

Aoshima Shrine: Sacred Strings

The concept of ties or bonds, symbolized by strings or ropes tied together, plays an important role in Japanese mythology and religion. At the most fundamental level, in Shinto these ties bind heaven, earth, and all things together, and are thus closely associated with life itself. They are also symbolic of romantic relationships, and in this context are often represented by strings. Many verses in the eighth-century *Man'yōshū*, the oldest extant collection of Japanese poetry, mention strings bound together as a symbol of love. This imagery of life and love remains prevalent in contemporary Japanese culture and language, and has at least since the Edo period (1603–1867) been expressed in the form of paper strings tied to sacred structures or trees to pray for, among other things, health, protection from evil, and luck in love. Here, visitors can make a wish by purchasing a string of their choosing and tying it to a tree or rope. The blue strings are used to pray for health; green, for professional or academic achievement; yellow, for success in business; red, for love, children, safe childbirth, or a happy marriage; and the white ones are for wishes that do not fit into any of the other categories. The ¥100 for each string is a donation to the shrine.