**Festival of Peace and Bounty (Shushō-e)**

The Festival of Peace and Bounty, also called the “Demon Expelling Ceremony” (Oni-oi Kaishiki) takes place at Engyōji Temple every year on January 18. On this special occasion, masked performers representing protector deities lead a procession through the temple grounds, stopping to perform a ceremonial cleansing dance at Hakusan Gongen Shrine and concluding with a climactic ceremony in the Maniden Hall. The red deity, Wakaten, is an avatar of Bishamonten (Sanskrit: Vaishravana), a celestial guardian of earthly treasures. The green deity, Ototen, is an avatar of the Wisdom King Fudō Myō-ō (Sanskrit: Acala). Both are said to have guided the founding abbot Shōkū when he started his ascetic training on Mt. Shosha in 966. The two avatars have served as protectors of Engyōji since its establishment, featuring prominently in temple lore and traditions for over a millennium. During the Festival of Peace and Bounty, they work together to drive malevolent spirits from the temple grounds. Their frightful appearance draws from traditional associations with a demon that “frightens away evil and welcomes spring.” According to folk customs, the ritual is also associated with wishes for peace and a bountiful crop.

On the day of the festival, formalities begin around 1:00 p.m., when the red and green deities are blindfolded and led up the mountain to Hakusan Gongen Shrine. There, they distribute “demon chopsticks” made from prickly ash. Wrapped in a paper amulet, these gifts are thought to ward off evil. Wakaten carries a bell in one hand and a long torch made of pine in the other. Strapped to his back is a wooden mallet decorated with a flaming jewel. Ototen wields a wooden broadsword finished in black lacquer. With Wakaten in front, the pair lead a procession down the mountain, stomping the ground forcefully along the way and shouting incantations. This process, called the “demon dance” (*oni-odori*), is thought to appease the spirits of the land and prevent earthquakes.

Once the procession arrives at the Maniden Hall, more chopsticks are distributed to the spectators, and the ritualized dancing continues. Ringing his bell continuously, Wakaten leads his green companion Ototen on a scripted journey around the darkened interior of the hall. They circumambulate the hall’s principal image, a statue of Nyoirin Kannon, whose tabernacle is opened to the public only on this one special day each year. Spectators also have the rare privilege of viewing statues of the Four Heavenly Kings (Shitennō), fierce guardians of Buddhist teachings.

For generations, members of the local Umezu family have coordinated the traditions associated with this annual festival. Starting each year in early January, they prepare special foods, rehearse the choreography, and mend or replace the ritual costumes, tools, and masks. Members of the Umezu family also enjoy the privilege of playing the roles of the red and green deities each year.