



O-Furo

I had a bath today - first one in months! You don't have to be disgusted to hear me say that; of course I have a shower here in my home and use it all the time. But because I live alone, it seems to me to be just too wasteful to run a full bath here with nobody to share it, so I usually just make do with the shower.

There is a very big downside to this though - a shower will get you clean, but it does nothing at all towards getting you warm, and when winter comes along and my house begins to get cold, I very much miss having a good hot bath every evening, as I did in the days long ago when I lived together with my children. Some days I wrestle with my conscience - having a little 'debate' with myself; the voice in one ear reminds me about the wasteful aspects: how many litres of water will be thrown out, and how much gas will get burned, just for the sake of a few minutes pleasure for one person. But the voice in my other ear can counter this. It points out that my overall usage of both water and gas is so low that most months it doesn't even register on my bills - I pay nothing but the *kihon ryokin* ('base' charge). (In fact, the local gas company long ago gave up on me, and took away my standard-size tank, replacing it with a small 'mini' model.) And when you throw in the fact that the finished bath water can be scooped out and used for doing a load of laundry, thus saving even more energy, I don't think that anybody could accuse me of being wasteful of these resources.

Another factor that should push me towards using my bath more often is the fact that it is completely automated. This house of mine has no air conditioning and no heating system, but it does have an automated bathtub! Using a little control panel in the kitchen, you set the desired temperature, the water level, and the time you want to jump in, and then flick it to 'automatic'. Around 20 minutes before the appointed time, you hear a deep rumble from far-off as the double-barrel gas heater on the outside wall at the back of the house kicks into action and water begins to spurt into the tub.

A buzzer sounds when everything is ready, and you simply stroll in there, pull back the cover, and begin your hot soak! And what's more, the system will even maintain the temperature for you; there is a double-hose connection between the tub and the heater, and as the water begins to cool off, it is automatically circulated back and warmed up again. It just doesn't get any better than this!

After reading this description, you must be wondering what all my confusion is about. After all, with such a wonderful bathtub available to me, and in this very chilly house to boot, surely I should be enjoying a long hot soak every day!

But as I said, most of the time I leave it all turned off, and simply have a quick shower.

I think I can identify a few reasons why I avoid using this bath. One is of course the resource issue, as I mentioned. Another is that there seems to be a bit of a Puritan streak in my character; for some reason I avoid doing things that would make me more comfortable, including spending money on myself. This perhaps comes down to me from the culture I was born into. It's not a question of being stingy; my parents for example, are happy to spend money on people around them, but have great difficulty spending it on themselves, and I seem to share this too.

Over and above these factors though, I think I can identify one more, and this is perhaps the strongest. It's a *social* thing. It simply doesn't feel right to take a bath by myself. It's the same as with drinking. Think of the difference between a person who kills a bottle of wine by himself in an evening, and one who shares it with convivial friends. It's a completely different image, isn't it!

So what prompted today's bath? Well, I'll tell you more about it next week, but until then can simply remind you of the old saying, "The more, the merrier!"

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