

## Suganuki Purification Rite

Date: July 31st

On the first day of the [Goshinkosai](#) summer festival, the three main deities of [Usa Jingu Shrine](#) are transferred from their sanctuaries at the [Jogu \(Upper Shrine\)](#) to portable shrines and carried to a temporary enshrinement site called the [Tongu](#), where they stay for three days and two nights. Before the ceremonies can commence at the Tongu, priests carry out the Suganuki purification rite to cleanse themselves. Similar summer purification rites have been held since the Heian period (794–1185), but this variation is unique to Usa Jingu and uses distinctive purification tools.

Three sacred *gohei* wands with zigzag paper streamers are set up in a holly bush next to the Tongu in a formation said to imitate a river, with a small stand for offerings and a straw mat placed on the ground in front. After three recitations of a purification prayer, each priest cleanses himself using a *tokenawagushi*, a special wooden wand with a purple paper streamer and a flat piece of straw wedged into a slit on top. Two strands of rope, one twisted clockwise and the other counterclockwise, are tied to the shaft of the wand, and during purification each priest unwinds the ropes and ceremonially scatters the fibers.

The next step in the rite makes use of another unique purification tool: two large rings of woven grass joined together. One ring is laid around the straw mat in front of the offerings, and the other is held vertically by an assistant. Each priest in turn ceremonially kneels within the first ring and bows deeply as the assistant lowers the second ring down to the ground over the kneeling priest. This action is called *suganuki* (“passing of the grass ring”), which is where the name of the rite comes from. After the priest rises, he throws the *tokenawagushi* toward the three *gohei* wands, symbolizing purification by water.

In the case of the head priest, the rite is more complex. A different set of woven grass rings is used, and the passing of the ring is performed three times: for the country, the people, and the head priest himself. After each pass, the head priest rises and circles back to the starting position, alternating directions in a figure-eight pattern. Once the head priest has been purified, he throws the *tokenawagushi* toward the *gohei* wands. The entire ritual is completed with three more recitations of the purification prayer, and the Goshinkosai summer festival can proceed.