

Meigen, Kakugen – Sayings of Famous People

By Miriam Davis

Browsing in a bookshop I came across

名言格言がわかる本

by 国語学習研究会著(こくごがくしゅうけん きゅうかいちよ) at ¥1,300 and published by メイツ出版(しゅつぱん) in December 2004.

This book introduces 100 sayings by well-known people, both Japanese and non Japanese, in an easily understandable form for Japanese elementary school children. Each saying is used in a simple cartoon illustrating its meaning, followed by an explanatory paragraph. The colorful format with lots of pictures, large characters and lots of furigana on Kanji make this an excellent resource for intermediate students of Japanese and above, as long as you don't mind the content of the cartoons being aimed at grade school children. In the first section you will find sayings by a variety of people like Tolstoy on love, Clark of Hokkaido University, Archimedes, Socrates and Winston Churchill.

On page 13 a quote from the opening of the Heike Monogatari reflects the sudden changes in the ruling Heike family's fortunes in the Kamakura period (1192-1333) but has come to symbolize the Japanese sense of the emptiness and brevity of life, or as the book puts it:

冒頭の有名な一節で、仏教の持つ無常観 (sense of mortality) を見事に表現しています。

祇園精舎の鐘の声諸行無常の響きあり

祇園精舎 is the name given to the temple where Buddha is supposed to have preached. 諸行無常 (everything is transient) とは万物が消滅流転(生まれ変わり変化)してとどまらないという意味です。当時、権勢を誇った平家がたちまちにして滅んだ事を表現したこのは、一節聞く人にいのちのはかなさを感じさせてくれる名言と言えます。

On p17 is Eddison, (inventor of light bulbs, gramophones etc.) to encourage you in your

Japanese language study! Genius is 99% effort and only 1% inspiration!

天才とは99%の努力であり、残りの1%がひらめきである

A quote from Plato (プラトン) (p24) has echoes of Romans 7:14ff without the hope that the Bible supplies.

自分に打ち勝つことは、勝利のうちの最大の物である

この言葉は、自分の内面にある怠惰や食欲と言った悪い気質に足を引っ張られる事の多い人間は、その自らの気質を克服する事が何よりも大切な事であり、また大切なだけに非常に難しいことである、という意味です。どんな人でもついつい自分は甘やかしてしまうもの、自分に厳しくすることは分かっているても難しいものですよ。

The section on sayings of famous people is followed by proverbs grouped by association - with animals, nature, success and defeat, religion, work, time, the body and actions, the heart and numbers. Here are three that brought to mind Scripture references and that could be used in preaching and teaching.

48. 蒔かぬ種は生えぬ

Unless you plant seeds nothing will grow or no results without effort. This can be used in both positive and negative ways.

49. 勝って兜の緒を締めよ

When you have won a victory keep the string of your helmet tied under your neck ready for the next battle. In other words, remain on your guard.

77. 口は禍の門

The mouth is the gate to trouble.

Wanting other sources of sayings in Japanese?

Go to www.jp.omf.org/christian and click on 'Quotes from Famous Christians' for quotes arranged by topic with topic index and vocabulary list.