

# "Daily Word" Echoes

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(Essays submitted by listeners/readers on themes of "Daily Word" messages between January 16 and February 20, 1996. Corrected and edited by Clark Offner.)

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## January 16 Message (Subject #296)

*The theme for our meeting is:  
"Plans, Hopes and Fears for 1996".*

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My greatest plan for this year is to go to the United States of America. Last year, I traveled there for the first time in my life. I went to a small city in Michigan named Saginaw. That city has a Japanese Culture Center along with a Japanese tea house and a Japanese garden. The director of that center is a Japanese woman who loves that dainty house and fascinating garden and is devoted to activities related to them. The budgeted amount she receives from the city to manage those valuable assets is very limited so she has been holding events every year to raise funds for the maintenance of those facilities ever since she became the director.

Last year, she planned some stage performances of traditional Japanese art and music. On her request, about ten women from Handa and nearby cities and towns went to America for that purpose. They were instructors and teachers of traditional Japanese art and music, such as tea ceremony, flower arrangement, ko-to music, Japanese dance and kimono dressing. I accompanied them. We paid for the flight by ourselves. In return,

there was no charge for our accommodations. We stayed with American families. The family I stayed with was a retired couple; the husband was American and his wife was Japanese.

She was one of the so-called *sensô hana-yome*, war brides, young Japanese women married to American soldiers after the war. Coincidentally, she came from the same town in Osaka where I am from. She was happy to talk to me in her native language, in the dialect of Osaka in particular. We spoke in *Osaka-ben* all the time while we were together. I had never spoken so much in *Osaka-ben* since I left my hometown. I spent about ten days in America, but I scarcely spoke English. I was always with some Japanese. I realized it was not helpful to me to use only my mother tongue where people spoke English, the language I had studied for so many years. Next time, I should put myself in a situation where I hear only English and have to speak English.

The leader of this artists group was a Japanese woman professor of English. She suggested that I attend summer sessions of the Intercultural Communication Institute in Portland and advised me to write to that institute and request a pamphlet about the "summer institute for international cultural communication". I immediately did so two weeks ago. I have been waiting for their reply and look forward to attending the summer sessions.

I have two problems. Firstly, I am an extraordinarily strict vegetarian. I cannot eat out. I have to find a dormitory

or an apartment house where I will be allowed to cook for myself. Secondly, I am very traditional in terms of clothing. I usually wear kimonos, but kimonos are not appropriate garments in this case. I have to make some other clothes to wear there for it is my principle to make almost all the clothes I wear by myself. Right now, I am busy unsewing some old kimonos to remake them into more modernized apparel that would make my trip and stay more convenient and comfortable. (NAOMI KONDO, Handa)

In Japanese, we say *Ichinen no kei wa gantan ni ari*. It means "New Year's Day is the day for planning" or "Decisions made on New Year's Day are the key to a successful year". My hope is to make progress toward my deep longing and this is most difficult for me because my deep longing for 1996 includes plans, hopes and fears, all three.

I long to have a tender heart, not only for human beings but for all things. If I can become more tenderhearted, I will speak about my thoughts to others and, if anyone approves of my longing, the world will become a little happier than before. I, myself, am the only problem—whether or not I will put forth the effort to accomplish my aim. I am concerned about the destruction of nature, bullying in schools, child suicides, cruelty toward old people or animals, international relations. Having even a little sympathy will help to solve many problems.

I pray to God at the beginning of the New Year that I will not spend days idly through the year and will talk to others about the love of God.

(MICHIKO SANO, Minami, Nagoya)

As for my personal plans for 1996, first of all I would like to study the "Daily Word" messages more carefully and digest them better so that I can make further progress, both intellectually and spiritually. These days, I feel urged to do

so, though I have been a very lazy student for a long time. I have been a student of Dr. Offner's since 1988 when I noticed an article about the "Daily Word" messages in the *Asahi Shinbun* and requested copies to be mailed. I regret very much that I have not been able to make much use of the precious gifts profusely given by Dr. Offner through the messages. How I miss those 8 years which have flown by like an arrow while I have grown older and my memory is worsening year after year.

It is said that 1995 was a horrible year for us Japanese and so it was for my family also. Last May, I lost my mother and then my husband became sick. How depressed I was and without vigor those days! When I was very gloomy, I received the good news that Dr. and Mrs. Offner would provide us listeners in the Tokyo area an opportunity to see them near Tokyo Station on August 24, 1995 on their way to their homeland. Ms. Shizuko Muto and I were able to go there. How happy we were to see our loving teacher and his wife face to face and to enjoy talking with them for a while! Talking with him, I felt as if I were urged to be a more faithful student. Since then, I have been much encouraged and recovered my vigor. I am so grateful for their kindness and thoughtfulness to share their precious time with us when they were very busy.

I am an old woman whose studying ability is very poor. Devising a system for effective studying was necessary. It is said that an effective way for us foreign students to study English is to memorize English sentences as much as possible. I would like to memorize passages which seem to me significant or impressive as much as possible. Then I would like to follow the way Mr. Tomoyasu Kimura mentioned in the 15th anniversary issue of "Daily Word" Echoes. He wrote that after listening to the messages a number of times, he tried to write down all the sentences in each message. That seems too difficult for me, but I plan to

try to do so as much as possible. The messages, which are the result of Dr. Offner's marvelous talent and precious effort, should not be wasted. They are always very interesting and beneficial. I would like to broaden my knowledge and deepen my thinking through studying them so that I may grow healthier even in trials.

I would like to contribute essays to "*Daily Word*" *Echoes* as often as possible, though I am poor in writing. Once I contributed for a while, but soon gave up, thinking it was too difficult for me to continue. After a long break, I tried again and found that my ability had remarkably declined. I would like to try again as much as possible, so that I may stay young. Now I imagine my deceased mother watching over me with a smile. "You do not need to take care of me anymore. So spend your time studying the messages and do not give up."

(MICHIKO KAWAMURA, Meguro, Tokyo)

I will write about my two main hopes for this year. First, my hobby is painting and our painters group usually takes a sketch tour abroad once every two years. This year, we are planning to go to Spain in June. As I have never been there, I am looking forward to going. But at this time, I cannot decide whether to go or not. The problem is the condition of my health. Since the end of last year, I have not been so well, but if I regain good health, I will join the tour. I hope to make as many sketches as I can and bring them back with me.

My second hope is related to the problem of our two grandchildren. They are now 5th and 7th graders and victims of school bullying, as I wrote in a previous issue of the *Echoes*. The principals, homeroom teachers and child psychiatrists did their best but failed to persuade them to go back to school. From last autumn, they have not attended school, staying home everyday. My daughter looked for a special class for absen-

tees in and around the city but failed to find one. Now she is planning to send the elder child to the international school in Toyota and has already contacted the Summerhill School in England for the younger one. We sincerely hope that this year will be a better year for them.

(TSUYOSHI HAMADA, Minami, Nagoya)

I have two hopes and one plan for this year.

My first hope is to gain the 2nd rank of the Taikyokuken for which I have been training for two years. There are five ranks: beginner, middle, advanced, sub-teacher and teacher. I am still far away from teacher, which may require five more years of training, but I'm thinking that doesn't matter if only I keep healthy.

My second hope is to be a translator of "English Literature for Children", but it is very difficult to pass the license examination for 2nd grade and then 1st grade. A person with a 2nd grade ranking can take part in a translator group and can brush up on his or her technical ability, but it's very difficult for me. By the way, I now have a 3rd grade ranking.

Regarding my plan, I have been studying sign language on NHK television for one year now. I have become able to understand and to speak with my hands and also to finger letters but only for simple conversation. So, I'm planning to join a volunteer group and would like to help deaf and dumb persons even a little.

(MIEKO OKUMURA, Mizuho, Nagoya)

To tell the truth, I am three score and eleven years old as of this January. It stands to reason that I have come to think of the time when the curtain will fall on my life. I know that no one can escape one's destiny. Sooner or later the inevitable will come to pass. So I ponder this matter long and deeply before reaching the conclusion that I had better be prepared for my demise.

What I hope and pray is that I will keep so well as to need little help from others to lead a normal life until the very time that a sudden natural death robs me of life. Thus my plans should be focused on how to keep well as long as I am alive. One of the prerequisites for keeping well is to keep regular hours. This is my top priority in order to keep well.

Beyond the personal level, I think I should have something to say about various matters present-day society faces. In order to do so, I should keep abreast of the times, seeing the world in a different light. Some people say they see no bright prospects for the future. There may be a possibility that their pessimistic view is correct. But I am in no mood to agree with their gloomy outlook. Then, what can I do about it? This is the question I face in the year 1996.

(SHOJI SUGIMOTO, Suginami, Tokyo)

This year will mark a new start for my husband and me because he is going to retire from his job at the end of March. I don't know what he will do after that. He will probably stay at home all day long. Although I will have to do more household chores than before, I'd like to express my sincere thanks to him for his working hard for more than 35 years.

I'm afraid, however, that the sudden change in his lifestyle may adversely affect his mental or physical health. I really hope he will find something to do soon, which will help him maintain his health. I have already told him that his retirement is also my retirement. At that time, he was astonished at my words, but now it seems to me that he is trying to understand them. I wonder if my lifestyle will change due to his retirement. These are my hopes and fears.

(MICHIKO NIWA, Shôwa, Nagoya)

When I attended the "Daily Word" meeting on the 21st of January, I felt confident about my health, but from the

end of January, I noticed that I had some stomach trouble and called a doctor for the first time in many years. This made me realize I have to take better care of myself as I get older. As a result, I had to take medicine with me on my trips. Some trips were included in my hopes and plans for 1996 and I have taken two trips as of this time.

I visited Okinawa and Palawan Island in the Philippines in February. The trip to Palawan Island was one of the most enjoyable and memorable trips I have ever taken. The island is completely isolated from 20th century civilization, if I may be permitted a slight exaggeration. There were no telephones, fax machines, radios or television sets. There was only an unpolluted ocean and a hospitable staff at the hotel. Having no specific program or schedule, we could do whatever we wanted to do. Some of the group enjoyed snorkeling, scuba diving and canoeing.

A number of small fish came near me while I was enjoying swimming. In Canada last September at Bow River, I could not catch a single fish in half a day, but here I caught several big fish in a short time. On a boat, we ate them as sashimi. At night, we could see the Southern Cross, the Big Dipper and the Milky Way high up in the sky. The sound of the waves provided a pleasant accompaniment while we were dining. How I wish I could have stayed longer!

(MIDORI KODAMA, Midori, Nagoya)

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#### January 23 Message (Subject #297)

*In Japan, writing may be considered an art as well as a means of communication, but the art form known as shodô does not enhance legibility. Shodô, or calligraphy, is the suggested theme for*

*an essay this week. What do you think of this style of writing? Have you taken classes in calligraphy? Do you appreciate this form of art? What are the benefits of learning to write in this manner? What do you think about the future of shodô?*

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My hometown of Kasugai is called a city of calligraphy. This is because Dôfû Ono was born here in 894. He is one of the three great Japanese calligraphers, known as *sanseki*. He is a descendant of Imoko Ono, a famous Japanese envoy to the Sui Dynasty in China. He somewhat changed the Chinese style calligraphy to a Japanese style. The Dôfû Memorial Hall is located near the JR Kachikawa Station.

There is a saying that "calligraphy reveals one's character". It might be true. Beautiful calligraphy, as a work of art, is very impressive. It is delicate, gentle and powerful.

When I write poor letters with a brush, they reveal my state of mind reflexively. Often they show instability. Peace, stability, affection, carefulness and power are important. All kinds of superior mental qualities are required.

(TOSHIYUKI KOTERAZAWA, Kasugai)

As I may have written previously, calligraphy, *shodô* or *kakikata* was one of the required subjects in elementary and junior high schools in Japan. In our school days, pupils carried inkstones (*su-zuri*), and ink sticks (*sumi*) to school for their two calligraphy lessons a week. We also took writing brushes (*fude*), calligraphy papers and textbooks (*tehon*) with us. Our teacher used to make the rounds of the class, standing behind each pupil and instructing how to write correctly. I was not good at calligraphy. I sometimes carelessly dripped ink on the white paper when I was going to start writing. It was

because my writing brush had too much ink on it.

Although the semi-cursive writing style (*gyôsho*) of Chinese characters and Japanese *hiragana* is not so difficult to read, the cursive writing style (*sôsho*) is sometimes quite illegible. The printed style of writing is good for official documents, such as one's personal history. Being illegible, both cursive styles are good for advanced classes in calligraphy. It is said that the printed style is as easy as just standing, the semi-cursive style is a little more advanced, like walking, and the cursive style is as difficult as running. Japanese or Chinese sentences written with a writing brush in semi-cursive or cursive styles are really a work of art to display on a wall or in an alcove. They are difficult to read, so we often wonder what they mean. It is good for us to learn and to appreciate them as we think about the meaning.

People in the old days used to write in these styles with a writing brush on rolled letter paper. Our mother used to receive letters written in cursive style on rolled paper from her sister. Mother said, "Sister Ritsu has *tappitsu* (good handwriting)." As I was a child, I could not understand nor could I read them. I thought that *tappitsu* meant to dash off letters hurriedly. Later, I understood that *tappitsu* meant to write very skillfully and I thought much better of my Aunt Ritsu. I wish I could write large Chinese characters with a bamboo broom on a mat-sized paper. But first of all, I must learn how to write skillfully in a printed style with this pen in my daily life. (KAZUO TAGUCHI, Fukushima)

*Shodô* is the art of drawing characters with a brush and India ink to express spiritual depth and beauty. *Shodô* originally came from China, but in Japan, Chinese characters (*kanji*) were combined with the Japanese syllabary (*kana*).

At first, we should begin with the square style (*kaisho*), progress to the semi-cursive style (*gyôsho*) and then move on to the more advanced cursive style (*sôsho*). That is the system devised in Japan to produce this character art. With a brush soaked in India ink, one can freely control the thickness and the tone of the characters, unlike using a pen.

I used to exhibit my calligraphy at exhibitions and received a number of prizes during my school days. I like the atmosphere in which my attention is calmly concentrated. That is how calligraphers are able to express their spirit and ideas.

Beyond the standard square style of writing (*kaisho*), writing styles can be divided into the somewhat simplified semi-cursive style (*gyôsho*) and the still more simplified cursive style (*sôsho*). Except for New Year's cards and the like, a brush is ordinarily not used for writing, but *shodô* is included in the elementary school curriculum.

*Haiku*, which are poems in 17 syllables, or *Tanka*, which are poems in 31 syllables, are very beautiful when written in semi-cursive style. They remind me of the beautiful elegance of a Japanese woman dressed in a kimono.

(MIEKO OKUMURA, Mizuho, Nagoya)

I do not like this style of Japanese writing and I have never taken classes in calligraphy. I do not appreciate this form of art very much because some famous artists are proud of their writing style which we cannot figure out. I think they are not considerate of persons who cannot read such writings. If they were to write in a readable style, it would make a better impression on the readers. I do not think that *shodô* will become more popular in the future.

(TAMAKO MORIMOTO, Tsuyama)

*Shodô* (calligraphy) is the art of fine and elegant writing. This visual art

is characteristic of countries where people use Chinese characters which can be objects of aesthetic delights. While similar to the decorative calligraphy of the West, it is more deeply rooted as a fine art form, in part because every character has meaning of itself and because of the great diversity of character shapes. As early as the 9th century, when Japanese nobles had great esteem for the culture of the Tang Dynasty, they regarded *shodô* as an important part of their education. The invention of *kana* (Japanese characters) in the 9th century encouraged the development and popularization of *shodô*.

*Shodô* is considered to be a way of cultivating the mind as well as promoting skillful penmanship. It is judged not only by its surface beauty but also by the calligrapher's character. When we were children, *shodô* (which was often called *kakikata*) was one of the few subjects taught at private schools together with *soroban*. (In this case, *shodô* is a style of writing using a brush.) These two skills were essential requirements for people living at that time.

Fine writing is an indication of the education of the calligrapher, or at least it has been so. I am not so good at writing, especially when using a brush and *sumi*. I hesitate to sign my name when requested, for example, at a wedding dinner or at the entrance of an art exhibition, especially when the signature is written with a brush. My wife is rather good, or at least, better than I, at writing because she was taught it quite thoroughly when she was a child. I often ask her to write a letter for me in certain cases when there is no one observing.

Persons with poor handwriting are now greatly benefited by the appearance of word processors. I myself am one of them. These days, I write letters or other documents with a word processor and what I must write by hand is only my signature at the end. But, at the same time, this tendency to use word processors pre

vents people from writing beautiful letters by hand. My son usually writes many theses or articles in his work and sometimes I have a chance to look at his manuscripts. I am shocked at his bad writing (resembling that of a schoolboy) and tell him he is fortunate to be living in this machine-oriented society. If he had to expose his own handwriting directly to people's eyes, he would be regarded as an uncultured person simply by his poor penmanship. (MIKHIKO YOSHIMOTO, Gifu)

I do not truly appreciate calligraphy because I cannot write characters in a beautiful style. When I was young, my father advised me to practice *shodô*, but I did not like it. I said at that time that I would be careful not to use mistaken characters and words instead of practicing writing. If I use the wrong characters, I am truly foolish—not only unskillful but ignorant. I intend to keep the word I said to my father.

A word processor helps me very much. It must be used with great care, however, for it will choose a mistaken word if I am not careful. Typed words are easier to read than skillfully written ones. By the way, my husband's brother-in-law is learning to read ancient manuscripts, called *komonjo* in Japanese. I can read only three or four words on a line.

In conclusion, I feel strongly that I was truly foolish because I did not follow my father's advice.

(MICHIKO SANO, Minami, Nagoya)

Among my school friends in the northern part of Kyoto Prefecture, there was an apprentice monk named Tôgen, who had a slim body and was well-mannered. He always had his head cleanly shaved. A friend told me that his calligraphy work brought in money.

After we graduated from school, some thirty years passed. I was working in this city. One day in a street car, by chance I noticed a monk in a black robe.

To my surprise, it was Mr. Tôgen. We were surprised and enjoyed seeing each other. He told me he was teaching English at a university and had temples in Nagoya, Kanazawa and Higashiura. Several years later, he was assigned to be the chief leader of a propagation campaign in the United States. At the send-off party, he was attired in beautiful, colorful robes. The mayor said in his congratulatory speech, "I came here imagining to see a stout, strong Zen monk, but how tender and soft you are!"

Then, about two decades ago, our South Library E. S. S. members made a one-day excursion to the countryside. On the way back to the city, we dropped in a famous Buddhist temple in Higashiura. When I went through the temple gate, I read the name of the temple, Ken-kon-in. I was indeed impressed with the calligraphy—beautiful, strong and streamlined letters. When I read the signature, I was quite surprised. It read "Tôgen". I realized this was my friend's temple and my friend had written this.

Later, he became the second highest monk of Sôjiji Temple in Kamakura and the highest monk in Sôjiji, Noto Peninsula. A few years ago, he passed away. I should have asked him for some of his calligraphy! What a pity!

(TSUYOSHI HAMADA, Minami, Nagoya)

I think that *shodô* is an art. I attended calligraphy classes for about seven years when I was child. My parents think that a smart person is a good calligrapher so my brother and I studied it. He was in kindergarten and I went to class with him and my friends every week on Saturday afternoon. It was very enjoyable.

We were fond of mischief. We painted with ink (*sumi*) on our hands, legs, clothes and faces. We had to prepare twenty sheets of paper, but I often failed to write and always turned in about ten or fifteen sheets. But the teacher was generous and kind. The hard-



est work was *seiza*. My legs became numb. I learned *shodô* and *sadô* for a long time even though I disliked *seiza*. This experience taught me that I can overcome any difficulty, but I don't like it. Maybe I'm not a good calligrapher.

(KEIKO UKAI, Minami, Nagoya)

It was when I became a second grader that I began taking calligraphy lessons near the elementary school I went to. According to my mother, it took a long time for me to be "allowed" to take lessons there. The calligraphy master was such a strict teacher that he did not want a talkative, active boy like me to disturb the other pupils, so I was sum-marily rejected at first. Since she knew that I needed disciplined training, however, mother knocked on the door of the calligraphy master again and again until he gave me permission to attend on one condition. Unless I was able to sit still and devote myself to practicing calligraphy, I would be expelled. To his surprise, I did devote myself and even got the first prize in a *shodô* contest. Through this experience, I became confident and came to believe in my ability.

Now, I do not practice *shodô* nor can I write Japanese characters using *sumi* ink as well as I used to, but the fact remains that I did a good job in calligraphy during a certain period in my early years. This is all I can say about my personal experience with calligraphy, but there are some other things I think of.

For one thing, *shodô* practice seems to be representative of one aspect of our culture: to copy the prototype of something. In a calligraphy lesson, we are expected to look at the model, called *tehon*, as carefully as possible, then write our own character which should be an imitation of the *tehon*. However hard we may try, of course, we cannot produce an exact copy, but we are praised for producing an approximation. We never think of writing in a different manner.

During lessons, we are not allowed to talk. All we can do is to ask for some detailed instruction when we cannot understand the master. As I wrote earlier, I am talkative by nature, so I found it extremely difficult to keep silent. As you may know, a large number of Japanese, especially when they are children, take *shodô* lessons during which they are allowed to talk very little. This aspect of the *shodô* lessons may have made many Japanese poor at speaking.

Last of all, about my dream. When I become old and retire from the job of teaching, I would like to take *shodô* lessons, but I wish to produce my own calligraphy. Of course, I should again learn the basics of calligraphy, but once I've learned them, I hope to produce my own creative works of calligraphy.

(TOMOYASU KIMURA, Nishi, Nagoya)

Calligraphy is called *shodô* in Japanese. This term has *dô* at the end of it, like *sadô* (tea ceremony), *kadô* (flower arrangement), *jûdô* (Japanese wrestling), *kyûdô* (Japanese archery) and so on. *Dô* literally means a way or road. In this case, I think, it indicates the right way, the proper method, principle or art.

Calligraphy was one of the most important subjects at school. My late father went to school for only eight years, but his handwriting was far better than mine even though I went to school for twice as long. The handwriting of my mother was equal to his although her school education was seven years longer than his. Calligraphy was practiced very intensively at primary school.

For a calligraphy lesson, children have to bring everything they need for the class, including an ink stick, an ink stone, writing brushes and a paperweight. When I was in the fifth grade of primary school, one of my classmates brought a small bottle containing liquid ink. She was reprimanded by the teacher for not bringing her ink stone and ink stick. The



teacher told us that calligraphy did not mean only writing but included all the preparations for it. It began with rubbing the ink stick on the ink stone. We had to sit up straight while doing this and could not speak but concentrated on moving our hand smoothly so that the end of the stick touched the surface of the stone evenly. Doing this, we became calm and then focussed our attention on the point of the brush and on writing.

A calligraphy lesson is a sort of mental training. It takes much time and patience, like other lessons of Japanese traditional arts. It takes many years for a learner to master the fundamental rules and skills. Once acquired, these skills enable one to write Japanese and Chinese letters in the correct order and to change them into the running style properly. One can even read letters written many years ago in a simplified form. Calligraphy was an essential part of our culture and its mastery was mandatory for those who wanted to be educated.

These days, though, there is rarely an opportunity to read old documents and those who can read them or who can write very well with a brush are not so highly respected. Calligraphy lessons are less and less demanded by people who use word-processors or computers. I am afraid that, someday, calligraphy will no longer be taught at school.

(NAOMI KONDO, Handa)

I was one among a number of classmates who were above average in *shodō*. It was the practice in our classroom then to display some well-written works on the wall and mine was almost always among them. By way of reference, the *shodō* we practiced then was the square style, the most basic form of Chinese characters. Other styles such as the semi-cursive and cursive were taught in more advanced levels.

As graduation from middle school was drawing near, I heard from a friend

that mastering the cursive as well as the semi-cursive styles was a necessity to becoming an adult. As I was longing to become an adult, I was very eager to master both styles. Keeping a copybook of "A Thousand Chinese Letters" at my side, I spared no effort to learn to read and write basic letters in semi-cursive and cursive styles. Some letters in the cursive style were so difficult to learn that I had to be content with only reading them and to give up trying to write them. But after some time of endeavor, I felt content with the result, finding myself able to read and write a few hundred Chinese characters. In fact, I even fancied myself to be a respectable adult already.

After leaving school, opportunities for taking up my writing brush became fewer. Caught up in a great maelstrom of denying traditional things as evil that was caused by the defeat of Japan (or, more correctly, Japanese militarism) after the end of World War II, *shodō* was one of the victims neglected by the general public. With the restoration of a peaceful society, however, some of the good traditional things have returned and *shodō* is among them.

I would like to mention about recent tendencies among some people who love *shodō*. They try to seek sophistication in their works so much that they are prone to forget the very basics of *shodō*. Some who call themselves avant-garde artists tend to give priority to aesthetics at the cost of legibility. Without legibility, *shodō* makes no sense. It is an undeniable fact that some ancient *shodō* works have lost their legibility for ordinary people, but that is an inevitable result of the flow of time.

(SHOJI SUGIMOTO, Suginami, Tokyo)\*

I have some acquaintances who are very good at calligraphy. All of them have practiced it for many years and exhibit their works a few times a year. Though I don't know exactly, it seems to me that

works of calligraphy exhibited can be classified into two groups. One is imitative, closely copying another calligrapher's work. (Almost all beginners belong to this group.) The other is creative, developing her or his own unique style.

Several years ago, I was shocked to view my friend's work at a calligraphy exhibition. There was only one big letter written on the paper, 120 cm. wide and 60 cm. long, which I managed to read. I thought it was a kind of picture with white and black, expressing her heart. Her calligraphy experience totals more than 45 years. Needless to say, her common handwriting is very beautiful and whenever I receive a letter from her I envy her good handwriting.

It is natural that good writing is better than poor writing. Albeit, when we had to decide whether or not to let our children attend *shodō-juku*, a private school for calligraphy, their father said that what is most important is the content of their writing or thinking, not their beautiful penmanship; now they need to play outside. I agreed with his opinion. As a result, partly inheriting poor penmanship from their parents, our daughters and son also have poor penmanship. (YOSHIKO TOYOTA, Kanie, Aichi)

Writing is an important means of communication. The Japanese writing system changed after the war. When I went to school before the war, we had to learn far more characters in more complicated forms than now. We were taught to write inflections of verbs quite grammatically. After the war, the Japanese government recognized the need to simplify the form of writing so that students might learn more easily. They made a list of a limited number of characters approved for general use. Characters themselves were simplified, though their original meaning and flavor were lost. Now, the inflections of verbs are no longer grammatical, but simply dependent on

phonetics. The revision may have been successful in promoting a more practical use of written Japanese, but we cannot deny that Japanese characters have lost their original style and attractiveness. Maybe the younger generation cannot read the old type of written Japanese very well and we older ones cannot get used to the new style.

Now, we live in a global age. To maintain good relationships, communication is essential. For effective communication, legibility is also required. Today, word processors are quite common and we have few chances to write letters with a brush and ink. I suppose Japanese long ago were far better calligraphers than we. We must be quite pessimistic about the future of calligraphy for, as Dr. Offner stated, calligraphy does not enhance legibility.

I am ashamed that, though I am old, I have never taken classes in calligraphy and am quite ignorant of it. Though I know my artistic appreciation is quite limited, I do recognize its positive value as an excellent art form and as one of the precious assets of Japanese art. Certainly, calligraphy is a creative art form in which one attempts to express spiritual depth and beauty by means of *kanji* and *kana* characters written with a brush and ink on Japanese paper. The Chinese characters were introduced to this country from China in about the fifth century A.D. Then, we invented two phonetic syllabaries to express Japanese more correctly. One of these syllabaries is *katakana* and the other is *hiragana*. Each of these symbols represents a single sound. Over the years, the forms of those symbols have changed and, without studying them, we cannot read them now.

Calligraphy has a long history and a precious heritage, which stimulates our interest in deepening our understanding and appreciation. Calligraphy is not easy to learn. One must practice repeatedly, following the rules faithfully. It is said

the beauty of expression (brush strokes, structure, color of *sumi*, arrangement, etc.) all make the work worthy of appreciation. Isn't it wonderful that just one stroke of a brush can cause the work to move our hearts? Though our life style has been modernized, we still like to hang a work of calligraphy by an expert or a celebrity in the alcove of our rooms.

At old people's clubs, calligraphy is the most popular subject to learn and many elderly people enjoy studying it. On the day of the First Writing of the New Year, many elementary and junior high school students enjoy writing auspicious words with a brush and ink. As an art form, calligraphy will survive and I really hope it does.

(MICHIKO KAWAMURA, Meguro, Tokyo)

I will write a little about *kana* calligraphy in which I am involved. As you know, *kana* are the original monosyllabic Japanese characters which were fashioned from simplified Chinese ideographs (*kanji*). Their origin can be traced to the 10th century. Continuing through the 11th century, this distinctive, artistic syllabary became established in the 12th century. Their aesthetic beauty has played an important role in the history of Japanese calligraphy. The so-called *onna-de* (feminine script) calligraphers have developed an expressive world of refined calligraphic beauty, adopting a continuous writing technique known as *renmen-tai* that produced beautiful flowing scripts.

Today, those who study *kana* calligraphy use classic textbooks that contain masterpieces of the great calligraphers of the Heian Period and practice *renmen-tai* (a continuous writing of *kana* characters) at the beginning. When you view *kana* works on display, you may find this form of continuous writing difficult to read, but I think that matters little if you sense some feminine or poetic beauty, a kind of picturesque aroma, exuding from them.

In recent years, *kana* calligraphy has been exhibited abroad also, in America and France, for example, and a tendency to enhance legibility is emerging among calligraphers. Needless to say, it is essential that everyone can read. I hope that legible *kana* art will be more enjoyed by many people who also appreciate its own traditional beauty.

(SADAE HASHIMOTO, Minami, Nagoya)

In olden times, it is said, *yomi*, *kaki*, *soroban*, or reading, writing and calculation were the basic studies and their importance was emphasized, but nowadays, these functions have been taken over, more or less, by machines, such as word processors and calculators, which are almost necessities for a business.

They have advantages. Letters are clear and calculators work rapidly, but I still prefer handwriting, especially when it comes to personal matters. Whenever I receive a letter written beautifully, I feel happy. Even if the writing is not so good, I still feel the warmth and personality of the writer.

I took calligraphy lessons in my youth and continued for several years. I mostly took lessons in *kana* and *rinsho*. It was very complicated and time-consuming work for this rapid modern age.

(MIDORI KODAMA, Midori, Nagoya)

In Japanese calligraphy, or *shodô*, Chinese characters, or *kanji*, Japanese syllabaries, or *kana*, including both *katakana* and *hiragana*, are all written, either alone or in various combinations to suit the requirements of our native language.

When we write Japanese vertically, we begin at the top of the right side of the page and go down. Each new line follows to the left. In some cases, we write horizontally, starting at the top left-hand side of the page and go from left to right as in English.

Not only is the vertical style easy to write, it is also considered the natural

way. The characters flow into one another, forming the basis of the art form related to Japanese calligraphy, or *shodô*, so-called *shûji*.

By virtue of the many opportunities I had to take *shûji* lessons during my school days, my calligraphy improved and was changed into calligraphy. Nowadays, most Japanese write letters or cards on their *wa-puro* (word processor) or on a *pasu-kon* (personal computer) instead of using a *fude*, or Chinese brush, and *sumi*, or Chinese ink, resulting in a deterioration of their penmanship. I am one of those who are trying to write letters and cards using the original *shodô* method in order to promote Japanese tradition. Whenever I receive greeting cards and/or letters which were typed on a *wa-puro* or a *pasu-kon* I do not receive any friendly vibes from them. I think, however, that official letters should be typewritten which makes them easy to read.

Only recently, I had an opportunity to submit my personal history in *shodô* style when applying for a new job (after already reaching retirement age) which seemed to have made an impression on the director of the company. Now it is very rare for those who write their personal history to use the *shodô* style. I have determined not to permit this traditional Japanese art to perish as long as I live. (JAIME IWAI, Owariasahi)

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#### January 30 Message (Subject #298)

*For the third theme [for the next issue of the "Echoes"] I am suggesting the names of three historic men whose lives are related to this 30th day of January. You may choose one or more of them to write an essay about. They are: Franklin Roosevelt, the 32nd president of the United States, who was born on this day in*

*1882; Adolf Hitler, who was appointed German Chancellor on this day in 1933; Mahatma Gandhi, the Indian political and religious leader, who was assassinated on this day in 1948. Each of these men affected the course of world history. What are your thoughts or memories regarding one or more of them?*

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The United States insisted that Japan withdraw from China and from its alliance with its Axis partners, but Japan refused to do either and negotiations failed. On December 8, 1941, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. Hearing the news, I was frightened, fearful of the threatening, dark future. What a foolish mistake Japan had made! We should remember that Japan had owed much to the United States, which was far stronger than we. During the war, we were manipulated to feel hostility toward them and their president, Franklin Roosevelt. Later, I came to know about him and appreciate him as a great president with a compassionate heart and strong leadership ability.

He was born into a well-to-do family and received a good education. At his school, Christian duty and responsibility to the less fortunate was emphasized and he was exhorted to enter public service. Unfortunately, at the age of 39, he was stricken with poliomyelitis. He was able to regain partial use of his paralyzed legs, slowly and painfully, over the next few years. During his illness, he developed patience and self-control and broadened his understanding of social problems. In 1929, he was elected governor of New York state. In those days, the world economy was very bad and the Wall Street crash occurred that year. When the economic depression deepened, he was willing to experiment and revealed his capability. As governor, he enacted many New Deal policies.

Then, he was nominated for the presidency and elected in 1932. When he took office, the streets were full of the unemployed and the banking system was collapsing. He firmly believed that government had a positive responsibility for the general welfare, not as a matter of charity, but as a matter of social duty. With his strong leadership, much of the basic legislation of the New Deal was enacted by Congress. Many major laws and new government agencies were approved. Among them, the TVA (Tennessee Valley Authority) which was formed to build dams, produce power, work on flood control and to promote industrial growth in that area is very famous. It is said that the early stage of the New Deal was quite successful.

He realized the importance of talking to the general public in a friendly way so that it might understand his principles and share his opinions. I still remember his famous "fireside chats". He was a warm, friendly president and a strong leader. During the Second World War, he tried to aid the Allies against the Axis to protect democracy and planned to make a world organization to stabilize the postwar world. He was reelected in 1944, the only president ever elected to four terms. He passed away in 1945. He was certainly a great president.

Now, Japan is facing a crucial situation, both domestically and internationally. In order to overcome the difficulties and to ensure a better future, we need good leaders, equal to the task and trustworthy. In order to get good leaders, we should be more concerned with politics and try to raise our standards, morally and intellectually. We should remember it was common Americans that elected Franklin Roosevelt to be their president.

(MICHIKO KAWAMURA, Meguro, Tokyo)

In January, I had a chance to travel abroad to India and was deeply impressed by their society. Here, I will comment on

that society which is full of inconsistencies and on Mahatma Gandhi who devoted his life to improve that society. Gandhi's tomb in Delhi was covered with many flowers and a great number of pious people were offering prayers in front of it.

India has been controlled continuously by other nations throughout her long history. Most notable was her subjection to the Mughal Empire. I had been expecting to find footprints of the Buddha because India was his native country, but almost all the historic sites I visited were remains of Islam and the Mughal Emperors. (At many spots sacred to Buddhism, there is no trace of historic ruins.)

Following the conquest by Islam, British domination was remarkable in her history and many traces of it are evident today. Many old hotels are English-styled and the elevators inside them are called "Lifts". "English meal" is equivalent to "Western meal". It was convenient that English was spoken in public places, such as hotels, airports and stores, but the mass of people seemed quite indifferent in regard to English. I took pains to understand their peculiar, provincial accents, though I gradually grew familiar with their English. The British way of domination was very clever. They even adopted a policy to cause the two religions, Hinduism and Islam, to be antagonistic to each other in order to prevent unity of the whole nation.

Mohandas K. Gandhi was persistently confronted with such British policies. He developed a nationwide movement for independence from Great Britain, emphasizing nonviolence, passive resistance, non-cooperation and insubordination. He was given the honorific title of "Mahatma" (Saint) and was called "Father of India". After India's independence in 1947, he exerted himself for reconciliation between Hindus and Muslims but was assassinated by a fanatic Hindu.

Traveling in India, I could not help noticing that people are generally poor,

that the country is still slowly developing and that what obstructs its growth is the religion of Hinduism and the caste system. (This system itself is derived from the religion.) I felt that people should free themselves from the bondage of that religion for their modernization. Many farsighted leaders have aimed at abolishing the caste system from of old (Buddha himself was one of them) and have failed. Gandhi was pained by the miserable living conditions of the people belonging to the lowest class and endeavored to improve their conditions but died before he could realize his aspiration. Indian society is too huge to be moved by a single great man no matter how influential he may be.

(MIKIHICO YOSHIMOTO, Gifu)

I have never met nor talked with Franklin Roosevelt or Adolf Hitler but I have seen their pictures on television. At first, I must say that my brother and I like America so we are always in agreement in regard to it, but I am sorry to say that I do not have a good feeling about Franklin Roosevelt. The reason is that I saw his picture in a newspaper during the Second World War. The caption said that his pipe was made from the bone of a Japanese killed in the war. It took my breath away at the time. I thought that the news must be mistaken, but I was greatly shocked nevertheless. Thinking about it now more calmly, I presume that it was the bone of an animal and that the Japanese newspaper's report was the result of militaristic misinformation, but I cannot forget my shock at that time. I say again, I am sorry that I received this bad impression of President Roosevelt instead of that of a man with a good heart who did not want war. I believe that America and Americans are honestly trying to do God's will.

In regard to Adolf Hitler, I hesitate to say it but we must not avoid considering a part of our history. It is easy to

criticize after-the event, but very difficult to make decisions at the time. I myself am not confident in his respect. Even if we condemn Hitler, it is fruitless. I also presume it is God's will. I must walk the way which God directs even though it is most difficult for me.

(MICHICO SANO, Minami, Nagoya)

Mohandas Gandhi was born in 1869 as the youngest son of the premier of a regional monarchy in India. When he was eighteen years old, he went to England and afterward was admitted to the bar. Then we went to South Africa when he was 23 years old and experienced how his fellow countrymen were harshly discriminated against there. He returned to his motherland and began an independence movement based on the principle of non-violence and nonresistance. He went everywhere with a simple white cloth around his waist, wearing sandals. He taught the people on their own level and worked together with them. He treated even the untouchables as sons of god. He won the independence without weapons but finally he was assassinated in 1948, when he was 78 years old. The poet, Tagore, conferred on him the title Mahatma.

His disciple, Jawaharlal Nehru's daughter, Indira Gandhi, and her son, Rajiv, were also assassinated. What a tragedy! They were willing to sacrifice their lives to save their countrymen. After the war, at the Tokyo Military Tribunal, only the Indian judge found Japan not guilty. I think it might be due to the influence of Mahatma Gandhi. Anyway, he was the greatest leader and savior of his people. I respect him!

(TSUYOSHI HAMADA, Minami, Nagoya)

Franklin Roosevelt was born in 1882 and became a politician in the United States. To my surprise, I heard that he was elected president four times. He put forth an effort to restore the economy after the Depression, put New Deal poli-

cies into practice, recognized Soviet political power, helped various countries in Europe and saved them from totalitarianism in those days. (YASUKO IZUMI, Seto)

As a person related to the 30th of January, I choose Franklin Roosevelt who was born on that day 114 years ago. Even in the years of the Pacific War, we knew about President Roosevelt in America and Prime Minister Churchill in England. More than 50 years have passed since the end of that war. Following the end of the war, the U. S. A. and Japan have been very friendly nations much longer than when they were opposed to each other. According to the *U. S. News and World Report* of 1982 (100 years after the birth of Franklin Roosevelt), he is the third most popular of all American presidents. We heard of Franklin Roosevelt's death from illness in the spring of 1945. Even at that time, I felt sorry that a great man had been lost. After a few months, the war was over and we learned, about America by and by, little by little.

Franklin Roosevelt was a promoter of liberalism. He made America a first-class power. He also proved himself very capable, showing his presidential ability not only in foreign affairs but also in domestic legislation. He put forth a great effort for economic reconstruction after the great panic in America in 1929. During his time as president, from 1933 to 1945, he was elected four times. I admire him for meeting with journalists as often as 998 times during those twelve years, whom he treated kindly. He also chose a group of university professors to be his counselors. He served his country very well and brought about industrial reconstruction. I am sure he prayed to God asking him what to do before making decisions to do those wonderful things. It is too bad that he became sick in his later years.

Although Franklin Roosevelt, as a leader of the United States, died before

the end of the war and was not able to see the good relations between America and Japan, he may be happy to know that I like my American teachers and friends who are in heaven, in America and in Japan. I hope there will never be a war between these nations whatever happens on earth. Jesus binds together the people who believe in him.

(KAZUKO TAGUCHI, Fukushima)

Once I heard an unforgettable episode about Mahatma Gandhi which became a picture clearly printed in my memory.

He was sitting on the ground, spinning cotton. To promote the cotton industry, he had prompted people to grow cotton and spin it. He himself often spun cotton. He used white cloths to cover the lower part of his body and his upper body was exposed.

Prior to his meeting with the English prime minister, he was asked by a high-ranking English official if he was not ashamed of wearing such rustic clothes. He answered, "No". On the contrary, he was proud of wearing them because they were the traditional Indian costume and he regarded them as the most appropriate garb for a formal occasion. (NAOMI KONDO, Handa)

Basho, the greatest Japanese poet, in one of his writings, quoted these wise words of Kukai, the ancient Buddhist priest: "You should not be content with following in the footsteps of your predecessors, but try to seek out what they sought." These very significant words have stayed in my mind since I first came across them dozens of years ago. Now I would like to apply them in relation to the great man I am going to write about.

In reading an article in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1966), I found that two main ideas prevailed in his activities throughout his life. "The only virtue I claim," he said, "is truth and non-violence." The article also included another



quotation: "My life is an indivisible whole and all my activities run into one another; they all have their rise in my insatiable love of mankind." Here lies the condensed essence of the thought of this great soul, in my view.

We should seek out what the great Gandhi sought throughout his whole life. He was all heart. He distinguished himself by getting to the heart of the problems he faced. He was very tenacious in seeking to attain his purpose. His great personality made everyone attracted to him. He was a genius. He has every reason to be venerated after his death.

Now I can safely say that the spirit of non-violence has taken shape in Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution that stipulates the renunciation of war, for war is nothing but violence at its worst. Thus, renouncing war means non-violence. To realize what Article 9 states must mean sharing the spiritual legacy of non-violence this great soul devoted himself to. It follows as a corollary that we should spare no effort to eliminate nuclear weapons from the whole world. This end goes well together with the creed of non-violence the Mahatma constantly advocated throughout his life.

(SHOJI SUGIMOTO, Suginami, Tokyo)

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#### February 6 Message (Subject #299)

*Last Saturday was the "season-divider" day, called setsubun, in Japan. The following day was risshun, literally meaning "start of spring". Actually, there are four "season-divider" days each year, but the term setsubun is now used only for the one at the beginning of spring which is also associated, traditionally, with the beginning of a new year. In the agricultural almanac, there are 24 seasons of about 15 days each, which are re-*

*lated to the relative position of the sun and the earth. Some of them are well known by the general public, but others are often overlooked.. Do you know, for example, what season follows risshun and on what day it begins? What do you think of these 24 seasonal divisions? In your daily life, do you ever think about them? If so, in what way or for what reason do they come to mind? I would be interested to read your comments about these 24 seasons and their place in Japanese thought in the past and present and what you think about their future.*

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The twenty-four seasons in the Japanese and Chinese calendars are rooted in the lunar calendar and related to the relative positions of the sun and the earth. Consequently, the dates of these seasons are slightly different each year. Nowadays, a great majority of people are indifferent to them. I also am not interested in them in my daily life, but I do think about them when I write cards expressing my best wishes to friends and relatives living far away during the hot or cold seasons and also inquire about their health.

These greetings should be written during a certain period. Summer greetings are called *shochû-mimai* when written before *risshû*, meaning "start of fall", and *zansho-mimai* after *risshû*. *Shochû* means the hot season and *zansho* the remainder of the summer heat. *Mimai* means in inquiry about another's health. The summer heat does not stop at *risshû*, falling on or about August 6th. It remains until the end of August or the beginning of September. One is not supposed to write summer greetings after *shosho*, meaning "end of summer heat", about August 23rd. I often forget to write summer greetings before *risshû*, so I usually write them after that. It is still hot even after "start of fall" and I am lazy and slow in writing

them. To remind myself of the deadline, I circle the "end of summer heat" day on my calendar.

Winter greetings are supposed to be written around *daikan*, meaning "great cold", about January 20th. I hardly ever write a card or letter during this season because I write New Year's greetings. I only write to those who are in mourning and to whom I could not send a New Year's card.

I regard the writing of season's greetings as a thoughtful Japanese custom. It enables me to keep up a good relationship with old friends and relatives I rarely see. Thinking about the twenty-four seasons reminds me that formerly almost all Japanese were farmers, keenly sensitive to the changes of nature, who made their farming plans precisely based on the agricultural almanac which is closely related to the twenty-four seasons.

(NAOMI KONDO, Handa)

As a composer of *haiku*, I know the seasonal words related to the seasons of *risshun*, *keichitsu*, *shunbun*, *rikka*, *geshi*, *shôsho*, *taisho*, *risshu*, *shûbun*, *rittô*, *tôji*, *shôkan* and *taikan*, but I didn't know the season that follows *risshun*. According to my lunar calendar, *usui*, rain water, comes after *risshun* and begins on February 19th or 20th. The name implies that icy water, warmed by warm air, vaporizes, ascends to the sky, turns to rain water and falls back again onto the earth. In this season, the buds of trees sprout and new leaves of grasses grow. I learned the word "rain water" for the first time. What a shame!

(TSUYOSHI HAMADA, Minami, Nagoya)

We Japanese are very sensitive to seasonal changes. One reason for this is that we have four distinct seasons. (In India, which I visited recently, for example, there are only two seasons: the rainy season and the dry season.) Another rea-

son is that we were originally an agricultural people whose work was related to seasonal changes. Appreciation of seasonal changes is vividly expressed in the famous *haiku*, "*Me-ni-wa aoba, yama hotogisu, hatsu-gatsuo*" (Fresh greenery for the eye, a cuckoo's song for the ear, and the first bonitos for the mouth). In Japan, the visual effect of serving food is important and dishware for it has to be carefully chosen—glass or bamboo-made dishes for summer and thick earthenware for winter.

In former days, we used the lunar calendar, which was inconvenient in various ways for agriculture. The system of 24 seasonal divisions was adopted to make up for the deficiency. A one-year period, from the time the sun reached the spring equinox point until the next time it reached that point (called celestial longitude), was divided into 24 parts and the 24 *sekki* were the names given those seasonal divisions. People could know the climatic changes in a year by these divisions.

As the year is divided into 24 periods, each division has about 15 days. Among these 24 *sekki*, *risshun*, *rikka*, *risshû* and *rittô* are the most widely recognized; everyone knows them. For example, we become very happy to hear the word *risshun*, feeling that spring is near at hand though the weather is still cold. The four next most widely recognized *sekki* are: *shunbun*, *geshi*, *shûbun* and *tôji*, which are all in the middle of the four major seasons. Other examples of *sekki* in spring are *usui* and *keichitsu*. The former is around February 19th when ice and snow begin to thaw and rainwater gets warm. The latter is around March 6th, when insects and worms which have been hibernating, begin to move. In addition to these 24 *sekki*, we have *zassetsu*, or other kinds of *sekki*, such as *setsubun* or *hachi-ya*, which are also very familiar to us. These various kinds of *sekki*, or seasonal divisions, have had special

meaning and sentiment for us. Hearing the names of these *sekki*, we people belonging to the older generation, are filled with deep emotion, but young people today seem to have no special sentiment for them.

In regard to the Japanese sensitivity to seasons, much greater attention should be paid to *saijiki*. This is a beautiful illustrated glossary of words with seasonal connotations regarding Japan's traditional, annual events, animals, natural phenomena and so on. All the words and phrases are exemplified by simple *haiku* poems and arranged according to the well-defined four seasons. The names of the 24 *sekki* are of course, the most important element of *saijiki* due to the circumstances mentioned above.

(MIKIHICO YOSHIMOTO, Gifu)

I will write about the names of the 24 seasons and their meanings.

January: 1) *shōkan*= little cold; 2) *daikan*= very cold. February: 3) *risshun*= beginning of spring; 4) *usui*= rain water. March: 5) *keichitsu*= insects/worms ending their hibernation; 6) *shunbun*= vernal equinox. April: 7) *seimei*= purity; 8) *koku-u*= grain rain. May: 9) *rikka*= beginning of summer; 10) *shōman*= little filling. June: 11) *bō-shu*= plant having an ear; 12) *geshi* summer solstice. July: 13) *shōsho*= little hot; 14) *taisho*= very hot. August: 15) *risshū*= beginning of autumn; 16) *shosho*= hot place. September: 17) *hakuro*= white dew; 18) *shūbun*= autumnal equinox. October: 19) *kanro*= cold dew; 20) *sōkō*= frost descent. November: 21) *rittō*= beginning of winter; 22) *shō-setsu*= little snow. December: 23) *tai-setsu*= much snow; 24) *tōji*= winter solstice.

This theme suggested by Dr. Offner was very helpful in stimulating me to add to my knowledge. I confirmed the names and their meanings because I did not know some of them. I marvel that they have come from China. I looked them up in the *Shinjigen*, a Chinese-Japanese dic-

tionary I use in composing Chinese poems. I felt deeply that Japanese should become more friendly and share the love of God with the Chinese. We can view our old history, for example, by reading the *Manyōshū* which was greatly influenced by China. (MICHICO SANO, Minami, Nagoya)

I did not know about the 24 seasonal divisions until I read a compendium of seasonal words for *haiku* poets some thirty years ago. I remember I was deeply impressed by the wisdom of the ancestors who devised such a clever system of dividing the whole year. The idea of the 24 seasons comes from the agricultural community whose schedule necessitates correspondence with the constant change in the climate throughout the whole year. It is quite natural that the 24 seasons correspond exactly to the ecliptic longitudes showing the places of the sun on its theoretical orbit.

The 24 seasons might have originally reflected public feelings toward the natural climate, but as modern civilization and urbanization progressed, some of the words have deviated from the original meanings. For example, we see the word *risshun*, or start of spring, on February 3rd in the midst of a usually frigid winter, though it immediately follows the coldest season called *daikan*. We, today's urbanites, tend to forget the 24 seasons in our daily lives and with reason. As for me, I am no exception. It is only when I try to compose a *haiku* poem that I become aware of the 24 seasons. As you know, every *haiku* poem in its traditional form has to include a word related to the 24 seasons. Then I realize that the 24 seasons have become a precious legend that I think will go down in the history of Japanese culture.

(SHOJI SUGIMOTO, Suginami, Tokyo)

To tell the truth, I didn't know at all that there were 24 seasonal divisions of about 15 days each until Dr. Offner sug-

gested this theme. Consulting the *Kojien*, my big dictionary, I found out the 24 names of the seasons. Except for six of them, the names are familiar to me, but I didn't know they were names of seasons. When I asked my husband if he knew about them, he proudly replied that that was a matter of common sense. Nevertheless, he could name only eleven of them.

Among the names, there is no doubt about which is his favorite. About March 6th, every year, looking pleased, he says, "Today is *keichitsu*, (literally meaning worms crawling up out of the earth after a winter's sleep). What an excellent expression we have (*iiete myô da*)!! Not only worms, but all of us feel ready to move actively these days of the year. Don't you?" He never misses making this declaration because on this day we can easily read or hear the word *keichitsu* in the newspaper or on television or radio.

(YOSHIKO TOYOTA, Kanie, Aichi)

*Risshun* begins on February 4th or 5th every year according to the solar calendar in Japan. This means that spring comes at the beginning of these 24 seasonal divisions. It is difficult for us to remember each of the 24 seasonal names. I think it is quite unnecessary for modern people to remember them, apart from specialists. I have never thought about them in my daily life. I only know about them by means of newspapers or television newscasts. To my regret, I have no interest in *risshun* or the *mame-maki* ceremony even though it is one of the traditional ceremonies in Japan.

(TAMAKO MORIMOTO, Tsuyama)

As everyone knows, there are four seasons in a year, but I thought that March 1st was the beginning of spring. At the same time, I had heard the word *risshun* on February 4th, which means "start of spring". It was unbelievable to me, for February is the coldest month in the whole year. But I notice that there

are some warm days between some cold days. "Three cold days and a few warm days after *risshun*", and gradually real spring comes. When a year is divided this way, *rikka*, start of summer, falls on May 5, *risshun*, start of autumn, on August 7 and *rittô*, start of winter, on November 7, following *risshun*. Such a division may be more convenient to Japanese farmers, but these dates are about three weeks earlier than the four seasons of three months each. If we divide the seasons into 24 divisions, *usui* comes after *risshun*, I think. I am sorry, I cannot tell all the names after that, except for *keichitsu* and *seimei* until *rikka*. If I knew all the names of the 24 seasons, I would feel the subtle seasonal changes more.

I would rather divide one month into two halves, about 15 days each, for I can receive my annuity to support myself on the 15th of the months with even numbers: February, April, June, August, October and December. But it is true that the division of one year into 24 seasonal divisions made it more convenient for Japanese farmers to decide the dates for sowing and reaping. It will also help us to understand the reason for the changeable weather and to love the nature which God created. So these 24 seasonal divisions should be kept by Japanese people as an incorporeal legacy of our ancestors with their long experience.

1) If winter comes, spring cannot be far behind. 2) Summer is drawing near, green leaves are growing in the field, on the mountain. 3) We don't know when autumn comes, but we are surprised at the windfall.

(KAZUKO TAGUCHI, Fukushima)

When I listened to this message, I could not answer the first question with the word *usui*, one of the seasonal divisions, so I took the almanac from my bookshelf and checked it out. I found that I knew 18 names out of the 24. I learned some of them through television and

some of them from my parents. I think I perceive the seasonal changes of weather, atmosphere and temperature by those names even if they cannot be seen or felt. *Risshû*, start of autumn, *tôji*, winter solstice, also stimulate some expectation of a change of season. There is an old saying that heat and cold will last until the equinoctial week, *atsusa samusa mo higan made*, in Japanese. I am now waiting for the equinoctial week which will bring moderate and comfortable temperatures.

(MICHIKO NIWA, Shôwa, Nagoya)

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#### February13 Message (Subject #300)

*Probably the most well-known kabuki drama which has maintained its popularity over the years is that called chûshingura, in which 47 masterless warriors, or rônin, literally meaning "men on the waves", avenge the death of their lord by killing his adversary and taking his head to their lord's grave to console his soul, after which they all committed suicide. This drama exhibits many characteristic aspects of Japanese culture and traditional mentality—including the emphasis on proper decorum, concern for face and the honor of one's leader or group, loyalty, discipline, the endorsement of vengeance and the approval of suicide. I would be interested in reading your impressions of this drama and its influence in Japanese history. Have you seen it performed? Do you approve of its theme and the actions of its heroes? Does it continue to attract and impress young people today as it did in prewar days and will it continue to be a popular drama in the future?*

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Every year when December rolls around, many television stations air the *chûshingura* drama, no doubt because it draws many viewers. It is also performed in many theaters and always attracts a large audience.

About sixty years ago, I stayed in Tokyo for a year. Then I thought visiting the Sengakuji Temple was a must and one day, I visited it. In the gloomy inner area, there were 47 warriors' mossy graves surrounded by big old trees. To my surprise, much incense was being offered, sending huge columns of smoke in the air.

Now I live in Minami-ku in Nagoya. It is said that Japan's first movie studio was established in our town about 70 years ago and the first movie they made was *chûshingura*. Near my home, there is a public park with a small wooden bridge which was selected for the location.

Many Japanese have a *hangan-biiki* feeling that implies sympathy for the loser, so I think this story will never disappear from Japanese minds.

(TSUYOSHI HAMADA, Minami, Nagoya)

When I was a student, I went to the Misono-za to see kabuki, which included *chûshingura*, because we were taught by Dr. Fujino who received his doctorate for his research on kabuki. For that reason, at that time, I saw the *chûshingura* drama many times. I thought of it only as a story without a deep meaning, but I enjoyed the performances and thought the performers played their parts well.

I presume young people will not understand this concept of revenge and give up their lives. I myself feel that way. I am selfish. I may hesitate to give my internal organs for my husband if it means I must die. I have given notice to donate my corneas to an eye bank and am thinking about donating my body after I die, but *chûshingura* is completely different.

This drama will continue in the future, but only as a dramatic performance to be enjoyed and the story has become a

kind of legend. Young people will not judge that it is good or bad and not think about following or not following its example. It makes no difference to me if the drama continues or fades with time.

(MICHIKO SANO, Minami, Nagoya)

In December of last year, I happened to watch most of the TV series drama, *Genroku Chûshingura*, written by a celebrated playwright, Mayama Seika. It was a play in six acts. I saw about four of them, including the first and last ones. Everything went according to the script, the outline of which is common knowledge among us. Watching the drama led me to reaffirm what I already knew.

However strange it may seem, I do not think that the drama made a deep impression on me. For one thing, I am far from a kabuki-goer. I am, probably by nature, unwilling to go in for kabuki plays. In fact, I have gone to a kabuki play only two or three times in my life. I do not agree with the pomposity which prevails in the traditional plays.

For another thing, I have not been infatuated with the drama. I have been, and am, rather a cool outsider. I learned a lesson from what another kind of infatuation brought about—the infatuation which the wartime leaders of this nation adroitly inspired in the populace in the days before and during World War II. They made full use of such elements as Dr. Offner noted in his message to tout ultra-nationalism. They connected those elements of *chûshingura* with the spirit of the then ultra-nationalism.

It is really surprising that the *chûshingura* drama continues to survive over these many years, half a century after the war, functioning as a stimulant to attract many people and strengthening its established reputation as a national favorite kabuki play. It must contain something that has taken root deeply in the mentality of the Japanese people.

(SHOJI SUGIMOTO, Suginami, Tokyo)

*Chûshingura* is a drama written in the mid-eighteenth century, first for *ningô-jôruri* (puppet theater) and then adapted to kabuki. It has been regarded as one of the best dramas. The main theme is loyalty and it has been highly approved by Japanese of all kinds from the beginning. A great number of movies and television dramas have been made from this drama by many famous directors in which numerous shining movie stars have acted. They always attract a large Japanese audience and bring profit to the filming business.

This drama is based on a historical event that happened in the *samurai* (warrior) society during the feudal Edo Period. The Japanese feudal system was like a solid pyramid with the *shôgun* at the top. Its structure was beneficial for the ruler who dominated his people with numberless rules and laws. In this extremely regimented society, people were obliged to think about duty, order, honor and discipline. A *samurai* especially thought of keeping his face and honor. The honor of his master was his greatest concern and loyalty was the most important virtue. For this sake he sacrificed even his own life and his family's lives. His attitude was supported by all Japanese living in this small isolated society.

The Meiji Restoration drastically changed the political and social systems, but the mentality of the Japanese did not change over night. It continued from generation to generation. I myself understand the sense of this tragedy. I have sympathy with the forty-seven masterless warriors. If I had lived in the Edo Period, I would have respected them and cried for them when they had fulfilled their calculated plan.

Now I live in a democratic society two and a half centuries after *chûshingura* was written. From my present viewpoint, this drama is nonsense. The warriors are stupid and their deeds are ridiculous. This drama is a product of the rig-

id society where people were forced to live with a narrow perspective. They hung on to the present and the past and had no idea about the future. If they had thought of the future of the children and vassals of their adversary, they would not have killed him. If the social code had been a little looser and they had had a little wider perspective, they would not have needed to kill themselves.

The last war in which Japan was defeated changed the Japanese once again and the bursting of the economic bubble caused them to think differently than before. They do not care so much about loyalty. I do not think this drama will appeal to young people in the future as it did in the past. (NAOMI KONDO, Handa)

*Chûshingura* is a very interesting topic and it reminds me of many things.

As a child, I really loved heroic dramas, such as *Kurama Tengu* and *Akado Suzunosuke*, in which the hero defeated his enemies for the sake of justice. I came to believe that the right was always the winner and that the right was always distinguishable from the wrong. In the same way, I felt happy to see the 47 *rônin* of the Asano Clan kill their adversary, Kira Kôzukenosuke.

When I began to teach at Nishio High School, however, I found some of my students from Kira hated *Chûshingura* for people in their town still respected their lord Kira, who is always treated as if he were a most disgraceful person. One student even said she had never seen any drama or play of *Chûshingura*.

It was not until this little incident that I noticed a clear difference in estimation of the same historical figure. It taught me a lesson in the importance of viewing history and historical figures with critical eyes. It may suggest that we have been much influenced by television when it comes to our points of view.

(TOMOYASU KIMURA, Nishi, Nagoya)

*Chûshingura* is the story of 47 *Akô-rôshi* (masterless warriors of Akô) who took Asano Takumi (their master)'s revenge upon Kira Kôzuke (who was unkind to Asano) in the 18th century. This drama has been repeatedly presented on the stage of *yoruri* or kabuki and has also been recited in *kôdan* for a long time. *Chûshingura* is very popular among Japanese and it is often said that the performance of this drama always makes a hit no matter how bad times may be. Why does this story of feudal days enjoy widespread popularity even today?

What accounts for the popularity of the story is the loyalty of the 47 *rôshi* to their lord and the tragic bravery seen in their death. These actions of the *rôshi* were based on *bushidô*, the feudal-military Japanese code of behavior. Formulated in the Edo Era with come Confucian ideas as its philosophical foundation, *bushidô* puts special emphasis on the *bushi*'s loyalty to his lord. It maintained, among other things, that *bushi* must serve his lord and his country at the risk of his life. "*Bushidô* is a way of dying" is a famous line from *Hagakure* ("In the Shadow of Leaves"), a book on *bushidô* written in the middle of the Edo Era. Young people today may say that *bushidô* is a holdover from the feudal times and nothing but an absurd standard of conduct. But *bushidô*, as behavioral ethics and as practical morality, flourished among military men until the end of the last war. Beyond that, the spirit it fostered somehow survives in the business world to the present day. Loyalty to business organizations and the total involvement of employees in their work are highly esteemed.

The most impressive element in the story of *Chûshingura* is the *rôshi*'s death after their success in revenge. They were permitted to commit *seppuku*, or suicide by self-embowment. Suicide is regarded as sin in the West. In Japan, however, suicide is not always condemned but is often looked considered an acceptable



way of apologizing for one's grave error, shouldering full responsibility or showing one's loyalty, for example. Often called *hara-kiri* in the West, *seppuku* was the death penalty to which high-ranking *bushi* were condemned for crimes of great gravity. It was considered to be a less disgraceful punishment than beheading. At the end of the last war, several generals committed *seppuku*, though they were not ordered to do so.

The 47 *rôshi*'s tombs are at Sengaku-ji in Tokyo. Many people offer flowers and incense sticks at their tombs everyday even now. This fact indicates people's respect and grief for the *rôshi*'s faithfulness unto death.

Kira Kôzuke was a feudal lord of Kira-chô in Aichi Prefecture. He is recognized for his good administration in the area even today. People of Akô-shi (the native place of the *rôshi*) and Kira-chô recently began to cultivate mutual friendship, getting over the enmity which has continued for 300 years between them. The passage of time sweeps away everything. (MIKIHICO YOSHIMOTO, Gifu)

I saw *Chûshingura* performed a few years ago when a director invited us to see it in Himeji City in Hyôgo Prefecture, which is the neighbor of Okayama Prefecture. I do not approve of its theme or of the actions of its heroes. There should not be revenge among human beings. I hope that such dramas as *Chûshingura* are not performed anywhere after this. *Chûshingura* exerts a bad influence on education and morality. It is against the will of God as revealed in Jesus Christ.

(TAMAKO MORIMOTO, Tsuyama)

First, I must confess that I have never seen the kabuki drama, *Chûshingura*, but I read about it in a storybook many years ago.

The 47 Akô *rônin* forced themselves into the house of their adversary named Kira Kôzuke nosuke and avenged their

lord's death by killing him on December 14, 1702. It was because Kira Kôzuke nosuke had offended Asano Takumi, the *rônin*'s lord, who immediately exploded with anger without discerning the time and place. This tragedy ended with the suicide of these 47 masterless warriors. It seems to have been considered virtuous to have been loyal to their dead master at the sacrifice of their families and their own lives to take revenge. And Asano Takumi, their lord, seemed to be happy in fact, before and during the war, these men used to be praised highly without hesitation..

However, from the Christian viewpoint, it is not God's will to kill a man even though he is an enemy. The Bible tells us "Never take revenge, my friend, but instead let God's anger do it." To commit suicide also was wrong. Although they were not so happy and experienced a difficult time after the death of their lord's enemy, they should have kept living. This drama attracted and impressed young people for a long time and misled them into taking revenge or into wars between people and nations. The drama may be continued to be performed, but we should not praise the 47 *rônin* as heroes. We should feel sympathy for them who were involved in their lord's misfortune.

(KAZUKO TAGUCHI, Fukushima)

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### February 20 Message (Subject 301)

*A bank is a business establishment for receiving, keeping or lending money. Banks and the banking business have been in the news recently. A Japanese bank was ordered to close in the United States because of its failure to abide by the law and the so-called jûsen problem in Japan continues to provoke controversy. The subject I am suggesting this*

week for "Daily Word" Echoes is "Banks". You may give your opinion regarding the *jûsen* problem or simply tell of your experience with banks. How often do you go to the bank? for what purpose? Are you happy with the service? Do you have any suggestions for improving the service? Do you often use the automatic tellers? Have you ever borrowed money from a bank? According to the American comedian, Bob Hope, "A bank is a place that will lend you money if you can prove that you don't need it." And the American poet, Robert Frost, wrote: "A bank is a place where they lend you an umbrella in fair weather and ask for it back again when it begins to rain."

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I go to the bank once a month, but a bank employee comes to our office once a week so it is very convenient for us to use the bank. All the members of our family use the bank for charges of gas, water, electricity, telephone, shopping at department stores, taxes and so on. These bills are paid automatically by the bank, even if we forget about them. It saves us much trouble. I presume that the other party also finds it convenient to use that same system.

I do not agree with the recent government's position related to the *jûsen* problem. I want our taxes to be used for welfare. If they are, I will happily pay more taxes. I feel that Japanese are being reprovved now. I told a friend previously that we were haughty so I was frightened when the economy failed.

I believe in God's love. Therefore, we must not chase only benefit for ourselves but pray and act on behalf of others. Then, God will give us truly happy lives. (MICHIKO SANO, Minami, Nagoya)

The phone was ringing. I picked up the receiver: "Hello". Then I heard a young

man's voice: "I've lost my credit card." "I'm sorry, but you have the wrong number," I said. We sometimes receive this kind of phone call. My husband once asked the person who said the same thing what number he had dialed. The number was ours, but he found out that the person intended to call a bank. It seems our phone number resembles that of a bank branch.

It must be an urgent matter for a person to tell that bank that he or she has lost a credit card. Although I have not had such an experience, my daughter once lost hers. She immediately told the bank and they swiftly took the proper steps so that no one else could use the card. I was relieved to know that she did not suffer any loss at that time.

I once had an uncomfortable experience when I used an automatic teller. I was very surprised when I finished using it and turned around to find a man standing very close to me, as if he had been watching my operation. I see some people keep a certain distance from the person using the machine when they are standing in a line. I, too, do so. Wouldn't it be nice if everyone did so?

(MACHIKO HORI, Naka, Nagoya)

I keep a little money in the bank located near our house. The young girl who sits at the counter is kind and well-mannered to us customers. She kindly tells us how to handle a small sum of money. She handles money like a machine. When I deposit money in the bank, she presents me with a large paper bag which is filled with some kinds of domestic goods. It is unpleasant when I have been kept waiting over twenty minutes. I have not experienced borrowing money from a bank.

*Jûsen* is the abbreviation of *jûtaku kinyû senmon kaisha* in Japanese. It is "Housing Finance Special Corporation" in English. *Jûsen* is the corporation that lent money unwisely. I have little knowledge regarding banks and *jûsen*.

(TAMAKO MORIMOTO, Tsuyama)

Housing loan banks (*jûsen*) became bankrupt. Usually, each company has its own responsibility regarding its management. If it becomes bankrupt, it has to take responsibility for what it has done.

According to the newspaper, however, the government decided to collect supplementary taxes from citizens in order to help the housing loan companies. Money from the taxes is going to be appropriated for that purpose. As far as I have learned from the newspaper, most Japanese people are angry at that decision. Some say that we had better give money from taxes to the victims of the Great Hanshin Earthquake. Others say that we they would rather spend ¥10,000 for their living expenses rather than giving it to the housing loan banks.

From what I hear, after officials in the Finance Ministry retire from the ministry, they get jobs at banks through appointments by orders from the top. Those who get jobs at housing loan banks are called "billionaires to the housing loan banks". It is said at least five officials are high taxpayers and their annual income is over ¥10,000,000.

Judging from these facts, the retired officials at the Finance Ministry are supported by the housing loan banks. The government wants to help organizations which bring advantages to the officials. It is terrible to use taxes from the people to help the companies in bankruptcy. If taxes are used to help them, the government should tell the nation how it will distribute the money.

(HIROMI FURUTA, Kita, Nagoya)

During my short stay in Toronto, I accompanied my friend when she went shopping at an elegant boutique. She purchased a fancy cape with fox fur attached to the collar for 870 Canadian dollars (67,900 yen). In addition, she paid two different sales taxes of 15 percent, bringing the total to about 1,000 Canadian dollars (78,000 yen).

I heard there that the Canadian government paid a tax refund to any tourist who claimed it. On behalf of my friend, I got a pamphlet, filled out an application form and mailed it to the Canadian Revenue Bureau. She received a cheque from Canada six weeks later indicating that her tax rebate was 61 Canadian dollars (4,760 yen). She was happy about it.

I went to her bank with her and asked a teller to pay her the money. He said that she had to pay ¥2,040 to her Japanese bank and \$30.55 (Canadian) to the Canadian bank as commission fees, so the remainder would be about ¥300. My friend was upset to hear that and became more angry at the sullen face of the teller and his blunt way of speaking.

Another friend who paid \$2,300 (Canadian) (¥179,400) for the goods she purchased was supposed to get back about ¥7,500 as her tax refund, but she got only about ¥3,000 after the commission fees were taken for both banks. If both of my friends had applied for it together as one person, they could have saved the commission fees and have received about ¥4,500 more.

I think that the bank is a place that takes rake-offs from its customers.

(NAOMI KONDO, Handa)

I have been engaged in business for about five decades and have learned many things. My fundamental rule is not to easily believe good news. I have seen many customers who went bankrupt because they dreamed of good news.

During the "bubble age", my eldest son strongly recommended moving to a new, larger office in a better part of the city, but I refused.

Last year, my daughter planned to build a new house on my land and wanted to borrow some money from the housing loan corporation. Afterward, we learned that the agent bank arrogantly demanded the new house and land as securities. The

land is not my daughter's. The value of the new house and the land would be almost three times that of the loan. The catch-phrase of the corporation was "pleasant housing plan", but these things made me quite unpleasant, so I persuaded my daughter to retract her application to the corporation.

Recently, the housing loan problem has become the subject of much controversy. The government, the bankers and the borrowers all had big dreams of pie in the sky. Those who should shoulder the responsibility are the government, banks and borrowers concerned.

(TSUYOSHI HAMADA, Minami, Nagoya)

I always try to view the NHK commentary on the latest issues of the day which begins at 10:30. Fortunately, I heard the observations of two famous people: Katsuto Uchibashi, a critic, and Noriko Konno, of the research center of a securities firm. While listening to Mr. Uchibashi, I realized the discrepancy in the government's attitude in regard to two major problems: relief measures for the victims of the Great Hanshin Earthquake and ways to solve the so-called *jusen* problem. Mr. Uchibashi pointed out that the Murayama government decided not to use any government funds to save individual households from a miserable situation while the same government decided to use part of the increased taxes to help the failed housing loan corporations. Aren't those companies involved in the *jusen* problem in the private sector? The government seems to have given special consideration to the *jusen*, but that special consideration has not been clarified sufficiently to convince the general public.

Last night, another commentary was given by a quiet but very persuasive woman. She explained how the whole nation should support the government's plan by agreeing to the increased taxes. She said it is hard to object to the proposi-

tion that the *jusen* problem be seen from the viewpoint of those who have to pay taxes as well as from those who must make decisions about the best use of government funds, but she went on to say that the paying of increased taxes would be beneficial to the whole nation in the long run. Ms. Konno, however, hastened to add that we must not forget the necessity of reviewing what we have taken for granted: land is the safest insurance against failure to pay back loans. We have found it easy to borrow money using land as a security, but what if a young businessman who wants to start a new business has no land? In the sluggish economy of present-day Japan, other things should be used as security.

There were several things I couldn't understand clearly, but I was under the impression that both people encouraged us, the general public, to give serious thought to this biggest issue of the day.

Now I am expected to express my own opinion on the issue. Having seen how our government has dealt with problems such as the Hanshin Earthquake, the Aum Shinrikyô subway sarin case and the *jusen*, I have learned that it takes an enormous amount of time to come to a conclusion, so we shouldn't depend too much on the results of the debates in the Diet. We should see what we ourselves can do as citizens of this nation. Secondly, we tend to think such big issues are out of our control and that we cannot do anything substantial. The problem itself may be too much, but we should think seriously about it as our own problem. It is now pointed out that a big earthquake had been predicted in the Kobe area but nothing was done about it just because they had never had any big earthquake. The Aum Shinrikyô had already been notorious for its strange rituals, but almost nothing was done to question the credibility of their "faith" because few people had been involved in such a scrutiny. And many people must have noticed

a great drop in the price of land after the collapse of the "bubble economy" but land continued to be used as security just because it had been considered as the safest insurance for a long time.

These days, I sometimes ask my students why they study English. Many students may answer, "English may be useful in the future", but I am very doubtful about their belief. Do they really think so? I am afraid they have said so just because their parents or teachers have told them so. If they were able to think of it on their own, they would surely study English much harder.

(TOMOYASU KIMURA, Nishi, Nagoya)

There has been no such time as today when banking concerns aroused such public controversy. Now even the cabinet itself is in danger of falling, being subject to the influence of the so-called *jûsen* problem. *Jûsen* is an abbreviation of banking concerns specializing in providing financing for housing. The banking concerns borrowed much money from bigger banks (called *botai-kô*) and lent it to companies (debtors) which required it for housing. In conjunction with the bursting of the so-called "bubble", land prices began to fall and *jûsen* became incapable of collecting loans from the debtors. It is said that some debtors are something like *yakuza* and have no intention of paying back the money even though they have the means. If we leave the matter as it is, it is said, most of the *jûsen* will be brought to ruin.

At this point, public opinion is divided. One opinion is that we should relieve the *jûsen* using public funds (which, of course, come from our taxes) because their bankruptcy will cause a sense of unease in the financial world and the prestige of Japan will suffer severely as a result. The government took this position and prepared a budget in line with it. The other opinion is that we need not relieve them and should leave the matter in

their own hands because there are no depositors at all as is the case with regular banks.

Regarding this problem, we are inevitably led to consider where the responsibility lies for the present situation. Needless to say, the responsibility lies with the debtors and *jûsen* in the first place. But now, the attack is mainly directed against the *botai-kô* (banks) which lent the money to *jûsen* without a due sense of responsibility and to the Finance Ministry which neglected their duties to take the lead and then to let the matter alone. People are leveling caustic criticism at the policy of *botai-kô* (banks) in particular. It is well known that bank clerks are highly paid. (It is said that their salaries are one and a half times that of other company employees.) Today, interest on a deposit is extremely low and banks are making much money from their business. Therefore, people insist that the banks should give up their profits for *jûsen* in order to lighten the tax burden.

Another related party responsible for the serious state of affairs is the Finance Ministry. As a retired public employee, I fully recognize the limits of leadership by government offices, but the lack of policies of the Finance Ministry at this time cannot be justified. If the Ministry had given more appropriate guidance to the banking concerns at the proper time, we could have avoided the present difficulty. The government is planning to ram the bill through the Diet. Chief Cabinet Secretary Kajiyama said: "People's discontent is preferable to uneasy finance." I urge the government to reconsider this kind of thinking. Otherwise, they will soon lose the broad support of the people.

(MIKIHICO YOSHIMOTO, Gifu)

By definition, a bank is a business establishment for receiving, keeping or lending money. However, as a matter of

fact, it borrows money from savers in general or the Bank of Japan at rates of about 0.5 percent and lends money to the borrowers at rates of more than 3 percent. According to a postcard from CARD Co., Ltd., an affiliate of a bank, it lends, surprisingly enough, at the rate of 27.8 percent.

On the other hand, many aged people who have retired from their company and are living on a pension and interest from their savings, are suffering from the low interest rates. Speaking of the banks, they failed to collect debts which were lent to reckless borrowers due to their own mismanagement. Subsequently, the banks are trying to shift their responsibility of uncollectable debts to the weak people suffering from the low interest rates under the name of a monetary panic.

Come to think of it, we cannot help thinking that a bank is a business establishment that "sides with the strong and crushes the weak", that "encourages the evil and punishes the good."

(HARUJI FUKUMI, Minami, Nagoya)

The *jûsen* problem has been much discussed in the newspapers and on TV lately. *Jûsen*, housing loan companies, made bad loans. That was the beginning of this trouble. I also don't understand why taxpayers in Japan must shoulder as much as 685 billion yen to aid the *jûsen*, which were mismanaged. I think it was due to the changeable business conditions, but aiding the *jûsen* is different from helping hungry people.

I began depositing money in the Kôgyô Ginkô two years after I began teaching school in Fukushima Prefecture in 1964. I continued to save and deposit money, little by little along with interest, in the same bank for about 18 years, until I moved to where I am living now. During those years, this bank served me with boxes of tissue, towels and cupid dolls sometimes. When I bought this two room dining-kitchen-bathroom apartment

19 years ago, I didn't have enough money in the bank to pay for it. My aunt had left us some money and this legacy plus my own money enabled me to buy it. Fortunately, I have never borrowed money from the bank.

Once on a payday just before my resignation, a clerk from the Fukushima Bank came to our school and advised me to open an account in his bank. Since that time, my annuities are paid into that bank every other month. I can withdraw money with a little interest when I need it for my daily life. My gas, electricity, telephone and NHK bills are all paid through the bank. It is a great help that I don't have to go from place to place to pay them.

I think that what Robert Frost said is very true: "A bank is a place where they lend you an umbrella in fair weather and ask for it back again when it begins to rain." Money is important. If I have money to spare, I would deposit it in the bank and not bury it in the ground [as the foolish servant did in Jesus' parable in Matthew 25].

(KAZUKO TAGUCHI, Fukushima)

I seldom go to a bank. Instead, twice a week a bank worker regularly comes to our place. At that time, both business and private financial transactions are handled. They usually bring small tokens of appreciation such as a box of tissue paper, a roll of saran wrap, cosmetic cotton and the like. We spend a short time over a cup of tea. The only drawback is that just when we become familiar with the worker, he will be transferred to another branch or section. It seems the workers remain in the same area for two or three years at the longest. (MIDORI KODAMA, Midori, Nagoya)

Among the 21 writers of the 60 essays in this issue are three first-timers. We welcome them and hope they and the "old-timers" will continue to write. (C. O.)