

Udo Shrine: Kokonohashira Shrine

Kokonohashira Shrine is small in size but enshrines a total of nine Shinto deities, one behind each of the nine doors of the building. The nine deities are associated with a key story in Japanese mythology, the first act of purification. Called *misogi* or *harae*, purification is a central ritual in Shinto, and is performed to cleanse both mind and body before worship. At shrines, this is done by washing one's hands and mouth at the entrance. In the Japanese creation myth, the deities Izanagi and Izanami, brother and sister, created 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 more than two dozen deities, including the nine enshrined at Kokonohashira. Among them are Sokotsutsu, Nakatsutsu, and Uwatsutsu, known collectively as the Sumiyoshi deities. These protectors of the sea and seafarers were included because of Udo Shrine's coastal setting and its popularity among local fishermen.