**Shintoism**



Founded in 660 BC, at the time of Buddhism, it was Japan's state religion until 1945. "Shinto" means "way of the gods" ("kami no michi"), and it is a "cosmic religion", that finds in the beauty and symmetry of nature manifestations of the gods. The essence of Shintoism is *kami*, the divine spirit found in all things in heaven and earth, mountains and rivers, sun and moon, plants, animals, and human beings... and very specially at Mount Fuji, the cherry blossoms, bonsai trees, formal gardens, and the Sakaki (the holy tree). Every Shintoist would be very happy to be a *"Franciscan"*, with the loving brother sun, sister mountain, brother dog, sister flower, brother neighbor, brother wolf. Shinto accepts the material world as good, while Buddhism view the world as evil, yet both religions are practiced in Japan... and often at the same time: They celebrate weddings in Shinto "shrines", and funerals in Buddhist "temples".

The main deity is Goddess Amaterasu, a sun goddess of fertility, reputed to be the founder of the ruler dynasty in Japan, so the Emperor is divine and Shintoism was the state religion until World War II (1945) nothing after-death! God Jino is the protector of property, usually found in the gardens at home. The Number of Shintoists, varies with different sources: Encyclopedia Britannica:  1974: 63 million; 1995: 3 million. Ministry of Education: 1974: 90 million; 1978: 99 million, with 88 million Buddhists, and 1 million Christians.

Shinto is an all-pervading indefinable way which is quite universal. Shinto or Kaminomichi or the way of the Kami or the Gods is the name of the religion observed by the Japanese from time immemorial. ‘Kami’ means God or deity, or sometimes soul. Shinto implies spontaneous following of the ‘Way of the Gods’. Shinto is not really an ‘ism’. It is only a teaching. It is not a set of verbal theories or concepts. It is the all-pervading way. It is very difficult to translate ‘Shinto’ into English. ‘Shinto’ means ‘The way of the Gods’ or the ‘God-like way’ or ‘The way from the Gods’. There is no proper equivalent for the term ‘Shinto’ in English. Shinto is an all-pervading, indefinable way which is quite universal. Shinto is divided into two classes, viz., the Sectarian Shinto, which is sub-divided into 13 sects; and the Shinto of the national faith of the Japanese, or the State Shinto Religion.

A perfect understanding of Shinto will enable one to have proper understanding of the Japanese nation and their culture. There is neither much grand philosophy nor complicated ritual in Shintoism. Shinto is not a religion adopted by the State. It is a religion of the heart. Shinto is a natural and real spiritual force which pervades the life of the Japanese. Shinto is a creative or formative principle of life. The Shinto principle is the background of Japanese culture, code of ethics, fine arts, family and national structure. Shinto is the chief agent which has rejuvenated, vitalized and reinforced the social and religious life of Japan. The system of Shinto resembles more the system of Hinduism than that of Confucianism or Buddhism. It is a kind of personal religion. It ascribes divine attributes to every being. It is a kind of pantheism. For the Japanese, nation means a harmonious complex of individuals, Kuni-hito. Salvation, for the Japanese, means the Salvation of the whole nation instead of salvation of a few individuals.

### Shinto Theology

According to Shinto theology, Ame-no-mi-naka-nushiis the Absolute Universal Self. This corresponds to Hiranyagarbha or the thread-Soul (*Sutratman*) of the Hindus. The visible universe (Ken Kai) and the invisible world (Yu Kai) have come into being from Ame-no-mi-naka-nushi through the activities of the three deities of Musubi, Principle of Creation, Completion and the Controlling Bond between the spiritual and the material, the invisible and the visible, the real and the ideal. These contradictory attributes are functional only. The Absolute Universal Self is not affected by these contradictory attributes. It is beyond these attributes. It-corresponds to the Nirguna Brahman (Attributeless Absolute) of Hinduism. The idea of time has come into existence from the attributes. Absolute loyalty to the Sovereign Emperor, who is regarded as a direct descendant and representative of the highest God, respect for ancestors, profound feeling of piety towards the parents and love for children form the fundamental structure of the Great Universal Way.

The mirror, the sword and the jewel have a figurative meaning in the course of the development of Shinto. They symbolize wisdom, courage and benevolence or intelligence, will and love in Shinto theology. These three are the holy ensigns of royalty of the Sovereign Emperor. They are supposed to symbolize the dynamic working of the Great Way and so they are found in the forefront of every Shinto shrine, popularly known as Mistu-tomo-e or the three big commas. There are many Gods in Shinto, but the ancestral Sun-God, Anaterasu-omi Kami, stands supreme above them. Susano-o-no-Mikoto is the impetuous divine brother of the Sun-God. He is the God of rainstorm. Tsukiyomi-no-Mikoto is the Moon-God. These three constitute a divine triad. They preside, respectively, over the plane of High Heaven, the vast ocean, and the realm of Night.

### Shinto Ethics

Purity is one of the fundamental virtues of Shinto ethics. There are two significations of purity. One is outer purity or bodily purity and the other inner purity or purity of heart. If a man is endowed with true inner purity of heart, he will surely attain God-realization or communion with the Divine. Sincerity is also the guiding ethical principle of Shinto.

### Ten Precepts of Shinto

1. Do not transgress the will of the gods.
2. Do not forget your obligations to ancestors.
3. Do not offend by violating the decrees of the State.
4. Do not forget the profound goodness of the, gods, through which calamity and misfortunes are averted and sickness is healed.
5. Do not forget that the world is one great family.
6. Do not forget the limitations of your own person.
7. Do not become angry even though others become angry.
8. Do not be sluggish in your work.
9. Do not bring blame to the teaching.
10. Do not be carried away by foreign teachings.

### Shinto Sayings

* + The heart of the person before you is a mirror. See there your own form.
  + Even the wishes of an ant reach to heaven.
  + Leave the things of this world and come to me daily with pure bodies and pure hearts.
  + A single sincere prayer moves heaven. You will surely realize the divine presence through sincere prayer.
  + Where you have sincerity, there also is virtue. Sincerity is a witness to truth. Sincerity is the mother of knowledge. Sincerity is a single virtue that binds Divinity and man in one.
  + Retribution for good or ill is as sure as the shadow after substance.
  + To do good is to be pure. To commit evil is to be impure.
  + To admit a fault is the beginning of righteousness.
  + The first and surest means to enter into communion with the Divine is sincerity. If you pray to a deity with sincerity, you will surely feel the divine presence.

### Common Shinto Prayer

Our eyes may see some uncleanliness, but let not our mind see things that are not clean. Our ears may hear some uncleanliness, but let not our mind hear things that are not clean.

