

<Japanese Words and Phrases> —*Tanabata* (Star Festival)—

Millions of stars shine in the summer skies. At about 1 o'clock in the morning, almost directly overhead, you can see Vega, a star of the first magnitude and part of the Lyre constellation, and Altair, part of the Eagle constellation. In Japanese, Vega is called *Orihimeboshi* (named for a young woman skilled at weaving), and Altair is called *Hikoboshi* (named for a young man who tends cattle). There is a legend concerning these stars.

“The weaver and the herdsman were hard workers but after the two married, they neglected their work; the weaver no longer worked at her loom and the herdsman no longer looked after the cattle. They were punished for this by being separated by a river, the *Ama no gawa*, or “river of heaven” (the Milky Way galaxy). They are only allowed to meet once a year, on *Tanabata*, July 7.”

In Japan, there is a custom of *sasa - kazari* (decorating bamboo poles), in which people wish that the weaver and the herdsman will safely cross the Milky Way and meet. They write their own wishes on *tanzaku* (special strips of paper), and hang them on the bamboo poles.

<日本のことば> - 「七夕(たなばた)」 -
夏の夜空にはたくさんの星が輝いています。
午前1時頃に天頂付近に観ることができ
ること座の1等星ベガ(「織姫星(おりひめ
ぼし)」、機織りの上手な娘)と、わし座の
アルタイル(「彦星(ひこぼし)」、牛飼
いの若者)には、七夕伝説があります。
「織姫も夏彦も働き者でしたが結婚をし
て、織姫は機を織らなくなり、夏彦は
牛を追わなくなったため、『天の川』
を隔てて引き離されてしまいました。
しかし、年に一度、7月7日の七夕の
日だけは逢うことが許されました。」
二人が無事に天の川を渡って逢うことが
できるようになると願いながら、日本では「短冊(た
んざく)」に自分の願い事も書いて、笹竹に飾
る七夕の「笹飾り」の風習があります。