8

Believing Is Seeing

A Religious Perspective on Mountaineering in the Japanese Alps

Scott Schnell

Do the environmental problems that now confront us call for basically scientific and technological responses, or are we also in need of images and concepts that inspire more ecologically mindful ways of living? In a critical assessment of the American environmental movement—specifically, its failure to reach beyond the limits of a special interest group—Shellenberger and Nordhaus (2004) offer several suggestions for appealing to the broader public. One such suggestion is that environmentalists "tap into the creative worlds of myth-making, even religion, not to better sell narrow and technical policy proposals but rather to figure out who we are and who we need to be" (2004:34).

This seems to underscore the mental dimension of environmentalism—the realm of conceptualization. Religion, after all, remains one of the principal means by which people order the world around them and ascribe meaning to their experiences. Understandably, however, many environmental advocates are wary of dogmatic assertions that cannot be empirically verified, such as a supernatural presence or design. But strict adherence to dogma is by no means the exclusive province of religion, nor does religion, in all its diverse forms, necessarily presuppose a supernatural entity. Geertz's (1965:4) definition of religion—one of the most widely cited in the social sciences—makes no specific mention of the supernatural

per se; in fact, it seems to apply rather broadly to *any* school of thought, religious or otherwise, in terms of "(1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic."

But how are the moods and motivations instilled, and how are the conceptions enacted such that they register a positive impact in the material world? The answer, I suggest, is *ritual*, considered here in the most fundamental terms as any activity that expresses or conveys symbolic meaning. Although ritual is a prominent element of traditional subsistence technologies (Anderson 1996; Berkes 2008b; Lansing 2006; R. Nelson 1983), it seems to have been all but eliminated from industrialized food and forest production. Recently, however, William R. Jordan III has incorporated ritual into his ecological restoration work at the University of Wisconsin Arboretum. Through his exposure to anthropology, Jordan (2003:5) recognizes ritual not as formulaic or prescribed behavior so much as an ongoing creative process: "At the deepest level, ritual offers the only means we have of transcending, criticizing, or revising a morality or [an] ethical formulation prescribed by authority or handed down by tradition. Most fundamentally, it is the means by which humans generate, re-create, and renew transcendent values such as community, meaning, beauty, love, and the sacred, on which both ethics and morality depend." These values, in turn, exert an influence on more mundane activities, such as our daily interactions with the landscapes we inhabit.

Jennings (1982:117) takes the potential for creativity a bit further, describing ritual "as a way of coming to know, that is, as a way of searching for and discovering knowledge." While the movements themselves may be prescribed, their inherent meanings are often left for the participants to discover on their own, and it is by performing the movements that certain attitudes are formulated, certain realizations achieved. From this perspective, knowledge does not precede ritual; rather, it is through ritual that knowledge is acquired.

These ideas suggest that focusing only on the outward manifestations of ritualized activity is missing the point; we must also consider ritual's effect on the heart and mind of the individual participant. I shall illustrate using a simple example. Several years ago I was invited by a group of rock climbers to help pick up the trash that had accumulated at one of Iowa's state parks. As we moved out across the landscape, gathering up discarded

items ranging in size from cigarette butts and bottle caps to old automobile tires, I remember thinking how futile our efforts seemed to be. After all, uncaring visitors would soon return to deposit more of their refuse, and in a few weeks the trash would be right back in place. Also, considering the vastness of the earth's surface and all the garbage that has been dumped upon it, what impact would our limited actions have in improving the quality of the environment? Then it suddenly dawned on me that I was focusing too narrowly on the material effects of our efforts and not enough on the experiential—that is, the mental and emotional. By engaging in this activity, we were impressing upon ourselves and one another the importance of environmental stewardship, of caring for the landscape. Moreover, since littering itself would surely continue, our cleanup efforts had to be ongoing—stewardship implied continual vigilance. There was even a sense that, since I had come to this realization while others perhaps had not, I had to be doubly dedicated in order to offset their indifference. Each act of picking up an item of garbage and depositing it in the proper receptacle further ingrained these ideas, and the lessons were registered upon my person through physical exertion and fatigue. An obvious social element was present as well; while working, I began to converse with other participants, and, not surprisingly, we discovered that we shared an interest in ecology and a concern for the environment. Soon we were exchanging contact information, sharing ideas, and suggesting relevant books to read. In a sense, our attitudes and perceptions were being mobilized toward environmental activism. "The hand teaches the heart," as the old saying goes, meaning that activity in the service of an ideal, such as Daneel's tree-planting sacrament (chapter 10, this volume), will ingrain the ideal more deeply and enhance the actor's commitment to it.

Of course, picking up trash hardly fits the concept of ritual as it is normally construed. When ascribed with a higher ideal or motivation, however, even a mundane activity may be said to contain a ritual aspect. Reader (1995), for example, describes how the common chore of sweeping in Japan becomes a metaphorical enactment for ridding the mind of counterproductive images and imposing order on a seemingly chaotic world. Thus, "actions which appear, at least on the surface, to be ordinary and everyday ones, may assume the status of rituals endowed with inner symbolic meanings" (1995:228). Reader recalls how, during his sojourn at a Zen temple, he and some of the resident monks were assigned to sweep the temple garden every morning even when it was largely devoid of leaves and debris. This, to him, initially seemed like a waste of time. But watching the

monks unquestioningly rise to the task led him to an important insight into the nature of Zen discipline—that even an ordinary activity like sweeping can become a kind of meditative exercise:

> The importance of work, in this respect, was in the performance of an action rather than with its practical ends.... [T]he central issue was of going through the motions, with a ritual performance that stated both to themselves and to all around that they were doing the right thing in the proper way at the correct time. Cleaning and sweeping the garden was a ritual performance and hence, as with ritual in general, its importance need not primarily, or at all, be with the external actions involved but with the inner meanings they symbolized. [Reader 1995:230]

Is there a place for ritual—or religion more generally—in the contemporary world dominated by science and technology? It has long been theorized that science will eventually replace religion as the preferred explanatory framework, its superiority being routinely demonstrated through empirical observation (for example, Berger 1967; Dawkins 2006; Frazer 1890; Freud 1927; Tylor 1920). So far, however, the displacement of religion by science has yet to transpire. Of course, challenges to the theory of religion's demise have been equally persistent, one of the best known being an essay by Evans-Pritchard (1937) titled "The Notion of Witchcraft Explains Unfortunate Events." Its argument is that while science can address the question of *how* things happen—misfortunes, for example—it cannot offer satisfactory explanations for *why* they involve certain people or occur at particular moments. Religious belief, in Evans-Pritchard's case witchcraft, supplies the missing information. However, it is not just negative events that religion helps to situate within broader fields of meaning, as several of the contributions in this volume attest (see, for example, Norget, Hallum, and Daneel, chapters 5, 7, and 10, respectively). At the very least, religion offers some emotional support under trying circumstances or a moral compass for negotiating difficult situations. Thus, religion will likely persist even as science and technology proceed.

Here again, Japan, the locus of my own research, offers an instructive example. Japan is widely considered one of the world's most technologically advanced and well-educated postindustrial societies. And generally speaking, the Japanese people, too, are skeptical of dogmatic religion, having witnessed firsthand how easily it can be manipulated in support of militaristic tendencies. Yet this does not stop them from flocking to Shinto

shrines and Buddhist temples on certain occasions (such as the New Year holiday), nor from praying for success in their endeavors, buying protective amulets, and commemorating the souls of their ancestors.

Reader and Tanabe (1998) explain this seeming discrepancy by distinguishing *cognitive* belief (or what I would call *literal* belief)—that which appeals to the intellect—from *affective* belief, that which appeals to feelings or emotions. Affective belief is a reflection not of what one knows to be factually accurate, but of the way one thinks and feels about things. Thus, a person can literally be a rocket scientist yet find no incongruity in visiting a shrine to offer prayers for the success of a mission and the safety of the crew. The ritual is a way of physically enacting one's sincerity and commitment, directed inward toward the self as much as outward toward some supernatural authority.

In expanding on this notion of affective belief, I would like to reverse the order of another well-known adage by suggesting that *believing is seeing*; in other words, what we refer to as "religious belief" is not so much an assertion of factuality as a favored way of envisioning or perceiving the world. As Guthrie (1993:42), citing Wittgenstein, reminds us, "we never merely see, but always 'see as.'" *Perception*, then, is simultaneously an act of *interpretation* based on our own preconceived notions—our "beliefs." I use "seeing," therefore, not in referring simply to visual perception, but to opinions and perspectives—the way one "sees" an issue—which can change over time, given the right opportunity or inspiration.

I do not mean to reduce religion to a mere psychological process, because the difference between perception and revelation will always be moot. To extend Evans-Pritchard's (1937) assertion, science can explain the mechanisms by which a vision is received but cannot predict the meaning or significance it will assume in the heart and mind of the recipient; *that* is where the religious dimension comes into play.

I illustrate these ideas by presenting two competing conceptual approaches to mountaineering in the Japanese Alps. One involves climbing as a recreational activity; the objective is simply to reach the top and return safely, enjoying the challenge, the sense of accomplishment, and the view along the way. This is often accompanied by assertions of mastery over nature such as "conquering" a mountain or staging a "final assault" upon the summit. The alternative, however, sees climbing as an act of devotion—an expression of humility, respect, and gratitude to the mountains as the source of one's sustenance, with the emphasis not on asserting mastery over—but rather reestablishing a sense of unity with—nature.

"OPENING" THE MOUNTAINS

In conducting ethnographic fieldwork, anthropologists are often drawn toward what they inwardly admire and perhaps find missing in their own experience. For me, that coveted missing aspect was the opportunity to engage in a kind of animistic veneration of the natural landscape. As a youth, I often wondered why people worshipped within the human-made confines of a church or temple building when they could immerse themselves instead in nature's grandeur and thereby recapture the sense of awe and mystery that must surely lie at the heart of religious experience (see Norget's discussion of "the numinous," chapter 5, this volume).

The Japanese seem to have recognized this, at least within their philosophical and literary traditions. That recognition is what drew me to Japan as my focus of ethnographic inquiry and to the rugged mountains that compose its interior. Mountains are by their very nature ethereal and mystifying. They reach into the clouds, blurring the distinction between earth and sky. It is little wonder that the Japanese, like people all over the world and throughout history, looked to the high mountains in seeking to transcend the realm of ordinary experience and routine.

But again, contemporary Japan is a highly urbanized, postindustrial society, having achieved economic and technological parity with the most prosperous nations of the West and in some respects surpassing them. Too often this has meant abandoning its own traditions in deference to the standards of Europe and North America, which in terms of modern economic and cultural development have long dominated the global arena.

Thus, despite Japan's long historical tradition of venerating the mountains, the most celebrated figure in the history of Japanese mountaineering, ironically, is an Englishman named Walter Weston (see Ion 1999). While serving as an Anglican missionary based in Kobe during the 1890s, Weston succeeded in summiting the highest peaks in a range of lofty mountains now popularly known as the Japanese Alps, or Northern Alps (figure 8.1). For this he is attributed with having "opened" the area to recreational climbing and is widely described as the "father of modern mountaineering" in Japan. Every year on the first Sunday in June, a festival is held to honor his memory at Kamikōchi in Nagano prefecture, the most popular point of access to the rugged Northern Alps.

Weston's heroic stature has been fostered in part by his own prolific memoirs, wherein he consistently portrays himself as an explorer of regions yet unknown—from a European perspective, that is. A case in point is his account of ascending a high and majestic-looking mountain called Kasagatake (Mount Kasa), which now lies within the boundaries of

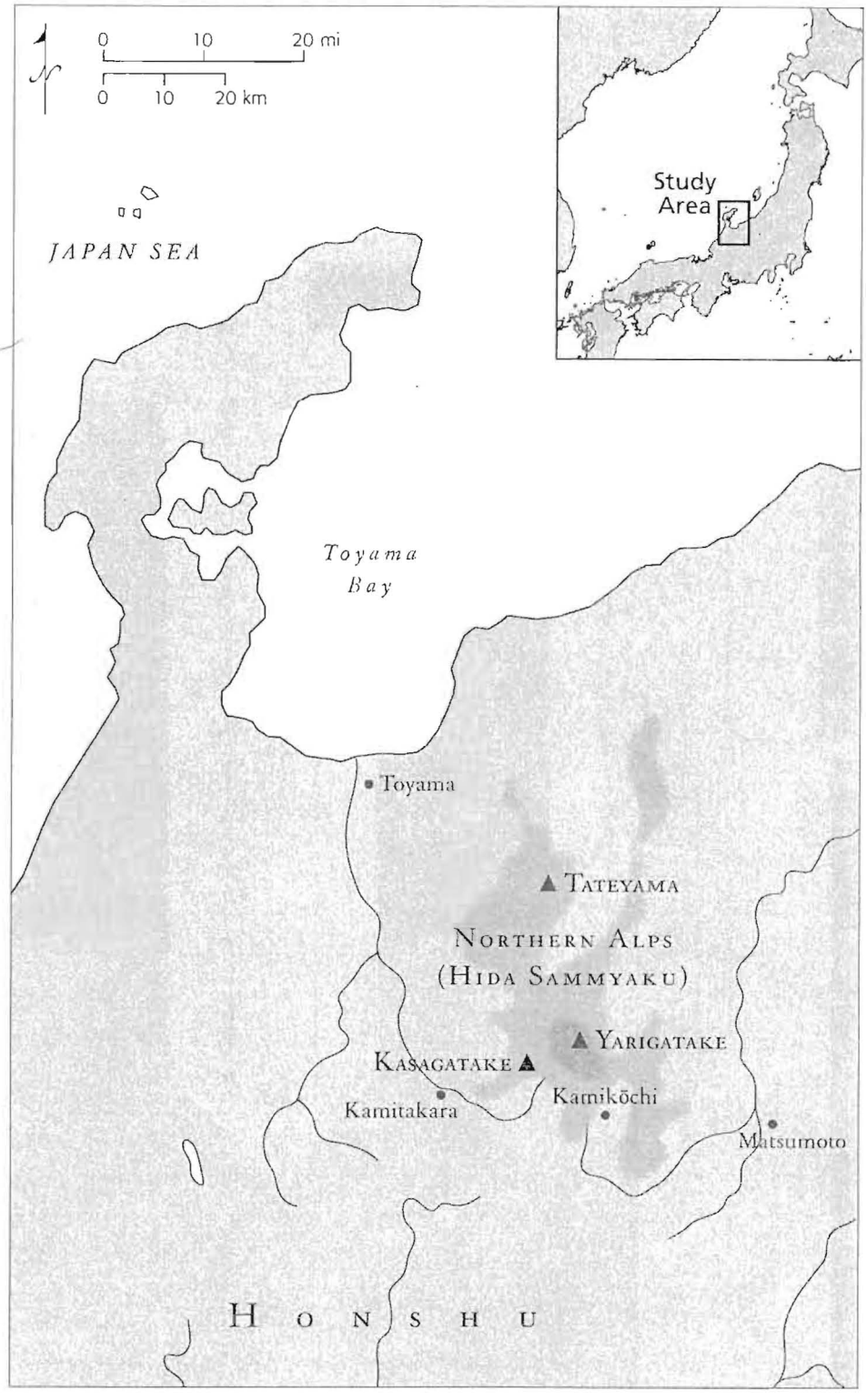

FIGURE 8.1

Map of central Japan showing locations mentioned in this chapter.

Kamitakara township in Takayama, northern Gifu prefecture (Schnell 2007). After overcoming a series of challenges posed by thick vegetation, slippery rocks, and generally rugged terrain, Weston and two companions finally arrive at the summit, guided by a pair of local hunters. He writes, "We found a tiny cairn, erected by the hunters on some former visit." To this he adds, "Excepting themselves—or some of their comrades—they told us we were the first climbers, European or Japanese, to set foot on the top" (Weston 1896b:249).

As is true for any of us, Weston was largely a product of his era. Here we can perceive the typical attitude of a Western colonialist adventurer in a foreign land—the desire to explore uncharted territories and describe them for an inquisitive and admiring public back at home. Thus, despite his status as a member of the clergy, Weston's desire to ascend the lofty peaks seems to have been driven more by personal ambition than religious motives. This is demonstrated by his proclamation "Yarigatake is ours!" in achieving the summit of another famous mountain (Weston 1896b:93). It was important for him to have been *first* to climb a mountain, to *conquer* or *claim* it in the language of European mountaineering at the time.

As to the singularity of his accomplishment, however, Weston was misinformed. Perhaps he had failed to understand what his hunter-guides were saying, due to his lack of proficiency in Japanese; perhaps they had simply told him what they thought he wanted to hear. Whatever the case, as local residents, they undoubtedly knew that a charismatic Buddhist priest named Banryū (1786–1840), fully seventy years earlier, had succeeded not only in reaching Kasagatake's summit but also in blazing a trail for others to follow, complete with Buddhist statuary, called *ichirizuka*, located at distanced intervals along the way to help them mark their progress. Indeed, if Weston had bothered to look inside the "tiny cairn," he would have discovered a bronze statue of Amida (Buddha of Infinite Light and Life) that Banryū had placed there during one of his several visits (Hokari and Hokari 1997:57).

Banryū's efforts constitute the opening of a mountain in a different sense, referred to as *kaizan* in Japanese Buddhist parlance. This activity entailed not simply reaching the summit but rather placing a Buddhist statue there as an act of devotion. The entire mountain thus becomes a kind of pedestal for the Buddha, and climbing it a quest for enlightenment and reunion.

Nor was Banryū the first to consecrate this particular mountain in such a manner. Evidence shows that a priest named Dōsen had climbed Kasagatake as early as the 1260s or 1270s, and the itinerant priest Enkū left

one of his now famous wood carvings at the summit sometime during the late 1600s (Hokari and Hokari 1997:28–29, 35–36, 51–56). In any case, Banryū never claimed priority in attaining the summit. His own memoir, preserved to this day in a local Buddhist temple, is titled *Katagatake saikōki,*[1] or "Account of the *Re*-Opening of Mount Kasa" (emphasis added), thus readily acknowledging that he was not the first.

Moreover, it is likely that these Buddhist ascetics relied heavily, as the Weston party had, on the guidance of hunters and timber cutters, the only people with extensive knowledge of the high mountain terrain. According to local belief, the upper reaches were occupied by the *yama no kami,* a spirit or deity of the mountains who seems to have been conceptualized as either male or female depending on a person's occupation. Hunters, for example, identified the yama no kami as female and venerated her as both their guardian and benefactor. It was customary among them to seek her permission before entering into her realm, to humbly thank her for the gifts she bestowed upon them in the form of edible vegetation and game animals, and to avoid incurring her displeasure by abusing the privilege. Confident in their favored relationship with the yama no kami, they alone could enter into the upper regions with equanimity. In fact, the hunters appear to have functioned as intermediaries between mountain (personified by the yama no kami) and village, or "wild" and domesticated space, and were regularly enlisted to ascend the highest peaks and offer prayers for rain in behalf of the farmers below (Weston 1896b:160–162, 1918: 141–142).

Banryū had been raised in a tiny village lying just to the west of Tateyama, one of the most venerated mountains in all of Japan and long a center for mountain ascetics. As the second son in a household subject to the rules of primogeniture, the young Banryū was eventually obliged to leave home and make a living on his own; he thus became a Buddhist monk (Kurono 1997:2). There is little doubt that throughout his early life he came in daily contact with the hunters and timber cutters who made their living in the surrounding forests, and his later acquisition of Buddhist concepts was likely seasoned by their beliefs (Kurono Kōki, personal communication, November 16, 2006).

Although he went on to be ordained as a priest and eventually founded a number of Buddhist temples, Banryū himself eschewed the confines of temple worship, preferring instead to engage nature directly on its own terms as the ultimate expression of the Buddha's wisdom. His was a solitary practice, but one that he encouraged others to adopt. The *yamabushi* of the Shingon and Tendai traditions were rather secretive and exclusive, but

Banryū was a proponent of Jōdo-shū, or Pure Land Buddhism, which enjoyed widespread appeal among the common peasantry. Thus, his primary concern lay with ordinary people who had neither the means nor the opportunity to devote themselves to esoteric study.

Banryū described himself as a *nembutsu gyōja*—a practitioner of a form of asceticism that drew on Jōdo-shū conventions. As far as I can determine, his ascetic practice in the mountains consisted of (1) chanting the nembutsu, an expression of faith in and gratitude to Amida Buddha; (2) otherwise remaining silent (*mugon*); (3) subsisting on a "tree diet" (*mokujiki*—the consumption of nuts, fruit, and other edible products of raw nature, as well as buckwheat flour mixed with water, but no cultivated or processed foods such as rice or miso); and (4) simply "merging with nature" (*shizen to ittai-ka suru*). The latter compelled him to seek ever more remote and challenging terrain, eventually leading to the summit of Kasagatake and other high-altitude destinations. The goal in this practice, it seems to me, was to shed all vestiges of society and culture that insulate humans from their natural surroundings and thereby to reestablish an intimate association with the essence of life as reflected in the image of Amida Buddha. That he succeeded in this effort is attested by his own written account, the *Katagatake saikōki.*

MIST AND MYSTICISM

The *saikōki* is an obscure but important document—perhaps the only existing firsthand account of opening a mountain in the Buddhist sense. Banryū, as its author, first explains his interest in Kasagatake and gives a brief accounting of others who had climbed it. He then describes his own initial ascent, crossing ridges and streams, then higher up "over crags and pinnacles so precipitous that words could not describe them." Upon reaching the summit, his immediate act is to chant the nembutsu. He notes also that he looked for signs of anger from the mountain spirits but that none was forthcoming. There follows a testament to the remarkable view: "To the south I could see the provinces of Mino and Ise, to the north Etchū and Kaga, to the east I prayed to Mount Fuji, as well as to Tateyama, and Hakusan. To the west I worshiped the sun setting over the Inland Sea" (handwritten manuscript, temple archives at Honkaku-ji, Kamitakara).

Upon returning to the realm of human settlement, Banryū determines to open a route to the summit for ordinary villagers to follow. After obtaining the blessing of local leaders, he organizes a party of sixteen villagers from Sasajima, located at the base of the slopes leading up toward the mountain, to help him mark the trail. After three days, they successfully

FIGURE 8.2

Painting by Banryū of his visionary experience in the mountains.

arrive at the summit. It is there that the most remarkable part of the narrative unfolds, namely, that while Banryū and some of the villagers are chanting the nembutsu, Amida Buddha suddenly appears to them "from the midst of the clouds" (figures 8.2 and 8.3). Banryū describes the image of Amida in some detail, its head and shoulders encompassed by a multicolored halo.

This visionary experience almost certainly derives from a natural phenomenon that sometimes occurs along the ridges and at the summits of the high mountains when the mist rises up from the valley below, but only in the early morning or late afternoon, when the sun is low in the sky. Standing with the sun at one's back, it is possible to see one's own shadow projected onto the mist as a kind of ghostly apparition, the head and upper body encircled by concentric, multicolored rings. In Europe this phenomenon is known as the "Brocken spectre," named after Mt. Brocken in the Harz Mountains of central Germany, where it is regularly sighted. But in Japanese Buddhist idiom, it is referred to as *goraigō*—an appearance or a manifestation of the Buddha. Banryū thus understood the encounter as Amida appearing before him—an expression of

FIGURE 8.3

The Brocken spectre, as seen in the vicinity of Roque de los Muchachos Observatory in the Canary Islands. Photo courtesy Dr. Stefan Binnewies and Josef Pöpsel of the Capella Observatory, http://www.capella-observatory.com.

approval for having reopened the mountain and thereby affording the same mystical or numinous experience to others as well.

It is significant here to note that, since an individual must be positioned directly between the sun and the backscattering mist in order to observe the phenomenon, several people may be standing abreast but each will see only a single image—namely, a projection of his or her own body. Of course, one can wave one's arms about and immediately recognize that the image does the same, but if Pure Land Buddhism encourages us to discover Amida in ourselves, this would not necessarily negate a religious interpretation. In any case, the immediate reaction of Banryū and his followers would undoubtedly have been to clasp their hands and bow, meaning that the image would simply have reciprocated in an expression of mutual respect.

It is noteworthy also that Banryū does not deny the validity of local beliefs but rather draws them into a comprehensive Buddhist framework.

Indeed, the image of Amida that Banryū encountered is reminiscent of the yama no kami concept, as both may be considered personifications of *daishizen*, or "all-encompassing, all-pervasive nature" (Buddhist priest, personal communication, Toyoshina, Japan, June 8, 2004). As Pals (2006:200) explains in his chapter on Eliade, "however the sacred is conceived, the role of religion is to promote encounters with it, to bring a person 'out of his worldly Universe or historical situation, and project him into a Universe different in quality, an entirely different world, transcendent and holy' [quoting Eliade]."

Despite his revelatory experience on Kasagatake, Banryū's most celebrated accomplishment came a few years later in relation to a different mountain—none other than Yarigatake, which, with its distinctive spear-shaped peak and an elevation of 3,180 meters, is easily the most recognizable symbol of the Northern Alps and therefore of Japanese mountaineering in general. Banryū spent years establishing a route to its summit from the vicinity of Matsumoto. Although suffering frostbite and nearly perishing in the effort, he eventually succeeded in placing a Buddhist icon at the top of Yarigatake, even attaching an iron chain along the precipitous final ascent to ensure that others could reach the top in safety. Such efforts have earned him the title of *shonin*, which in Pure Land Buddhist tradition is reserved for a great teacher or exemplar. It is here that my research enters into contemporary times, looking at how the image of Banryū has recently been resurrected and redeployed in support of a mountain-oriented aesthetic of humility and respect.

REDISCOVERING BANRYŪ

Throughout the twentieth century and largely owing to Weston's impetus, hiking and climbing in the Japanese Alps became hugely popular pastimes. They now attract thousands of visitors every year and, along with skiing and hot spring resorts, are mainstays for economic development in the area. The highest peaks reach to around 3,000 meters in elevation, which does not seem impressive by European standards, but considering that the climber starts out at an elevation of perhaps 600–700 meters, the trek to their summits is demanding. The summits are linked by a well-marked trail network, and while the steep slopes can be treacherous during the winter months, technical climbing is not required for most major routes during the peak climbing season of July and August. For an average visitor, in other words, the climb is something on the order of a very steep hike. The trail network is dotted by a number of well-maintained lodges that provide overnight accommodation and hot meals, greatly reducing

the amount of weight a climber has to carry. Consequently, the summits are accessible to young and old alike, and varying levels of physical ability are well accommodated.

Yarigatake, often described in tourist brochures as "the Japanese Matterhorn," occupies a strategic location at the intersection of several popular trails. For three generations, the Hokari family has owned and operated the mountain lodge located just below the summit, which is host to thousands of mountaineering enthusiasts every year. It thus serves as a kind of clearinghouse for information about the mountains. In the common dining area on the lower level of this lodge, there is an altar rather conspicuously devoted to Banryū Shonin, complete with a bronze statue. Furthermore, the Hokaris are the authors of the only significant scholarly work on the life of Banryū Shonin (Hokari and Hokari 1997), an ongoing project that has been decades in the making. It is largely through their efforts that Banryū has come to the attention of a wider public outside the local towns and villages he once inhabited.

Indeed, Banryū's memory might well have been lost if not for the efforts of several dedicated groups of followers scattered throughout Gifu, Nagano, and Toyama prefectures. These include the priests at various temples with which Banryū was affiliated, the members of several *ko* (lay) Buddhist associations, inspired by Banryū's teachings, and residents of Kamitakara township in northern Gifu prefecture, where Banryū practiced his austerities and first began his forays into the high mountains. Most influential of all, perhaps, is an artist, historian, and inveterate Banryū promoter named Kurono Kōki, who drew them all together into an advocacy network—Network Banryū.

To many mountaineers, evidence that Banryū had preceded Weston in ascending the lofty summits has been welcome news indeed, and he is now on the verge of becoming a kind of patron saint for the Japanese climbing community. In 1986, a statue commemorating Banryū and his achievements was erected in the plaza outside the main railway station in Matsumoto, one of the major gateways for visitors to the Japanese Alps. Every year in early September, the head priests of two key temples in the Matsumoto area lead a pilgrimage to the summit of Yarigatake to commemorate Banryū's efforts and raise awareness of his nature-oriented spiritualism. Having joined in this event myself on two occasions, I can assure the aspiring participant that it does not require the kind of austerities to which Banryū subjected himself. It does, however, involve chanting the nembutsu at regular intervals. As I have come to understand it, the chant is meant to remind oneself of one's own association with Amida—that is,

with a personification of all-encompassing, all-pervasive nature—to remove or break through the artificial/cultural barriers we have created between ourselves and the sources that sustain us, and to rediscover our connection to or place within the natural world.

Meanwhile, over in Gifu prefecture on the range's western slope, the township of Kamitakara began conducting an annual Banryū celebration of its own to mark the opening of the climbing season in mid-May. This creates an interesting counterpoint to the Weston festival held in Kamikōchi (on the eastern side), mentioned earlier. The principal of a local elementary school insisted to me (correctly) that the official name for the Northern Alps is Hida *sammyaku* (Hida mountain range) and that this was the term that should be used. "Japanese Alps," in his opinion, was derivative of European colonialism.

An inspired group of Kamitakara residents is now hard at work trying to reconstruct Banryū's devotional climbing route to the summit of Kasagatake, where he had his first visionary encounter with Amida. One of the members of this group is a venerable old bear hunter and former chief of the local mountain rescue squad. As both a hunter and mountaineer, his insight into identifying the most probable route over the rugged terrain to the summit is particularly valuable. So far the group has discovered five of the eight original ichirizuka that once marked the way, and the lower section of the route at least is now well understood.

Banryū's reopening of Kasagatake is especially meaningful to the people of Kamitakara for several reasons. First, Banryū had based himself there during his initial preparations, living in a cave located at some distance into the foothills. Second, the route he created lies entirely within the township, including its starting point at the village of Sasajima. Third, the mountain itself sits majestically at the head of the drainage system and dominates the entire landscape. Late in spring, a patch of snow melting on its western slope temporarily forms the image of a huge white horse; farmers in the region traditionally relied on the appearance of this image as a signal to tell them when temperature conditions and water availability were conducive to spring planting. Finally, unlike most of the other major peaks that lie along the border between Gifu and Toyama prefectures on the west side and Nagano prefecture on the east side, Kasagatake is located entirely within the boundaries of Kamitakara and in this sense is distinctively their own.

I recall vividly a comment made by a senior woman of Kamitakara following a local presentation on Banryū's legacy. She happened to be the mother of the resident priest at the nearby Buddhist temple that houses the *Katagatake saikōki*. She relayed to the audience how every evening she

climbs up the temple's bell tower to ring the bell eight times at sunset and as soon as she reaches the top, she faces the summit of Kasagatake, which is visible in the distance, then puts her hands together and offers thanks to the mountain for bringing her safely through another day. This illustrates again the significance of ritual, not necessarily in effecting an outcome in the outer world, but in conditioning one's own thinking toward greater respect and appreciation. The woman concluded by underscoring an important point—that Kasagatake was not just any mountain. She found phrases like "conquering" a mountain (*seiha suru*) or "setting foot upon" the summit (*fumitsukeru*) to be offensive—not to her personally so much as to the mountain itself. She urged the audience to follow Banryū's example by treating the mountains with respect and veneration. Indeed, although she did not mention it at the time, Banryū never referred to his own ascents as climbing; rather, he preferred to use the term *sankei*, which is usually reserved for visiting a shrine or temple.

Weston and Banryū can perhaps be seen as opposite ends of a continuum. In Japanese parlance, Weston represents *supōtsu tozan*, or sport mountaineering, the recreational form with which most of us are familiar. Banryū's approach, on the other hand, is best described as *shinkō tozan* (devotional mountaineering) or *tohai* (climbing as a form of veneration). Most people would fall somewhere between these two poles—closer to one way of thinking, perhaps, but not entirely devoid of the other. Indeed, the same could probably be said of the two "polar opposites" (Weston and Banryū) themselves.[2]

Part of Banryū's renewed appeal undoubtedly derives from the fact that he was Japanese, not a foreigner like Weston. We should be wary, however, of the tendency for nationalistic pride to inspire false dichotomies. Take, for example, the following item, which appeared in the newspaper *Yomiuri Shimbun* (2004) as part of a special feature on Kasagatake. It begins with a quote from the *saikōki*:

> "Amida Buddha appeared from the midst of the clouds...." Banryū is said to have encountered Amida Nyorai [Amida Buddha] several times on Yarigatake and Kasagatake. It is thought that he was seeing a phenomenon that occurs at sunrise or sunset, when, standing with the sun at your back, you can see your own shadow with a rainbow-like halo projected onto the mist. In Japan this is revered as goraigō, but in the West it is given unfortunate names like Brocken spectre (Brocken phenomenon), taken from the name of the German mountain where it is

> often seen. This seems to be a cultural difference compared with Japan, where from long ago mountains have been treated as objects of devotion.

I would argue that the two contrasting attitudes—which I have rather simplistically represented in the persons of Walter Weston and Banryū Shonin—cannot be attributed so easily to some gross distinction in national character between Japan and the West. In fact, the vast majority of Japanese climbers employ the term *burokken genshō* (the Brocken phenomenon) rather than goraigō; many do not even recognize the latter term. And the final ascent of Yarigatake—its precipitous spear-shaped peak—is often described as an attack (*atakku,* employing the English loanword). The "Westonization" of Japanese mountaineering, as Ireland (1993) described it, could not have occurred without a willing and receptive public (Wigen 2005).

Rather, preference for one or the other approach has more to say about the individual climber. The image of Weston appeals to the sport mountaineers—people who look to the mountains as a place to foster an indomitable spirit through physical challenges and exertion, where landscapes serve as settings for their own adventures. Banryū's example appeals to people who see the mountains as sacred—a revelation of the mysterious and divine, from which their very sustenance derives. Both types can be found within or outside Japan, regardless of nationality. Banryū's perspective, *or something like it,* may find increasing appeal around the world as we struggle with the consequences of industrial excess.

And that is one of the most lasting impressions I took away from my participation in the SAR seminar from which this volume derives. At first I felt a bit out of place as the only participant dealing with a religious tradition outside the realm of Christianity. Through my interactions with the other members, however, I began to recognize how closely some of their field examples paralleled my own. The general pattern involved a world religion (in this case, either Christianity or Buddhism) being adapted at the local level through the incorporation of indigenous or home-grown perspectives, producing a synthesis that was more finely tuned to a particular environment or more compatible with existing needs and preferences. I came to realize that, as a framework for environmental ethics, the problem with a world religion is precisely its global expansion and appeal; the wider it spreads beyond its place of origin, the less meaningfully it speaks to a particular landscape—*our* mountains, *our* rivers and forests, right here in *this place.* Localized popular belief—the ancestral guardians of the land in Zimbabwe (Daneel, chapter 10), the Mayan *Popol Vuh* (Hallum, chapter 7), the moral ecology of the Chinantec in Oaxaca (Norget, chapter 5),

even the strategic assertion of desiccation theory by indigenous Mexican forest communities (Mathews, chapter 4)—reinstills the missing relevance.

The Urapmin of Papua New Guinea (Robbins, chapter 3) are the exception that proves the rule; their efforts to disenchant nature coincide with their embrace of industrial development, as happened in the West during an earlier era (Merchant 1989). If expelling spirit from the land is a correlate of our own isolation from nature, perhaps reintroducing spirit to the land is a necessary step in uniting us again. The contributions to this volume give us some idea of how that might be achieved.

RECREATION OR REVERENCE?

In conclusion, I am by no means suggesting that Weston is unworthy of the special esteem he has been given. Rather, I maintain that Banryū offers a more useful and instructive example for a public increasingly concerned about the impact of human activity on the natural environment and increasingly aware of the ecosystemic relationships that integrate and sustain us. As objects of reverence, personifications of nature such as the mountain god—or, in this case, Amida Buddha as a manifestation of dai-shizen—offer potentially useful images to a world sorely in need of restraints on environmental abuses. In the words of theologian and philosopher Leonardo Boff (1997:118), "only a personal relationship with Earth makes us love it." Ritual is a way of enacting such a relationship, and personification through ritual makes it easier to imagine and articulate, easier to *conceive.*

Mr. Kurono, the founder of Network Banryū, once told me that when Westerners see the Japanese offering prayers in the direction of a Buddhist image and interpret this as worshiping idols, they are making a mistake. The image is merely a focal point, a device that renders a complex web of interactions into a more readily comprehensible form. He also noted that the image of Amida represents different things to different people, so the equation with dai-shizen is a reasonable one to make (personal communication, Irigawa, Japan, September 20, 2006). As with ritual, the form may be prescribed, but its meaning is negotiable. The same may be said of chanting the nembutsu.

Of course, it is open to conjecture whether conceptualizations like these will encourage more sustainable interactions with the environment. But it is clear from the conservationist ethos of traditional hunters all over Japan (as expressed through their veneration of the yama no kami) that such was the case at one time, so at least the potential is there. As Rappaport

(1979:100) suggested, "to drape nature in supernatural veils may be to provide her with some protection against human folly and extravagance." From this perspective, animism—that is, ascribing awareness and sensitivity to the environment (R. Nelson 1983:31)—emerges not as superstitious and backward but as a truly enlightened point of view.

In the artificial worlds we have created, so cut off from our natural surroundings, Banryū's example of merging with nature is well worth emulating. After all, direct personal interactions with the landscape can be highly moving and memorable experiences. This was impressed upon me during my own ascent of Kasagatake in October 2006, when the goraigō/Brocken spectre suddenly appeared before me "from the midst of the clouds." I found that my prior understanding of the physics behind the phenomenon did little to dilute its mysterious effect. Like Banryū, I see it as an expression of encouragement and favor—from nature personified in my own projected image.

Notes

1. This is an alternative rendering of the mountain's name, Katagatake rather than Kasagatake, as it is more commonly known in the present day.

2. Weston, of course, was not entirely devoid of religious inspiration from the mountains (Weston 1896b:88), nor was he oblivious to the threat of recreational mountaineering (Weston 1896a:146). And in some of his later writings, he seems to espouse a more sympathetic attitude toward the spiritual power of the mountains (Weston 1918:157).