

The God Bishamon and the Poem
(Bishamon Renga)

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Bishamon
Worshipper 1 (W1)
Worshipper 2 (W2)

W1 I am a resident of this neighborhood. While it is a fine year every year, this year is particularly felicitous. As this is the first Day of the Tiger, I intend to make my customary pilgrimage to Mount Kurama. There is also one who lives nearby who always accompanies me. I will go invite him to come along. I must hurry on my way. Truly, while everything was in a bustle during the old winter, now that the spring has come, all is in a state of peaceful prosperity. Well, here I am already. First I will announce myself. Hello in there! Is anybody home?

W2 Well, someone is at the door. Who is there?

W1 It is I.

W2 Oh, it is you! And to what do I owe the honor of this visit?

W1 Is not today the first Day of the Tiger?

W2 Truly, it is the first Day of the Tiger.

W1 Thus I have come to invite you to accompany me on our customary pilgrimage to Mount Kurama. Will you not come with me?

W2 I am pleased that you have come. I have been awaiting your arrival. I will accompany you indeed.

W1 If that is the case, come, come. Let us be on our way.

W2 With all my heart.

W1 Do you not agree that it is thanks to the bounteous beneficence of the God Bishamon that we are able to make our customary pilgrimage to his shrine once again this year?

W2 It is as you say, indeed. It is a most felicitous thing to be able to make our customary pilgrimage in a state of good fortune and perfect health.

W1 Well, here we are already at Mount Kurama.

W2 Truly we have arrived.

W1 First, let us offer our obeisance.

W2 That is a fine idea.

BOTH (They mime striking the gong.) Jagan! Jagan! (They sit down and bow in obeisance.)

W1 We sincerely request that we be blessed with safety in the home, great wealth and good fortune, perfect health and long life. (They bow once more.) Though it is our custom to visit the quarters of the priests, as the sun is almost set, let us quickly make our preparations to encloister ourselves here for the night.

W2 If that is the case, let us sleep right here.

W1 That is a fine idea. (BOTH doze off. Pause.) Oh, how felicitous. The God Bishamon has blessed me. Well, I must say, how grateful I am. (He bows in gratitude.)

W2 What are you making such a fuss about?

W1 Why, a most felicitous thing has happened to me. A priest of eighty some years appeared wearing a fragrant habit, carrying a string of crystal prayer beads, and leaning on a dove cane. He spoke to me in gentle voice, saying that in return for my faithful annual pilgrimage, he appeared to bless me. In other words, he gave me an exclusive blessing of good fortune.

W2 Please wait right there for a moment.

W1 With all my heart.

W2 (Aside.) I know not what to think of this. Since I make the pilgrimage every year that same as he does, it would seem that I would also deserve a blessing. Oh, I know what I'll do. (To W1.) I say, I say. A most felicitous thing has happened to me as well.

W1 What might it be?

W2 In general appearance, it was much the same as yours. Around the middle of the night, as I recall, A priest of eighty some years appeared and said that in return for my faithful annual pilgrimage, he had come to grant me an exclusive blessing of good fortune. He said that he would entrust you with my blessing and that I should receive it from you on our way back home. This was my divine revelation. So please give that blessing you received to me.

W1 Oh, no, if this blessing had been for you, it would have been placed directly in your hands. As this blessing was give to me, there is no way that I will hand it over to you.

W2 But that was my divine revelation. You must, indeed,

hand it over to me.

W1 If that is the case, in gratitude for this blessing, let us compose a set of punning linked verses. You compose a link to my punning verse, and if your link is of sufficient quality, I will hand this blessing over to you.

W2 I agree entirely. First, compose your punning verse.

W1 How is this?

W2 How is what?

W1 Hearing that only one exclusive blessing was forthcoming from Bishamon. . .

W2 As the dark was swept away, my anger on Mount Kurama was so great that I ate a centipede.

W1 You have done extremely well. Oh, how strange. I feel a sudden alteration in the atmosphere.

W2 Truly, it is a portentous atmosphere.

W1 First, come over here with me.

W2 With all my heart.

BISHAMON As the dark is swept away, from the source of the light of my own glory, I, Bishamon, step forth.

W1 Who is this who appears before us.

BISHAMON Well, I must say, what foolish words you utter. The one who appears before you now is that very God Bishamon you come to worship for faithfully every year.

W1 We humbly thank you for your gracious appearance to us. First, come all the way inside. (He brings a stool for BISHAMON to sit on.)

BISHAMON The matter for which this Bishamon has appeared here is of no great import. Since the two of you quarreled with each other over the blessing that I granted to you, I came here to straighten out this matter.

W1 For this, we are increasingly grateful.

BISHAMON To begin with, it was wrong to expect sudden joy, for you must build up prosperity as though piling up sheets of tissue paper, one upon another. First, hand that exclusive blessing there to me.

W1 Do you mean to confiscate it entirely due to our

quarreling over it?

BISHAMON No, no. I will do no such thing as that. In order to ensure perfect fairness, I will split it in two equal parts with my fierce halberd. It is for this that I order you to hand it to me.

W1 With all my heart. (He places the blessing on his opened fan, and offers it to BISHAMON, who mimes splitting the blessing in two with his halberd. Then he gives one half to W1 and the other to W2, who express great joy and gratitude.)

BISHAMON Well now, earlier I heard voices reciting something or other. What was it?

W1 It was a set of punning linked verses that we composed in gratitude for the blessing you gave us.

BISHAMON It is a most laudable thing you have done. (Chanting.) Then, how did the punning linked verses go?

W1 (Singing.)

Hearing that only one exclusive blessing
was forthcoming from Bishamon. . .

W2 (Singing.)

As the dark was swept away,
my anger on Mount Kurama was so great

that I ate a centipede.

BISHAMON (Singing.)

Bishamon, in response

To this amusing set of verses. . .

(He dances to instrumental accompaniment, after which he sings again.)

Bishamon, in response

To this amusing set of verses,

Prevents all demons and disasters from descending on either of
you.

(Offering his halberd to W1, who accepts it.)

And to you, I present this halberd.

W2 (Singing.)

(To W1.)

Oh, I say, how I do envy, how I envy you!

(To BISHAMON.)

I pray you, please grant me also another blessing.

BISHAMON (Singing.)

(To W2.)

Your request is only natural,

And as it is so natural,

(Removing his entire suit of armor
and offering it to W2, who accepts it.)

My all powerful protective armor,

I now present to you.

(He faces front.)

Declaring these all the blessing he has to give,

The God Bishamon,

Declaring these all the blessing he has to give,

The God Bishamon,

He leaves them here in this very place.