



Inamura no Hi (The Fire of Rice Sheaves)

LONG ago there was a village along the shores of Wakayama Prefecture. In this village lived a man in a house on a hill that overlooked the ocean.

One summer's eve the village held a festival, and the local shrines were filled with people celebrating. Eager to join the festivities, the man changed into his exquisite kimono. As he was changing, however, he suddenly felt the earth shake violently. He remembered words of advice from the village elders: "After a long earthquake comes a tsunami." He immediately turned to scan the sea below.

He saw the water recoiling fiercely to form a towering wave. "Oh, no! A fearsome tsunami is coming!" he said, quickly setting fire to a torch and rushing toward the shrines where the festival was going on. As he ran, though, he realized he would never be able to make it in time to warn the other villagers. He had an idea: he would set fire to the piles of rice sheaves that had been harvested and use those as a signal.

However, the man knew it wasn't right to set fire to someone else's rice sheaves, so he returned to his home and set fire to the ones in



his yard instead. The rice sheaves were soon ablaze, and smoke poured forth. The villagers, who had been wrapped up in the festival, suddenly took notice. Thinking a fire had started, they rushed to the scene to put it out. When his fellow villagers arrived, the man yelled, “A tsunami is coming—head for the hills!”

Everyone frantically raced to the shelter of the mountains. Just as they all clambered to safety, a giant tsunami engulfed the village. Fortunately, everyone was spared. From the bottom of their hearts, the villagers thanked the man who had sacrificed his own valuable rice sheaves to protect the village.

The man then worked with the villagers to create a long, tall embankment so that such a thing would never happen again. 7

THE SITE OF THE INAMURA NO HI STORY

The tale of “The Fire of Rice Sheaves” is based on the large tsunami that occurred after the Great Ansei Earthquake of 1854. Goryo Hamaguchi, a man from Hirogawa in Wakayama Prefecture, sacrificed his personal properties to save the people of his village.

In 2007, the Inamura-no-Hi no Yakata Hall was built in Hirogawa to pass on the story of his amazing deed and spirit, and the lesson this episode has to tell. Many people visit the site to learn of the dangers of tsunami and deepen their knowledge of how to protect themselves against such a disaster.

