

A Calendar of Words Seasonal words for December

Another term for December is *shiwasu*. It is written “monks run” in kanji characters, because December is a busy season when even monks who are usually calm and composed must make haste to get things done. During this month, many people hold year-end parties, or *bonenkai*, and paint the town red as they get together and look back on the year that is about to end.

O-misoka is a seasonal word for December, referring specifically to December 31st, the last day of the year. Japanese companies are normally closed during the year-end, and most people spend those days preparing to usher in the coming year. It is typical for the entire family to gather, eat *toshikoshi soba* (year-end *soba* noodles), and quietly listen to *joya no kane* (midnight tolling of the temple bells) together, on *O-misoka*.

Toshikoshi soba are eaten on *O-misoka*, in hopes of good fortune, continued health, and longevity in the coming year. The *joya no kane* begins late at night on *O-misoka* and continues into the first few seconds of the new year, and symbolizes the casting away of man's 108 earthly desires of the old year prior to welcoming in the new.

As the end of *shiwasu* draws near, people greet each other with the phrase, “*yoi otoshi wo*” (have a good new year). As it is a widely-used phrase that celebrates the coming year, you might like to try using the greeting “*yoi otoshi wo*” in parting this year.

ことばの歳時記 さいじき がつかきご ～12月の季語～

12月の別名を師走(しわす)と呼び、その由来はいつも泰然と
しているお坊さんすら走り回るほど忙しくなるからと言われて
います。忘年会などで多くの人が盛り場に繰り出し集うなどし
て、行く年を回想します。

さて12月の季語である「大晦日」(おおみそか)は1年の終
りの日、12月31日を指します。日本の年末は仕事を休み、新年を
迎える準備も終えて、家族で団らんし、「年越し蕎麦」を食べて、
静かに「除夜の鐘」を聴くのが一般的です。

ちなみに「年越し蕎麦」は、家運・身代・寿命などが永く伸び
るようにとの願いをこめて食べるそうです。「除夜の鐘」は、古
い年押し除けて新年を迎える夜に、108の煩惱を取り除き、
新年を迎える意味を込めてつきます。

師走も押し迫ってくると、「よいお年を」と挨拶を交わします。
これは、来る年をあらかじめ祝う意味がありますので、研修生・
技能実習生のみなさんも新しい年がよい年であるようにとの
願いを込めて、挨拶を交わしてみてください。