

SHINTO

People Places Practices Philosophies



The symbol of Shintoism is the torii gate present at the entrance of all shrines marking the spot where deities dwell. This portal is the fulcrum between the sacred and secular worlds.

People

Founder: Shinto is the primal, indigenous religion of Japan. As with all primal religions, there is no founder.

Local Leader: Priest

Population: 120+ million

Places

Place of Origin: Japan

Date of Origin: Pre-history

Significant Holy City or Place: Islands of Japan generally and many specific sacred mountains, rivers, caves, crossroads, mythological and historical sites, war memorials, etc.

Major Population Centre: Japan

Place of Worship: Shrine

Protocol for Visitors:

- Approach the entrance to a shrine and bow respectfully. Keep to the left avoiding the centre of the path to show humility.
- Perform a purification ritual of washing the hands and rinsing the mouth using a bamboo ladle at a basin of running water.
- Wash first the left hand, then right. Rinse the mouth. Tip the ladle backwards letting the water run down the handle to rinse and purify the handle. Return the ladle to the basin, open side of the dipper downward.
- Ring the shrine bell to announce your presence to the deity.
- Place a small offering in the donation box.
- Remove shoes before entering any shrine building.
- Stand before the main shrine area, make two deep 90° bows. Clap hands twice. Bow once more. Stand silently or perform prayers with hands joined, palms together in front of the chest. Bow at the conclusion of prayers and withdraw by taking three steps backwards without turning your back to the deity.

Practices

- The heart of Shintoism is daily shrine worship either at public shrines or small household shrines.
- Today shrine worship is more personal and less national than in former times.
- The vast majority of Japanese who practice Shintoism also practice Buddhism. Most "life events" are administered by Shinto rituals; most "death/afterlife events" are administered by Buddhist rituals.
- Humans and kami (divine spirits) exist in the same world. Shrine worship is the method of establishing respect for, connection with and balance between humans and the divine.
- Wish-fulfilling amulets and protective talismans may be left at a shrine, taken from a shrine, carried on one's person, or placed in personal spaces. Once a year all amulets and talismans are burned in a purification festival.
- Great respect is held for nature and ancestors. Ancestor worship is a significant practice of Shintoism.

Philosophies

Divinity: Shintoism has multiple major and minor divine spirits known as kami. Some kami are mythological divine figures, the prime of whom is the Sun Goddess, Amaterasu; other kami are natural forces (wind, lightening, fire, etc.), geographical formations (mountains, rocks, trees, etc.), animals and plants, abstract concepts (compassion, justice, etc.), former emperors, noble individuals, and deceased ancestors.

Scriptures: The Kojiki (Records of Ancient Matters), The Nihongi (Chronicles of Japan), numerous other writings.

Quotations:

- "When chaos had begun to condense, but force and form were not yet manifest, and nothing was named, nothing done...the Passive and Active Essences then developed, and the Two Spirits became the ancestors of all things." *Kojiki*
- "Great Japan is the divine land. The heavenly progenitor founded it, and the Sun Kami bequeathed it to Her descendants to rule eternally. Only in our country is this true; there are no similar examples in other countries. This is why our country is called the Divine Land." *Jinno Shotoki*

Golden Rule: "The heart of the person before you is a mirror. See there your own form." *Shinto Proverb*

Belief:

- Shintoism has no definite set of theological beliefs or code of morality. Morality and theology are naturalistic.

Key Concepts:

- The word "Shinto" is made from the words: *shin* = "gods or kami" and *tao* = "way." Thus Shinto literally means The Way of the Kami.
- Shinto is the worldview, spiritual consciousness and ritual practice of the people of Japan.
- The goal of Shinto practice is attainment of sincerity and a true heart.
- Three Oracles – Honesty, Purenness of Mind, Compassion

Branches: There are many sects of Shintoism. Some focus on nature worship; some stress shamanism and divination; others emphasize mythology, purification rites, and meditation practices similar to those found in Hinduism. Each of the following has numerous sub-sects and schools.

- Koshinto Shinto – literally "Old Shinto" as practiced before the influence of Buddhism.
- Shrine Shinto – the most prevalent practice.
- Imperial Shinto – practiced only by the imperial family.
- Folk Shinto – practice that includes folk traditions.
- Sect Shinto – practice that does not include shrines.
- State Shinto – established after 1945.

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