

## En the Ascetic

*Linda Klepinger Keenan*

At the end of the seventh century there lived in the mountains of central Japan a man named En no Ozunu, who came to be known as En no Gyōja. The word *gyōja* means “one who performs religious practices.” It was used especially of holy men who devoted themselves to rigorous ascetic disciplines deep in the rugged mountains in pursuit of spiritual powers. “Ascetic” is perhaps the closest English equivalent.

Today most people associate the name of En the Ascetic with the Japanese mountain religious tradition called Shugendō, for eventually he did come to be revered as the spiritual ancestor of men who went into sacred mountain areas to chant incantations and perform ascetic practices. These practitioners of Shugendō are sometimes called *yamabushi*—literally, “those who lie down in the mountains.”

In fact, however, En the Ascetic did not take his place as the patriarch of Shugendō until several centuries after his death, during a period when mountain ascetics were beginning to organize into groups and thus felt the need to identify a progenitor. In his own time, so far as we can learn, En did not gather about himself a group of disciples, establish any kind of religious sect, or hand down any specific body of teachings. And long before he was adopted as the official founder of Shugendō, many stories about him circulated among the people and appeared in the literature—in histories, tale collections, and poetry.

The earliest written account of En the Ascetic appears in an official imperial history, the *Chronicles of Japan Continued* (*Shoku Nihongi*). This document was completed in the year 797, nearly one hundred years after the twenty-fourth day of the fifth month of the third year of the Emperor Mommu (699 C.E.) when, it records, a man named E (En) no Ozunu was banished to a distant island:

E no Kimi Ozunu was exiled to the island at Izu. Ozunu first lived on Mount Katsuragi and was known for his magic. The Outside Junior Fifth Rank Lower Grade Chieftain of Korea Hirotari apprenticed himself to him. Later he came to envy his Master's

powers and slandered him, saying that Ozunu was leading the people astray. As a result, Ozunu was exiled to a distant place. People say that Ozunu enslaved the gods and demons and forced them to draw his water and gather his firewood. If they did not follow his orders, he bound them with spells.

This brief notation raises many questions. What manner of man was this "En no Kimi Ozunu"? How did he "lead the people astray," and why did this result in his exile? Some answers are suggested by the political and religious situation in seventh- and eighth-century Japan. This period was characterized by the continuing effort of the ruling Yamato clan to centralize and rationalize the power of the state. They looked to T'ang China for a model of government organization and adopted Buddhism as a state-sponsored religion. Buddhism was so closely allied with the state, in fact, that the temples themselves were organized under a government bureau. Priests were examined and promoted by the government and held bureaucratic rank, while the state maintained strict control over their activities. No one was allowed to become a priest or wear priestly attire without official approval from the imperial court. Thus, no matter how earnestly one desired to practice the Buddhist path, it was quite difficult to enter the priesthood. As a result, many "lay priests" took their religious practices into the mountain forests, far from the centers of population. This trend made the government so apprehensive that it promulgated more and more regulations—against preaching the doctrine outside the temples, against fortune-telling and sorcery, and against healing with unorthodox practices. Only officially recognized monks and nuns were allowed to make retreats in the mountain forests, and then only under the close supervision of their superiors and on condition that they would not mix with the populace.

In the eyes of the officials, the primary function of Buddhism as the state-established religion was to protect the state, to buttress government authority. Religious practice outside the state structure was viewed as potentially inimical to its interests. Most threatening to officials was any charismatic figure who might attract to himself the loyalties of the common people. And since the religious needs of ordinary people were not addressed by official state Buddhism, they were indeed vulnerable to the influence of "holy men" who professed to have the power of performing miracles and of controlling the invisible forces of chaos and destruction that threatened their meager existence. The authorities feared with some justification that such a man might stir up the people, threatening the peace and order of society. And there is evidence that many such figures did practice in the mountains during this period despite strict government regulations. The vigilance of the Yamato government to detect and crush out any charismatic holy man provides a likely context for the *Chronicle's* statement that the ascetic on Mount Katsuragi was "leading the people astray."

Still, the authorities must have been impressed with En early on, for one of their own officials apprenticed himself to the magician on Mount Katsuragi. Historical records indicate that this man, Hirotari, was a member of the Bureau of

Court Physicians. (Later, in the year 732, he is said to have become director of that bureau.) Hirotari was an exorcist or physician (*jugonshi*), whose role was to expel evil influences through the chanting of incantations. He must have been seeking new and effective techniques through his apprenticeship with En the Ascetic, but apparently he or his superiors concluded that this man and his practices were dangerous. So En the Ascetic was banished to a distant island. Perhaps, too, the authorities felt especially nervous to have him practicing his powerful magic on Mount Katsuragi so close to Fujiwara, the capital of the reigning Emperor Mommu.

What precisely were En the Ascetic's religious practices? The *Chronicles* refer succinctly to the "magic" he practiced on Mount Katsuragi, but they do not identify it as belonging to any particular tradition. Japanese scholars agree that it is impossible to determine the exact nature of his practices, but they surmise that he (and others like him in that age) engaged in some combination of native and imported magic—perhaps a mixture of indigenous Japanese shamanistic practices with early Esoteric Buddhist rituals and elements of religious Taoism. Whatever the nature of En the Ascetic's knowledge and techniques, however, they must have been in some sense new or unique, or he must have demonstrated particular efficacy in their use, to have drawn so much attention to himself.

Ascertaining En the Ascetic's precise religious lineage may be problematic, but clearly he must be discussed in the context of the mountains of Japan and religious practices in those mountains. The *Chronicles of Japan Continued* state that En the Ascetic practiced his "magic" on Mount Katsuragi, which lies on the western rim of the Yamato Plain, the political and cultural center of Japan for centuries. And this theme of religious practice on sacred mountains is the ground bass that runs through every variation of En the Ascetic's story over the centuries.

Japanese religious practice drew from many sources, accommodating both the imported religion of Buddhism and the native Shintō tradition, while accepting Chinese yin-yang beliefs and other aspects of religious Taoism. Yet perhaps far more important in the religious life of the Japanese people than any sectarian label or doctrine are certain constant themes, such as that of mountains and the many beliefs and practices associated with them. Scholar Kishimoto Hideo describes two very different, indeed precisely opposite, attitudes toward mountains in Japanese religious practice—one "symbolic," the other "behavioral." In the first, the mountain functions as a symbol in the mind of the people. They do not approach it, and the mountain may in fact be tabooed so that no ordinary person may set foot upon it. This view of the mountain may relate to the belief that agricultural deities come down to the fields during the growing season and then return to the mountain to dwell there on high until the following spring. Another reason for revering the mountain from a distance is the belief that certain mountains shelter the souls of the dead. This "symbolic" sense of the mountain as sacred, inhibitive, and to be worshipped from afar may reflect ancient, indigenous traditions.

By contrast, the "behavioral" attitude toward mountains regards them not as objects of worship but rather as training grounds for attaining religious ideals.

Here, people do not keep their distance from the mountains but climb the steepest peaks and brave the deepest and most threatening recesses to undertake arduous ascetic practices. From the earliest accounts, En the Ascetic is described as performing his practices on the mountain, so clearly he represents this more active attitude. This is consistent also with his later adoption as the patriarch of Shugendō, whose practitioners either traveled about to various sacred mountains to perform their practices or secluded themselves on one particular mountain, where they cultivated ascetic disciplines to attain "Dharma power" and the ability to subjugate evil demons.

As the legend evolved, the name of En the Ascetic became linked with one after another mountainous region in Japan. The earliest instance of this linkage is seen in the second written account of his story, found in a collection of tales entitled *Miraculous Stories of Karmic Retribution of Good and Evil in Japan* (*Nihonkoku genpō zen'aku nihon ryōiki*, commonly abbreviated as *Nihon ryōiki*). The monk Kyōkai (or Keikai) of Yakushiji Temple in Nara compiled this collection, completing his work in the year 823. He writes that En the Ascetic

gathered the multitude of gods and demons and exhorted them, saying, "You are to build a bridge reaching all the way from Mount Katsuragi to Mount Kinpu in Yamato." The deities were distressed at this, and during the reign of the emperor at the Fujiwara Palace, the Great Deity Hitokotonushi of Mount Katsuragi became enraged and slandered him, saying: "E no Ubasoko [or Ubasoku, an unordained Buddhist ascetic,] is scheming to overthrow the emperor" . . . The Great Deity Hitokotonushi was bound in a spell cast by En the Ascetic and has not to this day been released from that spell

Mount Kinpu, or Kinpusen, here refers to the entire mountainous region south of the Yamato Plain, including the modern Ōmine and Yoshino. This area had long been known both as a beautifully secluded spot and as the home of the deities who provide water for the fields of the Yamato Plain. Located close to the imperial capitals—which, until the Nara period (710–784), moved at the beginning of each new reign—these mountains had been the destination of imperial excursions since the third century. Some of the early emperors even built detached palaces there. The beauty of the area was idealized in poetry and sometimes even described as the abode of Taoist immortals. Eventually, Mount Kinpu came to be regarded as the Pure Land of the Bodhisattva Maitreya (Miroku Bosatsu).

Moreover, with the introduction of metal techniques in the eighth century, the area's natural resources began to be developed, and it was imagined—and subsequently rumored as true—that there was gold to be found in these mountains. This very likely was the source of the name Kinpu, meaning "golden peak." Thus it was that this mountainous area—known variously as Kinpusen, Yoshino, or Ōmine, famous for its lovely natural environment, rumored as a source of gold, important for its historic connections to the imperial house, and considered to be the realm of Taoist immortals and the site of Buddhist pure lands—came eventually to be regarded as sacred, as a destination for religious pilgrimages.

The awe in which these mountains were held was enhanced by various religious

and social taboos enforced in the area. Women were prohibited from a very early period, and those men who desired to enter the mountains were required to conform to strict rules of abstinence and purification. The peaks of Kinpusen had a particular sanctity that was not to be violated. Even in later times, Shugendō practices undertaken in these mountains were perceived as having greater efficacy than those performed elsewhere.

The bridge episode in *Miraculous Stories* thus linked En the Ascetic, a mountain holy man celebrated for his magical powers, with Kinpusen, a mountainous area renowned for its sacred character. This is the first of many tales that connect the name of En the Ascetic to particular mountains and mountain temples throughout the country. From another perspective, En's confrontation with the gods over the bridge serves to illustrate the simple statement of the *Chronicles of Japan Continued* that the magician of Katsuragi had the power to enslave gods and demons, and to bind them in spells when they failed to follow his orders.

Most Heian period tales identify the deity who refuses to work on the bridge in the daylight for fear of being seen by human beings as Hitokotonushi, the local deity of Mount Katsuragi, who, despite being identified as male in earlier sources, is depicted as a female deity in Heian narratives of En the Ascetic. The Ascetic, in his wrath at this insubordination, casts Hitokotonushi into the bottom of a deep valley and binds her there under a spell. The deity then takes revenge by possessing someone in the imperial court and, through that medium, informing authorities that En the Ascetic is plotting treason. (Hitokotonushi here takes over Hirotsu's role as the slanderer.) This precipitates the Ascetic's arrest and banishment to an island near Mount Fuji, far from the capital. Later storytellers during the Heian period adhere rather closely to a fairly standard narrative of the legend, depicting the confrontation about the bridge, the binding of Hitokotonushi under a spell in the valley, the Ascetic's exile in Izu, his pardon and release, and his experiences on the Asian continent after flying away from Japan.

Toward the close of the Heian period (ca. 1120), the collection *Tales of Times Now Past* (*Konjaku monogatari*) introduces a new element into its version of the story. Here, En the Ascetic—through the power of religious devotions performed on Mount Kinpu—is vouchsafed the vision of a new divine figure, the Bodhisattva Zaō, who becomes an important guardian deity for mountain ascetics. This wrathful figure, burning with rage, is deemed particularly appropriate for a protector of religious practitioners in the perilous mountain heights.

En the Ascetic's vision of the Bodhisattva Zaō in *Tales of Times Now Past* is a harbinger of developments of his legend during the Kamakura period (1185–1333). Kamakura versions of the tale do repeat Heian storytellers' motifs, but they also add new, predominantly religious themes that are designed to emphasize and legitimize En the Ascetic as the model for lay monks practicing austerities in the sacred mountains. Typical is the account in a mid-Kamakura (1257) Buddhist tale collection entitled *One Hundred Cases of Karmic Origins, Personally Gathered* (*Shishū hyaku innen shū*) by Jūshin, a Buddhist priest of the Pure Land sect. This narrative includes a very important statement revealing that, at least by the middle

of the Kamakura period, mountain practitioners consciously modeled themselves on the image of this mountain holy man: "If one were to inquire into the origins of the lonely, perilous practices of the *yamabushi*, these all arose out of actions first taken by En the Ascetic."

The account of En the Ascetic in *One Hundred Cases of Karmic Origins* seems almost a miscellany of everything the author had ever heard about this man. Clearly the writer's priority, though, is to emphasize the Ascetic as a religious figure, a paradigm for practitioners of mountain austerities. The focus has shifted away from the magician of Katsuragi's confrontation with a local deity named Hitokotonushi. More important is the demonstration of En's credentials as a holy man—auspicious signs appearing from the time he was in his mother's womb, his faith from the age of seven in the Three Treasures of Buddhism (the Buddha, the teachings, and the community), his ascetic practices on the many different sacred mountains of Japan, and his legitimate place in the transmission of the teachings. The text claims that En was the first to "open" sacred mountains all over Japan for religious practices, in particular manifesting many wonders in Ōmine, "the most sacred peaks in Japan." In these mountains he left 120 hermitages, built a three-story stone edifice at Jinzen, encountered his own skeleton from his third lifetime, and set up one thousand stone monuments as an offering for his parents' enlightenment.

Perhaps most important from a Shugendō point of view is the account of how En the Ascetic received the Esoteric teachings from the great Buddhist patriarch Nāgārjuna during his retreat at the waterfall on Mount Mino'o. This episode acquired great significance in the tradition, for it established the Ascetic's legitimate place in the transmission of the teachings. Moreover, he is said to have appeared on various mountains as different manifestations of the Buddha—as the Bodhisattva Hōki on Mount Kongō, and elsewhere as the Peacock King.

In the author's eagerness to establish the religious credentials of En the Ascetic as prototype and patriarch of all ascetic practitioners in the sacred mountains of Japan, he even downplays the single (probably) historical fact—that imperial authorities had sent the man named En no Ozunu into exile on an island far to the east, off the Izu Peninsula. This event is mentioned almost as an afterthought, near the end of Jūshin's account in *One Hundred Cases of Karmic Origins, Personally Gathered*. Ironically, modern Japanese scholars seem to agree that the historical core of all that was told and written about En the Ascetic very likely boils down to these few bare facts: that in the late seventh century there was a man living on Mount Katsuragi in the Yamato area who was particularly adept at certain magical practices, and that he was for some reason sent into exile by imperial order in the year 699 C.E.

The translation is based on Jūshin, *En no Gyōja no koto* (En the Ascetic), in *Shishū hyaku innen shū*, in *Dainihon bukkyō zensho* 148 (Tokyo: Bussho Kankōkai, 1912): 136–140.

## Further Reading

H. Byron Earhart, "Shugendō, the Traditions of En no Gyōja, and Mikkyō Influence," in Kōyasan Daigaku, ed., *Studies of Esoteric Buddhism and Tantrism* (Kōyasan: Kōyasan University, 1965): 297–317; Ichirō Hon, "On the Concept of Hijiri (Holy Man)," *Numen* 5 (1958): 128–160, 199–232; Linda Klepinger Keenan, "En no Gyōja The Legend of a Holy Man in Twelve Centuries of Japanese Literature," including an English translation of the drama "En the Ascetic" by Tsubouchi Shōyō, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1989; Hideo Kishimoto, "The Role of Mountains in the Religious Life of the Japanese People," in *Proceedings of the Ninth International Congress for the History of Religions*, 1958 (Tokyo: Maruzen, 1960): 545–549; Paul L. Swanson and Royall Tyler, eds., "Shugendō and Mountain Religion in Japan," special issue of *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 16, 2–3 (Summer 1989); Royall Tyler, ed. and tr., "The Wizard of the Mountains," in *Japanese Tales* (New York: Pantheon, 1987): 127–130.

## One Hundred Cases of Karmic Origins, Personally Gathered: En the Ascetic

We respectfully relate that one hundred years or more after the Buddha's teaching crossed into our realm, from the end of the reign of Emperor Tenji and into the reigns of Empress Jitō and Emperor Mommu, there lived a remarkable ascetic. This was the Lay Priest En. His father was Takakamo no Makagemaro, his mother Shirataume Totokinmaro of the same clan. He was born in Yabako Village in Upper Kazuraki (Katsuragi) district in the land of Yamato, where in later times was built Chihara Temple.

En was possessed of uncanny qualities from the time he was in his mother's womb. From the age of seven, he took refuge in the Three Treasures. As a young man of nineteen he repaired to Mino'o Falls in the land of Settsu, where he accumulated merit by assiduously performing ascetic practices—chanting mantras and sitting in meditation. He amassed power through his perseverance in these practices.

Before too many years passed, he effected the appearance of thirty-six Diamond princes [deities in the form of furious-looking boys] in billowing white clouds above the dragon cave. Thereafter, he devoted himself to the practice of the Buddhist teachings, renewing his wondrous powers again and again. Vowing to save and benefit sentient beings of the coming final age, he placed images of the Diamond princes in many locations: the so-called Fifteen Diamond Princes remain in Mino'o, the Eight Great Diamond Princes in Ōmine, and the Seven Diamond Princes in Kazuraki. However, for the peak called Not-Yet-Illumined, he pledged one Diamond prince for the future; in those days it had not yet taken form.

We respectfully relate that an amazing event occurred at Mino'o Falls. The Ascetic, borne up by his holy powers, entered from the head of the falls into the dragon cave in the cloud-wreathed rocky heights. After proceeding some

distance into its innermost regions, he espied an exquisite scene, all golden and bejeweled, and bearing no resemblance to anything seen in this material world of Jambūdvīpa. Suddenly there was a Diamond gate. He knocked on the gate, and a voice answered from within.

The Ascetic responded, saying, "I am the Lay Priest En from Jambūdvīpa."

The voice within said, "Know you not? I am the Great King Tokuzen, and this is the Pure Land of Nāgārjuna."

Whereupon he opened the gate, and En went in and gazed about at this place. Neither thought nor speech could encompass it. By setting foot in that pure realm in his earthly frame, he was washed clean of defilement in body and mind alike. He met the Great Sage Nāgārjuna and was blessed with the means for salvation and equipped to follow the Buddha Path. Truly he was graced.

Further, En the Ascetic established the One Vehicle Enlightenment Temple on Golden Peak in Kumano (at the southern end of the Ōmine Mountains). He began going onto holy peaks here and there and was the first to set foot on the holy mountains of many districts. With clouds for his shelter and a stone for his pillow, he reclined upon a mat of moss. If one were to inquire into the origins of the lonely, perilous practices of the *yamabushi*, these all arose out of actions first taken by En the Ascetic. All things in the beginning are admirable, but by the end of the corrupt age they tend to become unimaginably degraded. However, the example that he passed on to his descendants has not deteriorated in the least. There has not been one person in this whole country since the time the prayers were recited who has donned a monk's garments and implored the merciful protection of heaven, who has not fervently desired to forge a karmic linkage with the One Vehicle Wisdom peaks of the two mandalas, the Womb-store and Diamond mandalas. There are a great variety of circumstances in which to practice the Path of the Buddha, but the circumstances of the *yamabushi* are truly noble and awesome. They prize the unexcelled Way without regard for their own lives. Verily, what practice is the equal of their forsaking their lives in the mountain forests for the Way of the Buddha? None! And in particular, the one whose will to seek immortality was most profound was En the Ascetic. And thus, for over thirty years he dwelled in a stone grotto on Mount Kazuraki, covering himself with a cloak of wisteria and sustaining his life on pine needles. At last, having acquired merit, he rode upon a cloud of five colors and came to the contemplative retreats of the immortals.

Mount Kazuraki is the same as Mount Kongō. Because the Ascetic established a sacred precinct on this high mountain for the sake of the life to come, this miraculous peak became in its entirety *The Sutra of the Lotus of the Wonderful Dharma*. Thus it is that Mount Kazuraki is called "The Peak of the One Vehicle." . . .

And the mountains of Ōmine comprise the peaks of the two mandalas, the Womb-store and Diamond mandalas. The mountains known as Kumano com-

prise the Mandala of the Womb-store Realm (which presents the Buddha mind as cause for awakening), where provisional manifestations of the Buddhas have left their traces in twelve locations. Mount Kinpu is the Diamond Mandala (which presents the result of awakening), and there in thirty-eight places they have softened their light (to appear to humanity). That peak was not originally in the country of Japan; it was actually a mountain in the land of the Buddha's birth and came flying through the air to our realm and alighted here. The deities who have manifested themselves there are likewise protector deities from the land of the Buddha's birth. The original form of the manifestation of Kumano Shōshō Gongen is Amida Buddha, who is the main Buddha of the Lotus Section of the Karma Assembly in the Diamond Mandala. Kongō Zaō is the Buddha Śākyamuni. Śākyamuni is also called Vairocana, who is the Great Sun of the Diamond Realm. Thus, the mountains of Ōmine are the most sacred peaks in Japan. . . . Further, in these mountains the Ascetic left behind hermitages in 120 places. Three hundred eighty immortals dwell therein.

At Jinzen [in Ōmine], there is a three-story stone edifice. The lowest level is the Amida Mandala; the middle level is the Mandala of the Womb-store Realm; while the top level is the Mandala of the Diamond Realm. On every level is a great dais. Carefully arranged upon the stone on each dais are ritual Diamond bell posts with strings of the five colors.

We respectfully relate that in the cave of the immortals there is an old skeleton. All of its joints are still intact and have not fallen apart. It lies on its back facing upward, grasping in its left hand a single-pronged Diamond pounder and holding in its right hand the sword of wisdom. It is more than nine feet long. It has a withered tree growing up through its eye. Upon seeing these things (the Diamond pounder and the sword), the Ascetic tried to take them. When he tried with force to budge them, they were as solid as a mountain and could not be removed.

He petitioned the gods and Buddhas, and his guardian deity granted this revelation in a dream: "These are your remains from a previous life. You have been traversing these mountain peaks for seven lifetimes already since you first received life. In your first three lives you left behind your skeletons. Your stature in the first life was over seven feet. In your second life it was over eight feet, and in the third life more than nine feet. This is your third skeleton. If you wish to ascertain the truth of this, intone the Mystic Formula of the Thousand-hand Kannon five times. And then if you pray the *Heart Sutra* three times, you should be able to take these things."

Both hands of the skeleton then opened immediately and, as he had been told in his dream, this also opened the three-story stone edifice that he had constructed during his first, second, and third lifetimes.

Further, this Ascetic had long practiced the teaching [and chanted the mantra] of the Peacock King, readily manifesting its mystical powers. Some say that the Ascetic perfected the "Mantra of Compassionate Salvation" at the age of seven and recited it one hundred thousand times every day.



It might be asked: When En the Ascetic was in the land, the mantra teachings had not yet even reached T'ang China, let alone Japan. How is it then that the ceremonies of the Ascetic and the rituals of Ōmine are essentially in accord with the mantra teachings? To reply: In contrast to those of lofty intentions, whether of high rank or low, En the Ascetic is celebrated as a sage for all eons. Thus how could he entirely forget his previous existences? How could he not practice teachings that are eternal through all time?

All in all, the Lay Priest En appeared on Mount Kinpu as the Great Sage Itokuten; on Mount Kongō as the Bodhisattva Hōki; and it is also said that in some places he took form as the Peacock King.

This was a remarkable ascetic—he ran floating across the ocean's surface as though treading upon dry land and soared among the mountain peaks like a bird in flight. Moreover, the Ascetic was not shallow in his resolve to repay the kindnesses of his mother and father. During his lifetime he built a temple to make an outward gift of his sincere respect and to repay the kindnesses of his father and mother. One hears also of the offering he made to Taima Temple. . . . During the reign of Emperor Temmu, . . . for the sake of his parents' enlightenment, En donated to Taima Temple several hundred acres of mountain forests and fields that he had inherited from his ancestors. In the Main Hall of his father's temple the Ascetic deposited within the sixteen-foot statue of Maitreya a small gilded bronze image of the Peacock King, who for many years had been his guardian deity.

The Outside Junior Fifth Rank Lower Grade Chieftain of Korea Hirotari initially revered the Ascetic but later came to envy him. The courtier slandered him, saying, "This fellow has the evil look of someone who is sure to agitate the realm. He is bound to be bad for the nation, for the ruler, and for the people."

Another time the Ascetic called to account the Great Deity Hitokotonushi of Kazuraki, for she had utterly failed to finish building the stone bridge of Kume. He bound her seven times around with silky floss from the sacred *sakaki* tree and left her at the bottom of a ravine. As a result, the deity took possession of someone in the imperial palace and in this way reported the matter to the ruler. This was during the reign of Emperor Mommu.

The great king dispatched emissaries to arrest En the Ascetic, but he flew up into the sky so they were not able to do so. Then they went to take his mother Shirataume into custody. The Ascetic appeared at the Wisteria Court and—his heart taken captive by his mother's sad plight—he begged them to arrest him in her place, thus exemplifying the bond of compassion between parent and child.

Nonetheless, in the fifth month of the third year of Emperor Mommu's reign, he was exiled to the island at Izu. In the daytime, in obedience to the sovereign, he dwelt on the island performing his religious practices. At night, he flew over to Mount Fuji in the land of Suruga to practice. After three years passed, in the fifth month of the first year of Taihō, they summoned him. Slowly he made his way toward the imperial court and then flew up into the air.

He wished to leave the country but regretted that he would not then be able to repay his parents' kindnesses in their homeland, so he erected one thousand stone monuments at Jinzen in Ōmine, dedicating these to them on Kūhachi Peak. . . . The records of the ancients report that after that, when the Ascetic was about to leave the country of Japan, his mother Shirataume was distressed at parting from her loved one. The Ascetic, too, was at a loss, loath to think of the separation of mother and son. Unable to forsake his mother, he had her ride in a bowl while he sat upon a woven grass mat, and they were transported ten thousand *ri* across the billowing waves to the kingdom of Silla (Korea).

At that time, the Buddhist teacher Dōshō of our realm had crossed over to T'ang China under imperial orders to seek the Buddhist teachings. He had gone to Silla at the invitation of the five hundred Silla "tigers" and was teaching the *Lotus Sutra* deep in the mountains there. At one session, a participant raised a question in the language of Japan. The Venerable Dōshō asked who he was. He answered, "I am the Lay Priest En from the country of Japan. I left my country because the hearts of the gods are unruly and the hearts of the inhabitants are defiled and confused. But even gods and immortals find it difficult to forsake the bond between parent and child, so my mother has accompanied me to these foreign regions. And since the remains of my loving father are still in Japan, I now travel back and forth to that country regularly. I came to hear you speak because you are a spiritual leader from my homeland."

When Dōshō came down from the speaker's platform to seek him out, the voice was audible but he did not see anyone. . . .

Another account says that the Ascetic prayed, and the figure of Śākyamuni appeared. "How in these latter days can he benefit the sentient beings of the defiled world in *this* guise?" the Ascetic wondered, and he prayed again. Then appeared the wrathful form of Zaō. The Ascetic offered him great reverence and accepted him in faith. He who long ago expounded the *Sutra of the Lotus of the Wonderful Dharma* on Vulture Peak now is revealed in the body of Zaō on Mount Kinpu. And his attendant protectors are Fudō and Bishamon. We respectfully relate that Zaō's embodiment is a stone image that is three feet high on Mount Kinpu; on Mount Kongō it is five feet high, in a stone box enshrined deep down in holy ground.