

LESSON NOTES

# Japanese Culture Class #23

## Bon Festival

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# 23

# VOCABULARY

Kanji	Kana	Romaji	English
提灯	ちょうちん	chōchin	paper lantern
赤提灯	あかちょうちん	akachōchin	red paper lantern (usually assoc. with food)
大文字焼き	だいもんじやき	daimonji yaki	well-known Bon festival in Kyoto
灯籠流し	とうろうながし	tōrōnagashi	paper lantern floating
盆踊り	ぼんおどり	bonodori	Bon Festival dance
五山の送り火	ござんのおくりび	gozan no okuribi	well-known Bon festival in Kyoto
お盆	おぼん	O-bon	Bon Festival

## SAMPLE SENTENCES

お盆は祖先をまつる期間なので、祖先の霊を迎える前にお墓を掃除するのは大切なことです。

*O-bon wa sosen o matsu kikan na no de, sosen no rei o mukaeru mae ni o-haka o sōji suru no wa taisetsu na koto desu.*

Obon is a period of honoring one's ancestors, so it's important to clean the family graves before welcoming their spirits.

## GRAMMAR

お盆 ・ おぼん ・ *o-bon* - Bon Festival

The Bon Festival, or *O-bon*, is an important holiday in Japan, held on either July 13th - 15th or August 13th - 15th, depending on the location in Japan. Recently, though, more and more people are celebrating this holiday during August. many companies also give their employees time off to observe this event during August. The festival is an event of Buddhist origin observed in order to honor of Buddhist origin observed in order to honor the spirits of the ancestors.

Many Japanese will return home during this time to visit their families and the resting

place of their ancestors. Because of this, it has become one of the busiest times of travel in Japan, whether by plane, train or otherwise. The peak travel period this year will be from August 12th - 15th.

Traditionally, in preparation of the return of the spirits of the ancestors, Buddhist altars in the home are prepared with offerings to the spirits - many times fruits, vegetables, or other food and drinks. Also, to guide the spirits home, 提灯・ちょうちん・*chōchin*, or lanterns, will often be lit at the entrances of homes.

During the festival, one of the popular events that people partake in is 盆踊り・ぼんおどり・*bon'odori*, or Bon Festival Dancing. These songs and dances are unique to the localities where held, and have over 500 years of history. The dances are often around a bonfire and are accompanied by drums.

At the end of the Bon Festival, the spirits are guided back away once again by lanterns or fire. One of the most well-known events that is related to this is 灯籠流し・とうろうながし・*Tōrōnagashi*, during which hundreds of paper lanterns or offerings are set aflame and sent out into the water of rivers or the ocean. This is an incredible sight to see, and should be attended if one has the chance.

Another very well-known festival held during the closure of the Bon Festival is 五山の送り火・ござんのおくりび・*gozan no okuribi*, held in Kyoto. Translated literally, this would be ceremonial bonfires of the five mountains, which is actually a fair description of what takes place. Five large bonfires in the shapes of various kanji characters are lit on the sides of five mountains that surround the city. The first to be lit is the character 大・だい・*dai*, on the 大文字山・だいもんじやま・*daimonji yama*, or Daimonji mountain. Because of this, this festival is also widely known as 大文字焼き・だいもんじやき・*daimonjiyaki*. This lighting of these bonfires begins at 8:00pm on August 16th, and all characters can be seen burning at 8:30pm.