

The Star Festival

Long, long ago, the Lord of Heaven had a beautiful daughter who was a skillful weaver. The brightly colored cloth she wove was so beautiful that everyone praised her for her work. She was so fond of weaving that she spent every day at her loom. When she was old enough to get married, God, her father, looked for a suitable young man; young, handsome and worked hard. He found a cowherd who was good at keeping cows and worked very hard.



When the cowherd Altair met the weaver Vega, he thought he had never met such a beautiful girl in his life. Vega also thought what a handsome young man he was. In a nutshell, they fell in love with each other at first sight.

Soon they started their married life. They did nothing but enjoyed their sweet life at home: Vega lost her interest in weaving, so she didn't sit at her loom anymore; Altair didn't work on the field or feed his cow either. God, their father, thought it seriously wrong and warned them to do their work as they had done. But they ignored his warning. Their behavior invited God's anger. A river made from stars was placed between Altair and Vega. The river, Milky Way, was becoming wider and wider. At last they couldn't see each other's shape any more. However loudly they shouted, it was impossible to hear each other's voice. That was the divine retribution against them.

She sat at her loom so that she could forget him, but she couldn't weave any more because her eyes filled with tears. On the other hand he was so absent minded day and night that he didn't go to the fields to work. His cows became thinner and thinner and the fields got worse and worse. God felt pity and anxious about them.

One day he said to the couple who was crying and wishing to meet again, staying still on both side of the Milky Way.

"My daughter, providing you weave at a loom again, I'll permit you to meet him. Can you swear to do that?"

"Yes, of course. If I could meet him again, I'll do anything you'd tell me to," she swore the God.

"My son-in-law, providing you work in the fields again, I'll permit you to meet her again. Can you swear to do that?"

"Yes, I can. If I could meet her, I'll do anything you'd tell me to," he swore the God.

"So you can meet each other here on the night of the 7th of July every year," God said to them.

That night, the separated couple was out by the Milky Way, staring at the opposite side of the river shore, when a flock of magpies flew over and made a bridge with their wings until the couple could meet again over the Milky Way. How happy they were when they met again for the first time in a year!

That's how they can meet each other once a year.

This story originally came from a Chinese legend.

The Star Festival has been celebrated in Japan on the night of the 7th of July. People, especially school children, write their wishes on slips of colored paper and attach them to branches of bamboos, and place them outside of their houses.

Sendai City in Miyagi Prefecture and Hiratsuka City in Kanagawa Prefecture are famous for their Star Festival display along the main streets, and millions of visitors enjoy walking through the decorated streets. (2010.7.1 With Itaya)

七夕

むかし、むかし、天帝には機（はた）織りの上手な美しい娘がおりました。織姫（おりひめ）が織る色鮮やかな美しい布には、誰もが驚嘆の声をあげるのでした。織姫は、機織りがとても好きで、毎日布を織っていました。

父親である帝は、年頃になった娘に、ふさわしい相手を探していました。美男子で働き者の若者を。牛を飼うのが上手な若者が帝のお目に止まりました。

牛飼いの彦星（ひこぼし）にとって織姫は、生まれて初めて見る美しい女性、織姫にとっても彦星は申し分ない男性でした。二人はたちまち恋に落ち入りました。

まもなく二人の甘い新婚生活が始まり、織姫は機織りに興味を失い、機には見向きもしなくなりました。彦星も畑に出て行かなくなり、牛に餌をやらなくなりました。帝はこの事態を深刻にとらえ、以前のように仕事をするように二人に忠告しました。しかし二人は父の言葉に耳を貸そうとはしませんでした。ついに帝の怒りをかけてしまいました。帝は彦星と織姫を、星が流れる川で隔（へだ）てることにしました。その川が天の川（あまのがわ）です。その川幅はどんどん広くなり、とうとう二人はお互いの姿はおろか、どんなに大声で叫ぼうとも、その声は相手に届かなくなってしまいました。二人に天罰が下されたのです。

織姫は、機を織って彦星のことを忘れようとしたのですが、溢（あふ）れ出る涙で仕事ははかどりませんでした。彦星も、昼夜、物思いにふけるだけで、畑にも行きませんでした。牛はだんだんと痩せ衰え、畑も日に日に荒れていきました。

帝はそんな二人がかわいそうになり心穏やかではいられなくなりました。ある日、帝は、天の川の兩岸にたたずみ、お互いを求めて泣き叫ぶ二人に言いました。

「我が娘よ、また機を織るなら、彦星と逢うのを許してあげよう。どうだ？」

「はい、機を織ります。また彦星さまとお逢いできるのなら、どんな仰せにも従います。」娘は父に誓いました。

「我が婿よ。また畑で働くなら、織姫と逢うのを許してあげよう。どうだ？」

「働きます。また織姫さまとお逢いできるのなら、どんな仰せにも従います。」彦星は帝に誓いました。

「よかろう。それならば毎年7月7日の夜、ここで逢うがよい。」

天の川に隔てられた二人は、その夜、天の川のほとりで、対岸を見つめていました。すると鵲（かさぎ）の群れが飛んで来て、その翼を広げて橋を作りました。そして二人は天の川の上で再会しました。1年ぶりに逢えた二人はどんなに幸せだったことでしょう。

こうして二人は毎年一回だけ会えるようになったのです。

この話は、中国の伝説に由来しています。日本では、七夕は7月7日の夜、行われます。特に学童たちは、願い事を色とりどりの短冊に書いて、竹の枝に結んで、軒先に出しておきます。

宮城県仙台市や神奈川県平塚市の七夕祭りが有名です。何百万人もの人が訪れ、七夕飾りで賑わう中心街の散策を楽しみます。(Kudos)

