

*Ema*, or votive tablets, are wooden plaques with a picture specific to the shrine on one side, and a blank space for writing a message of gratitude or prayer on the other. They are available at the *juyosho* amulet office for ¥500 and decorated with either a Meiji Jingu crest or, over the New Year period, the zodiac animal for that year.

The word *ema* literally means ‘picture of a horse’, and dates back to ancient times when devotees would donate horses to shrines. Over time pictures of horses came to replace actual horses, and further developed into the *ema* of today.

Messages written on *ema* can be anything from pledges to the *kami* to expressions of gratitude, aspirations for the year, or other heartfelt messages. Messages can be written in any language and by anyone, regardless of faith. Once you have written yours, please hang your *ema* on the votive tablet rack, which surrounds a camphor tree. The *ema* are offered by the shrine priests to the *kami* at the *mikesai*, held every morning. The tablets are eventually burned in a ritual fire.