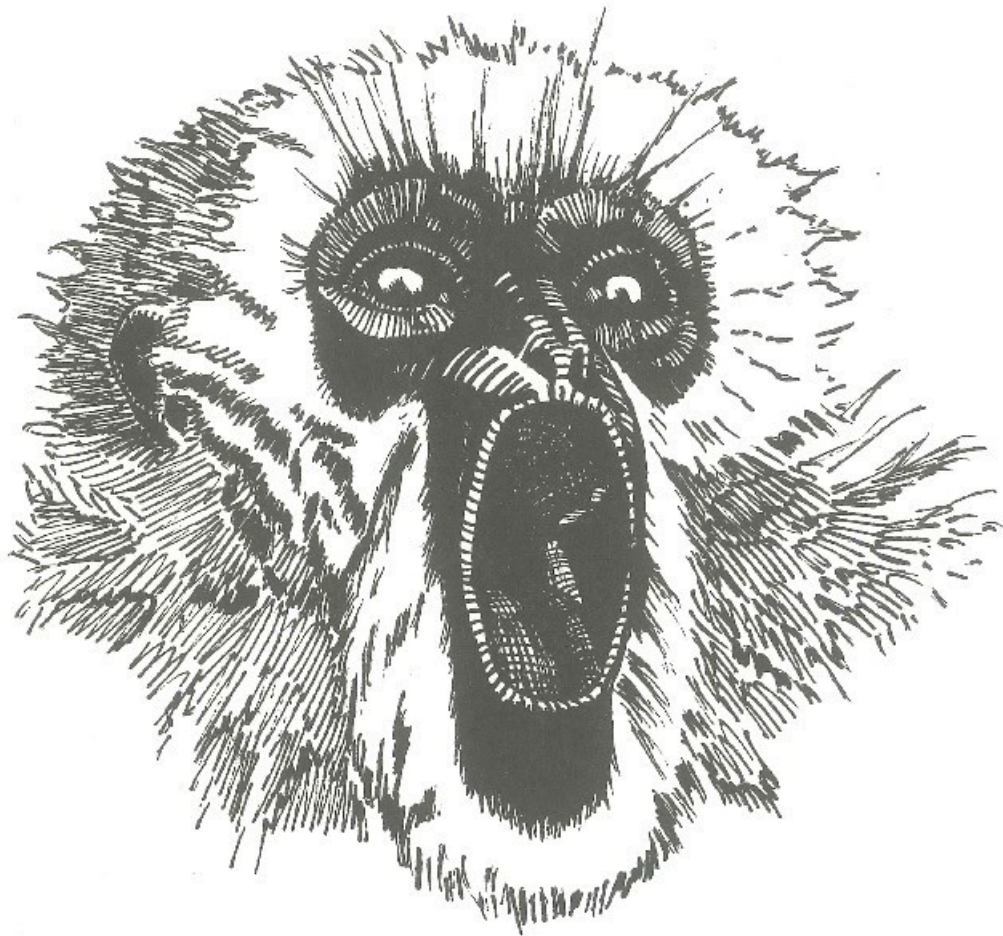


# GIBBON STORIES, MYTHS AND LEGENDS FROM JAPAN

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We present these stories, myths and legends to highlight the cultural importance of gibbons in habitat countries. We must start with a clear statement that consuming any part of a gibbon has **no medicinal value** and that gibbons must **not be kept as a pet** (it is illegal everywhere). So please do enjoy these stories, but remember they are just stories.



## JAPAN

Gibbon Hanging - Edo period, 18th century. Hanging scroll; ink on paper.

Hakuin was the greatest Zen priest-painter of the mid-Edo period, and famous as a vehement reformer of Zen practice in the eighteenth century.<sup>1</sup> He was active at the Shōin—ji, Hara, and the Myōshin-ji, Kyoto, where he served as abbot. He perfected a simple, refined style of painting with deceptively simple compositions, executed with great subtlety in the handling of ink tonalities. In this haunting work, a solitary gibbon stretches his hand toward an invisible moon, which, in the water's reflection, is not even there. "the gibbon's grasping at an illusion is mocked by Hakuin, who in his inscription names the gibbon Yoshida, a reference to the Zen monk Kenkō (1268—1350), author of the *Tsurezureg ysa* (essays on idleness). Kenkō's book is a series of meditations on the human condition and conveys a subtle degree of focus on the permutations of the human realm. Nonetheless, Hakuin found Kenkō's fascination with the fine points of human intercourse ridiculous, and far from the path to enlightenment. Hakuin's painting suggests that Kenkō's



focus on humanity's foibles misses deeper ontological truths regarding the human condition. Hakuin painted numerous versions of this subject. In a similar hanging scroll in the Gitter—Yelen Collection, the inscription reads, “The monkey of Yoshida is no better than a fly’s head.”

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