

Renge-e and Kaerutobi Ritual

Kinpusenji Temple holds the Kaerutobi ritual in early July. It is the most eye-catching of the three main annual rituals.

The Kaerutobi ritual is part of the Renge-e ritual in which Shugendo practitioners in traditional garb gather lotus flowers from a pond in the Okuda area. They carry the flowers up to the Zaodo, the main hall of the temple, to honor the Zao Gongen (the principal images venerated by Shugendo practitioners). Then the action moves to a long stage in front of the hall, as a man dressed in a bright-green frog costume hops his way to the main hall of the temple to receive blessings from the priests.

The root of this one-of-a-kind festival is a legend about a man who insulted the gods, and as punishment was left high atop a mountain crag. He later repented, so the high priest of Kinpusenji Temple took pity on him, turning him into a frog so he could get off the crag. After making his way to the temple and expressing his sincere regret in front of the Zao Gongen, he was returned to human form through the power of prayer.

During the festival, local men carry the “frog” up to the temple on a platform. During the festival, the “frog” is carried up to the temple on a platform carried by local men. Once at the Zaodo Hall, the frog reenacts his hopping journey three times, to the chants of priests and Shugendo practitioners. Finally, his show of remorse is judged sufficient, and he is transformed back into human form. While this ceremony may seem a little

comic on the surface, it symbolizes a competition among Shugendo practitioners to demonstrate their spiritual ability.