

Shinzen Weeps at Beauty of Japanese Children's Poem

00:00:00 Because, just as you had to learn the ABCs, every Japanese child has to learn the Iroha.
00:00:12 The Iroha is the traditional ordering of the Japanese script.
00:00:21 Hiragana, are you aware that Japanese language is written in a combination of kanji, which
00:00:29 are Chinese characters, and kana, which are Japanese syllables, syllabary.
00:00:37 There's two kinds of kana, but the one that's normally used is called Hiragana.
00:00:44 The way that school children learn Hiragana is they learn a poem.
00:00:51 A poem that contains each syllable of the Japanese language once and only once.
00:00:59 And that poem is traditionally ascribed to Kobo Daishi, also known as Kukai.
00:01:11 And Kukai was the person who introduced Shingon into Japan from China.
00:01:18 And he developed his linguistic sophistication because he studied a little Sanskrit.
00:01:29 And the Sanskrit, Panini and such, he was, the people in India invented grammar, really.
00:01:39 The world's first scientific grammarian was Panini.
00:01:44 And because Shingon uses mantras a lot, and so they wanted to know Sanskrit, so they actually
00:01:51 learned phonological principles.
00:01:55 They meaning the monks, the Shingon monks.
00:01:57 And they learned it based on Indic notions of linguistics.
00:02:04 So there was an indirect impact all the way from India, all the way to Japan, when the
00:02:18 Japanese written language was first sort of developing in the Heian period.
00:02:23 It was Shingon monks that did it because they had linguistic sophistication.
00:02:29 They created the equivalent of their alphabet.
00:02:34 And so whereas you learn the ABCs, a Japanese child learns this poem.
00:02:43 Iro wa nioedo, chirinuru wo, wagayo tarezo tsunemaru, ui no okuyaba kyo koete, asaki yume
00:03:04 michi e mo sezu.
00:03:05 That contains each syllable of the Japanese language exactly once.
00:03:09 And then you memorize that poem, and you learn the kana that way.
00:03:14 And that's the direct influence of Shingon on the Japanese language, which is absolutely
00:03:19 indelible.
00:03:22 Every Japanese person knows it.
00:03:26 So what does the poem mean?
00:03:30 It's very interesting.
00:03:35 Iro means color, Iro wa nioedo, although the colors are bright, chirinuru wo, the flower
00:03:47 will eventually fall to the ground.
00:03:52 Wagayo, in this world of ours, tarezo, who, tsunemaru, can expect to live forever.
00:04:08 Ui no okuyaba.
00:04:14 Ui is the name of, this is really incredibly beautiful.
00:04:18 Ui is the name of a place, but it's a pun also.
00:04:24 Ui no okuyaba, maybe you know what yama means in Japanese.

00:04:28 What does it mean?

00:04:31 Mountain.

00:04:32 Okuyama means furthest mountains.

00:04:35 So ui no okuyama kyo koete.

00:04:42 Today I crossed over the furthest mountain of ui, but it's a pun because ui also means

00:04:53 sanskrita dharma, as a technical term in Buddhism.

00:04:59 Sanskrita dharma is compounded things.

00:05:04 You've probably heard this, okay?

00:05:07 Things that arise due to causality, anything other than nirvana is a compounded thing.

00:05:14 So ui no okuyama, today, ui no okuyama kyo koete, today crossing the farthest mountain

00:05:23 of the village of ui, asaki yume miji, no longer will I be subject to superficial dreams,

00:05:39 ei moresu, nor will I be intoxicated anymore.

00:05:46 It's a whole talk about impermanence and enlightenment.

00:05:51 That's how every Japanese child learns their alphabet, to this day.

00:05:57 Little if your culture.

00:06:01 You don't want to know what I know.

00:06:10 So ui no okuyama kyo koete, asaki yume miji, ei moresu.