

***Mikoshi* Portable Shrines**

Mikoshi are temporary shrines for deities and are used to carry them from one place to another. Hiyoshi Taisha Shrine is thought to be the first place where *mikoshi* were used, following the gift of two palanquins by Emperor Kanmu (737–806) in 791. Before the Emperor's gift, deities were transported on sacred tree branches.

Each of the seven shrines of Hiyoshi Taisha has a *mikoshi*. They are adorned with animal motifs, crests, hanging mirrors and bells. Dragons, phoenixes, *shishi* lions, and monkeys are thought to be messengers and servants of the deities.

The *mikoshi* used today are replicas of ones made in the late 1500s. The older *mikoshi* have been designated Important Cultural Properties and are kept in a storage facility near the trail to the summit of Mt. Hachijōji. The facility is open to public viewing in November.

The modern *mikoshi* are the same size as the originals but significantly lighter. They weigh about 800 kilograms compared to their predecessors' 1,500 kilograms. It takes about 30 people to carry one *mikoshi*. Each one is maintained by a different team of townspeople living near the shrine, and it is these teams who carry the *mikoshi* on their shoulders during the Sannō Festival held each spring.