

<Japanese Words and Phrases> —*Setsubun* (End of Winter)—

February 3 is *Setsubun*, or the end of winter. *Setsubun* actually means “change of seasons,” and refers to the day before *risshun*, the first day of spring. To welcome spring, on *Setsubun* people drive away *jaki* (evil) and *sainan* (misfortune) and wish for *fukuzen* (good fortune) in the New Year.

On *Setsubun*, either the *toshi otoko* (a man who was born in a year with the same sign of the Chinese zodiac as the present year), or the head of the household, scatters roasted soy beans while saying “*Oni wa soto, fuku wa uchi*.” (“Out with demons, in with good fortune.”) It’s a custom to pick up and eat the number of beans that corresponds to your age, or your age plus one year, in order to wish for *mubyo sokusai* (good health and good fortune) for the year.

In Japan, there is a proverb that says *Iwashi no atama mo shinjin*. Roughly translated, this means that “with faith, even the head of a sardine becomes holy.” On *Setsubun*, it is a custom to fry the head of a sardine, skewer it with a holly branch, and hang it at the entrance to the house. It is believed that the bad smell of the sardine’s head will prevent demons from entering the house.

<日本のことば> —節分 (せつぶん) —

2月3日は、節分の日です。節分は本来、季節が移り変わる意味で、「立春 (りっしゅん)」の前日を指します。春を迎えるにあたって「邪気 (じやくき)」や「災難 (さいなん)」を払い、新しい年の「福善 (ふくぜん)」を願うものです。

節分の日には炒った豆を、「年男 (としおとこ)」または、一家の主人が「鬼は外、福は内」と言いながらまきます。この時まかれた豆を自分の年の数だけ、あるいは、年の数よりひとつ多く拾って食べ、一年の「無病息災 (むびょうそくさい)」を願う風習があります。

そのほかにも、「鯛 (いわし) の頭も信心」などといわれる鯛の頭を焼いて、ヒイラギの枝に刺し、家の入り口に差す風習があります。これは鯛の頭の悪臭で、邪気(じやくき)が家に入るのを防ぐという意味があります。