

History and Traditions of Waterfalls in Japan

Japan has many cultural practices that involve water. One such practice is *takigyō*, the tradition of chanting or praying while standing under a waterfall. The importance of ritual purification by water is mentioned in two of Japan's earliest chronicles, the *Kojiki* (712) and the *Nihon Shoki* (720). It seems that *takigyō* was first used to purify the body and spirit before entering the precincts of a sacred mountain.

Many waterfalls are thought to be manifestations of Shinto and Buddhist deities. Some people practice *takigyō* in order to come into direct physical contact with these deities, while others wish to demonstrate their devotion to them. The water is icy cold, and it hits the body with tremendous force. It takes considerable strength and determination to remain focused and to recite sutras or offer prayers while standing under a waterfall.

Recently people have begun practicing nonreligious *takigyō* to improve their physical stamina and mental focus. Stress reduction, becoming one with nature, and absorbing negative ions have also been given as motivations for the practice.