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# miso (soybean paste) Pera Pera Penguin's

5-minute Japanese Class by Hitomi Hirayama  
Vol. **30**

*I was recently invited to a friend's house, where his wife cooked a lot of Japanese food for me. She spent the entire time in the kitchen cooking dinner, while I was eating it with her husband. When she served us some sushi, her husband told me, "Temae-miso desu ga, oishii desu yo!" I thought it was the miso used for miso soup. As it was my first experience to eat miso sushi, I said, "Miso no sushi wa hajimete desu (I've never had miso sushi before)." But it did not taste like miso at all when I ate it. Ms. Hirayama, have you ever had miso sushi?*

Japanese people like to use proverbs. They are usually very short expressions, but they carry a lot of meaning. In some cases, you may be able to express your thoughts with one proverb, instead of using difficult vocabulary and grammar to make the same point. Most proverbial sayings are easy to learn and use and are a quick way to express complex ideas. But be careful. Since proverbs are fixed expressions, Japanese people will not understand what you mean unless you say the whole phrase. We have described the meanings of the proverbs as well as the meanings of each kanji so that you can remember them more easily.

You could use a Japanese proverb in the middle of a conversation in English.

proverb	ですね。 desu ne	ですよ。 desu yo
	asking for agreement (..., isn't it? ..., you know? ..., don't you think so? etc.)	giving information
e.g., Koga-san : I was very surprised to hear that his company went bankrupt. Did you hear any rumors about it?		
Pole-san : No, it was "a thunderbolt out of the blue" for me, too. (I was shocked, too. / I was surprised, too.)	青天のへきれきですよ。 sēten no hekireki desu yo a thunderbolt out of the blue	

If you criticize or reprove someone too directly, he or she may be offended or even become defensive. However, if you offer your criticism in a subtle way by using kotowaza, you might soften the person up enough to accept your opinions, even though such a proverb might have a strong meaning.

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| <p><b>A) To each his own</b></p> <p>When 10 people get together in one place, each one will have a different hobby or likes and dislikes.</p> <p>Ten people with 10 colors.<br/>(10) (people) (10) (colors)</p> <p>十人十色<br/>jū nin to iro</p> | <p><b>B) You reap what you sow</b></p> <p>Whether what you do is good or bad, you will have to deal with the consequences—generally used as a warning.</p> <p>Retribution is the result of the cause.<br/>(cause) (result) (retribution)</p> <p>因果応報<br/>in ga ō hō</p> |
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■■■ No, Mr. Pole! I've never had miso sushi before. But there was no miso in the sushi you ate. What your friend said was a proverb. "Temae-miso desu ga, oishii desu yo!" means, "I don't mean to sing my own praises, but this is delicious!" Japanese people frequently use proverbs in daily life, because being able to use "kotowaza" (proverbs) is considered to be a sign of intelligence. You should try to use some, too! It is a good opportunity to increase your Japanese vocabulary, and your Japanese friends will think that you are smart! Learning proverbs is useful even for busy people who do not have enough time to study Japanese as they can use proverbs for communication. By the way, you should try delicious "miso pan" (bread with miso inside), which is sold at a miso store in Kameido, Tokyo!.

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| <p><b>C) Stop beating around the bush</b></p> <p>This means "speak directly," "get to the point," even if the subject is difficult to discuss. Japanese people use this phrase when they want to clear things up, since they are generally reluctant to speak directly right away.</p> <p>Direct stab with one sword<br/>(single) (sword)(direct)(put in)</p> <p>単刀直入<br/>tan tō choku nyū</p> | <p><b>D) Being inconsistent</b></p> <p>It is used to criticize someone who says something different from what they have said before or whose actions do not match their words.</p> <p>No support causes disruption<br/>(fork)(scattered)(disruption)</p> <p>支離滅裂<br/>shi ri metsu retsu</p>  |
| <p><b>E) Unable to know what to do nor how to solve problems</b></p> <p>You are unable to find any clues to help solve your problems. You have no idea what to do.</p> <p>A search in darkness<br/>(dark) (in~) (grope for)</p> <p>暗中摸索<br/>an chū mo saku</p>   | <p><b>F) The right person for the right job</b></p> <p>A person gets right job according to his or her skills and knowledge.</p> <p>Right person in right place<br/>(right) (material) (right) (place)</p> <p>適材適所<br/>teki zai teki sho</p>   |
| <p><b>G) A person who pays no attention</b></p> <p>This proverb originally means "a horse just moves its ears when a spring wind blows." A person who hears the words, but let them go in one ear and out of the other.</p> <p>Ears of horse in the east wind.<br/>(horse) (ear) (east) (wind)</p> <p>馬耳東風<br/>ba ji tō fū</p>   | <p><b>H) Stay on your toes</b></p> <p>Although everything is going well, an enemy may sneak up and overcome you if you are not careful. It teaches us to be on guard at all times.</p> <p>Carelessness is the greatest enemy.<br/>(carelessness) (powerful enemy)</p> <p>油断大敵<br/>yu dan tai teki</p>  |
| <p><b>I) Survival of the fittest</b><br/>(Big fish eat small fish)</p> <p>This phrase literally means the weak is prey to the strong, and it is hard to survive. It is used when a small company is purchased by a larger one.</p> <p>The weak becomes food for the strong.<br/>(weak) (meat) (strong) (eat)</p> <p>弱肉強食<br/>jaku niku kyō shoku</p>   | <p><b>J) Blowing one's own trumpet (horn)</b><br/>(If I may say so myself...)</p> <p>Miso was a traditional food that people made when they wanted to show off their culinary skills. Since Japanese people do not like to sing their own praises, they use this phrase to show their humble attitude when they want to boast in a subtle way.</p> <p>Homemade miso<br/>(my own) (miso)</p> <p>手前味噌<br/>te mae mi so</p> |



## 4-letter character proverbs

# 四文字熟語

よん も じ じゅく ご  
yon mo ji juku go

- friend : It is really hard to succeed in this company because people on the top have absolute authority.  
Pole-san : Survival of the fittest ですね。 desu ne
- friend : The personnel department did an excellent job of reorganizing!  
Pole-san : The right person for the right job ですね。 desu ne
- friend : I baked this cake myself. I don't mean to blow my own trumpet, but it's delicious!  
If I may say so myself, "It's delicious!" ですがおいしいですよ。 desu ga "oishi desu yo"
- friend : Let's be careful.  
Pole-san : Stay on your toes. ですね。 desu ne
- friend : I think we have had good weather lately, and I hope it's going to be...  
Pole-san : Stop beating around the bush. お願いします。 ni onegaishimasu
- friend : It seems like we are still searching in the dark, and we have no idea what to do...  
Pole-san : No idea what to do to solve a problem ですね。 desu ne
- friend : Nothing I say makes any difference to him. It's like I'm talking to a brick wall!  
Pole-san : A person who pays no attention ですね。 desu ne
- friend : He doesn't know what he's talking about. What he says is confusing.  
Pole-san : Being inconsistent ですね。 desu ne
- friend : He was always difficult to deal with, and last week, he got fired!  
Pole-san : Reaping what you sow ですよ。 desu yo
- friend : In the last meeting, we couldn't reach a consensus.  
Pole-san : To each his own ですから... desu kara ...

Answers	1. I)	2. F)	3. J)	4. H)	5. C)
	6. E)	7. G)	8. D)	9. B)	10. A)

With cooperation from Yasuhiro Koga