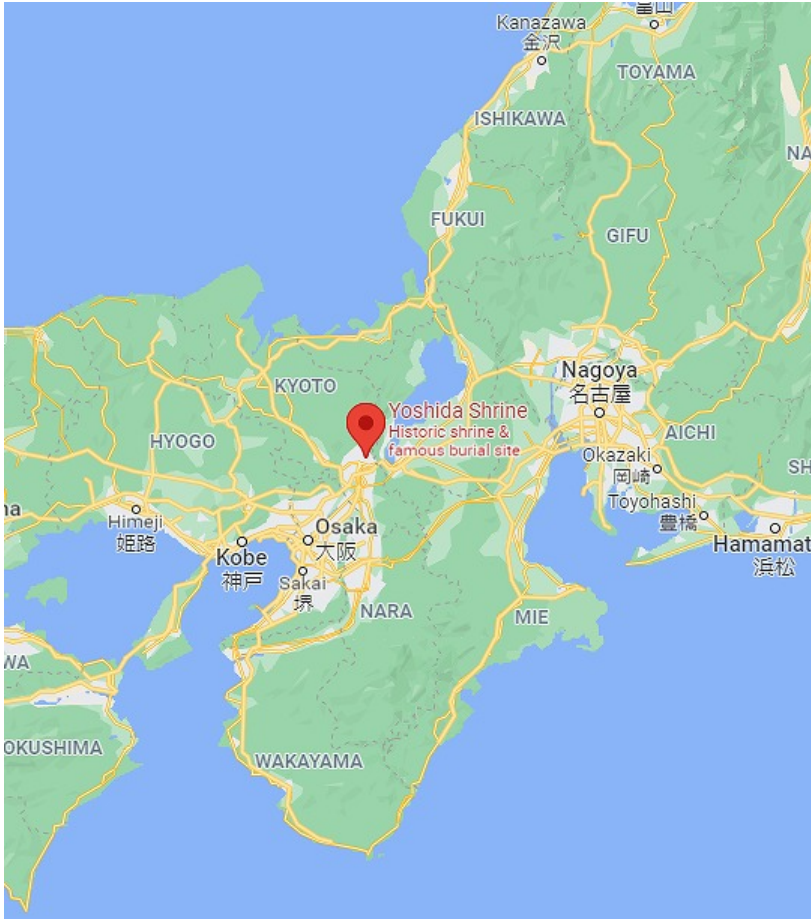
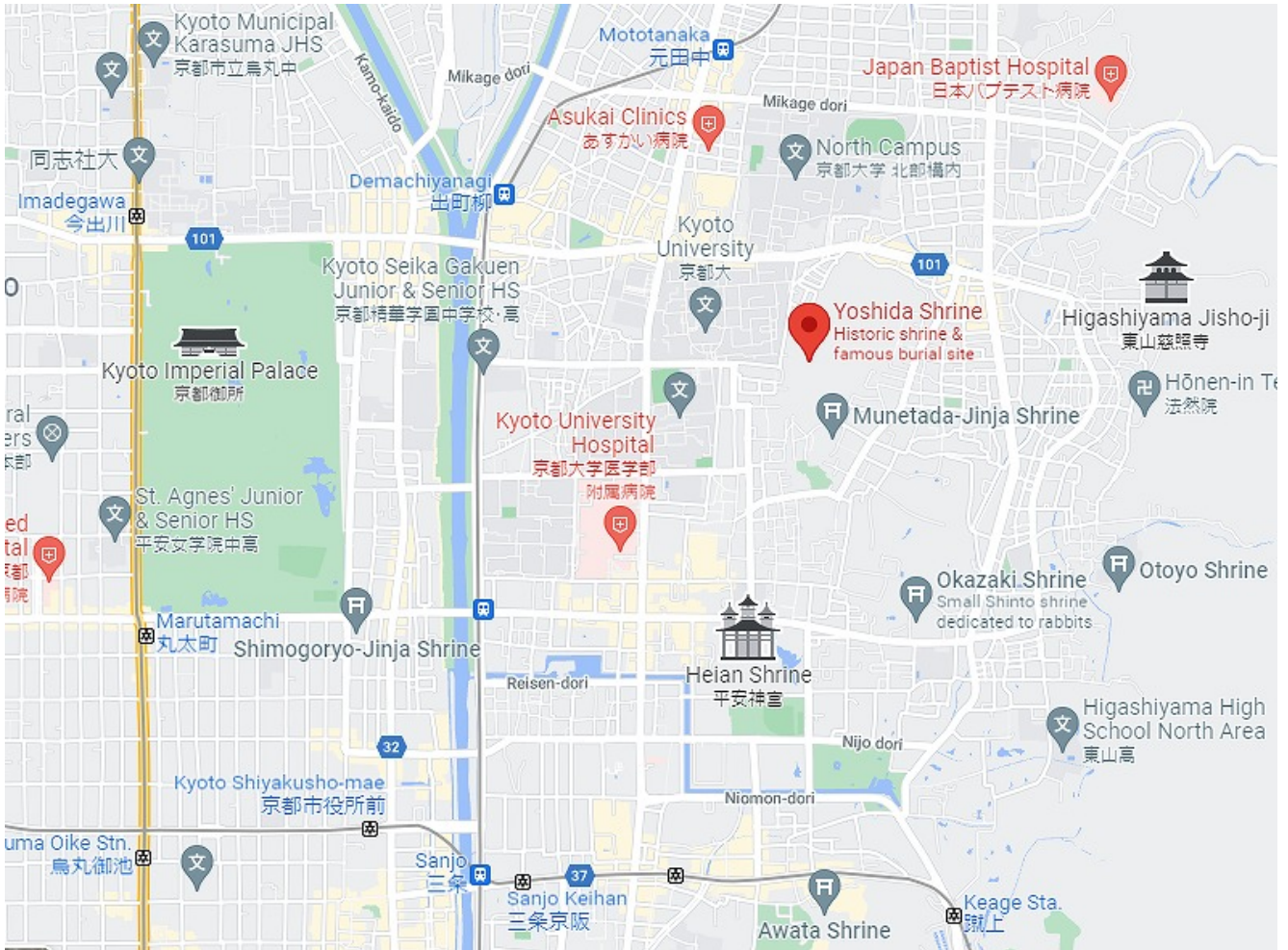


# Ogres vs four-eyed superman~ Setsubun at Yoshida shrine





**Date:** February 2nd of every year

**Location:** 30 Kaguragaoka-cho, Yoshida, Sakyo-ku, Kyoto-shi, Kyoto

**Access:** A 20-minute walk from Demachiyanagi 〇〇〇 Station on the Keihan 〇〇 Railway. Or take the 206 bus from Kyoto Station, get off at "Kyodai Seimon -mae 〇〇〇〇〇 (the main gate of Kyoto University), and walk 5 minutes.



Setsubun rituals\*<sup>1</sup> are one of the most popular winter

traditions held across the country. Although it is becoming less common, people still perform it at home, at shrines and temples, and at schools. Basically, it is held on February 3rd, but in Hyogo and other prefectures, people often hold it in January, and in Hiei-zan\*<sup>2</sup>, they do it on New Year's Eve. Here at Yoshida Shrine, although the day is orthodoxly set for the 3rd, a performance takes place on the night of the 2nd. This performance is not particularly unusual, as they do it everywhere. It is just that the number of visitors here is tremendous. The approach in front of the shrine has about 800 street vendors. The next day, the shrine held a lottery where the first prize was a car. This website has yet to find out why Yoshida Shrine was the only shrine to hold such a large Setsubun event. However, considering that this kind of event would not have been possible outside of Kyoto, it makes me realize the power of Kyoto as a city.

\*1: Setsubun 節分 A concept introduced from China, the word means to divide the seasons. It also refers to the events that take place at that time. Nowadays, however, Setsubun is used only for the border between winter and spring, and people are not aware of it in other seasons.

\*2: Hiei-zan 比叡山 A holy place of Buddhism opened by Saicho 善導 after he finished his studies in China in the 780s. It is located on the border between Kyoto and Shiga prefectures. This place is the center of Buddhism in Japan, along with Koya-san 高野山, which Kukai 空海 founded at the same time. In both cases, temples line the entire mountain (about 100 in the case of Hieizan).

## Origin of the Ceremony

Kyoto became the center of Japan in both name and reality around the 780s. The Setsubun Festival at Yoshida Shrine is also famous for its ability to pass on to the present a large number of events from that time. This is supported by the existence of "Hosou-shi 盆首". This is a ritual that has been

passed down from China, where it is believed that a kind of demon called “Hōsōu-shi” is able to exterminate evil spirits. The Chinese thought that in order to contain the demons, they needed a kind of psychic who also had the power of demons. That’s when they came up with the idea of “Hosou-shi”. The Japanese people imported it directly from China to Japan. Hence, the “Hosou-Shi” has four eyes. And he appears in a red costume, accompanied by a child. The color red has the meaning of protection against evil.



Hosou-shi 四目



**On the day**



On the day of the event, the ceremony began at 6:00 p.m. First

of all, three demons appear and rampage in front of the audience who stand inside the ropes in order to keep them from going out near the demons. However, they only waved their golden sticks around and shouted “Oh, wow! Then came the “Hōsōu-shi” with their children in tow. The demons resist. However, they are not the enemy of the overwhelmingly powerful “Hōsōu-shi”, and they repeatedly take a stance and get hit. In this way, they go around the building called Maidono 三門 three times. When the demon has left, the “hoosou-shi” strikes the shield he is holding and declares that he has driven away the evil spirit. Finally, the men in charge draw the bowstring. They believed that this sound would complete the protection against evil spirits.



<https://www.sankei.com/photo/story/news/190202/sty1902020016-n1.html>





<https://www.nippon.com/ja/guide-to-japan/gu900080/>

**Actual situation**



<https://www.sankei.com/photo/story/news/190202/sty1902020016-n1.html>



<https://www.nippon.com/ja/guide-to-japan/gu900080/>

In fact, around 5:00 p.m. (when it is already dark) the area around the shrine is filled with people on their way to the shrine. The approach to the shrine looked as if it might be the site of a big concert. Steps are slow and unsteady. When you enter the shrine, the first thing you see is a place where you wash your hands and purify your mouth with water to cleanse yourself. There was already a long queue here. Naturally, the area in front of the dance hall is roped off, and it becomes so packed with people that there is no room to move. Reluctantly, people go to the slope of the mountain at the back. Like an outdoor concert, the slope got filled with people. From the top of the mountain, you cannot see the important part of the ceremony. The path leading to the maidono is also crowded with people, so even the people here cannot see the ceremony. The people who have secured the front row have already been there since around three in the

afternoon. And the actual performance lasted less than an hour. If you want to know how scary Kyoto can be, you should definitely try it out. But only if you have plenty of time to spare.



[https://ja.kyoto.travel/event/single.php?event\\_id=3939](https://ja.kyoto.travel/event/single.php?event_id=3939)



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