

# "Daily Word" Echoes

P.O Box 30, Moriyama Post Office, Nagoya 463 Tel. (052)794-6422  
March 29, 1998 Number 59 ¥200

(Essays submitted by listeners/readers on themes of "Daily Word" messages between December 2, 1997 and January 6, 1998. Corrected and edited by Clark Offner.)

\*\*\*\*\*

## December 2 Message (Theme #338)

*The suggested theme is: traditions, thoughts, memories related to harvest time or Thanksgiving Day.*

\*\*\*\*\*

This autumn I found it difficult to understand why people were not so happy to learn that the nation enjoyed another bumper crop of rice. The rice glut posed the question of what should be done with the excess rice. Common sense dictates that a glut of food somewhere should be used to make up for the lack of food in other places where people desperately need it. In reality, however, this doesn't work. I wonder why. Isn't there an international organization to balance such disparities? This is the big question that this year's rice harvest has raised in my mind. What is the meaning of a "borderless economy"?

(SHOJI SUGIMOTO, Suginami, Tokyo)

When I was in primary school, I spent two years in a small town near a village. It was a very important time in my life. I would not know anything about harvest time or about how our foods are grown if I only lived in the city.

Our school held classes until noon during two weeks at harvest time when most of my friends helped their parents

on their farms. I told my mother about it with great surprise since it was my first such experience. She told me that I had a happier life than those friends. I could not understand her meaning at that time, but I am very thankful for my happiness now.

(MICHIKO SANO, Minami, Nagoya)

November 23rd is Labor Thanksgiving Day. It is a day set apart to recognize the importance of labor, and on this day we express our gratitude to the working people. I hear that the fourth Thursday of November is Thanksgiving Day in the United States and that turkeys and pies are served at dinners on that day. It was in 1948 that our Labor Thanksgiving Day was established, but before that, during my childhood, this day was called Niinamesai, the Harvest Festival held in the Imperial Palace. That was the day when the Emperor dedicated the newly-harvested rice to *tenjin-chigi*, the gods of heaven and earth, and ate the rice for the first time in that season. Therefore, originally this was a day of thanksgiving to the gods or to nature that granted a good harvest. In our childhood, we were taught that, when we eat rice, we should think of the people who raised it, but city-dwellers today have no particular celebration; most of them spend the day just resting.

As the Japanese economy has grown stronger, the Japanese people have become known the world over as hard workers. However, this perception of Japan

often includes negative nuances, including the idea that Japanese are simply "economic animals" pursuing profit above all else. We Japanese have been engaged for more than two thousand years in a system of agriculture centered on rice cultivation. If the farmers did not put much effort into their work, they could not support themselves. It is probably from this that the custom of working hard arose.

It was through so-called *arbeit* in my student days that I recognized the importance and difficulty of labor, especially physical labor. I participated in the *Jidai-matsuri* parade in Kyoto dressed like a samurai and marched down the streets for three hours in front of the onlookers. During the summer vacation, I worked along a river beach in Hiroshima, my hometown, gathering small pebbles for construction materials. When this heavy labor was over, I had no surplus energy for pursuing my studies. Compared to such physical labor, work as a private tutor was much easier. I could get high wages for that comfortable job and recalled the theory of the "value of labor" by Karl Marx.

The Japanese work ethic, however, has been undergoing significant changes in recent years. As the Japanese have attained a relatively high level of material affluence, their values have become more individualized and many people, particularly young people, are placing a special emphasis on personal-interest activities outside of their work. It is sad that many people today have lost a sense of gratitude for working persons and also for labor itself.

**(MIKHIKO YOSHIMOTO, Gifu)**

Before the end of the Second World War, November 23rd was called *Niiname-sai*. Since ancient times, this has been an observance known as the Shinto harvest festival, carried out at the imperial court. At that time, the emperor dedi-

cates the year's new rice to the gods and tastes it for the first time. This observance is still held today in the imperial household. In 1948, it was designated a national holiday for the people to honor labor, celebrate manufacturing and give thanks to one another.

On this day in each shrine of a tutelary god, the Shinto priest used to present new rice or fresh vegetables to the tutelary god. I remember when I was a child at harvest time I went to my mother's family home in the country to help with the rice harvest. It was difficult to cut rice with a sickle. Now it is a dear memory.

Nowadays, parents do not go to work on this day. Rather, they go out for dinner with the whole family. They take the day off and rest instead of laboring. Some events are held for the family near a park or flower garden. Anyway, laborers should relax both mind and body on this day.

**(MIEKO OKUMURA, Mizuho, Nagoya)**

My parents were not farmers, but I was born in a remote country area of Kyoto Prefecture and lived there until I was in sixth grade. Then, all boys and girls wore kimonos and straw sandals and went to school on foot. There were no radios there at that time. The village was situated in a basin, surrounded by hills. A river ran through the center of the lowland and along the river were many rice fields.

Autumn was the best and busiest season of the year. Golden rice ears swayed in the breeze while sparrows and countless grasshoppers swarmed on them. In the river and streams lived many fish and crabs, including crucian carp, sweetfish, catfish, eels, loaches, and so on. All living things, including human beings, coexisted harmoniously.

I also was busy gathering chestnuts and mulberries. Even now, I fondly remember such fascinating experiences.

At the same time, I feel very sorry for today's children who cannot experience such a beautiful countryside season. After the war, farmers began to use chemicals and many living things have disappeared. Water is running in the river without fish, crabs and shells. It is a dead river. What an ominous situation!

(TSUYOSHI HAMADA, Minami, Nagoya)

According to the large Japanese dictionary, *Kôjien*, Labor Thanksgiving Day was called *niinamesai* in prewar days. On that day, the emperor dedicated the new harvest to his ancestors and tasted some himself. In my childhood, we celebrated *niinamesai* at our school together with our principal, teachers and other pupils.

On August 15, 1945, Japan was defeated in the Pacific War. Those of us born and raised in Korea were forced to leave that land. My family relocated in a small village in the *sannin* district where my father was born. He had to remain in Korea for a few more months to settle some business matters. Due to the disorder resulting from the defeat and the extreme food shortage, the school there was temporarily closed. We stayed in the village and helped my uncle work his land. Working as a farmer was quite a new experience for me as I was raised in an urban area. As I worked very hard as a farmer for a long time, my uncle became concerned about my neglecting to study. One day he said to me, "You are not going to be a farmer in the future. You should go to school as soon as possible to study for your future work. Looking back, I think his anxiety was quite natural and I appreciate his advice. But I don't think the time I spent working as a farmer was wasted. It was a pleasant experience for me to work hard in the rice field. I did not feel upset to do that kind of work. It was, rather, enjoyable. Thanks to that valuable experience as a farmer, I did not feel upset even in the

hard work assigned by my company afterwards.

Thus, I really think that the meaning of Labor Thanksgiving Day is not simply to celebrate the harvest, but to appreciate the effort required to produce the harvest. I will become seventy years old this year. I am very happy that I have good health and can still be vigorously active. I greatly appreciate the experience my uncle provided to work hard as a farmer in my young days.

(HARUJI FUKUMI, Minami, Nagoya)

In 1944, as the war was drawing to a close, my father told his family to evacuate to his hometown in Fukui to escape from the air raids though he himself had to remain in Tokyo. In those days, everything was desperate. Besides the air raids, we suffered from serious shortages of food, commodities and labor power. I had been to his hometown many times while I was a child to visit my grandparents, but at that time the situation had entirely changed. My grandfather had passed away a few years before and my grandmother had become very old. I thought I should try to work as much as possible to raise rice and vegetables in the field even though I had had no such experience.

In those days, the production of rice was strictly controlled by the government. Each individual farmer was urged to produce a certain amount of rice. Young men had gone to the front and the village was suffering a serious shortage of labor power. It was impossible for us to ask anyone to grow rice for us. Fortunately, a farmer's wife, who used to be my grandmother's maid and knew me well since I was a child, showed me how to work and helped me very much.

Fukui Prefecture is located in the middle of Japan along the Japan Sea. It has much snow in the winter. It is impossible to work in the fields in winter but when spring comes, the snow melts

and the black soil appears, proclaiming it is time to begin working in the fields. Men plowed the field with a spade in their own hands or pulled by a cow and tilled the ground evenly with a hoe. Then the rice paddy was filled with irrigated water, according to a certain program for sharing water among the villagers. When everything was prepared, rice seedlings were transplanted, usually by women. Since it was a group activity, the day was also determined according to a certain schedule drawn up by the villagers. They planted the seedlings in a row in a backbreaking way and I tried hard to follow the other women. Also while the plants were growing, they had to work hard, weeding by hand and spreading insecticide and fertilizer. While I was there, I came to understand that rice production required an immense amount of labor, meticulous skills and group collaboration. I was impressed with the primitive but scientific method, the result of the wisdom of many centuries.

Rice production largely depends on the weather. Unfortunately, in 1945, we could not expect a good harvest because of a lack of fertilizer and unfavorable weather. I was told it was very important for a good harvest that there be much sunshine and warm days in late summer and early fall, just before the harvest. In Fukui, a snowy area, when the harvest time was drawing near, people began making racks, several meters high with horizontal bars to dry bunched sheaves of rice. I remember that rice stalks were cut by hand but threshing was done by a machine, though it was primitive. Even though we could not expect a good harvest that year, we were thrilled to see new rice, brightly shining, as if it were a gift from heaven.

As a newcomer, I would have been just a burden to the farmers, but I still remember them with gratitude for their good help and many kindnesses. I came to understand how diligent, intelligent

and cooperative they were to carry out their agricultural and social responsibilities. Besides working in the field, I was allowed to attend a meeting held regularly to discuss irrigation, planting, harvesting and delivery of the allotted rice, according to the schedule indicated by the government. I could not understand very well then and was ashamed of my ignorance.

Though it was quite a short time, I came to like working outdoors. After I married, I lived in many places. When I had a yard, I always enjoyed gardening. I began by digging in the soil to make flower beds for sowing seeds. I was thrilled to see my children delighted with the beautiful flowers in the garden of our house. I hope they still have happy memories of the flowers in our garden.  
(MICHIKO KAWAMURA, Meguro, Tokyo)

My mind is filled with many merry memories of my childhood. Among them, the fall festival was one of the most cheerful, exciting events, exuding the taste of autumn. The sounds of traditional drums and flutes, peculiar to Japan, were heard everywhere in the neighborhood and children were very happy to wear a blue *happi* with a pink sash and a white headband, or *hachimaki*. The festival of thanksgiving for the harvest used to be held in October, much earlier than November 23rd. (Now, Sports Day is held on October 10th.) On that day, school boys and girls went around the neighborhood holding up a *shishi-gashira* (lion's head) with a long cloth for its body, crying together: "Wasshoi! Wasshoi!" They visited many neighbors one after another with a 6th grader ahead, who held a little lantern into which people put small change.

When I was five or six, I joined one of those *shishi* groups for the first time. "Wasshoi! Wasshoi!" As soon as we began to cry with loud voices at the door of a house, someone opened the door and gave us a little donation. "Arigatô!" we

called out in a louder voice and moved on to the next door. I remember when we came to a house with a forbidding black fence and no one answered our cry. "Cry louder!" a 6th grader urged us. "Wasshoi! Wasshoi!" "Much louder!" "Wasshoi! Wasshoi!" Suddenly, a man's loud voice came from inside the house: "Uchi wa rusu da" ("No one is at home").

Different from the "trick or treat" of Halloween, collecting money by children may be considered improper today, but in those days people enjoyed the festival very much and were willing to contribute small change for the neighborhood children's association, not from obligation. My parents really enjoyed hearing the children joyfully say "arigatô", but gradually the custom of *shishi* collecting contributions came to be called *kojiki-jishi* ("beggar lion").

When I was in 4th grade, I represented my class in the Pupils' Association of the school. As soon as the meeting started, a very handsome boy stood up and said, "Let's stop *kojiki-jishi*." He was the president of the Pupils' Association and that had been one of the important slogans in his election campaign. He didn't mean to stop the custom of the *shishi* parade, but meant to stop the collection of money which seemed to be disgraceful. His movement was successful, with the strong support of teachers. As a result, during the festival, *shishi* walked around without a lantern and with less cheerful crying. Of course, children didn't need to cry "arigato!" That boy was not only handsome but very bright and graduated from the graduate school of Tokyo University.

A couple of years ago, he suddenly appeared on television in the morning. He stated his political views and slogans in his election campaign to become a member of the local government. The good-looking 6th grader had become a bald man. Looking at him on television, I realized he really liked politics and remem-

bered his definite words in my elementary school days: "Let's stop *kojiki-jishi*." (KIKUKO KUWAHARA, Nakagawa, Nagoya)

Every year at harvest time an exhibition of *shôsô-in* treasures is held at the Nara National Museum. This autumn I had an opportunity to visit there.

As you know, the term *shôsô* originally denoted a repository for the rice collected by the government. In the Nara and Heian periods, the central government as well as provinces and large temples also used to have their own *shôsô-in*. During the course of history, however, all the *shôsô-in* except that of Tôdaiji Temple have been lost.

At the exhibition, a number of treasures that have been preserved for about 1,300 years were on display, including Buddhist robes, sutras, ornaments, old documents and records, etc. One of the representative treasures this year was "fragrant wood from incense", called *ôjukukô*. There were a few marks on it for General Ashikaga Yoshimasa, Oda Nobunaga and Emperor Meiji had cut some pieces from this incense wood for themselves. To my regret, I could not smell the incense at all since it was kept in a glass case. There was also a game board for playing *go*. It was a gorgeous one decorated with cut shells, pieces of ivory and gold. So the game of *go* has a long history.

I appreciated viewing these extraordinary artifacts of the Tempyo Era and also learned about the society and life style of those days. Afterward, I visited the *Shôsô-in*, located behind the Daibutsu-den. The old traditional wooden building of *hinoki*, with its raised floor, was standing in the quiet compound reflecting the rays of the sun setting in the west. I gazed at it for a while, being greatly moved with the beauty of its architectural style. My thoughts flew to the old time when Emperor Shômu performed the ceremony to thank the *kami*

with an offering of new rice. Is not this one of the beautiful traditions we have for which we should be thankful? (SADAE HASHIMOTO, Minami, Nagoya)

\*\*\*\*\*

### December 9 Message (Theme #339)

*One of the effects of global warming is even now evident to residents of Japan who live within sight of the country's most celebrated scenic symbol, Mt. Fuji. The white snow covering of the mountain peak during the winter and its brown sandy slopes during the summer are being eroded by a green carpet of vegetation because the temperature at the top of the mountain is gradually getting warmer and less snow is falling. An estimated 30,000 people visit the 3776-meter volcano during the July-August climbing season, but according to a local environment agency official, both industrial pollution and exhaust from vehicles are affecting the natural environment there. The theme suggested for essays this week is: Mt. Fuji. What thoughts, memories or experiences have you had related to this famous mountain? Why does it hold such a prominent place in Japanese traditional thought?*

\*\*\*\*\*

In May, last year, I stayed at a hotel in Yaizu City in Shizuoka Prefecture, which is famous as a port for deep-sea fishing. In the morning, before sunrise, I hurried to the lobby, erected my easel and made preparations for painting. Outside the lobby, a green lawn extended to a cliff. On the tip of the cliff, a big, old pine tree stood slanting with every bough hanging down toward the surface of the sea. On the left side, a cape was

projecting into the sea, casting a shadow on the water. The eastern sky was beginning to become orange and the sea was calm, like a mirror, but the horizon was too dim to be distinguished. I waited impatiently for the sunrise. Suddenly, I asked myself, "Where is Mt. Fuji? "Mt. Fuji must be visible!"

Little by little, the eastern sky became brighter and the outline of Mt. Fuji loomed out of the reddish clouds. What an impressive sight it was! It was just like a dream. From moment to moment, the sunrise scenery dramatically changed and it deterred me from continuing to paint.

(TSUYOSHI HAMADA, Minami, Nagoya)

I lived in the city of Hamamatsu until I was twenty years old. I could see Mt. Fuji from our school yard. It seemed to be about fifteen centimeters high. I felt it was natural that we could see it.

When I came to Nagoya, I felt lonely even though I was with my family because I felt that I had to live in a distant place where I could not see Mt. Fuji. I do not believe the mountain is sacred, but looking at it somehow stimulated a comfortable feeling.

I climbed Mt. Fuji with my father and brother when I was eighteen years old. It was very hard to climb from the 8th station to the top. I used not only my feet, but my hands as well. That was the steepest part of the mountain path. It was the only such experience for me and I do not want to climb it again.

I noticed that I could not stay at the top of a high mountain for a long time. I came down from the top after only ten minutes at the top of Mt. Fuji, Mont Blanc, Matterhorn and Jungfrau. I prefer taking trips to plateaus to climbing high mountains. Anyway, from my experience, I would say that Mt. Fuji is better to look at than to climb.

(MICHIKO SANO, Minami, Nagoya)

Mt. Fuji is the most famous mountain in Japan and has been considered an object of worship since ancient times. It is Japan's highest and most beautiful mountain, known throughout the world. In the past, it erupted frequently, but since 1707 volcanic activity has ceased. Nevertheless, geologically speaking, it is a dormant volcano.

In the Edo period (1603-1867) in particular, it was frequently climbed as a religious act. Because of its grandeur and beautiful shape, many Japanese artists who painted pictures of it have left behind outstanding works of art. There is, for example, the outstanding work called *Fugaku Sanjû-rokkei*, which means "Mt. Fuji's 36 Views", which were painted by *ukiyo-e* artist Katsushika Hokusai. It contains world-renowned masterpieces like the *Akafuji*, meaning "Red Fuji" in which the mountain looks red because of the splendor of the setting sun.

There are many wonderful expressions about Mt. Fuji related to the four seasons: cherry blossoms on Mt. Fuji in the spring, bright and clear in the summer, lakeside Mt. Fuji in autumn and silent snowfall morning Mt. Fuji and only light and shadows move slowly over Mt. Fuji in winter. Also, there are the ten best views of Mt. Fuji in Susono City. One of them shows a burning field at the foot of Mt. Fuji aimed at exterminating harmful insects. Its most famous annual celebration, a sheet of fire expanding impressively, can be seen from the Tomei Expressway.

(MIEKO OKUMURA, Mizuho, Nagoya)

Mt. Fuji is the highest mountain (3,776 meters) in Japan. (In my boyhood, Niitaka-yama in Taiwan was the highest because that island was a Japanese colony then.) It is world-famous for its superb conical form, but there is a small projection on the eastern slope that breaks the symmetry. This projection is called Mt. Hôei because it was formed by

an eruption during the Hôei era (in 1707). Although Mt. Fuji has been dormant since that time, it is classified by geologists as an active volcano. We never know when the next eruption will take place.

Mt. Fuji has been regarded as the very symbol of Japan and the Japanese spirit. Once Fujiyama, cherry blossoms and geisha girls were the three most important things for tourists to see in Japan. When some foreigners come to know that Mt. Fuji is called Fuji-san in our country, they mistakenly surmise that it has been given the honorific title of a person because it is loved so much. Surely, Japanese have a very special feeling for Fuji-san. We feel relieved when the beautiful shape appears from behind the clouds on our return from a trip abroad. Hearing the name, many elderly people will remember the famous song we learned in our elementary school days: "It stretches its head above the clouds, looking down at surrounding mountains, hearing a peal of thunder beneath; Fuji is the first mountain in Japan." We also have a saying, *Ich-Fuji, ni-taka, san-nasubi*, "First, Mt. Fuji, second, a falcon, third, an egg plant". This is an enumeration of things which are thought to be auspicious as the first dream of the New Year, though nobody knows the true meaning of the saying. We could see the majestic shape from our school yard in Tokyo on fine days because there were no high buildings around.

To the Japanese mind, Fuji-san is much more than a single volcano. It is regarded as a sacred object and climbing it has long been a religious practice. Some people consider it a place for a pilgrimage. Once I had the experience of climbing it and viewing the sunrise from the summit. It was a divinely beautiful sight. I have also experienced standing on the summits of Mont Blanc and Jungfrau and was moved by their greatness, but the inspiration from them was a little different from that of Fuji-san.

Fuji-san has exerted a great influence upon Japanese culture. Throughout the history of Japanese art and literature, this holy mountain has been the subject of innumerable poems and pictures. Hiroshige's pictures on the Tōkaidō in the Edo era are a typical example. The yearning for greatness and beauty symbolized by Fuji-san led ancient people to name many local mountains and towns after this mountain. There is Ezo-Fuji in Hokkaido and Tsugaru-Fuji in Aomori. Some sumo wrestlers and popular stars also have their names associated with Fuji-san. We should keep protecting it from various kinds of pollution.

(MIKIHiko YOSHIMOTO, Gifu)

It is said that there are two categorical groups of "stupid people" related to Mt. Fuji. The first one consists of people who have never climbed to its summit. If you have been there twice or more, you are categorized into the second group. It means that you should get there once and that is enough. So, I am a "stupid person" belonging to the first group. But there is a reason for that.

I have been to the *go-gō-me* (half-way point) of Mt. Fuji by car twice, but I have never been to its summit. When I was a student, my friend told me his experience of going there. He wanted to see the sunrise from the summit, so he planned to stay in a hut near the summit at night. It was during the summer and the mountain trail was filled with climbers. He finally reached the hut in the evening. After eating a plain meal in a crowded dining room, he had to sleep in a futon with strangers' feet on both sides of his head. He felt as if he was a sardine packed in a can. Afterward, his situation worsened. He was unable to lie on his back and had to lie on his side. After getting up once to wash his hands, he could not find enough room for his futon so he ended up crouching in a narrow hall to take a nap. Such a situation is not on-

ly caused by the greediness of hut owners who work for only two months a year, but also by the unwritten rule that they should not refuse admission to any climber. Even though I can understand that the refusal of an accommodation might mean death for some tired climber, this story has scared me away from the summit.

However, I am fond of viewing Mt. Fuji whose shape can be easily recognized everywhere. When I viewed it from the summit of Mt. Takeyama (3015 meters) in Toyama Prefecture, the top of Mt. Fuji was visible above a sea of shiny white clouds far away. From the same place, I was also able to see the characteristic shape of Noto Peninsula and Toyama Bay below in the northwest. I imagined the unobservable Pacific Ocean just beyond Mt. Fuji and wondered about the narrow width of Honshu. That was one of the most impressive sights of Mt. Fuji for me.

It is also quite enjoyable for me to look at photographs of mountains. Mt. Fuji seems to be the most popular target for photographers to shoot at. Some books carry only photographs of Mt. Fuji. We cannot imagine the swarms of people on it from those spectacular pictures. One of my friends also likes to take pictures of Mt. Fuji and gives me a New Year's card with his favorite one printed on it every year. Oh, that reminds me. I may receive another one soon. I feel the period of one year gets shorter year after year. Don't you think that time really flies?

(TOSHIAKI MIYAKE, Tsuzuki, Yokohama)

Mt. Fuji, along with cherry blossoms and geisha girls were the three main symbols of Japan in the past. "Fuji" and "Sakura" were the popular names of super-express trains on the main railroads of prewar Japan. On the other hand, Mt. Fuji, which was sanctified because of its beauty and dignity, was also abused



by some Japanese nationalists. During the war, since Saipan was occupied by the American armed forces, B-29 American bombers used Mt. Fuji as a guide for the purpose of bombing main cities of Japan. Once the pilots caught sight of that figure, they never failed to reach their destination, whether it was Tokyo or Nagoya. The "sanctity" of the mountain was of no use at all.

I tried to climb Mt. Fuji for the first time when I was 66 years old. As I brought a handy oxygen cylinder with me, I was able to climb all the way to the summit. I was impressed with how rough and steep the climbing paths were, contrary to the mountain's beautiful appearance. The sudden change of climate was also fearful, but I believe these severe conditions must have enhanced the dignity of the mountain behind its natural beauty and mildness.

I hope I may have another opportunity to climb Mt. Fuji in the future.

(HARUJI FUKUMI, Minami, Nagoya)

I like walking in fields and woods or in the countryside. I also like to climb mountains, so I have climbed Shiroumadake, Yake-dake, Fujiwara-dake and so on, but for some reason I was never interested in climbing Mt. Fuji. It may be because I had heard that Mt. Fuji is good for viewing from afar but not so enjoyable to climb.

Nevertheless, I did climb Mt. Fuji in the summer of 1992. The motivation was simple. In those days, I heard that young acquaintances from America who had lived in Japan for only a few years had climbed Mt. Fuji and two of my friends happened to invite me to join them in climbing. But the result was not so good. We started climbing from the fifth station on the mountain (5-gô-me) where we had gone by car. My physical condition was not so good from the starting point, about 2300 meters above sea level, and I couldn't help giving up climb-

ing and staying at a cottage at the 8.5-gô-me (3400 meters) due to mountain sickness and sending off the others, who conquered the summit. But viewing the rising sun floating in a sea of clouds was the most impressive sight I have ever seen—even if it was from the 8.5-gô-me rather than from the summit.

Do you know the saying, "A fool is one who does not try climbing Mt. Fuji even once; a fool is also one who climbs it twice"? What do you think the saying means? I understand it to mean that we should try to do anything once, even though it may be very hard or seems silly. I may become a fool who tries to climb it twice some day.

(YOSHIKO TOYOTA, Kanie, Aichi)

Every summer before we had our first child, my husband and I used to climb mountains in the Japan Alps in a group of five or six. The leader of the group, whom we called Pin-chan, was an expert in rock climbing and had experience climbing foreign mountains. He always made the plan for our climbs: dates mountains, courses, lodging and food. Food was assigned to each of us to prepare and carry. When I found "cans of azuki and condensed milk on a food list, I asked him, "What for?" "To make *kôri azuki* with snow (frappe with *anko*)", he answered.

Actually in climbing almost 3000-meter-high mountains, we sometimes passed through very dangerous places where some climbers had lost their lives. After such an extremely tense moment passed, we took a short rest, lying on a snowy flat and enjoyed talking and eating a little snow ball with sweet *azuki* and milk. "This is one of the greatest pleasures in mountaineering", Pin-chan would remark with a satisfied smile. He was one of my husband's colleagues and rather strange in many ways. He must have climbed the highest mountain in Japan, but he never made a plan

for us to climb Mt. Fuji and I did not feel like proposing it either. I knew well what his reaction would have been: "Mt. Fuji? Then you don't need me. Join the long line of people going to the top of Mt. Fuji and, in time, you'll reach the highest spot in Japan. Even a little kid can do that. Ha, ha, ha."

In fact, the mountains of the North Japan Alps were much more attractive and exciting for us. When we stood on the top of one of those fascinating mountains in Toyama or Nagano prefectures and were surrounded by or above a huge white ocean of clouds, we could enjoy viewing the peculiar peaks of some mountains floating on the clouds: Tsurugi, Yari, Kasa, Hodaka, Yakushi, Jōnen, Mitsumatarenge--and far, far away, the beautiful shape of Mt. Fuji on a very clear day. Whatever mountain we climbed, we never failed to try to find the isolated, graceful shape of Mt. Fuji, as if that had been the purpose of our hard mountaineering.

I thought Mt. Fuji was really the mountain to be viewed, and in fact, it can be seen from as many as 21 (or 19) prefectures in this country. I also thought that this highest mountain was open to family members from young children to old grandfathers or grandmothers. And I hoped the day would come soon when I could enjoy climbing this beautiful mountain with family members and not in a group of mountain climbers.  
(KIKUKO KUWAHARA, Nakagawa, Nagoya)

No other mountain in Japan is higher than Mt. Fuji. No other mountain in Japan is more beautiful than Mt. Fuji. To describe it, we are prompted to make use of the superlatives of all modifiers. Mt. Fuji is the most magnificent mountain in Japan. Mt. Fuji furnishes the most sublime, the most exquisite, the most splendid view. I cannot find a suitable modifier to describe that greatest of all mountains.

Mt. Fuji has held a prominent place in Japanese traditional thought. Why? This is a very difficult question. I only can point out two things. Rather, two things combined in the course of history. One is the tremendously wild force it manifested when it erupted centuries ago. The other is its elegant shape. According to one theory, the name Fuji comes from an Ainu word meaning a violent mountain erupting fire. This suggests ancient people had a great fear of the volcano which has been dormant since then. On the other hand, Mt. Fuji has such a fine symmetric shape that it has aroused the public's admiration. Thus, it stands to reason that Mt. Fuji has enjoyed a kind of breathless adoration for a long time.

(SHOJI SUGIMOTO, Suginami, Tokyo)

I once lived on the skirts of Mt. Fuji with my husband for ten months. It was in Fuji City. As soon as I got up in the morning, I made it a rule to go out of our apartment and look at towering Mt. Fuji just in front of me. Its firm and dignified appearance with its long skirts exuded nobility. Its entire shape was rarely seen for it was surrounded by clouds which changed minute by minute. Sometimes, only the top of the mountain was seen and at other times only the lower half, but I was really attracted by it and became an admirer of Mt. Fuji.

I think the shape of Mt. Fuji is very simple but beautiful. Everyone who sees it easily remembers its shape and since it can be seen from Japan's capital and from the main road called Tōkaidō, it is familiar to many Japanese. It is loved by many Japanese as reflected in the children's song, *Fuji wa Nippon ichi no yama*, which means "Mt. Fuji is the highest and most wonderful mountain in Japan".

(MICHIKO NIWA, Shōwa, Nagoya)

The beautiful shape and the tall height of Mt. Fuji are attractive to us

and for a long time it was considered a symbol of the land of Japan. It frequently appears in songs, poems and pictures.

In 1997, Yamaichi Securities Company issued a special calendar to commemorate its hundredth anniversary. The calendar, from January to December, included pictures of Mt. Fuji painted by Yokoyama Taikan, one of the most famous Japanese painters who specializes in painting Mt. Fuji. At that time, I am sure, they did not expect to discontinue their business as they did at the end of the year. If my memory is correct, one of the founders had a name related to *yama*, or mountain. Their name may imply that they had confidence in being like Mt. Fuji in their business.

The fact that nothing is certain and nothing remains the same forever reminds me of the story of a rich man's worries about his possessions in the New Testament.

(MIDORI KODAMA, Midori, Nagoya)

How long has it been since I saw Mt. Fuji? Probably it was a few years ago that I last saw the mountain. One day in the fall, we went on a trip to Shizuoka. Unfortunately, it rained hard when we left Tokyo, but as we approached Shizuoka, it gradually cleared up and when we reached Hamamatsu, the elegantly symmetrical mountain, covered with white snow against a clear blue sky, appeared brightly in front of us. How thrilled and thankful we were to see that magnificent sight.

These days in Tokyo, it may be very difficult to get a view of Mt. Fuji from the urban area, hindered by tall buildings. Even though I understand the situation quite well, I still miss those days when people could enjoy the wonderful sight more easily and feel better acquainted with it. In Tokyo, some areas were named for Mt. Fuji, including Fujimi-dai and Fujimi-chô. Both names indicate that they are good places for view-

ing Mt. Fuji. In the precincts of some shrines, it used to be common to have a miniature Mt. Fuji for climbing. It was regarded as a religious activity instead of climbing the real mountain.

More than half a century ago, when I was a child, the house in which I lived was located about a mile west of Shinjuku. Even then, Shinjuku was a bustling center, but the area I lived in was quiet, though quite close. I lived there until my family was evacuated to the country during the war. While I was there, I had a good view of Mt. Fuji, though distant and small, from the second floor window of a room on the west side of the house. In those days, most Japanese houses were made of wood and had one or two stories, so we could enjoy a panoramic view even from the second floor window. Beyond the rows of houses in the residential area, we could see the Tanzawa Mountain Range from right to left like a thick, dark blue belt and behind the left hand corner, Mt. Fuji could be seen when the weather was fine. The elegantly symmetrical shape made even an ordinary view quite picturesque. I could enjoy various changes in its appearance, depending on the season, weather, and time of day. Especially I was impressed with the wonderful view in the evening. The setting sun gave various glorious colors to the earth, transforming solemn Mt. Fuji into a dark, triangular silhouette. In late fall and winter, a chilly wind often blew in Tokyo in those days. It raged over the earth like a witch rioting. I was very scared but I was relieved to see the figure of the mountain solemnly standing still. I miss those days when children had more free time and were not so pressed as today.

When I was a senior high school student, I volunteered to join a group in my high school to climb Mt. Fuji one summer. Even then, climbing Mt. Fuji was regarded as a profound spiritual experience and many pilgrims tried to arrive at

a shrine at the top of the mountain, but climbing mountains was not so popular as today. In late July, our group, led by a gymnastics teacher, tried to climb the mountain. In those days, sportswear was not so common as today and we were told to make our leggings by ourselves. Fortunately, the weather was fine on that day and we went to Fujinomiya by train. Then we visited the Fuji Sengen Shrine to pray for a safe climb. That was regarded as a base camp for climbing pilgrims. I am not so sure, but I think we went halfway up the timber area by car, not by bus, for busses were not so common as today. Then we began climbing along the road in the timber area and then on the naked slope of lava, which looked like small brown stones, to the top, panting due to a lack of oxygen. Though we were young, we were tired out when we reached the top. We wanted to get a good view from that spot, but the lowlands were all covered with thick clouds. We stayed overnight at a frugal stone cottage there. The next morning, we were able to enjoy a magnificent view of the sunrise. After visiting the shrine at the summit, we went down the mountain by way of Subashiri, running down the sandy slope. Once we began running, we could not stop running all the way to the foot of the mountain. Maybe it took about an hour, while climbing took more than six hours! We went to Gotenba, southeast of Mt. Fuji, and took a train to Tokyo.

Certainly, Mt. Fuji is the highest mountain in Japan and its magnificent, graceful figure is loved by the Japanese and is famous around the world as a symbol of Japan. I miss Mt. Fuji these days in Tokyo.

(MICHIKO KAWAMURA, Meguro, Tokyo)

With its elegantly symmetrical profile, Japan's most famous and highest mountain, Mt. Fuji, has for a long time been a symbol of Japan, towering up to

3776 meters (12,390 feet). Most foreigners, whether in Japan or abroad, have identified Japan with Fujiyama, Geisha girls and *ukiyo-e*. These three features may be more familiar in foreign countries than in Japan. With the passing of time, it must be acknowledged that both *ukiyo-e* and Geisha girls have undergone enormous changes, but Mt. Fuji, although it rears its sky-high peak over a changed region, remains unchanged itself. The familiar symmetrical cone shape is the same as that seen in ancient times.

A careful look at the majestic mountain strikes us emotionally with wonder as we view its perfect form piercing a sea of clouds no matter how many times we have seen Mt. Fuji and whether we see it through the windows of a *shinkansen* train speeding along the Tokaido Line or from a 747 jet carrier flying even higher than the peak itself. Mt. Fuji is especially beautiful in the morning and evening. Before the sun comes up, it changes from indigo to scarlet. When the scarlet becomes deeper, the mountain seems to rise yet higher, evincing a strong masculine impression. After the scarlet changes to indigo in the evening, it no longer appears so high. As its soft outline seems to melt back into the sky, there is something, inexpressible in words, very feminine about it. The artist, Hokusai, expressed his wonder and surprise at the different aspects in his *Fugaku Sanjū-rokkei*, (36 views of Mt. Fuji) and showed the beauty of the mountain when viewed from different angles. Mt. Fuji is deeply embedded in Japanese tradition from the poems of the *Manyō-shū* and the wood block prints of Hokusai. There is a famous verse of Buson: "Only Mt. Fuji/ Remains unburied/ The young leaves!" This verse emphasizes that the height and sublimity of Mt. Fuji cannot be obscured by the young leaves on it. White snow glittering in the sunlight, new green leaves, a blue sky and the pleasing touch of a soft breeze.

Although Mt. Fuji is classified as an active volcano, during July and August, the climbing season, hundreds and thousands of people make the trek to the summit in an endless stream, spending five hours or more to arrive there. The crater (3.5 kilometers in circumference) is rimmed with immaculate white snow in winter, which makes us feel strikingly magnificent. <sup>harmful</sup>

Nonetheless, an adverse influence is beginning to be evident on Mt. Fuji as a result of carbon and nitrogen dioxides and other detrimental substances which are being produced by people in the world, resulting in global warming. In fact, recently there was no snow inside or outside the crater. Never before have we witnessed this miserable sight. If we leave this problem unresolved, the average temperature of the world will rise two degrees by the end of the 21st century causing the sea level to rise 50 centimeters because of melted glaciers, resulting in a threefold increase in the area below sea level. As a result, the area of the sea will greatly expand. When this occurs, countries along the rim of the Pacific and Indian Oceans will suffer serious damage from tempests and high tides. Countries like Japan with long coastlines will suffer from abnormal weather, harmful influences on animals and plants spreading contagious diseases which should cause us anxiety.

My information comes from the "Zoom-Up '98 Crisis of Global Warming" TV program broadcast on Channel 11 at 10:30 a.m. on January 12, 1998 and the editorial in the *Chûnichi* newspaper on December 11, 1997. Global warming is not only a problem for the distant future. It is a present problem for the Fijians. A number of villages in the littoral zone have already been submerged and residents have been forced to move to the hummocks. Typhoons have increased fourfold. A man working for a non-government organization who came to Kyoto

from Fiji expressed his fears pertaining --- to the global warming crisis.

I wonder if the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change held in Kyoto, December 1-10, was successful? Regarding the controversial targets on carbon dioxide emissions which are blamed for causing global warming, leaders only set 2010 as the target year. The world is moving steadily toward cultural destruction, mass starvation and ecocatastrophe. Nonetheless, the Japanese seem to have adopted a throw away principle. It is difficult for me to believe that many Japanese discard innumerable quantities of unsold personal computers because newer models have been produced, five-year-old cars and unsold lunches from convenience stores. Unsold products along with refuse from fast food shops are discarded like garbage and much electricity is wasted. The throw away principle seems to be approved by both suppliers and consumers.

What should be done about this? Since I drive a car, use a refrigerator and watch television, I must be a small destroyer of the environment. A running car emits 1000 times as much carbon dioxide as a human being. Because a small car produces less pollution, Toyota factories in Europe are now planning to produce smaller cars. "Small is beautiful!" If possible, let us take a bus or go on foot instead of using a personal car. It is important for us to think of ways to conserve energy. When washing our face or brushing our teeth, do not let the water run excessively. Use stairs instead of an elevator when going up only one or two floors. Before using a vacuum cleaner, arrange things so as to shorten the time electricity is used. Power plants emit carbon dioxide to produce the electricity we use. Keep in mind the result of a two-degree rise in temperature on our planet and remember that small power is beautiful.

(JAIME IWAI, Owariasahi)

\*\*\*\*\*

December 16 Message (Theme #340)

*The short English word spelled l-o-t has a number of different meanings. A piece of land may be called a "lot". Another meaning of "lot" is a large number. A third meaning of "lot" is an object used in deciding a matter or choosing a person by chance. According to the 1st chapter of the New Testament book of Acts, lots were cast to choose a replacement for Judas Iscariot, the man who betrayed Jesus. A game of chance in which the winner is chosen by lot is called a lottery. A number of companies, private and public organizations conduct lotteries to attract customers, to raise money or to encourage dreams of riches at little cost. What do you think about lotteries? Have you often participated in them? Have you ever won prizes or other benefits as the result of a lottery? What do you think is the most popular lottery in Japan? Do you think lotteries conducted by public organizations or government bodies are good or inappropriate? Why do you think so?*

\*\*\*\*\*

According to a dictionary at hand, a "lot" is "one of a set of objects used to decide something by chance" and is also "such a method of deciding". One's fate or fortune is also meant by this word. The Oxford Dictionary states that "lottery" is a "gamble in which part of the money paid for entrance-tickets is distributed by lot among some of the holders". (I think this explanation is not especially suitable.) I have played roulette, shot craps and tried other gambling games for entertainment at casinos in Las Vegas and Macao. When I visited Europe, I was surprised to find a casino at Amsterdam Airport. We have

no casinos in Japan because most gambling is illegal here. However, there is some legalized gambling sponsored or sanctioned by local governments, including racing (horses, bicycles, motorboats, etc.) and lotteries.

Public lotteries (*takara-kuji*) started immediately after the war to deal with the depressed economic conditions and to give an additional source of income to both national and local governments. Today, the result of the nation's most popular New Year lottery is usually announced on December 31, now a traditional event of the New Year's holidays. Under the Tokugawa shogunate, lotteries called *tomi-kuji* were just as popular as *takara-kuji* are now. Mentioning the year-end, *fukubiki* (lotteries) issued in bargain sales in shopping districts are also popular among people. When someone wins a big prize, they give the bell a ring and thus brighten the atmosphere of the year-end.

I have never bought *takara-kuji*, but my wife has sometimes. The reason is quite simple: I believe the law of probability. For the same reason, I never play pachinko nor engage in other forms of legalized gambling such as horse or bicycle racing. In the case of pachinko, there is a little chance for the player to demonstrate some ability in propelling a small ball. Although, strictly speaking, not a form of gambling, pachinko has eclipsed many kinds of gambling in popularity. The secret of this popularity is, I think, maybe the player's tiny hope of showing his ability. But, concerning horse or bicycle racing, it is the racer who must show his ability; the spectators' lot is completely controlled by the racers.

All kinds of gambling are accompanied by a bookmaker or promoter, who is the one that makes a profit. For this purpose alone, national and local governments promote the above-mentioned gambling. Luckily, people tend to forget a time of loss and remember only a time

of profit. When they compare their wins and losses, most people must have lost money in total, but still they continue to dream about the next time. This is the reason why the promoters can well manage the operation. What most completely depends on fortune is *takara-kuji*. In this case, a winning number is decided just by a singular chance. There is no room at all for the buyer to display his ability. When I tell my wife this obvious truth, she always criticizes me, saying *yume-no-kibô-no-nai* (having no dream nor hope). But still I have no thought of giving up my principle of believing the law of probability.

(MIKIHICO YOSHIMOTO, Gifu)

I am basically not interested in gambling. I have never made bets on horse races, not to mention boat or bicycle races. Therefore, I can proudly say that I have never lost money on the races. But I do participate in a lottery once or twice a year. It is the only time I gamble to test my luck.

"If you don't buy a lottery ticket, you don't have a chance to win at all." What an enticing catch phrase this is! I think it is true. It has a strong attraction for me. Then I buy a minimum package of ten tickets. While I say to myself that I have bought a dream, the dream gets bigger and bigger until the day of the announcement of winners. I have never won more than 3000 yen in the lottery. I know that we cannot get money so easily. That is life. But it is also true that many people have already won immense sums of money. How did they win? Why not me?

Well, I should be cool. Before buying lottery tickets, I should take the probability of winning into account. I surely learned how to calculate probability at school. I know it is as small as a chance of finding a diamond that has been lost in a sandbox. But for some reason, I forget that figure and remember only the number of winners when I buy tickets.

This time of the year, I usually get tickets of the Year-End's Jumbo Lottery, but I have still not decided whether to buy any this year. My sense of righteousness deters me from making a purchase for I just don't want to do anything beneficial to the antisocial bank that gave rogues of *sôkaiya* a lot of money.

(TOSHIAKI MIYAKE, Tsuzuki, Yokohama)

I can hardly ever remember winning a lottery in my life. From my childhood until now, I have had almost no luck in becoming a winner as a result of "probability". When I was in primary school, because there was a serious shortage of such school supplies as stationery, some articles were allocated to schools from local governments. Such articles were often distributed in classrooms by means of lottery because there were too few to be given to all the pupils, but I have no memory of getting anything in those lotteries. Since that time, I have had contact with many lotteries from *fukubiki* lotteries at seasonal sales to the New Year's card lotteries, but I have always been very unlucky in such lotteries and as for *takara-kuji*, it is far beyond my reach.

The outcome of a lottery is based on probability, so each person should have an equal chance to win, but in fact, inequality seems to be evident. Some persons are very fortunate and win prizes, while others (including me) do not. The person who won in *fukubiki* also wins in *takara-kuji*. I have never had such an experience. What an unequal world we are living in! It seems life does not conform to mathematics. But is that so?

The law of probability in mathematics is very curious and incomprehensible, I think. Suppose you participate in a lottery which is set to have ten percent of winning numbers. If you buy ten tickets, you should have one winning number among them. But if you have no winning number, you can't blame the law of



probability. You may be more likely to find ten winning numbers if you buy ninety more tickets, but you must be aware that even if you bought a hundred tickets and found no winning number, you still could not blame the law of probability. You are more likely to find a winning number if you buy more tickets, but again, even if you bought ten thousand tickets and found no winning number, you still could not deny the law. That is because the law applies only in the case of a "large number".

How strange this law is. It is called "the law of the large number". What is the large number? It is only said to be a large number and mathematics does not specify how large it is, but it is not an infinite number. To be honest, I cannot think clearly about such a thing. It is so incomprehensible that I even perceive an aspect of divinity whenever I think about it. There are so many things that are beyond our comprehension in the world. "Lot" has the meaning of a large number. It seems that "lottery" also implies a large number. Don't you think there may be some unrevealed secret in this coincidence?

According to mathematical law, if I continue participating in lotteries, I should eventually improve my chances of winning, but at the same time, there is the possibility that I will never win. That is why I don't buy lottery tickets.

There is an English saying that "marriage is a lottery". As I have mentioned, I am unlucky in material lotteries. On the other hand, I consider myself a very lucky person in regard to the "marriage lottery". But what does my wife think?

(NOBUYOSHI TAKAGI, Midori, Nagoya)

When I was working in a company about twenty years ago, there was a company savings account which had a higher rate of interest than that of ordinary commercial banks, which could be used by company employees. Once a year, on

the anniversary of the company's establishment, a lottery without any preconditions was held as a special entertainment for the depositors, sponsored by the company. The company received no benefit from the lottery but used it to express its gratitude to its employees.

The lottery related to New Year's postcards has a similar character. It gives dreams and pleasure to the receivers without any special expenditure on their part. Such lotteries are acceptable to me. However, I am against those lotteries, such as raffles, which are characterized by speculation. I believe real riches should be gained as the result of effort. Even if great wealth were gained by chance, it would be far from real success and will disappear in due course. Thus, I have no interest in any speculative lottery.

If such kinds of lotteries are introduced into banks, it would be a problem. I hope that banks will not become involved in offering speculative lotteries to depositors for the purpose of gaining more money without examining how to realize a higher interest on deposits which must be the primary duty of banks.

(HARUJI FUKUMI, Minami, Nagoya)

It is difficult for me to write on this theme because I am not interested in lotteries. *Tomi-kuji* in the old days, Edo Era, was administered by the Tokugawa *bakufu* and now there are many lotteries sponsored by prefectures or other groups which are recognized by the government. What we call *takara-kuji* in Japanese is the biggest one. Its prize becomes bigger year by year. I wonder why so many people participate since the chance of winning is so small.

I have been opposed to this lottery, but recently my thinking has changed a little because I realize it is a state undertaking which brings in important income and the present financial state of the Japanese government is bad. I hope



it will stop raising taxes. But I have a suggestion about the lottery. It is better that many people win small prizes rather than one getting a big prize.

(MICHIKO SAND, Minami, Nagoya)

Government bodies hold lotteries to raise money. Conducting lotteries is a very effective way to raise money because I understand that a bookmaker can usually keep at least forty percent of the sales after deducting the various costs involved. Government bodies which hold lotteries are supposed to use the money raised to build public structures or facilities such as highways, bridges, educational institutions, etc.

I have occasionally bought lottery tickets, but have yet to win a big prize. Each time I draw a blank, I always console myself with the thought that I have made a small contribution to a public fund. That is a kind of sour grapes attitude, indeed. To tell the truth, I hope to be a winner some day.

(SHOJI SUGIMOTO, Suginami, Tokyo)

\*\*\*\*\*

#### December 23 Message (Theme#341)

*Today is the birthday of the present Emperor, Akihito. It is also the birthday of Joseph Smith, founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, whose adherents are known as Mormons. Celebrations are being held these days by both Christians and non-Christians to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, traditionally commemorated on December 25th. In the United States, it is customary to celebrate birthdays of family members, friends or respected persons by having parties and giving gifts. What about the customs of your community and of your family? Do you have thoughts memories or any comments to make on the subject of: Birthday Celebrations?*

\*\*\*\*\*

On the birthday of someone in my family, the whole family celebrates. Ordinarily, neither champagne nor wine is put on the dinner table, but they are there on birthdays. In my childhood, I often visited my friend on his birthday and he was invited to my house on my birthday, but the custom gradually disappeared as the war became severe.

After I entered my company, my birthday was celebrated more simply with no one from outside joining in the celebration. However, after my retirement, the situation has become quite different. Three women who were my coworkers are accustomed to sending me a birthday present. On my last birthday, they sent me two kinds of gorgeous cyclamen accompanied by a greeting. They call themselves "three innocent girls" but I wonder if it is true because some of their children are already university students. Anyway, it is true that they have never forgotten me even now that ten years have passed since my retirement from the company. I deeply appreciate their warm consideration extended to me and, besides, I am happy to have an opportunity to meet them and express my hearty thanks.

I am sure that my birthdays of late are more enjoyable than those of my childhood.

(HARUJI FUKUMI, Minami, Nagoya)

Yes, we do celebrate birthdays in our family. January 13th is my birthday, so I expect other members of my family to give me a card and presents. My friends abroad also send me cards and gifts. We used to have a little party at home, but these days, since Yoko, my wife, is busy with her own work at NHK Culture Center, we go to a Skylark Family Restaurant or a little more luxurious restaurant at Sakae. The best part of

our birthday parties is the recognition that we are loved by our family.

(TOMOYASU KIMURA, Nishi, Nagoya)

It is fresh in our memories that the hostage incident in Peru occurred in connection with the birthday party for the Emperor at this season last year. I hear that it is customary for the embassy of each country to hold such a celebration on their sovereign's birthday. *Tenchōsetsu* was a national holiday before the war and the custom continues to be observed even today under the new Constitution. But, if my memory is correct, it was not so common in prewar days for ordinary people to celebrate their own birthdays as they do today. The reason is, I think, because of the different way of reckoning one's age. Counting a person's full age, which is common in the West, was introduced after the war under the influence of the occupation forces. Before that, everyone was considered a year older on New Year's Day, regardless of the actual date of one's birth. A baby born on Christmas became two years old a week later. Under this system, it was on New Year's Day, not on one's birthday, that one could actually feel getting older.

In prewar days, we had other opportunities to celebrate children's growth besides their birthdays. May 5th, *Tango-no-sekku*, was Boys' Festival. Families with small boys started preparing for the festival about a month before. They displayed a miniature warrior's helmet, swords and a warrior doll in the house and prayed for their boy's good health. *Hina-matsuri* (*Momo-no-sekku*), held on March 3rd, was a festival for girls. It was a traditional custom to display ceremonial dolls on tiers. Girls invited their friends to a party and enjoyed themselves drinking *shiro-zake* and eating *hi-shi-mochi*. On *Shichi-go-san*, November 15th, another ritual was held as a celebration for children who had reached the

ages of seven, five and three. For this celebration, the children were dressed in their best clothes.

These days, we celebrate children's birthdays following the Western custom, especially when they are small. We give them a gift and prepare a cake for the celebration. Once they are grown up, however, birthday celebrations become very simple. In my family, which ordinarily consists of my wife and me, birthdays are celebrated only by going to a favorite restaurant (Western dishes on my wife's birthday and sushi on mine) and just making a toast. We do not give presents to each other. My wife often buys something she likes on her birthday and just tells me about it, saying it is for her birthday. so I need not be troubled at all to choose something for her.

We Japanese have a custom of celebrating *koki* (70th birthday) or *kiju* (77th birthday) and other special birthdays in commemoration of our longevity. Even if these specified ages are considered especially auspicious, we should enjoy our ordinary birthdays more, considering it fortunate to have advanced to another age because we can never avoid getting older regardless of our own will.

(MIKIHiko YOSHIMOTO, Gifu)

I remember that when I was young, I was given a birthday present and had a special dinner. It was the same for all our family members, but it was discontinued during the Second World War when we could not think of birthdays of others in our family.

I give birthday presents to my husband and grandson. My husband's office has a small birthday celebration, taking cake and tea together the month of his birthday. I decide about my birthday celebration myself. My husband and I have a special dinner. It is a very happy time for me. I call my brothers to say *omedetō* by telephone on their birthdays. It is only a verbal celebration, but we take a

trip with them at a mutually convenient time instead of a birthday celebration.

(MICHIKO SAND, Minami, Nagoya)

My first child was born nine years after I got married, following two miscarriages. When she was born normally after long labor pains, I truly realized that her birth was much more significant and memorable than any other important incident I had experienced in my life. It was not until I had a child that I understood that to a mother, her child's birthday was actually more meaningful than her own birthday.

At my second miscarriage, seven years after my marriage, I was very discouraged, plunging from the apex of joy at becoming pregnant to the depths of grief at losing a baby. In my hospital bed, I could not help hearing the faint cries of babies in other rooms. When I was gazing at the ceiling at night, the woman in the other bed in the room talked to me, also gazing at the ceiling. She told me about her sorrowful experience of losing her baby during the birth process a few years before. The next morning when I went out of the room, an old woman cleaning the corridor stopped to move the mop and said to me, "I lost my son when he was three due to leukemia". Walking along the long corridor to the doctor's room, I deeply realized there were very many sorrows relating to a new life whether before or after the birth.

I will never forget that long period before my daughter was born as well as the greatest joy at her birth. I'm sure I was given that period from Heaven to gain a deeper understanding of the importance of life. Whenever I face complicated problems in raising my children who are approaching the difficult ages, I think of the period when I had eagerly hoped to become a mother and of many women who have difficulties in having their own children despite their hopes.

When my daughter became one year old, many of my relatives gathered to celebrate her birthday. During the party, I felt very faint movements of new life in my body and secretly thought that no one at the party was more precious than my second child. Occasionally, not only on their birthdays, I tell my daughter and son that both of them are presents from Heaven, by far the greatest presents received throughout my life.

(KIKUKO KUWAHARA, Nakagawa, Nagoya)

When I was a small boy, I used to look forward to my birthday. On that day, my mother prepared a special small feast for me and my family to celebrate my birthday by ourselves. In those days, it was customary for each family to celebrate a family member's birthday with a private feast. It was not customary to invite people from outside to attend the celebration.

After a generation passed, however, customs seemed to change a little. I remember when my sons were small, they invited some of their good friends to a party so that their classmates could join in the celebration. Those invited were expected to bring gifts for them. Here we can see the cultural influence from America.

What makes people want to celebrate their birthdays? Why do they feel happy on their birthdays? In my view, the affirmation of human life makes people happy. Happiness comes from life. It is truly a good custom for a community to celebrate their members' birthdays. Each one of us naturally celebrate our birthdays. We cannot pass our birthday without thinking of our birth and subsequent life or something about our future life. Here lies one meaning of "Happy Birthday to you."

(SHOJI SUGIMOTO, Suginami, Tokyo)

Except for our grandchildren, it is not our custom to celebrate birthdays,

but last summer on my birthday, I got a very special, unexpected present. It was from my grandchildren. They handed me an envelope, saying, "Happy Birthday, Grandma". It was wrapped very carefully. After I unwrapped several pieces of wrapping paper, I found five shoulder-pounding tickets with an expiration date. Their message was as follows: "This is a very splendid (*chô-gôka*) gift so please make use of the tickets while they are effective." I couldn't help laughing but at the same time, I felt they were darling, even though they are always noisy and mischievous. Their priceless gift was truly priceless for me.

(MIDORI KODAMA, Midori, Nagoya)

I don't clearly remember when it was that my parents began to celebrate their children's birthdays. It might have been a few years after the end of World War II. We children were allowed to request our favorite dishes for dinner on our birthdays. It was a special dinner for all family members because we were still suffering from a food shortage. But my birthday is January the 3rd, which means it is still during the New Year's holidays. As most Japanese celebrated the New Year for three days at that time, my parents did the same. But it was a very busy time, making visits and receiving visits from their relatives and customers, so my birthday celebration was usually forgotten. I complained to my mother, but her answer was like this: Your birthday was celebrated all over Japan and our dishes were more special than those of other children. And she never made any special dishes for me. I reluctantly agreed that she need not make special dishes for me.

Many years have passed since then. I now have two daughters. Since they got married, they always come to my house during the New Year's holidays with their husbands and children. They celebrate my birthday together every year,

presenting me with some gifts. So now I am very thankful that my birthday is January the 3rd.

(MICHIKO NIWA, Shôwa, Nagoya)

\*\*\*\*\*

### December 30 Message (Theme#342)

*The suggested theme for those who wish to write an essay is: important events of 1997 from your perspective. You may write about events related to your personal experience or events of national or international significance. To you, what were the memorable events of the past year?*

\*\*\*\*\*

Mother Teresa's death. I had never met or conversed with her, but I was shocked to learn that she had died. She had only a small bag even when she went abroad. I saw her picture carrying her bag when she came to Japan. A commentator also spoke of it on television. It left a strong impression on me. She said that when God's love is in one's heart, it is materialized by deeds.

I remember the book entitled "Deep River", *Fukai Kawa*, in Japanese. The author is Shusaku Endo. In the last part, someone asked Mother Teresa's group why they did what they did. They answered that they could not help but do so. The group manifested the love of God which Jesus taught in the Bible: Love your neighbor as you love yourself. God's love is the most important thing for us. I must reflect upon this matter again and again. This theme prompted me to engage in some self-examination.

(MICHIKO SANO, Minami, Nagoya)

In recent years it has become customary at the end of the year to choose

one Chinese character to symbolize the events of the past year. The character chosen for this year means "to fall". I think this choice is quite natural considering that there have been many events which can be described by using this word.

The first "fall" this year was the hostage crisis in Peru. Though Japanese hostages were all liberated safely, 17 people "fell" after being shot. The next "fall" was the cruel murder committed by a middle-school boy in Kobe which shook all parents throughout the country. This incident should stimulate thought about how to educate children. Next, the "fall" which is closely connected with our social life was the bankruptcy of some banking institutions, including a famous bank and a securities company. Following an amendment to the Foreign Exchange Law, the money market will be greatly liberalized from next April. Foreign banking concerns will advance into Japan and the so-called "big-bang" will shake up our banking market.

The death of three people known throughout the world are included in the "fall" category. Teng Hsiao-Ping, the most influential person in China, died in February at the age of 92. Diana, the ex-Princess of Wales, died in a miserable traffic accident in August at the age of 36. And Mother Theresa, the Nobel Prize-winning sister, died in September at the age of 87.

"Falls" at the very end of the year included those related to the Pocket Monster and the New Frontier Party. In the case of the Pocket Monster, children watching television fell one after another and about one thousand of them received medical treatment at hospitals. Recently, producers use too many techniques of strong beams or blinking lights in TV movies. They should carefully consider how to improve the situation, referring also to foreign standards. The New Frontier Party "fell" three years

after its formation and was fragmented into six parties. We cannot easily remember their names, which will surely change again in the coming year.

Lastly, mentioning my own family, my wife fell down in April due to a slight brain blockage. Doctors said it may have been caused by overwork. These words reminded me of her endeavor to accomplish the publication of her book. Happily, she has recovered from the illness and has almost no after-effects. Now, she is back to her former life, holding posts at some schools and giving lectures at various places. I sincerely hope she will never fall down again for the same reason.

Now, the year 1998 is at hand. In the early part of the year, we will host the Olympic Games in Nagano. If Japanese athletes take an active part in the Olympics, we can expect a lucky start in the new year. We do not want to see things "fall" in the new year, whether in the skiing or skating matches of the Olympics or in any area of our society.

(MIKIHiko YOSHIMOTO, Gifu)

These days, when I wake up in the morning and find myself as safe and sound as ever, I often give a sigh of relief because the night has passed without an incident. Indeed, we live in such a turbulent and terrible society. It is not unusual for ordinary people to be hurt or even killed by familiar neighbors. Little girls in Wakayama and Nara prefectures are examples. Both of them were killed last year by neighbors who they knew. These were really frightening incidents in that ordinary people suddenly committed murders without any reasonable motives. Similar cruelties followed one after another. I cannot help recognizing that we live in a society rife with violent and terrible crimes.

Nothing was as stunning, however, as the heinous crime committed by a 14-year-old junior high school student in

Kobe last May. Of all people in the world, he chose one of his junior friends as his poor victim, decapitated him and put his severed head in front of the main gate of his school with a statement that he had committed that murder to exact revenge against compulsory education and the society that created it. The killer also said that he was an invisible person who held a grudge against his teacher.

Parents throughout the country fell into a stunned silence at the callous disregard for human life. That unheard-of event put the educational system and its environment on trial. A newspaper editorial stated that the Kobe case must prompt a review of education. But I would like to suggest otherwise. This case was an unprecedented crime committed by a psychopath as a certain psychologist noted. Any presumptions that pays no attention to psychopathy will make little sense. What an extraordinary incident to happen! And it remains very important in that people must keep tackling the problem no matter how long it takes.

(**SHOJI SUGIMOTO**, Suginami, Tokyo)

I remember two outstanding personal events during the past year. First, my essays in Japanese were published in a monthly magazine six times in a row. Second, a male singing group to which I belong, performed in front of an audience of about eight hundred for the first time in Nagoya.

I am a reader of a monthly magazine for people 60 years old and over related to the JR and traveling. It has a column called "Readers' Plaza" which welcomed contributions about popular songs in the old days. I sent in my essay and, luckily enough, it was printed early in the year. Then I wrote an essay on another topic and it also was accepted. I continued to send in my essays and six different essays were printed during the whole year. Furthermore, some people, known and

unknown, telephoned, sent letters and postcards to me after reading my essays.

Moreover, when the performance by our singing group was held last fall, 1,200 tickets were issued and about 800 people gathered in the hall. In my particular case, I offered 30 tickets to acquaintances and friends and all of them attended the concert. I appreciated their warm consideration.

I am now very happy that my contributions to the magazine have never been omitted for over one year and that our vocal concert was quite successful. But what I feel more thankful for is that I was acquainted with more people and encouraged by them beyond my expectation.

(**HARUJI FUKUMI**, Minami, Nagoya)

There are two things I would like to write about with respect to the important events of 1997.

The first one is about my daughter, Megumi. She is now in the second year of junior high school and a year from now she will be busy preparing for the entrance examinations for senior high school.

It was early in February that my wife and I had to make an important decision about our daughter's future. Right after we came back from Britain, we were aware of our inability to help her with her mathematics and science studies so we asked a man who used to be a judge and was very fond of teaching children math and science to teach her. That was about three years ago and as Megumi did not do well in those subjects, we began to worry about her. We had tried to cancel the former judge's teaching but failed to talk him out of these "private" lessons. His favorite hobby was photography and since he took many pictures, we began to wonder if his photographing was related to the unsuccessful performance of our daughter. In order to persuade me to let him continue his lessons, he eloquently told me how

difficult it would be for Megumi to study math and science by herself, but we decided Megumi should no longer go to see him for help.

When Megumi became a second year student of junior high school and had no one to ask for help in math and science, she did a lot of studying herself. Now she has gained confidence as she has seen her math and science ability greatly improve. We are proud of our daughter and hope she will become more and more independent as a learner.

The second event is about myself. I am now 45 years old and think of this age as an important phase of my life.

Hoping to make this year a turning point, I tried to get a new job, but failed to do so. I was shocked, but now I see that "failure" as a blessing in disguise. The disappointment made me realize what I should do. Teaching English is my lifelong career and in order to find the greatest joy in it, I need a variety of teaching experiences. In order to make my teaching as effective as possible, I need to do much research. With this in mind, I feel I am well on the way toward my goal. I am teaching different kinds of students at different classes and am doing some research by myself and other research with eight scholars. So all I have to do is to trust in the Lord, my Guide in life.

(TOMOYASU KIMURA, Nishi, Nagoya)

\*\*\*\*\*

#### January 6 Message (Theme #343)

*Today I will suggest two different themes; you may choose which one appeals to you. Since this is the Year of the Tiger in Japan, the first theme suggested is: Tiger, Tigers or the Year of the Tiger. What do you associate with tigers? Have you ever seen a tiger? If you have, what was your impression?*

*What kind of person is called a "tiger"? Why is this year the Year of the Tiger? Do you have any special hopes or expectations for this year The second theme is about the peculiar Japanese food made from soybean curd called tōfu. Tōfu has become popular among some Americans because of its exotic, yet healthful, character. Do you like tōfu? Do you eat it often? Do you like it plain or with other foods? How is it made and why is it considered good for the health?*

\*\*\*\*\*

Have you ever heard that tigers can travel a thousand miles a day? This year is the year of the Tiger. The tiger is the only carnivorous animal in the twelve zodiacal signs, or *jū-ni-shi*.

In Chinese thought, tigers are symbols of power and nimbleness, so it might be well to borrow the power or strength of tigers in order to get out of this stagnant state of the Japanese economy. Moreover, it is a pity that in the world of politics and bureaucracy, there remains a strong power structure that hinders the accomplishment of administrative reform.

The Japanese lunar calendar is borrowed from Chinese astrology. What we call *jikkan*, or ten celestial stems, is a series obtained by dividing each of the five elements of *ki* (wood), *hi* (fire), *tsuchi* (earth), *ka* (metal) and *mizu* (water) into two parts, called *e* (elder brother) and *to* (younger brother). Thus we obtain such combinations as *ki no e* (wood-elder brother) and *ki no to* (wood-younger brother).

The combination of the two series (ten celestial stems and twelve zodiacal signs) produces the cycle of sixty days or sixty years as sixty is the first number divisible by both ten and twelve. So if one starts with *ki-no-e*, *ne* (wood-elder brother, rat), one ends after sixty

years with *mizu-no-to*, *i* (water-younger brother, boar) and the cycle is completed. From sixty-one, a new cycle begins. That is why we use the word *kanreki* in relation to a man who has reached sixty, literally meaning the circle of the calendar. The twelve zodiacal signs were combined with Chinese Yin-Yang theory in the 7th century and various fortune-telling concepts related to one's fate or good or bad luck were included.

The twelve zodiacal signs are helpful to learn in what year someone was born, but it is groundless to suppose that a person who was born in the year of the Tiger has a violent temper or that one born in the year of the Ox is patient or enduring.

My mother, who is now 84, was born in the third year of Taishō, which fell on the special year of the Tiger called *Go-oh*. She is always proud of her birth year as though that gave her an advantage. She doesn't know why that year is so special, but she believes that a person born in that year has good fortune even though he or she has a rather violent temper. She had an experience which proves that she was born under the luckiest star. When she was in her forties, she became seriously ill due to a stomach ulcer. She repeatedly vomited blood and her condition became critical. But thanks to my father's diligent care along with blood donations from several people, she miraculously recovered after six months. Fortunately, from then on, she had never contracted a serious illness. I believe this is all attributed to the magical power resulting from her birth in the year of the Tiger *Go-oh*.

(**SHOJI DOMAE**, Kasugai)

Tigers are animals as big as lions and are of the cat family. They live in a wide area from Siberia to Pakistan. Due to the development of forest lands, the numbers of tigers are decreasing greatly. Now an organization with its head

office in the Swiss Confederation is collecting funds to save the tigers.

(**YASUKO IZUMI**, Seto)

Tigers are valuable and beautiful animals compared with other animals. They live in North China, India, Thailand and Indonesia. Tigers are an endangered species, protected by the Washington Treaty. However, there are now 5,000 of them. Their fur was used as a carpet in ancient times, but it is forbidden to do so nowadays.

(**TAMAKO MORIMOTO**, Tsuyama)

There is a small shop that makes tofu near my house. It is operated by an aged couple, so-called bean curd makers. I like tofu very much, especially that made by hand. Whenever I want to eat tofu, I go to that shop to buy newly-made tofu early in the morning. It is still warm in my hand when I receive it. It is really delicious with a faint odor of soybeans and a subtle taste when I eat it while it is still warm. Its taste is quite different from that sold in supermarkets at a low price. The latter is watery and inferior with less bean content. I think the handmade tofu has the original taste. I often introduce the shop to my friends and I hope these small producers will continue to make their products, not succumbing to Japan's severe recession.

(**MICHIKO NIWA**, Shōwa, Nagoya)

Recently restaurants specializing in tofu cuisine have become very popular. In Kyoto, there are a number of famous tofu restaurants. In such restaurants, courses from beginning to end, including the dessert, are made of tofu.

Last spring, I went to Kyoto with a friend and was invited to a fine tofu restaurant. We enjoyed the beautiful form as well as the flavor of the food. I like almost all products made of soybeans, but I especially like tofu. The elaborate tofu dishes in a restaurant are all right,



but I prefer it in its simple form. In the summer time when I have a poor appetite, a piece of cool tofu is very smooth on my tongue and in the winter, the steam from the pan of boiling tofu makes us warm both physically and spiritually.

We eat tofu quite often throughout the year. It is an ideal food because it is tasty, healthy and inexpensive. While writing this essay, I remembered that I have not eaten *kôya-dôfu* for a long time. I suddenly missed that taste.

(MIDORI KODAMA, Midori, Nagoya)

For my breakfast, I usually eat a few pieces of plain soybean curds about four centimeters square and one centimeter high. They are said to be very healthful because they contain much protein and are easily digestible. They are also indispensable for the famous Japanese food, *sukiyaki*, and are used as good additions to *miso* soup.

Among Chinese dishes, there is a tasty one called *mâbo-tôfu* in which tofu is mingled with minced meat, red pepper and some vegetables and boiled in sesame oil. It is a favorite food of Japanese people. Tofu is so soft and digestible that it is suitable for aged people and women.

I attend a monthly haiku poetry meeting which has four men 87 years old. Last December, these aged men held a *bônenkai* luncheon in another place prior to the regular haiku meeting which was to start at 2:00 p. m. They informed us in advance that they would have their *bônenkai* at lunchtime and after that they would attend the regular haiku meeting. But they did not appear even after 3 o'clock. Getting impatient, we inquired about where they were holding their party and found out it was at *Ume-noki* ("Plum Tree"), the famous Japanese restaurant for tofu dishes. Responding to our call, they arrived at our meeting around 4:00 p. m., apologizing for being

so late. I presume they so enjoyed eating the tasty tofu that they forgot the time of the haiku meeting.

I hear there are various grades of tofu dishes at different prices. Now that I will attain the age of *koku* (70 years old), I hope I will have a chance to eat at such a high-class restaurant that specializes in tofu dishes.

(HARUJI FUKUMI, Minami, Nagoya)

Tofu is my favorite food. Have you ever heard a tofu vendor's horn in the evening? It is a very nostalgic sound for me, even today, because it reminds me of my childhood when there were no supermarkets. Nowadays, it is common to buy packaged tofu at a supermarket, but fresh tofu floating in a vendor's bucket of water tastes much better than the packaged one.

Many years ago when I heard a tofu vendor's horn in my neighborhood, I ran after the vehicle and asked the vendor to stop in front of my house. Since then, fortunately, I have been able to buy very fresh tofu every Friday evening. I can describe the difference between fresh and packaged tofu. The "real" tofu has a good odor and taste of soybeans. If you eat plain tofu, you can tell the difference. It is very nutritious and healthful. If you have any health problems, tofu is the best food for you.

(MICHIKO SAKAKIBARA, Kasugai)

Tofu has a high nutritional value because it is made from soybeans. It is also very convenient for us. It does not have a peculiar taste, so we can use it in many different ways. We can eat it in all seasons, making it hot or cold. We can eat it by itself or with other foods, such as meat, fish or vegetables. It is indispensable for *nabemono* (a meal boiled in a pan). Tofu can be combined with many other tastes. We can also change its size and shape. It is very good for people of all ages, from babies

to the elderly. One reason we use it so often is because it is so convenient.

I watched a man making *age*, fried tofu, when I was a child. As if he was a magician, his hand changed the tofu to *age*. *Age* is also used in cooking and is convenient like tofu.

(MICHIKO SANDO, Minami, Nagoya)

I have special memories of tofu from my boyhood days. As I have often mentioned in previous essays, I was evacuated from Tokyo to Hiroshima during the war. My mother's parents, with whom we lived, were tofu makers. I woke up very early in the morning at their home because of the noise of a mill grinding soybeans. Sometimes I helped my grandparents make tofu so I am familiar with the manufacturing process. To make tofu, soybeans are first soaked in water for from 10 to 24 hours. Then they are ground into a milk-like liquid. With the addition of a specified amount of calcium sulfate (which we call *nigari*), the curdy liquid congeals into a very soft, custard-like substance. The mixture is poured into a square frame over the bottom of which a straining cloth has been spread. Gentle pressure is applied to squeeze out the excess liquid until the custard is about half of its original size. The remaining curd is tofu; the squeezed out lees or sediment is called *o-kara*.

Tofu was first made in China over 2000 years ago and soon spread throughout the Far East. In Japan, it came into wide use from the middle ages. By the way, the Chinese characters for tofu in China are the same as in Japan and are pronounced similarly. In the early days, tofu was homemade and sold only in special shops, but now it is made in factories and sold in supermarkets. In my boyhood, even in Tokyo, tofu was usually sold by vendors who carried tofu in a box on a bicycle or hanging from a pole.

Tofu has become very popular in Europe and America as a health food. Soy-

beans contain high quality vegetable protein and are called "meat of the farm". Tofu also has a high nutritive value containing protein and calcium, but it is low in calories. During the war, all of us Japanese ran short of provisions, but my family members could get quite enough food as we lived in a rural district. Tofu, especially, which was produced by my grandparents, helped to alleviate our food situation. *O-kara*, the squeezed out lees, also was an important food for us. We could eat as much of it as we wanted because it was going to be thrown away.

Tofu is one of my favorite foods. There will never be a day when I do not eat tofu. (By the way, it is the same with *nattô*, fermented soybeans, which I eat every morning.) Tofu can be eaten in various ways. I like *hiya-yakko*, cold soybean curd, most. We eat it with soy sauce, minced *negi* (green onions) and grated *shôga* (ginger). In winter, *yu-dôfu* is very good. It is cooked in hot water and served with seasonings. Tofu is also one of the most popular ingredients for *sukiyaki*. Every morning, I take traditional Japanese food for breakfast: *nattô*, laver and *miso* soup. Ingredients of the *miso* soup may be a potato, a radish or something else, but mostly tofu. I think tofu is one of the most nutritious, cheap and convenient foods for us Japanese. (MIKIHiko YOSHIMOTO, Gifu)

Most Japanese eat rice every day. What other foods do we eat daily other than rice and seasonings? In my home, bean curd (tofu) is one of them. I buy tofu at supermarkets and also from a tofu vendor who drives around the town. Her car, which broadcasts lovely music like *Aka-tonbo*, or "Red Dragonfly", comes in the evenings of Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

Now, in winter, we love food served in a pot, which we call *nabemono*, of which there are many kinds: *sukiyaki*, *mizutaki*, *misonabe*, *yudôfu* and a special

*nabemono* with no name. All of them require tofu. As the weather gets warmer, we will eat *hiya-yakko*, cool bean curd seasoned with soy sauce, pieces of green Japanese onion, dried bonito and ginger. All the year round, I have *miso* soup with bean curd and other different ingredients every morning. I think bean curd is delicious, nutritious, easily digestible and easily cooked. We can call tofu one of the masterpieces of Japanese cuisine

(YOSHIKO TOYOTA, Kanie, Aichi)

I like tofu so much that it has been my custom for a long time to enjoy tofu dishes almost every day. Tofu is, indeed, one of my favorite foods.

I like tofu better than any other food because it leaves a good taste in the mouth, but I would be at a loss if asked to explain how it tastes. It tastes quite plain and simple, full of delicate savors, but very good.

The above is just part of the story. Not only does tofu taste good, it is extremely nutritious as well. It's great merit as a food is that it is full of a variety of nutrients. Moreover, it is very inexpensive. I know nothing more nutritious and inexpensive than tofu. It stands to reason that tofu has enjoyed great popularity among people since its introduction from China more than a thousand years ago.

(SHOJI SUGIMOTO, Suginami, Tokyo)

Tofu is a food that the common people in Japan have loved for many years after it was introduced by Buddhist priests who had studied in China. I hear that during the Tokugawa Shogunate, in 1780, a cookbook entitled "One Hundred Kinds of Tofu Delicacies" was published in wood block print.

When I learned the Chinese characters for tofu (meaning rotten soybeans) for the first time, I wondered why tofu was a good food. Later, I learned that the character for "rotten" may also de-

note liquid matter that becomes solid after being condensed.

I enjoy eating tofu delicacies, roasted tofu or fried tofu almost every day. Above all, I like eating cold, diced tofu flavored with soy sauce and dried and scraped bonito, called *hiya-yakko*. I also like boiled tofu cooked with meat or codfish and some vegetables, such as Chinese cabbage and stone leeks. Every dish I mentioned tastes very good. I understand well why Americans also like tofu. Not only in America, it will be popular soon all over the world because it goes well with foods of any flavor.

Tofu is made from soybeans. They contain much protein. Also, they become light and aid digestion. Where there is tofu, there is a way to become a good cook. That is why tofu is called a healthy food and is loved by all people who have tried it. I am thankful to God for being a Japanese for I have been enjoying tofu from my childhood.

(KAZUKO TAGUCHI, Fukushima)

\*\*\*\*\*

Among the 21 contributors to this 59th issue of "Daily Word" Echoes, there is one first-timer, who has been a listener to the spoken messages for many years. We welcome her to these pages. If my calculations are correct, she is the 104th person who has contributed an essay over the past 16 years and the 53 essays included in this issue bring the total number of essays printed to 3047.

Since the next issue will be #60, since my age has reached 70 and since I am about to retire as pastor of the church in Takahama, that may be a propitious time to discontinue this publication. Although that is not definite at this time, I do recall the words of Ecclesiastes 7:8: "Better is the end of a thing than its beginning." (C.O.)

*favorable*