

The Story of Kasa Jizo (kasajizou)

～ Shizu Lee

A Japanese tale adapted and turned into a puppet table play by Shizu Lee for the Star Garden at the Austin Waldorf School

Once upon a time, there lived a poor old man with his wife in a distant place in the mountains. They made a living by weaving straw into rice bags and sandals, which the old man brought to the local villages to sell.

One cold New Year's Eve day, the old man gathered all the bags and sandals that they had made during the whole month, packed them on his back, and started for the nearby village, saying to his wife: "Selling all

of these I'm sure I can buy enough rice for us to make rice cakes for New Year."

It started to snow, but the good old wife couldn't stop her husband from going, so she saw him leave and she prayed that the snow wouldn't get worse and that he would get back home safe and sound.

On his way, the old man passed in front of five Jizo statues that stood silently on the roadside. He looked up at them, and bowing, he said, "Excuse me for having to pass in front of you. You must be cold in this heavy snow." He brushed away the pile of snow that covered their heads.

Arriving at the village, the old man couldn't shake off the image of the five Jizos from his mind. "Oh, they must be shivering. It is so cold outside, those poor fellows." So he sold all the bags and sandals and realized that the money he earned was enough to buy five bamboo hats for the Jizos.

With the hats in hand, he hurried back home happily and, arriving at the Jizos, he was surprised to find out that there were six of them! He couldn't believe his eyes, but there they were... six of them. He brushed away the snow and put on the hats on their heads one by one. When he got to the sixth Jizo, he hesitated for a moment, then took off the piece of cloth he wore as a cap, and covered the head of the sixth Jizo with it, tying it under the Jizo's chin.

Arriving home, his wife came to meet him at the door, smiling happily: "Let's get started to make the rice cakes! It's New Year's Eve!"

"But my dear wife," the old man said, "I'm so sorry! I didn't buy the rice." The wife was upset. "But how can we spend New Year without rice cakes?" The old man told her the whole story of the Jizos. "I'm so sorry," he said to his wife, "but we have our house to keep us warm and comfortable in this weather. Those Jizos do not have anything to protect them from the snow, nor can they do anything but stand still."

His wife listened silently to all he said, "Well, if that's the reason, I'm proud of you; and surely we won't die without rice cakes on New Year's Day. A porridge would do. We can at least do the ritual of rice cake pounding, even though we don't have rice. We can pretend there is rice in the dough, and pound it."

So, they took out the dough, and started to pound it, making a clattering sound like everyone does on New Year's Eve. Then they had their porridge, and satisfied, went to bed.

Somewhere around midnight, they were awakened by a strange dragging sound on the snow, and voices that could be heard faintly. The old man woke up and said to his wife: "Don't you hear something?"

His wife opened her eyes "It's midnight...what could it be but the wind and the falling snow?" They listened to the night sounds. They heard chanting:

Up there, up there is the house of the man

Up there, up there is the man who gave us hats

Up there, up there is the man who gave us his treasure

The chanting went on and on, followed by the sound of crashing snow. Wide awake, the old man and his wife hurried to their front door and were shocked by what they saw: five Jizos wearing bamboo hats, the sixth wearing the old man's scarf, walked in two rows of three, carrying a big straw bag between them. They walked straight to the house, and placed the heavy bag carefully on the porch. Then they returned to their place by the road where they stood to protect travelers who passed by. Only then did they stop their sing-song chant.

When everything was quiet again, the man and his wife went outside. They carried the straw bag into the house. To their amazement, it was full of rice, enough for the rest of their lives.

Outside stood the six Jizos, steadfast in the peaceful snow. ◆

Shizu Lee is a Sunbridge graduate who has been working as a kindergarten assistant for the last three years at the Austin Waldorf School, with over ten years of previous teaching experience in Japanese early childhood. Through learning and working in early childhood programs, she has found special interest in puppetry and storytelling. She especially enjoys sharing stories from Japan with her class children.