

FOREWORD

I first met Koshikidake san close to thirty years ago when I went to Mt Haguro in August 1994 to take part in the mountain entry retreat called the Autumn Peak (Akinomine) at Kotakuji. I had gone to Haguro for the first time two years earlier in 1992 at the invitation of Yamagata prefecture to take part in a “yamabushi experience” there. I was captivated by that experience, so different to the practice in a Zen temple that I had been doing for the previous fifteen years or so. The event had been organised by Hoshino Fumihiro, whose family had been head of the pilgrim lodging Daishobo for around three hundred years. He was then director of the Ideha Cultural Centre in Toge, a museum at the foot of Mt Haguro, and was passionate about bringing visitors to an awareness of the long religious tradition of the area.

However, this tradition had been broken in the nineteenth century, when Jakkoji, the shrine-temple complex on Mt Haguro, was forced to become a shrine and abandon its Buddhist and Shugendo heritage. In 1873 a religious bureaucrat called Nishikawa Sugao was sent from Tokyo to rid the complex of what he called old fashioned ways and superstition. It proved impossible to wipe the slate clean and he had to tempt especially high-ranking families like Hoshino’s to accept the new order by making compromises with important Shugendo traditions, especially the Autumn Peak retreat. Hoshino’s family gave their allegiance to the new shrine in 1874, and from then they occupied junior positions in the shrine organization and followed the revised ritual patterns and explanations that looked to Meiji Shinto constructions and obscured the Buddhist heritage. The “yamabushi experience” provided by Hoshino was deeply coloured by such revised interpretations, yet he and the

mountain together left me wanting to know more about Shugendo.

In September 1993, at Hoshino's suggestion, I took part in a newly created practice at Dewa Sanzan Jinja called Miko Shugyo. Women were not allowed to take part in the Shrine's Autumn Peak. They had long asked to be included but there was considerable opposition to the idea from both within and without. Some said that breaking the ban on women would bring down the wrath of the kami on the shrine, while others rejected innovation per se, fearing unforeseen repercussions. In a form of reverse discrimination, one shrine yamabushi explained his opposition that it was not necessary for women to train in the mountain because they were already more spiritually powerful than men. The then head of the shrine, the late Abe Yoshiharu, who was a powerful force behind the instigation of Miko Shugyo, remarked to me that it was his impression that a good deal of the opposition was based on the fear that women's physical strength would be insufficient for yamabushi training, and further, their presence would distract male trainees if men and women trained together. When asked about the old rationale of female pollution, he said that such thinking was not fitting in the modern age and it was not a logical excuse, given that in ancient times women occupied a central role in ritual. Proponents of women's inclusion took the opportunity offered by the celebrations in 1993 marking the 1400th anniversary of the mountain's legendary founding to include a five day training period in late June, justifying the decision that it was in accordance with the will and compassion of its legendary founder, Hachiko Oji, and in response to the social changes in recent times that had brought women more to the fore.

Though Miko Shugyo was a contrived practice having only surface connections with the traditional form of the Autumn Peak, I am grateful to have had the opportunity to have been able to practise inside the Buchudo, the “Mountain-Entry Hall” at Fukugoshi about a mile from the Main Shrine on Haguro’s summit. The seclusion rituals of the present Autumn Peak, conducted by Haguro Shugen Honshu and based at Kotakuji, its temple at Arasawa, were devised according to the layout of the Buchudo, a long rectangular building, with a shrine at one end and a large door in the middle of one of the long sides. As I was to discover, compromises had to be made both to the living arrangements of participants as well as to some ritual elements when constricted by a typical temple layout. I was also charmed to find reminders of the pre-Meiji past that have been lost in the modern Buddhist practice, like the custom of eating a skewer of five vegetables of different shapes called *gorinto* directly before leaving the Buchudo for the last time.

There was another outcome of Miko Shugyo that turned out to be life-changing for me. Abe san acted as daisendatsu, with the late Hoshino Mitsuo (Yoseibo) as his deputy (*doshi*). It was Yoseibo who showed us the headless statues near the Main Shrine on Haguro and explained what had happened as a result of the legislation to clarify Shinto and Buddhism (*shinbutsu bunri*), and who expressed his sorrow at the rift that had rent Haguro Shugendo as a result. Wanting to bridge the divide, as a young man he learned the Hokke Senbo (Lotus Repentance Liturgy) that is the core of the recitational of the Autumn Peak, and when visiting his parishioners always carried the Heart Sutra to chant with them. I owe my deep interest in *shinbutsu bunri* and its consequences for Haguro Shugendo to Yoseibo’s passionate concern that this policy had wrenched out its heart.

When I went back a couple of months later to visit the area, I asked Abe san about what had happened in the 1870s, and he kindly gave me a copy of a manuscript diary written by Nishikawa Sugao at the time. This became the basis for my doctoral dissertation at Cambridge University in 2000.

Having tasted Shugendo through Miko Shugyo, I now wanted to experience the “true” Autumn Peak as practiced by the Buddhist Haguro Shugen Honshu, and so it was that, at the introduction of Professor Suzuki Masataka of Keio University, I took part for the first time in August 1994. Though I say “true”, in fact modern Autumn Peak practice, whether Shinto or Buddhist, represents many compromises. The modern practice has shrunk to seven days (it was once reputedly 75) at both temple and shrine, resulting in ritual contraction, while extraneous Buddhist liturgical elements were added over the centuries. On the other hand, Buddhist symbolism was removed and the liturgy rewritten in Shinto terms by the shrine after 1874, meaning the inherent symbolism of the ten realms of rebirth is underplayed, as are the ritual practices associated with it. The one practice enthusiastically retained by the shrine Autumn Peak is *nanban ibushi*, symbolising the hells. It is treated as an ascetic practice, performed after each liturgical session at night, not only during the first section of the mountain-entry, as traditional ritual manuals stipulate. It lasts up to three times the length of the temple practice and there is pride among participants at their endurance.

That August, I remember sitting in the train heading toward Tsuruoka and, seeing Gassan, feeling that I had arrived home. I was proud finally to be taking part in the Autumn Peak at Kotakuji. This pride took a new meaning when I took ordination in 2006 and added my name to all of those priests of

the past, especially those whom I had “met” in accounts of their experiences in the 1870s, as well as those who had helped to preserve Haguro Shugendo into the twentieth century.

Because seating during *gongyo* (Haguro Shugen’s liturgical service) is according to rank, it so happened that, though Koshikidake san was senior to me, each year we regularly found ourselves sitting in more or less the same area. We talked a lot about Shugendo, about the tragedy of *shinbutsu bunri* and about the centrality of *shinbutsu shugo* (combinatory) ideas and practices in restoring Shugendo. Subsequently, when reviving his family temple, he set about bringing back combinatory ritual practices, such as the incense goma, as fully as possible, based on his family’s ritual documents, nine of which he had published in 1999.

I have closely followed Koshikidake san’s efforts to restore his family’s temple and reconstruct its Shugendo practices and traditions. I share his feelings of sadness and loss about the distortions created by Meiji religious policy. And I commend his endeavours to bring Shugendo to an audience outside Japan. It will be very interesting to see if Shugendo can transcend Japanese cultural and religious borders, and in doing so, how it may do so while remaining true to those very limitations. I hope this book may bring English readers a knowledge of, and a deeper appreciation for, the delight that is Shugendo.

Gaynor Sekimori
Chimyoin Jikun

25 November 2022