

Japanese baths: A lesson in mindfulness



Learning to be more mindful and patient with tradition Japanese baths

Caroline Ishii
Columnist

A third-generation Japanese Canadian chef, speaker, writer, and lover of food and travel. I am currently living in Japan to finish a book on Canadian culture and cuisine, with a vegan and wellness angle, for the Japanese audience.

The book will be published in Japanese by Tokyo publisher, Kirasienne, set for release in spring 2018.

I love being in Japan. What fascinates me most is how much my Japanese ancestry and background helps me understand the Japanese in many ways, in particular, their love of food such as rice, pickles, *mochi* and anything *adzuki*.

However, at other times, I am reminded how “Canadian” I am. This story is about one of these

times. It starts with taking a bath in Japan.

Akiko knocks on my door. She says, “my grandmother wants me to tell you that the bath is ready.”

Thus, starts my day. This is not out of some English high society novel where servants are preparing baths for you. This is daily life in Japan.

We share a small, but deep common bath that is heated to around 40 C. Although this bath is old and resides in a 100-year-old Japanese house, there is a cute woman's voice that comes on from the bathtub.

The voice is the heating device that tells you in Japanese that the bath is at temperature and ready.

This is one of the things that fascinates me in Japan, the old and the new. Technologies that bring a more human touch to interactions, like your toilet talking

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to you and providing you with the opportunity to customize your experience, your car telling you the door is open, and your bath telling you it is ready for you.

The true cleaning takes place before the bath when you sit on a small plastic stool with a plastic basin and *hishaku* water scoo-

per to clean yourself, which I do rather awkwardly, shivering, and anxious to get into the warm water quickly.

There is a low shower-type device that I tried to use the first time, but it takes a long time to heat up and wastes a lot of water.

In a household that tries to conserve water and energy at every turn, from wearing more clothing inside the house when the weather becomes cooler, heating up only the room that is being used, drying clothes on racks and lines inside and outside the home even in the winter, and carefully recycling, showers seem blatantly wasteful.

I noticed my North American routines and habits that I miss the most are very wasteful I admit, and the bath experience in itself is helping me become more mindful in living here.

While Japan has all the distractions we have at home, cell phones, video games, computers, TV — you name it, I find in general, the people are more mindful, generous and kind then they are back home.

There is rushing but not so carelessly that we drop things because we are not thinking, trip because we are not careful about where we are going, or knock



PHOTO CREDIT: MINNEAPOLIS INSTITUTE OF ART

Ito Shinsui, 'After the Bath,' January 1917, Japanese woodblock print, ink and colour on paper at Minneapolis Institute of Art.

others aside with our backpacks by mistake in our rush to get somewhere else. I'm afraid that's me sometimes.

In a lineup, you don't see people impatient and giving you stressed, loud sighs or rude stares if you take more time at the

counter. Everyone knows that waiting is part of life and if there is any question of who goes first, it's always given to the other person.

In a long lineup at a busy ramen

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A Japanese internment camp love story



How my parents found each other with a little help from relatives

David Tsubouchi
Columnist

If I told anyone other than a Japanese Canadian that I was writing about a camp love story, they might think immediately of a romance at a summer camp.

I write a fair bit about the negative impact the internment camps had on my family and my community but there was some good that actually came from the experience.

My mother, Fumiko Takahashi and her family were interned at Lemon Creek, as were my father's family, the Tsubouchi's.

My father, Kiyoshi Tsubouchi, was shipped to Camp 101, a PoW camp in Angler, Ont., along with my mother's brothers Hideo and Akira.

My uncle Akira and my father become good friends during their

time there.

My grandfather, Hyakuzo Tsubouchi, had seen my mother around Lemon Creek and thought that she would be a good match for my father.

My Auntie Haruko says that my grandfather kept boasting about how good-looking my father was.

While my father was being described to my mother in Lemon Creek, my uncle Akira was no doubt mentioning his sister Fumiko to my father in Angler.

After the postwar release from the internment camps and the eastward exodus of the Japanese Canadians, my Tsubouchi grandparents headed east on the train.

When the train stopped in Fort William, my grandfather Tsubouchi had tried to persuade my grandmother Takahashi to settle the family in Fort William with the ultimate goal of setting up my

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father with my mother.

Unfortunately, she had already sent Uncle Hideo and Akira ahead to Toronto to establish a place for the family. My parents' fate took a small detour.

After my father had seen that the family had settled in Fort William at the encouragement of his father and the invitation of his

friend, my uncle Akira, my father travelled to Toronto.

According to Aunt Haruko, when my father finally did meet my mother, it was love at first sight.

Years later, my mother told me that when she met my father she thought he was very handsome. My father similarly fell for my mother like a ton of bricks.

Though every love story has a few obstacles. In this case the obstacle was my strict grandmother, Suga Takahashi. She was a strong woman who raised seven children as a single mother after the war. She could also be very opinionated.

When I asked my Auntie Haru what Bachan originally thought of my father, she said that at first she didn't approve because even though my grandfather Tsubouchi was educated, she thought he was a flirt.

My grandmother had never met my father but she had seen his photograph and knew his father. She thought that he was very handsome and figured, like father, like son.

My mother and father then started seeing each other in secret with only my Aunt Haruko as a co-conspirator.

Considering how strict my grandmother was, Aunt Haruko could have been in big trouble



PHOTO COURTESY: DAVID TSUBOUCHI

A photo of David Tsubouchi's parents, Fumiko (nee Takahashi) and Kiyoshi Tsubouchi.

since she was providing the alibis.

Finally my grandmother gave in to the inevitable and my parents were married. My parents were devoted to each other throughout their lives.

Despite very difficult circumstances, the seeds of love were planted with a little help from family and friends. That is my camp love story.

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restaurant, I was standing beside a group of high school boys. The server came out to ask who's next. I didn't say anything because I usually understand about half of what people are saying.

It's a different world I live in here when people expect me to be like them but I am not. I understand, sometimes more, sometimes less, and this was a less moment.

What surprised me is that the boys spoke up to say I was next, gesturing to me kindly to go ahead. The server came to me and kindly asked me to stand next to the door because I was next. This I understood and I was touched. I don't see this happening often back home.

But back to the bath. I wash myself as clean as I can get and try to throw water on every part of my body before getting in because I don't want to leave any soap residue in the bath water.

I open the hard-plastic covers to the bath and enter. It is warm and comforting, though when I sit down my legs are scrunched up against my body. I wonder how people that are taller than me manage.

I think that's part of what keeps the older generations that live in this house, including Akiko's mother and grandmother, who is in her eighties, so healthy.

The bending, the squatting, the crawling, entering into small places, sitting down at low tables with legs crossed, bringing out the futon and covers every night

to sleep on the floor and then putting them away every day in the closet, would be tiresome to us, but is part of their daily lives and keeps them healthy.

In North America, we go to yoga classes to do this kind of stretching, bending and squatting. We are told that if we keep on doing this we will stay healthy and flexible as we age.

Being here is living proof of this. In fact, lots of Japanese workers begin their days with stretching exercises at their offices, and taking the stairs to and from the subway lines in Tokyo, sometimes several storeys up or down, an adventure and trek in itself.

I also believe living in community keeps us healthy. There are four generations living together in two houses side-by-side on Akiko's grandmother's property and one dog that no one wanted, so the grandmother took in.

The generations of family help take care of each other. For instance, Akiko's mother and grandmother help with her family, they take care of her young child when the daycare is not available or if the child is sick.

But again, back to the bath. I often don't take baths at home because I don't make the time. I think it will take too long. I don't like when parts of my upper body get colder while my bottom half is warm and no matter what position I'm in I can't seem to get comfortable.

Don't worry, I do take showers. When I do go for a bath, it's a luxurious thing for me, like a spa

night or treatment when I'm not feeling not well.

The Japanese style bath is designed to be deeper, so warm water covers more of the body. The whole family uses the water which is not for cleaning but solely for relaxation, which is why we clean ourselves before getting in. I find that there are many ways that the Japanese pause in their day-to day-lives, and bathing is one of them.

In North America we talk of wanting more peacefulness and stillness in our lives. Then why don't we bring more in? What are we afraid of? Why do we crave our cell phones, TV, or other distractions when we are still?

I admit that I once even binged on Netflix while I was in the bath. I queued up a good TV show and positioned the laptop carefully away from the bath.

While fun at the time, I felt guilty for needing to have a diversion even in a bath. And I was so tired, I fell asleep and woke up in a cold bath with Netflix waiting for me to continue. Not exactly a mindful moment.

I am fascinated by the Japanese approach to living and baths. My Japanese heritage is sometimes buried deeply beneath my Canadian roots.

However, with every bath here and chance to be still, I am becoming more mindful and feel myself becoming more Japanese.

Caroline Ishii is a chef, author and speaker. For more from Caroline visit her website: carolineishii.com



Visitors celebrated the new year with tons of delicious food and drinks, like Ozouni soup specifically made to eat for Oshougatsu, which is always nice with some Biru!

From HATSUMODE P. 1

the *Kansho* bell and everyone celebrated the new year with delicious Japanese treats and fun games.

The temple hosted the event with Team Samurai Resurrection, established in 2014 by a group of young Japanese business and restaurant owners in the Greater Toronto Area, with the objective to preserve, promote and share Japanese culture with Canadians.

Traditionally the Year End Bell Ringing Service is on New Year's Eve, and the bell is struck with a wooden mallet 108 times. The bell is used to "ring out" the faults and impurities of people in the passing year and aspire to start the new year off fresh. The Toronto Buddhist Church holds its annual *joya no kane* or bell of the

last night on Dec. 31.

The bell ringing 108 times can be explained mathematically by $6 \times 3 \times 2 \times 3 = 108$.

We have our six senses (touch, smell, hearing, sight, taste and consciousness), three ways those senses can be experienced (positive, negative, neutral), two desires (our search for pleasure or lamenting what we don't want), and three represents that all these attempts have taken place in the past, is in the present and will be in the future.

In the basement social hall you could find authentic Japanese food, drinks and pastries, traditional Japanese children's games, crafts and prizes. DJs played music all day and a stage was front and centre for festive dancing and live bands to welcome in the new year.

YUKIAI

Kodo's Chieko Kojima and Nagata Shachu

ゆきあい



The JCCC and Nagata Shachu are proud to present Japanese dance and taiko artist Chieko Kojima, a founding member and principal dancer of the world renowned Kodo drummers of Sado Island. Her YUKIAI project creates collaborations with artists both within Japan and internationally. For this performance, Kojima collaborates with Canada's premiere taiko group Nagata Shachu for an unforgettable evening of dance, drums and song.

Saturday February 17, 2018 at 8:00pm

Admission
\$25 (JCCC members)
\$30 (non-members) \$20 (seniors)
Tickets available at 416-441-2345 or www.jccc.on.ca



FIREWORKS

Should We See it from the Side or the Bottom?

CANADIAN PREMIERE



Nobuyuki Takeuchi and Akiyuki Shinbo's gorgeous romantic fantasy is set over the course of a single day. Norimichi and his friend Yusuke are both secretly in love with their classmate Nazuna but are too nervous to confess their feelings. Which of them will get the chance to escort her to the annual fireworks festival in the evening? And will Nazuna follow her secret plan to run away to the city? With its young love, metaphysical questioning, and tranquil small-town setting, a must see for fans of Your Name. Voiced by Masaki Suda and Suzu Hirose.

Sunday, February 18, 2018 @2:00pm

For tickets, call 416.441.2345
\$10 JCCC/\$12 General HST included

