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愛氣塾通信

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お正月, New Year's Season

Traditions of O-shogatsu, New Year's Time in Japan

Neil Segal

The New Year holiday in Japan, *Oshogatsu*, is a time of prayers and greetings. Japanese view each year as separate and the 3-day new year holiday as a time to participate in rituals which they hope will bring a successful year. Traditionally, debts are to be resolved before the end of the year so that no business or obligations from the previous year will be carried over into the new year. This custom even extends to cleaning homes, offices, temples and dojo by new year's eve in order to start fresh in the new year.

Spring Cleaning and Decorating

The cleaning is called *Susuharai* (煤払い), soot-sweeping, or *Ōsōji* (大掃除), grand spring cleaning. This cleaning is intended to remove the physical and spiritual blemishes of the past year in order to purify the home for the coming year. This is equivalent to *misogi* for the living and working environment.

On New Year's Eve, a pine decoration known as *Kadomatsu* (門松) is placed at the entrance to homes (see Vol. 2, Issue 1 for further details). This new year's decoration is intended to bring good fortune to the home or business. *Shimenawa* (注連縄), a straw rope with strips of paper hanging in a zig-zag pattern is another common new year's decoration, which is hoped to protect the home from evil.

New Year's Holiday

All new year's preparations are completed by *Omisoka* (大晦日), New Year's Eve. Nearly everyone except those who work in entertainment or transportation have a three-day holiday known as *Shogatsu Sanganichi* (正月三箇日). Traditionally, Japanese spend this time at home with their families. However, more recently, many Japanese begin the holiday as early as December 29, when public offices close and take advantage of the long holiday to travel to ski or go to *Onsen* (温泉), hot spring resorts.

To wish someone a Happy New Year, say
明けましておめでとうございます
Akemashite Omedetou Gozaimasu!

New Year's Foods

The 3 day *oshogatsu* holiday is a time of rest for stores, so it is necessary to stock up on food ahead of time, and a time of rest for housewives, so enough food is prepared ahead of time to last the 3 days. One special food eaten over the New Year's holiday is *Mochi* (餅). This is made by boiling sticky rice and then pounding it into cakes. It is then eaten either grilled or in a new year's soup, *Ozoni* (お雑煮). *Osechi-ryouri* (お節料理), a set of over 30 foods, prepared before the holiday and traditionally decoratively arranged in lacquerware boxes, is eaten throughout the New Year's

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holiday.

Offerings

Mochi is also stacked, decorated with citrus fruits and branches, and left as an offering to the gods in hopes of bringing favor. This is called **Kagamimochi** (鏡餅). Other offerings placed in front of the small household or dojo shrine include: dried persimmons, dried chestnuts, pine seeds, black peas, sardines, herring roe, crayfish, sea-bream, dried cuttlefish, **Mochibana** (餅花) flowers made of rice and straw, mandarin oranges, and others offerings depending on local customs.

Concluding the New Year's Festivities

On January 4th, most people return to work, but New Year's customs and festivities last through January 15th. **Kadomatsu** are traditionally removed on January 14th and burned in a neighborhood bonfire while people sing, grill **mochi**, and tell fortunes. Therefore, the first 14 days of the year are referred to as **Matsunouchi** (松の内), "within the time of pine." January 15th is **Seijin no Hi** (成人の日), day of adulthood, when all those who reach age 20 that year become adults in a public ceremony. On this day, the ancient New Year, **Azuki-gayu** (小豆粥), rice gruel cooked with red beans, or **Zenzai** (善哉), soft sweet bean soup, is eaten to protect against illness and evil spirits throughout the year.

For further information, please refer to Volume 2, Issue #1, regarding: **Omisoka** (大晦日)- New Year's Eve, **Hatsumode** (初詣)- visits to temples/shrines, **Gantan** (元旦)- New Year's Day, **Mochi** (もち)- rice cakes, **Osechi Ryori** (おせち料理)- New Year's foods, **Nengajo** (年賀状)- New Year's greeting cards, **Otoshidama** (お年玉)- New Year's gelt, and **Shochikubai** (松竹梅)- 3 aspects of life.



News from Japan...

16 Year-Old Girl Apprehends Car Thief With Back Throw

(Yamanashi Prefecture) On December 8th at around 9:10 AM, Mari Okada, 16 years-old, discovered a thief breaking and entering a car in the municipal civic center parking lot. She caught him and threw him with *Seioinage* (背負い投げ), a judo throw, and then pinned him. Bystanders witnessed this and called for police, who took the man into custody.

Ms. Okada holds the rank of shodan in judo. The thief's name was Kazuyoshi Kubotera, 69 years-old. He began robbing bags and valuables from cars at 9:00 AM. Ms. Okada apprehended him while she happened to be at the civic center to attend her younger sister's youth judo competition. (*Yomiuri Shinbun*)



Japanese Language Study

A Time of "Firsts"

Oshogatsu is a time of renewal and "firsts." Storekeepers have a ceremony for **Hatsuni** (初荷), delivery and stocking the first merchandise of the year. Artists and poets traditionally perform their first work of the year on January 2nd. Some other "firsts" of the year include:

- 初夢 [Hatsu-yume] first dream of the New Year
- 初音 [Hatsu-ne] first warbling of the New Year
- 初空 [Hatsu-sora] first sky of New Year's morning
- 初釜 [Hatsu-gama] first tea ceremony of New Year
- 初詣 [Hatsu-mode] first temple visit of New Year
- 初姿 [Hatsu-sugata] first kimono wearing of the New Year
- 初湯 [Hatsu-yu] first bath of the New Year

Expectations

Following the Path

Connie Bruce

Beware of expectations! Unlike the cute ghosts and ghouls that stand at the doorstep on Halloween, singing “trick or treat”, the expectation goblin is lurking in the shadows constantly. I often hear parents disappointed because their children are not living up to their expectations, spouses disappointed in one another for lack of expectations being met, etc.

While practicing Aikido, we should be mindful of how our expectations affect our practice. Do we get caught up in our expectations to the point that we will make the technique happen regardless of anything else? Or do we set the expectations aside, take what was given to us and use it to restore harmony?

We have all termed a practice “a good practice” because apparently our expectations were met. In all actuality, every practice simply *is*. It is a collection of moments, with each and every moment being an experience. Whether we walk off the mat drenched or spend an hour practicing *tenkan*, there is something new to be learned if our expectations don’t prevent us from fully experiencing the moments.

We all have had fulfilled and unfulfilled expectations. Expectations are undoubtedly a human trait. However, we don’t have to allow them to dictate our lives. In fact, we can befriend them and strive to understand them, which will lead to a deeper understanding of ourselves and others. In this way, we can improve our ability to prevent these little goblins from blinding us to the whole experience and stealing precious moments that will not return.

As always, I appreciate everyone training with me. I always leave a practice wealthier than I was when it started.

Thank you.



SUBSCRIPTIONS TO AIKIJUKU TSUSHIN

\$30 for 1 year for non-members

Free to members who are enrolled in courses for Japanese language, Calligraphy, Aikido training, or other cultural arts.

COURSES

AIKIDO: THE PATH OF HARMONIOUS SPIRIT

Aikido is a path of discipline aimed at perfection of the spirit, through flowing with the natural energy of the universe. The art and path of Aikido was discovered and taught by Morihei Ueshiba, known as O'Sensei. Through practicing circular movements for the restoration of harmony out of conflict, the aikidoist develops sensitivity for flowing with universal energy. Classes are ongoing with group and private lessons available.

NIHONGO: JAPANESE LANGUAGE

In Basic Japanese, students will experience all four integrated language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) to develop a foundation for Japanese communication. Students will learn about Japanese culture while improving language skills. The first two lessons include an introduction to studying Japanese language.

Second semester Japanese is designed for students who have completed Basic Japanese, or the equivalent. This class will continue to emphasize learning integrated language skills to further develop proficiency with contemporary Japanese language while deepening an awareness of Japanese culture.

As language and culture are linked, students will find greater satisfaction in *Aikido*, *karate*, *kendo*, *shodo*, and other studies with a basic knowledge of language. The next term will begin January 22, 2002.



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