

The Pine Trees Visit Ise Shrine

They say one of the most famous shrines in Japan must be Ise Shrine located in the city of Ise in Mie Prefecture. It has been a traditional custom to visit the shrine and pray for their happiness, especially in the Edo era many people visited there. This is one of the old stories about a visit to Ise Shrine.

Long, long ago there was a young couple who had once visited Ise Shrine all the way from their village in Akita. The man was called Matsukichi (Pine-man), and his wife, Matsu (Pine-lady). They were an extremely handsome couple and looked honest. They'd saved money for visiting the shrine, and their long cherished dream finally had come true.

On their way back, the woman claimed she was too tired to sleep outdoors. Although they didn't have enough money to stay at an inn, they knocked on the door of an inn nearby.

The man showed a pair of Nusa (Nusa is the sacred cloth given to the visitors at Ise Shrine) and his drawstring money pouch, and said to the innkeeper,

"We just visited Ise Shrine. As you see, we got the Nusa at the shrine. We'd saved money for this trip, but we spent many days and much money. Now we are penniless. My wife says she is very tired and she can't sleep outdoors tonight. Would you do us a favor? I know this is an unreasonable demand, but would you give us a stay somewhere in this inn tonight?"

The inn-keeper looked at them for a while, and then said,

"I believe that no people who visit Ise Shrine are dishonest. Will you come visit again next year? All right, I can wait for your bill by then."

About the same time as the previous year when the young couple had visited Ise Shrine, a group of people stayed at the same inn. The innkeeper entered their names in the visitors' book of the inn, and he noticed they came from the young couple's village. He looked around but he couldn't find the couple. He asked the visitors,

"Aren't there Matsukichi and Matsu in your party? I think they were from the same village as you are. They stayed here last year but they didn't have money to pay. They promised to pay it at their next visit." The people looked one another in perplexity. No one knew them at all. The innkeeper added,

"They looked honest, and the wife seemed weak. I didn't want to be merciless to the Ise Shrine visitors. So I told them I could wait for their bill at their next visit."

When the Ise Shrine visitors returned home, that story was spread among all the villagers. Although no one knew of the couple whose names were Matsukichi and Matsu, a man said, clapping his hands,

"The two must be the pine trees. I've been wondering about the pine trees standing in the precinct of Suwa Shrine (a branch shrine of Ise Shrine). Didn't you notice the piece of cloth on the top of each tree?"

"Yes, I saw them. That must have been the work of strong wind," said another man, "and they must have been blown and caught on the trees from somewhere."



“Please look at the cloth carefully,” the first man said, “You got Nusa when you went to the shrine, didn’t you? Those two pieces of cloth on the trees are Nusa, I believe. It sounds incredible, but the two pine trees must have visited the Shrine.” Then a woman said,

“Wait a minute. I remembered something. Last autumn I was worried about the trees, because the leaves gradually became brown. I thought they were going to die. But a month later their leaves became green again. Maybe you are right. They surely visited Ise Shrine, and came back here a month later with Nusa.”

All the villagers were deeply touched by the mysterious event. Nobody doubted that the trees’ spirits visited the shrine for the villager's happiness in the guise of human beings. They gathered under the trees and worshiped them as the sacred trees.

The villagers soon collected money the same amount as the young couple’s debt that the innkeeper told them, and sent it to him.

If you visit that rural village, you can see the huge pine trees standing side by side in the precinct of the Suwa Shrine. The trees may wait for you to come, as you know pine is ‘matsu’ in Japanese that means ‘wait’.(2004.1.1 with Itaya)

松のお伊勢参り

日本でとても有名な神社の一つは、三重県の伊勢市にある伊勢神社とのことです。そこにお参りし、幸せを願うことが昔からの慣わしでした。中でも、江戸時代には沢山の人がそこにお参りしました。これは、その伊勢神社にまつわるお話の一つです。

むかし、むかし若い夫婦が秋田の村から、はるばる伊勢神宮にお参りに来ました。男は松吉、女は松と言いました。二人はとても似合いの夫婦で、正直者に見えました。お伊勢参りのお金をため、長年の夢がついにかなったのです。

旅の帰り、女は、とても疲れて外で夜の過ごすのはつらい、と男にもらしました。宿に泊まるお金もない二人は、通りすがりの宿の表戸をたたきました。男は宿屋の主人に、ぬさ（伊勢神宮にて参拝者がもらう神聖な布）と巾着（お金入れ）を見せ、こう言いました。

「私どもは伊勢参りの帰りです。ぬさも頂いてまいりました。伊勢参りにと、お金を貯めてまいりましたが、長旅ゆえお金は全部使ってしまいました。あいにく今は一文も持っておりませんが、妻が、ひどく疲れて、今夜は外で夜を過ごすのはつらい、と申しております。お願いです。とんでもないお願いであることは重々承知しておりますが、どうか、どこでも結構です、一晩の宿をお与えいただけませんか。」

主人は、二人をしばらく見て、こう言いました。

「伊勢参りに来られた人に悪い人はおらん。また、来年も来るであろうな。よかろう、宿代はその時でよかろう。」

さて、その夫婦が伊勢神宮をお参りしたほぼ一年後のこと、数人の旅人がその宿屋に泊まりました。主人は、宿帳の名前を見て、旅人たちが、あの若夫婦と同じ村から来ていることに気づきました。ざっと見まわしたが、なじみの顔はなく、村人に尋ねました。

「この中に、松吉と松というものはおらんかな。みなさんと同じ村だと思うのですが。一年前、ここに泊まったのですが、一文なしで、一年後のお参りのとき払うという約束で宿を取らせてやりましたが。」

村人たちは、心当たりがないという表情でお互いの顔を見合わせましたが、二人を知っているものは誰もおりませんでした。

「二人とも人をだますような人には見えませんでしたな。それに奥さんのほうはどこか体の具合が悪いように見えましたな。そこで宿代は来年で結構ですよ、と言っておきました。」と主人は付け加えました。

伊勢参りを済ませた村人たちが村へ帰ると、その話はさっそく村中に知れ渡りました。

松吉と松の名を知るものは一人もいませんでしたが、ふと一人の村人が、手を叩き、こんなことを言いました。

「その二人なら、きっとあの松の木じゃ。諏訪神社（伊勢神宮の支社）の境内の松のことが気になっていたんじゃが。木のでっぺんに布があるのに気づかなかったか。」

「うん、確かに、俺も見た。風の仕業で、どっかからか飛ばされて、あの木に引っかかったにちげえねえ。」と別の村人が言いました。

「よく調べてみねえか。」と最初の男。「おめえ、お伊勢参りに行ってぬさをもらったよな。あの木の二枚の布もぬさにちげえねえ。信じられねえが、あの松の木がお伊勢参りにちげえね。」



すると、一人の女がこう言いました。

「ちょっと待って。思い出したわ。去年の秋、あの木の葉がだんだんと茶色になってきて、このままだと枯れちゃうと思ったことがあったわ。でも、一ヶ月後、また元の緑に戻ったの。」

村人たちはこの不思議な話にとても心を打たれ、その松の霊が人間に姿を変え、村人の幸せを願ってお伊勢参りをしたことを疑うものは誰もいませんでした。村人は松の下に集まると、その御神木に手を合わせました。

村人たちは、宿屋の主人が言った宿代を集めると、さっそく送りました。

その田舎の村を訪れることがあったら、今でも諏訪神社の境内に並んだ二本の大きな松の木を目にすることでしょう。その木はあなたが来るのを待つ（松）ていることでしょう。(2004.1.1)