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Dying in Japan: Japanese folk and religious beliefs about death

Goodman, Elizabeth Kushi, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1994

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DYING IN JAPAN:

JAPANESE FOLK AND RELIGIOUS BELIEFS ABOUT DEATH

by

Elizabeth Goodman

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Sociology
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
The City University of New York

1994

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

4/25/94
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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Acknowledgements

This work owes its origins to Prof. George Fischer, who encouraged me to write about the Japanese way of death when I spoke with him about my many everyday conversations on death in Japan. Upon his retirement from the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, Prof. Rosalind Bologh generously took over supervision of the partially completed dissertation and offered her perceptive insights and ideas for its completion.

Thanks are also due to Professors Lindsey Churchill, who read many early drafts and offered encouragement, Felix Gross who read through the most complete penultimate version and gave his kind advice, and William Kornblum who assisted with the tasks of administration and offered welcome support. I am grateful to all of them. But let it be noted that any errors are mine.

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Chapter 1

Theoretical and Methodological Considerations in Approaching Ideas about Dying and Religion in Japan

The Japanese view of dying is a seasonal view. It is very sad for a child to die in the springtime of life. It is fitting to die in the fullness of the year when winter covers the earth. While earth is resting, the seedlings for the new year's growth slowly gather up the strength of their ancestral stocks and uncurl in the warm sun of Spring. So life follows life with an unbroken cycle of rising and falling lives.

Agricultural peoples know this rhythm well and when their culture encourages belief in the sacredness of the land and their religion promises rebirth in another existence as part of the inevitable cycle of forever becoming, we have ancient beliefs and modern physics surprisingly agreeing on the inevitability of change and the need to become something in this teeming world.

It is difficult to think of another modern nation where the seasons are so sensitively honored, a tradition that has been celebrated since the days the first poems in the Manyoshu were written, about 750 A.D. (Manyoshu: 1969). Often special places become associated with particular events and the Japanese turn them into festive occasions, returning to admire the spring or autumnal displays, writing poems about blossoms or the red and gold of falling maple leaves. Even the cold frost covering a sere winter garden has beauty and sadness in Japanese eyes. This remains true today, almost as it was a hundred years ago. Tokyo's people rush out during one of her rare snowfalls to view the city landscaped in white, rhapsodize over the first plum blossoms, and set out a family party under the cherry blossoms. They line the streets for shrine and temple festivals and dance in the streets every summer for the entertainment of the dead at OBON, (Japan's most important religious observance). Then businesses and shops close down, and crowded thoroughfares empty as the other one half of Tokyo's people return to their hometowns, to visit relatives and the family graves. We learn more about seasonal observances in Tokyo, in the November 1985 Japan Society of New York Newsletter where Peter Popham says,

> These traditions [of Tokyo] are not what Westerners tend to think of as city things because they are related to nature and the flowering of the seasons, phenomena to which city living is customarily thought inhospitable. Tokyo's people, though, have never found any difficulty in welcoming nature, and making celebration of it an intrinsic part of city life.

Yet to say this is part of the ordinary pleasure of Japanese life sounds eccentric to Western urbanites. Because the West has compartmentalized its daily existence to fit its highly mechanized and bureaucratized system of production, spurred by individualism and a once-ascetic form of Protestant religion, life there has been generally rationalized into a time to work, a time to socialize, even a time to pray segment of the week. Japanese also subscribe to a modern, Western style of production. Yet, somehow, they seem to carry with each modern daily routine, all the traditional elements mentioned above. They don't feel that pressure to separate into segments the different modes of being that the traditional rhythm of life represents.

Japanese religion provides a unified way of thinking about the world and dying—one that may have been modified by, but not lost to modernization. First and last, the Japanese have little sense of sacred and secular areas of life. The main claim of this work is that the lack of such separation between sacred and secular underlies, or accounts for, Japan's highly unwestern attitudes toward religion as well as dying.

"All is related," says the Buddha, and all become one in the great unknowable void of the universe. This sense of unity, the harmony of nature and the universe, has been remarked upon by more than one Oriental scholar as denoting the difference between Eastern and Western ways of thinking. Eastern philosophy counsels all to live in harmony with nature. Westerners seek to control it.

In this comparative context, the problem of Western social research appears to be an almost unalterable commitment to the West's own values of science and economy. Britain's great scholar on Japan, Basil Hall Chamberlain, once remarked:

> The love of truth for truth's sake is not a general human characteristic, but one of the exceptional traits of the modern European mind developed slowly by many causes, chiefly by those habits of accuracy which physical science does so much to foster, . . . the concern of ancient peoples and of Oriental peoples has always been, not so much truth, as edification (1982:244).

Western social science research often subordinates the fact that a human's inner world is shaped by differences in culture. Ordinary people all over the world are not concentrated on their economic well being as much as they are on their emotional well being and satisfying relationships.

Along these same lines, Peter Homans, a professor and sometimes critic of Western psychotherapy, labeled Sigmund Freud's discovery of the ego as "The final overcoming of a religious view of the world" (Homans, 1984:133-154). Homans's point was that modern science "balks at the notion that the `inner world' is shaped by culture, and with few exceptions studies religion by focusing on religious history, religious myths, religious ritual, and religious dogma--not religion's function".

All this leads us into University of Chicago's Joseph Kitagawa's key point: Buddhism, one of the world's major religions, is more than a doctrine and cult. It is also a social reality and a whole way of life (Kitagawa, 1987, 1982).

Buddhism is a total system, which attempts to give an explanation for history, physical science, cosmology, and philosophy. It prevents the sundering of unconscious thought and activity into separate and rationalized categories of being, long after the religious elements which produce certain turns of mind, have been consciously considered. Buddhism continues to have its effect in the modern age on technology and industrialization, particularly in a country like Japan, which by its geographic and linguistic isolation has been able to keep considerable control over imported ideas and philosophies. Foreign missionaries have labored in Japan since the sixteenth century, but have had little success in gaining Japanese converts. The

Japanese have always given polite attention to Christian proselytizing and expressed admiration for the self reliant character sometimes produced by Christianity's individualistic philosophy, but there has been no wish to substitute it for the traditional religion of the nation, the Japanese version of Buddhism.

Japanese Buddhism is not the gloomy version of the original and ascetic Indian discipline--requiring monkish devotion and practiced by genteel intellectuals--but a folk religion, which marries the remnants of beliefs from more primitive days, and incorporates them into the common notions of today. In a closed society such as Japan was, and in some ways remains, the same sort of beliefs and practices are collectively held by all. Anthropologist E. E. Evans-Pritchard, when writing about theories of primitive religion said, "Religion is acquired like a language, by being born into a particular society" (1965:54-55). And in The Origins of Religious Life, Emile Durkheim noted that:

> Once brought into existence by collective action, religion gains a degree of autonomy and proliferates in all sorts of ways, which cannot be explained by reference to the social structure which gave birth to it, but only in terms of other religious and social phenomena, in a system all its own. (1918:47).

Buddhism is responsible for the totalistic view that the Japanese bring to all their enterprises and relationships. Just as Max Weber proposed ascetic Protestantism to be the source for entrepreneurial habits of mind, which led to the rationalization of activities in other areas of life, I propose the idea that Buddhism is responsible for the nonsegmented, totalistic way the Japanese approach their phenomenal world--which becomes the most fruitful model for understanding their ideas on, and their acceptance of death. Although it is almost 150 years since Admiral Perry sailed into Tokyo Bay to open Japan up to the west, the Japanese attitude on life's values still remains demonstrably different from those of modern nations in the west.

When we try to answer why, in a western frame of analysis such as Marxism, we would have to couch our question in its ethnocentrically inclined vocabulary, such as "are the relations of production under modern capitalism so very different in Japan? Is factory work less boring in Toyotaville than in Flint Michigan?" The answer is "not very different," according to Robert Cole, in his study Blue Collar Japan: The Changing Tradition (1973).

As more and more Japanese give up life on the land to move to jobs in the cities (less than 5% of the population remains in heavily subsidized commercial farming), will they lose their attachment to the land and begin to realize that the superstructures of modern capitalism are affecting the quality of their lives decisively? Not yet, if we count the insignificant numbers who vote for radical party candidates (despite the overt lack of some of life's amenities in the crowded condition of Japan's largest cities)--because Japanese do not measure their lives by the same material standards that dominate peoples' thinking in the West.

Our question might be rephrased to ask: What is the veil that separates the reality of the production floor from the illusionary world of the tea ceremony? But it would still be an ethnocentric analysis of Japanese behavior. For it assumes categories of thought to be universally focused on the self--a Western kind of self.

"We cannot simply dismiss these phenomena by labels like 'cultural lag,' 'backward peoples,' or, "Asiatic underdevelopment," but must rather seek the answer in the cultural characteristic and traditional ways of thinking of each group of people," warns Asian scholar, Nakamura Hajime (1964:3). Nakamura is emphatically telling us: the assumption that the structures of consciousness are focused on economic survival or gain may be very ethnocentric.

The questions Western social scientists often ask are based on economic concerns because the quality of life is thought, in the West, to be the byproduct of such forces. It does not allow us to ask: How well does this view relate to questions about the quality of life in this or the next world which has concerned people since time immemorial? Despite our technological rationality we have not been able to order such thoughts out of existence. In Japan, people do not apologize for them because they do no feel our own vast separation between past, present, and future. Nor, as was stressed already, do they see life as separated into sacred and profane divisions.

For our topic, a further discovery for a Western sociological detective is the realization that the Japanese do not regard themselves as autonomous individuals in the same way the majority of Westerners do. They live in a group oriented society, and their inclusion in the group membership validates them as worthy human beings. They earn the esteem of their fellows by subordinating their individual desires for the benefit of the entire body. To act only for oneself would be selfish and lead to a marginal life outside of the warmth and security of the group.

This feeling of being part of a group extends beyond to the grave, I shall contend, and is one of the major reasons, why Japanese so do not trouble themselves enormously with fear of death. In response to a request for attitudinal surveys on death from the Japanese sources at the Japan Society library in New York, the Japanese librarian could think of nothing, "...because we Japanese don't worry so much about death." She later suggested an American book by Lifton, Shuichi, and Reich, entitled Six Lives, Six Deaths (1978).

These initial findings separate us from some of the theorizing of Max Weber in sociological theory and the sociology of religion. Weber brought out some of the consequences of individualism resulting from a Calvinist form of religion and its stimulus to the development of capitalism (The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism). Weber also brought out how, after religious anxiety waned, when its need for a sign of approval from God faded, secular materialistic religion was transformed into a habit of mind. Weber posited that these early as well as later inclinations spurred capital accumulation and reinvestment, and proved to be the catalyst for the technological explosion of the West.

It is a story well known to sociology and still generating valuable work. One limitation of the Protestant ethic and its heritage is that in the West we can ask only certain questions. The phenomenological attitude, in the sense of bracketing our taken for granted assumptions and our "natural attitudes," becomes our major resource as soon as we realize that a people's views are a result of, literally, where they stand in the social world, in the midst of their culture.

To analyze Japan, we need a sociology based on the idea of a collecttivity to replace the "loneliness of the individual" or alienation theories born in the Protestant West. As against Weber, we may do better testing Durkheim's theses in the Japanese setting—remembering, as Durkheim tells us, that by performing religious rites, society reifies itself and worships its own existence (1918:7). For example, we see the Japanese who enthusiastically maintain the annual ceremonial round of festivals. Here by participating, they are unconsciously led to preserve the nature of their Japanese cultural identity. At such times both parents and children commonly offer incense, water, or food, to the resident deity as part of holiday outings to temples and shrines. (The Japanese word for festival, *matsuri*, implies meeting at the temple.)

Still thinking of Durkheim, we notice how closely his idea of a collective conscience is allied to the consensual nature of Japanese social enterprises and the well known Japanese predilection for waiting until everyone is in relative agreement before embarking on a major course of action. We can also utilize Durkheim's idea of the formal sacred community as it bears on the village cult of the Ujigami, a titular deity and ancestor of local families in village Japan. Though shrine devotion declined after World War II (largely because of its association with the official cult of State Shinto which glorified war), the deserted neighborhood shrine precincts, some of which I first visited in 1974, were ten years later prosperous looking and bright with new additions on well swept grounds. The idea of a sacred community attached to an industrial giant makes us pause and leads to the need for studies like this one. And we have discovered, in Japan, that what Durkheim referred to as *mechanical* solidarity has not been replaced by *organic* solidarity.

Yet we need to note a difficulty, in a study on Japan, in testing or relying on a thesis framed in the theoretical dress of Western social science. That crucial difficulty lies in the fact that the Japanese do not separate their thinking into isolated categories. For a researcher to insist on a Western based approach, even one as tempting as Durkheim's, encourages a grave skewing of original intention. It is precisely because of the un-Western way of thinking in Japan that the Japanese have not lost their traditions and the support of religion in time of dying and grieving. Pointing to the coexistence of Buddhism and Shinto in mutual harmony on the same temple grounds is just a major example particularly germane to the present work. One can extend it to everything the Japanese do. Within this scheme, of a much less segmented culture, one can find the answer to the Japanese uniqueness in the modern world.

Most of all, only more so, Japan has not separated her sacred community from her profane. This explains the simultaneous expression of skepticism and religious behavior one often meets in Japan. "No power," (because Japan was defeated in WWII) laughs the young cosmopolite as he claps his hands in front of the local shrine to which he has guided his Western sightseeing friend. This skeptical attitude has not undermined the respectful routines of his life: some day he may return for more serious devotions, or perhaps not. It is a comfortable relationship which does not ask for a declaration of belief or disbelief. The same attitude may help explain, perhaps, the unabashed founding of new religions as much as the tacit continuance of magical beliefs. In Tokushima I recently met a retired doctor who started his own religion and had installed a splendid altar in his home where he conducted devotions in priestly garb. In New York City, 1984, I met a young Japanese woman who had temporarily moved out of her East side apartment because her priest-uncle in Japan had counselled her that the West Side would be a very beneficial direction to reside in during these months of her life. He too had founded his own religion, she said. Perhaps these examples may be taken as clues to help Westerners see the unity of religion with mundane life in modern Japanese minds.

"The Japanese are always involved in a web of relationships which cannot be broken and must be maintained at any cost," is Robert Ballon's advice for the foreign businessman. He goes on to say that a Japanese cannot isolate himself in order to answer a question directly and decisively on the spot. He is too involved with the feelings of other people in his related world. "Like a mother with a child who gets anything it wants, you cannot separate her--or the people--from the nation," says Ballon. "There is a giant organism where men and things form a unity it would be dangerous and erroneous to break" (Ballon, 1976:3-6).

The Japanese are always alert to the relationships which exist among them, because no one has value by himself but only in relationship to other things. "The self is not differentiated from the family or group," asserts Japanese psychologist Inui Takashi (Craig and Shively, 1970:1-28). This fusing of the self with others is, in some sense, also extended to nature. One's life intertwines with it like with one's surroundings, and it grows and has a harvest like nature's seasons. In nature one finds moods corresponding to one's own. For according to Shinto, nature is the sacred benefactor of the race. And because of Shinto, today's Japanese still pay extraordinary devotion to the seasons.

For instance, in their youth the Japanese are diffident toward religion. To children, shrines and temples are nice places for school outings. Shrines and temples become more important as people grow older and turn to them as objects of pilgrimage, which is not unlike the reactions of people in other cultures. But in Japan, all share a common heritage of Buddhism, endowing them with the knowledge that existence is basically transitory. This is known to the befeathered teenagers, dancing every Sunday in Tokyo's Harajuku, as well as to the startled grandmother who visits from the country. Continuing examination will reaffirm that the Japanese continue to use their traditions to cope with grief and meet death—and uncovers how taken-for-granted religious values continue to endure in modern society, despite change and industrialization.

Chapter 2

The Legacy of Japanese Culture and Religion

What the occasional visitor to Japan sees, in the urban landscape, expressing from airport to town, and all along the railroad beds that connect the great cities of Osaka, Kobe, and beyond, is a wall to wall continuum of homes and factories, with occasional green lawns that turn out to be new growing rice. Invariably one is traveling across the Tokaido route that stretches along the coastline of Japan. Inland lies mountain after mountain with only small level patches of land. In the crevices and around the riverbeds that cut their way to the sea level, bearing along the rainfall from the mountains above, small clusters of houses are nestled in the rice paddies and steal their precious space from the arable lands. In this landscape, where one is exposed to the palpable ferocity or benevolence of nature, one sees the seeds of Japan's first religion, reverence for nature or Shinto, "the way of the gods."

But Shinto beliefs about the soul had proved vague and unhelpful even then, and it is the revolutionizing introduction of Buddhism that brought mainland culture and sophisticated Indian metaphysics from China to Japan. With these the Japanese began to define and elaborate their own version of the soul and its future life. To this was added Confucianism which extolled the virtues of loyalty and duty to the nation and the family. How these traditions persisted to exert their influence on the apparently secular Japanese of today are traced in this chapter.

Japanese legends begin with the sun goddess Ameterasu's descent from heaven. She is the mythical ancestor of all Japanese and the practices, and beliefs connected with honoring her, make up the native religion of Japan called Shinto. Its written records, the Kojiki and the Nihon Shoki, did not appear until the early eighth century when it became increasingly necessary to defend Shinto practices before the growing popularity of Buddhism, the "foreign" religion, introduced by monks from China and Korea in the sixth century.

Imbued with nature, pre-Buddhist tales of Shinto lack a tragic sense, or as the Japanese historian Anesaki points out, "A sense of conflict with demonic fate, that Greek cultures, for instance, knew (Anesaki 1956:209-307). Instead Shinto preaches the essential goodness of the human being. It streses gratitude and awe for the benevolence of nature, with a later version adding reverence for ancestral memory. (Nitobe 1968) An awe of the power of nature produced a reverence for anything, whether natural or human, if it seemed to represent some unusual force or beauty. Such manifestations were felt to have a personal identity and called Kami, which means a spirit above, and thus a kind of deity.

Kami were not in the domain of the out of reach far away heavens, but in things that were everywhere around one, in the rocks, in the trees, and in the mountains. Ancestors too could become Kami and join the company of deities that lingered in the neighborhood of their former homes,taking an occasional interest in the affairs of men. In this way Shinto developed a fusion with ancester worship.

The Shinto inspired Kojiki (712) described death as retirement to a dark defiled world, usually in the mountains or beyond the sea. (Hori, 975:141-179). So naturally one ought to celebrate life while one had it. Shinto did little to comfort the lamentations of the bereaved of those ancient days. We get our sense of it from the Manyoshu poetry, a collection of written verse compiled in the eighth century, and containing earlier work from an oral tradition.

> Since you, my lord have gone,
> many long days have passed.
> Should I now come to meet you
> and seek you beyond the mountains?
> Or still await you-await you forever?
>
> (Longing for the "Emperor Nintoku,"
> Manyoshu, 6:1981)

The Manyu poems accepted the interchangeable movement of the spirit between the realms of the dead and the living which existed together in the same world. (Ebersole, 1983).

Another Japan expert, H. Byron Earhart, says one of the most important junctures where the living, the souls of the dead, and the Kami, meet is the sacred mountain. In the classic Manyoshu, many poems describe the souls of the dead in the sacred mountains as if it were another world, and attempts at burials there can be documented from prehistoric times onward. (Earhart 1970, also Kidder 1977, Yanagita 1964). These scholars investigated a wide range of folk and orthodox rituals associated with nature and sacred mountains.

Belief that the mountains were the home of the Kami made them seem to lead to the other world of the dead, and so, an appropriate place to offer ritual observances. These mountainous landscapes have not changed today. Mountains are almost everywhere in Japan. In the ever dewy evenings, they send out fingers of swirling mists, and in the daylight they are unpredicatably changable, as sudden rains and thunderbolts overtake the brightest day. It is still easy to appreciate the mysterious events and powers ancients associated with mountains. In the country some elderly farmers will tell you the god of the rice paddies Ta-no-kami comes down for the planting season to bring water to the fields and returns in the winter. Woodsmen and mountain hunters call him Yama-no-kami and think he always stays above (Yanagita, 1964). These planting and harvesting seasons are the time of religious observances and Shinto shrine dances called kagura, sacred performances later adapted for the Noh drama.

Today Shinto devotions might be practiced on the top of the mountain following a series of small wayside shrines leading up to the main shrine. Folklorists like Yanagita and Hori say this is a relatively recent idea influenced by Buddhist practices. Their researches found older customs that placed worship at the foot of the mountains, perhaps because of the awe over the deity.

In 1985 New Yorkers saw a Japanese Film Himamatsuri, based on a true incident that occured in Wakayama prefecture. It fictionalized actual events where a Japanese lumberman and hunter killed all the members of his household and himself when they sold their traditional family holding to a commercial developer. The lumberman's conviction was that the mountain kami's spirit was being degraded by its abandonment to greedy interests. An American audience was poorly prepared to understand the intentions of the suicidee. In a New York Times review, the film critic found the motives of the protagonist obscure.

Before the days of Buddhism, Shinto beliefs ignored death and feared pollution to such an extent that the entire Capital was shifted to a fresh site whenever the ruler died. The rise of Buddhism during the seventh century fundamentally softened the views behind this practice. But the Japanese philosophy which was essentially for life, and the importance of human sentiments, emotions, sensual pleasure, aesthetic appreciation of nature, cleanliness, etc., was laid over with an affirmation for death, which the Buddhist teaching provided, comments Toyomasa Fuse, in an article for Asian Profile (1984: 233).

The new religion of Buddhism promised rebirth or escape from life into nirvana. In Japan, this became the promised land of amida Buddhism, if not one of the intermediary heavens decribed in the sutras. Even then, the great majority of the this-world inclined Japanese looked forward to another life. Even if suicide were the cause of death, it was possible to be reborn into a better situation. People who were close to each other hoped to meet again. Chance acquaintances might have met in this life because they once sheltered under the same tree or shared water from the same well, according to an old saying.

The Buddhism of the folk must be distinguished from the orthodox creed of the intellectual and the scholar, which was never fully accepted by the people of Japan, according to Yanagita Kunio, although, of course, it remains the province of the religious professional (see also Hori, 1968). What attracted the ordinary man and woman was the obvious and ingenious interpretation of change, and the explanation of the traumas of life and death, matters Shinto neglected to solve. According to the people's understanding, the dead were happy or unhappy, not especially because of the attention or neglect shown to them by the living, but because of their past behavior while alive. Because of attachment to overwhelming human passions some of the dead might cling to this world. A murdered person is a standard type of "angry ghost" in folk tales, or it may simply be a deeply humiliated woman, like the aristocratic Lady Hollihocks in, The Tale of Genji. Consuming rage is central to the Noh play Aoi No Ue (Keene, 1970:230).

Popular belief was not put off by the dreary prediction of interminable rebirths. It was accepted as a merely symbolic doctrine. Under these notions a homey form of ancestor worship became a part of the Buddhism of the Japanese family, that was unlike the formal ancestor worship practiced in China. While the dead were not exactly gods, their affectionate presence and encouragement could be experienced around the house and people turned to them in times of difficulty. In this way, people can still be seen to address their dead in terms of reverence and endearment. These practices are often illustrated in Japanese movies, TV series, and soap operas. Directors like to dwell on such moments for they are sure crowd pleasers. One designation calls them "three handkerchief movies." But such sentiments also fit comfortably with the popular Mahayana Buddhism practiced in Japan. This teaches that all matter is sentient, where even inanimate things can become Buddhas. Even though it may take many lives, it is possible for all to attain a state of being in which one is free of desire and therefore suffering. Such a peace and bliss is called nirvana. Nirvana describes itself as the ultimate goal of the Buddhist universe where all the cosmos is a living aggregate of matter. Just like a human life, it is made up of karma, which can then make up worlds,--and determine the character of societies. In this universe, the future is shaped by the welding power of all thoughts and actions. Good actions and good thoughts create paradises, and the opposite happens when the acts are wicked. Every atom, every action, is irresistably drawn to its appointed place. Thus, depending on whether it is good or bad, every act will not only affect one's rebirth, but affects the world and its future history (Hearn, 1970).

A most attractive feature of Buddhism is its emphasis on compassion and equality. It is not anxious about differences between it and other religions. It teaches no discrimination between the self and god. Society is not just in the present, but exists in a vast realm back through the past and into the future. At the moment one lives here, another generation is dying, and life goes on. As an idea this is intuitive and a matter of belief: one has to accept religion as having a mysterious power. In order to help humanity, Buddhism says, one has to recognize that one is a Buddha, for without use of its teachings, there is no Buddhism. The later Amidaist sects decided that fervent repetition of Amida Buddha's name, alone, was sufficient for salvation. However, recognizing that one is a Buddha does not automatically endow Buddhahood. It does mean one accepts the principle that a human has within himself the capacity to become a Buddha. Unlike Hinduism which believes the soul continues through countless incarnations, Buddhism says it is only the deeds one has committed that live on--not the unique personality—that changes—as through socialization, from life to life. Everything is impermament, so there is no permanent self. Yet no one is born free, to start out doing as they please, because of the burden of karma from other lives. Humans suffer due to attachment to impermanent things, while the universe is in a constant state of flux. People imagine they are permanent, one day to discover they are not (Hearn, 1970; La Fleur, 1983; Kitagawa, 1987).

In Buddhism, unlike Hinduism, it is not the individual soul, or personality, that passes on, only the karma, or deeds, that leave lasting effects. But just as in the earlier Hindu system, the universe is nothing less than a complete moral order constantly changing and reforming from the pressure of the countless actions of individuals.

There is a further difference between the Japanese version of Buddhism and Indian Buddhism, in which the Japanese have incorporated their Shinto beliefs. The folk heritage says that ancestors hover nearby, and guide the future generations, glossing over the contradictions of how newly emergent lives can carry on an extension of their past life in another existence. The confusion of these teachings is critically noted, within the writings of folk historian Yanagita Kunio. In About Our Ancestors (1988), Yanagita championed the original native beliefs of Japan over the official Buddhism that would send the souls of the dead "a billion miles away to nirvana" (1988:62).

The fundamental notion of Hindu thinking, from whence Buddhism sprang, was based upon the ultimate unity of all existence. How to realize this in thought and life was the main problem of the Hindu philosophers. But as Max Weber has pointed out, the ancient Brahmin schools put so much emphasis on the transcendental nature of attainment, that the depth of esoteric teaching tended to be kept apart from everyday life, and made it a religion for genteel intellectuals, and eventuallly a class of priestly professionals (causing Buddhism to disappear in India) (Weber, 1964). The common people were regarded as incapable of attaining any such heights in this one life. This helped keep the four Indian castes perpetually apart. Ordinary men and women were restricted by the obligations of daily existence. They had to console themselves with the thought of higher attainment in some other life, lives beyond knowing into the future. But the Buddhist transformation of religion was a bold break through such spiritual barriers as well as in the social structure. Everybody was seen as capable of attaining Buddhahood. The Nichiren sects said this could happen even in this body. This was the reason why this movement became the beginning of a universal religion which was able to go beyond the bounderies of India and influence nearly the whole of Asia, historian Anesaki Masaharu says. "It was the outcome of a personal conviction of a great spiritual genius" (Anesaki, 1970:61).

As we may remember from the Manyoshu poem cited earlier, in the days of primitive Shinto, death did not completely sever the living and the dead. Shinto could not explain entirely the dead, and people would yearn and call out for a return of the dead. After the teaching of Buddhism, the future became better defined. Even non-religion practicing Japanese continue to hold the thought that a deceased's soul lingers around earth for forty-nine days, waiting for rebirth or paradise as it hovers near its old home. When the forty-nine day waiting period is over, a parish priest is invited to perform a farewell service (hoji), and friends and family members gather for a feast. The final procession to the cemetary is led by an eldest son or the spouse. They follow the priest, with relatives and friends, and carry the container of ashes to its final place in the grave. There will be successive memorial services, the first one on the next year's anniversary of death, and at gradually lengthening intervals, (quite regardless of the religiosity or irreligiosity felt in the house), and as long as close family members live and remember the deceased. In some places memorials are stopped at the thirty-third year; in others, they last longer. Customs may vary slightly according to the family sect and the part of the country (Smith, 1974; Newell, 1976).

At home the Ihai memorial tablet of the dead person is in the family altar and will represent the departed's spirit. It continues to be thought of as involved and concerned with the affairs of the household. Some day a time will come when it is discarded into the river but that will be when no one now living remembers the face of its owner. The spirit tablet regularly receives food from the family table. It should be the first cup of rice from the day's new batch, as well as daily water, and occasional gifts of fruit and cake, whether purchased or brought by visitors to the home. This tradition is common wherever there is a butsudan in the house. The writing incised on the ihai contains the deceased's kaimyo, a posthumous name, which reflects something noteworthy about the departed's character, and his or her hopes in a future life. Priests recieve an important part of their income for composing them. Besides the ihai tablet in the home Butsudan, every year at Obon festival time, new wooden toba grave markers are ordered to replace last year's old ones. These tall flat sticks are left to lean on the family stone and represent a miniature stupa (used in all Buddhist countries to mark the relics or presence of a saint). They may contain quotations from a particular sutra revered by the deceased's sect. In the Nichiren sect, the "namu myoho renge kyo" of the Lotus sutra is always used and may also contain wishes for happy fulfillment in the next world. (For translations of sotoba texts see Robert J. Smith's Ancestor Worship in Contemporary Japan [1974] or Lafcadio Hearns's "Literature of the Dead" [Exotics and Retrospectives, reprinted 1976].)

Bushido

Under the influence of the severe warrior code, that taught implacable devotion to one's lord was the highest duty of a samurai, a further shaping of Japanese religion and morality took place. This morality was deliberately intensified by the directives of the 1870 Meiji goverment, discussed by Tsrurumi Kazuko in her book, as a "socialization for death." (Tsurumi, 1970) Originally it supported behavior for men who must always be in a state of readiness for death and grew from the Confucian precept that required social beings to be responsible members of society, and the beneficiaries of others' obligations to social duty. Each level of society was subject to someone else, the lord to the people, the people to the lord, the child to the parent, the wife to husband, and so on. These were obligations that could never be forfeited. One can muse over them in a handbook written for samurai, The Hagakure, which actually appeared in Meiji times, later than the feudal era that depended on its values, and much after the times that warranted its practices. The earlier Tokugawa government cultivated these Confucian values as a form of social control, and after two hundred and fifty years of peace under their stewardship, ostensibly justified their value. (However, samurai were forbidden to kill themselves over honor, though they ocasssionally tried.) Today, the image of the samurai warriors still lives to fire the Japanese imagination, his ideals, honor, courage, loyalty, and frugality, evoke pride and a certain emulation. Corporate Japan still sends its employees out for "hard training;" a euphemism for what can be punishing exertion accompanied by moral lectures. In summer of 1986, the Mainichi Daily News reported the death of a student at government construction college, and the collapse of two others, after they were forced to march seventy kilometers with heavy packs in hot weather, while training for supervising on-site construction projects. There was nothing wrong with their health before they set out according to the school doctor's examination, so the school's press release said, it shouldn't be blamed.

The samurai code of morals and outlook on life was known as bushido, meaning "the way of samurai" or bushi. The samurai was even advised to pick his teeth when hungry, to show his imperviousness to hardship (Nitobe, 1968). Bushido demanded sincerity and truthfulness. Treacherous lies and actions, crooked ways and duplicity, all were reckoned a great disgrace. The word of a samurai was so highly esteemed that to ask him for a written guarantee was a deliberate insult. The Bushi were trained from their earliest youth to be courageous and endure pain, privation, and hardship. The samurai's children grew up with stories about the great deeds of their ancestors. At night, modern Japanese children still get up in the middle of the night, to prove bravery to their peers), the samurai youngsters had to visit haunted spots, such as execution fields, graveyards, and battle grounds. In peacetime the Bushi demonstrated their fitness in exhibition tournaments. To yield one's life on the field of battle was regarded as supreme honor and fulfillment. The lord of a castle was under equal obligation to care for his samurai, as if they were himself. The obedience of the samurai was voluntary, not compulsory, bushido teaching said, for it was an unknightly act for a samurai to execute any order of his lord that did not correspond with his conviction. In such cases, he had to warn his master, and try to persuade him to act otherwise. If the loyalty of a samurai to his lord conflicted with his conscience, his only recourse was to commit suicide. (Saito 150-155:1912.)

Japanese thinking still respects suicide as a valid way of recriminating against wrong. Instead of attacking the perpetrator, a modern Japanese can make the ultimate reproach by taking his own life in reproach. During the 1970's Lockheed aircraft purchase scandal, that brought down the Tanaka government, highly placed officals were found taking bribes for contracts; and a private airman drove his plane into the grounds at the Kanemaru estate, one of accused, and killed himself, leaving a note of chastizement. In 1990 newspapers reported more famous suicides: a dietman's personal secretary who was involved in raising illegal political funds; and another man involved in bank-lending scandals, all seeming to want to apologize. This kind of action is supposed to shame the wrongdoer into changing his ways and reexamining aims. It could also be an apology for failing to protect the reputation of superiors. Since the worth of a samurai rested on honor and was his most valuable possession; if he injured his honor, he theoretically forfeited his existence as a Bushi and ritual suicide by SEPPUKU, (harakiri) offered the only means of retrieving his honor.

This system of ethics was extolled as an admirable example of behavior to all citizens during the politically reforming Meiji era. The new regime hoped to give birth to a newly-united and self conscious class of citizen: of Japanese who would be one nation and not people divided by the old traditional categories, of clansman, warrior, merchant, townsman, and farmer. This is discussed by Tsurumi Kazuko in Social Change and the Individual: Japan Before and After Defeat in World War II (1970).

The modern Japanese prize swords, because swords are the "soul" of the samurai. They sentimentalize about the blossoms of the cherry tree because they fall in the wind, like the young samurai of old, giving their lives to their lord without regret. Samurai values were also compatible with the values of Zen Buddhism and the discipline it practiced. Zen austerity added a taste of asceticism to samurai life that was not natural to "this world" oriented Japanese. Japanese natural inclinations, then as now, were attatched to the sociality of life and feelings for the "particular." They competed against attachment to abstract ideals. Sacrifices are more easily made for people than institutions. Good human relations hold out the promise of security and social approval.

Under the encouragement of the Kamakura warrior shoganate, (1192-1333) of those times, Bushido found compatability with the Zen form of Buddhism. Zen practice was encouraged for its disciplined ascetism and offered a source of prestige and countervailing power against the courtly elites in Kyoto; the warrior shogon rulers aspired for legitamacy with which to face the aristocratic families of the capital.

The Confucionism that developed under the long lasting Tokugawa government (1600-1867) as a means of social control had lain quietly under the surface since it promulgation in the seventh century when the regent of the times, Shotoku Taishi, (594-662) announced his seventeen Articles of Constitution. The Seventeen Articles, based on Chinese ideas of good law, and unquestioning obedience to authority, regulated relations between the people and the state to provide the basis for an orderly government. The Japanese obedience to authority is a legacy not yet gone, and noticeable even in Japanese behavior today. The Japanese habitually avoid contradicting others and do not like to criticize their peers. The norm is persuasion and gaining a concensus among parties to a dispute, retaining the ideal of the Confucian program for harmony. Confucianism teaches regard for one's parents and elders, and the opinions of those in positions of power. Official powers are not used lightly by those who have them, even today. The ministries and bureaucracies that do the work of goverment in Japan are manned by serious and devoted men considerably influenced by Confucian ideals. They have also received the benefits of what was called moral training in prewar Japanese schools which has again been called for by the Nakasone govenment of the 1980's. They, the bureaucrats, instead of the speechmaking politicians, carry out the actual work of the nation. They are the modern inheritors of a Confucian tradition, and are even often grandchilden of the victorious samurai clans who reinstated the emperor and took over the reigns of government in the Meiji era, a period in Japan when Japan greatly feared annexation by foreign nations. Chinese classics of Confucianism formed the core subject of every young man's study in the old local Daimyo schools (started in the seventeenth century) until the Meiji ogliarchs of 1868 devised their newer, more modern, Confucian-based curriculum to prepare Japan for her defensive posture against the West. Though Confucianism inspired them, the Japanese intellectuals and patriots never developed the kind of "temple, priest, and ritual" Confucianism practiced in China and Korea. They did take what they valued in Confucianism: its moral teaching and its instruction on proper attitudes toward country and family. The new officials added a Shinto-inspired nationalism and encouraged people to see Japan as the home of the kami. They were following a longstanding Japanese tradition of being willing to learn from China and others; always adapting ideas to fit their own perceived uniqueness. The Japanese, by going their own way, broke from the static formalism that Confucianism induced on the mainland in China. (Tsunoda, de Bary, Keene, vol II: 1963.)

Confucianism's return was led by a renaissance in scholarship, of what is called the "National Learning" school, and was epitomized by such writers as Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801) and Hirata Atsutane. They preached that there was a true inborn Japanese spirit which was naturally good and ingenuous. Motoori's poem extolled the national spirit:

> Should anyone want to know about the Yamato heart
> it is the mountain-cherry blossoms
> blowing in the morning sun.
>
> (Muraoka, 1964)

From these seeds grew the patriotic ideology known as kokutai, a form of national mystique that taught Japan was one family and the Emperor its father (Tsunoda et al., 1963). By extending the Confucian virtue of loyalty from one's parents to the entire country, Meiji educators were able to teach successive generations of Japanese that they were a special kind of family in the world. This is an enduringly strong, sometimes noticed by outsiders, conviction of superiority justified as a rationale for behavior with explanations like: "...but we are Japanese".

Though never a religion, Confucianism's ideas were fitted to Shinto beliefs that originated in the preliterate past. The idea of kokutai culminated in its institutionalization by the Meiji government, as the form of State Shinto, which however never succeded in suplanting the, by then, fully internalized Buddhism in the heartland of Japan.

After the 1930s, state Shinto became the offical wartime creed of Japan. This Emperor cult said that no child belonged to its mother; she might raise it, but its life was a gift from the Emperor and he could ask for it some day. Older Japanese remember having to get up from their train seat, to bow, whenever they passed one of the official State Shinto shrines during the war.

State Shinto as a religion was officially abolished by the occupying powers after World War Two. Most war-weary Japanese were not sorry to see it go. Yet its shadow lingers and looms large at the Yaskuni Jinja, where at the former national state shrine of the war dead, many families have names of dead relatives inscribed. In the 1970's politicians were criticized, by the liberal press, for their seeming support of the old wartime dogmas in making their annual semi-offical visits to Yasukuni. Since the 1980's they come openly and more boldly, instincts sensing the undying attachments of the Japanese to their deified dead and a reawakened confidence in their own institutions.

In the quiet streets on Sunday morning, passing sound trucks blast patriotic slogans and play old army songs. They are funded by rightist groups that still uphold kokutai or nationalistic values. As Japan grows and unflexes itself from the subservient posture of the war defeated, we see more and more nationalistic statements in the newspapers and from the halls of government. One can quote Education Minister Fujio (of the 1986 Nakasone cabinet), who, in defense of revisionist Japanese history school books, explained that the reason for Japan's annexation of Korea was "to save it from Russia" (see Mainichi Daily News, August 1986). By 1988, a cabinet minister named Okuno Seisuke was denying Japan invaded China (New York Times, May 11, 1988). It is an example of how indulgently uncritical Japan can become, now confident of itself in the light of its economic power, and less needful of secrecy in expressions of national sentiment. These statements set forth an emerging, refurbished, even though still subliminal, pride in the memory of Japan's feudal history: its traditions and practices, sometimes arrogantly remembered, sometimes mellowed with true Buddhist gentleness and the sense of mono no aware (sadness at the transience of life).

Japanese Language and Culture

The first impression of Japan concentrates on the modern appearance and the Westernized look of its cities and people, especially since so few old buildings are still standing after the firebombing of the Second World War. A longer investment of time and interest is necessary to understand just how deceptive the surface of contemporary life can be. Many articles and books have appeared in the Western press as appraisals of modern Japanese life, some by writers, who may not get away frequently from the bustling capital, and who rely heavily for much of their impressions of Japan on the cosmopolites and English speaking intellectuals they meet in the floating world of bars, corporate hospitality centers,-- and other workers in Western liaison positions: the young employees eager to cater and learn from them. They reflect the side of Japan that adores foreign fads and fashion. Ordinary Japanese take off their shoes when they get home, and see the world from the eye level of the tatami floor. To be accepted into family life is uncommon for those above; one is usually an outsider; the GAIJIN, a native word for non-Japanese, which means people from outside, and implicitly, "people not like us." Japanese language itself has an incalculable effect on the expression of ideas in Japan, and offers a testing of the interesting Sapir-Whorf hypothesis—that the expressive capability of a language is related to what people care to think about, and circumlocutiously illustrates what is important to them (Sapir, 1939; Whorf, 1956). It is very hard for a non-Japanese speaker (and, conversely, a native speaker who has internalized all the residual norms) to measure just how much effect this might have on a native world view, even with a reasonable study of culture and practices in hand.

Japanese written characters appeal to the visual senses; they are not abstract symbols for sounds (except for some grammatical devices and occasional sound substitutions). Unlike the Western alphabet, each concrete picture can tell a story or import a moral view. Getting an education on how to write is at the same time getting an education in how to think about the world. Traditional societal values are reinforced over and over again in competition with the scientism of the the technological world which expresses itself in abstract "amoral" symbols—and thus is neutral about the world.

Japanese language is classed with the Altaic languages group and bears some relations to Malay and Korean, yet its syntax is quite different. For lack of an indigeneous writing system, Japan was forced to borrow the pictures and derived characters of Chinese writing introduced with mainland culture during the fourth and fifth centuries, even though the sounds of spoken Japanese were completely unrelated to the sounds of Chinese and the word order is altogether different.

Through the long years of Japanese feudalism and strong government control over the lives of its subjects, speaking freely could be dangerous for the ordinary man. With a preference for vagaries and reticence in using personal pronouns and clear subjects, the Japanese language continues to carry some of these inherited reasons and likings for indirect and even nonverbal communication. Adamant positions are dangerous in social negotiations and fixed stands are more likely to cause rebellion than cooperation, as any labor mediator knows. Similarly, explicitness in words is the opposite of successful communication in Japan because it means the parties involved did not think alike and have actually failed to intuit each others needs. It is a kind of rudeness to approach people with anything that resembles orders, (the word kudasai [I order you to give me] and its various forms are preferably avoided); in addition, explicitness demeans others by implying they are so socially retarded as to lack understanding of your positiion. The Japanese refer to their "stomach language," hara (the ancients thought the seat of the heart and emotions lay in the stomach), and say that a true heart-to-heart-talk begins after the conversationalists "cut open their stomachs." The Japanese place a great deal of importance on "flavor" and suggestion in their conversation; it means approaching a topic obliquely and avoiding bald statements. Because one does not speak straighforwardly, one avoids rough and naked words; for if one is to enjoy a good exchange, one must avoid any cutting remarks or implications of criticism to maintain good feelings. The theme, as always, is social harmony, not confrontation. (See Nihongo Notes, Book III, Japan Times, Tokyo.)

The Japanese must learn many versions of address (one each for employers, strangers, children, family members, etc.) because every expression made by one person to another automatically sets the speaker in a relationship to the other—as being superior, equal, or inferior, or being young, old, a man, or a woman. Honorifics replace the missing use of proper nouns, for one knows who is being addressed by the level employed. Every native speaker is extremely sensitive to levels of usage and generally reluctant to make direct personal references (a fact that may contribute to the firm sense of self that contemporary Japanese youths occasionaly complain they lack). As verbs dangle at the end of long sentences that seem to have no subject, the Japanese cannot easily eavesdrop on a stranger's conversation because, as they admit, they cannot guess who or what is being talked about without prior knowledge. The great number of verbal suffixes or inflections that add nuance to Japanese verbs, expressing how the speaker feels about something, allows the Japanese language to be "moist" with emotion—yet not accusatively pointed at any particular person as the cause. (Japanese talk about people being "wet" or "dry" types.) In summarizing, we note the characteristics of Japanese religion include their preoccupation with the particular rather than the universal: and that religion seeks accommodation with native local beliefs, besides being allied with the social and political structures. A noted scholar of religion, Joseph Kitagawa, has written that the Chinese had

> shifted the emphasis in Buddhism from "nirvana to the phenomenal world, but the Japanese shifted it again to the more immediate and concrete world of the Japanese people." (Kitagwa, HISTORY OF RELIGIONS, 1965:325).

There seems to be no clear dividing line between god, country, and human in Japan. Statues of Jizo, guardian of the traveler, the lost, and children without parents, are all over Japan, offering patient assurance to all the ostensibly unreligious Japanese, that though unaligned, they also will be taken care of in the future world and watched over in this one.

Today new religions proliferate in Japan, but closer examination shows they are very much founded on the ideas of the old. (See The New Religions of Japan, or The Rush Hour of the Gods, or Reiyyukai: Lay Buddhism in Japan). According to the Japanese Buddhist way of thinking, all life has a potential for the divine. In the eighteeenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, men and women have been inspired to reinterpret and revitalize the old religious tenets they valued in new ways that appeal to the same enduring human needs. They require the universe to be meaningful and ultimately sheltering. They ask help in understanding the passage of time in human lives and give an explanation for dying.

1. Japanese Buddhism is a system. It does not begin and end merely when the Japanese are thinking about religion. Contemporary Japanese say they

seldom reflect upon their religion unless they are old, reiterating their seasonal approach to the life cycle.

2. The practice of remembering the dead is institutionalized in the Japanese State. According to modern scholarship, the Kojiki and Nihonshiki, Japan's first written historical documents, were efforts to legitimize a ruling clan that emerged from the power struggles between competing families during the sixth century. By tracing their lineage back to a mythical descent from the sun goddess Ameterasu, the victorious Soga family established their claim to divinity and initiated the view held through the long years of Japanese written history, that they were one family of people inseparable from the gods and the government. It was not until the aftermath of defeat in World War II, that a new, foreign-imposed constitution interrupted this ideology.

During the Nara period (710-794) after the installation of the Empress Suiko and her religiously devout nephew, the devout and cultic figure Prince Shotoku Taishi, full administrative support came to Buddhism, effectively legitimizing sentiments about the Japanese state as a sacred community. The official stamp was set. A syncretic form of Buddhism, Japanese, it combined pantheistic Shinto beliefs, folk and doctrinaire religion, and a long standing custom of ancestor worship, whose diffusion from mainland China is yet little understood. In Japan, religion involving the ancestors has always been used to reinforce the notion that the nation and the people were of one origin. All through the vicissitudes of the following medieval ages, and the wars between competing Daimyo lords, the inviolateness of the Emperor, the country's divine ancestor, was held aloft, separate from the battles for land and power. It helped create the permanent bonding all Japanese owed to their Emperor and their country of origin—like a thread stretching from one continent to another, we suggest, even from one world to another, through the realm of the living to the realm of the dead, where all are Japanese.

Similar sentiments were articulated by folklorist and Shinto supporter, Yanagita Kunio, in his book About Our Ancestors:

> One matter which I wish to emphasize is that the afterlife of our people, the eternal existence of souls within our land and not in a distant place, has been firmly maintained from the beginning of the world until now. I think that this is an important feature, distinguished from the doctrine of any imported religion, but there has risen a dispute over the two views whether this or that idea is right, and somehow the decision has been allowed to fade off . . . this native concept has been handed down to this day, giving immeasurable influence upon the lives of our people, and we must recognize that it is of great importance in our history (1970:61).

Kunio continues in this vein with:

> . . . According to the Japanese feeling, even if the flesh decays and the body disappears, the tie to the native land is not cut, amd each year the spirit returns on a fixed day to the home of its descendents and wants to see how the children are growing and gradually taking their places in their work in society, Buddhist priests persuaded them to aim at attaining Buddhahood, to give up their hope of returning to this world, and to be helped into a distant place. No matter how they explained it, their teaching has not been thoroughly accepted (1964:69).

3. The religious-aesthetic realm: Space is not empty. The part Buddhist-more Shinto sense of being surrounded by an invisible living space (mu in Japanese) and being intergrated with visible nature, also contributed to the intermingling of art and religion in daily life. Mu formed the Japanese spatial

aesthetic Westerners still see in art today, and it is related to the idea of semi-deified ancestors existing in some invisible nearby place. Mu was added to the concept that all living things, even rocks and trees, are capable of sentient life, (and thus even these things, Tendai Buddhist sect founder Saigyo argued, can become a Buddha). Religion appears in a host of cultural forms, such as the tea ceremony, calligraphy, or simply arranging flowers in a vase according to some school of practice. Performing a tea ceremony is not unlike acheiving calm though the practice of meditation and bracketing out the rest of the world--to appreciate, or to be in tune with the invisible living space that surrounds one and is inside one as well. It is consistent with the special attention the Japanese give to nature and the events of the seasons, and it is informed by their ability to see their own lives as an integral part of the universal reoccuring round.

4. The process of modernization has been called a change in perspectives of kinship. Industrial tasks in the modern world demand devotion to the work project over attention to the feelings of individuals and their affective ties. However the Japanese do not inordinately sacrifice relationships for work. The Japanese have not been overwhelmed by the necessity to change priorities while accomplishing their goals. They have carried on the imagery of the family to the workplace. Most typical is the worker who, when interviewed, unconsciously says (for example), that he is a "Sony man," not that he is "an electrical engineer." The Japanese still see life in terms of collective communities. This includes their religion—and ultimately, it includes their dying. Even where Buddhism advocates individual enlightenment, this

enlightenment is reinterpreted by the Japanese to mean harmonious interaction with one's specific universe. Religion becomes a guide to better human relations: all are part of the individual's same sacred community.

Sutra Stories

Every Japanese knows some stories from the Buddhist sutras. Buddhist sutras, poems, and stories supply many keywords and generate images for daily living. The Lotus Sutra is especially famous for parables that supply some of the same allusions, precepts, and imagery, to the Japanese as the Old Testament stories from the Bible provide for Western readers. Because of the Lotus Sutra, Rissho University's Tamura Yoshiro says, "Town culture was profoundly shaped and transformed during the Muromachi period" (1334-1568) when after extensive promulgation by the Buddhist priest Nichiren: "everything was affected, from the right way of making a profit to the right way of writing of poetry" (Tamura, 1989:5). This profound message of the fourteenth century was that everyone could become a Buddha in his own lifetime through right thinking and right practice, a concept still called sokushin jobutsu. Today many people venerate the teachings of the Lotus Sutra because it is still the major text for a number of active Buddhist sects—and it is also important to many of the so-called new religions (Hardacre, 1984).

Most Japanese living today have heard the Lotus Sutra's burning house parable. It tells the story of a father who promises his children a goat, a deer, and an oxdrawn playwagon, if they will hurry out of a burning house. Afterward he gives them a magnificent carriage instead. It illustrates how Buddha had to use many different approaches in his teaching because of the differing capacities of audiences, even though there was only one ultimate truth for them all. The story taught the idea that people should not regret leaving this world any more than they should regret leaving a burning house. Another tale is about the return of a prodigal son who does not know his father has become a wealthy and powerful ruler. Secretly the anonymous father prepares his son for the important work he wants to leave him for him, using many devices to keep from intimidating the boy, just as does the Buddha when he teaches, even though he has only one goal of enlightenment. The Hidden Jewel is another sutra tale of a man who sews a priceless jewel into the coat of a friend who lies in a drunken stupor, and then has to leave before the friend awakens. Not knowing he has the jewel, the sobered friend suffers many deprivations before discovering what was with him all the time. This reminds humans that they carry with them the inmate capacity for achieving Buddhist enlightenment.

The Magic City tale compares Buddha to a leader who stops to refresh his followers during a difficult journey over a mountain pass. He makes a city magically appear out of the mist so the travelers can pause and recover their strength. Then the city fades away. This explains how the Buddha used teachings which are only provisionally true, as an expedient to enlightenment, in accordance with the request of his audience told in the beginning chapter of the Lotus Sutra, because the common people said they could not understand Buddha, and five thousand arrogant priests deserted him. Another story is the Parable of The Physician where Buddha compares himself to a doctor whose sons unwittingly take poison. Because of their delirious refusal to try the remedy he provides, he is forced to lie and sends them word that he died. The shocking news convinces his sons to take the medicine, as a last chance to try their father's healing skills.

Also, there is the story of The Topknot Pearl, about a philospopher king who keeps a marvelous jewel hidden in his hair. The king gives his followers many presents but saves for their last gift, his greatest jewel, when it could be best appreciated.

Lafcadio Hearn was perhaps the first English-language writer to notice that the folksayings of Japanese represented a moral quality that remained unaffected by later social changes (Hearn, 1970), which has been more recently discussed by sociologist Nakane Chie (1970). Hearn felt that all folk and proverbial sayings must have a special psychological value for its group in order to endure, and found many of Japan's popular sayings were indeed indebted to these religious texts. The homily that teaches "meeting is only the beginning of separation" is found in the sutra that says "all who live must surely die and all that meet will surely part." A popular reproof, "they are like a crowd of blind men feeling an elephant," is in a similar vein. Humans acting as individuals are limited, like the blind man feeling the elephant in order to "see" it. The blind man only thinks his hands are on the whole truth. Another observation—"the flower goes back to its root at death—reminds us that at death all life returns to the earth where it becomes part of the original void (Hearn, 1921).

Arthur Waley's translations of Buddhist stories, known to the West under the title Monkey, are also popular with the Japanese who know them as The Journey to the West and The Monkey King's Journey. The tales were compiled from Lotus Sutra tales by the Chinese story teller Ch'eng-en (1506-1582), and have entertained Asian readers for many centuries, as they follow the adventures of a sage on a great religious journey from Tang China to the West. The stories are also a great favorite for dramatic entertainments and today are made into cartoons and films for the delight of young and old alike.

The Chinese characters representing the elements of wood, fire, earth, metal, and water, which appear on gravestones are also evocative symbols. They represent the human world that goes back to the earth at death. One is reminded of the Biblical verse,..."ashes to ashes and dust to dust." Process, ongoingness, and change are all components of the Japanese poetic tradition. They accompany the Japanese concern for good human relations, which is what the Japanese think is the foundation of their well being. The Japanese aethetic idea of life as a fluid, growing, changing process leads the way for thinking that the growing changing human force can evolve into a godlike Kami or Buddha state at death. Humans are their own catalyst: they employ Nature's procreative power and are physical manefistations in the everyday world; eventually this expanding force of life is extended into a version of immortality -- which can sometimes seem like a mirror of one's familiar homey reality. Fertility introduces life--which will eventually fall into death--which will provide the soil that produces nourishment for its own return. In the proper season, the inchoate matter blooms anew with rebirth and life. The relationship with invisible forces is symbolized in the mirror which is an object used in Shinto worship, which is about fertility. The mirror metaphor is a favorite heading in old book titles.

Japanese poetry, like the folktales and proverbs, gives many clues to what the Japanese think about death. When Japanese read poetry they indirectly affirm many traditional beliefs, and since poetry is a part of every child's education, and is read by everyone, in every social class, its influence is substantial.

The Japanese want their poetry to leave a lasting resonance, to ring in the mind after the words are read. Poetry must evoke rather than explain. Japanese do this by creating a "topic" rather than describing a subject. One poem will contain allusions to another and one key word can be used to recall another train of thought. A poem that is too explicit is criticized as leaving nothing to the imagination. Japanese, like Chinese poetry, is difficult to translate and generates translators' footnotes that are longer than the poem.

Poetic conventions offer metaphors that range from breezes which are associated with Spring and a beginning, to the Autumn moon, often illustrated with a silhouette of migrating geese, evoking sadness at a departed love or a death, like the natural world in winter, when life ends. Indeed, it has been stated that the language of Japanese sentences has no subject, but rather "topicality." This sets the frame within which the speakers create a dialogue. (See Satoshi Stanley Koike's 1991 linguistic study, What It Means to be a Subjectless Language, unpublished master's thesis, City University of New York.)

The Japanese like their poetry brushed in Chinese charactors, decorating the walls of homes and offices, or brushed on narrow little cards called gaku, made by amateurs practicing their calligraphy and passed around as little presents. Japanese artisans incise poetry on clay and iron tea kettles, or paint it on trays and folding screens. Book companies print it at the top of stationary for teenagers, and invariably, one finds poetic sayings if not poems set above the pages of diaries kept by little schoolgirls. Poetry may be for happy or sad occasions; it has a convention that requires it to mention the correspondence of the moment and season, to reverberate with correspondences to human life. Indeed, poetry has long been Japan's favorite form of serious expression, and still competes well with the popular novels that have appeared since contact with the West. Every spring, hundreds of thousands of Japanese, both children and adult, turn to writing haiku poems under the cherry trees

The metaphors of poetry are much closer to the everyday level of thought in Japan because of their constant appearance. Poems are repeated more than in any other modern country, and help explain the stubborn religious flavor attatched to aesthetic forms. They help a modern Japan preserve a long lasting religio-aesthetic-cultural tradition.

Added to the considerable influences from Buddhism in poetry are many stories of an anthropomorphic nature, stemming from Taoism which believed in the interchangability of matter, and which was empathetic to the native Japanese religion of Shinto. Shinto worships the natural world and its guardian spirits called KAMI.

Shinto embraced ancient beliefs about the existence of spiritual forces in nature such as rain or lightning. These forces are phenomena capable of exercising an influence on human beings and represent spirits worshiped in Shinto shrines today. Shinto which addressed the unclear division between human beings and the natural world has ever since made it difficult, the Japanese like to say, for them to focus on one exclusive sphere of existence without the other. Thus they could allow that perhaps life and death are reverse aspects of the same mirror. The respectful Japanese relationship with nature allows another dimension of spiritual thought which imagines movement between both: the seen events of life and the unseen ones of death.

Edwin O. Reischauer's closing statement reflects the influence of a lifetime spent in Japan when he expressed this Buddhist sentiment in the final paragraph of his autobiography, My Life Between America and Japan:

> Looking back on the past three quarters of a century, I can see that my droplet of life, falling when it did, has had a long, sometimes tumultuous flow, but always in the mainstream of world events. It has followed an exciting and satisfying course. Now it slows as it nears the river's mouth and prepares, in the Buddhist metaphor, to merge in the great sea of infinity (1986:355).

Most Japanese never lost their respect for National traditions which are entwined with elements of the sacred because nothing was torn away by a revolution or the destruction of their royalty to bring on the equivalent of the European Englightenment, forcing a new relationship between government and subject, events that opened Europe to notions of self-determination and individual rights.

But what is history in a far away world has not been exchanged by the Japanese for the national experience of life in their own country. People's daily perceptions continue to be influenced by Japan's religious and Confucian ideals of prospering under a benevolent government which takes care of all the people. An example of a feudal practice that contines: school children perform an annual ceremony of freeing birds and fishes as a prayer for the general well being of the nation. The place were this occurs is at the local Hachiman shrine, Hachiman, the god of war.

The death of the Emperor in 1989, and the new age of Heisei (the name of the Emperor Akihito's reign) that began the new reign as Year One, recalls a related Japanese connection to death, and the Imperial line. When an Emperor dies in Japan, the special term used is, "the Emperor has disappeared from view." Theoretically speaking, the Emperor has rejoined Imperial ancestors in the sacred world, which he represented on earth and he will no longer be visible to the living. The late Emperor Hirohito is now postumously called Showa, after the name for his era. Although it is a long time since emperors were able to govern in Japan (the last attempt before the Meiji restoration of 1868 was made by Go-Daigo in 1333 and lasted about three years), the reverence surrounding the institution of the Emperor and the sorrow felt by a great number of Japanese at his passing is due more to the spirtiual role and the feeling of guardianship he provides. The guardianship is an intrinsic part of Japan's Shinto religion in which the Emperor is the chief priest. He performs sacred rituals for the welfare of the land and the growing of the crops, emphasized by the divine role of rice culture in Japanese history. Indeed among the last few concerns of the dying Emperor Hirohito reported by daily newspapers, was that when he woke briefly from his sickbed during periods of intermittant coma, he asked the question: "How is the rice this year?" He is buried in sacred mountains like a chieftain of ancient days and joins in spirit the Emperors Taisho, and Meiji, adding his name to a long unbroken line from the past.

Knowing the proverbs and stories from religious tales in Japan helps to understand popular sentiment. They represent many of the images that Japan uses to set a frame of thought. They are valuable in explaining the undetachable aesthetic components and religious appeals in secular life. They also help a modern Japan preserve a religious aesthetic tradition, because unlike the limited use of such devices seen around the world, where preservation of culture rests mainly on the activities of educational elites, in Japan these ideas circulate among the common people.

Chapter 3

Everyday Life

Routines, Festivals, Traditions, Rituals

Living everyday life usually means doing the unreflexive activitites that occur in the course of a routine day. In Japan that may also include doing many unconscious things that have a religious origin. To describe precisely the complex religious life of the Japanese is not an easy task, so our methodology is to examine seemingly simple things and events. For example, when Japanese sit down to eat they say, "itadakimasu," a sort of "thank you, or I 'll take this" or yes, "I'll have some", but they are not thanking their hosts, they are habitually addressing the invisible dieties who nurtured the crops as they grew and shared the food with humans. Gohan, the Japanese word for food also means rice. Food is not just sustenence, it is a gift of the sacred and tied symbolically with the divine regenerative forces latent in the native soil. The word "gohan" is preceded by the honorable prefix go, which recognizes that agriculture, while not inseperable from human labor, is a cooperative venture shared by things besides the people—the land and the gods (Collicutt, 1989). At the end of the meal, the Japanese say "gotisosama," again thanking unseen spirits above.

Where Americans say, "good morning," the Japanese "ohayoo goziamasu—"by the grace of the above we have received another day." In the West, these salutations have lost their religious meaning, and are taken for granted everywhere that people greet each other. That may also be true in Japan—but it is only partly true. To get inside the subjective aspect of human activity, we should follow a Japanese family on its daily round through the year: festivals, food, common superstitions, social routines; educating the children, etc., and watch all the things that make daily living possible. Japanese religion enters into the most mundane things and is a subtle and encompassing institution. Examination discovers an extraordinary conciousness of nature and a thankful respect for gifts from the less than inchoate land. Eventually it will bear on our investigation of attitudes on dying.

The New Year is the most important festival in Japan. As in other Oriental countries, the new year is the gift of a new beginning, when all the old disappointments and failures of the past year are laid to rest. People hold end of the year parties called bo nen kai, literally "forgetting the old year." Japanese convention says everything becomes old after one year and ought to be renewed for the start of the next annual cycle. At this time people hurry to complete their unfinished business and new projects are postponed so they can be inaugurated in the first week of the new year. They will benefit from the good augeries of the season.

The local markets, Daruma-ichi, sell roly-poly dolls representing the Zen monk Daruma, and people buy them to ensure good fortune in the new year. These footless dolls show the fortitude and dedication of the monk Boddhidharma, (Daruma is his Japanese name), who lost the use of his legs while sitting in the same position and meditating for nine years. Because of the weights in the egg shaped bottom the dolls have the ability to right themselves automatically and this is considered an admirable quality for humans who must recover from life's adversities. The dolls supposedly bring luck in business, and help professions like farming and fishing, or any project one hopes will prosper. The Daruma dolls, made by farm families in Gumma prefecture, are without eyes. A purchaser paints in the eyes himself when a goal has been accomplished and brings his ideal into the light. Politicians enjoy doing this chore before a TV camera after their candidate has won an election.

Families will stay up all night to welcome the New Year. In the evening they have had a meal of buckwheat noodles, called toshikoshi soba, because the long thin strands symbolize longevity. The house has already been cleaned, and the next day's food prepared. There will be no cooking tomorrow. This is a time for dressing up in bright kimonos and visiting shrines as both small town folk and city dwellers visit their ujigami, the local Shinto clan shrines for families. There have been rice pounding parties around the temples and at the neighborhood associations. Each welcomes the merry makers to help crush the rice to make the flour for the traditional mochi cakes used for religious offerings. Some of the cakes they make will be shared with neighbors to go into their home's tokunoma corner, and others will go into the holiday soup. In Tokyo the displaced urbanites, families who have moved away from their home towns, gravitate to the biggest and most important shrine centers to participate in the holiday experience. Throngs of people will gather in the dark night. Tokyo newspapers estimate a million or more townsmen and their families may be waiting at the Meiji Shrine grounds when the priests come out and give the blessings at midnight. All over the country at the same hour, Buddhist temple bells are ringing 108 times, once for each of the 108 ills and sinful desires of humans. Everyone buys fortunes and charms, particularily sought out during this season without regard for the recipient's sectarian beliefs. It matters not whether it is to have fun or to take seriously. Unless strongly prohibited by their particular sect, the Japanese invariably bring home charms, amulets, and religious mementoes from a New Year's outing. Later in the day, formal visits are paid to the homes of superiors, and to those to whom one is in social debt. Since in Japan one is always in debt to someone for something it is a busy time. No one is deliberately neglected. Enveloping the day, like an invisible cocoon around the festive joymaking is a feeling of returning to sacred times, or what religious philosopher Mirade Eliade calls a suspension of the boundries between the past and the present. In The Sacred and the Profane (1959), he writes:

> . . . in this space, between the mundane and the transcendent, humans can shed their "worn exhausted selves" to feel the rebirth of the seasonal enterprise and the energy of nature by which humanity flourishes. When there is both death and rebirth such as an end and a new beginning,... this reconnects humans to the "great chain of being." Individuals can forget their individual fear of separation and death to be reunited with a "universal matrix."

Instead of unrequitable grief over death, sorrow is allayed by deferring to mythical times, such as the beginning of Japanese history when periodic deaths and rebirths commonly occured and allowed the land to be born. The Japanese have described such an age in their Kojiki. The present Shinto Harai ceremony is an ancient ritual cleansing ceremony based on the purification rites used for exorcising pollution. Harai ceremonies take place all year long and are repeated many thousands of times. Virtually all building projects have a Harai ceremony performed for pacifying the land before the foundation is put up. This writer witnessed a throng of limousine conveyed dignitaries, bankers, builders, sponsors, formally dressed in English frockcoats and striped trousers, bowing to the bare ground while a Shinto priest intoned prayers and waved the sacred gohei wand at the site of the construction in Aoyama, the Twin Towers, a modern office-retail tower in central Tokyo. When building supports are erected there may be a second Harai ceremony and even a third for the completed building. When an old home is torn down to make way for a new one, this is cause for a Harai ceremony. Increasingly popular since the ninteen eighties, and a sure sign of Japan's properity, is the Harai ceremony for owners of a brand new car who take it to a shrine to be blessed--in hopes that it will not be the cause of an accident or injury. Not far from Tokyo's International Airport, signs in the Narita temple's parking lot reserve spaces for cars and trucks waiting for this ceremony. The simplest and most commonly performed act of Harai is simply pouring water over the hands and rinsing the mouth when entering the grounds of a shrine. Other Harai ceremonies continue to be made whenever starting on a new enterprise or passing into a new level in life, such as when an infant is presented to the local shrine or temple on his thirtieth day (a girl on her thirty-third day) and is again presented at age three, five, and seven, years. Before World War II the entire nation was told to perform Harai on certain days.

Today the New Year's purification still continues to be the most popular Harai ceremony. Everyone prefers to start the year free of their past burdens. New Year's resolutions in the West are a similiar but much milder approximation of the same sentiment. The old Japanese lunar calendar began its cycle at Springtime to the season for planting. A natural optimism at the return of fine weather and the farmer's welcome of a good growing season cooperate to erase memories of last year's sadnesses and misfortunes.

During the first two weeks of the New Year the usual Buddhist rites of mourning are postponed because everyone is celebrating a renewal of life. As a matter of delicacy, New Year's cards are usually not sent to families that have had a recent death because it is time for the unified ancestral spirit (and fewer cards were sent in 1989 when the recent Emperor died). It is what the Shinto scholor Yanagita Kunio tells us is an inappropriate time for individual memorials. Souls of the old ancestors are thought to be close by, he says, and able to visit their former homes at the New Year (Yanagita, 1959). The dead join the living family to enjoy the celebrations of the land—a land of which Shinto says they continue to be a part.

A typical Japanese housewife will dress the children and herself in the kimonos that have lain folded in tall chests of drawers which usually crowd the walls of homes and apartments in Japan. They carry clothes for all the seasons and may hold a few precious old kimonos, proud possessions of the women who have managed to preserve their family heirlooms and bridal gifts. The husband too, will lay aside his business suit and work clothes to don the kimono his wife has laid out for him, stuffing his cigarettes and money in the long notched sleeves that serve as pockets. Probably he will put on geta, the wooden clogs designed to keep feet dry above wet ground. They will all join the clop-clop, scratch-scratch, of wood against pavement, made by the thousands of feet drawn to the shrine precincts on New Year's Eve. And as they pass through the high torii gate, they become symbolically separated from the the world of the everyday to enter the divine world of the kami spirits.

Any visit to a major Shinto temple means passing through a tall torii gate, ascending long flights of stone steps or walking through an avenue shaded by cypress and soaring crytomeria trees. One reaches a paved plateau bordered by stone lanterns and a stone water trough under a covered roof. Wooden and metal water dippers are waiting, neatly turned over by a previous worshipper for a rinse of hands and mouth. Sacred animals, usually a pair of stone, dog-faced beasts, guard the sanctuary. Other animals, usually the horse, or the foxes of the inari cult, also serve. Regional Shinto practices were based on local cults, and each area had its own ancestral deities, animal messengers, and guardian spirits, only some of which were absorbed over time into the unified national system.

Folk or traditional Shinto is procreational and varies locally because it is concerned with each region's harvest practises. The main spirit guardian who generally oversees the rice crop is Ta-No-Kami, the deity of the rice paddy. Farmers in the Sea of Japan area, say he comes down from the mountains on December fifth, to make his residence on the two bags of rice set out for his stay until February ninth. There is no proselytizing or evangelism in Shinto, and so separate varieties of kami have existed locally for long generations. After the close of the Tokugawa period, the Emperor's supporters were intent on restoring imperial power and putting an end to the shogunate system, and so they utilized the only vaguely defined Shinto cults to make them into formal units centered around the new official ideology. The purpose was to exploit the fact that the emperor's legitimacy lay in his unbroken line of descent from a divine progenitor held to be Japan's founding ancestor and guardian of the land.

Shinto shrine architecture derives from an style going back into ancient times, and which bears some resemblance to Polynesian bamboo houses on stilts over water. The simple high roofed wooden buildings are replaced periodically because cleanliness and purity is the Shinto rule. A massive white rope attached to a bell hangs over a shrine's open doorway. Worshipers will pull the rope to make it ring and announce to the shrine diety that they have come to pray. They practice Kashiwade, the clapping of hands to attract the god's notice and direct a prayer. Out of this ceremony came another, still popular, rite called, Tejime. In Tejime the hands are clapped ten times in a three- three-three-one rhythym. This is done at the end of celebrations and meetings to show that things have come to a happy close: reporting the event to the gods. It may be anything from the successful conclusion of a community drive to winning an election.

If a service is in progress at the shrine, we will see the priest in his white robes and high black lacquered cap. He offers rice, fruit, and food, before the altar, each article laid on a sheet of pure white paper and on a tray. In the perfectly clean and sparcely furnished nave of the temple, one sees only the simple altar that holds the food; and the sacred gohei wands of white paper strips, perhaps with a metal reflecting mirror too, and a drum to keep time to prayers. All this has been self-consciously borrowed from Buddhism, as the Shinto priest, Mr Noda, tells us (see below). There are no idols, images, or pictures, only the gohei, the offerings, and the white or pastel color robed priest at prayer. The impressive simplicity, the sometimes sequestered site in a forest or on an isolated hilltop, surrounded by tall trees, some of majestic growth and of immemorial antiquity; in this beauty, and in this silence, all is combined to instill reverence of nature and awe in the worshiper. Natural beauty moves one from the mundane to the higher deeper divine world, which can transform life into one of closer fellowship with the Kami (Ono, 1972:28).

Japanese find their god in surrounding nature and the deified superior humans who become part of it at death. We should contrast this to the West's Christian notion of the sacred which always puts god above nature, as well as man.

Shinto allows for the worship of actual persons by deifying them: for example, after his death the warrior Hachiman underwent an apotheosis and became the god of war. Before the Second World War, every deceased Emperor's spirit was worshiped. The Emperor is never said to die: "he just disappears from view" as he rejoins the invisible gods. This is a model from which to extend worship to one's own ancestors. The Shinto deities have humanlike limitations because they are not remote from people, and the awe they inspire is part of the natural phenomenona of nature, with its powers of rejuvenation and fertility. It follows that natural laws are the dominating principles to which men and women must submit. There was no need for the Japanese to turn to miracles, said Kato Genchi, in his study of Shinto (reprinted 1971). In the Japanese unified way of thinking, men and women are always part of the sacred because they cannot be separated from nature's whole. Like the Chinese characters for heart and mind (shin or Japanese, kokoro), both written by the same sign: neither can be torn from the other because neither can exist without the other.

There are more traditional customs connected with New Year's than any other holiday in Japan. At New Year's the fronts of many homes are decorated with pairs of pine branches as a symbol of longevity. Country folk say they wish to offer the visiting New Year deities a perch to rest on. At other spots, bamboo and straw floral arrangements called kadomatsu frame the gates and adorn house doors. After the New Year's holiday, people will send the decorations to the local shrine to be burnt communally, in a huge bonfire. In purely Shinto households, the entrance hanging is a shinemawa, a twisted white straw rope supposed to bring good luck to the house and keep out the bad luck. In virtually all the homes, the formal tokunoma alcove in the guest parlor, has mochi rice cakes piled up in a tower of three or more. Elsewhere we might see a decorative shimekazare display representing the fruits of the harvest, set out to give thanks for good crops and prayers for success next season.

No one neglects Japanese children who get pocket money called otoshidama and are encouraged to play traditional New Year's games like shuttlecock and battledore. In Tokyo, the most desirable shuttlecocks are sold just before the holidays, at a centuries-old battledore fair held in Akasaka's Sensoji temple, on the 17th, 18th, and 19th of December. Children clutching the hand of their parents and shop for spinning tops and special cards for the traditional poetry card game. It consists of two hundred cards inscribed with one hundred stanzas of favorite haiku and poetry. Almost everyone knows them because they are all very famous and taught in school. One player reads half the stanza on his or her card, another player has the card with the bottom half of the poem, and calls out the rest to makes a match. (Some people have become so familiar with these poems they need hear only the first two or three words before responding.) A different matching game has the children pairing popular sayings with the pictures that illustrate them. Blindfold drawing can also be hilarious as one tries to draw the eyes, the nose, and the mouth, on the blank face of a doll. The doll's face resembles the okuna mask used in the Noh drama. All these things are reiterations of Japanese tradition; and they survive as sturdy instituions somehow managing to keep the past never too far away from the consciousness of the present. At this time of the year in particular, young people are re-socialized in the values that have been esteemed and kept alive for many generations.

Alongside these essentially Shinto customs, a Buddhist temple visit is popular during the first week after the new year, especially before the seventh of January.

Praying for health and happiness in this first visit of the year is thought to be very beneficial.

New Year's day's dinner is unique. Eaten out of a lacquerware obento box, the specially chosen cold food, o-seshi, stands for desirable human attributes and symbolizes strength, endurance, to remind every one how they ought to behave.

At New Year's time sumo wrestlers have a special tournament and the Emperor of Japan attends in his official capacity. Like the ancient Greek games, sumo wrestling was originally performed for the honor of the gods, and the Japanese referee still presides in his priestly Shinto garb. At mid-January the palace holds a poetry contest. Since poetry was also said to be a gift from the gods, the Emperor and Empress personally read tanka poems they have composed for the season. Others at the palace read the poems on set themes solicited from all over the country.

More than any other holiday season, New Year's is a community event where the whole of Japan is the community. People reestablish their special family relationship of being Japanese. They reaffirm what their culture emphasizes, that life is eminently social regardless of the rationalizing and leveling effect of modern production methods. Essentially premodern institutions are proving they can manage to thrive in Japan's industrial society. This is partly because of the symbolic universe created by the many holidays and festivals that remind people of their origins, and partly because these are allied to a religious philosophy of life that is compatible with change. Buddhism accepts change, the major determinent in understanding the human experience. Not confounded by impermanence and fragility in life's relationships, it recognizes those things to be the main truth of human existence. Buddhism was a major religion by the time it reached Japan, but the Japanese modified it to fit their own group inclined ideals. Their adoption of the Buddhist beliefs had to incorporate the concrete human relationships they put above all other things: the Emperor, the land, the clan, the family, all the Japanese inviolates, and they modified some of Buddhism's abstract universal laws which might mitigate against the social pattern. In Japan the umbrella over religion was always communality. Its continuing eminence is what permits the Japanese to carry their view of community into a realm where many modern Western societies see only an end in death and the end of conciousness. The pluralistic nature of Western society is found to work against long term cooperation and structures, to hold its diverse groups together. Because the Japanese share a common heritage, their homogeneity can be regarded as the cement that makes concensus and cooperation come more easily.

When the Japanese weary of existence and the social ties that bind them too tightly with duties and obligations, retirement into nature and religion has always been a respectable retreat. The classic literature of Japan is filled with many tales of the great and noble who were defeated by life and became monks and nuns. One could alway escape the "tiger world" of pride and ambition by taking Buddhist vows. It was the other respectable alternative to suicide, as in feudal days and the ritual seppuku of the samurai. The only qualification for retreat was that one should be sincere. Sincerity has always been an acceptable apology for unusual behavior in Japan. One can be forgiven for many peculiar acts, and even admired, if one can demonstrate the serious committment behind one's actions. This is why activist Japanese tie a hamaki around their foreheads to show they are ready for any sacrifice and that they mean to win the fight. This is the other side of "the nail that sticks out gets hammered down" joke modern Japanese use to describe their conformity. Proof through payment of a heavy sacrifice reassures society that one is genuine and can win acceptence of an unusual action. This is the idea that has been offered as the motivation behind the sensational 1975 suicide of the novelist Mishima Yukio, who hoped by his "suicide of protest" to shame more Japanese into joining his movement for a return to tradional "Japanese values." Unfortunately his previously flamboyant and Westernized life style failed to convince people that he was sincerely motivated, and some newpapers dismissed him as an unbalanced posturer. With the passage of time he has been remembered more kindly, and adopted as an exemplar by Japanese rightist groups. The rightists were able to prevent the Japanese public from seeing a Western-made movie on his life (Mishima, 1986) by intimidating and threatening the theater owners who tried to show it.

Sentimental admiration is not far below the consciousness of modern Japanese who are more likely to show tears at the thought of a brave person's suffering than they are to solicit sympathy for their own personal tragedies. Newspaper stories, television dramas, and traditional entertainments, all do well with audiences when they replay stories of people who have shown unuusal endurance or perseverence.

Another unique holiday in Japan is "Coming of Age Day" for everyone 20 years old, held on January 15th. (Reverence for the Aged is celebrated on September 15th.) Ceremonial notice is taken that one's childhood is over and it is time to be a full fledged member of society and assume adult responsibilities. The Japanese call this becoming a shakaijin, a social person or member of society. A postcard comes from the neighborhood ward office inviting everyone twenty years old for the seijinshiki ceremony. To receive the gift and lecture awaiting them, the girls dress up in kimonos and often have their families give them parties. Age is not the actual determining factor however, for one is not a shakaijin if still in school or living on the resources of one's family. For the great majority, adulthood for men starts when they get a job, and for women, when they get married. It is also a kind of societal answer to the West's debutante party and an introduction to society, as the weathier families may rent hotel ballrooms for their daughter's shakaijin ceremony. Girls who are just working and spending their salary on themselves or just saving for a wedding do not actually qualify until they asume the responsibilities of a homemaker. The realty of being a shakaijin commonly occurs for them between the ages of twnenty three to twenty five.

Between the end of schooldays and so-called settling down to serious life, there is a traditional interim period during which Japanese youth feel free to experiment and indulge themselves. Contrary to what a recent Sunday New York Times feature writer thought he saw while he was photographing something he called "the transformation of Japanese society"—teenagers with green hair and razor blade earrings dancing in Harajuku park—the Japanese youths were not truly turning away from their past; they were acting very much in accepted patterns and having their permitted "fling" before they entered the next stage of their life. Until recently, in smaller communities and mountain towns still, there are separate lodges where local boys can sleep. They serve as a social center, an employment exchange, and a kind of clubhouse for the young men (see John Embree's Suye Mura for a description of a traditional young men's lodge). As long as you are not yet a shakaikin you are excused from many responsibilities. So instead of a rendering the "social fabric", Japanese manage the experimentational urges of their youth by allowing young people their way during an institutionalized free period when rowdy spirits and excesses are tolerated because they are in the proper season of the interval of a long life. Statistical surveys made by Japanese market researcher George Fields in 1983, show these age periods are followed by remarkably predictable changes. Upon reaching official maturity males start drinking beer instead of soda and stop wearing jeans; and they even give up their frequent movie going. Girls go through a similar metamorphosis, even cutting down the consumption of soft drinks that might not be good for prospective motherhood (Fields, 1983).

Children have fun on Setsubun, February 3rd. Although now just a children's holiday, once it was an ancient purification rite. The children march behind their father, or a male family member, who throws beans in and around the house to drive out demons and welcome good fortune. Today it has become popular to invite a famous person, especially a sumo wrestler, to perform the bean throwing at shrines and temples.

The third day of March is the festival of dolls, a day devoted to the happiness of girls. Until the war destroyed many homes and possesions, every respectable family had sets of court dolls which had been accumulated from generation to generation. Today, in the weeks before the festival, shop windows still beckon to passing little girls with their brocade robed doll princes and princesses waiting to be bought and taken home. Traditionally, when a daughter was born to the family, a pair of these dolls was considered her right and she played with them until she grew up. When she married, she gave them to her children, adding to the family collection. The dolls are customarily arranged in three hierarchical tiers. Prince and princess, ladies-in-waiting, attendents, and musicians, with furniture, dishes, tea ceremony wares, trees, sedan chairs, and all the things that might have been in a real lady's trousseau. The girls make the dolls offerings of rice and sake (Japanese rice wine), and play at adult female life: imitating the role of maiden, wife, mother, and grandmother. What is thought to have been an ancient fertility rite became practice for the women's roles to come. Even in the most cramped city apartments parents usually manage some sort of doll display. The very least might be miniature cut-outs with pop-up pictures. By now the weather is quite mild, usually the plum has flowered and the peach and cherry trees are blooming. These are the occasions for hanami, blossom viewing parties that bring hordes of people out into the parks to sit under the trees, while they write poems, eat, and drink sake. This is also the season of o-higan, meaning the "other side of the river," a place which divides the world of the present from "Buddha's paradise," the time of the vernal equinox which reminds people to visit the graves of their ancestors. Families wash the stone markers over the graves, offer incense, food, water, and prayers. At home, offerings of sweet bean jam covered rice cakes, ohagi, are also placed in front of the home's Butsudan altar for the sweet tooth of the visiting dead. The ihai ancestral tablets will be taken out of the Butsudan and placed in the tokonoma to show that the ancestors are today's guests of honor. If there has been a recent death, the priest may be asked to come in for a prayer session. Food served him and the family should properly be meatless and fishless, even without eggs, in respect for the Buddhist tradition against taking unnecessary life, though it seldom is today.

May fifth is another national holiday for all the children. Before World War II, it was called "the Boy's Festival," but the American occupation forces took the boy title away to discourage the militarism associated with the name. The dolls of the festival are dressed in armour, helmets, and swords, as the celebrants revere the role of warriors in Japanese history. Families with boys are still honored with out-of-door kites swaying from a very tall bamboo pole flying the representation of a large fish made of paper. The paper is hollow, and the breeze easily fills out the body to represent a carp, the fish able to swim swiftly against the current and leap up waterfalls—a metaphor for the samurai spirit of surmounting all difficulties to achieve success. Each boy flies his carp beneath the others representing his mother and father. It is again becoming popular to have samurai dolls indoors as suitable inspiration for boys, although few people still believe the dolls have the power to protect them from harm. Twentieth century children follow the stories of the famous warriors on televison, and parents hope their examples of courage and perseverence will be suggest role models to the young—who must strive to do well in school to enter prestigious universities. The Boy's Day holiday of earlier times appears to have been a community ceremony asking for divine protection, through the preservation of the community's children, and particularly its male children.

Ubiquitious shrine festivals and markets give pleasure to children and adults throughout the year, where in warm weather, portable gold fish ponds do a thriving business as children try to scoop up all the goldfish possible in one netting or go all out for a prize at ring toss. Here the gifts they buy for friends are often their first introduction to making difficult financial decisions. Their parents and grandparents are expected to provide the spending money-a custom most Japanese children regard their due. Older local people who may have contributed funds to mend the shrine buildings and improve the grounds come for the special divine favors. The food and wine of the festival, which has been offered to the gods, is eventually given to those attending the rites, for by eating foods symbolically enriched by the spirits humans may have an opportunity to share their divinity. Anyone can have a piece of the food or a drink of the sake and every street, house, and person, in the vicinity, where the sacred shrine vehicle has passed, is gratuitiously blessed with the divine favors. These festivals were originally Shinto celebrations, but over centuries they fused in common with Buddhist beliefs to became a semi-religious holiday event for all.

Merchants set up their stalls on the gravel pathways to shrines to sell carnival goods and add their genial cries to the festivities. Their financial contributions also directly or indirectly help support the costs of the festival. They have their own hereditary merchant associations, even some with yakuza organization sponsers, and may also travel about making a living at the religious holiday markets. Several festivals have become national and famous, like the Gion Matsuri in Kyoto, where dozens of straining men pull an elaborate cart, representing sacred deities through the streets. Thousands of tourists join the crush of cameramen and local people watching. The smaller Japanese merchants depended on these festivals for making a living, which they helped, in a union of practicality, and celebration of the national heritage, to keep alive even to this day. They support a special Japanese feature of everyday life, for as small entreprenuers who combine the sacred with the practical they are unwitting custodians of traditional culture. There are many stores, and large and small firms, who continue to support the shrines that populate their city ward. Their care continues even though the financial rewards are minimal to their business today, because of a Japanese habit of reciprocating with respect the feelings of indebtedness to those who once helped them live, even back to their parents days and grandparents time. Foreign exporters ignorant of these conservative Japanese merchant traditions often wonder why they cannot break into the Japanese distributional system. Being too far away to see the operations of daily life, the manufacturers outside of Japan fail to grasp why a rational offer of profitable goods cannot displace the social and reciprocal spirit inherent in traditional commercial relations. Few have seen the seamstress's shrine where professional sewing women "retire" broken needles in thanks to their divine benefactor. A shrine exists for just about every trade and profession in Japan. In November, 1990, The New York Times reported ceremonies at the opening of a new shrine in Tokyo for worn out computer parts.

Japanese holidays seldom just honor famous men. The Japanese words for holiday and festival are interchangable. Even if we look at the Emperors's birthday, we see that most holidays have both agricultural and religious origins. Before the war, the emperor was worshiped as a god, along with the other famous individuals who are still honored by holidays. These individuals were first raised spiritually to become gods. Such is the origin of the well known Osaka holiday of tenjin matsuri, celebrating Michizune Sugawara, a loyal poet, courtier, and caligrapher (845-903), who was unjustly accused of treason and sent to exile. The unnatural weather that followed his death convinced the frightened emperor to make restitution to his spirit by giving him posthumous honors and deifying him. Sugawara is the patron saint of caligraphy and a popular deity with students who don't mind asking for his favors at exam time.

When the sounds of the shrilling tree insects, or semi, are all around, and the wind chimes are spinning to summer breezes in the doorways, fireworks displays fill the warm nights over Japan as a prelude to the O-bon holidays. This marks the advent of the autumn and the harvest season. We have come around the Japanese calendar to reach the other most important holiday of the year. O-bon, which matches the New Year in scale, though it is Buddhist rather than Shinto in charactor. O-Bon remembers the spirits of those who are no longer living. The New Year holiday starts with spring and celebrates the rebirth of nature; O-Bon comes at the end of the main growing season and marks the death of nature. Festivities start off with the three day visit of the dead who return to their old homes and communities to visit the family and celebrate in the harvest. Dancing in the streets, religious ceremonies, and bonfires at night, are provided to both entertain and guide the visiting dead. The graves are washed again and decorated with fresh greens, flowers, and food of welcome. Both at the cemetery and in the home, incense is burned and special sweets appear. Priests and student priests at the local temples are occupied overtime with writing out memorial toba sticks, commissioned by the parishioners to replace last year's faded gravemarkers. Tokyo newspapers show how the main streets are deserted, and print their obligatory photographs of the empty pavements to contrast with the lines of people waiting at the train station for a ticket and a seat to their hometown. Offices and factories close down for three days. Everybody who can tries to visit their family graves and places of origin. Several generations of living Japanese may be reunited in country houses at this time to honor their dead. In the cemeteries only very few places are left undecorated, those looking pitiful with the withered stalks of last year's memorial leaves, pointing a bare reproach at missing family members.

The concept of time in Japan should be factored in our study if we want to understand the way the Japanese see their world. Time, metaphorically, is not measured the same way as it is in the West. The Japanese don't complain much about the extra hours needed to finish a project or a days's work. No one even needs to make appointments at the doctor, they just come in to sit and wait, for nobody is turned away. You can also send a relative to sit for you on busy days. At home, visitors drop in at any time and don't call up first, for that might make you feel you have to prepare something special for them. Western modes of production include time on their list of commodities, for "time is money," but Japanese time may be a different currency, because it is used to buy harmonious social life—even today and when giant Japanese companies export mass produced products all over the world. The commodity view of time in the West makes time measured into divisions: a time to play or worship, labor at home or office, Sunday for one thing, Monday for another. One of the hardest things for a Westerner to get used to in Japan is the unstructured time, and the unexpected social callers, the sudden decisions to fly off somewhere, the last minute idea to "go see somebody now!"—because "we" feel we have not been prepared. Modern Westerners want time to plan, need to change clothes first, maybe even take the washing in (it might rain) and generally finish a task. Japanese habits are reminiscent of the findings of sociologists who have studied lower socio-ecomonic modes of behavior—where people live for the here and now, and have not been socialized to defer gratification, because sometimes because they expect no better future—in contrast to their more secure middle class counterparts. Japanese may have an expectation of natural disaster that feeds this habit of behavior. They experience earthquakes regularly. Mountains slide down on homes in the rainy seasons, rivers rise in frequent typoons, and natural dangers confront them often on their volcanic island home.

We have previously discussed the closeness between nature and humans in Japan. In Japan, a special space is created by hanging a shinenawa, a thick white rope used at shrines or put around old trees. At New Year's it is used to denote that the particular enclosure within is sacred. It is fluid and impermanent like the boundary between the seen and the unseen world and like the rooms in a traditional house, which has walls that slide apart to make temporary spaces befitting any occasion. The Japanese don't need privacy and families say they get lonely sleeping in rooms alone, They don't hide their bodies from each other while bathing. To westerners they seem vague about time and space. How many times I have waited at home for Japanese friends who say "they will be back soon," but returned in hours.

When we look at the sacred dividing rope, we see there is also a Japanese inside-outside concept, one that protects the Japanese from unacceptable ideas from other countries. The "Japanese" space preserves the social customs that are valued and keeps revered institutions from being overwhelmed by foreign influences. Where there are common values, rituals focus attention on them, said Radcliffe-Brown, [8] and this recalls Mirade Eliade's notion of symbolic time, reprised in Japan by the annual festivals and other traditional rituals and formalities, further evoking the memory of folklorist and historian Yanagita Kunio's complaint about Buddhism: that the intrusions Buddhism brought to Japan, such as the custom of having individual posthumous Buddhist names after death, were contrary to the spirit of unity that is Japan's special quality.

Yanagita writes:

> . . . there is no historical justification for it . . . [the posthumus name].But most of the common folk had another idea of it, for they thought that by virtue of this name they could realize a clear distintion between life and death and could feel their sorrow elevated with time until they could look up and venerate the dead as the family guardian spirit forever, and perhaps partly for this reason some people would use this Buddhist name after death although they had Shinto burial rites carried out. In spite of all this, that the individuality of each ancestor is maintained forever, in Buddhist services, is incompatible *with our concept of a unified ancestral spirit* (1970:98).[2]

Pollution, the Shinto version of evil, is probably the only clear ontological division of space in Japan. What is not held sacred is polluted and therefore it is something to be avoided. It could be outside in the street or with one's being outside the country. That is why Japanese traveling abroad, in war, or even for pleasure, can feel unconstrained in their behavior, for they have left the "sacred space" and are theoretically in a state of pollution. Mary Douglas illuminates this notion when she labels perceptions of dirt as "something that's out of place," in her book, Danger and Purity (1966:2). The Japanese habits of consideration, circumspection, and cleanliness at home are well known, and contrast to the military's ruthless behavior in China during World War II, or the present day "sex junkets" of gamblers, real estate speculators, and other so-called marginal people going on vacation to Thailand and Korea.[3]

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[2] Emphasis mine.

While the anthropologists Mary Douglas and Victor Turner looked for fields of symbolic action, Elaide focused on the human nostalgia for an Eden, and the longing for a return to sacred time, as a place of peace and unity where all experience is ordered and everything has a clear understandable purpose (1959). Before 1947, Japan's popular account of a divine national origin was reinforced through the wartime governments reiteration of this history, and reinforcement of the teaching, as a foundation for their national policy. Their efforts exploited a human need to make a plausibility out of suffering and experience, to make it an act of commonality with others, what Mary Douglas referred to as "an act of \`at-one-ment,'" describing the way a human being creates solidarity with his species (1966:169).

When passing in and out of sacred spaces one is moving though dangerous disordered intervals, requiring the greatest rituals observed Arnold van Gennep (1960:146), an area called "betwix't and between" by Victor Turner (1967:31-32). To remedy such problems, Japan's Shinto rites provide the folk with a harai ceremony of cleansing, and Buddhism provided the saintly Jizo. Jizo is often found standing at country crossroads, places where people might stray and fall out of their proper space. Of all these intervals, the most dangereous transitional space was is the one

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[3] The Japanese consider many of the vacationers to Korea and Thailand to be marginal people—gangsters, real estate speculators, etc.—people who made fast money unscrupulously. See the section on "pollution" in Douglas, 1966:64-66.

between death and life and the one needing the greatest rituals, according to anthropologist Robert Hertz (1960). Thus Japanese funeral and memorial services are among the most carefully observed formalities, honored by all segments of Japanese society. These will be discussed further in chapter four.

A Telephone Conversation with Mr. Nima

While he was working at the Japan Information Center in New York, in April of 1987, Mr. Niwa and I had this conversation.

Mr. Niwa: Many Americans are disappointed to be told Japanese are not religious. I think maybe 20% are, but...

Narrator: Yes, people say that, but I was thinking about the way Japanese respect natural things and behave in a way that shows a kind of religious feeling. I know many Japanese say they are not religious, but did you watch the NHK drama, INOCHI (Life) on Japanese television Sunday night?...where Harue-san is dying and the old lady comforts her with: "I believe when people die they return in another life to be with the same people they love,...just like you and the mistress had to meet in this life," and so on...don't you have the impression this represents the way some of the older Japanese feel?

Mr. Niwa: Oh not just the older Japanese, I myself feel this way.

Narrator: Perhaps we have a different understanding of the word religion. You are thinking of being a church member and going to service every Sunday and paying dues or something and I'm thinking of a way of understanding and explaining things...

Mr. Niwa: Ha Ha, yes that's so. Probably I must agree with that.

Pilgrims

Although everyday life is a flow of small events, sometimes it leaves larger memories. Among these are the pilgrimages and group trips that most Japanese like to make. These social and communal excursions are popular with school groups, friends, and acquaintances, perhaps members in some local organization, and are often the only vacations many Japanese take.

One kind of popular outing is an excursion I made with a Sokka Gakkai group to the Nichiren Shoshu sect's head temple at Mt. Fuji. This huge temple complex is the ancient seat of the largest branch of the original 13th century Nichiren Buddhist sect. A group of lay members called the Soka Gakkai actively proselytized for the sect during the post-WW II period and now claim to have 8 million member families and support a political party called Komeito. Their pilgrimages are made by boat, bus, and car and many sect members apply regularly for the limited annual admission. All seem to be reaffirming their faith or seeking guidance, having a brief vacation, and generally, enjoying themselves. Members of this sect are more active than the groups one often sees on bus tours to other temples, such as the elderly Japanese folk who visit the famous eighty eight temples of Shikoku, to follow in the footsteps of Shingon sect founder Kobo Daishi. Other active groups include Jodo

Shinshu, a large traditional sect which welcomes annual visitors in its huge headquarter temple at Kyoto, and many of the so-called "new religions," whose members go out into the parks and train stations to proselytize. The controversial Yaskuni shrine for the war dead also attracts large delegations of visitors from all over Japan, as does the Emperors' palace in Tokyo, the destination of many group visit by middleaged Japanese who come to pay their respects, and sightsee. They all seem to be a great occasion for feeling Japanese. The trip I describe below was made in the summer of 1982.

I learn our ship makes many circuits each month, sailing between Tokushima city and Shizuoka, the port nearest Taisekeji temple and Mt. Fuji. The journey requires three days and takes eighteen hours at sea to reach the other shore on Honshu. Our ship sail at night. My sponsor, Mrs. Shono worries I might not understand the group's traveling rules, but I am getting along fine with the forty or so ladies sitting on tatami mats below deck. Our late evening began with the group praying while a man on the ship's television intercom led them and was followed by a box supper. Food was consumed quickly and the ladies' nodding heads and lowering voices soon reduced themselves to sleepy silence. We are confined below decks where we cannot see the sea, but feel its motion beneath us. Only the ship's engine can be heard now, and at 9:30 pm. the lights are out.

Morning begins at 6:30 but some ladies have been stirring since 4:30. The moniter and intercom is turned on again and a solemn chorus of mens voices begin chanting over the loudspeaker, as all the members kneel to pray facing their male counterparts on the screen. Then a short religious lecture is broadcast breakfast is consumed. Everybody helps fold the sleeping mats in the corner and the dishes are collected in an aluminum pan. Two ladies share in sweeping the floor and tidying up the rest. When we debark at 9 am. we see the sea at last. Until then no one has broken the rule for a look on deck, except for a stairway peek by me.

On the dock waiting buses are idling their motors in the bright morning haze but still there is no sign of Mt. Fuji; until an hour's drive through open country and green rice paddies brings us to our destination. We turn into the grounds of the huge temple park and are checked into overnight sleeping quarters at one of the large dormitory buildings provided for pilgrims. I see at least six structures topped with concrete flying buttresses for this purpose. All are three stories high and hold about three hundred people to a floor. As we enter our room, a two hundred foot long tatami covered hall, a playing phonograph greets us. It is the recorded voice of a young girl who tells the story of a crisis in her life which she resolved through religious devotions. Then an official welcomer arrives and we sit down to hear a talk with a brief recitation of prayers until lunch. Outside, inexpensive food and gifts are available at a festive street of shops and stalls which runs from one far side of the temple grounds to the other. A boxed supper will be on the house. But the first outing is a dutiful journey to the momuments of the past to see the graves of religious worthies who are buried here and visit the individual religious buildings. There is more prayer chanting at a picturesque temple in the shape of a hexagon, a structure of considerable antiquity. We learn it was built centuries ago by the wife of the lord from our own Tokushima region when she became a convert to the Nichiren sect of Buddhism. We are now properly prepared for our ticketed visit to the main temple in the soaring hondo, and our chief reason for coming here. But first there is lunch at one of the shopping arcade's resturants, and then time to line up, with ushers direct us, along the long entrance paths. The guides are accustomed to the large crowds and everyone is seated efficiently: older people go first along specially marked pavements.

The impressive ceremony is conducted by many priests who form a procession leading up to the main altar. We are swept on by the mezmerizing sound of many thousands of voices praying together. The prayers are to welcome the opening of the golden altar which parts it great metal curtain parts to show a mandala enscribed in the hand of the sect's founder, Nichiren. It is traced in precious metal over his strikingly bold and authoritative calligraphy preserved from the thirteenth century original gift to his followers.

We can stay inside only forty-five minutes. The priests must repeat the ceremony seven times that day for the other constantly arriving crowds. Streaming out after the ceremony, happy looking crowds pause to have their snapshots taken with friends in the heart of the great edifice, where a soaring fountain, symbolizing peace centers the plaza, and showers us with cascades of windblown water. As a foreigner I am exotic enough to be asked to pose by several smiling groups of ladies.

After we return to our quarters for a wash there is more sutra chanting, and at last, the box supper. We have barely enough time to finish and get ready for an evening lecture in a big modern hall across the lawn. The hall has no chairs, and everyone sits on finely woven tatami mats. From a sort of a stage in front, songs are directed by a young man waving two huge fans. He acts out the rhythms with gestures. The speaker appears to interpret a story from the Lotus sutra and explains how it is relevent to our modern lives; someone finds a folding chair for the western guest while he lectures. The evening ends with more songs, enthusiastically waved on at us from the stage by the young man with the fan. When we return to our quarters, a woman again speaks to us: saying something funny, and spicing her lesson with humorous anecdotes that make the ladies laugh a great deal. As the foreigner looks hot, the relaxed ladies nearby solicitously fan her; and watch the last event, a taped television broadcast of the organization's president, Ikeda Daisatsu, and his last visit to Russia. Our final hour before bedtime is free for browsing in the shops and buying the obligatory souveniers Japanese must bring home from every excursion; and also having a late snack in the row of shops which seem to open and close to the schedule of our visits.

The morning boat trip home is similiar to the first one, but everything feels freer and we sit on the open deck for the first time and pose for pictures. We disembark in the dark to scatter among the friends and relatives waiting in cars and taxis. As I am driven home I think back on the looming hulk of the mountain, Fuji-san, as it first appeared in the morning, black in the deep red dawn outside the dormitory window; silhouetted from behind. And suddenly I am startled by a recollection. It looked just like my 150 year old woodblock print at home, the one made famous by the artist Hokusai.

There is a special word in Japanese for making trips to temples and shrines called Mairyi. On my summer sightseeing walks to famous local temples, strangers on the path would sometimes notice me and call out, "a good Maiyri." "The Shikoku Mairyi"is the name for a pilgrimage to the famous eighty-eight temples on Shikoku. Japanese history records outbreaks of shrine and templegoing fever, called Okage Maiyri, at various times in history, as people would walk away from their work, to join a passing band: bound for important places like the great shrine at Ise. (Davis: 1983) These trips offered opportunities to escape the duties and obligations of normal life without punishment, and resembled chiliastic events that occurred during Europe's middle ages. In Japan everybody aspires to visit an important shrine at least once in their lifetime, and walking with others makes it much more comfortable and increased the special pleasure.[4]

The poet Basho (1644-1694) made a pilgrimage for the sake of his poetic inspiration when writing his famous work, The Narrow Road to the North, to represent a Buddhist metaphor for one's journey through life. The ordinary human need to be with other human beings is complemented, for most Japanese people, during these pilgrimages, by the idea that the same warm relationship enjoyed with humans is possible with the gods. Templegoing is a happy tradition that one needn't feel too pious about. And Japanese religion, like other forms of communal existence, puts up few separations against other things.

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[4] Winton Davis. (1983). "Pilgrimage and world renewal: A study of religion and social values in Tokugawa Japan, Part I." History of Religions, 23(2):97-116. Davis cites huge outbreaks of pilgrimage fever in 1705, 1771, 1830, and other less events, plus a last outbreak, the ee ja nai ka of 1867. The 1830 "Okage Mairi" is said to have attracted five million people.

Even traditional houses have their own logic in Japan. While individual enclosures are for different families; yet once inside them, one lives close to the ground where no one wears shoes, and metaphorically keeps in touch with the elemental. Rooms open, and one space is convertible to another, with walls or doors that slide apart to keep the space communal. A family may sleep together, even when there is plenty of room. With having no feeling of needing protection against one another, or articulating the distinction between personal rights, separateness appears to be a distinction relatively unconceptualized in Japan. Interior architecture encourages unification, not privacy, just like the social grouping which is the locus of Japanese life. It helps our argument to say the Japanese think of dying differently than their more separated Western cousins. The Japanese group treats its members as itself in a chain of customs that discourages individuals from expressions of individualism in personal life and binds them to the group. To be one with a group comforts the dying, and softens an individual's fear of the unknown, when all can continue together in undifferentiated universes. Because the Japanese prefer not to dwell on divisions, they can envision their religious ideal as total unity.

Ordinary People: At Home with Three Households in Tokushima

Not long ago I stayed at a fifty year old house in Hiroshima town, a suburb of Tokushima city. The house's street entrance was taken up by a sake shop, behind which a family of six lived in the spacious two story interior. The inside was far more impressive than the streetfront sake shop with only a tatami family room visible through the rear of the store. On the inside, the house had the feeling of a 1925 Art Nouveau interior, though the floor was divided by traditional tatami mats. Graceful 1920-ish looking arabesques of bent bamboo filled the open fanlights around the ceilings and between the rooms, and allowed the passage of cool air. There was even some Tiffany style glass paneling remaining from earlier years. A minuscule interior garden filled with pine and shrubs, was rather given over to spiders nests, and a sleeping Siamese cat. They seemed to be the only creatures with time to enjoy the space. Attached to the pine tree above the sleeping cat, a footed tray of clear unvarnished wood held fresh food: fried tempura and an assortment of vegetables and pickles on a green leaf that lined the square box. The four corners were decorated with four white memorial vases holding four laurel branches. This was food for the Kami, invisible spirits of nature which Shinto tradition says inhabit the air of Japan. It signalled that somebody was maintaining traditional observances. This house in Hiroshima also contained the usual Buddhist butsudan cabinet and memorial altar for ancestors. In the morning I found an old lady kneeling before it.

She had changed the water for the flowers on the altar and placed fresh food offerings on the lacquered tray for the dead. I guessed she was also the one who had put out the food tray for the Kami spirits in the garden. A block away from the house, the grounds of the neighborhood Buddhist temple also shared space with a Shinto shrine; along with a children's playground, exhibiting the spirit of friendly coexistence between two different religions. Primary schools and playgrounds invariably adjoin shrine precincts, because they seem to be an ideal place for the protection of children. The schoolyard and shrine were brand new, suggesting a fresh infusion of money, not resembling some of the old neighborhood Shinto shrines I had seen during earlier visits, so neglected looking, they seemed to advertise a postwar disillusionment with the State Shinto ideology of the military led years.

The master of the house was absent all day at another job while his wife tended the store which sold sake, beer, and whiskey, to take out or drink on the premises at a worn wooden counter with stools for five. Her daily lot seemed more pleasant than that of many Japanese housewives who are confined to housekeeping and tending their children most of the day. Her three daughters were almost grown up except for a late born child, one excessively coddled girl of about seven. Madam's cheerful no-nonsense manner reflected her experience in bantering with the laborers who came to buy at the sake shop. Her housekeeping was far less dutiful than at many other households I saw, those of ladies who had no excuse of business. Her "catch as catch can" school of tidying up kept the house clean, but preserved it from improvements that might have disguised its original 1920s' appearance.

Her cousin in nearby Naruto, where I also stayed for some nights, seemed mainly to keep house for her husband and three children. She was the youngest of this group of relatives and had a husband who worked at home, representing a furniture firm that sold legs for tables, and related wood products. Their house was the newest of the three I visited and the only one that did not contain a Butsudan or display any religious articles. A new family car was parked just outside the kitchen door under a blue plastic sun roof. Mrs. "Naruto's" kitchen equipment was as modern as anything American, but her frying was done on the usual two burner gas table, seen in kitchens all over Japan. Ovens are not common here. Most food is boiled, steamed, or grilled on a mesh placed over the flame, and smoke is allowed to billow into the room. Microwave ovens are a common new addition. Deep frying or tempura cooking was learned from the Portuguese and many popular foods are batter dipped, or bread crumbed, and fried—even hot dogs. This lady was proud to say she made her own dashi, the basic soup stock for cooking, and not the instant powder, and proud of being able to serve her family home made, instead of store bought, pickles. The father of this house was addressed by the children, by his formal title otoo-san, and the mother as ooka-san, unlike the family in my own house, where "papa" and "mama" was the more preferred style when the children were young. (Later they were taught in school to say otoo-san too.) This father was a mild sort of young man who did not fit the old housewive's joke that "a good husband is healthy but absent." Their neighborhood was quite new looking and located in a sort of subdivision near the Naruto beach.

The home of my third hostess was busy Osaka, the city most like New York in appearance, and also in the manners of its people. My hostess's husband was a brother of my own relative's husband. He was the next to oldest of eight children raised on a farm in the Tokushima countryside, and after a set of earlier divorces he was living with his new young wife and their four year old son. She was a beautiful girl much younger than he, and was eventually divorced by him, to end up running her own snack bar in a narrow house and shop he built for her in a busy Osaka shopping arcade, He also owned a bustling coffee shop there that did not seem to require his personal attention. He divorced the young wife to marry an older woman he had once courted in his youth. "She manipulated him into leaving his wife by lending him money for his real estate business," the gossips said. Nonetheless he retained a certain respectability because he was always a good provider. He insured a future for all his ex-wives by starting a business for each of them. This young ex-wife continued to visit us and remained part of our extended family because she had born two children, apart from which she enjoyed the goodwill of all the relatives who gave up trying to understand her ex-husband, their own brother, blood relation though he was. When I first visited their home, they lived in an apartment house pretentiously calling itself a mansion, located just off the covered shopping arcade. It has a square floor plan and featured an American style kitchen and bathroom. The living room was filled with bulky furniture and an oversize English period desk. The glass case in the entrance contained a suit of samurai armor which Mr. "Osaka" was rather proud of showing off, along with the antique sword on display beside it. Though personally attentive and charming, Mr. "Osaka" seemed a bit more harried than most of the Japanese I met. He never seemed to say "thank you" for services, and continually kept forgetting his route on highways; never believing the directions he was given, stopping every few minutes, when I was with him, to ask the same questions. He had never been to the temple at the nearby historical city of Nara, and even fidgeted through the one hour of amateur Kabuki theater I later requested him to take me to. He claimed to be a totally nonreligious man though he stuffed his pockets with purchases of temple charms and amulets when we got to the famous Horyuji temple, I had guided him to; it's fame and location known to me only through my readings of it. These amulets included generous quantities purchased for me too.

Mr. "Osaka" seemed to reserve his admiration for western culture and I guessed he bought the Japanese antiques in his home as prestige enhancing symbols and for their investment value. There was no family Butsudan. I later discovered from his younger brother (my full time host) that their family's father was a priest, of a mountain-Shinto sect which kept itself relatively aloof from Buddhism, and that this divided some of the family members from those loyal to their father's ways, and others, like the younger son, who was converted by proselytizing Soka Gakai members to join Nichiren Buddhism. Younger Mr. Kato said he could not believe in his father's simple brand of mountain Shinto religion and joined the activist Nichiren Buddhism sect which explained more. This sect was adopted by a busy, proselytizing laymen's group, that recruited many Japanese from their old less active affiliations in Shingon, Tendai, and Zen, during the post-World War II period, when other, more complacent branches of Buddhism, seemed inattentive to people's postwar problems. But the whole family gathered together at the farm for the

Buddhist holiday of Obon. The Shinto family members, living on the original family land, commemorated the occasion by scattering raw rice on their graves in a Shinto manner while young Mr. Kato carried his Buddhist toba or grave markers, commissioned from his city temple, to the country graveyard, and put them beside his mother and father's tombstones. It was the cause of some grumbling between farm and city, because of what the farm relatives considered a betrayal of their father's religion. Everybody managed to be cordial enough, to share the holiday food and drink, and take home some produce from the farm. Even the many times married Mr Osaka drove in from the mainland via ferry and highway to be there regularly (sometimes with his newest wife, I learned).

The oldest son now ran this farm and tilled the land left by their father. He grew mandarin oranges, kiwi fruit, and special quality rice used for making sushi (which the relatives grumbled he didn't give away); along with vegetables on what was a considerable spread for Japan, the largest holding I had visited until then. The post war land reform act allowed nonfarming Japanese no more than two and a half acres of land, in order to do away with the class of absentee landlords who could charge rental tenants half their rice harvest. Prohibitive land prices today prevent most working farmers from increasing their holdings, but this family had many sons who left their property together, in the custody of the eldest, even though they were entitled to a division by law. One of the younger farm family males had just finished building a new traditional house for all the farm branch to live in, next door to the old house. This farm branch shared the quarters, though the younger people commuted to town jobs for their living. Inside the house there was a large stage-like platform serving as the tokonoma alcove for the main parlor. On it they kept an ornamental display of dried vegetables and flowers and a raised stand of food offerings for the Kami spirits. Bolted up near the ceiling was a fine, large, blond wooden shelf, called the kamidana. It held a complete miniaure Shinto shrine. There was no Butsudan, and in this mountain valley farm, where the tradition of revering the departed father's religious ideas was observed, one could see how closely the farmer's interests and Shinto's ideas are tied to the agricultural cycle of growth and seasonal renewal. Visiting a field on the nearby mountainside that afternoon, I saw the abandoned Shinto temple that their deceased father had been priest in: one square dusty room with an old harmonium, and a fading photograph of the formally robed priest and his wife, left among the few scattered farm utensils. It seemed no one visited here except to tend the mushrooms growing in trays outside, under a black mesh awning in a nearby cave. All the holiday Shinto offerings were made in the new house.

The occasion of our visit was also an opportunity for younger Mr. Kato to attend his high school reunion party in the village. Driving back home to town that night, he laughingly described his old classmates, who didn't provide any liquor for the festivities; they were all parsimonious farmers' sons to the end, or so it seemed to this now worldly, yet daily practicing Buddhist, city man.

Doctors

All my Japanese informants wondered why doctors never tell a patient when he has a fatal illness. I wondered how this fit in with some well-known Japanese notions of death: lovers who willingly commit double suicide; the mothers who kill their children along with themselves, so as not to leave the children alone; the old samurai ethos which said, "be ready to die at any time;" and even the Zen admonition to free yourself by "dropping off mind and body" to become enlightened. How does the reluctance of Japanese physicians to tell patients they may have a fatal illness relate to the generally open minded approach to talking about death?

I began my miniature survey of four local doctors by asking, "What is this I hear about not telling patients who are fatally ill they must die? People say cancer patients are never told they have cancer."

The answers fell between two polar extremes. Dr. Hibano was at one pole. He was leaving his office when I came to see him but his wife/assistant courteously invited me into the tatami room next to the consulting office anyway. We spoke, and I asked my basic question.

"Yes, what you heard is true."

"Why so?" I asked.

"Well, we fear the patient may kill himself. Cancer is a fatal disease, so only when we find an early case of, say, stomach cancer, do we tell the patient he must have an operation and can be cured. We don't tell them the name of the disease. If it's an incurable case of stomach cancer, we say it's a benign ulcer. We just don't want them worrying. The family is informed instead. I can't say really, that there may be something from Buddhism deep inside us and affecting our decision, I don't think much about religion."

At the other pole, there was Dr. Morioka: "We are Japanese, so I fear we cannot speak directly about anything that will hurt someone. I could not tell, even you, if you have cancer, even if you say you want to know. I could tell some of the family but not women in the family who are emotionally involved. Maybe we are a Japanese island and must see each other all the time. There is no escape from hurt feelings, so we avoid saying anything that might harm others."

Dr. Morioka is quite unlike Dr. Hibino. Both are in their forties, Morioka perhaps a little older. Hibino walks, and talks, and acts briskly, like a Westernized extroverted no nonsense rationalist (at least at this meeting). He is a graduate of Kyoto University Medical School, (second highest ranked in the nation) and a licensed translator of English. By comparison, Dr. Morioka is sensitive and almost poetic. He struggles to express in English the subtleties he wishes to describe. The family in Japan will settle the patient's life, he tells me. The patient needn't concern himself about winding up his affairs. People are much more connected and it doesn't matter whether amicably or not.

Dr. Morioka goes on to tell me the story of a famous Buddhist writer: "I forget the name, it was in about 1974 or 1975. Everybody knows of him. He asked his doctor who was also a friend of his to please inform him if he had the stomach cancer suspected. `Yes,' the Doctor told him, `I'm sorry that you do.' Suddenly he couldn't tolerate food any longer and died within a week, though he should have lived much much longer!

"No, I don't think I could even tell you such a thing," Dr. Morioka says. "I have studied Western religious thinking and though I am not a Christian, I can understand the views. But we are isolated from the rest of the world. We live well together by not being direct in all areas of life. We just don't say many things. And often don't say what we mean." He concludes by saying, "Please come to me if you have any serious illness, . . . I would like to do everything I can to help you."

Conclusion: the first doctor said: "Obviously we don't want the patients killing themselves."

The second Doctor said: "It's not the Japanese way to be direct—and give anxiety—in any area of life in Japan." He also added an implication of the Japanese sense of a human collectivity: a person is not owned by himself—not as an individual, because others, particularly the doctor, can take charge of his social self. Individuals are not solitary creatures, not even as legal entities, because people in Japan don't have individual birth certificates. They are entered in the family registry as a first daughter, second son, and so on. When children marry a son will start a new register for his offspring and a daughter will be transferred to her new husband's family.

The other doctors with whom I spoke fell between the first two with their answers. One of them told me the selfsame story about the famous Buddhist writer who abruptly stopped eating and died once he heard he could not be helped. Perversely, I wondered whether the Buddhist writer had deliberately willed himself into oblivion because he thought it better for himself, and the doctors, typically, were offended because his quick death was a rejection of their skill and orientation toward life.

Japanese hospitals and doctors play an involved role in the lives of their clients because the relationships are social as well as medical. Patients come because someone they trusted brought the two sides together. During a period of hospitalization, friends have a chance to show their regard actively, and the interdependency of the group is acknowledged. It allows people to prove how much they are a part of each other and how valuable a part of each other's wellbeing.

The hospital patient may be inundated by gifts of food from visitors; although he or she ought perhaps not eat what is brought by visiting friends and families, such gifts of food are seldom if ever explicitly forbidden by the medical staff. Doctors are accustomed to making a trade between the medical treatments they might prefer to prescribe and psychological benefits patients may receive from social interactions. My nurse friends at a Tokushima hospital inherited many of the luxuries patients were given by visitors, and during the weeks I joined the nurses at lunch for English practice they consumed the edible treats. The most commonly offered hospital gifts are whatever foods are the patient's favorite. These foods should be fresh and should also be perishable rather than durable items. Everyone wants to reassure the invalid that the hospital stay will be brief, and a gift of food, that does not last, gives the message clearly. As a result, of course, the staff often inherits many of these gifts as pleasant additions to their meals.

Upstairs, most of the patients were resting in their own sleepwear. Family members plan to sleep overnight on the floor next to the patient's bed, and to assist in all ways in making the patient comfortable. Relatives commonly perform many tasks done by hospital staff in a Western hospital. Relatives bathe the patients, change their clothing, and do small housekeeping chores, to show regard for the sufferer.

If a person is in the hospital because of an auto collision the guilty party will call at the hospital personally and try to visit every day while the victim is convalescing. As a result of these visits there are far fewer lawsuits over accidents—since the offender seems genuinely concerned. Interestingly, one does not see growing plant gifts in the patients' rooms because they would mean a long stay. The nurses at the Toyo Byoin told me it is preferable to send them back when inexperienced young visitors sometimes bring them. If the patient is someone like a teacher, or an employer with a large staff, droves of visitors may come in leaving gifts, for which the family sends a "thank you" note later.

Because a hospital stay is also an opportunity for extra sleep and relaxation, with freedom from one's usual duties and obligations, the Japanese may use hospital stays to compensate for not taking long vacations from work, with the result that, on the average, hospitalization for the Japanese is longer than it is for Westerners (Onuko-Tierney 1984). Of course, hospital costs are much lower than in the United States and most families subscribe to National Health Insurance. Regular social life goes on in hospitals and visitors can come for the the day and stay for the night, within reason. Close relatives and friends are expected to want to help out when someone is very ill. In a Japanese hospital, human relations may outweigh medical efficiency. This is a burden which most Japanese doctors good naturedly accept. Thus, going to the hospital is a group affair—even to the last moment. There are doctors who will sit with their dying patients to the end, as was described in a "Japan Conference" paper by Bruce and Susan Long who described a physician who liked to drink a final cup of sake with his patients, because when his medical role was done, the social role was still in effect (The Midwest Regional Conference on Japan, Knox College, Galesburg, Il., 1980). He was assuming a function sometimes done by a close relative, who shares a final cup of water with the dying person, in a custom called shimizu (Goodman, Chapter 4).

The regard for good relationships is basic to Japanese life, to the degree that the cultivation of good feelings may take precedence over many other important matters. This affects not merely the social arena per se, but also areas of life concerned with the most advanced science and technology.

Conversations in Awa about Religion and Dying

A young design artist from Tokyo, Koji, says, "I don't think people take religion so seriously anymore. I don't practice any religious customs, but our religion is here, so maybe I will someday. Probably I should like to visit the famous eighty-eight temples of Shikoku when I retire, and things like that."

A 26-year old housewife says: "I don't know much about Buddhism, I should study more. My grandparents have a Butsudan at home, but they are far away and I only visit at o-bon holidays. When they die, I will go there on memorial days. Probably I will have more time to study when my children are older."

In 1987, a 33-year old Japan Airlines airline stewardess told me, "I was taught I will become a god when I die, so I don't worry about death."

Informal conversations at the Awa Ikeda teacher's conference of 1987 brought forth this statement from a sixty-year-old private school English kindergarten teacher: "We Japanese don't pay so much attention to our religion because it's just there when we need it. I myself would like not to be born again when I die, because I would prefer to be, like . . . the stars in the sky."

Another lady says, "I believe you can have your religion even if you don't act religious." She was one of a small group of English-speaking Japanese women, sitting with her friends in the hotel lobby at the Awa Ikeda seminar for teachers and students of English.

Conversations about death can be easy in Japan, as people make everyday remarks about death and dying in ordinary conversation. The ease with which average Japanese converse about death shows that despite the weak religious outlook many Japanese claim to have, they are quite comfortable talking about facing death, in sharp contrast to the many Americans who cannot bear to hear mention of their own or anybody else's demise.

The Japanese accept aging and the things appropriate to their years. This shows up in simple things: older people stop buying certain patterns and colors of clothing as inappropriate; when speaking, their use of more familiar language becomes acceptable as older folk drop the level of honorifics when addressing peers and younger people. More time may be spent at the family Butsudan doing ordinary tasks, or the older person may take to copying sutras by hand, gaining religious merit while practicing calligraphy. The Japanese are reconciled to the passage of time, and uncomprehending of the common Western habit of hiding one's age. "How old are you?" is perhaps the second most frequent question a newcomer is asked in Japan.

All levels of society group their activities around age cohorts, with appropriate expectation of behavior, clothing, etc. The women sitting under the hair dryers in the beauty salon may be thumbing through European beauty magazines, but the hairdressers provide unsolicited "correct" hair styles for the over age forty clients. There is an acceptance of the changing seasons that surround life. The Japanese don't feel they have to prove themselves to others over and over again. They do not attempt to conceal their lineage, or their status, or their age, in order to appear more attractive. This is more of a problem for more mobile Westerners who must win favor as individuals in each new place they enter. Japanese feel accepted as they are; one's community is one's identity, and not a subject for unease.

The same year as the conference, a group of college students told me, "We are young so we don't think about death now." This youthful cohort of people was very conscious of what is appropriate to their time of life. They said quite frankly, it is not the season to think of death. In this at least they are removed from a previous generation of young people, the youthful samurai of the feudal period, who were taught always to be ready for death, so that life might be given easily if duty to their lord required it.

After the Meiji restoration of the nineteenth century, and early in this one, a similar ethos was circulated among the common people to urge them to sacrifice themselves for the good of a newly united nation. Today's democratically raised young generation is also informed of its expected duties in life: circumspect behavior and work for the good of the household, whether in a company or society, in order to be accepted as good Japanese and achieve their best potential selves.

Some complaints about what Japanese call a "my home generation" have begun to surface in socially critical writings and are a cause for concern in government planning circles—those in the nation's upper echelons and policy making bureaucracies. The bureaucrats want to strengthen the quality of moral instruction given in grade schools. At the same time, the intense pressure put on children by their parents and teachers to study hard and get into a good school is also recognized as a serious problem that divides young people. The nature and direction of the pressure is making the present generation self centered, pitting them in competition against other children, so they turn inward, and run the risk of becoming selfish, causing some to become school dropouts, and others to turn to "bullying" their schoolmates.

Neighborhood Manners

Living in Japan, we find small things are different. A newly arrived housewife is expected to properly call on her new neighbors in the surrounding apartments or homes with a simple and non-intrusive visit and a small token gift with an exchange of formal greetings. She says, "dozo yoroshiku [please think of me kindly]." Similar courtesies are practiced when leaving. These courtesies are practical devices that help create unity and sympathy among newer city residents who may still continue to live quite separate lives. The unique mixture of land use in Japan also helps preserve community patterns: low income families may live beside a wealthy family, or a business, because of old inherited land patterns. This land mix is unlikely to change radically, because of the high land costs and paucity of places to which to move. A national, government-supported unwillingness to uproot people who are long time residents is institutionalized and real or tacit laws protect families from land or home condemnation in the name of progress.

Japanese Superstition

To understand Japan, it also helps to study what is sometimes called *numina*, beliefs about spirits and the creatures from the other world that color the Japanese imagination (see Numina in Japan, a Japan Society Pictorial edition [Addiss, 1985], or Carmen Blacker's study of shamanism, The Catalpha Bow [1976]). Blacker says we should try to think of Japanese notions about spirits "like a break in the ontological plane ... or a rupture of level ... that the ordinary man or woman is powerless to cross, but [in which] the spiritual beings on the other side are not so confined." We must bear in mind, Blacker reminds us, that formal religion and common folk understandings are basically different things which have become blurred in Japan. He documents the not-uncommon-beliefs that the cause of many of life's misfortunes originates in the world of the spirits, particularly the superstition that the angry dead may retaliate if they are not properly cared for. They are most likely to cause harm when they are the victims of violence and murder, or those to whom justice has never been rendered (1976:20). Japanese folk literature tells us that so violent can a wronged person's feeling become, that such a person can unknowingly separate him- or herself from the body and attack someone far away. The classic noh drama, Aoi No Ue, tells such a story about a lady and her rival, Rokujo. She was neglected by her lover Prince Genji, and then humiliated in a deliberate carriage accident caused by her rival's servants. On the noh stage, Lady Aoi is conjured from the other world to tell her story, but such is her hate, that even the prayers of the listening priest cannot pacify her rage or bring her peace. There is also the frightful scorned wife, a kabuki theater character in the play, Yotsuya Kwaidon, traditionally performed in the summer, because its frightening scenes of revenge, are supposed to chill audiences and keep them cool in the heat.

Blacker also uses noh plays to provide evidence of beliefs in spirits all through Japanese history. He thinks many noh plays are concealed shamanistic rituals that were used to call up ghosts:

> In them we hear flutes, drums, and sounds, believed perhaps capable of resonance in another world, . . . looking at the plays today, we see a subtle fabric, . . . [where] a network is thrown up, like the scattered rings of mushrooms in a meadow, a legend here, a myth there, a place name, the name of a deity, the remnant of a rite, . . . there is a subterranean network below (1976:31-32).

Blacker criticizes the usual doctrinal separations made by western students of Japanese religion. Japanese Buddhism and Shinto are inextricably intertwined, borrowing each other's liturgies, rituals, and myths, "so that a worshiper is scarcely aware whether he is addressing a Shinto kami or a Bodhisatva" (1976:33).

Folk beliefs say that although some spirits may take full possession of human beings, others just borrow their voices to speak out through mediums and Shinto priestesses. The mediums and intermediaries between the invisible and visible worlds are conventional appearing people, who are respected, not just tolerated by their neighbors. They enjoy a higher social status than the simple life style of many of them would suggest. In Tokushima I was once about to be taken to visit a local seer by the wife of a university dean. My friend's husband would have accompanied us by being politely respectful, though perhaps he would have been acting for my benefit, but his wife seemed very serious about making the meeting take place.

Mediums live in nearly every Japanese village, and even now, near the end of the twentieth century, a great number are reported to live in and around the cities of Osaka and Kyoto. Customarily generous with their services, the mediums expect only little gifts or small payments of cash in return. Another time I went to visit a retired teaching colleague of the previously mentioned friend, a hereditary Shinto priest, who had conducted his own investigation of sorcery, now described in the section below.

A Visit to the Home of Mr. Noda, the Shinto Priest

(September 9, 1985.)

Mr. Noda's Shinto shrine sits on a little hill, opposite the impressive Otani "Entsuji" Buddhist temple in Naruto. "Famous because of its origin in the 1200 year old Soto sect," he tells me, when we meet. He and his wife live in a traditional house entered through a covered wooden gate below the stone steps leading to their own more modest religious establishment. Small patches of farmland are in the back of two homes where Mr. Noda, his son (also a priest), and a grandson, live in separate houses surrounded by plots of the vegetables grown for their daily needs. Mr. Noda inherited his father's position as the neighborhood priest after an earlier career teaching engineering. Today he wants to tell me about his recent visit to Osorie Yama (Terror Mountain) in 1985.

A mutual friend, Professor M., who once taught in the same technical college with Mr. Noda, introduces us. In his prologue the professor gives me a sketch of Osorie mountain saying, "It's a place where you find blind and aged sorceresses who will chant for you, doing foolish recitations of meaningless words that sound like sutras, probably in their own local dialect—but where no trances occur. All the sorcereses were saying, `Your relatives who are in the other world are happy and healthy and nothing is wrong. You should do your work in this world; be kind and friendly, so when you go to the other world you can be happy too.'"

After we arrive, priest Noda plays a tape recording he made of the "sorceresses" chanting. They sound like priests chanting sutras in a Buddhist service. He says: "Nothing queer happens there, and I saw no unusual occurrences during my three days of observation. I had decided to investigate when I heard some television reporters claimed to be bewitched. I suppose weak personalities can be enchanted, after which they are still told to be kind to others, to have respect for parents, and so on, getting general moral advice."

He recalls how he saw thirty or so blind women sitting about two meters apart under a long canopied tent. Each "sorceress" had her "clients" collected around her, most of whom were seeking tidings of their deceased.

"Every sorceress has her name written on a sign behind her and because some are famous, more people lined up for a turn to speak to her. The landscape is very clear and views from afar seem very close. There is no grass and the powdery ground feels dusty—making it seem as if smoke were about to rise out of the ground around you." He says the clear mountain landscape reveals many peculiarly shaped volcanic formations and it is a dangerous place to walk about. "Soft shifting sand makes moving difficult and sulphurous fumes escape from hidden fissures here and there. Flocks of crows are all about, living on the cakes offered by the visitors. Statues of Jizo-San are also found here, many of his images are scattered about the rocks."

Mr. Noda notices all the sorceresses preach the same words of comfort to their clients. "The clients are mainly worried people—the fathers and mothers of a child who died recently, and so on. They wish to appease their dead by inquiring about their well being. Very few people go to the temple there just for the sake of religion, or just to pay respects. Most are seeking comfort of some sort."

Mr. Noda makes me a gift of the cassette tape he made and says, "The trip to Osorie mountain was in July, on the twenty-first to the twenty-fourth, around the Bon festival holiday for the dead, so there were huge crowds there instead of the more often deserted scene.

"The nearby hot spring hotels [onsen] are built in barracks-like formations, and are all busy. Some cater to the poorer guests where only a fifty yen dormitory payment is asked. You bring your own food and try to make do with a few amenities. This is also where the sorceresses come to drink and make merry after their day's work is over." The inns are supported and maintained by religious minded donors for the benefit of travelers. Performers and street musicians are all about.

Mr. Noda mentions what he calls the children's language of the piling up of stone pebbles to look like Buddhist stupas, for the help of dead children. "By night the devils come and break them down." He wishes to see if the "devils" are the accolytes of the surrounding temples, who he thinks come at night to cart the food away to the shops.

He says disdainfully, "Buddhism is about death, but Shinto is about the benevolence of nature which gives life and permits humans to exist: it gives men nurture.

"Many forms of Shinto were perverted over the years, some by priests, and some by the military people during the war, he saysm "but true Shinto is always pure and honest." This is what he works for, that original Shinto be restored, even though he says he is not an important person and has no influence.

Mr. Noda explains his view of Shinto. "Shinto has a brightness while Buddhism resembles the landscape of India; its Bukkyo [the Buddhist doctrine] is about sadness. Buddhism has its origin in loneliness, illness, and death. Buddhism naturaly wishes to escape from this kind of world and searches for the western paradise of purity. Not Shinto. Wherever you visit Shinto shrines there are no tombs. Shinto has nothing to do with ashes and bones, only the spirit is enshrined in a Shinto shrine. The great difference is—that Bukkyo worships idols—Shinto worships and reveres living things. No matter how hard today's youth may speak against Shinto, for today's Shinto is quite different from ancient Shinto, it still is there. Originally, it was only about nature, but that has been deformed since past times. Shinto must give benefits to everyone. No matter how much science offers you, you need more."

Priest Noda was trained in science and worked as an engineer. He holds some patents from his professional days at the Anan Technical College. "Benevolence of nature must be the basis of Shinto," he continues. "No one properly explains the true essence of Shinto to modern people." He wishes to return to the original Shinto but cannot loudly say so for fear of offending the other, higher, priests. His definition of a purely spiritual Shinto has been rejected by the establishment Shinto priests he says. "The corruption of Shinto over the years has taken its toll on those who preach it. Bukkyo resembles Shinto sometimes, but the line is distinct. The terror and the benevolence of nature are the lessons of Shinto. Human beings are kept alive because of the benevolence of nature, and giving thanks to nature is the essence of Shinto."

He wishes to state, he is quite happy with his "third-rate" establishement.

Gift Giving

Gift giving means much more than simply exchanging compliments. It is a way of increasing the ties that bind the living with the unseen. Japanese cultural forms employ many anthropomorphic Shinto or Taoist symbols that help maintain beliefs through utilitarian objects. Religious beliefs are popularized through the handicrafts and useful objects made for ordinary use, when modest artisans produce everyday items inspired by spiritual themes. Universalistic ideas such as the three worlds that surround man—the heavens, the earth, and the human world—are metaphors for the growing of ornamental chrysanthemums: their juxtaposition in three different heights teaches humans they are at the midpoint of three worlds. (A concept further expounded in the philosophical work of Watsuji Tetsuro [1971: 88-115].) Japanese of every income level admire and support buying these handmade goods and objects, accepting their extra cost over mass produced items. Perhaps because modern city homes today have become smaller than before, the beautiful small things may, more than ever, be the only way to ameliorate confining space limitations. The cupboards in many Japanese homes bulge with more handmade gifts and artistic novelties than will ever be needed. They are an accumulation of the never-ending rounds of gift giving that Japanese use to show esteem for each other. The gifts require that they have a fineness comparable to the expression of respect the giver wishes to convey, and help perpetuate the work of the craftsmen who make them. An amused potter I knew confided he couldn't sell all his output at earlier exhibitions, until he raised his prices, to convince people how good the work must be, reassuring the timid that they were of sufficient quality for gift giving. Exchanging religiously imbued Japanese handmade goods helps improve human social ties, yet properly credits nature with Shinto inspired gratitude, as if there is a tacit consensus with the unseen and the society of humans.

Chapter 4

Death and Dying

The unique sharing of lives that makes others part of one's humanly-constructed subjective reality is painfully torn upon the death of a close associate. If it is an isolated couple, like the dyad in Georg Simmel's study of basic social forms, the death of one half makes the existence of the remaining part problematical. The void produced by an absence through death is a rent in the socially constructed world of lived experience, for the close sharing of time with another that has made it inextricably mixed with one's own time. But the Japanese fill the gap created by a personal loss and refuse to accept separation after death, not allowing the memory of the departed to disappear. Instead, the missing person is promoted into a larger community of souls that one may draw upon for comfort and encouragement.

Elderly Japanese who feel their end may be near consider it appropriate to prepare for death, much as our grandfather Tanaka, who is quite well, but who has been practicing his caligraphy by copying Buddhist sutra passages since grandmother died. He calmly realizes he is ninety three and may have to follow her soon. Like the familiar Japanese saying, he hopes "to die on tatami," which means a peaceful normal death. It is an expression that reflects life lived low on the ground and tied to earth and nature, aided by a religion that preaches death is not oblivion but a change in circumstances. The Japanese are less cognizant of the original Indian doctrine based on the four noble truths, which said that all life is suffering--and only by renouncing desire for life could one truly live. In Buddhism rebirth is actually a consequence of one's own craving to be reborn. Only when one has subdued all desires, is the chain of rebirth broken and nirvana reached (Vidya, 1979:59-101).

Our family friend was in his seventies when he died and I heard he liked to drink and gamble and have a good time. On a July day in 1985 we joined about thirty of his friends and relations for his funeral, at a small hillside temple across the Ko-Naruto bridge. We parked our car under the shade of some trees in a field and walked along a gravel path to the temple, lined by rows of paper flowers on six foot stands. A low hanging tile roof cast coolness around the building and invited us in. The family members were waiting inside the foyer and sitting formally on the tatami mats. The women were dressed in black kimonos and the men wore formal Western-style morning coats. The rest of us wore conservative modern dress. We bowed very low to the eldest son and his wife, expressing our condolences, and added a muted phrase of sorrow. Then we joined the others sitting and chatting over the decorative lunch boxes called obento. After about twenty minutes we moved into the inner sanctuary where cushions placed against the wall waited for us. We sat on our knees, looking across to the family and up at the funeral altar over our right shoulder. The departed Mr. Oka lay between us in an unpainted pine coffin draped with red brocade and summer flowers. His framed photograph was on a temporary altar made of tiers of unpainted shelving covered with a white cloth and decorated with flower vases, Buddhist ornaments, and a large green melon. Traditional mochi rice cakes made a pyramid to one side.

The ceremonies began with Mr Oka's son standing up to read some message cards while he looked at Mr. Oka's coffin as though addressing him. Then the head priest entered, swishing purple robes, and wearing a tall gold brocade miter on his head. Five younger priests followed. Their heads were shaved bare and they wore purple too. The chief priest began praying where he stood and the younger priests arranged themselves in a row on the floor. They began to beat time rythmically with drums, bells, and wooden sticks, while they chanted in low rumbling tones. After about ten minutes they finished and friends and relatives began filing up to Mr. Oka's coffin, one, by one. First each bowed to the family, then picked up incense powder from a tray and held it up to Mr. Oka, dropping it in three separate pinches into the burner on a low table in front of the altar. When every person concluded this ritual they made a reverent bow to Mr. Oka. After the offerings two men rose to remove the coffin cover. They took out the plastic bags of ice inside and uncovered Mr. Oka's flacid face. It was a signal for each guest to come up and pick a flower from one of the altar vases and drop it into the coffin as they circled by. My companion was the only person who did not take the flowers; instead he stepped outside and picked some laurel leaves growing outside the door (it was a custom of his own Nichiren sect).

One man put the cover back on the coffin and took an ordinary stone from his pocket which he passed around to the family members, including the children. Each used it to give a tap to one of the nails on the coffin cover. Close friends and relatives then picked up the coffin and carried it to the black and gold hearse waiting outside—an imposing Victorian conveyance, with faceted glass sides and a gold phoenix resting on top. It glittered in the afternoon sun like a mythical chariot as it bore Mr. Oka to the crematory. At the crematory the body was placed inside one of the ornamental iron-door firing chambers and reduced to powdery ashes in a few hissing minutes while close friends and relatives watched. When the ashes were cool, his eldest son grasped ordinary chopsticks and selected five different cinders from five different locations of Mr Oka's body for the burial urn.

Later, we drove one of the women guests to her home and were invited into her coffee shop for refreshments. Before we could enter she opened a small white packet and sprinkled something over the doorstep. She passed it back to us to do the same. It was salt for performing an act of purification after leaving a place of death, a Shinto custom condoned by Buddhism. The salt was in the gift handkerchief given to all the guests. Two weeks later, a messenger delivered another gift to our house: a boxed set of summer bed-sheets, tokens of gratitude from the Oka family. We also left a gift at the funeral, our condolence money, in the special black and silver braid tied envelopes, used for funeral offerings. Floral tributes are not Japanese custom.

Like the people of the premodern societies studied by Arnold van Gennep, Robert Hertz, Malinowski, and other anthropologists, religious Japanese like to think of death as just one of the many possible states of being in the universe. Such beliefs are usually a legacy of tribal lore and folk wisdom, now dismissed by modern science, which exposes a web of neurons and electrical impulses where the ancients found another dimension of life. Yet biology, which helps give a modern description of life, cannot ultimately define it, for as science teaches, nature is interested merely in perpetuating itself, and pays no particular regard to humans. Seeking a more humanly satisfying explanation, Eastern thinkers observed nature, and studied the rhythms of earth, trying to interpret nature's will while adapting themselves to it. They had little interest in the rights of one individual self or ego. Their main concern was with the relations of the whole.

To explain "relations with the whole," we point to the usage of the common Japanese ending do—or a way of life. A "do" suffix means following a school or manner of doing things. Japanese use the do in Shinto—the way of the gods, Bukkyo—the way of the Buddha, and Bushido—the way of the warrior, and so on, continuing to use the suffix for many ostensibly secular disciplines. This linguistic device suggests how following a religion, calling, or profession, affects one's style of life, and is not regarded as being very unusual because, as it implies, it means one simply follows to the best of ones ability, the teachings and ideals of one's self-identifying work. The Japanese habitually extend this attitude to almost all they do. It is part of their famous work ethic, based on a philosophy of not wasting oneself on inferior things when doing the best one can gives life meaning, and self esteem, and gains value before one's peers. It is also a link that attaches the individual to the larger unit. Japanese religion carries on to a Buddhist conclusion, and concept of death that connects humans back to a cosmic center and foundation of life. Similiar concepts have been voiced in the West too, but mainly by native American peoples, who also regarded humans and the cosmos as a unified whole, the belief expressed, for example, by native-American writer Vine Deloria, in God is Red (1973).

People in Japan continue to hold onto traditional beliefs by not routinely separating every activity they engage in. The construction of a modern building will have an earth pacifying ceremony performed by a Shinto priest as a matter of good order, to maintain religious and communal ties and permit the Japanese to share their spiritual feelings with the community and family.

The Japanese community is much larger than the visible community in a neighborhood. Tradition and Japanese Buddhism teach that every kind of being, sentient or non-sentient, reside in spiritual communion with one another. "Everyone is destined, together with oneself, to attain Buddhahood ... all beings are separate in appearance but make up one continuity" explains historian Anesaki Masaharu (1956:217).

(Tokushima, Sunday, July 12, 1985.

Forty-nine days have passed since our grandmother Tanaka's death, and her family is holding a traditional memorial service. (Forty-nine days is the time, folk religion says, it takes for the dead to cross between worlds and enter a new life.) The day's weather includes both sunshine and rain as we drive to the farm around sharp little mountainsides, and narrow embankments—the natural phenomena that typically narrow all the roads in Japan. We passed green rice paddies, one-story shopping strips, and scattered homes, on the winding national highway to the small city of Anan. By the time we arrive at the Tanaka homestead, a priest is chanting sutras and the family and friends are kneeling before the household butsudan, decorated with trays of fancy fruits and cakes. These are not merely for grandmother Tanaka but for all the dead, for today coincides with the beginning of the Obon season when all the ancestors are thought to return and visit their old homes. The middle-aged priest wears a grey mesh kimono over white cotton, and a broad shoulder sash is encrusted with white braid and corded rosettes. He prays with his back to the twenty-five or so people sitting behind him, facing the altar, at the front of a long tatami-matted room. One long wall of sliding glass doors open onto a shallow veranda above a rustic garden where grandfather Tanaka keeps a modest gold fish pond. A stone lantern, some ornamental maples, and a few dusty shrubs complete the landscaping. On the distant horizon, mountains sketch a scenic frame around neighorbing fields and homes.

Some guests in the room are chanting prayers with the priest, while the others sit and listen. Grandfather Tanaka is just sitting quietly at the very back behind everybody else. Today he wears a black net coat over a white cotton kimono, and white tabi socks on his feet. His granddaughter-in-law and his great-grandchild sit in front of him. The child is making nonsensical sounds as she crawls about and mimics the priest's words. Grandfather occasionally attracts her with a toy and plays with her. He is not chanting prayers with the others, just listening. His body is lean and it makes his large musician's hands noticeable in proportion to his slim frame and small head. He likes to play the samisan, a banjo like instrument, with his friends, and sings the gidayu parts from the puppet plays he used to accompany professionally at the Osaka puppet theater in his youth. Although ninty-three years old now, he still works on the land outside, growing the household vegetables and a cash-crop of rice. The eldest son, his wife, and their son, live with him. They have a small kimono shop in town and some of the younger people go out to work.

Grandmother Tanaka was eighty-three when she died this spring and sister-in-law, Hiroko, whose husband's sister is married to the oldest Tanaka son, was with her when she died. "It was very peaceful," she said. "Obaachan spoke to me when I came and apologized for not being able to get up to serve me. She just said, `I'm so tired.' I went out to the fields to tell grandfather that obaachan is very weak; she could die soon. But grandfather said, `Oh she might get better tonight,' and kept working." About two hours later grandmother closed her eyes and died on her futon bed on the tatami covered floor, literally fulfilling the Japanese hope for a peaceful death: to die on tatami.

Today the priest is chanting for her. He says grandmother's posthumous Buddhist name represents her kind and mild character. While he prays, her oldest daughter-in-law passes around a tray of incense. We take the tray, one by one, and go forward on knees to the altar; with our fingers we take the three pinches of powdered incense and each time raise it up to the butsudan, then deposit it in the dish next to grandmother's photograph. Today, her picture is in the place of honor in the tokonoma alcove next to the family altar. As each person drops the incense she or he offers a silent prayer and when everyone is done, Mrs. Tanaka's oldest son rises and thanks everybody for coming. He beckons us to follow him in the procession, as he picks up the wooden box of his mother's ashes and carries it in his arms. He has taken it out of the family altar where it has rested these past forty-nine days. The younger Tanaka boys now lead a single file through a narrow path in the rice fields carrying wooden toba sticks before them. The largest toba stick has grandmother's new Buddhist name on it and there are some smaller new ones for other graves as this is rememberance season for everybody. The new toba memorials will replace last year's sticks, now faded from the wind and rain. There are about twenty simple graves in the middle of the growing rice, some belonging to the neighbors who share the ground with the Tanaka family. Grandmother Tanaka's oldest son digs a shallow hole in between the other graves, and lets down the box of ashes tied up in a white cloth. He places a small granite square over it and erects the wooden memorial marker in back. A bundle of incense sticks is lit, and we each take one for putting on the grave to a last refrain of: "Namu myoho renge kyo." Nearby an unseen bird calls out and we turn homeward while the sun flickers in and out of the clouds to brush brushes light and dark shadows before us.

Back in the house we find the living room cushions rearranged in two neat rows, and the women bringing lacquered lunch trays out of the kitchen. Guests and children help to distribute them. A full sized lunch tray is set in front of grandmother's picture and a miniature one for other dead is placed on the altar. Both trays have chopsticks thrust upright in their rice bowls to signify they are meant for the dead. Then beer and sake appear and suddenly the conversation becomes more animated. There is an exchange of reminiscences and I must reassure everybody that indeed, I prefer Japanese beer over our brew at home, as grandmother's oldest son plays a formal host and comes down the aisle, pouring beer or sake into our cups—held up formally for filling, in two outstretched hands. We fill his cup after he fills ours and make him drink too. The priest is eating all the food, even the meat, and drinking along with us. It has become a real party with everyone enjoying the tradional dishes, although yet there is no rice on our trays, for we are not expected to finish the meal for some time. We have miso soup, cucumber salad with minced squid, fried sweet bean-curd stuffed with rice and mushrooms, fish sashimi, vegetable tempura, and seaweed covered sushi rolls. Even red rice with beans appears a little later, the festive dish usually served on occasions like the New Year, birthdays, and weddings. I think it means happiness that grandmother has finished her forty-nine day journey between worlds and can be thought of as getting settled into her next life.

After all that eating, drinking, talking, and reclining on the tatami floor, the cameras come out. People begin snapping pictures of each other. Grandfather has decorated the upper half of the parlor with family photographs, calligraphy, religious texts, poems, and certificates of his professional awards. The Emperor Hirohito and the Empress are also displayed on the wall in poses that make them look about 40 years old. One of the photos of grandfather shows him in his formal stage costume as a joruri chanter. I am on the wall too, posing with the whole family on my first visit in 1974. About now it becomes six o' clock, and a cheerful clatter starts. Everyone begins readying cars to back out of the driveway. Grandfather invites me to return for the joruri music meeting next week, but first one last photograph with the rest of the relatives in a group on the veranda. I pose holding grandfather's hand. We receive packages of food to take home to the children who had school events today and couldn't come. Our condolence money is left behind in the special envelopes tied with black and silver braid and placed discreetly on a tray near the butsudan. As we are getting into the car, Hiroko says to me, "Why don't you go in and say goodby once more to grandmother Tanaka, she might be back soon." So I step back into the house and bow to her picture gazing out from the corner of the room.

It is the custom to refer to the dead as hotoke samma, or Buddhas, as it is hard for the Japanese to imagine anyone so hopeless they could not become a Buddha (after they worked out their burden of karma) even through it might take many rebirths. Eventually all the dead will become hotoke.

Inside the home, the family Butsudan ties together the community of the dead and living family members, and sometimes other close but non-related individuals who are included in the household altar (literally Buddha's shelf) so that even those dead who are not connected by kinship but through affective bonds, can be included among the commemoralized. Younger families and couples without their own Butsudan expect to be represented in their parents' and grandparents' Butsudan. They know that the eldest among them will someday take on the tasks connected with it.

The religious traditions encourage Japanese to believe that death means rejoining a universe in which many things may co-exist. They are trusting to a religion that provides "an inner sense of continuity with what has gone on before and will go on after them," as Robert Jay Lifton tells us when he writes that:

> A sense of immortality is much more than a denial of death; it is part of life-enhancing imagery . . . that binds each person to significant groups and events removed from him in time and place (1968).

Lifton points out that the lack of stigma attached to most suicides in Japan is because "death is perceived less as an enemy than in the West, for ... it belongs to the same cosmos as life" (Lifton and Kato, 1979).

As the Japanese approach to death connects all the generations, it maintains the teaching that although death is unavoidable the dead will have a valuable place in the affairs of the living. The teachings of the past are enshrined and the experience of the dead will protect and guide the younger generations who follow, continuing onward and respecting their benefactors.

This linkage of the dead with the living is achieved formally, in transitional ries, which have a great complexity and duration, as anthropologist Arnold van

Gennep discovered. He found that funeral rituals which incorporated the newly dead into the underworld, or another world, were given the greatest importance in most societies. One such step of incorporation was the formal funeral dinner and usual food shared after funerals and memorials. The purpose of these meals was to reunite all the surviving members of the group with the deceased in a new way, by "the same way that a chain which has been broken by the disappearance of one of its links is rejoined" (1960:188).

> For individuals as well as groups, life means to separate and to be reunited, to change form and condition, to die and be reborn. It is to act, and to cease, to wait and rest, and then to begin acting in a different way. . . . There are always new thresholds to cross; summer and winter, a year or a season, birth adolescence, maturity, and old age; the threshold of death and that of after-life--for those who believe it (van Gennap, 1960:188-199).

A Joruri music meeting, honoring grandmother Tanaka, is taking place at the Tanaka farm house in Anan, on Saturday, August 17, 1985, five days after her formal, 49th day, memorial service. Grandfather and his friends, most of whom are afficianados of the puppet theater, have gathered in the parlor for an afternoon of playing the samisan and reciting plays.

Upon my arrival, I find Grandmother's portrait still in the tokonoma alcove place of honor today, with a tray of rice and tea in front of it. Grandmother's memorial ihai tablet, with her long posthumous Buddhist name, had been moved out of the butsudan to a new place in front of her portrait. Below it, on a white cloth draped over a three-step stand, is an uncovered box of mandarin oranges and another box filled with fancy cakes, for it is still the Obon season and time for honoring all the dead. The oranges and sweets will be eaten by members of the household later and the rice bowls' contents, which are refilled every day, probably put back into the steamer to merge into the whole, and get eaten too. We anticipate lunch but not until grandmother and the others enshrined in the family Butsudan are served with their miniature portions on two trays. Our elderly neighbor, who acts as the master of ceremonies, stands up and strikes a wooden clapper, the same kind used in theaters to announce the beginning of a stage performance. He announces the names of the musicians present in a loud voice—just as if it were a theatrical event. Then, each person approaches grandmother's portrait, and offers her the formal three pinches of incense, while the others chant a prayer. Not all the guests know the prayer being recited, for some are used to the texts of their own sect, or just haven't memorized them, but they all seem to have brought Buddhist rosaries to wrap around their fingers. Then the lunch trays appear accompanied by soft drinks and liquor. Once more there is a formal sounding preamble issued by our master of cerermonies as he theatrically intones that this meeting is to honor grandmother Tanaka. As we eat gandfather takes his samisan out from the velvet wrappings inside a smooth-worn wooden music case and tunes it. He puts on a stiff blue winged shoulder capelet, the stage uniform of the traditional joruri chanter (joruri texts are the spoken recitatives of the doll theater puppet plays—Ningyo Joruri) while two other friends retire behind the screen and change into their formal stage robes. Two women relatives who are cooking and serving are the only nonperformers. All of them are local folk who live and farm in the area, and amateurs who like the hobby of the doll-puppet theater, a traditional pastime in Tokushima and nearby

Awaji Island. Office workers, high school students, and ordinary housewives, can study the plays and learn the parts in classes at the town culture center. Our country group sounds quite professional despite their age, but grandfather Tanaka at ninety-three must be the oldest. They act out the stories in various dramatic voices and grandfather performs the instrumental parts on his samisan; popular scenes from stories that are familiar to everyone.

When Grandmother Tanaka was alive she joined this same group many times in the past, serving the refreshments and enjoying the recitations. After a fine summer day spent singing and playing in her honor, I remembered the verse someone composed in their last hours:

Goodbye little bird,
I'll hear the end of your song
in some other world.
anon.

Faith in the cyclical nature of life is again illustrated in this haiku poem:

Lighting one candle with another's flame
at dusk, in Spring: the same yet not the same.
Buson

The poem repeats the Buddhist theme that rebirth follows death—not only life after life, but also from instant to instant—even within the same life, and reminds us that inevitable change is the only reliable truth. Here the spring sundown marks the end of the day or the end of a life. There is the cycle of dawn to sundown—and the circle of seasons—which start with the spring and signal a new beginning. In the poem, a rebirth is initiated when a new candle is lit from the fire of the old. The translater and poet, Harold Stewart, who chose this example for his essay on religious and the traditional backgrounds of haiku poetry, stresses how karma (the result of one's past actions) can affect the future and follow rebirth into another life. The new life "carries the seeds of the same desires, lusts, and hates, which one carried in the first life"—which will be relit to follow one through eternity without Buddha's enlightened teaching (Stewart, 161:1976).

Another example of faith in rebirth is seen in the traditional Japanese noh play, "The Priest and the Willow." It ends happily when:

> Amida's teaching sinks into our heart.
> Each time a man
> In this world
> Calls upon his name
> A new lotus is born
> In his Western realm
> And when, after a lifetime
> Of unremitting devotion,
> The man at last dies,
> The flower comes
> To this world to meet him,
> And lead him up
> To the highest empyrean
> Truly a joyful teaching

(Twenty Plays of the No Drama, Donald Keene, ed., 1970)

These noh plays are usually about exorcising the torments of the unhappy dead. Very often we met a sightseeing priest stops to rest at a historic place where he encounters a shy stranger who tells him the history of the area and says he lives nearby. The stranger later proves to be an unhappy ghost from the past who is tied to the spot by his inability to forget feelings of hate or envy, and is still at torment from insatiable desires. In an expressive dance he reprises the events of his life and inspires the priest to pray for him. Usually he finds peace at the end of the prayers and mysteriously glides off the stage to finally enter the other world.

Teaching Children about Death

Stoicism among the old toward the approach of death is not exceptional in Japan. It is the death of a young person that causes general dismay.

The fall school semester in 1985 marked a sad time for school children in Japan. It was just the beginning of the new term when fifty-four children, from schools from all over Japan, died in a Japan Airlines plane crash over the Gumma mountains, August 12. The Mainich Daily News described how some of them were remembered. The two hundred Edogawa School classmates of two of the crash victims, Kaori and Yoshimiki Tashiro, gathered in memory around their school grand piano where all once had practiced together. Kaori and Yoshimiki's grandparents donated the final payments on the piano as a memorial to them and their parents, also victims of the crash. The teachers decorated the piano with chrysanthemums and the children sang the school song. Nearer to the crash site, in in Fujioka City, elementary and junior high school students gave their classrooms to the rescue workers and provided beds for the family members of victims, many of whom came to Fujioka to be near the wrecked plane. They also saw the school become a temporary morgue for the relatives, who used it to identify their dead. Memorial services were held by the children of the city's First Elementary School. The children faced the mountain and offered a minute of silent prayer while their school principal, Masashi Urabe, told them: "With thirty one elementary school children killed in the crash, its up to us to try a little harder, for their sake." All through the town of Fujioka services for the dead were held in schoolyards and classrooms.

In Tokyo, at the Ota ward school of nine year old Ken Miyajima, aboard the plane with his parents to attend the famous annual high school baseball tournment at Koshien stadium, classmates erected a small altar with his photograph and decorated it with chrysanthemums. Drawings and papers Ken had written while in school were placed before it while classmates said prayers. Another student from Yokosuka, Ryutaro Kawakami, was not found. Services were held for him using the dirt gathered from the place where the bodies of his mother and two sisters were discovered. A nine-year-old student read the eulogy in school. Hidenori Yoshioka's body also was not found, so flowers were placed at his desk and classmates and teachers prayed for his soul each morning that week (Mainichi Daily News, August 1985).

The following year, seventeen hundred relatives attended memorial services given for the plane crash victims in the town of Uenomura which was about eight kilometers from the crash site. The town mayor, Takeo Kurasawa, unveiled a monument showing two hands clasped in prayer and vowed the statue would be maintained in perpetual memory of the dead. The village children joined hands with the more than one hundred child relatives of the victims while the police band played solemn music (Mainichi Daily News, August 1986). Years after the crash, the Mainichi again wrote a feature about how many relatives were gathering at the

Uenomura momument annually (August, 1991). Many relatives made the arduous climb up the steep slopes of Mt. Otsutake, the year after the crash, to offer flowers, incense, and favorite foods to the spirits of the deceased, the Mainichi had also reported in 1986. Two children of victim Masakatsu Taniguchi were quoted as saying, "Please appear in our dreams at night, father." Their father was one of the six parents who left notes for their families, written just minutes before the stricken plane fell. Mr. Taniguchi's note to his wife said, "Please take good care of the children and bring them up to be strong." Mrs. Taniguchi said she and and her two boys regularly reported to their father in prayer: that they have been in good health, and request him to watch over them from above, "and to appear in the dreams of the three loved ones he left behind from time to time" (Mainichi Daily News, August 6, 1986). Mrs. Taniguchi was not feeling well that firs time up, she told the reporter, but her two boys encouraged her to climb Mt. Otsuke. One son, Makoto, led her by the hand, while the other, Atsushi, carried the heavy rucksack containing beer and manju--favorite snacks of her husband. As the years passed, the newspaper reported the family was still climbing up the mountain on anniversaries, and published a photograph of the now-grown son who kept reporting to his father (Mainichi Daily News, August 1991).

Our Kitten Dies

On a warm summer night in Japan, we lost our black kitten in a traffic accident. The children had raised her since she was a few days old, squeezing drops of milk into the tiny mouth and keeping her warm through the winter under their bed covers. When the kitten followed us out into the unlit road in front of our house, she got confused by the headlights of two passing cars and a motorcycle and died from a blow on the head. Teru, the oldest child, then in the sixth grade, turned and noticed her lying silent on the dark pavement. He rushed to pick her up and carried her back to the covered vestibule between our houses. He was alternately shaking and stroking the kitten crying, "No, no, please don't give up." It was more than a few minutes before he would accept she could not respond. When the other three children came home an hour later, all gathered around her, where she lay nested on a white towel in a cardboard box. After a time they began to chant the same prayer their parents did: the namu myoho renge kyo refrain from the Lotus sutra. They held Buddhist rosary beads taken from the family Butsudan drawer, and they prayed for the kitten's journey into the dark next world, hoping that like a human, she might be born again after forty-nine days. One of the children gave her a coin, and another put in some favorite food, and a Buddhist rosary was then wound around her paws. The little girl added a favorite toy. The middle boy offered one of his crayon drawings. There was a note tucked in too, a poem or a message: perhaps something secret written on it, for help on the last journey. In the morning their father dug a grave in the nearby, unused field, and they stood around and recited the traditional prayers. Forty-nine days later, they recited a conventional memorial sutra, and next summer, on the anniversary of her death, I found they had still remembered memorial prayers. That summer they also thought of taking their bicycles to visit the seashore grave of "Michan," our old gray Siamese, who had died three years ago. They were following their parents' example and had learned the way of dying in Japan: the dead don't just disappear entirely, they are in another world, and can enhance, whether through memory or bequest, the kindness and texture of this one.

Japanese children are not shielded from death, neither in life nor in children's fiction. Television and movies they watch often include a scene of final leavetaking when someone dies from a fatal illness or accident. Films and cartoons will show scenes of respectful rememberence even when the dead one is the slain villian of an animated cartoon. Many of the cartoons are filled with the same violent actions seen on American television. Yet the Japanese children see the following consequences of death and learn the dead do always not get up again after being runover, in the usual style of an American Walt Disney cartoon. A very early Post-World War II Japanese adventure film, The Bullet Train (dubbed in English) was recently shown in the US on late night television. It portrayed the fleeing criminal, played by Ken Takakura, escaping as if it were to a welcoming angel's call (where he will find another world), not to the muffled rat-a-tat gunshot sounds of the pursuing police but to a hauntingly beautiful song as he runs to death in the night. (It would now seems to be a directorial device also borrowed by some Western filmmakers).

The Buddhist sentiment continues when a child loses his mother or someone dear to him, even in a cartoon film. There is an almost obligatory sequence of her gentle face looking down form the clouds and offering comfort and the assurance of unaltered love.

One of 1985's biggest box office successes was an animated feature film about separation and death, "Night On the Galactic Railway" (Ginga Tetsudo No Yoru). Based on an allegorical tale by the famous contemporary writer, Kenji Miyamoto, the film attracted large audiences of adult viewers as well as children. The tale was about two young friends who boarded a mysterious train, passing through their town on the night of the local village festival, in a foreign looking place, that vaguely resembled the Japanese Tanabata festival (a Chinese legend about the herdsman and weaver maid who can meet across the opposite ends of the Milky Way only one night a year). After visiting fantastic cities in space and seeing strange people, the train returns them to their hometown, but one of the boys cannot get off—because, we learn, he is no longer alive. He died that very evening before the boys met. The accelerating train carries him off to a distant unknown where his forlorn friend cannot follow. And we discover again that showing death and its mysteries is not an inappropriate subject for children's movies in Japan.

Abortion

Women with a sick child, or wanting a child, or in mourning for a child, may leave articles of clothing and toys next to statues of the little saint Jizo. Women who have had abortions also pray to Jizo, to apologize for their selfishness, and ask him to take care of the unborn's soul. Although Buddhism is against the taking of life, it does not make an issue of ordering the women to deny themselves abortions.

Abortions are common procedures in Japan, used usually because of the lack of a broader dissemination about more sophisticated methods of birth control, and because of the medically perceived danger of using birth control pills. The women who have abortions pray for their unborn children to be sent back to be born another time, and to ask forgiveness for not allowing the children into the world. These aborted children are referred to as mizuko, water children, and it is a favorite practice to ask the Boddhisatva Jizo to take care of them. The tiny commemorative images of Mizuko are, now more than ever, found around the statues of Jizo: a remarkable example of an old religious practice expanding itself into modern times. Abortion was less common to women of earlier days. They may have feared they would be criticized by their neighbors for having an abortion, or, simply accepted larger families, Samuel Coleman suggests in his book on family planning in Japan (1983:269).

More temples have begun to cater to women, by dedicating larger spaces for placing the mizuko commemorative images. At some sites one sees thousands of these doll-like replicas and plaques—rows and rows totally filling up the special space. One of Shikoku's eighty-eight famous temples near my summer home recently opened a new altar for the mizuko images. It was fully occupied by the time of next summer's visit. Some temples have been criticized for taking advantage of the guilt feelings of the women who aborted, reaping large profits from the special fees they charge for various services.

The Japanese feel that abortion is not just taking a life away, but is also a matter of selfcenteredness, about a woman caring more for herself than others, even though economic hardship is the usual reason given for having an abortion. In Samuel Coleman's, Family Planning in Japanese Society, he offers a Japanese magazine essay translated as: "Tracing the origin of mizuko—children snuffed out without seeing the light of day or their mother's faces" (Coleman, 1983:270).

Some temples regularly hold memorial services for the mizuko, and every temple has a statue of Jizo somewhere on the grounds. In the enclosure directly around the little saint, one sees articles of children's clothing hanging from the walls and railings. Home-sewn red baby bibs are tied in layers around Jizo's neck. They represent requests and prayers. They are for a sick child, an aborted fetus, a dead child, and could just as well be for a desired pregnanacy. They are left by men and women asking for a favor, or for forgiveness, or just for a good outcome to a project, or life in the future. Some of them leave signs and photos of themselves and their group on the temple railings and shutters. Many of these come traveling in groups with other middle-aged or old people who simply seek the kind regard of the diety after visiting the main temple and want to include Jizo-san. in their devotions. They leave a hand written cloth banner with their names and group title there. Samuel Coleman's book reported how family planning activists, with the help of an officer in The Ministry of Health and Welfare's, Population Problems Research Institute, collected funds to place a plaque and statue of Jizo at the Osaka Higashinari Ward Health Center. A similar plaque was placed in Tokyo at Segenji in Shinjuku. Its aim was "to impress upon women the gravity of the situation and the cruelty of abortion by offering them the opportunity to make religious acts of contrition and apologies to the fetus." Coleman also found commemoration to a local midwife in Tokyo's Suginami Ward where she taught women about contraception after the end of World War II. Her plaque quotes her as saying, "I clasp my hands in prayer for the souls of the unborn" (Coleman, 1983:270-277).

In 1986, a young woman I personally knew in Tokushima was offering incense and reciting a sutra chapter for several hours each day, during the month after her abortion. The recitations provided consolation for the period of transition, when her life changed suddenly from newly married to divorced woman. The abortion was her choice because of a decision not to settle down as a provincial housewife in a disappointing marriage. It probably left her appearing flighty and callow in the eyes of more conventional neighbors and relatives.

Praying for a Happy Death

The Pokkuri-San movement in Japan unites old people in a club centered around the Boddhisatva Jizo. (Pokkuri means to fall down suddenly and die.) It is attracting new members and new groupings in Japan because it provides the equivalent of a social center, as well as supplementing the relatively few government-maintained secular facilities for old people. Temple and shrine precincts were always been gathering places for the neighborhood locals, so generations of old people find them familiar and comfortable. There are many kinds of Boddhisatvas—the enlightened ones, who defer their Buddhist salvation to stay on earth and help others achieve enlightenment—but Jizo-san is an overwhelming favorite because he is the primary guardian of the common people. Now, during this world's so called degenerate period which Buddhism calls the age of mappo, Jizo-San will stand at life's crossroads and serve until the next Buddha, who is called Miroku can appear.

The Pokkuri Jizo movement is identified with the desire for an easy death, though its members assure me its just as important for them to live a happy life till their end comes.

The three year old Pokkuri-san Association I visited in 1987, at Umaki, on the outskirts of Tokushima City, met once a month. The invited speakers were not always ecclesiastics, or lecturers asked to explain the Buddhist sutras, but regular teachers and university professors from whom the old people learned to take care of themselves and focus their attention on living a more healthful life. "The really elderly are often left without the friends of their youth," the voluntary secretary I spoke to said, "they become prey to loneliness, but here they can meet new people of their generation and expand their outlook, while getting out of their homes occasionally." Once a month a charter bus carried them here from Tokushima City's Civic Center near the railroad and bus station, to the temple ina countrified area of farm lands and suburban homes, for the fare of thirteen hundred yen.

I learned that other older independent pokkuri organizations existed in Kyoto, Nara, Uji, and Okayama, prefectures. The popularity of the Pokkuri cults seemed to be gaining momentum as news about them appeared in newspapers and on television and invited emulation. These groups are not united by any central office though they all used the neighborhood Shingon temple. The monthly meetings at Umaki attracted two hundred and fifty people at a time: "we give or take a few according to the weather," the secretary said as he showed me the list of 1700 local people who had paid 1000 yen a month to be informed of special activities by mail or phone, stored in a carton of bundled paper slips. He said the people who contribute mailing money collected a stamp worth gift points, entitling them to the gift of a pillow with Jizo-san's image at the end of the year. This energetic, seventy four year old, man said that an opportunity to start a club for old people devoted to Jizo presented itself when the temple rebuilt its main building. "It was an auspicious time to try something new." He then brought out newspaper clippings and photographs from the dedication ceremonies three years ago. A printed brochure also gave information about the Pokkuri club, and he gave me one to take back home. One of the sides contained a sutra the members chanted at meetings or when alone, and the other side had a map with the location of the temple. "We meet for many reasons. To have faith is important though I myself am not fully certain about the next life. It is impossible to know. The most we can live is a hundred years, so while we are alive, it is important to live happily. Coming here is valuable for one's bodily health, for bringing friends together, encouraging sociability--especially with so few other opportunities for really old people. An isolated elderly person is more apt to do wrong." (I couldn't pursue this statement further, perhaps he is referring to suicide among the ailing and lonely.) "Our chanting the hanya shingyo sutra together is reassuring and comforting. I believed in the many things I was told when I was young—now I see heaven and hell may be in this world, so a healthy life is valuable. I am enjoying myself, going on trips, singing, fishing, worrying about the unknown-- and I pray to have a sudden death." My sociologist's question to him started with: "In view of the fact that so many old people have children now living far away, in small city apartments, to be near their jobs, and far from their elderly parents homes, mightn't the elderly feel worried that if they got sick and became a burden on children who couldn't easily care for them, wouldn't they thus wish to die quickly?" He seemed startled and said, "Oh no, I don't think we have come to that yet, worrying about neglect from our children. Many of us have our own homes and live simply, so we don't think of ourselves as burdens. No, no such idea ever occurred to me, no, that's not why we come here."

A Visit to the Hospital at Katsuura

We came upon a small group of people in the corridor of the small country hospital in Katsuura, where we had come to visit a relative of the family. Three women and a man were weeping as they pushed an old man on a hospital bed into the elevator we had just exited. He was dead—I could see through the handkerchief covering his face. There was no doctor or nurse in sight, only the weeping foursome. Earlier, a doctor at the deathbed may have held the patient's hand, then joined the nurses in a respectful minute of silence at the moment of his death, with hands clasped in prayer. But now, there was no need for staff's presence, there was nothing they could do. Only family duties remained: to wheel the body into the elevator, to make arrangements to take it home, and to begin the preparations for burial. At this man's home, probably prayers would be said throughout the night and family members would come and go. Sometimes a priest comes to the house to stay and pray all night. Then, after the funeral tomorrow, an elaborate hearse will arrive to carry the old man to the crematory, where the eldest son or senior relative will select the cinders from his remains for a burial urn in the family grave. This is the countryside, so daughters of the house and some of the neigborhood women will likely be at the house to help prepare funeral food for the guests. In a big city like Tokyo, specialty firms cater the funeral lunches and deliver them in the elaborate lacquer obento boxes.

Our farm relative whom we had come to visit was not in his bed. Instead we found his elderly roommate, who said, oh, he had gone home for the weekend and would return on Monday. His ailment was merely high blood pressure.

We left and drove to his home at the end of a steep and narrow road at the top of a small hill that had been leveled long ago. Coming out to welcome us, he said, "Yes, I came back because the hospital's cooler was always off at night. My room was so hot, and then, I guess I'm so used to my place ...." He had lived here more than seventy years, in this house built over a hundred years ago. The dark interior and bare walls with scratched wooden floors, inside an dirt packed entrance, was still in its original old style and told its age. His elderly wife was senior sister of the much younger brother, my host, with whom I lived every summer. The old wife offered us glasses of cool barley tea and her daughter-in-law stopped dinner preparations and divided a watermelon for us to share from a common tray. The old wife, who has grown slow and stiff from the years of bending in the rice paddy outside, said she had first arrived here as a bride, fifty years ago. By big city standards she had few modern household conveniences in her kitchen, but she had the patient services of her pleasant-mannered daughter-in-law, and there was a clear view of the unspoiled mountains and pine trees to gaze at all these long years.

We exchanged our store-wrapped fancy fruit for the jar of sour home-pickled plums and the tomatoes daughter-in-law took out of the yard at departure time. I gratuitiously instructed our invalid to resist meat and salty food for the sake of his health: "Push away the soy sauce and do get well soon." He nodded in the agreeable Japanese way, of not being contradictory, and came out silently to watch us drive away, while the cooling breeze of evening rose and brushed darkness over his fields.

Songs and Poems for Death

Songs and poems expressing one's feeling on the way to death are a feature of the Japanese wartime experiences. The Japanese "hit parade" songs, of the thirties and forties, were catchy tunes still played in special nostalgia-oriented drinking places today. They have words and titles like: "Here Is My Final Letter To You," and date from the time of the Japanese invasion of Manchuria. There is this song:

> Hundreds of miles from our native country,
> separated in far Manchuko,
> the bright setting sun
> shines over our friends under the tombstones.

Sentiments behind such farewell songs and poems of Japanese soldiers in World War II, recall the practice of writing death poems started by Buddhist monks in the medieval period. Eventually their popularity expanded to other classes of Japanese, like the soldiers, who often wrote their final goodbyes in the form of poetry, before going out to battles from which they might never return.

Here are some of the classic examples of death poems known to numerous Japanese. They are part of the standard lierature of Japan and because many were written by famous historical figures they are still well known. Some here are new translations by Yael Hoffmann, in an English collection of poetry entitled Japanese Death Poems Written by Zen Monks and Haiku Poets on the Verge of Death (Hoffman, 1986). A poet, Sokan, left this message as his death poem:

Should someone ask where's Sokan gone?
Just say, "He had some business in the other world."

d.1540 (Hoffmann 1986:80)

The poetic examples usually show a legacy of calm, resigned, cheerful, and bemused, statements about death and express varying kinds of religiosity. Some are Shinto rather than Buddhist in their inclination, and the vast majority of authors plan reappearance in another world, or at least expect a fading into nature—blessed by Buddhist compassion or hopeful of a Kami presence. Only a few express absolute longing for nirvana, an end to rebirths, which ought to be the true gift of enlightenment. Generally the poems follow the popular desire for a future life, in typical Japanese expectation.

This poem is by a man who died in 1856.

I come to see my grave in Nihon'enoki,
And here to my delight,
I find beside me Kikaku and Itcho
Friends I can talk to.

(Hoffman 1986: 81)

His expectation of future sociality seems to be quite an enduring one, an indication of the indestructability of Japanese sentiments. Although it is a hundred and thirty years since the poem, a recent newspaper story reported how young Japanese are increasingly buying their own grave sites, and visiting them on holidays. The article said: "Cemetary plot sales are florishing; young Tokyo people are saying they want to be buried with their friends instead of with far away relatives they never met." They visit their unoccuppied graves on holiday outings and spend the day picnicking in the cemetary (The Mainichi Shimbun, September, 1987).

Another picnic that ended on the way to the cemetary was the cheerful conclusion to a contemporary play by the Hawaiian-born Japanese-American playwright Edward Sakamoto. It was produced at the Pan Asian Repertory theater in New York in 1984. Manoa Valley tells the story of a family reunion and picnic on the day Hawaii was admitted to statehood. The cheerful finale of the last scene ends with the approximate words: "Hey, everybody, let's go to the cemetary and share the good news with our family!"

There are also many accounts of people and creatures with the ability to move between worlds in the folktales of Japan. Connections between humans and spirits are popular topics in both modern and historical literature.

A Shinto-imbued view of future life is expressed by an eighteenth century poet, Kashiku, in the next example from Yael Hoffman, who says the poet's name can be translated as "yours truly," because it employs the same charactors used to sign letters with "yours truly."

Mt. Fuji's melting snow
is the ink with which I'll sign
my life's over letter,
"yours truly." (Kashiku).

Kashiku, early 18 C. (Hoffmann, 1986:85)

A Zen Budhist faith and its emphasis on sudden flashes of insight is expressed below by a Zen monk named Ingo. He is thinking of the classic Chinese characters for earth, fire, water, air, and ether, the elements which create the universe (charactors often carved on gravestones) and how he will be liberated by death.

Seventy-three years
I've drawn water from the fire
Now I'll become a tiny bug.
With a touch of my body
I shall shatter worlds.

d. 1281 (Hoffmann 1986:103)

Monk Kozan Ichikyo wrote:

Empty I entered the world
barefoot I leave it.
My coming, my going—
two simple events
that got entangled.

d. 1360 (Hoffmann 1986:108)

Another monk, Bairyu, thought about how everything starts all over again at death, like the hydrangeas who turn green again when they die:

O hydrangea--
you change and change
back to your primal color.

d. 1863 (Hoffmann 1986:138)

A twenty-year old poetess who expected to die by spring was reminded of the Japanese custom of putting on new clothes for the New Year, which is the beginning of spring in the lunar calendar.

A fawn frolics
in the fields as I put on my new
spring robe.

Chiyojo d. 1746 (Hoffmann 1986:151)

The famous nineteenth century designer of woodblock prints, Hokusai wrote:

Now as a ball of fire (HITOMA)
I shall travel
the summer fields.
d, 1849.

His hitoma refers to balls of St. Elmos fire (heat lightning) that is said to hover around graves. He looks forward to becoming a kami, a deity of the fields.

Another monk, Chosi, wrote:

Good going on the path
to the West.
A migrating bird.

d. 1768. (Hoffmann 1986:155)

The bird flying to the west is going in the same direction as Paradise in Amida Buddhism.

The poet Donsui wrote:

Lotus seeds in ten
directions
jumping playfully.

d. 1729 (Hoffmann 1986:159)

A lotus flower is one of the symbols of Buddhism (Buddha is often portrayed sitting there) so like the ripe lotus seeds, Donsui will jump into another universe when he dies.

The lotus image is also used by the poet Seishu who died at ninety-four:

Rain clouds clear away:
above the lotus shines
the perfect moon.

d. 1817 (Hoffmann 1986:280)

Nineteenth century monk Jakura also liked lotus imagery.

This year I want
to see the lotus
from the other side.

d. 1913 (Hoffmann 1986:204)

Because he felt death approaching by early spring, the poet Fuwa wrote:

The earth is fragrant
with plum petals falling
on my way home.

d.1712 (Hoffmann 1986:165)

Another poet, Hakurin, died just after the ohigan festival which marks the autumnal equinox, a season when graves are visited. He wrote:

Well, let's just follow
the equinox bells (higan no kane)
to the other shore.

d. 1897 (Goodman trans)

Relieved of the obligations and duties that pursued him during his life, the poet Hamon wrote:

In stillness, I
light bodied, set out for
the other world.

d. 1804 (Hoffmann 1986:187)

A poem by Issa, one of Japan's most beloved haiku poets, equates the matter of life and death, finding they are exchangeable in Buddhism:

From one basin
to another—
stuff and nonsense.

d. 1827 (Hoffmann 1986:200)

Because he was ninety, poet Kiba wrote:

My old body:
a drop of dew grown
heavy at the leaf tip.

d. 1868 (Hoffmann, 1986: 222)

To describe Buddhist enlightenment, poet Retsuzan wrote,

The night I understood
this is a world of dew,
I woke up from my sleep.

d. 1826 (Hoffmann, 1984:262)

Yael Hoffmann's book describes the death of a poet named Shisui, who though he was not strong enough to write, was besieged by his followers to leave a poem. He grasped a brush with both hands and drew a circle, just as have many other artists who used the circle symbol in an expression of faith and completion. The Shisui's example is from Zen Buddhism: a circle conceptulizes the perfectly enlightened mind that is so void that it can be open to all things and stands for an optimistic death (Hoffman, 1986:295).

A last example is this poem by Teishi,

A morning glory—
yet how long it stayed alive!
Full fifty years.

d. 1700 (Hoffmann 1986:324)

The fast growing morning glory can climb a fence and bloom overnight. Such was the morning glory that stole poetess Chiyo's water bucket when she went to borrow water from a neighbor. Rather than break the tender new life she wrote: "A morning glory has captured my pail, so I came to beg for water." Teishi's poem he says he is surprised at how long his life seemed though it was but a moment of time.

Japan's popular culture draws from the same traditions as its poetry. A popular 1987 Sunday television series written by James Miki, for NHK Japanese television, was based on the life of the former lord of Sendai Province, entitled, "Masamune, The One Eyed Dragon." The final segment of the series was devoted to the death of Masamune. It showed a dying Masamune urged into the world of death by his past selves: his dead wife, his mother, and the child he once was. He tells his wife in the final vision, "In the next world I want to see you with both eyes." He has had only one eye since a childhood accident. Now, having both eyes open, metaphorically, he will be able to open his eyes to enlightenment. Masamune's ambition for his family caused the death of many people and he actually wrote this death poem himself:

> My soul, a moon full of clouds,
> I leave the darkness of this world.

As a feudal lord during the Tokugawa struggles for hegemony, he was involved in bloody battles and territorial intrigues. He was successful during his early schemes, as he fought to protect his clan and secure the future of his domains. His final words are an apology for a lifetime of war and show his expectation of eventual salvation.

Not to Die Alone

Because a person dies alone, it seems to be the most alienating situation that the eminently social and socially constituted human being has to face. For those willing to embrace a communal religion like Japanese Buddhism, it is an alternative way to continue unifying with one's species. Religion's consolations offer mediation and an emissarial companion during life's final hours. Japanese have the Amidaist practice of tying a thread to a dying person's hand and an image of the Boddhisatva Kannon or Jizo. We have already mentioned the Japanese doctors who say they try to hold a patient's hand at death, but there is also a tradition for a close family member to drink a last farewell of water, called shimizu, together with the dying person.

Although America has fewer of these kinds of institutions, the needs of her dying are no less. During an interview with Patricia Murphy, a nursing sister of St. Vincent's Hospital in New York, and director of a program for AIDS patients, the New York Times writer, Jane Gross, reported that: "What patients want most is cool sheets, a hand to hold, a promise that they will not have to bear too great a suffering, and, *that they will not have to die alone*" (March, 1987). When a society is "musically attuned," or, as when Max Weber was rhetorically speaking about those with a calling for religion, when a society has ears sensitive to its human need for sociality, like Japan's, the dying benefit from the related feelings of being enfolded in a great though unknown project of human society. They feel they are a part of greater things. They are comforted by Buddhism's promise to return in another life, and encouraged that they will have consequence with their friends and relatives, either as Kami spirits, or reincarnated in Buddhism.

Kyoto University's Buddhist scholar, Nishitani Kenji, writes that Japanese religious philosophy's greatest contribution toward the ease of human suffering, becomes most apparent at the time of death. "The impersonality of modern life leaves a void which science cannot fill." He says:

> By wielding his great power and authority in controlling the natural world, man came to surround himself with a cold lifeless world. Inevitably, each individual ego became like a lonely but well-fortified island floating in a sea of dead matter. The life was snuffed out of nature and the things of

> nature; the living stream that flowed at the bottom of man and all things, and kept them bound together, dried up (1982:11).

Japanese versions of Buddhism stress the unity of life with other things and are unlike the Indian version which dwells on the unimportance of life. Indian philosophy concentrates on each person working out his life to escape from the Hindu wheel of karmic retribution, while the Japanese model uses social norms demanded by the group to realize salvation acting together. In Japan, the emphasis on harmony had become paramount and the religious solution to death was to preserve the group by bonding it forever to the "sacred land," which is one Japanese synonym for society.

Chapter 5

Conclusions

As we have seen, the Japanese way of death is unique because of certain elements. Japanese trust in the importance of the family attaches them to the idea of an otherworldly invisibly continuing family, as it were real and with an objective existence through which beneficial exchanges can occur. Modern Japanese do not have to see apparitions to imagine benevolence and concern emanating from their forebears. As long as there is no great change in the popular Japanese respect for their antecedents and the social system remains supportive, generational bonds remain sturdy enough to be a useful source of emotional assurance, bringing safety and comfort within the supernatural teachings.

Many Eastern people accept a cultural *weltanschauung* originating from a religious way of being and maintain institutions that now seem little encouraged in the West. In the Japanese view this includes a system of social habits that encourages good human relationships. By avowing humans to be the ultimate resources of their society, the Japanese also agree these resources should not be sacrificed for the full temporal prize of a purely modern free market economy. By resisting the promptings of a totally rationalized economic system, the Japanese cultivate a parallel model that allows them to keep some of their valued traditions.

In the West practioners of the psychoanalytic and other healing professions have researched the more traditional Eastern societies for newer treatment models for their patients, based on a growing of concern for the West's inability to come to terms with death—one's own and others. These more holisitic Eastern cultural approaches treat difficulties of readjustment in bereavement through a variety of rituals. They value the relationships of the living with the dead (E. N. Jackson, R. J. Lifton, Stephan Levine, et al.). Jackson, like many of his colleaques, writes, in an article entitled, "Grief and Religion," that "modern psychological understanding now recognizes and appreciates the value of religious rites, rituals and practices, which anthropologists discovered were fortifying the individual against stress and grief,"

An example is studying a holistic religious view of the world, like Buddhism's, with its teachings about the equality and ultimate oneness of all beings, that, Jackson asserts, leads believers to an attitude of compassion and tenderness toward other weaker forms of life. "The religion provides a sense of mystic and intensely personal identity with the universe and all that makes it up" (The Meaning of Death, Fiefel, ed., 1965:218-233).

In examining the objects of traditional Japanese culture, we find we cannot divorce them from Buddhism and Japanese religion in general. The religious themes influence Japanese painting, architecture, literature, and handicrafts, and cast a subtle aura over many varieties of everyday experience. Western admirers of the

Japanese aesthetic have discovered how uniquely different its attempts at total harmony with nature are, compared to their own world's themes, of control and domination.

A fundamental difference between the East and West lies in the way Japanese and Western people regard experience, previously cited in the works of Nakamura Hajime (1964). Westerners are trained to analyze and discriminate, but not particularly unify experience, or see phenomena all as one. Easterners take relationships for granted and as a result do not suffer from the same inability to unify the last experience of their lives—death—with one coherent whole. By way of contrast, American researcher Herman Fiefel, points out the following effects of the American attitude on death:

1. It has led to a denial of death in the American outlook.
2. It has not furnished us with the necessary framework for adjusting to death philosophically.
3. As a result of our emphasis on science, it has not kept pace with the psychological needs of humans, for by excluding the subjective thoughts of humans, in preference for empirically measurable results of hard science, it has left us without the necessary tools for separation and reconnection (Introduction, XI: 1965).

Our own conclusions find that the idea of an ongoing community of the living and the dead, blurs the distinction between the past, present, and future. Contemporary Japanese can experience comforting traditions that are hundreds of years old even during this time at the end of the twentieth century. Japanese are routinely exposed to the ancient Matsuri celebrations of their Kami gods at the year-round neighborhood shrine festivals, where they are pleasurably reminded of their spiritual roots. A Sunday television highlight in Japan, is the episodic, government-financed drama (NHK) usually about one of the great events of the feudal, and not so distant, past. Weekdays, popular "soap operas" have their numerous re-runs and draw on traditional views of religion and ethics for portraying the values of their common folks. Even the seven days a week serials about samurai dispensers of justice, featuring men who are models of Confucian virtue and moral recitude, show them expressing among their heroic attributes, the sentiments of Buddhism, with its stress on compassion and equality. Though varying in their complexity, many of these programs keep the past in contemporary view, give it importance, and perpetuate a public taste for traditional habits of thought. Through these and other routine elements in their life, Japanese share a sense of being a part of an uninterrupted procession of special human beings who are related because they are Japanese; and continue to absorb, though not through any formal curriculum, but by virtue of their secular customs Buddhism, with its particular Japanese inlay of Shinto and Confucianism.

Many young people today have a hazy notion of traditional religious philosophy and there are fewer institutional attachments for them than their parents and grandparents as the teaching of religion in schools was discontinued after 1947 under the new American imposed constitution Yet the youth of today respect religious ethics and rely on its formulae for attending to sorrows by ceremony: observing memorials, honoring deaths, welcoming births, attending the coming of age ceremonies, and acknowledging the various rituals for time's passing. In August 1989, college bookshop owners said, in a report by the Mainichi Daily News, that the fastest growing segment of their book sales was in the religious category—and that this was true even though young people are generally expected to reserve deeper interest in religion for a later time in life. Today's youth usually reply to questions about their religious beliefs with: "Well, now I'm young, but I might study more some day." As Robert Bellah observed in "The Meaning of Dogen Today":

> Custom encourages all Japanese to hold in personal reserve [for when it will be needed] the Buddhist claim that enlightened human thinking can find a solution to problems of life and death (La Fleur, ed., 1984:153-158).

Sigmund Freud's one time associate Otto Rank, defended the healthy mind's capacity for protection and defense against anxiety when he explained a human preference for the unscientific and seemingly irrational. His ideas provide a wide explanation for the persistence of traditional religion amidst the contradictions of modern life—because, as he would agree, the inner emotional life of humans has been little altered despite the demands of rationalizing twentieth century science and technology. The glossed over contradictions and inconsistencies required for a religious acceptance of the world are routinely surmounted by the ordinary Japanese and other peoples. Rank gives his idea of a healthy human mental state in the following words:

> If (a) man is the more normal, healthy, and happy, the more he can . . . successfully . . . repress, displace, deny, rationalize, dramatize himself and

> deceive others; then it follows that the suffering of the neurotic comes . . . from painful truth . . . Spiritually the neurotic has been long where psychoanalysis wants to bring him without being able to, namely that point of seeing through deception of the world of the senses, [and] the falsity of reality. He suffers not from all the pathological mechanisms which are physically necessary for living and wholesome(ness), but in the refusal of these mechanisms, which is just what robs him of illusions important for living . . . [this person] is much nearer to the actual truth psychologically than the others and it is JUST THAT FROM WHICH HE SUFFERS (emphasis mine.) (cited in chap. 9 in Becker, Denial of Death, 1973:176, original in Rank, Will Therapy and Truth and Reality, 1939:251-252.)

Rank's insightful though non-religious explanation of the need for illusions helps us understand how a personal world view based on religion is constructed.

William James, while writing on religious acceptences, similarly supports this view when he states:

> Whether it is in the lowest sphere of sense or in the highest of intellectuation, we find it {the human mind} always doing one thing, choosing out of several of the materials so presented to its notice, emphasizing and accentuating that and suppressing as far as possible all the rest. The item emphasized is always in connection with some interest felt by the consciousness to be paramount . . . (Collected Essays and Reviews, 1948:142).

Educated Japanese agree with science too, even as they are just as likely as their grandparents to return to older internalized reasons for trusting to a next world—at the time it comes to leave this one. The superficial inroads of Christianity in Japan and the tiny minority of Japanese who convert to Western religion after generations of missionary proselytizing, is an indicator of the difficulty in penetrating traditional Japanese beliefs. Conversations with thoughtful Japanese such as the students interviewed at Awa Ikeda (Goodman, Chapter 3) affirm that few who know their religion are willing to shed its benefits, even while, in their youthful days, they ignore it. In a conversation at Ikeda a Japanese woman told me, "Our religion is there when we need it." Another occasion brings to mind the statements of Sakata Nobuko, widow of the physicist Sakata Shoichi (he was the first to introduce the two meson theory of atomic structure—and a colleague of Noble prize winner Yukawa Hedeki) who told my friend, mathematican Sam Rubin, then on the engineering staff of New York City's Transit Authority, that she felt her late husband's spirit would visit her dreams that night. She said that her husband often did so, and this chance meeting with Mr. Rubin, who was an admirer of Sakata's work, would probably make it more likely. She was a rational, intelligent, and educated woman. She had traveled to international science conferences with her husband and associated with academics from all over the world. The men of her family were all in science and her father was known for his work as a biochemist—yet she unself-consciously stated her personal beliefs and religious bias during this meeting at the International House in Tokyo. She told Mr. Rubin this initial "bumping into each other" was probably meant to be, recalling the popular Buddhist sentiment that people who met in other lives will probably meet again in this one.

Tomasaburo Bando, the celebrated actor and onnagata player, a star performer in Japan specializing in female roles for the Kabuki theater, said in a New York Times interview in 1984 (May 4) during his appearance at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York, that if he were going to be born again he would like to become a ballet dancer—though he would prefer not having to be born again to repeat the karma and birth cycle.

Sociologist Nakane Chie, in Japanese Society (1970), tells us that Japanese social patterns resemble a language with a basic indigenous structure or grammar, which has accumulated a heavy overlay of borrowed vocabulary, and yet, while the outlook of Japanese society has suffered drastic changes over the past hundred years, the social grammar has hardly been affected. Industrialization and exposure to Western culture had not effectively changed the basic cultural system, she says (1970:72).

In Buddhism everyone is eminently reformable. The Japanese don't see a vast difference betweeen the gods and humans in the way Christianity does. Everyone is born with the hope of enlightenment, though waiting for it to germinate through awareness of one's inate capacity. In terms of lineage, family ties exist not just in the present but also link the past and future generations. While one generation is being born, another is dying, and the generations procede in an endless train.

Regarding these statements there are certain Buddhist views and teachings that propound dogmas we may examine for their effect on the Japanese view of death.

1. Religion requires that to explain life's uncertainties one must accept the teaching that there is a force beyond the individual. Buddhist logic compares this force to a process. The relations among people create a current that affects events--though the relations start out as intangeble streams of thought and unconscious behaviors, they take form as soon as they act on something concrete. Hence, bad or good thoughts and actions turn into real events.

They are not merely unactualized imagination, says Buddhalogist David Kalapuhana in his Principles of Buddhist Psychology (1987):

> There is no need to assume any form of transcendence or absolutism in reading the Buddhist texts. . . . Buddhism is a "non-metaphysical explanation of experience." Its avoidance of extremes allow it to be called the middle way (1987:23).

2. In the Buddhist view all things change, whether they are animals, humans, or anything else in the world, and since everything is transient, there can be no permanent self. This helps along the idea that life and death are transient states which could be interchangeble. "To see the self as temporary, nothing but a succession of states, and a procession of perishing moments each to be replaced by a new state, makes learning to give them up without regret as a little thing," Mary Douglas says, in Danger and Purity (1965:174).
3. The physical universe is governed by laws of cause and effect, which act on an each other unceasingly, according to Buddhism, so all human and non-human events are affected and have consequences and cause reactions. Nothing remains the same. But people are not just objects swayed by vast forces, they are able to exert their own force on things and each other, to make changes.
4. Because humans make the mistake of trying to attach themselves to things that are changing, imagining them to be permanent, they suffer from disappointment. Every animate and inanimate object in nature must follow the law of the universe; it is born, grows, matures, declines, and dies. Men and women seeking permanence feel betrayed when confronted with this great

law of change and mutability. Yet life's dislocations and separations cannot be avoided. Buddhism says there is pitiful anxiety about something that is only natural law.

5. To escape suffering one must break the habit of craving, forget the self, and help humanity. One's own efforts and the intention to practice Buddhism must be declared in order to realize the goal of becoming a Buddha, whether in this world, as say some sects, or in a future time.

Other contributions to Buddhism, which came to Japan through China, also brought to the Japanese the older moral code esteemed by Confucius. It is connected with learning to write and everyday events that last throughout the (nine, twelve, or more) years, of going to school in Japan. Modern Japan writes with the old pictographs and writing methods of China. These ancient morphosyllabic symbols are themselves carriers of an ideology and propound a moral system based on harmony in human relationships. A typical example of a moral teaching occurs if the writer adds together the separate charactors for woman and child to make a new word for goodness.

The Meiji period modernizers of Japan esteemed this old writing system so highly, that even after a lengthy consideration of alternatives, during the period of major reforms in the late nineteenth century, they decided they could not abandon Chinese character writing—despite the time consuming efforts required to learn to write it, nor convert to an abstract alphabetical system—despite the compelling strategic inducements for easier communication with the West. Thus the language of Japan acts as a conservator of its philosophy for it retains the original religious ethos to which it is connected and remains to influence the National conscience. Kanji, Chinese charactor writing, survives and mediates the technological changes that have taken place. Thus writing in kanji has the function of being a template imposed on human actions, or, one could say, a higher order imposed over Japanese hearts and minds. Japanese brush writing has even acquired a semi-sacred charactor which becomes apparent to the careful observer if he notices how, particularly when written with ink and brush, the formal manuscript is handled with reverence. One notices too how important documents are exchanged and how written papers are handed over, held out—and by bowing to the giver or receiver, who also raises the paper up when receiving it, while bowing, as if towards an imaginary altar. Curiously, kami, the word for paper, is the same spoken word used for spirit or god. Hair too is called kami. Yet these are generally explained as homophones, and written differently.

Findings reveal that the Japanese way of death is unique by being related to the above items; and by offering special benefits. Some of the benefits are:

1. Psychological benefits to the mourners and the dying.
2. Providing a continuity between the past, present, and future: a bridge between the living, the dead, and the next generation.
3. Benefits are related to other activities in life—such as business and everyday life—things which are segmented in Western society.

By acknowledging and providing socially accepted and expected ways of dealing with sad feelings and memories of loss, the Japanese culture avoids the added difficulty, in grieving, of making people feel alone and different; because it avoids making the grieving person feel isolated, or not accepted as normal. One is not made to seem pathological because one is unable to forget—so that grief is compounded— instead it is softened. A person is helped to live with a loss by making the loss less, which is accomplished by a home altar carrying mementos that helps keep the deceased person present in a benevolent way. The cultural norm provides a sense of remaining in touch with that person's love and advice, accentuating and enhancing it, through cultural rituals that permit involving, addressing, consulting, and communing, with the dead.

A. The Japanese way of keeping in touch with the spirit of the dead through the family altar, the Butsudan, takes place in the home, where it replaces the need for regular visits to a temple, and conveniently ties the daily family routines to the dead, allowing the members to interact with ancestors on a comfortable basis; and the daily tending to a home altar creates a sense of unity among the different generations. There is considerable difference between attending the formal religious institutions of temple or church, or being able to pray at a home altar when one is depressed or worried. The help comes immediately through the psychological lifting of a burden: through the hominess of the surroundings-- with the imagined presence of one's grandparents, or others long gone, a brother, sister, children, or a spouse, and, especially in rural areas, the nearby graves of the ancestors sleeping on the hillside or in fields ouside, all these give compelling support to a less fearful view of death.

B. All Japanese families try to visit and decorate their family graves for the special Obon holiday when the folk culture says ancestors come back to visit their family home. It is customary to repeat the visits at the spring and autumn equinoxes, the holidays called Ohigan, or "the other side of the river," a Buddhist metaphor for the world beyond. The two seasonal observances are recognized institutionally, by being national holidays, when it is considered the proper thing to go out and take care of one's family graves before enjoying the other holiday fun. Neglecting to keep up the appearances of a grave brings disapproval from the neighbors. One dubious result of this fact is that as the Japanese become more affluent they are replacing their antique, weathered, and aesthetically pleasing gravestones with the new highly polished granite stones seen in the United States. The Japanese idea is the dead should benefit from a family's prosperity too, so they get new memorials.

C. The Japanese festival and holiday shrine visits renew people's sense of communal unity and the feeling of being Japanese as something special. The Japanese feel exclusive for being related through a special culture.

D. The tolerance that Buddhist thought represents unites the diverse folk traditions: keeping the beliefs inherited from Shinto and Confucianism in harmony. This tolerance may provide a model for resolving some of the other dissonances of life, and the inconsistencies between doctrinal religion and folk beliefs do not war with each other. Need for pluralism or competition between imported cultures, does not upset the homogeneous Japanese.

E. Despite its finality, death does not cause a complete separation in the minds of the socially minded Japanese. Thinking of and tending to the dead is an institution. Families and friends meet periodically to have a feast on set days of rememberence. Because the rites and observances are carefully followed by the majority of households, the dying may feel consoled they will be always be remembered by friends and relatives who will not neglect to keep in touch with their spirit. Nor do the Japanese worry about whether they are to be punished for their sins during this life. It is not an important part of religious preaching.

The generalized deity or
how a historical person becomes deified

3. _\
2. __\
1. ____\

Traditional stages and changes in the status of the dead person to a final elevated status, shown in a descending pyramid.

3. This is reached after as much as 50 years have passed. The final stage: diffusion and dispersal into a generalized deity shown by 3 on the top. The dead person has acheived fullfillent in the kami or hokke state and is in union with a larger group of souls or ancestors who have joined

together as a spiritual force for impersonal good and abstract guardianship. That person's *ihai* tablet is taken out of the family altar when all living memory is gone.

2. It may be 15 or as much 25 years after a death. Both the idealized memories together with personal memories of the person are still present and may be particularly recalled on memorial days or special occasions; but a large time span has passed.

1. 1 to 15 years. The immediate—and intermediate period after a death. Intimate memories are focused on the individual and his or her acts, with still recurring thoughts of the time of death and the surrounding events remain present.

It can be stated that the numerous formalities observed in both the public and private spheres of Japanese life mean a vast amount of social behavior is dependable and predictable. The Japanese technique for dealing with life's complexities is to follow a set of formal rules. If one can only observe the proper forms, things will go smoothly and properly. (This was once taught by Confucius.) When there are too many choices to make, we observe how many people may avoid confusion by accepting clearly restrictive rules because they simplify making difficult choices. The complexity of life today, and the modern information age and its purported overload on the individual psyche, have been cited as late twentieth century phenomena responsible for an increase in the growth of fundamentalist religious sects and movements.

Our analysis of the Japanese way of death finds high importance in the fact that the majority of Japanese affect many formal behaviors and rituals, to an extent uncommon in the West:

1. This requirement of correct and proper behavior gives explicit rules and provides clear expectations.

2. These correct procedures may be extended to the idea of preventing the unhappiness of all the dead—not just those with whom one is accquainted, but beyond, by cultivating the good will of the unhappy spirits of strangers (see Goodman, Chapter 4). Even if the reason for respecting such spirits through a ceremony is difficult to explain today, it can be argued people feel such rituals may have value in a generalized smoothing away of the possibility of chaotic events and taking out insurance against the unknowable. The rituals encourage correct behaviors even when they become a formality.

3. It is a fact of contemporary life that modern corporations support shrines. The corporate sponsorship of a particular deity recalls the older idea of a village deity or local ujigami who is thought to look out for the local families of villagers who call themselves the ujiko or children of the diety. Aristocratic family shrines still exist, some going back to the Heian period (794-1194), when clans like the noble Fujiwara built themselves family-centered places of worship. Today companies pay for the construction and maintenance of shrine buildings and support an attending priest and his family. They are not creating new personal kami or gods, just adopting an existing one. Okutsuka Company, a giant manufacturing conglomerate in

Shikoku, recently built a new Naruto-san temple in Naruto. The company management staff usually attends the ceremonies where the Shinto priest performs the annual rites which are not different then those at other shrines. It is common in Japan to visit a large department store and find a family shrine on the roof among the children's rides. The resident gods may benefit anybody, but having a personal connection to one is a special comfort and a custom observed by generations of merchants and craftsmen. A list of shrine sponsors would include Hitatchi, Mitsui, Mitsukoshi, and many other familiar corporation names. A new craft shrine that opened in Tokyo in November 1990 for worn out computer parts was reported in the New York Times in November, 1990.

Knowing that there are elaborate rituals helps the dying to feel comforted that their life has a proper conclusion and their spirit will have a presence for others, as they will be respected and perhaps become elders and guardians of the community. Their final social duty, giri, is joined to individual human feeling, ningyo—to be unified in life's final work.

Observe how religious ideas tie together the artistic components of Japanese culture, drawing their ethos from past generations when medieval courtiers admired sensibility and refinement in feeling, scenes familiar to readers of Murasaki Shikibu's classic, Tale of Genji (Waley 1955, Seidensticker, 1980). Today Japanese still pay elaborate attention to the beauty of the changing seasons which can be interpreted as a legacy of the metaphorical accommodation to death, as the seasons of life pass, and whether there is death in nature or death in human beings, always, the hot vigor of youth is cooled by the winter of time's passing. A famous treatise by noh dramatist Zeami decribed a certain kind of sublime beauty, known as yugen, like blossoms on a dead tree, themes that have been symbolized in art by the Japanese. Another favorite artistic metaphor is shown by flying geese, silhouetted against the autumn moon and departing into the unknowable void. These may remind human beings they are only temporary on the cosmic scale and evoke Japan's poetic phrase of sadness at life's transience: mono no aware. Cherry blossoms are another theme of the seasons in Japan, and a metaphor for young death: the short lived blossoms are both beautiful and sad because they fall as easily as did the lives of the young samurai of feudal days. Seasonal affinities and their respectful observances are found in the indigenous Japanese religion of Shinto, with its awe of nature's growth and fertility. These ideas remain part of today's aesthetic equation. The Japanese do not feel their formal attentions to the artistic components of life wasteful, nor counterproductive to their commercial endeavors. They are not too time consuming for today's society for they are respected as spiritually satisfying; and the Japanese pay for them in the modern coin of time and money.

Custom also continues in the Japanese manner of putting a good face on unpleasant things, in a term for inner feelings and outer feelings called honne and tatemae. Properly brought up Japanese try to maintain poise and do not display displeasure nor offer opinions which might be upsetting to others. This explains the smile that may accompany a confession of bad personal news for it is social training to avoid burdening others with unnecessary worries. A reciprocal side exists in the way of attention and services offered by friends who want to show their regard in a crisis. We have remarked how they will sleep all night on the hospital floor or help with feeding and bathing the patient, washing personal night clothes, making the tea, and serving snacks when other visitors come: relieving the nurses of many chores. The Japanese also try to extend routine cordial hospitality and repress hostile feelings toward people they dislike, giving those they dislike almost the same attention and courtesy as those they genuinely prefer. Medieval Buddhism taught every person is potentially valuable and after death can become a Buddha—implicit in the Japanese term for the dead (hotoke or Huddhas); thus every person may some day recover from his or her unpleasantness, and become a valuable neighbor, or perform a kindness or service to someone else in future years. The Japanese do not expect repayment for their favors tomorrow because people are here for a lifetime, and more. The debtor relationships impinge on the family as well as the individual. Someone else may repay the debt someday. It can even be a descendent, for the current generation is encouraged to consider itself the legatee of other's pasts, a habit seldom appreciated by foreign free trade advocates, who complain they cannot gain market entree in Japan even though offering competitive goods and services.

A further complement to our study about death is the Japanese habit of self-cultivation, the kind of improvement Japanese equate with charactor bulding. This concept was voiced in the past by a medieval Buddhist master, Dogen, founder of the Soto Zen sect, who said in his major work, Shobogenzo that to lead a virtuous life one must concentrate upon cultivating oneself in body and mind, something which the zen practice of meditation still aims to further. Japanese self-cultivation is not considered a further development of individuality or ego expression, as in the West, but rather a way of being grateful for one's opportunity to be in the world and appreciating the possibilites left by an unknown predecessor. The Japanese like to feel that when someone starts out upon an important endeavor they should be committed. In such situations the Japanese will sometimes tie on a headband, called a hamaki, to announce their intentions. This kind of devotion is seen in the way some apprentices also work at mastering a task. The practice is unrelenting, with no halfhearted commitment or turning back if things go hard. The person thinks very deeply before beginning, then does one's best to achieve the goal. Such dedication can seem obsessive to an other-directed westerner, and this devotion to discipline even stamps itself on some Japanese faces. One can guess the persuasion of some of these dedicated adepts and seekers, just by observing their faces, choice of dress and demeanor, or ascetic lifestyle. Society treats such devotees with respect and admires their search for perfection, treating them as if they were on a spiritual pilgrimage. People offer encouragement and say "Gambarimasu [try your best]."

Japanese words also express the search for other kinds of perfection, for mastery of a body of technique called ikikata, which some professionals require. Additionally, the suffix do can be added to the name of one's calling. It means following "the way of that profession" (see Goodman, chapter 4.) Seeking for perfection carries onward the Buddhist sense that being born human is a precious opportunity where one has the advantage of intelligence and awareness, and thus the best chance of achieving enlightenment. Enlightenment will mean discovering that death is not fearful.

There are subtle layers of thought that eventually turn into a Japanese form of ethnocentrism. Within the Japanese sense of uniqueness lurks an inherent chauvinism, usually hidden from the homely mirror of everyday life. As the Japanese strive to prosper and justify a value in everything that advances community goals, the Japanese may become oblivious to the rights of outsiders. To be fair, the Japanese are vaguely xenophobic from centuries of isolation and exclusion from the outside world. The Japanese perceive themselves as misunderstood, and still feel the boundaries of the island that contains them. It is an island, walled by their special language and guarded by their own racial myths which they incorporated into a this-worldly Buddhism when the Japanese transformed their clan-led society after the fourth or fifth century. They employed Buddhism to fortify themselves into a larger, imperially-led, hierarchical, family-centered unity. Only when going outside of Japan and taking a distanced view can a sophisticated and limited segment of the population, today, regard their homeland critically. Artist Isamu Noguchi, the reknown modern sculptor said, in a museum video on his work: that he should not be regarded as a Japanese artist because his work was so universal. You cannot be a Japanese and be internationally minded at the same time, he says in the film about his work at the Noguchi Studio Museum in Queens, New York.

Thus Japanese loyalties do not simply mean feelings of patriotic allegience to the state but to other Japanese who make a kind of nationwide family. These are feelings that turn being Japanese into a folk nationalism, rather than a military nationalism, which is based on ideas of domination and conquest. The Japanese do not encourage immigration to their country. They consider even their own third generation of Japanese-born Koreans a population of aliens. During the past century a massive inculculation of "we are a special people, etc" was implanted into the populace by reform minded men who reclaimed the Emperor Meiji as a governing head of state. The Meiji government needed to impress a rural population with a sense of national unity and get people working for the goal of modernization and security: with the aim of protecting the nation against the, then, encroaching Western powers colonizing neighboring countries. Japanese suspected the importuning European traders being the vanguard of latter day conquistadores. Eventually, in the nineteen-thirties, ultra-nationalist ideologues intensified the feelings of exclusiveness for their own militaristic aims, fomenting the Pacific war. These disfunctions still attach to the Japanese way of life.

Only a few Japanese recognize their own feelings of nationalism and a sense of racial superiority re-emerging in the statements of politicians and officials in government. The element of racial superiority long within Japanese culture is not just a remnant of the ultra-nationalistic 1930's and 1940's: though now divorced from aggression and wartime ideology, Japanese feelings of being a unique people lies near the surface and can be exploited for aggressive purposes should there be a crisis, one fears. The possibility arises more easily than elsewhere because while it is a democracy, Japan has a uniform and monolingual culture. Competing ideologies are always transformed to fit the Japanese mold. Though not attached to any official program, Japanese ethnicity or populism is based on the feelings of an unbreakable bond with other Japanese, of shared history, shared customs, religion, an isolated language, and one race. (See Goodman, Chapter 4.) These are *horizontal* webs of loyalty to other Japanese. They supplement the *vertical* loyalties tied to hierarchies in a traditional manor house fashion where the group or corporation is loyal to its own members, decribed in the work of Nakane Chie, Japanese Society (1970).

The Yasukuni shrine, a gathering place for the souls of the Meiji era and other war dead (discussed in Chapter 4) is a source of reverence and inspiration for many older Japanese, where they engender nostalgic feelings and recollections of youthful patriotism. Worship at Yasukuni seems alarming only to part of the population with it's suggestion of war glorification. A visit to the shrine grounds was accompanied by the racous sounds of wartime songs from a truckful of rightists outside the gate. They were blasting exhortations to return to national purity and virtue, disturbing the peaceful scene, yet uncomplainingly tolerated by everyone present: all seemingly related by their Japaneseness and a common socialization. Inside the shrine greying veterans were remembering their dead friends from the war, outside, the young rightists were calling for a renewed national conscience. Inside, the mother was attending her children, and no less than them, thought perhaps unthinkingly since her schooldays, inculculated with a Japanese respect for martyrs of the past. She was merely accepting the we-ness of the group, not even involved with the worshipers, or the rightists, and oblivious to the dangers of ultra-nationalist causes in the events around her: they occured in the taken for granted context of everydaylife and she is enmeshed in the social construction of her Japanese life world, which is like life in any other closely bound group, and accomplished through repetition of habitual and commonplace events that are impressed upon the unexceptional routines of the day. Her children are probably being socialized to follow the same security-assuring, soothly concensual nature of their society, and unless they become radicalized in school someday, or introduced to critical thought (often by being introduced to Marxist literature in college), they will not easily be able to take an ourside view of themselves or trouble to analyze the Fascist implications of today's scene. The Japanese danger lies in not readily discriminating between forms of acts by the dead: dutiful acts for one's country, or the arrogant excesses of war criminals. Sacrifices which ended in death seems unified, whether they emanate from the enshrined souls of the soldiers who died in the field, or those who were guilty of criminal acts. The former National shrine for worshiping the war dead easily becomes a magnet for nationalist right wing propagandists as Japanese emotions flounder over the separation of the two groups into different catagories.

The Japanese little think of themselves as existing in private space, they are socialized to think of their group, and, for that reason, dislike making personal objections that may cause social disruption. This passivity and acquiescence is reprised in the Japanese saying: if the line is long, people will join.

We have noted that Japanese philosophy means an acceptence of the quasi-religious view that everything is related to everything else. It is linguistically correct to say that all previous Japanese philosophy was religious (noted in Goodman chapter four) because there was no particular Japanese word for the discipline of philosophy, and it was necessary to borrow a European term in order to distinguish between what is still talked of as Western thought. This underlines our conclusion:

1. The Japanese do not subscribe to the idea of death as an anomaly in the middle of life.
2. Death is not considered wrong. Death is in the order of things. Death comes in its time--at proper season.
3. There is no end to human experience: IF YOU'RE ALIVE, YOU'LL ALSO BECOME DEAD. In the same way, in order to understand death, the Japanese would argue, see LIFE.
4. The Japanese want to do everything correctly, because, like the idea of karma in Buddhism, one's actions will affect everything else. And if everything is done correctly life will be smooth, or smoother, and death too.
    - * A ceremony makes sure things are done correctly.
    - * The correctness makes the outcome more secure.

- * Because wrong or neglected acts can have unanticipated consequences, they are avoided.

These beliefs dictate the general conclusion of this study. One's behavior should not upset the order of things. An upset may have undesirable results. Because everything is related, a good ceremony provides insurance against unwanted consequences. Adherence to correct behavior reassures beliefs about the correctness of death.

This is the kind of religious culture that Max Weber cited as the reason why industrial capitalism did not develop in the East. Nevertheless we see that it does not seem to be obstructing the capitalist development of Japan.

The Japanese respect the cyclical and changing nature of life as it follows the rotation of the universe. Yet things are forever in flux. No event can recur in quite the same way. Because this is a universal process it is better to assist one's part in the order by doing things correctly and to the best of one's ability. The security that follows doing things the right way, so that it will secure a proper result, simplifies life and the dilemmas of life's choices. The ceremoniousness of today's Japanese society need not rest on the deep faith of old, when Medieval society spent much time over Buddhist observances, avoiding pollutions, copying sutras and prayers (which elderly people still find a soothing ocupation today) nor require an authoritarian government's cohesive rule, (this characterized the two hundred and fifty years of peace under the Tokugawa government [1600-1868], which strictly controlled procotol and entitlements for every strata of society), not in order to continue habits of thought and behavior long ingrained.

Until social consensus and the desire to cooperate and consult disappear in Japan—and it has not disappeared under the most trying events of nuclear war and defeat, or under the necessary conditions of capitalism—and while the Japanese continue to write in their philosophizing Chinese characters, we may expect to see the Japanese world view surviving fairly intact. This social consensus includes pacifying what may or may not be unhappy ghosts, making sure funerals are carried out correctly, and remembering the memorials of the dead. It appears that the Japanese will long continue to visit graves on important holidays and observe rituals going back in time. For whether the supernatural is true or not, is not the point for modern Japanese. They see life as a series of *good relationships*—human or perhaps other than human. The ceremonies assure one is doing things corectly, and they uphold the good relations, and, through ritual observances, the natural world merges with the supernatural and returns to life, some respect for its mysterious origins.

We have tried to show how everything is related in Japanese thought. Death is not separate or different from the rest of life. Japanese tradition believes in a whole which doesn't necessarily end at death and is not static. Life is a continuous process and death is another continuation and aspect of the process.

In the West, this view is separated. Things are discrete and isolated or perceived as being complete in themselves. This affects not only our way of life but also our death for we try to see death as a separate end. Recent research cited on grieving in America suggests that our treatment of death as a final event, and an end, is problematic. People don't forget their dead. The death of a loved one is not simply a discrete occurrence or an event to be gotten over after a reasonable period of mourning, because our life's fabric is woven out of relationships with other human beings, and cannot be unwoven or discarded for the new dress of the new born.

Public Television recently presented a documentary film on Colonel Doolittle, of World War II fame, "Doolittle, American Hero" (May 1991, New York, channel 50). It showed surviving members of Colonel Doolittle's wartime air crew at the annual roll call ceremony for their fellows who died in the war. As each dead man's name was called, a surviving partner would call "present!"—the living speaking for the dead. One of the spokesmen for the group of elderly men taking part in the film, said, "I still get tears in my eyes remembering him." At academic conferences on grieving, people who are cited say "I remember it would have been my childs birthday today," and so on, affirming that Westerners also do not stop thinking of their dead.

Westerners do not readily acknowledge death is an important part of human experience, nor talk about the fact that the memories of the dead remain with the living. Easterners do, and accept it, and integrate it into their lives, even while holding to a religious outlook they may be hard pressed to articulate.

Kyoto University's Nishitani Keijio, a Buddhist philosopher who also teaches Western philosophy, gives grounds for the beliefs of many Japanese in his book, Religion and Nothingness, where he says:

> The point at which the ordinarily necessary things of life, including learning and the arts, all lose their necessity and utility, is found at those times when death, nihility, or sin--or any any of those situations...that undermine the roothold of our existence and brings the meaning of life into question--become pressing personal problems for us.
>
> This can occur through an illness that brings one face to face with death, or through some turn of events that robs one of what has made life worth living.... A void appears here that nothing in the world can fill: a gaping abyss opens up at the very ground on which one stands...not one of all the things that has made up the stuff of life until then, is of any use. (translated by Winston King, 1982:32.)

In sum, we have seem how Japanese culture includes the following key features that shape the relationship to death and dying:

- All Japanese are acquainted with the idea of reincarnation.

The native religion of Shinto, which is incorporated in Japanese Buddhism, has no idea of retribution and the dying are not fearful of divine punishment for their faults.

- The need to take care of the mortuary tablets of the dead kept in the family altar involves the living with the dead as a daily household responsibility.
- The emphasis on seasonal elements in nature is extended to a seasonal attitude on life. The Japanese circumspectly match same age groups together in virtually all social activities.
- The Japanese officially respect the dead with National holidays.
- The Japanese indicate their relative ease about death by discussing their own and others death in ordinary social conversation.

The Japanese regard life as a series of cyclical events, with a belief that life has seasons like the rest of the natural world, and may repeat itself in new forms; this offers the possibility of rebirth for all things.

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