically the result of the movement of water which transforms the potential energy of precipitation).

Another example is the dry beach. Recently a newspaper reported a study carried out by some official research institute which indicated that a 1,200 hectare dry beach corresponded to a sewage disposal facility processing 60,000 tons per day. Why don't we use these natural processes? I think the best way to prevent the useless consumption of resources on the earth is the reasonable combination of artificial methods and natural power.

We must seriously evaluate which is the best way of paper supplying. Is it really useful to produce high quality paper only by the recycle system? Without reasonable consideration it may cause further environmental contamination and further the demand for energy consumption. Isn't it wiser to produce high quality paper from natural wood and only low quality paper by the recycling method? A more important thing is how to reduce paper consumption itself. The thoughtless adoption of artificial recycling technology means more confusion of energy consumption and leads to further contamination of the earth. We must be wise not to make such a mistake. Remember that all living matter on our earth is a part of the immense recycling system (*rinne*, metempsychosis in Buddhism).

(NOBUYOSHI TAKAGI, Midori, Nagoya)

Sometimes at a bookstore, I see some materials such as letter paper, notebooks, envelopes, etc. with the label "This is made of used paper". The price is not so cheap, but when I find such things and if the quality is good, I try to buy them for in that way I join in the cooperative movement of recycling.

At the supermarket I patronize, there was a recycling campaign. The notice at the entrance stated: "We are going to participate in the recycling movement of milk

cartons and food trays. Please join us. As for milk cartons, open the empty carton, wash and dry it and carry it to a certain corner of the store." Housewives are too busy to do so. As for food trays, fish and vegetables are put in them so they may not be sanitary. That's the problem. Really, the campaign didn't last long.

Sometime ago on a television broadcast, I saw a recycling operation for cans and glass bottles at a certain place in Sendai. On a street corner were two large boxes—one for used cans and the other for glass bottles. People carried them from their homes and put them into the boxes. Then, at a certain time, trucks came and carried them to the factory where cans were pressed into metal blocks and bottles were melted and made into other bottles. Only two process, simple and easy. I thought this was a feasible and good idea. I hope this movement will be carried out successfully. (KIMI KONDO, Miura)

"Recycle" wasn't in my *Sanseido's GEM* dictionary. Of course, this is only a very small, pocket dictionary. But this word was not in the *Idiomatic and Syntactic English Dictionary*, published by Kaitakusha either. Now, I don't understand why this word isn't in these dictionaries and, at last, I said to myself, "I'll have to give up writing about this theme."

But after a few weeks, I remembered Mr. Offner's kind letter. It was as follows: "I admire your vitality at 88 years of age and hope you continue in good health for many years to come." I have been repeating his messages out loud every morning. I also repeat the phrase: "Continuation brings success". I decided I must write because this admonition was made up by me.

One day, incidentally, a woman in our *Rōjin* Club said to me: "At last, I recycled my old-fashioned overcoat for my daugh-

ter." Although she spoke in Japanese, she used the English word "recycle". "Recycle" has become so popularized that it has already become Japanese. "Oh!" I said to myself, "recycling carries out its mission perfectly." (HYOWAY OHWAY, Kami, Hyōgo)

I did not know what to write on this theme when a newspaper headline caught my eye. On reading the story, it occurred to me that I ought to share that interesting piece of news. The article began with this paragraph: "Kobe (Kyodo) A company in Takarazuka, Hyogo prefecture, has developed a system to recycle waste paper into construction materials and other products." (p. 3, March 4 issue of *The Japan Times*)

This recycling system is expected to reduce the volume of waste and carbon dioxide emissions from incineration plants. According to the story, a local government in the Kansai region plans to build an experimental plant this year. Put into practice, the idea will help greatly to recycle wood resources, I believe.

In my view, it is true that "many a little makes a mickle" and that many individuals' bits of carelessly discarded things leads to unexpected pollution. The recycling efforts of individuals may prove to be successful on a small scale, but it is another story when the recycling effort is made on the public level. This is the recycling that really counts. In this sense, the above story deserves attention insofar as recycling is concerned. Indeed, human creativity counts as much here as in other areas of human activities. I hope we will see many more innovative ideas for effective recycling like that mentioned above, one after another, in order to save the earth, the only place we have to live on.

(SHIOJI SUGIMOTO, Suginami, Tokyo)

It ought to be considered an obligation

to recycle as much as possible the reusable goods around us. As resources on this globe are not inexhaustible, it is very important for our own lives and those of our descendants.

The reforming or utilization of waste products is similar to recycling. I do not know about the method of recycling industrial waste, but some women's groups make an effort to recycle Japanese paper into postcards, milk cartons into *meishi* and waste kitchen oil into bar soap. One of my ways of utilizing waste is to make use of used tea leaves and coffee grounds as fertilizer to enhance the growth of plants. As dried coffee grounds contain oil, they are also suitable for pin cushions. Egg whites and egg shells are used to remove particles when cooking clear soup. If summer oranges are organically cultivated, the peels can be preserved in sugar. Many advertisements are inserted in the newspaper every morning. I use the plain reverse sides for writing notes or to make rough copies of the essays I compose on "Daily Word" themes.

I enjoy trying to think of ways to recycle things around us. Improvidence is not a virtue. Rather, it is shameful.

(TAMAKO MORIMOTO, Tsuyama)

Since many Japanese became well-off, they easily throw away used things when they grow tired of them. It is wrong indeed to do that and it is natural to have an increased emphasis these days on recycling and reusing products.

In our church, we sometimes hold a recycling shop, gathering unused articles. I take some tablewares which have not been used for some years and used clothes that seem to be too loud in color for me now. I am happy when I know these things will be useful for others. And everytime I go to the recycling shop, I can find some-

thing I want. There are many kinds of clothing for adults and children, kitchenware, handcrafts, stationery, various kinds of food, furniture, bicycles, and so on. The profit is given to the church. If there are things of no use being kept in the house, they will occupy a good deal of space and the owners will soon decide to discard them in the mountains, in a river or along the seaside, turning these places of natural beauty into dumping grounds. We should contribute such things to a bazaar or to a recycling shop if we can afford to do so and should have things repaired and use them until they are worn out.

Mr. Koyanagi, a member of our church and a teacher at an agricultural school, went to a mountain near Fukushima to find television sets or washing machines thrown away by rich people. Most of them were still usable if they were repaired. They were repaired and sold to people who liked the cheap second-hand goods. Then he offered the money to the church for the construction of the *Dendōkan*. I cannot do as he did, but I do collect milk cartons, flatten them and take them to the place where they are made into picture post cards. Also, I like to unravel the woolen yarn of worn-out sweaters and reknit them, using a little new yarn. And I make dustcloths or floorcloths from worn-out shirts or old towels. Anyway, I would be thrifty in regard to myself, but generous when I contribute things to the recycling shop. (KAZUKO TAGUCHI, Fukushima)

"Jesus took the bread, gave thanks to God, and distributed it to the people.... He did the same with the fish, and they all had as much as they wanted. When they were all full, he said to his disciples, 'Gather the pieces left over; let us not waste any.'" (John 6:11-12)

March 9 Message (Subject #241)

According to a Chinese legend, some sparrows picked up grains of rice and stored them in a piece of bamboo. After a rain the rice fermented and sake was produced. This is one interesting theory of why the Chinese character for sake is composed of characters meaning water and bird. Another interesting theory is that the Japanese pronunciation comes from sasake meaning "bamboo smell". Whether or not such theories are true, sake has played an important part in Japanese tradition. In the present-day, sake continues to be served on various occasions and people who refuse to drink may be thought strange or unsociable. Alcohol is considered both a social lubricant and a safety valve in the pressure cooker of modern Japanese society where strict self-control is required during daylight hours. What do you think about sake and other alcoholic beverages? What are the pluses and minuses of drinking them? What do you think about people who refuse to drink? Why do you think there has been an increase in the number of women and young people with drinking problems?

After I gave birth to my first child, I became allergic to alcohol. Since then, I haven't been able to drink any kind of alcoholic beverage. Even a small sip of beer or a faint odor of sake makes me feel sick or cough. I have never been to a bar or a beer garden. Even a light apéritif, I can't share with my husband at dinner.

Believe it or not, I came from a family that was addicted to alcohol. My father

loved sake. He never began his dinner without it. He always drank hot sake from a small winecup served by my mother. The more he drank, the merrier and more talkative he became. My brothers and sisters accompanied him at his drawn-out dinner. They learned to drink sake when they were still relatively young. My little brother tasted sake for the first time when he was a kindergartner. He took father's winecup and licked it. Then he made grimaces and funny gestures. This entertained us all. After that, a tiny portion of sake was served to him by someone who wanted him to give this performance. My brother is now a heavy drinker of alcohol. My other siblings also drink alcohol every evening.

I, however, did not imbibe. I was never against my father's drinking, but I did not like his taking so much time for it. He spent three hours drinking sake every evening. I considered it wasteful and a little stupid. He made many mistakes and often made an absolute fool of himself, but I never despised him. After all, sake made him feel happy. He always said, "*Sake wa hyaku yaku no chō*." ("Sake is the best of a hundred medicines.") I think this is true. Statistics indicate that those who live long are usually moderate drinkers. Alcohol loosens tension and makes one feel relaxed. Drinking seems to generate a friendly atmosphere among people who imbibe. Drinking with strangers will help them become friends with each other. Drinking with old friends makes their relationship smooth and intimate.

I really envy those who can drink. I have never enjoyed talking with people while drinking. I have never sung a song in a *karaoke* bar. I am always sober. I can never escape from reality. I am always somewhat tense. I yearn to be totally relaxed in body and soul. I enjoy life only half-way. If I could drink, I could enjoy

life thoroughly by participating in various kinds of social activities and making friends with people of diverse types. Ah, I wish I could get drunk just once and be in an ecstasy or a trance! Then I would not mind if I had a hangover the following day.

Although I don't envy those who drink too much and become alcoholic, I doubt that not drinking at all is better than drinking too much. (NAOMI KONDO, Handa)

Sometimes I am at a loss about what to write on a given theme, but this time I have nothing to worry about because "sake", the subject of this theme, is a favorite tonic of mine which has accompanied me throughout my life.

Hiroshima, my native place, is one of the famous sake-producing regions, along with Nada and Fushima, as it has a supply of good water and good quality rice. There are about 2,600 sake manufacturers producing about 4,000 different brands across the country. Local brands (*jizake*) are appreciated as much as national brands. Our Gifu Prefecture produces many kinds of *jizake*. Since it is closely connected with us, the word sake is often used to mean "alcoholic beverages" in general.

When we drink sake in moderation, it is very wholesome. It is often said that sake has ten merits: it is the best medicine, a prolonger of life, a meal for the traveler, an overcoat against the cold, a convenient excuse to visit without an invitation, a disperser of sorrow, a social leveler, a relief from work, a harmonizer of all men and a friend to those who live alone. People usually drink after work to refresh their exhausted minds. Sake removes the shyness most Japanese have deep within them. Therefore, drinking is very useful to facilitate human relations.

In our country, sake is served on every possible occasion. It is served even at a

wake and after a funeral. We do not think it is unnatural to drink, cherishing the memory of the deceased. Today, many young people, including women, have a taste for alcoholic beverages. I am not so senseless to say that young girls should abstain from drinking (I myself enjoy drinking with my daughter when she returns home), but they should drink in moderation and not get drunk. It is unworthy of a gentleman or a lady to be seen very drunk in public. In the Muromachi era, sake drinking achieved the status of a ceremonial art, nearly comparable to the tea ceremony or flower arrangement. Strict rules governed the serving and sipping of sake, as well as the procedures for refilling companions' cups and offering one's own to be filled in turn. This highly structured and refined approach to drinking was apparently intended not only to heighten the pleasures of drinking, but to discourage over-indulgence in and dependence on alcohol.

When I was young, I drank very much. I had experiences of having only a faint recollection of the events of the night before when I woke up the next morning. I was pursued by uneasiness and repented of my heavy drinking. When I was in a busy office, I used to attend banquet dinners several days in succession and was compelled to drink socially. I could not drink comfortably at such times. Today, I usually have a drink at supper at home as I relax and imbibe at my own pace, which I think makes sake taste better than ever before.

(MIKIHiko YOSHIMOTO, Gifu)

I am not fond of sake so I do not enjoy the experience when I drink it. I always presume that it tastes nice and remember how difficult it is to control drinking. Can I stop drinking if I like it?

I have attended many parties where sake was served. I see some people who

enjoy drinking. They become very relaxed when they drink. It is good if they relax truly and dispel their gloom calmly, but some of them seem to become over-relaxed. They enlist the help of sake and say unexpected words. It is not a wholesome way in which they express themselves. They should speak and act frankly when they do not drink sake.

(MICHIKO SANO, Minami, Nagoya)

I am a total abstainer from liquor and tobacco. Perhaps, I am naturally abstemious. At any rate, I can go throughout the year without any alcoholic beverage. They call such people *geko* in Japanese. When I was a little boy, my father used to say to me, *Geko no tatetaru kura wa nashi*. The meaning in English is: "No teetotaler was ever known to own a godown." Although he who told me so was certainly a *geko*, he himself owned a godown. Ha, ha, ha!

For a little while, please be patient as I tell you about my view of wine. When a welcome or farewell party, etc. is held for one of my comrades, I attend the gathering and have a chat with others over winecups, as merrily as I can, and express my hopes for the guest of honor's happiness. I pretend to drink and absolutely never say that I can't drink. This is the way I act on such occasions.

You know well the condition of an alcoholic. Our bodies shake from alcoholic poisoning. I am afraid of so-called *aruchū* in Japanese. Now, I have coffee with milk and sugar after every dinner and the aroma of coffee gladdens my nose. Nowadays, I sometimes drink black coffee alone. If I continue this coffee habit, will I suffer as a coffeeholic?

(HYOWAY OHWAY, Kami, Hyōgo)

I suggest that the production of sake in Japan and the importation of alcoholic

beverages from foreign countries be decreased from the present amount.

There are a few pluses related to sake. For example, it may give an appetite to people who take a little cup of sake before their suppers. Sake is a good seasoning for cooking. Sacramental wine in churches is very important.

It is said that "sake is mad water" in Japan and the minuses of drinking are too many to mention all of them here. As drunkards lose their reason and morality, they brawl and sometimes commit murder. They often cause traffic accidents and, unfortunately, they cause injuries and/or death. Finally, they often lose their jobs and become the cause of domestic tragedies. Furthermore, many incurable diseases--liver trouble, heart diseases, diabetes, etc. plague alcoholics. Alcoholics may ruin themselves.

I think people who refuse to drink are normal and drunkards are abnormal in the world. But some people who are not suited to their condition from birth must refuse to drink. Anyway, I highly respect people who refuse to drink.

The times are changing and the number of women and young people have more opportunities to be invited to attend parties than previously. At every party, sake is served to them. I disagree with the idea that they must be drinking companions of their seniors or make a show of drinking sake too. Their actions depend upon their home background, their friends and the older people around them.

I am concerned about the easy availability of sake from vending machines along many streets. I hope and pray that the saying "Japan is a drunkard's heaven" will soon disappear.

(TAMAKO MORIMOTO, Tsuyama)

The message of March 9th reminds me of the family crest of Date, the feudal lord of Sendai which consists of a sparrow and some pieces of bamboo. Indeed, in Japan, we think bamboo fits well with sparrows (*take ni sasu*) just as Japanese nightingales go well with plum blossoms (*ume ni uguisu*). So I think that the grains of rice stored in the pieces of bamboo by sparrows turned into sake were fermented after a rain in old China and a wise man composed the Chinese character for sake. The Japanese pronunciation *sasake* interests me. I wonder whether the sake of the present smells different than that of the old days.

Alcoholic beverages, including sake, may make drinkers cheerful and merry. Sake also makes them forget their anxieties and sorrows for a while. They will consider everybody as their close friend. From this point of view, drinking sake may be a plus in daily life. These days, life is more complicated; young people and women also have to struggle for existence. Women are under the stress of keeping house, so many of them find relief by drinking sake. Although some people cannot put their thoughts into words, intoxicants loosen their tongues. When they become sober, however, men of good sense will be sorry for their actions while intoxicated, especially if they had quarrels or made a slip of the tongue under the influence of sake, saying something they should not have said. Such words are irretrievable. This is the minus side of sake.

My father was a strict teetotaler. I hear he used to say, "A Christian minister should abstain from alcoholic beverages so as not to cause other people to stumble." I hear also that once the parents of one of his students brought him a bottle of sake as a year-end present. Needless to say, he refused to accept it. But they left the bottle at the door of our house anyway. The

next morning, finding it, he poured out all the sake at the foot of the pine tree in the garden to dispose of it. A drinker would say, "How wasteful to throw away good sake, but he was as inexorable as his nickname, 'Stone'."

My brother does not drink sake either, but he accepts such a present and says "Thank you". Then he makes his wife go to the store and exchange it for some bottles of soy sauce or other food. He can accommodate himself to the circumstances better than his father. I don't think that sake must always be avoided since I, myself, sometimes enjoy vegetables pickled in sake lees, but strict self-control is required for anybody that drinks and drinkers should not force non-drinkers to drink.

(KAZUKO TAGUCHI, Fukushima)

There is an old saying that *sake wa hyaku yaku no chō*, which means Alcohol is the best of all medicines. When you drink sake, a proper quantity of it is good for your health, but too much is another story.

My father taught me that you may drink sake if you want, but never drink too much. Now, I enjoy drinking a glass of beer with evening meals almost everyday. It makes me happy and relaxed. My motto in drinking is that it should be enjoyable and never be excessive. I think you should not force others to drink sake on any occasion. In this regard, I don't think people who refuse to drink are considered strange or unsociable. However, young people, especially young students in college or university, often force others to drink too much sake quickly, saying *ikki-ikki*, just for fun at a party. Since this is really a dangerous and savage way of drinking, it sometimes causes some students a great deal of trouble and may even result in death. I do hope people will enjoy themselves and relax while drinking.

(MICHIKO NIWA, Shōwa, Nagoya)

"Echoes" of Other Messages

January 20 Message Excerpt:

The verb "inaugurate" means to induct into office by a formal ceremony. Today is Inauguration Day in the United States. At the inauguration ceremony on the east portico of the Capitol in Washington, D.C., Bill Clinton, will be inaugurated as the 42nd president. According to the 20th Amendment to the Constitution, which became effective in 1933, the terms of the President and Vice-President shall end at noon on the twentieth day of January. The oath of office, administered by the chief justice of the United States, is contained in Article II, Section 1 of the Constitution. It consists of the following words: "I do solemnly swear that I will faithfully execute the office of President of the United States, and will, to the best of my ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States." May God help the new president to make wise decisions which will affect the whole world.

The two most important events of 1993 thus far are the engagement of Miss Masako Owada to the Crown Prince and the inauguration of Bill Clinton as the 42nd U. S. president. Newspapers reported on the former event on January 20 with photos. The previous day, January 19, all television stations broadcast the press conference held by the couple. I was deeply impressed by the Crown Prince's promise, "I will help and protect Masako-san to the best of my ability all through my life." And still more impressed with Masako's sincere state-

ment: "I will do my best in that new way of life." She spoke in her own words.

The following day, January 20, was Inauguration Day in the United States. Viewing the television broadcast of the oath-taking, "I do solemnly swear . . .", I was reminded of President Kennedy's inauguration ceremony. The weather in Washington, D. C. seemed to be very cold. I remember that from Mr. Kennedy's mouth a white breath of air came out with every word. The atmosphere was filled with hope and expectation, yet he did not live long. Why was he assassinated? Will President Clinton keep people's respect for long?

(KIMI KONDO, Miura)

February 22 Message Excerpt:

William Boetcker, having noted that "A diamond with a flaw is more valuable than a brick without a flaw", concluded that it is "Better to be a strong man with a weak point than to be a weak man without a strong point."

How glad I am to write that I was able to understand today's (2/22) spoken message without the aid of reference books. Of course, before dialing the telephone number, I read the message over and over again out loud. "Oh," I said to myself, "today's message is easier than yesterday's and that of the day before." Even when they are a little easy, understanding these messages is the happiest time for me.

When I was a student, I was taught by one of my teachers *keizoku wa chikara nari*

in Japanese. Now, I can't put this proverb into English well, but it will be as important as the song of the so-called *shidare yanagi ni tobisuku kaeru*. I agree, and in line with this poem, I repeat many times the following verse: "Jump up and down, down and up, again jump up and down. At last the frog can reach the willow's branch." (HYOWAY OHWAY, Kami, Hyôgo)

March 19 Message Excerpt:

In order to train children to take safety precautions in emergencies, schools sometimes have fire drills or earthquake drills. Soldiers have drills as a part of their military training. And policemen also have drills to improve their skills. One day last month in Niigata, the local police force was holding an armed robbery drill. To raise public awareness about crime prevention, an NHK television crew was filming the event. . . .

"I hope tomorrow's message will be easy as usual because it will be Saturday," I said to myself in a soft voice. "But that's tomorrow's problem and today I must try to comprehend this Friday message as much as I can."

When I began the message, "In order to train children to take safety . . ." I was greatly troubled by the words "precautions in emergencies". Then, I said to myself, "Even these first few words are difficult to understand, but anyway, I will hurriedly read to the end of the message." And then I unexpectedly found an "an" before the let-

ters "NHK". Oh! I'm embarrassed to say that I had forgotten that an "an" is used instead of an "a" before vowel sounds (a, e, i, o, u) and words beginning with a silent "h" (such as "hour" and "honest"). Although "N" is not a vowel, its pronunciation begins with the vowel sound "e", so it is right to precede it with an "an". Then I also remembered that the indefinite article before "European" is not "an" but "a" because its pronunciation begins with a "yu" sound.

Oh, how difficult it was for me to write the above sentences in English! After all, I must say that reading is more important than writing, and I believe that you will agree with me.

(HYOWAY OHWAY, Kami, Hyôgo)

March 20 Message Excerpt:

Along the wide staircase that led up to the second floor, was an upright piano on which all six of us children took piano lessons when we were small, although none of us grew up to be accomplished musicians. I don't recall ever hearing my mother play the piano, but once and a while my father would play some of his favorite hymns. Early on Sunday mornings he often played quite loudly and sang at the same time while we were still in bed. For us, it was a kind of signal that it was Sunday morning and it was time for us to get up and get dressed to go to Sunday School.

Whenever I receive the "Daily Word" messages on the weekend, I always say to myself, "I hope I'll be able to understand

even if it's only the Saturday message. It makes me so happy to be able to understand them. I don't know why the Saturday messages are easier than those of the other six days." Every Saturday, you write about your family rather than about world history or so-called philosophy, so you use easy words instead of difficult ones.

For example, I read over last Saturday's (March 20th) message loudly and pleasantly alone. The following sentence was included in it: "Along the wide staircase that led up to the second floor was an upright piano on which all six of us children took piano lessons when we were small, although none of us grew up to be accomplished musicians."

I have an upright piano in my parlor too. It was bought when I retired from my position as the principal of an elementary school for the purpose of playing some of my favorite melodies when I was tired from working in the fields. But I can't play any of my favorite hymns as your father did. Instead, I play *Mill in the Black Forest*, *Wiener March*, *Cuckoo Waltz*, *Csikos Post* and *Gavotte*, etc. Nowadays, I am too old to play the piano as I did when I was young. In spring, I used to sing the song called *Spring Has Come* while playing the piano. In summer, *Summer Has Come*, in autumn, *The School Excursion*, and in winter, *It Snows*. Of course, I'm not a pianist, but how enjoyable it is to sing these children's songs accompanied by the piano. Now, I'll say to myself "Singing is making me young, isn't it?" (HYOWAY OHWAY, Kaml, Hyôgo)

"Sing to the Lord, all the world! Worship the Lord with joy; come before him with happy songs." (Psalm 100:1-2)

March 23 Message Excerpt:

Botany is the biological science of plants, or shokubutsugaku in Japanese. Today is the birthday of the man known as the "father of American botany". John Bartram was born 294 years ago on March 23, 1699. Bartram had no formal schooling but possessed a keen mind and a great interest in plants. In 1728 he purchased land along the banks of a river near Philadelphia. There he planted the first botanical garden in the United States, which was frequented by Benjamin Franklin and George Washington and which still exists today as part of the Philadelphia park system. In it there are many giant trees which were planted by Bartram himself. The word "botany" comes from a Greek word for "plant" which is found only once in the Greek New Testament, in Hebrews 6:7: "God blesses the soil which . . . grows plants that are useful to those for whom it is cultivated."

When I learned the word "botany" for the first time, our teacher advised us to remember it, thinking of *botan*, Japanese for a beautiful tree peony. At the same time, I learned the word "botanist" because it so happened that there was a classmate whose father was a botanist at Tohoku University. There are many kinds of plants in Japan, such as trees, grasses, flowers, blossoms, vegetables, fruit, mushroom fungi, moss and ferns. Even some of the plants considered weeds are attractive. So it is difficult to distinguish between grass and weeds, but we pull up the weeds in our path or from around useful trees and vegetables and pretty flowers. Since the old days, people have enjoyed making gardens with beautiful green trees, stones

and ponds or lovely flowers.

I am very happy to know about "the father of American botany". Benjamin Franklin and George Washington, whom we know well as great men in American history, must have respected John Bartram and the successive presidents and scholars encouraged the people to make botanical gardens all over the U. S. A. and I realize why America is so beautiful now.

Also in Fukushima, municipal government officials have been planting saplings on Shinobuyama or street trees as in Sendai. I am so happy to see flower and vegetable gardens in this city and its suburbs. And God blesses the land because the gardeners cultivated well and grow these flowers, trees and vegetables, also fruit in autumn. I know very well that the Bible verse in Hebrews 8:7 is very true.

(KAZUKO TAGUCHI, Fukushima)

March 24 Message Excerpt:

Having a sense of humor makes life more interesting and enjoyable. Newspapersmen who recognize this fact sometimes include a play on words in the headlines of articles. For example, a recent article in The Japan Times was entitled "Chinese dishes cause ministerial stir". From that headline, readers would imagine the article was related to Chinese cooking and they would wonder what kind of ministers would be stirred up about that delicious cuisine and why. In fact, the article was about the Chinese government's attitude toward foreign radio and television broadcasts and whether or not Chinese citizens should be permitted to own satellite dishes, the dish-shaped antennae needed to re-

ceive them. There was disagreement on this matter between two government ministries. Another article was entitled: "Beer-Lovers can party president". The Polish Beer-Lovers' Party, which was formed to promote beer drinking among vodka-loving Poles and holds seats in parliament, recently expelled its president and founder on charges of manipulation and financial mismanagement. Because of the association of cans with beer, the editor chose to use "can" in its slang meaning of "dismiss", thinking readers would smile at the pun. A sense of humor has been called the best "defence against adverse fortune".

I am truly obtuse in regard to humor. I have a "stony head" (*ishi atama*, in Japanese). I cannot explain things. I have only two answers: yes or no. I do not like to talk just for effect. To avoid speaking in a way that hurts the feelings of others, I must pay careful attention to others, but my "stony head" will never change.

I can understand the humor of others, however. I presume it must impress me more than others because I admire it from the bottom of my heart. I wrote the other day that I like to watch *rakugo*. I could never accomplish such things even if I stood on my head. I love the humor of others, which I can understand, enjoy and admire, but I cannot be humorous myself. I'm sorry that my head will be an *ishi atama* which will hurt others forever.

(MICHIKO SANO, Minami, Nagoya)

I enjoyed reading/correcting the 52 essays/comments of 15 contributors to this 42nd issue of "Daily Word" Echoes. I hope you enjoy reading them also. Keep listening/reading/writing! (C.O.)