

A Brief History of the kamidana

A kamidana houses an ofuda (symbol of kami). In the edo period, ise-kô (ise shrine fraternal groups) formed in every part of Japan. When a pilgrimage was made to ise jingu, an amulet or "oharai-taima" was taken home. These amulets were also distributed throughout Japan by the various ise-kô. A "daijingu-dana" or house shrine was set up to enshrine these amulets of the Grand Shrine of ise. This practice was the origin of the kamidana.

Setting Up a kamidana

Before setting up a kamidana you must cleanse (purify) your home. Choose a site that is pure, light, quiet and high. Also it should be where the family gathers, convenient for making offerings to kami, convenient for daily prayers, and on a North or West wall (so the kamidana's doors open to the South or East)

If there is a floor above the kamidana it is best to write the word "kumoi" 雲井 (sky) on a piece of paper and place it above the kamidana so any people upstairs will not be walking over the kamidana.

Place the kamidana just above head height. On each side of the kamidana place evergreen branches in the sakaki tate (special vases). A shimenawa (straw rope) with shide (paper shapes) should be hung above the kamidana.

shinki

shinki are ritual implements. Sets are available online (<http://www.tsubakishrine.org/omamori/kamidana.html>), or you can assemble your own – plain white china and unfinished wood are preferred. At a minimum, you will need: two tall vases (for evergreen branches); two shallow bowls (one for rice and one for salt); two covered, short vases or glasses (one for water and one for sake); and a holder or hinged box (for the ofuda).

ofuda

The kamidana must have an ofuda, (a symbol of an enshrined kami). There are many types of ofuda. Each year, at New Years, return your old ofuda to the shrine you obtained it from and receive a new one.

misogi

At a shrine perform misogi at its "temizuya" (hand washing place). Pour water over your left hand and then your right hand. Pour water into your cupped left hand and use it to rinse out your mouth. Pour water over your left hand again, then hold the dipper upright so the remaining water runs down the handle.

If a shrine is not available, in your daily shower, bow twice, clap twice, and say "suijin" or "mizu no kami". As the water runs over your body, say "*Purify the tsumi I have done... Purify the kegare I have touched.*" Bow once and say "suijin... domo arigato gozaimasu" or "mizu no kami... domo arigato gozaimasu"

Offerings to kami

shinsen are the offerings to kami. Generally shinsen consists of rice (o-kome), rice wine (o-miki/sake), water (o-mizu), and salt (o-shio). These should be changed frequently, preferably daily. After you remove the food offering you may consume them (naorae).

Praying at Your kamidana

After kensen (the act of offering food), please face the kamidana and enshrined kami, bow twice, clap twice, and call the kami; then give gratitude for the gifts of life, pledge to do your utmost, and offer any prayers. After prayers, bow once again, and thank the kami – "*onegaishimasu*".

For More Information:

http://www.stonedragonpress.com/minzoku_neo_shinto/topic_011_01_01_02.html#idKamidana