

# Obon - Festival of the Dead

## Hill Family JAPAN



**Are you familiar with the Mexican Festival, The Day of the Dead? Japan has something very similar called Obon.**

This festival is held annually around August (depending on the area). It's a time when families get together and mourn their dead. They visit their loved one's grave and wash the grave stone. Some pray to their ancestors at the grave and even leave food, but many more try to lead their ancestor back to their home by placing a lantern outside their house (if this is the first Obon for the recently dead) or inside their home (for family that has been dead for a while).

People travel all over Japan to return to their family's residence for this reunion. **They eat, drink and have fun, all the while believing their relative's spirit is there with them.** At meal times they leave food and drink for their ancestor by the family Buddhist altar. During the reunion, family members visit with their deceased loved one by praying to them at the altar.

Another part of Obon is neighborhoods getting together to carry their local shrine's Mikoshi (large transportable altar) throughout the streets of their neighborhood. The whole community gets together to help carry the altar on their shoulders (think ark of the covenant but much bigger and with many more people). Others cheer or play drums. The whole purpose is to unite the community in this celebration. It's often when new members of the community are welcomed in and accepted. Which of course makes it more difficult for a missionary to be accepted by the neighborhood.

**To us Christians this seems very foreign. I mean why leave food for dead people? But let me paint this in a different light.** Imagine a young Japanese husband with a wife and 2 kids. His job just transferred him to a city far from his home town. He knows no one. One day at work he gets a phone call that his wife died in a car crash on her way home from taking the kids to daycare. The love of his life and the mother of his 2 toddlers is gone. He will never see her, hold her hand, kiss her, or be with her again. His children will never know their mother. What hope does he have? She is dead forever.

So he tries to make sense of it by believing his wife's spirit is with him. He leaves a lantern outside the house so she can find her way home. He leaves food for her to show he still thinks of her and loves her. He teaches his children to pray to her in the hopes that they won't forget their mother. He joins the community in carrying the altar, because he really needs a friend right now.

**The question comes down to, how do you deal with death?** All across the world, cultures struggle to deal with death! Because there is no answer in this world for that pain and loss. Our skin, language, and culture may be completely different, but in death we are all the same. There is no pain like the loss of a loved one. The world tries so hard to fix what we broke in the garden of Eden, but it can never repair the damage that sin caused. We truly died that day.

**And so Obon is one of the world's ways of trying to quench death's sting and comfort the hurting.** However we know it's just a bandaid over a knife wound to the heart. There is no hope, no comfort save in the resurrection of Jesus Christ!!! He is the only one who conquered death and came back to give us hope!

We ask that you pray for us to continue to improve in Japanese, to comfort the hurting, and to share the Good News of the one that still conquers death!

### Prayer Request Updates

**Language:** I will preach this month in our children's church. Please pray for me as I prepare. Rebel and I teach kids in a Sunday School format as well, and it's been great practice for us. It would take me a few chapters to explain why Japanese is the hardest language in the world to learn, but plenty of linguists have already done that. That being said, God has helped us tremendously, and we are doing well with daily communication! Thank you for your praying for us!

**Visitor:** One of our fellow language school students said she would visit the church this Sunday. Pray that she will come!



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