

### **The Takiabi Festival at Shirataki-jinja Shrine**

The Takiabi Festival, held at Shirataki-jinja Shrine on August 1, is a festival with an unusual conclusion: participants carry the shrine's *mikoshi* (portable shrine) beneath a 17-meter waterfall.

Originally the residents of the town of Happō celebrated their summer festival in a more typical fashion. After purifying themselves and praying at the main shrine, bearers carried the *mikoshi* through the streets so that others could offer their prayers to the deity. Their circuit complete, the participants then returned the *mikoshi* to Shirataki-jinja and concluded the ceremony. However, during one particularly hot summer, the bearers went to cool off at the waterfall behind the shrine, carrying the *mikoshi* with them. This *takiabi*, or “waterfall rinsing,” was so invigorating that it became a permanent addition to the festival. Now bearers make a ritual circle of the waterfall pool, passing beneath the falls, before returning to the riverbank.

The Takiabi Festival is also unusual in its strict adherence to tradition. Participants may only be men, and they are required to wear a white robe—white being a symbol of religious purity in Japan. Unlike most festivals, the typical food vendors and gaming stalls are cleared out the day before and carrying the *mikoshi* around the town and into the waterfall is the only thing performed on the day, clearly distinguishing religious ritual from secular revelry.