



## Bookends ...

All of us are used to hearing certain familiar sounds. Music that is played on the platform at your local train station when the doors are about to close; a repeating announcement broadcast by a small truck rolling through your neighbourhood selling something; the sound of window shutters being closed for the evening ... all these things are a kind of background music to our lives. Some of the ones I hear every day will also be familiar to you - we all know the sounds of Shinjuku Station, for example - but each one of us probably knows a number of sounds that have meaning for ourselves only.

There is one particular sound in my life that acts as a kind of 'bookend' to each of my days - I hear it nearly every evening just about the time that I go to bed, and I hear it again just as I am getting up. Can you guess what it might be?

No, I don't mean the sound of the toilet flushing! :-)) The sound that I have in mind is the sound of a particular scooter moving past the front of my home. Every evening at exactly the same time - 11:42 pm - I hear it first in the distance, then coming closer and closer, the scooter slowing down as my neighbour arrives home from the train station and pulls into his parking space. And in the morning, at exactly 7:35 am, five (sometimes six) days a week, out he goes again, the sound of the scooter fading in the distance.

He obviously catches the same two trains each day, and he is very punctual; if my clock happened to be broken, I would still be able to tell what time it was at least twice a day!

With this schedule, the amount of time he spends at home matches almost exactly the amount of time I spend in bed! He seems quite happy though, and on his days off, spends all his time with his wife and two young daughters. And of course, it is because he is willing to spend so much time commuting, that his family is able to live in this peaceful, and quite green, community.

I have a commuting routine too, although it is not quite so lengthy as his. After I have finished breakfast and it becomes time to head to work, I make a cup of tea, then open a door in my entranceway that exposes a stairway leading downwards. Down, down to the basement I go, and a couple of minutes later I am sitting at my bench ready to start the day's woodblock printmaking work. Coming 'home' in the evening doesn't take long, either!

I don't want you to think that I am bragging about my situation. Some time ago I was chatting with this neighbour (on a Sunday of course!) about our commuting patterns. From his point of view, my routine of sitting in that little workshop alone for all those hours a day was *taihen* ... difficult. And that's perhaps the same word that I would use about *his* daily routine! It seems we both have chosen the kind of life that suits us best!

But I wonder - are any of my routines acting as 'bookends' for somebody else's day? I think so - every time I come out of the bedroom in the morning at this time of year, Boots the cat is waiting for me, listening for a certain sound ... the 'click' as I turn on the *kotatsu*!

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