

A time for renewal

A Shinto religious event, Hatsumode, draws a crowd to Kalihi on Thursday

By Gary T. Kubota POSTED: 01:30 a.m. HST, Jan 02, 201

People gathered at Hawaii Kotohira Jinsha in Kalihi for blessings on New Year's Day. The Japanese tradition, called Hatsumode, occurs during the first three days of the New Year. With offerings and the ringing of a bell, more than 1,000 people ushered in New Year's Day with a visit to Shinto religious shrines off Olomea Street in Kalihi, renewing their hopes for a good year.

Many who visited the shrines Thursday also took the opportunity to purchase omamori, or good luck amulets — embracing a Japanese tradition of renewal and purification developed centuries ago.



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The amulets, religious inscriptions within a silk brocades, may be worn as a necklace or attached to personal belongings such as a purse, bag, or key chain.

Participants also got their heads bitten by a Japanese "shishimai" lion for good luck, sipped sake with gold flakes from a "taru" barrel, and powered down complimentary bowls of ozoni mochi soup for good luck.

The annual Hatsumode event at the shrines, formally known as the Hawaii Kotohira Jinsha — Hawaii Dazaifu Tenmangu, is open to the public, and visitors were welcome regardless of their religion.

"It's starting new," said Honolulu resident Dayna Higa. Higa, who was standing in line to make an offering with her husband, Justin, and daughter, Audrey, said the visit has become a tradition in their family — one she practiced with her grandmother at Shinto shrines on Hawaii island.



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Irene Takizawa, wife of the Rev. Masa Takizawa, said the original shrine in Kalihi was founded by Japanese fishermen who offered prayers before embarking on a fishing voyage. It was recognized as an official Shinto shrine in 1920.

Takizawa said several other groups joined, some adding shrines from different prefectures in Japan, including Fukuoka, Hiroshima and Kyoto. She said the Shinto religion, indigenous to Japan, has its beginnings in agricultural rituals and seasonal worship of deities and developing a close relationship with nature.

The purification rituals are performed to re-establish balance and order with human beings, nature and the deities. Similar to Hawaiian native beliefs with aumakua or guardians in nature, Shintoism has deities tied to nature, including waterfalls, Takizawa said

"I think we share many beliefs and customs," Takizawa said. The shrines in Kalihi also offer Hawaii amulets including the turtle, or honu, for long life and prosperity.

Hawaii travelers to Las Vegas can sometimes be seen carrying a green frog amulet. The Japanese pronunciation of word "frog" is the same as the Japanese word for returning home, and the frog has become a symbol of safe travel home. Takizawa said the frog amulet also represents hope for monetary return or that "whatever you give will come back to you."



