

# OBON!

Story by Anna Lin

Dedicated to Dr. Chaote "Akinori" Lin

Little Shotoku was born deaf.

Born in Japan, *Sho-kun* -< くん loved his grandparents.

Sadly, his own parents lost their lives from a huge earthquake and following *tsunami* 津波, both of which destroyed much of the area, including mountains, forests and the earth.

With the help of his grandparents, his deafness never took away his enjoyment of life.

*Ojii-san* お爺さん and *Obaa-san* お婆さん made sure Sho-kun loved life by enhancing his other senses.

"Sho-kun, look at the *sakura* 桜 cherry blossoms --- like pink rainfall!"

"Obaa-san, the *sushi* 寿司 tastes so fresh --- *oishii* おいしい !"

"Sho-kun, feel the steam of the *ofuro* お風呂 --- the heat rising."

"Ojii-san, I smell *ocha* お茶 --- your favorite tea!"

In school, Sho-kun was an excellent student.

"Obaa-san, I can read all the *kanji* 漢字 in this book."

"Ojii-san, I can write stories about *samurai* 武士 --- how they fight using *kendo* 剣道 ."

Despite all his blessings, there was one thing little Sho-kun never tried.

Every summer, his village had its own *Obon Matsuri* お盆祭り, the festival held to honor their ancestors.

"I love to watch **Bon odori** 踊り!

The dancers are so graceful.

They practice for months!

I also know the steps.

I can dance with the **uchiwa** うちわ, **sensu** 扇子, **hachimaki** 鉢巻 and even the **kachi kachi** かちかち.

I only wish I could hear the music --- the **takebue** 竹笛 and **shamisen** 三味線."

But Sho-kun never joined the odori.

Summer was approaching, and the Obon Matsuri was three months away.

"Sho-kun, you know all the steps, why not join the odori?"

"Obaa-san, I can see the dancers clicking their kachi kachi, but they are not together.

How can I join?

Is something missing?"

Obaa-san had no answer.

She turned to Ojii-san.

"What can we do to help our little Sho-kun?"

"Obaa-san, remember the days before the tsunami, when the dancers would step to the beat of the **taiko** 太鼓?

That has been missing for years.

A big, fat drum could be heard, and felt, by the entire village."

Quietly, Ojii-san went to work.

"Mmmmm... In the mountains, I will find wood.

Many, many trees in the mountains.

Ah, a fallen tree --- ookii 大きい , thick and wide.

Collapsed from the earthquake long ago.

I ask to accept this majestic tree as a gift from nature.

**Onegai itashimasu お願いいたします .”**

At home, Ojii-san wasted no time.

Without rest, he carved, hollowed, and smoothed a part of the tree until it became a large barrel, so large a *sumo* 相撲 wrestler could fit inside.

The body of the taiko was ready.

What next?

“Mmmmm... I will search the forest.

Many, many animals in the forest.

Ah, a deer.

Body still warm.

No injuries, no signs of sickness.

Just died of old age.

I ask to respectfully accept this body.

**Onegai shimasu お願いします .”**

After the deer skin was stretched, Ojii-san needed to attach it onto the body of the taiko.

“Mmmmm... I will dig the Earth.

Many many minerals in the soil.

Carefully, carefully.

Ah, rich minerals!

Another gift from nature, I humbly ask to use them for metal.

Onegai shimasu.”

From the minerals, Ojii-san made large tacks to nail the deer skin onto the barrel for a drumhead.

After many weeks and much hard work, Ojii-san’s taiko was finished!

The Obon Matsuri was now three days away.

As always, Sho-kun practiced the odori.

“Ojii-san, Obaa-san, **kotchi mite** こっち見て --- look at me!”

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Obon day has arrived!

Presented with a new *happi* ハッピ , Sho-kun excitedly put it on and tightened his *obi* 帯

.

“Ojii-san, Obaa-san, I’m going to the village now --- *itte kimasu* 行って来ます!”

All of a sudden, he felt a vibration.

Then another. And another.

This feeling was unlike any other, for it entered from the bottom of his feet, rose throughout his body and thumped in his chest.

Slowly, rhythmically, it shook the ground to a gentle beat.

The entire sky seemed to sing a song.

“Nani 何 ? Taiko???”

The shaking gently woke the earth.

As Sho-kun approached, he slowly understood.

In the distance, with mountains as its backdrop, a grand *odaiko* 大太鼓 stood, taiko players rotating, pounding a thunderous beat.

At that moment, Sho-kun knew what was missing.

Feeling the waves of vibration, the dancers moved together to the rhythms.

"Obaa-san, Ojii-san, *hayaku* 早<!

Is this the taiko Obon had long ago, before the tsunami?

Where did it come from?

How did it get here?"

"Sho-kun, the taiko is a gift for the village --- and a dedication to those who lost their lives. Come, let's enjoy!"

And for the first time, Sho-kun jumped in the odori circle!

He danced as the sun set, until the stars twinkled, and the moonlight shone.

The pulse of the taiko linked Sho-kun, the dancers and the entire village.

Once again, Obon was complete.

Smiling wide, Sho-kun waved, as they joyfully circled around the taiko.

The villagers continued their tradition, always thankful, treating the trees of the mountains, the animals of the forests and the Earth with great respect.  
And every summer, the taiko provided the pounding heartbeat of Obon... all thanks to little Sho-kun and his grandparents.

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## Japanese terms from *Obon!*

| Kanji | Pronunciation   | Definition                                 |
|-------|-----------------|--|
| -くん   | <i>-kun</i>     | term of endearment for a young boy         |
| 津波    | <i>tsunami</i>  | tidal wave                                 |
| お爺さん  | <i>Ojii-san</i> | grandfather                                |
| お婆さん  | <i>Obaa-san</i> | grandmother                                |
| 桜     | <i>sakura</i>   | Japanese cherry                            |
| 寿司    | <i>sushi</i>    | vinegared, seasoned rice                   |
| おいしい  | <i>oishii</i>   | delicious, tasty                           |
| お風呂   | <i>ofuro</i>    | hot bath                                   |
| お茶    | <i>ocha</i>     | tea  |
| 漢字    | <i>kanji</i>    | Chinese written characters                 |
| 武士    | <i>samurai</i>  | warriors of ancient times                  |
| 剣道    | <i>kendo</i>    | Japanese martial art of fencing            |
| お盆    | <i>Obon</i>     | the summer period of honoring<br>ancestors |
| 祭り    | <i>Matsuri</i>  | festival                                   |
| 踊り    | <i>odori</i>    | Japanese traditional dance                 |

|          |                          |  |
|----------|--------------------------|--|
| 鉢巻き      | <i>hachimaki</i>         | headband                                 |
| うちわ      | <i>uchiwa</i>            | round paper fan                          |
| 扇子       | <i>sensu</i>             | folding paper fan                        |
| かちかち     | <i>kachi kachi</i>       | wooden clackers                          |
| 竹笛       | <i>takebue</i>           | Japanese bamboo flute                    |
| 三味線      | <i>shamisen</i>          | Japanese three-stringed lute             |
| 太鼓       | <i>taiko</i>             | drum                                     |
| 大きい      | <i>ookii</i>             | big                                      |
| お願いいたします | <i>onegai itashimasu</i> | please (honorific form)                  |
| 相撲       | <i>sumo</i>              | Japanese wrestling                       |
| お願いします   | <i>onegai shimasu</i>    | please                                   |
| こっち見て    | <i>kotchi mite</i>       | look over here                           |
| ハッピ      | <i>happi</i>             | Japanese worker's jacket                 |
| 帯        | <i>obi</i>               | wide belt                                |
| 行って来ます   | <i>itte kimasu</i>       | an expression said when leaving the home |
| 何        | <i>nani</i>              | what?                                    |
| 大太鼓      | <i>odaiko</i>            | large drum                               |
| 早く       | <i>hayaku</i>            | quickly                                  |