

## Purification Pond

Purification (*misogi* or *harae*) is a central ritual in Shinto, performed to cleanse both mind and body before worship. At shrines, this is done by washing one's hands and mouth at the entrance. The practice appears in the Japanese creation myth, in which the deities Izanagi and Izanami, brother and sister, create the islands of the Japanese archipelago and the various deities that are to inhabit them. Izanami dies before their task can be completed, and Izanagi attempts to retrieve his sister from the underworld. He is unsuccessful, and upon his return to the realm of the living washes off the contamination of the netherworld by immersing himself in water. This purification results in the birth of various deities, among them three of the most important gods in the Shinto pantheon: Amaterasu, the sun goddess; the moon deity Tsukuyomi, lord of the night; and Susanoo, god of the sea and storms.

In the *Kojiki*, the first written chronicle of Japan, the purification of Izanagi is set in the province of Hyuga (present-day Miyazaki Prefecture). When scholars in the eighth century first compiled the myths of Japan in Nara, the capital at the time, they likely chose Hyuga as the scene because it was located far away facing the southeast and was therefore considered the place closest to the rising sun and, by extension, to the realm of the gods. The purification is set at a river mouth lined with lush plains where evergreen plants grow. This location symbolized eternal life rather than any specific place in the real world, but it was later tied to various locations in Hyuga, including the "purification pond" here in the city of Miyazaki.