Kotsuji's Gift

The Daring Rescue of Japan's Jewish Refugees

Jundai Yamada

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Maggid Books

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"If Sugihara was the Pitcher for the Jewish refugees,
Kotsuji was their Catcher"

This volume honors the memory of

Abraham Setsuzo Kotsuji זצ"ל

and pays tribute to
Rabbi Meir Soloveichik,
Jundai Yamada, Andrew Saidel,
and to all those who are working to
recognize, and eternally remember,
the courage, heroism, and אהבת ישראל,
Kotsuji exemplified.

פייג'א רבקה בת אסתר הענטשא ומשה אריה
מנחם צבי בן מרדכי ולאה

רחל מירל בת חנה שרה וישראל צבי
מנחם מענדל ליפא בן אריה ובתיה מלכה

For the daughters of Kotsuji Setsuzo and Kotsuji Mineko,

Aiko, Teruko, and Yuriko

Contents

Author's Note

This volume includes both Kotsuji Setsuzo's memoir, *From Tokyo to Jerusalem*, first published in 1964 in the United States, and my own book, *Inochi no Biza wo Tsunaida Otoko* (The Man Who Extended the Visas for Life), released in Japanese in 2013. Since publishing the book, I have remained in awe of Professor Kotsuji's choices in life and have continued my research over the past 12 years. This English edition contains important new findings.

Born in 1899 to a Shinto household bound by tradition in Kyoto, Kotsuji converted to Judaism when he was 60 years old after many twists and turns in his life. He was an extraordinarily rare Japanese person, who made inspiring decisions in challenging times, and thus saved lives.

Six decades have passed since Kotsuji published his memoir. In his autobiography, he tells of a life which spanned a tumultuous period, including times of warmth, sadness, irony, and joy.

It is important to note he cultivated the core Bushido belief that one should "help those in need" from his childhood, and he never lost sight of the importance of basic human goodness in offering a helping hand in a world thrown into turmoil. This humanity caused him to come to the aid of the Jewish refugees who found their way to Japan. And it was this dedication to humanity which inspired me and drew me to his story.

After his courageous deeds on behalf of these refugees, he was forced to flee to Harbin, chased out of Japan, his own country, during the war. Japan subsequently surrendered in August 1945, but Kotsuji was persecuted in China, which had suffered greatly during the war.

The deeper I delved into Kotsuji's life, the more I learned of the tragedies of the war. Now, more than ever, I deeply feel the vital importance of peace for all of us. It is my hope that readers will be inspired by the extraordinary story of Kotsuji Setsuzo and the Jewish refugees that unfolded 85 years ago, and see it as a testament to spreading world peace and developing lasting friendship.

Finally, a word about names. Kotsuji wrote his book in English, and names are presented in the Western tradition, with first name followed by family name. My book first appeared in Japanese, so names are written in the Japanese tradition, with family name followed by first name. I retained this order in the English edition, with the exception of my own name.

Kotsuji refers to his two daughters by their given Western names, Mary and Julie. In my Japanese-language book, I use their original Japanese names, Teruko and Yuriko, and I continued doing so in the English edition.

Jundai Yamada
Tokyo, Japan

Acknowledgments

My journey of discovery with Kotsuji Setsuzo has been filled with fortuitous meetings and discoveries, a continuous series of surprises that were hard to imagine, let alone anticipate.

I would like to give my thanks here to the people whom I have met, and who have assisted me in countless ways throughout this exploration.

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Foreword

Rabbi Dr. Meir Soloveichik

A bestselling book by psychologist Robert Cialdini is titled *Pre-Suasion: A Revolutionary Way to Influence and Persuade*. In the midst of this very non-Jewish volume, which has been translated into forty languages, we are suddenly given a picture from 1941 of two rabbis from Eastern Europe who found themselves in front of the Japanese foreign ministry in Tokyo. They were two of the leaders from a group of thousands of yeshiva students, who had been given a transit visa by the Japanese Consul in Kovno (Kaunas), Chiune Sugihara, allowing them to flee across Europe and Asia, arriving in Kobe, Japan. Two of those Jews were my maternal grandparents, Rabbi Shmuel Dovid and Nachama Warshavchik.

Meanwhile, Germany was allied with Japan; and as Cialdini writes:

> The Nazis had sent Josef Meisinger, a colonel in the Gestapo known as the "Butcher of Warsaw" for ordering the execution of sixteen thousand Poles, to Tokyo. Upon his arrival in April 1941, Meisinger

> began pressing for a policy of brutality toward the Jews under Japan's rule – a policy he stated he would gladly help design and enact. Uncertain at first of how to respond and wanting to hear all sides, high-ranking members of Japan's military government called upon the Jewish refugee community to send two leaders to a meeting that would influence their future significantly.

Thus, two rabbis came down from Kobe to Tokyo, and in what must have seemed a surreal moment, met with the Japanese generals. The rabbis received an utterly unanswerable question: Tell us, why do the Nazis hate you so much? One of the rabbis was frozen, terrified, but the second, Rabbi Shimon Kalisch, known as the Amshinover Rebbe, remained calm. As Cialdini describes, he delivered a response to the Japanese generals:

> Rabbi Kalisch's knowledge of human nature had equipped him to deliver the most impressive persuasive communication I have encountered in over thirty years of studying the process: "Because," he said calmly, "we are Asian, like you."
>
> The older rabbi's response had a powerful effect on the Japanese officers. After a silence, they conferred among themselves and announced a recess. When they returned, the most senior military official rose and granted the reassurance the rabbis had hoped to bring home to their community: "Go back to your people. Tell them we will provide for their safety and peace. You have nothing to fear while in Japanese territory." And so it was.

"We are Asian, like you." The story is true, famous, striking, and amusing. But it also embodies a very serious point. The Land of Israel is poised between East and West, and in a certain sense its worldview of the human person can be seen as a balance between the two. The modern West has emphasized the individual, endowed with rights; the East, as anyone who has traveled there will see, has a greater focus on the collective, on duties. Judaism has always sought to synthesize these elements, to celebrate the human individual while reminding us of what each of us owes to others. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks recalled a fascinating conversation

with the great historian Paul Johnson, writing that he asked him "what had struck him most about Judaism" during the long period he spent researching it for his masterly *A History of the Jews*:

> He replied in roughly these words: There have been, in the course of history, societies that emphasised the individual – like the secular West today. And there have been others that placed weight on the collective. Judaism, he continued, was the most successful example he knew of that managed the delicate balance between both – giving equal weight to individual and collective responsibility. This, he said, was very rare and difficult, and constituted one of our greatest achievements. It was a wise and subtle observation. Without knowing it, he had in effect paraphrased Hillel's aphorism, "If I am not for myself, who will be (individual responsibility)? But if I am only for myself, what am I (collective responsibility)?"

This is a wonderful point, and in truth, Hillel's most famous mantra is not only about responsibility, but also about identity. We each have the potential, and the obligation, to develop our unique gifts, to allow our individual "I" to emerge; but at the same time, if I see my "I," my very self, as atomistic, alone, unimpacted by others, there would be no "I" at all. For in truth, every one of us is who we are in part because of the sacrifices of others, in the past or present. To focus solely on one's own life in one's self-understanding is to only see part of the picture.

It is with this in mind that we may appreciate the fact that the photograph featured in Cialdini's book is incomplete, cut off; in the original photo, there is a Japanese gentleman standing to one side of Rabbi Kalisch. This is Setsuzo Kotsuji, whose tale is told in this extraordinary autobiography. As important as Sugihara's lifesaving visas were, they expressly permitted only transit through Japan, and it was through Kotsuji's efforts that the Jewish stay in Japan was extended, week after week, month after month. Those, such as Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz, who had encountered Kotsuji in Japan, knew well what they owed to this man, which is why they so ardently embraced him decades later when this Japanese hero embraced Judaism.

But few remember this story today. Thus, in a striking way, this photographic lacuna captures the way in which, as the story of the Jews in Japan is told, he has been largely, inexplicably, inexcusably out of the picture. The fiftieth anniversary of Kotsuji's passing went largely unnoticed as well in the larger Jewish world, and his name would inspire recognition among a paltry few.

This would be profoundly regrettable even had he written nothing about his story; but in fact he has left us this book, *From Tokyo to Jerusalem,* that is so much more than a memoir; it is, in a certain sense a religious classic, the story of a man raised in the religion of his ancestors, who ultimately turned to the Jewish faith while still retaining a deep respect for his own Japanese past. All these aspects of a biography unlike any other made up the "I" that was Setsuzo Kostuji; all these elements merged together to form one of the great heroic personalities of the twentieth century. And now that his memoir has been republished, Kotsuji's tale can finally receive the recognition it deserves.

"We are Asian, like you"; Kotsuji was truly an Asian Jew, and the magic of the memoir is the way in which he embraced the faith, and the people, of Abraham, while his Japanese heritage continued to inspire his story. "I was raised," he tells us, "in that ancient religion of Shinto, a religion existing already at the dawn of the history of Japan." His family, it was said, dated "back to 678 AD, when the Kamo shrine in the Kamo section of Kyoto was dedicated." By his generation, the Kotsujis were no longer priests, but his father did dedicate himself, and then train his son Setsuzo, to perform for the family one of the major rites of Shinto, the "lighting of the sacred fire." His discovery of the Bible, and his informing his parents that he could no longer perform the rituals of his ancestors, inspired a striking reply, communicated by his mother:

> Your father admits that you are doing well these days. He thinks it may be due to the book you are so eagerly reading. He says that if this is so, it must be an excellent book and the religion in it is good. And if God is only One, he would have it only that way. You may go ahead with your new faith. Only remember your ancestors, and be proud of your great heritage.

"Remember your ancestors." This Kotsuji did, even as he became the only Hebrew scholar in Japan, a man who sought out Jews to share with them his love of their people's story, and who ultimately risked his own wellbeing to help Jews in crisis, and to defend Judaism from its detractors. He did this selflessly, motivated both by his own original heritage and the Hebrew Scripture that had changed his life. In perhaps the most important passage in the book, one which informs us profoundly as to who he was, Kotsuji tells us his two sources of inspiration in deciding to take action, the *Bushido*, the Samurai moral code his parents had taught him, and the Tanakh, as he writes:

> I was determined, however, that I would do what I could and use what influence I had to help. There is a *Bushido* saying which goes, "It is cowardice not to do, seeing one ought"; running away from trouble went against the grain of my youthful samurai-trained notions of honor and pride. Further supporting me were words of the Old Testament: "Grass dries up, and shoots will wither, but the word of our God stands firm; always."

We must pause to ponder the passage, to marvel at the merging of two different cultures and traditions in this one man, in this act of heroism; two codes commanded him, the Bible and *Bushido*, Scripture and samurai, the small boy merging with the profound moral man he was.

Here we have a man raised to honor his ancestral heritage but who cherished the Scripture of Israel; a man who knew Japanese and Hebrew; a man who loved Abraham's journey, and suddenly found Jews on a miraculous journey of their own; a man inspired to act by the combination of samurai sayings and Semitic Scripture; a man who paved his own unique path and suddenly was perfectly providentially positioned to help thousands of others in one precise moment. Do I not owe him gratitude as a descendant of those Jews, to include Kotsuji in the picture that is my own life, my own sense of self? If Kotsuji is cut out of the picture of Cialdini's book, if he is largely unknown, does that not make me all the more obligated to include him in the picture that is my own family history? And am I not obligated to do

what I can to ensure that this tale, one so Japanese and so Jewish, is told in both Japan and the Jewish world?

Fortunately, there is already a moral beacon in Japan that has begun that task. The Jewish obligation of gratitude lies at the heart of the story of Kotsuji that is told by Jundai Yamada, whose own incredible examination of Kotsuji's legacy is also chronicled in this volume. Jundai has sold thousands of copies of his book, his Japanese account of Kotsuji's heroism, and here it is finally presented in English. In the book, he describes his striking visit to the daughter of Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz, Rivka Ezrachi, who remembered the celebratory gathering in Jerusalem following Kotsuji's conversion:

> "My father talked about Kotsuji all the time," she said. "My father always felt *hakarat hatov* toward Kotsuji, and also to the many other Japanese people who helped them. He always said he would never forget what they did for us."
>
> …When Rivka told this story, her husband began to speak in Hebrew, which Rivka interpreted for me. "*Hakarat hatov* means gratitude in English. This is a very precious word in our religion. When we wake up in the morning, we are thankful that we have been given another day to live. This is what gratitude means for us. It's very important."
>
> Waking up in the morning. This is something most of us take for granted. But he said to be thankful for each morning. I wonder how many people really feel gratitude for just waking up in the morning?

These remarkable reflections by Jundai Yamada were written before October 7, and they resonate even more at this moment. The past many months have been difficult ones for the Jewish people, but the courage, and resilience, reflected in Israel and the Jewish world have made manifest what even the enemies of the Jews have noted about us – that we love life, that we well understand its fragility, and that we therefore place gratitude at the heart of Jewish existence. That Kotsuji himself would devote his life to Judaism and the Jewish people, and help protect so many, is thus a great source of gratitude, one of the remarkable

ways in which Providence has revealed itself in Jewish history. That a distinguished actor from Japan would be so moved by this story that he would travel the world to research it, and work to tell it to his countrymen, is a miracle all its own.

This past, unforgettable summer, I visited Japan with my family, and – thanks to Andrew Saidel, who has also devotedly dedicated himself to preserving Kotsuji's legacy – I had the very good fortune, and the very great blessing, of becoming friends with Jundai Yamada. At one point, as we discussed all things Kotsuji, Jundai reached into his bag and pulled out an object, holding it forth as he asked me what it was.

It was what Jews call a mezuza; a sacred scroll containing some of the most famous verses of Deuteronomy, contained in a case. I explained to Jundai the nature of a mezuza, and how Jews traditionally see it as a sign of God's protection. Jundai, in turn, told me that he had received this mezuza from Kotsuji's daughter – to whom Jundai had introduced me this summer – who had told him to affix it to his door.

This small moment is emblazoned in my mind, a brief episode embodying the tale told in tandem by the two Japanese men in this volume. Setsuzo Kotsuji was himself a mezuza to countless Jews, a providential protector of thousands, a man who came to lavish love on the Hebrew letters inscribed inside, and whose own life was defined by the central creed placed by Jews on their doors across millennia: *Listen, Israel: the Lord our God – the Lord is one.* Today, the tale of Abraham Kotsuji is being told thanks to Jundai Yamada, who had held Kotsuji's mezuza in his hand, and has affixed it to his door. And, as I close my preface to this remarkable book, my *hakarat hatov* to them both is overwhelming.

From Tokyo to Jerusalem

Abraham Setsuzo Kotsuji

To the memory of my parents

My Spiritual Journey

It was September 20, 1959. I lay on the operating table of the Shaare Zedek Hospital in Jerusalem. Dr. Nahum Cook stood at my side, a scalpel in his hand, prepared to perform the ritual of circumcision.

"What am I doing here?" I asked myself. "I am sixty years old, a Japanese, the descendant of a long line of Shinto lords, priests of the Imperial Household of Japan. What brought me to this place? Why did I come to this one spot in the world, surmounting such odds as few men have surmounted in a lifetime?"

This book was written to answer these questions for myself as well as for those who have wondered at how a Japanese found and took to his heart the God of the Old Testament.

It was Bernard Geis, my publisher [of the original edition, 1964], who urged me to write my story. To him I shall be forever grateful. I would like to express my deepest gratitude, too, to James Collier for his invaluable assistance in the preparation of this book. And to Mineko, my wife, and Mary and Julie, my children, who provided for my spiritual journey their patience, warmth, and understanding.

Abraham Kotsuji

Chapter One

The eight-year-old Japanese boy and his father stand before a shrine in Kyoto, an important town in central Japan, about 250 miles from Tokyo. It is one of the hundreds of top-ranking shrines in Kyoto. It is May 15, the festival of the Kamo Shrine. The boy is excited. He has seen the steady parade of relatives in and out of the house all day, eating and drinking lavishly. He has seen the fire-red carpets spread over the *tatami* sleeping mats, and the *manmaku* curtain with the family crest gracefully dyed on it stretched across the latticed front of the house. He has walked out with his father, partly to exercise their taut stomachs but mainly to visit the Kamo Shrine. They clap hands and bow reverentially before the shrine. The boy is moved by the solemnity of the occasion. The father takes advantage of the moment.

"Setschan," he says quietly, "it is time that you knew of our ancestors who served here for 1,400 years."

The boy is puzzled. "Served? Served how?"

"They were chief priests of this temple."

The boy is astonished. "Priests?"

"Yes."

"But why are we no longer priests, father?"

It is difficult to explain to an eight-year-old. "We did not give up our priesthood, precisely. Neither I, nor Grandfather. In ancient days we, the Kotsuji family, were a celebrated priest-clan. But then…times changed."

The boy is serious, only half comprehending. "Where did the ancient days go, father?"

The father smiles. "The old days can never come back, except in the mind."

"How, father?"

"Look up and close your eyes," the father says.

And so, the father and son stand together in the ancient shrine, eyes closed, concentrating solely on the eternal silence and tranquility prevailing in the sanctuary. The noisy festival crowd, the present day is gone. They contemplate the glory of ancient days. Then, together, they open their eyes, and Setschan turns a shy face to his father. The father's face is dignified, but affectionate.

Then the moment was over. Yet it was never over, for it remained with the boy for almost sixty years. In one sense, the father was wrong. True, the ancient days cannot return; yet in a way the boy, after the pilgrimage of a lifetime, has gone back to the ancient days.

I was that boy. I was raised in the ancient religion of Shinto, a religion existing already at the dawn of the history of Japan. Over the fifty-odd years of my life from my early adolescence, as scholar, as teacher, but mostly as seeker, I groped my way through Shinto, searching, always searching, for a religious resting place. I found it on the twentieth of September, 1959, when I entered the covenant of Abraham through the solemn rite of circumcision in Jerusalem, to become, to my knowledge, the first Japanese convert to Judaism. This is the story of that search.

I was born on February 3, 1899. By the old calendar of feudal Japan, February 3 was New Year's Eve. It is called Setsu-bun, a word meaning "the season," the opening of spring. Accordingly, I was named Setsuzo – the third day of the season. Affectionately, my parents called me Setschan. To some who are close to me I have been Setschan ever since.

My mother, whom I resemble, stood five feet five inches, tall for a Japanese woman. Her name was Fukuko. Her eyes were deep set, which

annoyed her vanity, for most Japanese women have relatively flat eye sockets. Like Japanese women of her time, she was not highly educated. She made up for her poor education with a stubborn intelligence. She would argue her points against anyone. Once she even did battle with a Doctor of Law, who finally had to confess he was wrong.

My father, Kisabro, was stout, of medium height, and both strong and healthy. He never once visited a doctor throughout his entire life. His nose was large for a Japanese, and his lips had a Caucasian thickness. A reserved man, he felt that it was the mother's business to distribute affection, the father's to demonstrate dignity and present an example for the children to emulate. I was close to him only on a few occasions in my life, and as a child I regretted his reserve, what seemed to me then a lack of love.

I should not have complained, perhaps. My brothers insisted that I was my mother's pet, and in truth she was always proud of me, always boasting of me.

My father did not have to earn a living. We were upperclass people. In the Japan of that time class was established by family lineage, not by property, or money. As members of an old family descending 1,400 years through a line of Shinto priests, we stood high in the social hierarchy. My father lived from his inheritance. He spent his time in horticulture, practicing the traditional and difficult Japanese art of growing dwarf plants.[1] He was, moreover, a scholar of Classic Chinese, and of course he worshipped often at the Shinto shrines which dotted the city of Kyoto.

I was the baby of the family. There were, besides me, my eldest brother, Genjiro, ten years older than me, who became a brilliant mathematics student; my second brother, Kiknoske, who survived a series of misfortunes to become a self-taught genius at the classic art of the Japanese Noh-play; my older sister, Mitsu, who died in a street-car accident; and a second sister, Hisako, who married into a wealthy Tokyo family.

I recall the dawn of my life not as a consecutive sequence of events, but as a series of isolated pictures or images, like magic lantern slides projected onto the wall of a darkened room. I can hardly call them memories.

1. In Japan horticulture of this sort is not mere gardening but is virtually considered on a level with music and painting.

At my age it seems as if the events they picture happened not to me, but to somebody else. Thus, it is more fitting for me to tell the early part of my story in the third person.

The first of these images is symbolic and prophetic. The baby Setschan is perhaps four. He sees two flickering lights – whether they are oil lamps or candles he cannot tell. He hears a voice reciting words unintelligible to his small mind, but recognizable as the voice of his father. The image is of a pair of oil lamps, wavering on the Shinto altar, and the voice is the short prayer of evening. The image will haunt Setschan for the rest of his life. He need merely recall it to invoke a mood of solemnity, of awe, a deep religious feeling which neither teacher nor preacher could ever have taught him.

The lantern projects another image. The custom then was for the mother to carry the child on her back, his legs spread as if he were riding a horse. Setschan remembers one woman whose back meant something special to him. Once he found himself being carried on a different back. He grew enormously unhappy and wept. No matter what divertisement the poor, harassed woman offered him, he wept for many hours. Finally, she grew angry and demanded, "What is making you so unhappy?" He simply cried harder, for Setschan was a stubborn and moody boy. At last, the woman whose back he loved and so yearned for ran to rescue the wretched child. The woman could only have been his mother. The compassion she poured on the forlorn little soul made up for his distress. The emotions born from this incident have had an unfathomable influence on the man Setschan grew to be. The longing for a religious home and the inexorable search for it which shaped the whole of Setschan's life is paralleled by the passionate yearning for the comfort of the familiar back.

It also reveals the stubborn set of Setschan's mind. His mother held to the notion that the child should not be corrected away from home, especially when he was on an outing. Scolding could wait; during the expedition the chance for a moment of pleasure should not be denied the child. Even for rude behavior she admonished softly and moderately.

One day, when Setschan was three or four, she took him downtown. They were happily walking along, hand in hand, when Setschan was suddenly attracted by a window full of display ornaments. The centerpiece was a mammoth model steamship, perhaps three feet long, and perfect

in all details. Setschan stopped dead on the sidewalk, absorbed and enchanted by the wondrous object.

"Mama, I want that ship."

She tugged his hand to make him move along. "This ship is not to be sold. It is only for display."

"I want it."

"Perhaps we can find another ship to buy sometime." She tugged at his hand again. "Come with me now."

"No. No, this ship, this ship, only this ship."

She gave in, beaten by his implacable will. They entered the shop, and she asked the price. The salesman explained that the ship was not for sale but meant only for display. However, he said he would be glad to let it go for fifty yen.

The mother was astonished and dismayed by the price. Fifty yen was equal to several hundred American dollars. It was impossible for her to buy the ship, and she told the boy so. The boy stood firm. "See the dancing doll," she said. "Look, over here, Setschan." But he would not be diverted. Crying and howling, he was dragged from the store. He clutched at an iron rail running along the window where the beautiful ship was displayed, continuing to scream as his mother attempted to drag him away. A crowd collected; the mother was embarrassed and abashed. Finally, she broke his grip on the pipe and, half in tears herself, carried him still struggling down the street to a toy shop, where numberless small boats lay on their sides on the shelves. None of them would do. His mother despaired. Then all at once, the boy's eye lit upon a monkey doll. "I want that," he said.

Weak with relief, the mother bought it for him immediately. The price – roughly equivalent to fifteen dollars – was not insignificant. The doll was cheaper than the ship, however, and it taught the mother a lesson which she later repeated to the child: "To be a captain or a monkey-keeper is all the same to a child."

At the age of five Setschan was prepared for kindergarten. This posed a problem, for, incredibly, the boy had not yet been weaned from his mother's breast. Japanese children at that time were usually suckled for two years – a system that still exists in many parts of the world. Long breast feeding has the advantage of nurturing a natural affection between

mother and child; at the same time, it hinders the growth of an independent child. In any case, Setschan's mother had nursed him far too long. He had to be weaned before he could enter kindergarten. Even today he remembers this. Although he cannot recall the precise taste of the milk, he remembers the sweet pleasure of the suckling and his assumption that somehow life would go on this way forever.

It did not. One day, as his mother sat on her folded knees, as Japanese do, Setschan climbed up to ride her legs as a horse, and then, as was his habit, he opened her kimono to suck. A hard, bitter taste flooded his mouth. Shocked, surprised, and hurt, he burst into tears.

He was tasting dried carp's liver, an old-fashioned medicine used in Japan at the time, which his mother had made into a paste and smeared on her nipples. As he stared up at her, his small face contorted with unhappiness, she said gently, "From now on Mamma's milk will be bitter, Setschan. Instead, you will get cow's milk, and I shall give you candies. It is time to go to kindergarten. The other children will laugh at you if you are still sucking at your mother's breast."

There is a saying, "A good medicine tastes bitter." Perhaps in this case it was true. Nonetheless, the shock of the experience, and the consequent lesson that happiness does not last forever, remained with Setschan for the rest of his life.

But Setschan was not finished with pre-kindergarten surprises. He needed various things for his first trip out into the world: new kimonos, woolen European-style shorts, sandals, shoes, and a small leather bag for his books and paper.

His father took him to a large leather shop to purchase the bag. The brutish smell of leather assailed his nostrils, and he knew for the first time the primitive raising of the hackles, the instinctive signal to beware. Setschan had never played with other children; the rude smell of leather – which even today he can remember – raised his fear of facing for the first time a band of other children.

But he went to kindergarten, and not only survived, but grew to enjoy it. He sang, studied, and during lunch hour he played games. The favorite game among the kindergarten children was "Genji and Heike," Japanese "Cowboys and Indians." The Genji were the "good ones." This game tells us something about the meaning of shame among the Japanese. The

power struggle between the Genji and Heike families, both descended from emperors, which erupted into war for control of Japan in the twelfth century provides the historical background of the game. It was a period when warriors wore highly colored armor, swords, and sheaths of splendid workmanship inlaid with gold and silver, and bows made by great artists. The war has always captured the imagination of the Japanese, much as the battles of King Arthur have fascinated the West, and it particularly enticed the boys in Setschan's kindergarten, for Kyoto had been the country's capital at the time of the struggle.

At the beginning of the game several white Genji flags and several red Heike flags were placed in a basket. The white flags of the Genji were of course most desirable, since by the rules of the game the Genji must win. Thus when the boys were released for lunch, there was a wild scramble for the white flags. Psychologically, the red flag holders were beaten before they started. As play continued from day to day it began to take on a realistic tone, as if the emotions of the original struggle had come to life again. The whites grew unruly and began to oppress the losers. They began to punish the reds, to badger them physically, to make them cry. It was, however, not so much the physical damage as the shame of defeat that made the losers weep. Ultimately, when the schoolteachers realized what was happening, the game was stopped, and the flag basket was taken away. But this did not happen before Setschan took his turn with the red flags. The bitterness of this experience impressed his malleable mind with the conviction that sympathy must be extended to the less favored. His later learning made this ideal a permanent part of his view of life.

Setschan was beginning to know life: victory and defeat, happiness and despair. He was now to learn the harder lessons of love and death.

There lived, in his neighborhood, an unforgettably beautiful girl with soft hair and an exquisite voice. Her name was Ren, and Setschan called her O-Renchan. It became O-Renchan's custom to visit Setschan at his house every Sunday, arriving early in the morning and staying until noon, when someone came to take her home for lunch. One Sunday, when she had come as usual, nobody came for her at noontime. The two children, overjoyed, ate lunch together, and played nearly until dusk before O-Renchan had to go. She promised to come again the

following Sunday. She failed to appear – not that Sunday, nor any Sunday after. Then Setschan overheard his father and mother whispering in their bedroom. They were saying that O-Renchan was dead; they were saying that Setschan should not be told, for he was a sensitive child.

Setschan did not quite understand death. He knew, though, that it was a very serious matter, for it had prevented O-Renchan from visiting him. Feeling as though he had been put under a taboo, he slipped away to another room, where he collapsed, curiously exhausted, on a *tatami* mat. After a while he heard his mother, aware of his sudden silence, looking for him. When she came upon him, she ran to him crying, "What is the matter, my son?"

He said nothing. She took him up on her knees and gave him a compassionate embrace. Slowly, the love flowing from her warmed the coldness in his soul and brought him back from his anguish. But the pain long remained, for he had poured all his love and affection onto the beautiful O-Renchan.

Life for the small boy was not, however, all sorrow and tragedy. Japan is a nation given to festive and traditional holidays. Kyoto, with its enormous number of Buddhist and Shinto shrines, is particularly rich in traditional gaiety. In the Japan of the time, a religious holiday was usually the signal for a joyous, happy occasion. The solemnity which accompanies Christian holidays, such as Good Friday or even Easter, is largely absent from Shinto ceremony. Parishioners of a Shinto shrine usually live nearby. On a festival day, long curtains or cloths bearing the family crest were stretched across the front of the home. Sometimes the latticework face of the house was removed, opening the rooms directly onto the street. The children dressed up. The parents tried to keep from scolding them, at least for that day; usually the children got a bit of pocket money – the boys for tops, the girls for paper balloons. Vast quantities of festival foods, usually various kinds of dried fish and special vegetables, were prepared and served to the friends and relatives who dropped in, with unlimited quantities of the beery rice wine, sake.

Then, when all were thoroughly full, they dressed in costumes of ancient tradition and paraded through the streets carrying the gilded and decorated portable shrine which had been removed from the main shrine altar. Before them went the musicians dressed in the costumes of

old-time noblemen, playing ancient music on reed pipes, small drums, and cymbals. Ultimately the long, colorful procession arrived at the shrine just as the sun dropped behind its ancient roof, and the music rose to a crescendo.

Such a festival could hardly avoid leaving a mark on the young boy's mind. Setschan was fascinated by the color, the noise, the ancient grace, caught up with a feeling that somehow, he was reliving an experience out of the great past.

Another traditional event which Setschan experienced for the first time in the autumn of his fifth year was what the Japanese called the mushroom hunt. The town of Kyoto is surrounded by low hills. In October a kind of mushroom called *matsutake*, or pine mushroom, can be gathered on certain of the hills which are thickly covered with red pine trees. Customarily a group rents one of the hills and hunts mushrooms for an entire festival day. The person who collects the most mushrooms is awarded a mock prize. He is allowed to sit next to the prettiest girl, or perhaps choose the prettiest of the group. Amid laughter and merriment, volunteers slip down the hillside and scoop up the water which flows under the layer of decayed pine needles blanketing the slope. Boiled in this water, rice and the meat of chicken they have brought along has a heart-soothing, exotic taste. Then, as the sun goes down, the whole group troops in a single file slowly down the narrow hillside path heading for home. Setschan's first mushroom hunt took place in beautiful autumn weather; Setschan remembers with happiness the softness of the air and the bright blue of the sky.

Another pleasant memory of that autumn was the annual athletic meet of Setschan's school – a kind of kindergarten Olympics. The boys race fifteen or twenty feet only, and all get a paper flag of the rising sun as a prize, regardless of how fast they run. What Setschan remembers is that he did a great deal of running.

These events in the life of one small child were being played out against a far larger event – one of tremendous importance to Japan. Forty years later, it was to have considerable effect on Setschan's life. Russia had been moving into Korea and Manchuria, territory the Japanese considered under their sphere of influence. The Japanese offered to negotiate, but Russia, already a major world power, was confident that she

could defeat so small a country as Japan and therefore refused to negotiate. On February 6, 1904, the Japanese broke off diplomatic relations with Russia. Two days later, without prior declaration of war, Russia attacked the Chinese fortress Port Arthur, the terminus of the Manchurian railroad. It was an ancient town strategically located at the tip of the Liaotung Peninsula, a finger which sticks down between Korea and the north coast of China.

Belated declarations of war appeared on February 10. The whole country boiled with anger. Caught up in the excitement, children ceased their normal play and turned to games of war. On hillsides, in and out of bushes, they charged across their battlefields. Casting lots by the old Japanese method of scissors, paper, and stone, the children picked one lucky boy to be a gallant and isolated Japanese soldier. The rest were "Roskies." Over the long afternoon the Roskies would fall on the slopes one by one, until the gallant, isolated, and finally victorious Japanese soldier was the only one left.

But the real war was not so simple. Bottling up the Russian fleet, the Japanese gained a few quick victories, broke into Port Arthur, and then settled down to a siege of the fortified high point, Height 203, named after the meter markings on the military maps. These battles brought the Japanese face to face with machine guns for the first time. They did not understand them; they thought that the Russians were using some kind of magic, for every time they heard the ferocious sound of rolling drums, soldiers died where they stood. Nonetheless, they did not panic, determined to die bravely. The fighting was bloody and exhausting. On July 6, 1904, a special suicide unit flung themselves three times against Height 203, suffering enormous losses in vain; among the dead were two sons of the Japanese General Nogi.

For the people of Japan, the month of November was very dark. The people gave up the luxury of pleasure, bending their whole spirit toward the fighting at Port Arthur. Finally, after great losses, the southwestern portion of the height was taken. Then boredom and exhaustion set in on both sides. Russian and Japanese soldiers were often separated only by the thin iron wall of the stronghold which the Russians were defending. One day some Russians pushed a bottle of transparent liquid through a gap in the iron of the stronghold. Startled Japanese soldiers handled it

warily, fearful that it might be explosive. Veteran soldiers, however, realized that it was vodka. Thereafter men of both armies exchanged food and drink. It became clear to General Nogi that his troops had lost their fighting spirit, and he called for a new army, which arrived in December. The mood of the people was heavy, and even little Setschan, listening to the adults talk, became aware of an atmosphere of foreboding. Luxuries were curtailed, and daily another man from the neighborhood was conscripted.

The Japanese attack on Height 203 began on December 5, 1904. Early in the morning thousands of soldiers observed the last sake-drinking rite, a tradition dating back to knightly days. Then they rose, charging to the high wall which divided them from the Russians and leapt over it. The Russian machine guns began to explode, but from the Japanese who leapt over the wall there was an odd silence. As more and more men poured over the wall, the terrible machine guns roared, and the odd silence of the Japanese continued. It was the silence of death. On the other side of the wall the Russians had driven swords and spears into the ground. As the Japanese soldiers streamed over the wall, they were skewered like fish on the sharp spears, and machine-gunned where they fell. It was only when the mound of corpses reached a height of six feet that the remaining troops could tramp over the backs of their dead comrades and sweep the Russians out of the fortress.

With the fall of Height 203, Port Arthur was doomed, and on the third of February – little Setschan's birthday – the Russian commanding officer, Stessel, handed over to General Nogi the guns, warships, arms, ammunition, horses – the whole of the military force of Port Arthur. The Emperor, hearing from General Nogi how gallantly the Russians had fought, allowed Russian officers to keep their swords and soldier straps. This was a typical example of Japanese war etiquette, a remnant of the feudal code of samurai chivalry. In the traditional samurai code, no enemy leader would be beheaded; but he would be permitted to undergo the rite of *seppuku*, the self-immolation called *hara-kiri* in the West.

Important as the victory of Port Arthur was, it was taken soberly by the people at home, for it had cost the lives of ten thousand veteran troops. Conscription age was raised, and raised again, until it reached the age of forty-five. Setschan saw the father of a kindergarten playmate

disappear into the army, and never return. He grew uneasy for his own father. He saw two of his uncles called to the battlefield. His uneasiness increased. One day he timidly approached his father.

"Father, will they make you a soldier?"

"Perhaps. Perhaps not. You see, I am the first son. The first-born son need not go, so that the family lineage can remain continuous.[2] Do you understand, Setschan?"

Setschan felt relieved.

"But if there is another big battle like Height 203, even first-born sons may have to be soldiers."

Setschan's face grew anxious.

"Setschan," the father said softly, touched by the boy's concern, "if I must go to war, you will offer the holy fire in my place. Will you be sure to remember, Setschan?"

The boy nodded.

"As long as you do it, God is with you."

"Father… "

"And God will be with me also and support me… in Manchuria."

Setschan began to weep silently, tears pouring from his eyes, as he struggled not to cry out. The father's eyes moistened. Then suddenly Setschan could stand it no longer. Crying "No, no, no, no," he burst into full tears, and charged into his father's belly, his face contorted with the expression of a raging beast, the sobs choking his breath away. Even when O-Renchan had died, he had not felt this anguish.

His father comforted him. Then he led him to the altar and showed him how to kindle the oil lamp.

This was a significant event in Setschan's religious life. The offering of the sacred fire is one of the major rites in Shinto. The lamp is a simple, shallow dish about three inches in diameter. It is made of unglazed pottery, which means that the tradition dates to the period before ceramic art was well developed. It is filled with oil, and the pith of a kind of rush, weighted to keep it upright, is floated on the oil. Several ritual methods

2. The Japanese of that time believed that lineage was transferred through the first-born son; for that reason, first-born sons were especially valued in the family and the community.

are used for lighting the lamp. The simplest and most common method is to place a bit of cattail or rush on a flint and strike it with steel. The sparks ignite the bit of rush, which is then used to light a sulfur stick, which in turn is used to light the sacred fire in the lamp. The method is not easy, but it is considered sacrilegious to use matches to light the sacred fire. The technique, of course, was too difficult for the six-year-old Setschan; it was years before he mastered it. Fortunately, his father was not conscripted, and there was no need for him to learn to light the fire in a hurry.

Setschan's father remained fearful that he would be called up, and for the next several months he made special efforts to indoctrinate Setschan in the Shinto heritage, helping him to learn the prayers by rote. He took the boy to various shrines after sunset to pray at the altar in the darkness. Setschan stood a few feet behind his father, watching two dim lights flicker from afar at the inner altar. Setschan was mature enough to realize that in the event of his father's death, he would be expected to carry on the ancestral tradition. Yet fear for his father's life cast a shadow over his understanding of the Shinto religion and planted the doubts that were to cause him so much distress in later years.

After the fall of Port Arthur, Japan moved rapidly from victory to victory. On March 10, 1905, General Oyama captured Mukden, the ancient capital city of Manchuria, along with five hundred cannon and two hundred thousand Russian troops. The people of Kyoto normally celebrate the blossoming of the plum trees with sake parties in March. Overjoyed by the coincidence of the coming of spring and the great victory, they paraded through the streets night after night shouting, singing, and carrying paper lanterns. On May 27 and 28, Admiral Togo destroyed the Russian Baltic fleet in the Tsushima Straits, which run between Japan and Korea. The tide of victory ran with the Japanese, but the country's forces were nearly exhausted, and when President Theodore Roosevelt offered to negotiate a peace settlement, the Japanese were glad to accept. Diplomats from Russia and Japan met at Portsmouth, New Hampshire. The Japanese demanded a huge indemnity for the losses they had suffered, together with the Russian island of Sakhalin. The Russians balked, and eventually Roosevelt persuaded the Japanese – who were not in a condition to continue the struggle in

any case – to settle for half of Sakhalin, and no indemnity. But when the treaty was signed on September 5, the people, who had hoped for reparations to relieve them of the ponderous tax burden the war had imposed on them, grew violently angry. In Tokyo, mass meetings took place in front of Hibiya Park and Shintomi Theater. The mobs went on to burn some official buildings and a few street cars. Unappeased, they vented their hatred of President Roosevelt on Christians in general, destroying a number of Christian churches. Setschan's older brother, now sixteen, read this news to the young boy. He decided that the people of Tokyo must have lost their minds, since the people of Kyoto found the incident unbelievable.

In the long run, the reparations were of little import, for the effects of the Russo-Japanese war on Setschan, Japan, and indeed the world at large were enormous. Russia, its morale broken, moved directly from war to the 1905 revolution, a preview of the Communist revolution in 1917. Japan emerged from the war a world power. Unfortunately, the grasp of the militarist clique over the country had been very much strengthened.

A prophetic incident occurred to Setschan during the war. A household servant – a young girl of thirteen named O-Yoshi, whom he liked very much – had taken him out for a walk, when suddenly they came upon twenty red-bearded Russian prisoners of war in nondescript uniforms. The Russians were in the care of a young Japanese officer.

"Are they Roskies?" the boy called in a loud voice.

"Shush," hushed the girl, frightened that a Rosky might hear him and become angry. "It is not good manners to ask questions like that so loud," she whispered in his ear.

The Japanese officer began calling the prisoners' roll. One of the names called was "Kagan." It was Kagan who, a few moments later, when the roll call was completed, approached the pretty maidservant and the small boy with a smile and handed Setschan a bit of pound cake and patted him on his head. Then, as they marched away again, looking sad and disgraced, Setschan watched them, feeling sorry for the soldier named Kagan who had been kind to him.

Kagan is the Russian word for Cohen. Unknowing, Setschan had made his first, prophetic contact with the Jewish people.