

Momotarou
桃太郎
Little Peach Boy
By John Marshall©2011

Long, long ago, in the remote countryside of Japan, lived a kindly old woodcutter and his wife. One day, they were sitting sharing a cup of tea at the close of day, remembering all the good things that happened to them during their long life together. The only thing missing, they agreed, was never having had a child to love and care for.

As it happens, the God of the Mountain overheard them speaking. The Old Couple had always taken good care of his mountain, only removing as much as they needed and being kind to the animals and trees of his dominion. And so he decided to reward them.

The next day the woodcutter set off for firewood in the deep forest and the kindly Old Woman headed off to the stream to wash her clothes. As she was working away and singing a happy song to the birds overhead, she heard a big splashing sound coming from upstream. She stood to peer around the bend in the stream when suddenly, to her amazement, a huge, really huge, peach came floating toward her! “My goodness!” she thought, “What can this be? It looks so delicious, I’ll carry it right home. Won’t the Old Man be surprised!”

It was a very hot day, and the Old Man was feeling a bit tired. Even so, as he passed along the path to his farmhouse, he noticed some delicate flowers along the roadside and thought, “I think I’ll take these home to the Old Woman. She works so hard, won’t she be surprised!”

When the Old Man did finally walk up the path to his porch, there stood the Old Woman waiting for him as she did every evening. Sheepishly he handed her the flowers that had become just a bit wilted along the way. Even though she had a special surprise of her own, she let it wait until she thanked the Old Man for remembering her and caring enough to bring her such a special loving gift. She placed them in water and asked him to come see how they looked on the table.



There, in the middle of room was the biggest peach the Old Man had ever seen! It looked so

delicious! Yumm! He wanted to eat it right away, but he waited until after dinner when the Old Woman and he could sit down together to enjoy it.



Out came the cutting knife and just as the tip touched the peach, it split in half along the fold and there, in the very center where the seed should be, was a tiny baby boy looking up and smiling at them. They knew right away that this had to be a special gift from the God of the Mountain. Gently they picked up Momotarou, for this is what they named him—Little Peach Boy—and took him out on the porch. They joined their voices and sang a song to the God of the Mountain to let him know that they were grateful for being trusted with such a precious treasure. The crickets, the owls, and all the night animals joined in their song for everyone was happy with them.

Well, the Old Man and the Old Woman loved Momotarou with all their heart. And soon he became a young man.

One day he went to them, and bowing deeply, thanked them for all their love and kindness. However, now that he was a young man he must set about his life, and even though he hated to leave, he would be setting out on a journey the very next day to rid Japan of the terrible plague of *oni* troubling the land.

The Old Couple were very sad to know that he would be leaving, but as good parents, they knew that he must find his own way in the world. The Old Woman stayed up all night preparing Momotarou's favorite food for the journey, and the Old Man went to the back room and pulled out a splendid set of armor to give Momotarou—for the Old Man had been a very brave and handsome warrior in his youth.

With the morning light, the Old Couple waved good-bye to Momotarou, with tears in their eyes and joy in their hearts.

“Oh, what an adventure! “ Momotarou thought to himself. He was at last on his own and ready to be grown-up! And off he ran down the mountain, half tumbling as he headed toward the great sea.

It wasn't long before, without any warning, out jumped a fierce dog, growling and gnashing his teeth. “How dare you cross my path!” snapped the dog. But Momotarou could see that the dog was just cranky because he was hungry and said, “I'm Momotarou! I'm going to travel to *Onigashima*, the *Island of the Demons*, to save all of Japan. Won't you come with me? I'll give you some *kibidango* made by my own mother to seal the deal!” The dog was very hungry, so he politely took the delicious-looking rice cake that



Momotarou offered him. But he didn't eat it right away. He was a proud dog and new his manners, so he thanked Momotarou and tucked the *kibidango* away for later.

Along they went, becoming fast key came swinging toward them fierce. "How dare you cross his nose spread wide and see that he was just bluff-going to travel to *Onigashi*-of Japan. Won't you come you some *kibidango* made



friends, when out of the treetops a huge mon-brandishing a branch and looking ever so under my trees!" the monkey snarled with his teeth showing. But Momotarou could ing, and so he said, "I'm Momotarou! I'm *ma*, the *Island of the Demons*, to save all with me and my friend Mr. Dog? I'll give by my own mother to seal the deal!"

So off they went on their journey, with Momotarou in the lead and the monkey trying to act braver than the dog, and the dog trying to stand taller than the monkey.

As evening approached, they were nearly at the shore. It had become quiet, but out of the distance they could hear the flap of wings. Down swooped a huge pheasant and squawked, "How dare you travel under my sky!" But Momotarou could see that he was only startled by the unexpected travelers and said, "I'm Momotarou! I'm going to travel to *Onigashima*, the *Island of the Demons*, to save all of Japan. Won't you come with me and my friends, Mr. Dog and Mr. Monkey? I'll give you some *kibidango* made by my own mother to seal the deal!"



"Oh, I know all about the *oni*! I'll gladly come to help!" So Mr. Pheasant took the *kibidango* and pledged to join them.

As the sun set they could see the ominous *Onigashima*, the *Island of the Demons*, silhouetted against the growing darkness of the sky and each of them became just a little bit afraid of what the next day would hold.

Early in the morning, while the others still lay sleeping, Momotarou thought about his plan for the day. He was afraid of what he and his friends might have to face. But Momotarou was also brave, and even though he was afraid, he promised himself that he would do the very best that he could.

The four young heroes boarded a raft the clever monkey made for them and off they went with the morning air still chilly.

Now the *oni* are very lazy creatures, even though they are very fierce. As Momotarou and his companions approached the island, the sun was high overhead, but the *oni* were still sound asleep. Mr. Dog, with his special sense of smell, was able to lead them all along the safest path to the gate. The castle was huge! And the gateway so tall and locked up tight!

Mr. Pheasant silently flew over the highest barrier and unlocking the massive doors allowing his new-found friends to enter.

Momotarou put his finger to his lips and as they tip-toed through the compound they silently tied up all the *oni* without anyone ever waking up!

At last they came to the *oni* king. He was snoring the very loudest of all the demons! So they tied him up extra securely and then the four of them respectfully lined up in front of the king, for he was a king after all, and bowed low as the pheasant tickled the *oni* king's nose to wake him up. "Achoo! Who are you?" he asked in surprise. Seeing the four puny fellows lined up in front of his throne, he thought he was dreaming! But he couldn't move, he was all tied up!

Momotaro called out in a loud voice, "I'm Momotarou! I've traveled to *Onigashima*, the *Island of the Demons*, to save all of Japan. And now I have you! I'll give you some *kibidango* made by my own mother if you give up right now!"

The *oni* king could see he had no choice, and the *kibidango* looked sooo good! He remembered when his own *oni*-mother used to make such delicious *kibidango*, and so he agreed. Each of the *oni* came and bowed deeply before the conquering heroes and turned over all the treasure they had stolen through the years.

Momotarou and his companions worked very hard to return all of the treasure to the original owners. People were so amazed that such a young person could accomplish so much that they rewarded him with many splendid gifts.

On the way home they said good-bye to Mr. Pheasant and left him with his share of the rewards. They could see his friends dancing in delight, high in the sky, as he rejoined them.

Soon Mr. Monkey was back in his forest—his family was so happy to see him! Everyone chattered away, trying to tell him what happened while he was away before he even had a chance to tell them of his great adventure. And he, too, was given a very generous portion of all the treasures they had been awarded.

But as they approached the land of Mr. Dog there was no one to greet him. Mr. Dog did not seem happy but thanked Momotarou for including him in so much fun, but that he wouldn't need any treasure since he had no one to share it with.

As Momotarou turned to go, he called to Mr. Dog and invited him to visit his own family. He wanted so much for the kind Old Man and the kind Old Woman to meet his very first and best friend. So off they went with the dog's tail high and wagging quickly back and forth for all the world to see.

Oh, joy of joys! All the animals of the neighborhood had run ahead to tell the Old Man and the

Old Woman that Momotarou was on his way home. This gave the Old Couple time to prepare a big banquet in celebration and all the creatures of the mountain stayed to celebrate.

Mr. Dog seemed so surprised to see that Momotarou had so many friends! He was a little shy all of a sudden and stood back in the shadows as everyone listened to the stories of Momotarou. But Momotarou called Mr. Dog over and told everyone how brave he had been. Everyone begged and pleaded with Mr. Dog to stay and be their friend, too. And the God of the Mountain smiled.

