

# **Jôdo (The Pure Land)**

## **Dramatis Personae**

A Spirit	solo percussionist
The Great Priest of Shiga Temple	solo percussionist
The Great Imperial Concubine	high soprano

## **Part 1 - A Spirit (bells) - electronics**

A description of The Pure Land, with its fifty thousand million halls and towers wrought of gold, silver, lapis lazuli, crystal, coral, agate and pearls, and its multitude of angels for ever playing sacred music and singing paeans of praise to the Tathagata Buddha.

Both day and night the air is filled with the songs of cranes, geese, mandarin ducks, peacocks, parrots, and sweet-voiced Kalavinkas. (However sweet their voices may sound, so immense a collection of birds must be extremely noisy.)

The air is full of jewelled cords, and from these cords hang the myriad treasure bells which for ever ring out the supreme law of Buddha; and strange musical instruments, which play themselves without ever being touched, also stretch far into the pellucid sky.

The giant lotus flower, which by means of microscopic observation and astronomical projection can become the foundation for an entire theory of the universe and an agent whereby we may perceive the Truth. At first we must know that each of its eighty-four thousand petals has eighty-four thousand veins, and each vein gives off eighty-four thousand lights.

To concentrate on such images is known as 'thinking of the Lotus Seat on which Lord Buddha sits'; and the conceptual world that hovers in the background of our story is a world imagined on such a scale.

## **Part 2 - The Priest (percussion), the Concubine (soprano) - electronics**

The Great Priest of Shiga Temple was a man of the most eminent virtue.

In his dreams he lived nightly in the Pure Land, and when he awoke he knew that to subsist in the present world was to be tied to a sad and evanescent dream.

One spring evening he left his cell, leaning on his stick, and walked down to the lake. It was the hour when dusky shadows slowly begin to thrust their way into the bright light of the afternoon. There was not the slightest ripple to disturb the surface of the water. The priest stood by himself at the edge of the lake and began to perform the holy rite of Water Contemplation.

At that moment an ox-drawn carriage, clearly belonging to a person of high rank, came round and stopped close to where the priest was standing. The owner was a Court lady from the Kyôgoku district of the Capital who held the exalted title of Great Imperial Concubine.

Unwittingly the Great Priest glanced in her direction and at once he was overwhelmed by her beauty. His eyes met hers, and he did nothing to avert his gaze, she did not take it upon herself to turn away. It was not that her liberality of spirit was such as to allow men to gaze on her with brazen looks; but the motives of this austere old ascetic could hardly, she felt, be those of ordinary men.

In a twinkling of an eye, the present world had wreaked its revenge on the priest with terrible force. What he had imagined to be completely safe had collapsed in ruins.

### **Part 3 - The Concubine (soprano) - electronics**

The Great Imperial Concubine was utterly indifferent to the charms of the young rakes who flocked about the Court and of the handsome noblemen who came her way. The physical attributes of men no longer meant anything to her. Her only concern was to find a man who could give her the strongest and deepest possible love.

That old priest by the lake had at a certain stage in his life given up the Floating World and all its pleasures. In the eyes of the Imperial Concubine he was far more of a man than all the nobles whom she knew at Court. And, just as he had once abandoned this present Floating World, so now on her behalf he was about to give up the future world as well.

The Imperial Concubine recalled the notion of the sacred lotus flower, which her own deep faith had vividly imprinted on her mind.

At night when she listened to the wind sighing through the trees in the garden, the sound seemed to her extremely insipid when compared to the delicate music in the Pure Land when the wind blew through the sacred treasure trees.

### **Part 4 - The Priest (marimba) - electronics**

The Great Priest of Shiga Temple was fighting.

In the fight that he had waged against in his youth he had always been buoyed up by the hope of inheriting the future world.

But this desperate fight of his old age was linked with a sense of irreparable loss.

The various forms of religious meditation were all in vain.

Water Contemplation, too, was useless, for invariably her lovely face would float up shimmering from beneath the ripples of the lake.

Concentration, the priest soon realized, did more harm than good, and next he tried to dull his spirit by dispersal.

It astonished him that spiritual concentration should have the paradoxical effect of leading him still deeper into his delusions.

The Great Priest found a new pleasure in adorning his vision of the lady in various ways, just as though he were adorning a Buddhist statue with diadems and baldachins.

### **Part 5 - The Concubine (soprano), the Priest (percussion) - electronics**

The Great Imperial Concubine casually glanced through the blind that separated her from the garden. There in the shadow of the fresh green foliage stood a withered old priest with faded black robes and bowed head. For some time the lady looked at him. When she realized that this was without any question the priest whom she had seen by the lake at Shiga, her face turned paler still.

Now for the first time the lady fell prey to uneasiness. In her lifetime she had seen many people who had abandoned the world, but never before had she laid eyes on someone who had abandoned the future world. The sight was ominous and inexpressibly fearful.

The Great Imperial Concubine looked down at her elegant clothes and at her beautiful hands, and then she looked across the garden at the uncomely features of the old priest and at his shabby robes. There was a horrible fascination in the fact that a connection should exist between them.

She, of course, had no way of knowing that the priest was looking through her, beyond her, into the Pure Land. Time after time she glanced out through the blinds. He was standing there immobile. The evening light thrust its way into the garden. Still he continued standing there.

The Great Imperial Concubine became frightened. She felt that what she saw in the garden was an incarnation of that 'deep-rooted delusion' of which she had read in the Sutras. She was overcome by the fear of tumbling into Hell. Now that she had led astray a priest of such high virtue, it was not the Pure Land to which she could look forward, but Hell itself, whose terrors she and those about her knew in such detail. The supreme love of which she had dreamt had already been shattered. To be loved as she was - that in itself represented damnation. Whereas the Great Priest looked beyond her into the Pure Land, she now looked beyond the priest into the horrid realms of Hell.

It was dark on the other side of the blind and from outside it was impossible to see the lady's form. The Priest knelt down and, covering his face with his hands, he wept. For a long time he stayed there without a word and his body shook convulsively.

Then in the dawn darkness a white hand gently emerged from behind the lowered blind. The priest of the Shiga Temple took it in his own hands and pressed it to his forehead and cheek.

The Great Imperial Concubine of Kyôgoku felt a strange cold hand touching her hand. At the same time she was aware of a warm moisture. Her hand was being bedewed with someone else's tears. Yet when the pallid shafts of morning light began to reach her through the blind, the lady's fervent faith imbued her with a wonderful inspiration: she became convinced that the unknown hand which touched hers belonged to none other than the Buddha.

Then the great vision sprang up anew in the lady's heart: the emerald earth of the Pure Land, the millions of seven-jewelled towers, the angels playing music, the golden ponds strewn with silver sand, the resplendent lotus, and the sweet voices of the Kalavinkas - all this was born afresh. If this was the Pure Land that she was to inherit - and so she now believed - why should she not accept the Great Priest's love?

But the priest of Shiga Temple did not utter a word. He asked her for nothing. After a while his old hands relaxed their grip and the lady's snow-white hand was left alone in the dawn light. The priest departed. The heart of the Great Imperial Concubine turned cold.

Translation by Ivan Morris

Text taken from *The Priest of Shiga Temple and His Love*, by Yukio Mishima

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