Inamura no Hi
TSUNAMI RESCUE!
The True Story of Kamaguchi Goryo
The Man Who Saved His Village from a Tsunami
Complete with EARTHQUAKE and TSUNAMI trivia inside!


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ACCU Asia-Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO (ACCU)
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Back in 1854 in Japan, when Tokyo was still called Edo, and Samurai warriors ruled the country, a man named Hamaguchi Goryo lived in a village called Hiro in Kishū County (now Hirogawa Town in Wakayama Prefecture, located in Western Japan).

Mr. Hamaguchi owned two large, successful soy sauce companies, one in Edo (now Tokyo) and one in Shimousa Choshi (now Chiba Prefecture, east of Tokyo).
That autumn, Goryo came home from Edo to Hiro Village to see his wife and two daughters. The villagers of Hiro had begun preparing for winter. They had just finished harvesting their single crop, the rice they had spent all year growing with love and care.
Then suddenly, one day, peaceful Hiro Village was hit by a strong earthquake that made the ground shake violently. Goryo's house also swayed and shook so much that some of its big, strong posts fell down. The tiles on the roof came loose and fell off.

"Father, what's happening?! Help!!" wailed Goryo's daughters, and they began to cry.

"Don't worry, the earthquake will stop soon." Goryo said, trying his best to comfort his weeping daughters.
The shaking soon died down.
Then, Goryo heard a strange sound coming from far away.
"Boom! Boom!"
“What is that?” Goryo listened intently, trying to work out what the sound was.
He ran outside and looked towards the ocean from which the sound was coming...
"The tide! It's so far out!" he cried.
The water from the beach had receded far out to sea.
Goryo could see rocks on the beach where the water usually was.

"Boom!" "Boom!"
The strange sound from the ocean was getting closer and closer.

"It's a sign that a tsunami is coming!"
Tsunami had hit here many times before. They had caused lots of damage.

Ever since he was a boy, Goryo had heard many stories from the old people in the village about how scary and dangerous tsunami were.

After hearing these stories, he was sure that one day a tsunami would hit Hiro Village again. So, Goryo studied all he could about tsunami. He knew a lot about tsunami, including the signs that show a tsunami is coming.
There was no time to lose! The tsunami could hit at any time!
Goryo ran around the village, calling out to people to let them know about the danger.
"A tsunami is coming!! Quick, run to the shrine high on the hill as fast as you can!" he shouted.
Many of the houses in the village had been damaged by the earthquake. Some houses were leaning to one side. Other houses were completely devastated.

The villagers who heard Goryo shouting ran quickly to the shrine on the hill.
As they ran, a huge wave taller than a house came crashing down on the village. Goryo stayed in the village to make sure everyone got out safely. He was nearly swallowed up by the wave.
Goryo somehow reached the shrine on the hill, just as it grew completely dark. He was soaking wet but safe. The villagers who had gathered at the shrine cheered with joy.

"Mr. Hamaguchi, you're safe!"
"Thank goodness! Thank goodness, you're alright!"
Huffing and puffing, Goryo caught his breath.
"Is everyone safe?" he asked.
One of the villagers hesitated, and then said quietly.
"Actually, some people are still not here."
"What?!"
With that, Goryo grabbed a pine torch from one of the villagers. He ran down the stairs he had just come up, and down the dark path as fast as he could.
Along the way, here and there, Goryo could see bundles of rice straw that had been left after the villagers had harvested the rice. These bundles of rice straw, or rice sheaves, are known as "Inamura" in Japanese. The rice sheaves are important fertilizer for the soil, so the same land can be used to grow rice again the next year.

Goryo ran over to the rice sheaves and began to set them on fire with his torch. He lit them, one after another, without thinking twice. As he did this, he turned to the ocean and shouted "Hey! Everyone! Over here! Come this way, using the light to guide you!"

As he did this Goryo said to himself, "The rice sheaves are important. But saving human lives is even more important."
The villagers who had been swept away by the tsunami were being tossed about in the big, dark ocean. They grabbed hold of trees, roofs and the broken posts of houses that the tsunami had washed out to sea. They held on tight with all their might.

Suddenly, the villagers saw a number of bright red lights against the night sky. It was the fires that Goryo had lit.

"Look! Look! Fires! That's our village over there!"

"We are saved! We are saved!"

The villagers saw Goryo's fires and understood his message to them. They were able to return to the village using the fire as their guide. Thanks to Goryo's fires, their lives were saved.
Hiro Village was badly damaged by the tsunami. The villagers had lost their houses, and almost all of their humble, but treasured, belongings.
Goryo gathered food from nearly villages for the people of Hiro Village. He also helped his community rebuild their houses.

Still, the villagers were afraid that another tsunami would come. One by one, they began to move away from Hiro Village.
Goryo began to worry. "If things continue this way, Hiro Village will disappear all together..."
It was then that he decided, "I know! I will build a wall, a bank on the beach in front of Hiro Village so big and so strong it will stop any tsunami!"
If he could stop tsunami from hitting the village by building a bank, people could live safely in the village without fearing another tsunami.
By promising to pay for it with his own money, Goryo obtained permission from the Kishū authorities to build the embankment.
After the tsunami, many of the villagers had lost not only their homes and their things, but their jobs too. Goryo hired them to help build the bank, so they had work again. “Thanks to Mr. Hamaguchi we all have work again. Let’s thank him by building the biggest, strongest bank we can!” The villagers began working together to build the bank. They worked to make a bank so strong that it would still protect the village even in 100 years time.
Five years later, the villagers finally finished a great embankment 600 metres long and 5 metres high. From then on, they could live safely in the village without any fear of tsunami.
Then, one day, 80 years after the bank had been built, another large tsunami hit Hiro Village. However, thanks to the bank, the village was protected. This embankment is known as the Hiro Village Bank, and it still protects the people of Hiro Village, even today.
Goryo, and his time

Goryo was born in 1820, in Hiro Village in the county of Kishū (now the town of Higogawa in Wakayama Prefecture, western Japan). His real name is Hamaguchi Gi-hei. He used the name "Goryo" as an old man, after he retired.

In Goryo's time, known as the Edo period, Japan was ruled by a Shogun (a General) who lived in Edo (Tokyo), and his samurai warriors. The Edo period lasted for over 250 years, from 1603 to 1867. Towards the end of the Edo period samurai gradually lost their power, and merchants played a key role in society.

Goryo, who owned big soy sauce companies in Edo and Choshi, was one of the well-known merchants who carried out business at the end of the Edo period.

Goryo liked learning from a young age. He also continued his learning even as an adult, studying Japanese history and subjects new to Japan such as Western culture and world affairs. Goryo felt that in the future, Japan would need to be supported not just by samurai soldiers, but also by all Japanese people. So he worked hard to improve children's education by setting up a private school called "Taikyusha" in his home town of Hiro Village.

As described in this book, when a large tsunami hit Hiro Village in 1854, Goryo saved many lives by burning the village's precious rice sheaves. Mr. Lafcadio Hearn, a foreign English teacher and writer, was inspired by this tale, and used it to write a short story called "A Living God."
Then, Mr. Nakai Tsunezo, a man who grew up in a town near Hiro Village, wrote a Japanese story based on Hearn's story. The story was entitled "Inamura no hi" (The Rice Sheaf Fire). For 10 years after 1937, the story of "Inamura no hi" was incorporated in primary school Japanese language textbooks in Japan. It inspired many children during that time.

But it is important to remember Goryo did not just save the lives of people by setting fire to rice sheaves as described in "A Living God" and "Inamura no hi." He also used his own money to help his village recover from the damage caused by the tsunami and build an embankment. He worked hard, too, to make sure this embankment was built. He did this to protect the village from future tsunamis, which he knew, from his own study of tsunamis, could strike the village once again.

In 1867, the Shogun finally returned political power to the Emperor. This was the end of the Edo period and the rule of samurai. Goryo continued to do important work for the good of other people, even in the new Meiji period that followed. During this period, Goryo served as Ekiteinokami, then Minister of Postal Services of Japan, and then as the first-ever Wakayama Prefectural Assembly Chairman.
Learn more about Earthquakes and Tsunami

What causes earthquakes and tsunami?

Earthquakes and tsunami are caused by the movement of giant slabs of hard rock, known as plates. The earth's crust is made up of these plates, which move, grinding against each other or pulling apart.

Some plates are found under the ocean floor, while other plates have continents or landmasses on top of them. When these plates grind against each other, sometimes the oceanic plate is forced under the continental plate. As the bottom plate slides under the top plate, it may drag the top plate under with it. This causes a gradual build-up of pressure at the spot where the two plates meet. (Diagram 1)

When the pressure builds up to a certain point, it becomes too much for the plates to bear, and the continental plate will suddenly jerk back towards its original position. This jerking movement causes an earthquake. The earthquake not only makes the ground shake, it also makes the sea floor deform, causing it to rise up or drop down suddenly. When the ocean floor deforms like this, it also makes the water above it rise up or sink down at the same time, causing a tsunami. (Diagram 2)

This big shift in a large volume of water causes a wave which spreads out across the ocean in all directions, travelling at speeds of up to 100 kilometres an hour. This wave will eventually hit the coast. (Diagram 3)
A tsunami will slow down as it gets closer to land where the ocean is shallower, but at the same time it also gets taller. Big tsunamis crash onto the shore and make water rush inland at heights taller than you could imagine. (Diagram 4)

I have heard that the Indian Ocean tsunami on 26th December 2004 caused bad damage at places up to 10 kilometres away from the beach.

Yes, that's right. Tsunamis often travel up river streams and can also surge up to very high areas and areas far inland from the coast.
What should I expect when a tsunami hits?

Just before a tsunami is about to hit, will we see the tide go right out to sea, like you did in the story, Mr. Hamaguchi?

The tide does not always go out before a tsunami strikes. Some tsunamis will come rushing towards the beach without warning. There are two different kinds of tsunamis. With the first type, called a "negative" wave, the water will pull back and go far out to sea first, and then come rushing back in when the tsunami hits the coast. However, with the second type of tsunami (called a "positive" wave), the water will suddenly rise up and a tsunami will strike with little or no warning. Sometimes before the tsunami hits a noise will be heard coming from far out at sea, but this is not always the case. Therefore, there is basically no definite sign that a tsunami is coming until it strikes.

Tsunamis also come rushing towards the coast at very high speeds. For example, in the open water where the ocean is 5000 metres deep, a tsunami will travel as fast as a jet aircraft. In places where the ocean is only 500 metres deep, a tsunami will move at the speed of a bullet train. Where the water is 100 metres deep, the tsunami will travel as fast as the speed of a car on a freeway. Even in shallow areas only 10 metres deep, tsunamis travel as fast as Olympic athletes who can run 100 metres in 10 seconds. Also, the shallower the water is, the taller the tsunami becomes.

In addition, remember that it is not only one wave which hits the coast. A second or third tsunami wave can strike after the first wave has gone back out to sea. What is more, sometimes the second or third wave is even bigger than the first one.
Prepare!

Tsunamis are pretty scary aren’t they? Is there anything I can do to try and protect myself?

It is important to prepare in advance, so that you can respond calmly when an earthquake or a tsunami actually does hit.

Tsunamis strike after there has been an earthquake. But after a big quake, roads may be blocked by fallen buildings, or there may be a blackout due to power lines being knocked over. In order to be able to respond calmly in these circumstances, it is important to have worked out in advance where your nearest safe evacuation area is. Then, you should make sure you know how to get there, by actually walking the roads and checking the route to the evacuation shelter a number of times. Also, take note of any other high, safe spots, like hill tops and buildings three storeys tall or higher, that you could evacuate to along the roads you usually travel.

It is also important to discuss disasters and evacuation plans with your family in advance. You and your family should prepare, and decide on a spot to meet up at if you get separated when evacuating.
Action! What to do when an earthquake or tsunami hits.

What should I do if an earthquake occurs?

After the earthquake, it is possible a tsunami might hit. Stay calm and do the following things:

If you are near a river or the ocean when you feel the earth shaking,

1) **Move inland and to high ground away from the water immediately.** If there is a designated evacuation place near the coast, run there. If it is too far away or there isn't one, try and run to somewhere as far away from water and as high up as possible. Also, tsunami may rush over the top of river embankments, so it's important to move away from them right away.

2) **Never go down to the beach** to check whether the water has receded, or to see whether you can hear a noise coming from out at sea. It is far too dangerous.

3) **Check the latest information** about the earthquake or tsunami via radio or TV.

If you are not near water and you feel the ground shaking,

1) If you are outside, **move away from things that might break or fall on you** easily like glass windows, street signs, stalls or brick walls.

2) If you are inside, **get under a sturdy table or desk**.

3) Do not panic and jump out of buildings

4) If the gas is on, make sure you turn it off.

5) Do not move until the shaking stops.
I have heard that sometimes tsunamis are only 30cm high. Do I have to run inland and to high ground even when the tsunami is this small?

Tsunamis are amazingly powerful, so even a small knee-high wave can be strong enough to knock you over.

If you are knocked over, you could drown or get injured when you are hit by debris. So you must always vacuate, even if the tsunami is small.

What should I do after I've evacuated?

Even if you have evacuated safely, the most important thing is still to act calmly and protect your own life.

Once you are safely sheltered:
1) Make sure you check the latest information about the earthquake or tsunami before you leave your shelter and go looking for family or friends. One good way is via radio or TV.
2) If there is a tsunami warning or alert in place, do not leave your shelter until after the "all clear" has been given.
3) Even if you do not have a radio or TV nearby, always remember waves may continue to arrive in the first 12 hours after the original tsunami strikes. So, make sure you stay in a safe spot for at least 12 hours after a tsunami hits.
Guide for Utilisation

Target: Literacy Skill Level 3 (Self-learning level) and general public

Theme: Disaster Preparedness

Type: Institutional (For providing instruction and knowledge) and Follow-up (For enhancing literacy skills and learned/additional knowledge)

Objective:
1. To provide message of importance of disaster preparedness, emergency response and post-disaster reconstruction
2. To provide scientific knowledge of earthquakes and tsunami
3. To provide opportunity to discuss disaster preparedness among learners
4. To promote self-learning and reading
5. To stir the interest of learners in their own local wisdom and local heroes/heroines
6. To enhance learners' literacy skills

Application:
1. Before reading this booklet, discuss with learners what kind of disaster happens in their community.
2. Distribute the booklet to the learners and read the story.
3. Ask learners how Hamaguchi Goyo saved the villagers.
4. Ask questions about earthquakes and tsunami. For example, ask learners questions such as "Have you ever experienced earthquakes or tsunami?", "What you should NOT do when earthquake/tsunami happens?", "Why do earthquakes/tsunami happen?", "how can we prepare for earthquakes and tsunami?" etc.
5. Ask learners what they are doing for disaster preparedness, emergency response and post-disaster reconstruction? Discuss about the disaster preparedness of learners' family and community.

Note:
This is a prototype version meant for local adaptation. Any organization is welcome to adapt this booklet with written permission from ACCU. Please contact ACCU for further information.