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Omizutori¹

One of Japan's Oldest Buddhist Ceremonies

MARTHA BOYER AND JIKAI FUJIYOSHI

The aim of the present paper is to give a general outline of the Omizutori ceremony including its preparatory stages. It is based on Reverend Kōkai Kitagawara's booklet: Omizutori-gyōbōki (published by Reverend Kōten Kitagawara, 1966). Reverend Katun Kamitsukasa's pamphlet: Omizutori ni tsuite (published by Tōdai-ji), Reverend Kōshō Shimizu's Tōdai-ji shuni-e (published 1953), and Omizutori, Dramatic Buddhist Ceremonies, illustrated by Taikichi Irie (published by Sansai-sha, Tōkyō 1968) have also been helpful for the present paper. It is the hope of the authors to be able to follow this preliminary paper by future research work on this far too little known Omizutori ceremony. They feel grateful for the kindness shown them by the authorities of Tōdai-ji, and look forward to their continuing cooperation.

WITHIN the precincts of Tōdai-ji² in Nara, the majestic landmark of Buddhist temples, the Nigatsu-dō³ (Hall of the Second Month) nestles on a slope to the eastern side of the temple complex. A timber construction elevates the front of the building above the uneven ground so that the Hall seems to fit into the protecting hill to the rear. Although the Nigatsu-dō as it appears today is only three hundred years old, it has a history equal to that of the Kon-dō or Daibutsu-den (Great Buddha Hall) of the main temple.

The Nigatsu-dō was made the site for the practice of the ceremony called *Omizutori* by Imperial decree, and from the fourth year of Tempyō-shōhō (752 A.D.) to the present day, the ceremony has taken place as an annual rite more than twelve hundred times. Based on the text of the "way of the eleven-headed Kannon repentance" (*Jūichimen-keka-bō*),⁴ *Omizutori* implies that the Buddhist priests may repent their sins and intensify their piety by means of an eleven-headed Kannon-image enshrined in the Nigatsu-dō.

¹ 払水取 (御水取) ² 東大寺 ³ 二月堂 ⁴ 十一面権過法

Omizutori, taking sacred water, has become the popular name of the ceremony, but strictly speaking it is called *Sbuni-e*⁵ (ceremony of the second month) in accordance with its performance in February (in the lunar calendar). At present, the ceremony proper starts on March 1st and ends on the 15th of that month, but actually the inaugural ceremony is usually held on February 20th, and this date may be pushed back even to December 16th of the preceding year. The date of December 16th marks the anniversary of the death of Rōben Sōjō⁶ (689–773), the founder and head priest of Tōdai-ji, and this became the traditional date for appointing the candidates for the ceremony of the coming year.

The history of Nigatsu-dō records that in the tenth month of the third year of Tempyō-shōhō (751), a priest named Jitchū⁷ entered into the dragon den of the Kasagi mountain in the province of Yamashiro (now Kyōto-fu). From there he proceeded northward and arrived at the Inner Shrine of the *Tosotsu*⁸-heaven with its forty-nine “jewel palaces”. He made a circuit pilgrimage to these forty-nine abodes and visited the shrine called *Jōnen-Kannon-in*,⁹ where a great many celestial beings were practising a ceremony of repentance for the eleven-headed Kannon. The priest was deeply moved by the performance and decided to transfer it to the world of human beings. But he was warned in his undertaking. It was made clear to him that one single day and night in the *Tosotsu* (*Tusita*)-heaven⁸ equalled four hundred years in the world of man and also that the ceremony should be practised one thousand times every day without intermission. But most serious of all was the requirement that the ceremony should take place in the presence of a living Kannon.

In spite of all these difficulties, the priest was constant in his desire to introduce the ceremony to his own world, and he was convinced that if the human beings performed the religious austerities one thousand times a day at running speed, then the Kannon-*botatsu* would descend from his *Tosotsu*-heaven.

Soon after, the priest went to the shore of Naniwa (Ōsaka) in the province of Settsu, and looking toward *Fudarakusen*,¹⁰ the mountain on the southern coast of India where the Kannon was believed to dwell, he offered incense and flowers and implored Kannon to descend to earth. And thus one day a kind of altarcloth (*akaosbiki*),¹¹ wrapped around an eleven-headed Kannon-image, came floating

⁵ 修二会

⁶ 良弁僧上

⁷ 実忠

⁸ 兜率天

⁹ 常念観音院

¹⁰ 補陀落山

¹¹ 闍伽折敷

on the water from beyond the ocean at Naniwa. The priest Jitchū rescued the image from the water. When he touched the surface of the figure and felt that it was warm like human flesh, he knew instantly that this very image must be the living Kannon he had beseeched to descend to the world of human beings. He carried the image to the upper-shrine or Nigatsu-dō of Tōdai-ji.

The continued annual performance of *Omizutori* since 752 A.D. gives convincing proof of the priest Jitchū's success in introducing this unique ceremony to the world of man. The genuine spirit and dramatic beauty of *Omizutori* are bound to appeal to a world-wide public, but moreover, this austere ceremony offers a wealth of material for studying ancient or perhaps even pre-Buddhism. It is hardly too much to compare its significance to that of the Shōsō-in Repository of Tōdai-ji. Both institutions are, in their own right, storehouses of treasures that provide a background for the understanding of various aspects of Chinese and Japanese cultures.

The Participants and Their Duties

The priests who participate in the *Omizutori* ritual are called *Rengyōshū*¹² and must number eleven at a minimum—a figure which is said to have no bearing on the eleven-headed Kannon-image. The official titles of the individual eleven priests are as follows: *Wajō*,¹³ *Daidōshi*,¹⁴ *Sbusbi*, *Dōtsukasa*, *Kitazashū-no-ichi*, *Nanzashū-no-ichi*, *Kitazashū-no-ni*, *Nanzashū-no-ni*, *Chūdō-no-ichi*, *Gonsbo-sekai*, and *Sbosekai*.

Of these the first four mentioned are collectively known as *Sbisbiki*.¹⁵ Among them the *Wajō* is the senior and the one who administers the precepts throughout the practice. The second ranking is the *Daidōshi*, who is concerned with the exoteric teachings. He recites prayers for all souls, past and present, from the emperor down to the common people, and assures their enlightenment and rebirth into the Buddhist paradise. Furthermore, he prays for the continuity of heaven and earth to secure peace for the country and nation as a whole.

The *Sbusbi*,¹⁶ the third of the *Sbisbiki*-quartet, is in charge of the esoteric teachings. He invites the Four Guardian Gods and the Dragon God to attend the ceremony and makes use of scented faith-healing water. Finally, the

¹² 練行衆 ¹³ 和上 ¹⁴ 大導師

¹⁵ 四職 ¹⁶ 咒師

Dōtsukasa,¹⁷ the last in the *Shibiki*-group, occupies himself with miscellaneous affairs such as adorning the Shrine and rewarding or punishing the participants.

We shall limit ourselves to the above mentioned duties of the four *Shibiki* and shall add only that there are, of course, detailed rules for all the participants, whether priests, lay officials or servants. The latter number about fifty, an indication of the considerable scale on which the ceremony is carried out.

*Making Sacred Shintō Ropes (Shimenawa)*¹⁸

During the observance of *Omizutori*, the Nigatsu-dō and surroundings are considered sacred precincts. Special Shintō ropes (*shimenawa*) are made and encircle the sacred areas to protect them from the contaminated world outside. These ropes are furnished with small tufts of straw which hang down at intervals, and in between are inserted twigs of five-leaved *shikimi*¹⁹ (*Illicium religiosum*) and strips of folded white paper (*shide*).²⁰ Such ropes give evidence of *Ryōbu-Shintō*²¹ or Shintō influence transmitted by way of the Shingon school.

Under the guidance of a priest, devotees who are selected from special families make ninety sacred ropes during the two days of February 19th and 20th. On the morning of February 21st, they carry them to Nigatsu-dō. Later in the afternoon they offer thirty ropes to each of the following shrines: *Iimichi*²² (on a hill southeast of Nigatsu-dō), *Omyū*²³ (on a hill north of Nigatsu-dō), and *Kōjō*²⁴ (under a cedar tree called *Rōben* to the west of Nigatsu-dō). They form the ropes into circular rings and throw them in front of the shrines where the boy-attendants (*Dōji*)²⁵ have assembled to compete with each other in catching them. If by mischance the ropes fall to the ground, they are discarded as "dust". But those which are caught are hung on the walls of the Nigatsu-dō and the *Bekka-bō*,²⁶ the residence of the *Rengyōshū* in which a special fire, *bekka*,²⁷ is kindled on February the 19th with fire from the eternal lamp (*jōtō*),²⁸ which burns in front of the Kannon-image in Nigatsu-dō.

*Temporary Sacred Fire (Koro-Bekka)*²⁹

When the old fire has been extinguished, the new fire is to be used for all

17 堂司 18 注連繩 19 榊 20 四手 21 兩部神道 22 飯道 23 遠敷
24 興成 25 童子 26 別火坊 27 別火 28 常燈 29 試別火

activities, such as cooking, heating the rooms, and the bathwater, and so on. The special fire consists of two sessions, the *koro-bekka* or “temporary sacred fire” and the *sō-bekka*³⁰ or “full fire”.

Late in the afternoon on February 20th, the *Rengyōsbū* enter into the session of *koro-bekka*, either in their private temple, in a neighbourhood temple or inside the compound of Tōdai-ji. The boy-attendants draw water from the Ebisu-gawa, a part of the Sahogawa-stream, which cuts through the northern section of the city of Nara. They carry it to the Rengyōshū, and when the priests have finished their regular evening bath, they purify themselves by pouring this water over their bodies. Then they exchange their robes for new ones and put on a simple surplice (*biragesa*)³¹ of black hemp. Later they eat supper and practise hymn-chanting (*isōmyō*).³²

At dawn on the following day, the *Rengyōsbū* ascend to Nigatsu-dō, and the *Dōtsukasa* hands over the key of the Inner Shrine (*Naijin*)³³ to the *Dōdōji* official who unlocks the door, while he himself opens the three remaining doors, i.e. to the north, east, and the south. Lay carriers (*Mikosbinoyaku*)³⁴ remove the small enshrined Kannon-image from the inner sanctuary to the front section (*Rai-dō*)³⁵ of the Inner Shrine where they clean it and adorn it with white paper. Meanwhile, other participants sweep the interior of the hall, and when they have finished, the adorned shrine is carried back to the rear part of the sanctuary and placed on an image-dais.

In the afternoon, the *Rengyōsbū* leave their respective *Bekka-bō* and make a circuit pilgrimage together to the four temples located on the surrounding hills, the Hachiman-den,³⁶ the Daibutsu-den, the Tennō-den,³⁷ and the Kaisan-dō.³⁸ During this so-called “visiting the shrines” (*shasan*),³⁹ the priests blow their conch-shells from various places inside the Tōdai-ji compound to announce the beginning of the religious practice.

When the *Rengyōsbū* have paid homage to the above-mentioned temples, they proceed to the bath-house below Nigatsu-dō, a construction with a certain touch of elegance dating from the beginning of the Edo period (1651–1867). Inside the bath-house the wooden floor is slightly raised along one side and covered with coarse straw-mats on top of which another kind of matting

30 惣別火

31 平装袈

32 声明

33 内陣

34 御典の役

35 礼堂

36 八幡殿

37 天皇殿

38 開山堂

39 社参

(*tesbima*)⁴⁰ is arranged to mark the place for undressing. As soon as the priests have entered, they kneel down on the *tesbima* in order of seniority.

An official hands over a scroll of paper and an inkbox to a secretary who puts down the names and ranks of the *Rengyōsbū* for the year. The *Dōtrikasa* then inspects the completed list of names, faces the participants, and expresses his wishes for a happy New Year, asking everyone to carry through the yearly religious austerities and to pray for the present life and the after-life as has been done since the time of the emperor Shōmu (724-49), by devotees from the sixty provinces of Japan.

In their respective *Bekka-bō*, the *Rengyōsbū* occupy themselves with the many preparations for the ceremony. They make paper-robcs to be worn from the day when they enter into *sō-bekka* (February 26th), and they use paper for mending their wooden clogs (*tasbikake*),⁴¹ which they wear inside the hall of ceremony, and they also make use of paper for wrapping up charms. Every day is passed with paper and paste and scissors to produce the necessary outfit for the ritual, which runs from March 1st to 15th of that month.

In the early morning of February 23rd, the *Rengyōsbū* assemble in the *Bekka-bō* of the *Shōsekai*⁴² to make lamp-wicks for the Inner Shrine and flower-arrangements of paper camellias and nanten for offering to the Kannon.

On February 24th, the boy-attendants prepare one thousand rice-cakes to be offered to the Kannon during the first week of the session (March 1st to 7th), and on March 5th, they make another one thousand for the following week. This goes on in the *Gokusbo*⁴³ of Nigatsu-dō, i.e. the special hall (*Bussō-ya*)⁴⁴ for making rice for the Buddha.

In addition to making these rice-cakes, the boys make various kinds of pine-torches (*taimatsu*),⁴⁵ such as the *jōdō*-torches,⁴⁶ which are used on March 12th, or the *basu*-torches, which are used during the ceremony of "taking sacred water". There are also the *kaku*⁴⁷-torches to be used in the evening ceremony for the small Kannon-image and on the following dawn. But many more torches are made for special use in the ceremony of administering the Buddhist precepts, in the lighting of the Shintō-lanterns (*koe*-torches), and in the *basbiri*-ceremony of rapid circumambulation, and so forth. In fact, these torches are

40 臺島屋 41 差懸 42 処世界 43 御供所 44 仏餉屋 45 松明
46 上堂松明 47 加供

such a conspicuous part of *Omizutori* that the whole ceremony has become equally well known under the name of *Otaimatsu*.⁴⁸

The rules which the *Rengyōsbū* have to observe during their practice are graded in accordance with the number of times the participants have taken part in the religious austerities. In many ways these rules are similar to those which were practised inside the ancient Japanese military system, where they applied to the ranks of old and young soldiers.

On the evening of February 26th, the fire of *koro-bekka* is abandoned and from the following day, the *Rengyōsbū* enter into *sō-bekka*⁴⁹ to begin a new life at a new fire.

Full Sacred Fire (Sō-Bekka)

The *Rengyōsbū* practise individually during the session of *koro-bekka*, but reside together during the time of *sō-bekka*. In the early morning of February 26th their boy-attendants transfer their belongings to the *Sō-bekka-bō*, which is located inside the compound of Kaidan-in,⁵⁰ to the west of the Daibutsu-den.

When the *Rengyōsbū* have settled in their new lodgings, they take baths and exchange their garments for paper-robcs which are fastened with paper belts that were made during the preceding year of *sō-bekka*. A rosary called a *ji-nenju*⁵¹ is put into the belt when they ascend to Nigatsu-dō, but it should be noted that the participants make use of various rosaries according to the occasion. They wear the same surplice of black hemp as during the session of *koro-bekka*, but now it has been folded and sewn together to resemble a string or loop and is called *tasukigeta*⁵² (*tasuki*—string for holding up tucked sleeves).

After having been installed in the *Sō-bekka-bō*, the *Rengyōsbū* purify themselves, and the three lower-ranking participants make a fire by the steel and flint method while reciting the sacred words of Kannon (*dhāraṇī*). From then on the new fire (*sō-bekka*) is the only one to be used throughout the session.

During *sō-bekka* it is forbidden to eat between meals. Only when the participants retire to a small rest room are they free to talk and smoke and make themselves a little comfortable. Whenever they move from one room to another, they wear their indoor sandals and carry their *tesbima*-mats with them. In fact,

⁴⁸ 御松明

⁴⁹ 焼別火

⁵⁰ 戒壇院

⁵¹ 時念珠

⁵² 袷袢

the *Rengyōshū* are kept confined in the *Sō-bekka-bō* and are not allowed even in the garden. They have to obey the strict regulations until the end of the month, when they ascend to the Nigatsu-dō. Meanwhile they are kept busy preparing for the ceremony.

Thus the *Shusbi* makes white cotton cloth (*shirayū*)⁵³ for offering to the three earlier mentioned shrines around Nigatsu-dō. He cuts white paper strips to be attached later to the *kaku*-torches which are used only by the *Kakubugyō*,⁵⁴ who is in charge of prayer and offerings. Similar white paper strips are attached to the *basu*-torches which light the way for the *Shusbi* during the observance of "taking sacred water". Generally speaking, the white paper strips are made for purification purposes.

In the morning and evening, the *Rengyōshū* recite the text of exorcism (*Nakatomi no harai*),⁵⁵ the Kannon Sutra and the Amida Sutra in front of the corresponding guardian gods, and in the evening they blow their trumpet-shells. Three famous conch-shells are kept in the Inner Shrine of Nigatsu-dō, known as the *Ogiri*,⁵⁶ the *Kotaka*,⁵⁷ and the *Kuina*.⁵⁸ Tradition has it that on September 15th in the second year of Meitoku⁵⁹ (1391), when the lord Ashikaga Yoshihisa visited Nara and paid homage in the Nigatsu-dō, he was shown the *Ogiri* and *Kotaka*. His consort, who accompanied him, bowed reverently three times in front of the conch-shells and asked to hear their sound. The *Daidōshi* blew them, and the sound of the *Ogiri* was compared to the roar of an old lion, while that of the *Kotaka* was said to resemble the voice of a child playing with its mother. None of the conchs could dominate the other. It should be added that the third conch-shell, the *Kuina*, is thought to have been presented to Tōdai-ji by the Shōgun Minamoto Yoritomo (1192-98).

No food is served in the *Sō-bekka-bō* in the morning or evening until the *Rengyōshū* have finished chanting the text of *Nakatomi no harai* and some sutras, when the *Kakubugyō* appears at the entrance to the room and announces the meal. The attendants bring the food, plates and bowls which have been purified by fire produced by flint and steel. But after seven at night, when the big bell of the *Daibutsu-den* gives the signal for the first watch of the night (*shoya*),⁶⁰ no more meals will be served in the *Sō-bekka-bō*. The participants continue reciting

53 白木綿 54 加供奉行 55 中臣の禊 56 尾切 57 小麿 58 水鷄
59 明德 60 初夜

hymns until midnight, when they spread their bedding on the floor of the room and go to sleep.

On the morning of February 27 charm-paper is distributed to the *Rengyōsbū*, which they use to hand-print spells and god-images. Such charms are offered to the Kannon in the Nigatsu-dō. The participants also make paper bags (*dattan-bukuro*⁶¹ or *natto-bukuro*⁶²) for holding tinder and a kind of charcoal which they use for making fire during the secret ritual of the *dattan*-dance in which they act as the fire god (*Katen*)⁶³ and scatter sparkling fire around them.

In the afternoon of the same day, the ceremony of robes (*koromo no shūgi*)⁶⁴ takes place, and the *Rengyōsbū* put on black hemp robes (*jūe*)⁶⁵ with narrow string-like surplices. The *Kitazasbū-no-ichi* who is also known as the first “supervisor” holds a priest-staff (*shakujō*)⁶⁶ in one hand and carries a box for chopsticks in the other as if it were an incense-burner with handle. Then he starts to recite the formula called *Sanraimon*⁶⁷ or “three kinds of worship”; the participants join in the recitation and finally bow to mark the end of the ritual. The main purpose of this ceremony is to make sure that the robes fit the participants so that they can move comfortable during the main service.

The following or final day of the month marks the time for the *Rengyōsbū* to leave the *Sō-bekka-bō* and move into the secluded place below the Nigatsu-dō. It also indicates that the participants have now gone through the so-called preliminary practice. In the afternoon, the fireplace serves for the purification known as *kōkun*.⁶⁸ On top of a high pile of ashes incense is burned to purify the room and the belongings of the *Rengyōsbū*. Later the boy-attendants carry the purified objects to the secluded place and the *Rengyōsbū* blow their conch-shells to announce that they are ready to ascend to the Nigatsu-dō. Before finally leaving the *Sō-bekka-bō* and proceeding to the new secluded place they perform still another purification ceremony.

*The Secluded Place (Sanrō Sbukusbo)*⁶⁹

The secluded or retiring place (*sanrō sbukusbo*) comprises two sections, one for the *Rengyōsbū*, and one for the lay officials. The former, in which the participants stay in groups, is called the “four directions of the secluded place” and is located

61 達陀袋

62 納豆袋

63 火天

64 衣の祝儀

65 重衣

66 歸杖

67 三礼文

68 香燭

69 参籠宿所

below the flight of stone steps to the north of the Nigatsu-dō. It was constructed during the Kamakura period (1185-1392) and has been appointed an important cultural property. It is housed under the same roof as the narrow corridor (*Hosodomo*)⁷⁰ and the dining-hall and has four rooms for the *Rengyōsbū* and another four rooms for the *Kakubugyō* and other attendants.

When the *Rengyōsbū* enter the secluded place they are strictly forbidden to communicate with each other throughout their two weeks' stay. The four rooms are very similar. A fire is placed in the front part of the room at the foot of a big pillar on which a bamboo-container with flowers, a lantern, and a scoop are attached. At both sides of the fireplace white mattresses are spread, over which the participants arrange their *tesbima* mats, while the room-master and the senior participant take seats on opposite sides of the fire.

The second secluded place (i.e. that of the lay officials) is located south of Nigatsu-dō in connection with the bath-house, consequently it is called the bathing-resting-place. It has five rooms, including one for the bath-house attendants. These lay officials have their own charcoal-fire and generally wear paper-robcs partly covered by a white cotton skirt. But when they serve in the religious observances they put on a different kind of skirt made of dark grey hemp and tied around the ankles.

Similar to the arrangements in the *Rengyōsbū*'s four rooms, natural flowers hang from a wooden pillar, while on the walls are suspended rosaries and a purification staff with attached white paper as used in the *Nakatomi no harai* ceremony. The *Dōdōji* wears a peculiar small head-covering (*tokin*)⁷¹ and the special robe (*suzukake*)⁷² of the mountain-priests (*yamabusbi*)⁷³. His rosary is of large wooden beads, 1.5 cm in diameter.

Rite of Exorcism (Ōnakatomi no Harai)

The rite of exorcism (*Ōnakatomi no harai*), the purification of the *Rengyōsbū*, is distinctly a *Ryōbu-Shintō* ceremony and takes place at twilight. Generally speaking, this ceremony is known also as "assembling the goblins" (*Tenguyose*)⁷⁴ and aims at pacifying and purifying everyone to make sure the religious austerities can be carried through without disturbance.

The *Sbōko*,⁷⁵ *Dōdōji*, and other officials, proceed in white dress to announce

70 細股

71 兜巾

72 蓑々懸

73 山伏

74 天狗寄

75 小綱

that all trespassing of lay people is from now on prohibited around the area of the *Hosodono*, and put themselves on guard to prevent any violations. The *Rengyōsbū* wear a short jacket (*yuyakosode*)⁷⁶ and the string-like *tasukigesa* over their paper-robos and enter the *Hosodono* to wait for the *Sbusbi*. The serving official lights a nine foot long pine-torch and sits down to wait at the foot of the flight of steps.

After a while the *Sbusbi* arrives, proceeds towards the burning pine-torch, and kneels down in front of it. Then he starts to rub his rosary violently between his hands, takes off his surplice, and begins to whirl his purification staff around himself. He opens a scroll of prayers and recites to himself the text of purification. When the participating priests begin to pray, he raises his big staff and swinging it from left to right walks to and fro inside the *Hosodono*, purifying the participants and urging them to practise earnestly.

The *Rengyōsbū* also rub their rosaries between their hands and pray for purification of their six senses. The flickering flames from the pine-torch are reflected on the shiny surface of the hall's ancient red wooden pillars, and the sound of rubbing rosaries and clapping hands breaks through the cold and silent air of the vanishing day. The old cypresses are half hidden behind the smoke from the burning torch, but nonetheless add to the exquisite setting and serene atmosphere of this ancient ritual of purification.

*Administering the Precepts (Jukai)*⁷⁷

At about two o'clock in the morning on March 1st, the *Rengyōsbū* put on their robes to be ready for the ceremony of administering the precepts (*jukai*) in the dining-hall. Headed by the preceptor (*Kai-wajō*)⁷⁸ they enter the dining-hall through the southern entrance in the order of seniority. The floor is paved with tiles, with long daises arranged on the four sides on the hall; the one to the north is reserved for the *Wajō* and *Daidōsbi*, the one to the east for the *Sbusbi* and *Dōtsukasa*, the dais to the south for the *Kitazasbū-no-icbi* and *Nanzasbū-no-icbi*, and finally the dais to the west for the remaining five *Rengyōsbū*.

When seated the *Rengyōsbū* take off their *tasukigesa* and put them in front of them, and the boy-attendants remove them and substitute the so-called *jikidōgesa*,⁷⁹ which is especially meant for use in the dining-hall. The participants

⁷⁶ 湯屋小袖

⁷⁷ 授戒

⁷⁸ 戒和上

⁷⁹ 食堂袈裟

put these on in silence. No sounds are heard but the crackling of the paper-robcs and other garments which intensifies the quietude and serenity of the moment.

The dining-hall has no decoration, only an oil-lamp burns in front of a miniature shrine which holds an image of the Buddhist saint *Binzuru-sonja*.⁸⁰ A lay official places the *Kai-wajō*'s table in front of this image and arranges some rough stones and pebbles together with a *sbikimi* spray of three twigs and five leaves on top of the table. He then bows to the *Kai-wajō* and invites him to begin the ceremony of administering the precepts. He proceeds to the miniature shrine carrying a branch of *sbikimi* as if it were an incense-burner with handle, and makes three bows in front of the image. With the *Komori*⁸¹ official holding a small flaming torch for light, the *Kai-wajō* strikes two stones together and reads silently the text of precepts which he is thought to have received from *Binzuru-sonja*.

The ceremony proper has come to an end, and the *Kai-wajō* returns to his seat. Still holding the *sbikimi* spray between his hands, he bows three times and reads slowly the text of the precepts, transmitting their words to the *Rengyōsbū* they recite together: we will observe earnestly. This promise ends the administering of the precepts, and the officials give the order to the boy-attendants to bring the bowls and plates and place them in front of the participants.

*Ittoku Fire (Ittoku-Bi)*⁸²

At about three o'clock in the morning, when the ceremony of administering the precepts has finished, the *Rengyōsbū* return to their rooms. But soon again they make themselves ready for ascending to the Nigatsu-dō. They change their *jikidō-gesa*, which they had used in the dining-hall, for the *jōdōgesa*,⁸³ which must be worn in the hall. They assemble in the *Rai-dō* of the Inner Shrine and while waiting for the arrival of the *Dōtsukasa* make a deafening noise by stamping their wooden-clogged feet on the wooden floor.

When the *Dōtsukasa* arrives, they all rush into the dark hall. They circumambulate three times at great speed in the pitch-dark hall and bow to the Kannon-image. Then they open the doors in the three directions of east, south and north, and by the light of the flaming torches which penetrates from the outside through the latticed wooden door, they sweep and clean

⁸⁰ 賓頭盧尊者

⁸¹ 木守(職)

⁸² 一徳火

⁸³ 上堂袈裟

the interior sanctuary and offer flowers and burn incense on the altar table.

Later, the *Dōtsukasa* asks the *Sbosekai* and the *Gonsbosekai*⁸⁴ to enter the inner sanctuary, while the other participants remain seated in the *Rai-dō*. The *Dōtsukasa* stands facing south in front of the curtain which separates the *Rai-dō* from the Inner Shrine, and at a distance of 15 feet and facing north, the *Dōdōji* kneels with one knee bent, holding flint and steel for making fire. The participants hold their breath and anxiously watch the *Dōdōji*, who bows to the *Dōtsukasa* and makes himself ready to strike the steel with the flint. In a second, the noise of flint and steel striking each other breaks the silence, and a fire spark catches the tinder, and is transferred to a small piece of wood, which lights the wick of the eternal lamp. If the spark does not catch the first time, bad luck could come to the *Dōdōji*'s family.

From the Tempyō era (the 8th century) to the present, the *Dōdōji* has been selected from the Inagaki family. The eldest son of this family, by tradition called Ittoku, is the one who produces every year the fire with the flint and steel. This has given the ceremony the name *Ittoku-bi*.

When the *Dōdōji* has lit the eternal lamp, the *Dōtsukasa* carries it into the inner sanctuary where the *Sbosekai* sprinkles it with water, it is then offered to the Kannon-image. From now on the lamp is kept burning continuously until March 1st of the following year.

*Etiquette in the Dining Hall (Jikidō-Sabo)*⁸⁵

Every day at about half past eleven, the *Dōtsukasa* informs the *Rengyōshū* of the meal in the dining-hall. He strikes a bell in the hall and when the participants enter, takes his seat. They follow his example and go to their respective seats.

The *Dōdōji* official brings purifying water, and having asked the *Sbusbi* to say the prayers, purifies the main dish by sprinkling it with water. The attendant in charge of the cooking covers his mouth with white paper and fills some eating bowls with purified food which the *Dōdōji* then carries to offer to the Kannon-image in the Nigatsu-dō. When he has finished, he strikes the bell in the *Rai-dō*. As soon as the sound of the bell is heard in the dining-hall, the *Daidōshi* starts to read prayers, praying for longevity and peace, for the nation and for everyone from the Emperor down to the common people; for their

84 權處世界 85 食堂作法

enlightenment and rebirth in the Pure Land. Meanwhile, the participants are served boiled rice in large wooden lacquered bowls in quantities which would satisfy at least ten persons. *Miso*-soup is served in another kind of bowl and some other dishes are added. The prayers continue for half an hour, until it is time to eat.

Immediately before eating, the *Dōdōji* calls out "*arai-kumō*", which may be understood as an order to take boiled water and clean the bowls. An attendant carries in a wooden tub with boiled water for drinking instead of tea, as well as for cleaning the bowls after their use. When everybody has finished the meal, another servant says "*mansho*", and an old kettle with the left-over from the meal is carried away. This seems to be in accordance with the Nigatsu-dō's history of giving food to the outcasts.

In the same history (*Nigatsu-dō-engi*)⁸⁶ it is said that if the left-over food from this special meal is given to the outcasts on the slopes of Nara, they will recover from their leprosy. Thus, the *Rengyōshū* seem in former times to have given their food to families who were victims of leprosy and lived in the area of Kitayama.

When the *Rengyōshū* leave the dining-hall and step out of the door, they throw small wrapped-up portions of boiled rice (*saba*)⁸⁷ over the roof of the well (*akaiya*)⁸⁸ in front of the dining-hall. The old records say that in former times when the priests took their meals in the dining-hall there were no birds around the *akaiya*, so the priests made special prayers from March 5th to 7th, inviting birds to come to the well. In spite of this, no bird ever appeared. Nevertheless, the priests continued to pray for the arrival of the birds until March 15th. Consequently the "throwing rice over the roof" has been interpreted as feeding the birds.

The *Rengyōshū* have two meals a day, one in the morning and one at noon. When they leave the dining-hall after the noon-meal, they are forbidden to consume any more food and must even abstain from taking medicine or drinking boiled water. They have to practise the religious austerities without eating and drinking until three the following morning.

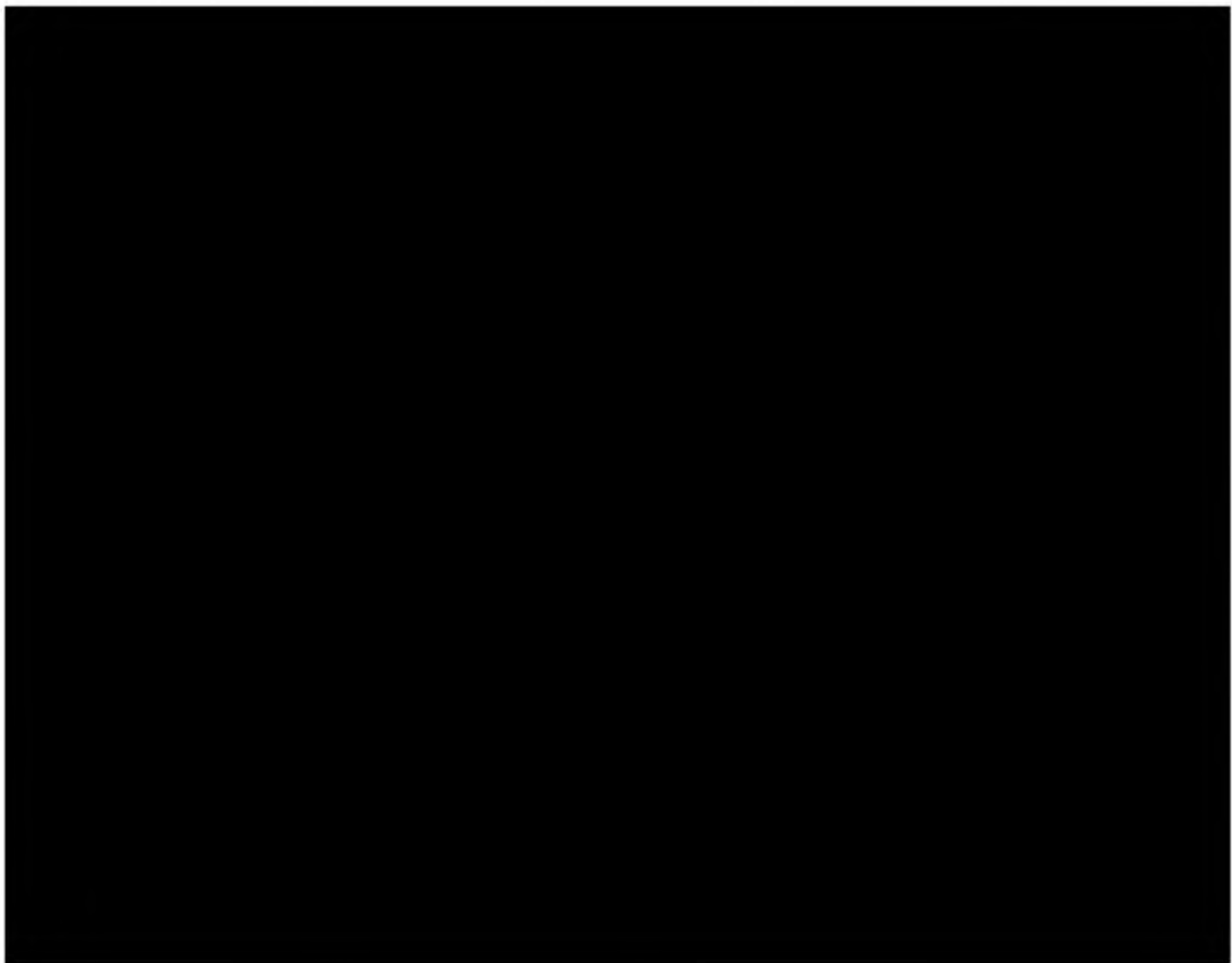
Worship at Shintō Shrines and Prayers at Prescribed Times

When, on March 1st, the sunset ceremony is finished, the *Rengyōshū* leave

⁸⁶ 二月堂縁起

⁸⁷ 生飯

⁸⁸ 關御井屋



Nigatu-dō

The Rite of Exorcism
(*Ōnakatomi no harai*)

The Fire God (Katen)

the *Rai-dō* through the southern entrance to make the circuit pilgrimage to the shrines of *Iimicbi*, *Onyū*, and *Kōjō*.

The *Daidōrbi* rings the bell and holding an incense-burner, he recites the text pertaining to the ceremony, imploring the gods to protect it. The participants' continued procession from one shrine to another evokes the illusion of unrolling a scroll-painting section by section. The worshipping priests, observing their religious austerities in the glow of the setting sun, would make impressive and colorful subjects.

At about four o'clock in the morning on March 15th, the *Rengyōshū* repeat their pilgrimage to the shrines to report the accomplishment of their religious rites and to express their gratitude for having been able to fulfill them without interruption. Every day the *Rengyōshū* recite the Amida Sutra and say prayers at prescribed times in a special room.

Six Times Observance

The daily observance is comprised of six ceremonies; at noon, sunset, the first, the second, and the third watches of the night, and at dawn.

According to the rules of the six ceremonies, a junior participant is appointed leader. He steps into the middle of the inner sanctuary, and accompanied by the circumambulating participants, recites the Three Obeisances (*Sanraimon*) and chants hymns of offering (*Kuyōmon*),⁸⁹ of Amida Buddha (*Nyoraihai*),⁹⁰ of scattering flowers (*Sange*),⁹¹ of repenting in front of the eleven-headed Kannon-image (*Jūichimen Kannon-keka*), of reciting the name of Kannon (*Kannon-bōgō*),⁹² of the merits of Kannon (*Gobutsu-gomyō*),⁹³ of the Great and Small Repentance (*Oisange*)⁹⁴ and *Sboxange*).⁹⁵ and also the hymns of Vow (*Hotsugan*),⁹⁶ and of the Heart Sutra (*Sbingyō*) and of the transmission of merits (*Ekōmon*).⁹⁷

A special board-arrangement (*gotai-ban*)⁹⁸ for making salutations is found at the southern part of the *Rai-dō* where a cypress board rests on a log with one end of the board on the floor. When using this board for kneeling down, the five parts of the priests' body are supposed to touch the ground; one talks of the "five parts of the body falling down", i.e. the forehead, the lower part of both arms, and both knees. In all the six daily observances, one of the *Rengyō-*

89 供養文

90 如來唄

91 散華

92 觀音宝號

93 五仏御名

94 大懺悔

95 小懺悔

96 発願

97 更向文

98 五体板

sbū steps out from the inner sanctuary, daily kneels down on the *gotai-ban* in the *Rai-dō*, and repents his sins. Sometimes this ritual is carried through at great speed and might appear more like a humorous play than a religious act. But it should be remembered that one single day and night in the *Tasotsu*-heaven equals four hundred years in the world of human beings—thus there is no time to lose.

Though the above outline gives the usual practice of the six ceremonies, they differ somewhat from each other; for instance, in the choice of hymns to be chanted, in the form of repentance, and also in the physical efforts of the participants.

At the sound of the large bell of Tōdai-ji at seven o'clock every evening, the *Rengyōsbū* ascend to the Nigatsu-dō in reverse order of seniority. The boy-attendants show the way with large burning pine-torches, 18 feet in length. When the *Kakubugyō* arrives at the hall, he asks the *Shosekai*, who has remained in the Inner Shrine since the sunset ceremony, about the time shown by the incense-burning. The *Shosekai* consults the "plates of time-incense" in the hall and may answer that they show some inches towards the first watch of the night.

In the past, when clocks were not yet in use, the time was reckoned by this so-called time-incense (*jikō*).⁹⁹ Lines were drawn in the ashes and incense was put along the lines, gradually to be burnt; and by way of the incense-smoke one could estimate the time.

The boy-attendants carry the flaming torches to the platform or open corridor on the west-side of Nigatsu-dō, where they whirl them around at such great speed that fire-sparks fill the air and large pieces of the burning torches scatter around. The torches are later carried to the southern side of the building to die out.

The participants enter into the *Rai-dō* from the northern entrance of Nigatsu-dō where they exchange their sandals for wooden clogs. Then they proceed into the inner sanctuary where they make three bows to the four sides of the image-dais. They start to circumambulate, making as much noise as possible with their wooden clogs. Later, the *Rengyōsbū* read the Lotus Sutra in such a rhythmic way that it is spoken of as a musical performance. When it is finished,

⁹⁹ 時香

the *Dōtsukasa* raises a corner of a large curtain hanging between the *Rai-dō* and the inner sanctuary, and facing the *Rai-dō*, he takes a curved stick (*chōshi*)¹⁰⁰ and strikes the door three times, calling, "south and north". The *Daidōshi* calls simultaneously, "southern seats", and the *Sbusbi* calls, "northern seats".

In military language, striking the door with a curved stick is a call to attention, whereas calling south and north is a call to muster. When the participants of south and north have responded to the *Dōtsukasa's* call, he furnishes them with "flower-baskets" and makes a sign to the leader of the ceremony to begin the ritual of the first watch of the night. The latter takes the main seat in the hall, the participants start to recite the text of offering and hymn to the Buddha and circumambulate while scattering the flowers. The *Daidōshi* recites the prayers (*Daisbugan*)¹⁰¹ in a strong and powerful voice.

When the ceremony of the first watch of the night has come to an end, the *Rengyōsbū* of the southern and northern seats blow their trumpet-shells. During this interval, the *Dōtsukasa* hands to the leading priest a scroll containing the names of 137,000 gods (*Jinmyōchō*)¹⁰² and a lamp called *Jintō*.¹⁰³ Then he lights the small pine-torches and the lamps in the four corners of the hall from the flame of the eternal lamp.

Later, the *Daidōshi* prays for all souls, from the imperial family down to the common people, and for those past and present. The participants again blow their conch-shells, and the *Sbusbi* recites the text explaining the ceremony called *Keibyaku*¹⁰⁴ or "reporting to the Buddhas and bodhisattvas". When he has finished, he puts on a special cap (*zokin*)¹⁰⁵ and carrying a container with purifying water, he proceeds to the middle of the hall, where he blesses the water and sprinkles it around. He then draws a magic circle (*kekkaï*)¹⁰⁶ in each of the four corners of the hall, rings the bell, and welcomes the Four Guardian Gods to the hall.

After the ceremony of the second watch of the night has been completed, the *Rengyōsbū* take their seats in the *Rai-dō* and begin their recitation of the repentance called *Hokkesembo*.¹⁰⁷ They recite with great fluency in harmony with the rhythmic sounds of a bell and the rattle of the metal rings of the priest's staff. The Inner Shrine is veiled in mystery by the flickering lights

100 調子

101 大元願

102 神名帳

103 神燈

104 敬白

105 頭巾

106 結界

107 法華懺法

behind the slightly moving transparent curtain and from the lanterns suspended in front of the hall. In the cold night the participants' breath is like white vapour, while the sound of the bell penetrates the stillness and crystallizes the very essences of the ritual. Everyone kneels spontaneously in front of the Kannon-image. One by one the *Rengyōsbū* leave the *Rai-dō* and retire to their rooms for a short rest.

The sound of the great bell announces again that the *Rengyōsbū* must begin the ceremony of the third watch of the night, which is carried out in an easy, almost relaxed manner compared with that of the first watch. Perhaps this is especially felt at the moment of the flower-scattering, when the participants emphasize their rhythmical circumambulation by stamping their feet to maintain the rhythm. From a psychological point of view this almost cheerful touch in the religious austerity is explained as a way of keeping the drowsy participants awake at this late hour of the night.

The following worship at dawn is very simple and is carried through at great speed. This applies equally to the circumambulation and to the chanting the hymns. When the *Rengyōsbū* have reached half-way through the ritual, the *Dōdōji*, who is dressed as a mountain priest, lights the small pine-torches and carries a wooden bucket of rice gruel into the Inner Shrine to offer to the Kannon. He recites the hymn of offering rice gruel and then asks impatiently: "is it now dawn?" The answer may be that it is still dark, or that it is beginning to glimmer, or else that it is bright—all in accordance with the length of the ceremony.

At about two or three o'clock in the morning, the lay officials go to the entrance of the *Rai-dō* to welcome the *Rengyōsbū* who leave the Inner Shrine shouting, "*chōzu*,¹⁰⁸ *chōzu*" (we are going to the toilet), and then run down the flight of steps and return to their rooms. The shouting of "*chōzu*, *chōzu*", when the participants leave the Inner Shrine, has a tradition going back to the time of the priest Jitchū. In his day when the ceremony of dawn was finished and the participants had left the Inner Shrine, the deserted hall was immediately taken over by long-nosed goblins (*tengu*), who assembled in the inner sanctuary to imitate the ceremony of the priests. To avoid this, the priests used to shout as they left the hall, "We are going to the toilets, but we shall soon be back to

108 手水

resume our ceremony." The threat of returning proved effective in keeping the goblins away from the hall.

During the period from March 1st to 14th, the pattern of the various ceremonies does not differ much. On a few days additional rituals are performed, such as the rituals of repentance, of the death anniversary of the priest Jitchū, of "speedy circumambulation" (*basbiri no gyōbō*),¹⁰⁹ of "taking sacred water" (*Omizutori*), and of the dance called *dattan*.

*Repentance (Sange)*¹¹⁰

After the religious austerities of March 5th, 7th, and 12th, and 14th, all the *Rengyōbū* do repentance together. One by one they repeat a formula of repentance which runs somewhat like this, "I was distracted by playing with my rosary, I was drowsy during prayer, I played with my conch-shell. I confess the sins that I have committed." The *Dōtsukasa* counts the number of times that the participants make bows in order to repent their sins. In all, the three senior participants make one thousand bows by kneeling down to the floor, the junior participants make two thousand bows, while the three lowest ranking participants make three thousand bows. These numbers should not be taken too literally, and it should be noted that when the *Dōtsukasa* counts and reaches the numbers four, forty, and four hundred, he skips them and repeats instead the numbers six, seventy, and eight hundred. The number four (*shi*) is deliberately omitted, because it is homonymous with the word for death (*shi*), and in the first Buddhist precept it is explicitly stated, "Do not kill". In consequence of this, and in accordance with the *Ryōbu-Shintō* conception of death as impure, mention of death is avoided.

The practice of repentance (*sange*) is performed six times a day although only in sections. In between, the participants perform other ceremonies of repentance. Thus the entire session of religious austerities may be considered a continual act of confession.

Death Anniversary of Jitchū

The priest Jitchū, the initiator of *Omizutori*, is said to be presumably of Indian origin. He is considered the foremost disciple of Rōben Sōjō, the founder of

¹⁰⁹ 走の行法

¹¹⁰ 懺悔

Tōdai-ji. In fact, Jitchū was such an eminent monk he was entrusted with directing the adornment of the main hall of Tōdai-ji on the occasion of the "eye-opening" ceremony of the Great Buddha in the fourth year of Tempyō-shōhō (752).

In that same year, he guided the construction of the Nigatsu-dō, and inaugurated the ceremony of *Omizutori* in which he himself took part from his twenty-second year. He continued to participate in it until after midnight on February 5th (lunar calendar) in the fourth year of Daidō (809), when he is said to have disappeared under the altar table never to be seen again. In spite of this tale, he is thought to have entered into nirvāna in an unknown year on February 5th, which explains that the celebration of his death takes place on March 5th.

This death anniversary celebration in his honour is performed in the same general way as the death anniversaries usually performed in Tōdaiji with only minor differences. It has the character of a lecture the subject of which is restricted to the Lotus and Kegon Sutras.

*Record of the Names of the Dead (Kakochō)*¹¹¹

After the ceremony of the first watch of the night on March 5th and 12th, a record is read of the names of the dead throughout the 1200 years of the *Omizutori* ritual; from the time of the emperor Shōmu and the empress Kōmyō through the founding of Tōdai-ji, including the persons attached to the installation of the Great Buddha, the successive high priests of the temple, the participants in the ceremony, the donors of Nigatsu-dō, and the lay officials as well.

The names are recorded also of such prominent monks as Kōbō Daishi (774-835), Shōbō Sōjō¹¹² (832-909), and Yōkan Risshi¹¹³ (1032-1111). But one passage in the record stands out as especially interesting and dramatic. It concerns a so-called "lady in blue". The story goes that during the Jōgen era (1207-10), when the priest Jūkei recited the death register, a lady wearing a blue garment appeared in front of him, asked why he had omitted her name when reading the register, and then vanished. But from then on, she was called the "lady in a blue garment", and as such she is named in the reading of the register.

Nobody knows whether priest Jūkei made a mistake in reciting the record

¹¹¹ 過去帳

¹¹² 聖宝僧正

¹¹³ 永観律師

of names, or if the lady's name was really listed originally. However, there can hardly be any doubt that Jūkei was taken aback when a lady with a pale face and clad in a blue garment made her appearance in the darkness of the Inner Shrine, where the smoke of incense was rising calmly and the lights from the lanterns were flickering faintly. At any rate, when the priests reach this passage nowadays, they recite in a tune of sadness and compassion: "lady in a blue garment" (*sbōe no nyōnin*).¹¹⁴

Nothing is known about the lady, but to judge from the context in which she is mentioned in the record of names, she might have been a contemporary of the emperor Goshirakawa (1155-58) and was probably of high rank. It is said in later times the "lady in blue" was added as number seventeen in the death register, placing her next to the name of Minamoto Yoritomo, the head of the Genji clan and the main donor of Tōdai-ji, who made possible the reconstruction of the temple during the Kamakura period.

Ritual of Running Circumambulation

This religious ceremony (*basbiri no gyōbō*) takes place before the third watch of the night on March 5th, 6th, and 7th, and again on March 12th, 13th, and 14th. The *Sbusbi* and *Daidōshi* purify the *Rengyōsbū* with scented water in front of the Inner Shrine, and when the large curtain between the *Rai-dō* and the inner sanctuary is drawn partly aside, they enter the hall together with the *Wajō* and the *Dōtsukasa* and take their seats. The *Sbusbi* then purifies the inner sanctuary with scented water, pays homage to all the Buddhas (*Tatbāgata*) and to the Kannon-boratsu. The *Rengyōsbū* join harmoniously in the recitation and circumambulate a few times led by the *Wajō*. After a while he proceeds in front of the eleven-headed Kannon-image and facing towards the upper-most head, the symbol of fulfilment of desire, he recites the word *Namu-chōjō*¹¹⁵ (*chōjō*=top) in order to dispell all illness.

Meantime, the *Dōdōji*, who is dressed as a mountain priest and wears loose trousers (*bakama*) tied at the cuff, raises the curtain so that when it is fully raised and touches the transversal beam of the entrance, it resembles the character for the number one (一). The *Dōtsukasa* lights from the flame of the eternal lamp the special pine-torch used in the running circumambulation.

¹¹⁴ 青衣の女人 ¹¹⁵ 南無頂上

While circumambulating at great speed he also lights the oil-lamps at the four corners of the hall. Later, he hits the flaming torch against the wooden floor in front of the Kannon-image in order to extinguish it.

The *Rengyōshū* continue to circumambulate, while the *Sbosekai* takes his stand in front of the Kannon-image. He raises his rosary, and recites the words *Namu-saijō*¹¹⁶ (*saijō*=top) in a long persistent tone. The three senior priests—the *Wajō*, the *Daidōshi* and *Sbusbi*—make salutations by falling down in the *Rai-dō* and touching the floor with five parts of their body. Then the *Wajō* recites hymns while the other participants continue their circumambulation.

The *Dōtsukasa* is the first of the *Rengyōshū* to take off his wooden clogs and circumambulate in *tabi*¹¹⁷ (the split-toe Japanese sock). One after the other the participants follow his example. The *Sbosekai* stamps his wooden clogs violently on the floor in front of the Kannon-image, and then he too begins the running circumambulation in *tabi*. The *Sbusbi* strikes the bell and begins to count the number of circumambulations of the participants, but when he stops striking the bell, the circumambulation gradually slows down. After a while, the participants headed by the *Dōtsukasa* jump out into the *Rai-dō* and fall down again with the five parts of their body touching the floor.

When all have completed this salutation, the *Dōtsukasa* gives the order to draw the curtain. He offers the participants a few drops of scented water, calling on the junior participants to extinguish the lanterns at the four corners of the hall and to carry the scented water into the *Rai-dō* to distribute to the devotees.

Small Kannon-Image

In former times there were two images of Kannon inside the Inner Shrine. One, of gilt bronze, was placed in the middle of the inner sanctuary and represented Kannon standing on a rock; it was seven feet high and dated from the Tempyō era. But in the 7th year of Kambun (1667) the figure was presumably destroyed by fire, although the remains of its aureole were removed to the Nara National Museum. The second figure of Kannon, the small one enclosed in the miniature shrine, was placed originally in front of the big one.

As earlier mentioned, the small Kannon dates back to the Tempyō period,

116 南無最上 117 足袋

and is believed to be the "living" Kannon, who came floating in to the shore at Naniwa from *Fudarakusen* far beyond the ocean. Consequently, this image is considered to be a most sacred and secret one. Even the priests who partake in the *Omizutori* ritual have never seen it.

In another context it has been explained that on March 1st the enshrined small Kannon is placed in the rear part of the Inner Shrine. At midnight on March 7th it is carried to the center of the hall, and on that same day at about six o'clock in the evening after the sunset ceremony, it is removed to the northern section of the *Rai-dō*. Under the guidance of the *Dōtsukasa*, the image-shrine is adorned with lights, incense, and flowers. Shintō priests from the guardian shrine of Tōdai-ji, the *Tamukeyama Hachimangū*,¹¹⁸ the *Dōdōji*, and the senior lay devotees, all watch the Kannon-shrine as long as it stands in the *Rai-dō*. It is during the middle of the post-midnight ceremony that it is carried to the central part of the northern outer-corridor, and after a short while, to the middle part of the southern corridor. The *Daidōshi* and the *Sbosekai* follow the transfers while praying, and the other participants blow their conch-shells in the inner sanctuary.

Finally, the participants carry the miniature shrine into the inner sanctuary and place it on the altar table to the north. The *Daidōshi*, the lay carriers, and others also return to the inner hall through the *Rai-dō*. This returning procession to the inner hall of both the enshrined Kannon and the *Rengyōshū* is called "late entrance" (*gonyū*)¹¹⁹ and is considered most sacred. It is said to follow the way of the Tempyō period, when at dawn, the "living" Kannon-image was taken to the Nigatsu-dō to be enshrined after having been rescued from the water at Naniwa.

*Day for Printing Charms (Goōbi)*¹²⁰

During the time of *sō-bekka*, paper is made for later use as charms with imprinted marks such as "ox-king" (*goō*)¹²¹ or with short sentences of prayers. On March 1st, when the *Rengyōshū* ascend to Nigatsu-dō, this paper is put in special chests. After the sunset ceremony on March 8th, 9th, and 10th, the participants print the paper by hand. They work sheet by sheet using *sumi* and scented water, all the while reciting sutras.

118 手向山八幡宮

119 後入

120 牛王日

121 牛王

Since ancient times such sacred and revered charms were offered to the imperial family. But at the beginning of the Meiji era (1868), this was halted. However, in the 13th year of Shōwa (1938), the imperial court sent a message to Tōdai-ji to make known to the authorities concerned that the Court would again welcome the temple charms. The old tradition was revived and from then on, on March 18th every year, the emperor, empress, and crown prince receive charms from Tōdai-ji. No other temple or shrine makes charms for the imperial house, although every January, Enryaku-ji (Tendai Sect) and the Tō-ji (Shingon Sect) perform ceremonies for purifying the garments of the emperor.

Wooden stamps for printing charms with characters carved after examples of Kōbō Daishi's calligraphy are still to be found in the Shōsō-in, though their number was unfortunately diminished during a conflagration in the Kambun era (1661-72).

*Basket Torches (Kago-Daimatsu)*¹²²

The boy-attendants make pine-torches in the shape of baskets (*kago*). They insert cypress greens into a number of cypress rods which have been cut into six inch square pieces and assembled in the form of flower bouquets. Then thin wooden boards are added to partially cover the cypress and rods so as to resemble a basket, a basket-ball, or even a cage. Moreover, several large boards are fixed like framing "petals" at the basis of this arrangement. To assure a neat finish, the boy-attendants finally include some branches of bluish cypress at its base.

Such basket-like torches, which measure about 4 feet in diameter, are attached to the tops of eleven tall (more than 24 feet long) bamboo stems. These are called *kago-daimatsu*. The giant bamboos are presented to Tōdai-ji from devotees from districts such as Yamashiro, Yamato, Kawachi, and Ōsaka.

On the evening of March 12th, the large bell at Tōdai-ji informs the *Rengyō-shū* that the ceremony of the first watch of the night is approaching. But before beginning this ceremony, three more announcements are made. First, the telling of the time from the burning incense-sticks, the next is concerned with the preparing of the robes and everything connected with the ritual; the third concerns the service in the Nigatsu-dō. The use of the giant *kago-daimatsu*

122 龍松明

and the assistance of the *Kakubugyō* lay participant distinguish this latter ceremony in a spectacular way.

By order of the *Dōtsukasa*, the *Kakubugyō*, who wears loose trousers (*hakama*) tied at the ankles, informs the *Rengyōshū* that they must line up in the *Hosodono*. Then he carries a burning torch before the *Dōtsukasa*, and while waiting for his orders, he rests the torch against the tiled-floor and kneels. The *Dōtsukasa* takes a step forward and then calls out, "Tell the time from the burning incense." Then the *Kakubugyō* ascends rapidly to Nigatsu-dō holding the torch firmly in his hands, asking in a loud voice what hour it is. Hearing the answer of the *Sbosekai* from the interior of the Inner Shrine, the *Kakubugyō* descends the flight of steps, still holding the burning torch, and delivers his answer to the *Dōtsukasa*.

When these preparatory stages have ended the giant *kago-daimatsu* is lit and one of the boy-attendants carries it on his shoulders up the stone steps. The torch's seventy-five kilogram weight makes the pole bend like a yoke. All the participants ascend together with their attendants to the Nigatsu-dō. The large torch is carried to the front of the veranda which encircles the hall, where the torch is whirled around in a circle. The sparks from this flaming fire-ring scatter in all directions. In fact, the Nigatsu-dō is entirely surrounded by fire from the eleven giant torches, which are all carried to the platform, and twirled around in a magnificent show of flames. The lanterns carried by the devotees add to the impression of a large flaming ocean. This is a unique carry-over from the Tempyō era, a reminder of religious austerities and their tenacity and survival in contemporary times.

Taking Sacred Water (Omizutori)

The ceremony of taking or carrying sacred water (*Omizutori*) is practised around midnight on March 12th, although the proper act of "taking water" is not carried out until two o'clock in the morning of the following day. Headed by the *Sbusbi*, the junior participants leave the Inner Shrine by the southern entrance, carrying with them long willow twigs, conch-shells and bells. Their attendants light their way by means of small burning torches. The *Sbusbi*, whose attendant carries the *basu*, a ten-foot long torch, proceeds to the stone steps south of Nigatsu-dō to the accompaniment of music from the participants' trumpeting shells. He raises his staff in the air, and sprinkles purifying scented

water as he descends the steps with the *Dōdōji*. All then go to the shrine (*Kōjō*) under the *Rōben* cypress to give prayers.

According to the history of Nigatsu-dō, Jitchū, during the two weeks' practice, invited 13,700 gods to attend, and recorded their names in the register of names of the gods (*Jimmōchō*). The god *Onyū-myōjin*¹²³ of Wakasa prefecture was delayed in coming because he was fishing in the Onyū River. To compensate for his late arrival, he informed Jitchū that he would offer scented water near the place where the religious ritual was to be performed. As he was fulfilling his promise two cormorants, one black and one white, took off from a rock and sacred water sprang from that very spot. Jitchū arranged some stones around it and made a well, which was called *akaiya*, the well for offering water to the Buddha. But after *Onyū-myōjin* had carried water from the Onyū River to the well to offer to the Kannon, the river dried up, and from then on it became known as Otonashi-gawa, the "soundless river". The story goes on to tell that a black and a white cormorant are enclosed in the *Onyū*-shrine, and that *Onyū-myōjin* is known also as the god of cormorants (*u no kami*).¹²⁴

A similar legend is connected with the place where the small stream Otonashi-gawa cuts through Obama in Wakasa prefecture, from where even today, water is sent to Nigatsu-dō. About four kilometers from Obama, at the upper portion of the Otonashi-gawa, where it runs through the compound of a small shrine called *Sbira-isbi*,¹²⁵ and at the place where the stream ends, it is named the "cormorant-still-current" (*u no se*).¹²⁶ On March 12th at about midnight, people from Obama and neighbouring villages assemble here, and by the light of flaming torches they perform the ceremony of sending water to Nigatsu-dō. Before the rupture between Shintoism and Buddhism the *Sbira-isbi* belonged to *Jingū-ji*¹²⁷ of Wakasa prefecture and was a branch-shrine of Tōdai-ji.

When the *Sbusbi* and *Dōdōji* have finished praying in front of the *Kōjō*-shrine, they enter together into the dark building of *akaiya*¹²⁸ and scoop water. The other participants remain at the entrance of the building, forming a kind of guard, now and then blowing their conch-shells in signal to the Nigatsu-dō, and also to inform the participants inside the *akaiya* how far the sacred water has been carried. They continue to give such information at intervals, finally

123 遠敷明神

124 鵜の神

125 白石神宮

126 鵜の瀬

127 神宮寺

128 関御井屋

returning to Nigatsu-dō, following behind the carriers of the sacred water.

The *Omizutori* ritual of taking sacred water to Nigatsu-dō has become so popular that it has given its name to all the ceremonies performed throughout the *Sbuni-e*. The name of *Omizutori* has also become a recognized subject for *haiku* concerned with spring. Three well-known *haiku* may be rendered here as an appropriate end of this section on *Omizutori*.

The participating monks,
Taking sacred water—
The sound of wooden clogs. (Bashō, 1644-94)

Taking sacred water;
The water of the silent current
Becomes tepid from this day. (Ryōta, 1707-87)

Taking sacred water,
Circumambulating the well—
The monks' breath. (Issa, 1763-1827)

*The Dattan Dance (Dattan no Myōbō)*¹²⁹

During the three days of March 12th, 13th, and 14th after the midnight religious austerities, the *Rengyōsbū* ready themselves for the observance of the "marvellous law of Buddha", the *Dattan no Myōbō*. Midway through the *Sbusbi*'s recitation of the ritual, the *Dōdōji* rolls the large curtain halfway up in the Inner Shrine, and kneels down in the central part of the *Raidō*. Later, he goes into the hall and invites the Four Guardian Gods to attend the ceremony. He orders the *Dōdōji* to raise the curtain completely. The large curtain is quickly rolled up to resemble the character "one". The *Rengyōsbū*, who are seated to the south and north, tie their robes around them with strings, making them as tight as possible to prevent them from fluttering. Their heads are covered with a peculiarly shaped cap and their feet are covered with *tabi*.

By circumambulating in the Inner Shrine, the *Sbusbi* draws a symbolic boundary as a barrier against evil. One of the participants opens the ceremony by acting as the god of water (*Suiten*),¹³⁰ and in a great hurry runs out into the

129 達陀の妙法 130 水天

middle of the *Rai-dō*, where he sprinkles water around him, makes a big jump, and then disappears. Soon after, another participant, who acts as the god of fire (*Katen*),¹³¹ appears in the *Rai-dō* and scatters charcoal fire from a portable incense-burner. A third participant appears and throws grains of rice as if sowing seeds, a fourth throws willow twigs, a fifth whirls a sword three times, a sixth whirls a priest's staff three times, a seventh rings a bell in a circular motion, and finally an eighth blows his conch shell three times, makes a big jump similar to that of the first participant, and then disappears. These eight are called the Eight Gods.

A magnificent pine-torch, weighing 37.5 kilograms, is lit in the inner sanctuary and carried out into the *Rai-dō* by the fire-god. He proceeds towards the water-god, who is holding a bowl of scented water and a small wooden stick. Facing each other the two participants take turns moving the flaming torch around in rhythmic movements in time with the ringing bell, the sounds of the whirling priest staff, and the trumpeting of the conch shells. The two participants retire two or three times to the inner sanctuary only to jump out again into the *Rai-dō*. In between they dance and circumambulate in the middle of the hall. At a sign from the *Shushi*, they carry the torch from the inner sanctuary into the *Rai-dō* where they move it up and down three times and then throw it to the floor. Then they take it up again and carry it into the inner sanctuary where they raise it on end and then dash it three times against the floor. Finally, they carry it to the rear part of the hall to extinguish it.

During the *dattan*-dance, fire-sparks fill the air not only inside the inner sanctuary, but also outside where the devotees are assembled. The ritual seems wild and rough, but has nonetheless a profound meaning as an offering ceremony to the Kannon.

In the history of Nigatsu-dō this observance is said to have started on February 1st in the fourth year of Tempyō (752) and to have continued until the fourth year of Daidō (809). That is to say, the priest Jitchū performed this ceremony annually for sixty years before the "living" Kannon-image; six times a day during the two weeks' observance every year. It was believed that eight Gods descended from the *Tōsotsu*-heaven to the world of man, and that at the spot this ritual was carried out, they performed miracles, and went on a circuit

131 火天

pilgrimage to Buddhist temples. Since then the priests of Tōdai-ji have imitated this rite.

The term *dattan* is a hybrid form of *tatta* of which the correct Sanskrit word is *tapta*, meaning aesthetic practice with fire. Thus the fire symbolizes the burning passions, while the water symbolizes the purification of evil desires. The ceremony of *Sbuni-e* is from beginning to end a disciplinary practice of repentance and ablution.

*Ceremony of Neban*¹³² (*Nirvāṇa*)

After the ceremonies of March 14th and the early morning of 15th, the *Rengyōsbū* return to their rooms to rest for an hour. Then, before making their boy-attendants carry their ritual utensils and scriptures back to their rooms, they ascend once more to Nigatsu-dō. Their so-called caskets (*goōbako*)¹³³ which are actually a kind of wrapping paper for the sutras they carry, are tied with strings of wistaria to the participants' staffs, and with these they begin to clear the altar table in the Inner Shrine. Within a short time, the adorned image-daises are transformed to the ordinary state in which they were found on March 1st. Only the eternal lamp remains burning.

The participants take their seats in the *Rai-dō*, and from the inner sanctuary the *Dōtsukasa* orders the *Sbosekai* to ring the bell for the preparatory stage of the ceremony. The participants enter the hall and take the same seats that they occupied on the morning on March 1st. The *Dōtsukasa* orders the *Gonsbosekai* to arrange a lecture table in the central part of the sanctuary so that it faces south. This is exactly similar to the arrangements made for the celebration of the death anniversary of Jitchū on March 5th. This similarity holds true for the acting participants as well, such as the lecturer, the leader, the questioner, and the one who scatters the flowers. They are all the same priests who took part in the death anniversary ceremony for Jitchū. The subject of the lecture to be given concerns the Kegon and Lotus Sutras.

When this *Neban* ceremony has come to an end, the *Sbusbi* marks the participants with a red jewel sign on their foreheads which corresponds to the one which was printed on the charm-paper. Such marks are believed to prevent illness and to convey happiness to their wearers.

132 涅槃講

133 牛王箱

Before leaving the inner sanctuary other rites take place which include offerings to the Kannon. Finally the *Sbushi* performs a purification ceremony which differs completely from those generally practised today. It may be compared to the purifications performed in such ancient temples as Hōryū-ji, Yakushi-ji, and Tōdai-ji. But it is only in the Nigatsu-dō that it can be studied today. In fact, as we see it now in the Nigatsu-dō, it is a forerunner of the style introduced by Kōbō Daishi, and is a veritable storehouse for studying the old esoteric Buddhism.

The *Rengyōsbū* return to their rooms after five o'clock in the morning and rest until daybreak. Then they order their boy-attendants to transfer their religious paraphernalia to their respective temples. At about two o'clock in the afternoon, the participants ascend to the Nigatsu-dō to perform the ceremony of complete extinction (*parinirvāṇa*) in the *Rai-dō* of the Inner Shrine. A large scroll-painting is hung in the middle of the *Rai-dō*, and the four senior participants—the *Sbi-sbiki*—perform the rite called *Sbiza-kōsbiki*.¹³⁴ The participants circumambulate the painting of *Nirvāṇa* while reciting the name of *Sbakamuni sbarirai*,¹³⁵ hymns of Buddha-relics (*sbari*)¹³⁶ and some other special texts concerned with the Buddha-relics. The end of this second part of the *Nehan*-ceremony marks the re-entry of the *Rengyōsbū* into the world of human beings (*sbaba*).

At the conclusion of the rite of *Omizutori* on March 15th, a great number of women come from early morning to late evening from Nara and neighbouring villages carrying their children on their backs, to pay homage to Kannon, and to urge the *Rengyōsbū* to put their *dattan*-caps on their children's heads. This custom is believed to assure a happy future for the children. The religious austerities of *Shuni-e* of Nigatsu-dō are, with this gesture, carried through to completion.

134 四座講式

135 舍利礼

136 舍利