

## “Manyooshuu”, vermilion and coffin lids

One of my favourite occupations is teaching the Bible to non-Christians. They learn about the Lord and I learn some fascinating Japanese expressions. I hope you will enjoy thinking of Bible verses or passages that might have given rise to the following and find your mind leaping to further spiritual applications.

“What is your greatest treasure?” I asked. “My children” said one lady and quoted the following from the ‘Manyooshu’ (万葉集), an anthology of poetry compiled in 759 in the Nara period. Notice the syllabic structure of the phrases is 5-7-5, 7-7.

「しろがね くがね たま ん まさ たから こ ie(世の宝という銀も

きん たま なに すぐ たから 、こども  
金も玉もいったい何になろう。どんなに優れた宝も、子供にまさるものがあるだろう  
か。)

One day we were getting into fairly deep waters while discussing Satan and the origin of good and evil. As I tried to explain the effect of sin in our lives, one member asked “Sensei, is it like this saying we have in Japanese?”

「しゅ まじ あか にんげん つき あ にんげん えいきょう、よ わる  
朱に交われれば赤くなる」 ie (人間は付き合う人間に影響されて、良くも悪くもな

る。人間は環境に支配されやすいものだという事。)

「朱」 is vermilion or red pigment which colours whatever it is mixed with. In the same way we are influenced for good or bad by the people we mix with.

Discussion of sin leads to the issue of judgement and eternal life. The following saying refers to how humanity regards a person’s life and contribution to society after his death.

「かん おお ことさだ し ひつぎ ふた ie(死んで棺 (coffin)の蓋 (lid)をされてはじめてその人のし

たことに対する評価が決定するという意味。)

It’s only when the lid of the coffin is closed that a person’s life is evaluated. Could we apply this saying to show that it is only God’s evaluation that ultimately matters?