

Oshōgatsu

Prayer Guide



To equip Christians in Japan for
the work of gospel ministry

DECEMBER 29 - JANUARY 4

Oshōgatsu

Prayer Guide

Oshōgatsu is the Japanese word for the first 7 days of the New Year; a time of relational and spiritual traditions centered around ushering in the new year.

Title: Utensils with Decorations for the New Year
Artist: Ryūryūkyō Shinsai (Japanese, active ca. 1799–1823)
Date: 19th century
Culture: Japan
Medium: Part of an album of woodblock prints (surimono); ink and color on paper
Dimensions: 7 11/16 x 6 9/16 in. (19.5 x 16.7 cm)
Classification: Prints
Credit Line: H. O. Havemeyer
Collection, Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, 1929



Introduction

In the hustle and bustle of modern day secular life in Japan, it is easy to forget that there are powerful spiritual forces at work that interfere with people's receptivity to the Gospel. *Oshōgatsu* is the name for the Japanese New year holiday, and is one of the most spiritually significant season in Japan. For Christians, *Oshōgatsu* is an invitation to be united in prayer and cry out to the living God.

This prayer guide is designed to focus your intercession on the spiritual dynamics at play during *Oshōgatsu*, both pleading for God to work in the lives of non-Christians and to strengthen Japanese Christians who face these challenges head-on. We long to see the day when the name of Jesus is cherished and proclaimed all across Japan.

To that end, we invite you to join for this focused season of prayer during the week of December 29th -January 4th

Title: Bowl of New Year Food
Artist: Teisai Hokuba (Japanese, 1771–1844)
Period: Edo period (1615–1868)
Date: probably 1808
Medium: Woodblock print (surimono);
ink and color on paper
On display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (NYC)



DECEMBER 29TH

3 DAYS 'TIL OSHŌGATSU

A *bōnenkai* (忘年会, literally "forget the year gathering") is a Japanese drinking party that takes place at the end of the year and is generally held among groups of co-workers or friends.

The purpose of the party, as its name implies, is to forget the woes and troubles of the past year, and hopefully look to the new year, usually by consumption of large amounts of alcohol.

A *bōnenkai* does not take place on any specific day, but they are usually held within December.

📖 PSALM 103:8-12

PRAY: Wisdom / Boldness / Openness

Wisdom for Christians, as they seek to navigate these traditions in ways that honor God; **Boldness** for Christians, to make the most of the opportunities this season brings; **Openness** for non-Christians, to receive the message of the only one who can truly erase the sins of the past year.

REFLECT

Write in Japanese: **New Year**

お正月



DECEMBER 30TH

2 DAYS 'TIL OSHŌGATSU

Rather than Spring Cleaning, people in Japan do New Year's Cleaning, referred to as *ōsouji* (大掃除), or the big cleaning.

The main reasons for undertaking an *ōsouji* are that it welcomes in the new year with a fresh clean home, and also because it prepares the house to welcome

in the *toshigami sama* (歳神様, the shinto god of New Year).

The idea is that having a clean environment is starting the new year fresh without clutter and welcoming in the gods for another year with respect.

📖 MATTHEW 25:1-13

PRAY: Preparedness / Steadfastness / Welcome

Preparedness for Christians, to live with an expectation for Christ's return; **Steadfastness** for Christians, to hold fast to the gospel; **Welcome** for non-Christians, to open their hearts to the one who stands at the door and knocks.

REFLECT

Write in Japanese: **Welcome**

歓迎





DECEMBER 31ST

1 DAY 'TIL OSHŌGATSU

One of the biggest Buddhist ceremonies at the end of the year is *Joya no Kane* (除夜の鐘), or the tolling of temple bells around midnight on New Year's Eve.

According to Buddhist beliefs, it is customary to ring the bell 108 times as this number corresponds to the number of evil desires that we suffer from on earth.

Ringling the bell 108 times supposedly rids us of our evil passions, and purifies us for the upcoming year.

 PSALM 139

PRAY: Confidence / Freedom / Comfort

Confidence for Christians, in the God who sees them; **Freedom** for Christians, from anxious and fearful thoughts; **Comfort** for non-Christians, to receive Christ and be comforted by God's power in their lives.

REFLECT

Write in Japanese: **Comfort**

慰め



JANUARY 1ST

OSHŌGATSU

The first sunrise to grace the morning of January 1 is called *hatsuhinode* or *goraikō* (初日の出 or 御来光); these terms describe a sunrise at the summit.

According to legend the *toshigami sama*, the deity of the New Year, appears during the first sunrise of the year.

Watching the first sunrise is a way to welcome the *toshigami sama* and the new year ahead.

While gazing at the first sunrise, the Japanese pray for good fortune. Some even make New Year's resolutions and set goals to improve their health and happiness.

 MATTHEW 5:14-16

PRAY: Boldness / Winsomeness / Hope

Boldness for Christians, to bear bold witness to the light of Christ; **Winsomeness** for Christians, so the only offense is that of the gospel itself; **Hope** for non-Christians, to receive the promised rest of Christ and put their hope in Him

REFLECT

Write in Japanese: **Bold**

大胆





トシコシ蕎麦
toshikoshi soba -
New Year's Eve



お雑子
ozouni - New Year



おせち料理
osechi ryouri -
New Year



おもち
omochi -
New Year



ぜんざい、おしるこ
zenzai, oshiruko -
New Year



七草がゆ
nanakusagayu -
New Year

Traditional dishes enjoyed with family and friends throughout Oshōgatsu.

JANUARY 2ND

2ND DAY OF OSHŌGATSU

Hatsumōde (初詣) is the first visit of the year to a shrine or temple. Those who don't do *hatsumōde* after midnight on the 31st typically make their visit between the 1st and the 3rd of January.

Most shrines and temples offer *omikujī* (おみくじ) fortune slips, and it is common to buy one to predict your luck for the year ahead. Good fortunes are often kept, while bad ones may be tied up at a designated spot at the temple or shrine in order to pray for better fortune.

📖 PSALM 130

PRAY: Anchored / Encouragement / Hunger

Anchored for Christians, to be rooted deeply in Christ, turning to Him in all things; **Encouragement** for Christians, to be encouraged as they wait on the Lord; **Hunger** for non-Christians, to recognize their need for more than what the world can offer.

REFLECT

Draw the kanji: **Hunger**

飢え渴き

JANUARY 3RD

3RD DAY OF OSHŌGATSU

You might have seen a green decoration made of pine, bamboo and plum (*ume*) trees in front of Japanese people's houses and offices during the last few days of the old year and the first few days of the new year.

It is called *kadomatsu* (門松), and during the period from right after Christmas until January 7, it is believed to

provide temporary housing for the *toshigami sama* in order to ensure a great harvest and blessings from the family's ancestors on everyone in the home.

Pine, bamboo and plum trees each symbolize longevity, prosperity and sturdiness.

📖 ACTS 7:48-50, MATTHEW 1:23

PRAY: Joy / Eagerness / Understanding

Joy for Christians, to overflow with the joy of God incarnate;
Eagerness for Christians, to share the good news of God;
Understanding for non-Christians, to grasp the difference between the God of the Bible and the spirits of Japanese tradition.

REFLECT



Write in Japanese: Joy

喜び

JANUARY 4TH

4TH DAY OF OSHŌGATSU

Otoshidama (お年玉) refers to a Japanese tradition that all children look forward to every year. Kids receive small envelopes with some cash from their parents, grandparents and close relatives, generally from 5-6 people. The average amount of money per envelope is 5,000 yen, but it generally increases

as the kids grow up.

The tradition originated as an offering of rice cakes called *kagami mochi* (鏡餅) to the *toshigami sama*. Those rice cakes, given from parents to children, were called *toshidama* in the past, and they came to be replaced with small toys, and then with money today.

📖 MATTHEW 13:44; 6:19-24

PRAY: Modesty / Zeal / Salvation

Modesty for Christians, to treasure the Kingdom of God not the kingdom of man; **Zeal** for Christians, to seek and respond to the Lord with fresh fervor; **Salvation** for non-Christians, to seek & receive the greatest treasure of all: the kingdom of God.

REFLECT



Write in Japanese: Salvation

救い

KANJI GUIDE

お正月 (Oshōgatsu) New Year

歓迎 (kangei) Welcome

慰め (nagusame) Comfort

大胆 (daitan) Bold

飢え渴き (uekawaki) Hunger

喜び (yorokobi) Joy

救い (sukui) Salvation

MATERIAL ADOPTED FROM

Bōnenkai

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/B%C5%8Dnenkai>

Ōsouji:

<https://www.allinjapan.org/oosouji-japans-version-of-spring-cleaning/>

Joya no Kane:

<https://www.nagoya-info.jp/en/event/detail/56/>

Hatsuhinode:

<https://matcha-jp.com/en/1518/>

Omamori and Omikuji:

<https://theplanetd.com/japanese-new-year-traditions/>

Kadomatsu and Otoshidama:

<https://japantoday.com/category/features/lifestyle/Guide-to-New-Year-traditions-in-Japan>



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Happy New Year!