

# Religious Faith

## ◆ Coexistence with Deities

The Ainu believed that flora and fauna, tools, tsunami (tidal wave), earthquakes, pandemics, and the like in *ainumosir* (the Ainu homeland) had a *ramat*, or “spirit.” It was thought that these came to *ainumosir* from the realm of *ramat* and returned there when their roles were completed.

According to the Ainu, deities are beyond the power of humans, but are indispensable to our lives. Most of the flora and fauna important to Ainu livelihood have been

considered “good” deities, whereas pandemics and natural disasters have been considered “bad” deities that threaten daily life.

The Ainu take every opportunity to pray to their deities. No matter which deity they are praying to, they start by praying to *apehuci kamuy*, the deity of fire, so that their prayers will reach the deity they are aimed at. *Apehuci kamuy*, which resides in the hearth installed in the *cise* (house), is the deity with whom the Ainu are most familiar, the one who keeps watch over them.



Ceremony to send the bear spirits  
(Performed in 1994 and sponsored by the Ainu Museum; property of the museum)



*Ikupasuy* and *tuki* (lacquer bowl) used when praying to deities  
*Ikupasuy* is used to convey people's prayers to deities.  
 (Property of the Asahikawa City Museum)



*Inaw* (prayer sticks) used when praying to deities  
*Inaw* has many roles: *Inaw* itself serves as a deity and also becomes an offering to deities.  
 (Property of the Asahikawa City Museum)

## ◆ Sending Back the Spirits of Deities

The Ainu Bear Festival is well known by many. Bears are believed to play the role of delivering fur, meat, and the like to the Ainu, and the festival is actually a ceremony to send the spirits of bears who have visited *ainumosir*, the Ainu homeland, back to the world where they belong. Sending back spirits involves a solemn ceremony, accompanied by a huge feast and the handing out of mementos. Ceremonies to send the spirits of phenomena in *ainumosir* back to the world where they belong have been very important to the Ainu. The more closely related are the spirits to daily life, the grander and more solemn is the ceremony.



*Inoka* (wooden charm)  
 Used by the Ainu on Sakhalin, it is made for use in the ceremony to send back bear spirits to pray for a bountiful hunt.  
 (Property of the Asahikawa City Museum)