

Namahage Performance, part 5: Discussion of Harvest and Family

The conversation shifts naturally from the sake to the past year's harvest; a topic that the Namahage are always expected to bring up, as it relates to the village's principal means of livelihood. The head of the household recalls how the harvest was abundant this year, attributing this fortuitous state of affairs to the Namahage and, by extension, to the mountain deities.

The Namahage agree to grant the fields their blessings again, but warn their host that his crops will not grow unless everyone in his family pitches in and works hard throughout the coming year. This is a direct reference to another of the Namahage's key roles: instilling diligence in all members of the community.

The Namahage are also guardians of orthodox family virtues. They ask the head of the household how his aging mother is doing, and seem pleased when the man assures them she is both well and grateful for her good health. The Namahage remind the host that everyone in the house has to help take care of older family members—a familiar expectation in traditional communities both in Japan and elsewhere.