

SHINTO AND THE JAPANESE PEOPLE

Overview: Shinto is the national religion of Japan. Its roots are pre-historical. The religion is an animistic religion. It involves ancestor worship as well as the worship of natural features such as a mountain or lake, as well as historical events and persons. Their gods (*kami*) are believed to reside in natural objects and to procreate. These gods can be helpful or hurtful in their actions. There is no unified set of beliefs and practices in Shinto. The worship is centered on individual shrines. Except for certain festivals there are no gatherings for worship, one stops by a shrine at anytime to make a request of the *kami* who indwells that temple or object within the temple. The Shinto beliefs center on the values of loyalty and duty to the family and to the group. Community is considered more important than the individual. Aesthetics are also highly valued. The national government has used Shinto beliefs to help foster these attitudes and promote nationalism.

The idea of ritual purity is very important and cleanliness is part of this idea. Their gods are offended by any ceremonial pollution related to blood or death.

The Shinto faith has been expressed in all parts of life, such as architecture (*tori* gates~wood gate with water flowing nearby for cleansing) and art (*origami*~"paper of the spirit"-people whispered prayers over paper or fabric and tied them on trees so that when the wind blew over them they would be repeated).

History:

It is one of the world's oldest religions, combining ancient religious practices with such influences as Buddhism and Confucianism. Shinto has no real founder, no body of religious law and only a very loosely organized priesthood. It is a non-exclusive religion, that is many practice Shinto (93% at last census) and a second or even third religion (77% claim also to be Buddhists, and 65% claim to follow no personal religion. For many Japanese to be Shinto is simply to be Japanese. In the novel *Shogun*, a person is forced to decide whether to remain a Christian. Her response is "I have been a Christian for a hundred years. I have been Japanese for a thousand years.

Views of God:

There are many gods. They procreate and indwell natural objects of the world. They are the gods of Japan.

Views of Scripture:

Their most ancient writings are from the 8th century AD. These writings called the *Kojiki* and the *Nihongi*, record the ancient stories handed down orally. They are not studied or quoted by most Shinto believers.

Views of Salvation:

There is no concept of needing saving, only a sense of needing to live in harmony with nature and community.

Views of Life After Death:

They believe they will exist after death in a spiritual realm and from there they will be able to help or hurt their family's efforts

Approaching People Influenced By Shinto With The Gospel:

Understand every Japanese person is deeply infused by Shinto.

Study Paul's Sermon on Mars' Hill: Acts 17:22-31

Works Consulted

Halverson, Dean C., The Compact Guide To World Religions, Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 1996

Nummela, Tom: Editor, One God Many Gods, St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1998