

Appendix 2

THE *MISOGI* RITUAL

Misogi, or ritual purification, as I have argued elsewhere in this volume, is a generic ritual of Shinto, performed first by Izanagi-no-mikot. It may be performed in rivers, in the sea, or under a waterfall. It may take different ritual forms, and there are numerous ways in which *chinkon*, the calming of the soul after *misogi*, may be performed. I have included here a brief lecture that attempts to summarize the meaning of *misogi* treated as a Shinto ritual but within the context of Shinto as a religion of the earth. I delivered this lecture to a group of scholars who visited Japan to experience *misogi* at the Tsubaki Grand Shrine. The second part of this appendix offers an outline of how *misogi* is performed at Tsubaki Grand Shrine.

THE MEANING OF *MISOGI SHUGYO*

Text: Stuart D. B. Picken, lecture given at Ise Conference to commemorate the centenary of the World Parliament of Religions, 1993.

Shinto and the Intuitive Awareness of the Mysterious

Religion in modern society is studied from the viewpoint of economics, sociology, politics, philosophy, and psychology. But surely alongside these it is also fair to look at religion from the point of view of religion itself. From this direction, we can speak of Shinto as one way of affirming the mysterious in the face of attitudes and beliefs that deny mystery in favor of "explicit rational provenness." Without a sense of the mysterious, life becomes meaninglessly dull and empty of possibility. Acceptance of the

mysterious is the recognition of *knowledge beyond knowledge*. There are the things we know and there are the things we do not know. There are also things that, when the technology arrives, we can know. But there is also *knowledge beyond knowledge*, the knowledge that by the nature and constitution of the human mind is impossible to know. We may know that it exists, but not what it is. It is the core of the mysterious and magnetic origins of faith.

Western religions, especially Christianity, in an attempt to reconcile belief with the age of science, have tried to “demystify” the universe, to *demythologize* it, as was the buzzword of the 1950s and 1960s. Strip away the old-fashioned cosmic terminology to let the message speak was the idea. But the message and the myth both vanished because the message and myth were more closely related than people cared to think. Some things can be said only in the form of a myth. If myth is then eliminated from discourse, nothing can be said. Consequently, there is no “God is dead” kind of pronouncements in Shinto, and no sense of the demise of religion. Atheism belongs in a system where there is a limited, arbitrary, and rationalistic definition of the divine. If theism is challenged, atheism is the result.

The mysterious should not be confused with the occult. The occult belongs in a dualistic system, where such contrasts exist. Japan’s cultural dynamics are based on monism, on ideals such as harmony and peace, where conflict and confrontation are not a part of life. This seems to be an intuition of nature.

Asceticism: Western and Japanese

An ascetic, according to William James, is someone who lives at the core of his or her spiritual energy and therefore whose actions and responses are perhaps slightly exaggerated. This is certainly true of some kinds of asceticism that have shown the tendency to go to extremes. The ascetic has grasped a way, and he or she travels along that way as far as possible to the point of the extinction of the self in some cases. But from the ascetic, we can learn the way in to the deep metaphysic of inner experience.

Asceticism itself has little to commend it or to attract great followings in the West, mainly because of its history. Western asceticism, with its absolute body/soul distinction, was designed to punish the body to save the soul. The medieval hair shirts, burrs in the shoes, self-flagellation, and other forms of punishment and self-abnegation have given to it an air of the morose and even psychotic. Its actions betrayed a gloomy view of humankind and an equally negative view of God combined with a totally pessimistic view of humankind’s hope of salvation. It is here that the contrast with Japanese ascetic practice becomes crucial for creativity and renewal. The Japanese ascetic, in his practices, seeks to enhance his pow-

ers, to become a new person through the rituals and disciplines to be undergone. There is nothing gloomy or pessimistic about them. They radiate with vitality and are performed with joy and enthusiasm. They may be serious ceremonies, but they generate energy and induce the lightness of heart that comes from growing inner confidence and heightened awareness of the natural and the cosmic that puts all other things into true perspective.

What Is *Misogi*?

Misogi is the generic form of the act of purification. It can be traced back to the Japanese mythology narrated in the *Nihongi* and the *Nihon Shoki* when Izanami left the land of impurity and bathed himself in the river Tachibana. The response of Japanese culture to all of life's boundary situations, as existentialists have called them, is purification to seek renewal. *Misogi* can be performed in many ways. It can be performed in the sea, in a river, or by standing under a free-flowing waterfall. The form we will discuss here is the waterfall variety, because it is dynamic and profoundly inspirational. The purpose is to commune with the *kami* of the fall, to be united with great nature, to touch the cosmos, and to seek renewal through purification.

Misogi, to be visualized correctly, requires that you imagine yourself with the minimum of body covering standing under a cascading fall with only your head projecting from the flow. The weight of water hits your shoulders and the back of your neck and completely absorbs you within itself. And as you stand, you simply utter the words

harai tamae—kiyomi tamae—rokonshojo

“Purify my spirit—wash away my impurities from the six elements
of existence.”

It seems a simple act, but if we break down its various facets, we can see where its power, its attraction, and its efficacy can be found; why for centuries Japanese have gone to the mountains to perform *misogi*; and why it is such an important part of Shinto. Let me suggest four ways of talking about it that will add weight to these observations.

1. *Misogi is a basic form of primal experience.*

There is ultimate authenticity in the act of standing under the fall and being immersed in nature itself. You will not know where your physical existence ends and the flow of the fall begins. For that moment, you and nature, *daishizen*, the cosmos, are one. *Misogi* simultaneously creates the awareness and satisfies the longing of the hungry to feel and experience nature in a way that assures and confirms that we are rooted in its life and processes. Standing under the fall, we are a part of that process, for that time, an indistinguishable element of it returning to the source of life itself, living water.

The world we live in is not a place where primal experience is readily available. Indeed, to many, experience is almost entirely secondhand. We learn from others what an experience *should* be. Our experiences tend to be measured by what others say or by what they claim, by what so called “experts” tell us. So we never really know for ourselves because we depend on others for evaluation or as a model for our activities. *Misogi* calls us back to our primal roots, back to the discovery of pure experience, and back to the search for authenticity.

2. *Misogi can be experienced as the power of renewal through ritual.*

Nowhere is the power to be born again, and again, and again more visibly demonstrated. Individuals with needs and groups with purposes have found *misogi* a help to becoming what they seek to be and to fulfilling their ultimate potential. There is nothing about *misogi* that makes it a once-only and absolute experience. Repetition heightens the need for quality and awakens us to the fact that in renewal, we see and realize that life itself is not a static substance but a flowing, living, and moving process. Over the many years during which I have practiced *misogi*, I have led many groups of students and businessmen, more Americans than Japanese, to undergo the experience. Never in those years have people failed to find the experience stimulating and awe inspiring. Many have made the great effort to come back not once but as often as circumstances would permit. They had begun to experience the meaning of renewal and they wanted to travel on that road. It becomes simultaneously the confirmation of human endeavor and the beginnings of that process that creates and re-creates ourselves in ways we cannot do on our own.

3. *Misogi can be experienced as a profound discipline of the spirit*

Part of the power of *misogi* to renew stems from its role as a discipline of the human spirit. The Reverend Yukitaka Yamamoto, 96th High Priest of the Tsubaki Grand Shrine, in response to his own basic need and yearning, performed *misogi* every night at midnight for 10 years to discover the meaning of spirituality. His experiences are remarkable. He spoke of many strange and inexplicable physical sensations. He also spoke of seeing the brightness of the rising sun at midnight. Such states of altered consciousness with tremendous symbolic power represent renewal through the development of spirituality. To meet Yukitaka, you would recognize him at once from the vitality that comes from renewal. The repetition and the discipline make steady renewal possible as a form of personal growth and development. *Misogi* is indeed on a par with physical training to become an athlete. This is psycho-physical training to become a spiritual athlete. This is what Japan’s ascetics are indeed—spiritual athletes. They are Olympians of the spiritual world. They are pioneers and discoverers of the vast tracts of uncharted inner experience that leads to outer change

and renewal. They are bearers and practitioners of one of life's greatest secrets.

4. *Misogi stimulates cosmic awareness.*

The final point I would like to make about *misogi* is its power to generate the cosmic awareness that we earlier identified as missing from modern life. The power of the cosmos is unleashed in *misogi*. You can touch the infinity of the cosmos for a second. Visit the outer domains of space in your own existence for a split second. Transcend time, motion, or place. The location of humanity within the great cosmic configuration of power and energy is confirmed, and awareness of quality and possibility becomes heightened. This is *enlightenment* gained in a second. Of course it is too brief an encounter for any articulation to take place. Therefore it must be repeated so that you can become familiar with that sense of the cosmic and come to feel at home and natural within it.

From Homo Sapiens to Homo Excellens

This title is one way to describe the form of the human pilgrimage, from the substance/mechanistic being of wisdom to the creative being of excellence. Quality must now become an equal value—excellence in being a human being as well as in being a technical human being. Life is at the center of this. Discipline also matters. The discipline of *misogi*, the rituals and the spirituality are designed to improve a person's quality as a human being. Progress within human civilization and for individual human beings becomes possible in these ways. This is the meaning of the process of transition from *Homo sapiens* to *Homo excellens*.

The Waterfall and the Holism of the Cosmos

Shinto is a religion that concerns itself with purity and purification. It is also a religious tradition that not only brings humanity and nature close together but also seeks to remind humanity that its life is embedded within nature. And within the ritual of *misogi* this meaning is stressed. *Misogi harai* is performed by the *gyoja*, the person undertaking the discipline, entering the fall before midnight or at the rising of the sun. Before the person enters there is a sequence of rituals and calisthenics, as well as a variety of esoteric actions to perform, but the culmination is achieved by stepping into the flowing water in front of the fall, bowing, clapping, and then turning around and standing under the fall, taking the full weight of the water on the back of the shoulders. This seeks to purify, to cleanse, and to restore. The entire theology of Shinto is symbolized in the act, in the belief that human nature can be purified and restored by returning to its deepest roots and the place of its origins.

How to Perform *Misogi Harai*

The following is a description of how *misogi* is performed at the Tsubaki Grand Shrine. It deals with the various stages before and after.

Before *misogi*, the mind and body should be conditioned. On the night before, it is recommended that meat not be eaten and alcohol not be drunk. The senses should be freed through the avoidance of any physical substances that might cloud or distort them. They should be ready to be receptive.

Preparation begins when the people taking part assemble in front of the shrine office at the agreed time and from there proceed into the hall beside the *Haiden* to receive a simplified form of *oharai* (purification) called *shubatsu*. Since the waterfall, which is called *Konryu Myojin* (*Myojin* means “gracious *kami*”), is a *kami*, there is need for purification before entering. Thereafter, the participants move to the dressing rooms. Men wear a white loincloth with a *hachimaki*, or headband. Women also wear the *hachimaki* in addition a long, white kimono-like robe. After coming out of the dressing areas, the participants move down to an open area above the entrance to the fall and face the *Honden* (main worship hall). They bow twice, clap twice, and bow once and are ready to commence the warm-up exercises.

Exercise 1 Furitama (*Soul Shaking*)

1. Stand with the legs about shoulder-width apart.
2. Place the hands together in front of the stomach with the right hand over the left. Leave space between them big enough for an imaginary Ping-Pong ball.
3. With the hands in that position, shake them vigorously up and down.
4. While shaking them, concentrate and repeat the words *Harae-dono-Okami*, an invocation to the *kami* of the place of *harai*.

The object of exercise 1 is to generate an awareness of the soul. *Kon* (the soul), in Shinto, is one of the four important elements, along with *Mei* (life), *Rei* (spirit), and *Ki* (spirit in its causal aspect—*Ki* is a kind of energy source). *Kon* is the most important of the four since human beings can also be described as *Waketama* (separated individual souls), which is another way of saying “children of the *kami*.”

Exercise 2 Torifune (*A Bird Rowing*)

1. Stand straight and put the left leg forward.
2. Clench both fists with thumbs inside.
3. Lean forward and move the arms as though rowing a boat, starting from the left knee and ending near the armpits. While “rowing,” shout “*Yie*.”
4. Perform this 20 times and then repeat Exercise 1, the *Furitama*.
5. Changing to a right-leg stance, repeat steps 1 to 3, shouting “*Ei*”

and “*Ho*” alternately. Do this 20 times, and then repeat Exercise 1, the *Furitama*.

6. Return to the left-foot stance, clenched the fists as before, and bring the hands up to the chest to a shout of “*Yie*.” Thrust them down and forward, with hands open and fingers extended, to a shout of “*Se*.” After this, once again repeat Exercise 1, the *Furitama*.

The object of exercise 2 is to introduce a dimension of physical calisthenics along with the spiritual. Since *misogi* is a psycho-physical experience, both types of warm-up exercises are necessary.

Exercise 3 Otakebi (*Shouting*)

1. Stand up straight, leaving the feet slightly apart.
2. Place hands on the hips.
3. Follow the *Michihiko* (the leader of the group who presides over the ritual) as he shouts the following three invocations: *Iku-tama!*
Taru-tama! *Tama-tamaru-tama!*
4. Follow him in repeating three times the long invocation *Kami!*
Okami! *Kunitsu-Okami!* *Sarutahiko Okami To-toshi-ya!*

The object of exercise 3 is threefold. Shouting *iku-tama* activates the soul, which is just coming to awareness. *Taru-tama* affirms the awareness that you can realize the infinite in your soul. *Tama-tamaru-tama* confirms both and keeps the soul activated at its quantum level. The closing invocation addresses *Sarutahiko Okami*, head of the earthly *kami*, and acknowledges him to be of great power.

Exercise 4 Okorobi (*Yielding*)

1. Stand as in exercise 3.
2. Place the left hand on the hip, and with two fingers pointing, extend the hand in a gesture that resembles the “Boy Scout Salute.”
3. Three *kami* are invoked here, and with each invocation, you cut the air in a sweeping gesture with the right hand:

Kunitoko-tachi-no-Mikoto! “*Yie!*”

Sarutahiko-no-Okami! “*Yie!*”

Kokuryu-no-Okami! “*Yie!*”

At each time of cutting the air, take a step forward with the left foot and then back again.

The object of exercise 4 is achieved by specifying these three important *kami*, *Kunitokotachi-no-Mikoto* (the earthly *kami*), *Sarutahiko Okami* (*kami* of guidance and head of the earthly *kami*), and *Kokuryu-no-Okami*

(*kami* of water, life, and *ki*). By doing this, the *gyoja* can be united with them, have their impurities removed, and receive their power as their own.

Exercise 5 *Ibuki (Breathing)*

1. Stand with the feet slightly apart.
2. Lower the hands and arms toward the knees in front of the body.
3. Lift the arms above the head by extending them fully outward.
4. Inhale while raising the arms.
5. Exhale slowly and deliberately while lowering the hands again.
6. Place hands and arms down by the knees and exhale completely.
7. Repeat five times.
8. Turn to face the waterfall, bow twice, clap twice, and open arms, palms facing up toward the waterfall.
9. Go down the steps toward the waterfall.

The object of exercise 5 is to conclude the preparation by taking deep breaths that have the effect of raising the metabolism of the *ki* to its highest level of sensitivity and receptivity by absorbing the *ki* of the cosmos.

Exercise 6 *Nyusui (Getting into the Water)*

1. Just before entering the water, participants will receive from the Michihiko *Sakashio*, or purifying salt that will be sprinkled on them.
2. Each participant receives a ladle with Japanese *sake* and salt. Spray it from the mouth in three mouthfuls into the stream.
3. The Michihiko recites the nine-letter prayer as follows:
Rin-Pyo-To-Sha-Kai-Zin-Retsu-Zai-Zen
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
4. The Michihiko then cuts the air symbolically nine times, and shouts “*Yei!*”

Diagram of the Square

The Meaning of the Prayer and the Square

In Shinto, the numbers from 1 to 9 symbolize the secular world and its impurities. Before entering the water the cutting of the square implies removing the impurities of existence from its nine areas.

5. Enter the water and spray water on the face, chest, and loins.
6. Clap the hands twice, and bow once.
7. Cut the air from right to left with the right hand as in exercise 4.
8. Approach the waterfall and enter, right shoulder first. Turn round and face the *Michihiko*, holding the hands in front with middle fingers together pointing away.

9. Shout the following:

Harae-tamae-Kiyome-tamae-ro-kon-sho-jo!

Continue until the Michihiko shouts “*Yei*” as a signal to come out.

The Meaning of the Final Prayer

The expressions *harae* and *kiyome* ask for the purifying of the individual by the washing away of all *tsumi* from the *ro-kon-sho-jo*, from the six elements of human beings that Shinto identified, the five senses and the mind.

After this is completed, participants return to the *Haiden* after drying off, for a period of *chinkon*, to pacify the soul. This in turn is followed by a *naorai*, a ceremonial drinking with the *kami*, which has the effect of strengthening the vertical *musubi*. In other words, the links between those purified and the *kami* become stronger. But also as people celebrate with others, the horizontal *musubi* also becomes stronger—that is, the *kami*–human being and human being–human being connections become more effective, and people in relation to people and people in relation to the *kami* can begin to understand how to realize their human potential.