

- Shinto has four affirmations: family and tradition, reverence towards nature, physical cleanliness and festivals held in honor of one or more kami. Have the class research one of these affirmations within their own traditions, religious or secular, and have them present a report or visual display of how their lives in some way mirror the Shinto affirmations.
- Research the history and practices of Buddhism in Japan with an eye towards how and why Shinto and Buddhism were able to coexist and even intermingle.

### Internet Resources

[www.shinto.org/2-1-e.html](http://www.shinto.org/2-1-e.html)

What Is Shinto in Brief — A brief introduction to Shinto from the International Shinto Foundation.

<http://kizuna.cwru.edu/asia110/projects/Meiji/meiji1.html>

Kami and Japanese Mythology — This site clearly explains the concept of kami and shares three myths in which the kami plays a significant role.

[www.religioustolerance.org/shinto.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/shinto.htm)

Shinto — Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance promotes religious tolerance through education. It provides links to related sites and features information about Shinto beliefs and practices.

[www.tmn.com/~mcgarity/sh/shrines.htm](http://www.tmn.com/~mcgarity/sh/shrines.htm)

Japanese Temples & Shrines — Provides background information about Shinto, including architecture, temples, shrines and gardens.

### Suggested Print Resources

- Hartz, Paula. *Shinto (World Religions)*. Facts on File, 1997.
- Picken, Stuart D.B. *Shinto: Japan's Spiritual Roots*. Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1980.
- Reader, Ian. *Simple Guide to Shinto*. Kent, England: Global Books, Ltd., 1998.
- Sokyō, Ono. *Shinto, The Kami's Way*. Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle, 1995.

# Religions of the World™

## SHINTO

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## Historical Overview

Shinto, the indigenous religion of Japan, is one of the world's oldest religious traditions and currently has approximately sixty-two million followers. It claims no specific founder and has no sacred written scriptures, nor does it restrict its followers from practicing the traditions and customs of other faiths. Shinto does not impose a regulating dogma on its followers; instead, it offers a richly complex and subtle tradition based on "the way of the kami" which, loosely translated, means "god" or "deity" but can, in different contexts, include ancestors, inanimate objects and nature itself.

## Time Line

**660 B.C.E.** — Approximate time when Shinto begins its formal development in Japan.

**500 C.E.** — Approximate time when Buddhism begins to arrive in Japan from China.

**712–720 C.E.** — The two great texts of Shinto mythology, the *Kojiki* and the *Nihongi*, are written in 712 C.E. and 720 C.E. respectively.

**1549 C.E.** — Christianity is introduced into Japan by Father Francis Xavier.

**1801 C.E.** — The writings of Motoori argue that Shinto is Japan's true and original religion. Through his work, he advocates the unification of Japan, the kami, the Emperor and the Japanese people under Shinto.

**1868 C.E.** — Japan becomes officially united as a nation state with Shinto as its unifying religion. Japan's modern era begins.

**1873 C.E.** — Christianity is officially permitted back into Japan.

**1945 C.E.** — After World War II, the Japanese state and Shinto are separated. There are no longer any formal ties between Shinto and the government of Japan.

**1946 C.E.** — Emperor Hirohito explicitly renounces his claim to divinity as formerly proclaimed under the Shinto tradition.

## Vocabulary

**Shinto** — The Japanese religious tradition viewed as an extension of the culture and nation of Japan. The word Shinto means "the way of the gods," "the way of those above" or "the way of the kami."

**Kami** — Japanese for divine, divinity or "what is worshiped." Broader than the English word "god," the closest English translation is "the sacred."

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**Torii** — The sacred archway that is the formal entrance to a Shinto shrine. It marks the passageway from the everyday world to the holy ground of the Sacred.

**Kojiki & Nihongi** — Two great texts of Shinto mythology. The *Kojiki* (The Records of Ancient Matters) is the earliest written record of kami (712 C.E.). *Nihongi* (Chronicles of Japan) is the second group of writings (720 C.E.).

**Amaterasu** — The Sun Goddess from whom the imperial line of Japanese emperors descend. She is one of the most important kami in Shinto.

**Honden** — The sanctuary in a Shinto shrine.

**Haiden** — The hall of worship in a Shinto shrine.

**Jinja** — A formal shrine or place of worship.

**Kannushi** — Literally means "divine master." These are the priests who are responsible for the rituals at Shinto shrines.

**Norito** — Sacred prayers offered by the faithful at Shinto shrines.

**Kamidana** — The Shinto shrine found in a Japanese home, usually located on a shelf.

## Pre-viewing Discussion

- Discuss Shinto, what it is and where it is practiced. Generate a list of the characteristics students believe are associated with this religion.
- Shinto is an ancient tradition; as they watch the show, instruct students to observe ways in which traditional practices are applied in present-day Japan.
- Mythology tells us much about the culture, customs, religion and history of a people. Share some traditional Japanese myths with the class prior to viewing the video. Discuss what they might be conveying about the Japanese people and the practice of Shinto.

## Focus Questions

1. From what three sources did Shinto emerge as a distinctive Japanese religious tradition?
2. What does Shinto mean in Japanese? What does this meaning tell you about the religion?
3. What determines a person's affiliation with a Shinto shrine? Are there restrictions regarding which Shinto shrine a person should worship?
4. In what ways does Shinto differ from Christianity, Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism?

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5. What is the significance of the Torii gate at a Shinto shrine?
6. What is the most important Japanese festival of the year?
7. What is meant by multiple affiliation? What insight does this term provide us regarding the nature of Shinto?
8. How do the Shinto kami differ from the Western view of God with regard to the creation of the universe, being a force of good and evil in the world, and divine interaction with the world?
9. What is the main purpose of the sanctuary and hall of worship in a Shinto shrine?
10. Explain the relationship between Shinto and the nationalization of Japan from 1868 C.E. to 1945 C.E.
11. Why is Shinto not a state religion in Japan today?

## Follow-up Discussion

- Christianity has remained foreign and relatively unpopular in Japan while Taoism, Buddhism, Shinto and Confucianism are often practiced by many Japanese concurrently. Encourage discussion about why this has happened.
- In modern Japan, Shinto shrines are important. How does the religious role of these shrines differ from congregational style house of worship (i.e. churches, synagogues and mosques)? What does this say about Shinto and its place in Japanese society?
- Discuss Shinto as either monotheistic or polytheistic in its belief of kami.
- Compare and contrast other religions or spiritualities in which animals or nature have divine roles with what you now know about Shinto.
- At times throughout history, Shinto has been a unifying force in Japan. Does the United States have any belief structures or institutions that bind the country and all of its varying ethnic groups together under a similar unifying system? (i.e. patriotism, government)

## Follow-up Activities

- Discuss the significance, structure and function of shrines in Shinto tradition. Using these three characteristics of shrines, ask students to consider whether or not there are any sites in the United States that could be considered shrines (i.e. the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial, flowers and candles marking the site of a tragic death). Have students develop a class mural or individual posters of pictures of some such shrines and provide an explanation of what they reflect. *(Continued)*