

Shinto, 1988

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SHINTO

I. HISTORICAL SOURCES

1. Shinto goes back to two historical sources:
 - a) In eighth century A.D., the Emperor ordered Yasumaro (officer) to write down all legends and myths pertaining to lineage of Imperial house.
 - b) Yasumaro travelled extensively throughout Japan and recorded.
 - c) In 712 A.D., he edited his research under name of Kojiki (Ancient Time Chronicle)
 - It contained myths and lineage of emperors down into his period.
 - d) Emperor was far from satisfied. He ordered Yasumaro to go out and record the differing versions of such ancient stories.
 - e) The second version was called Nihonshoki (abbrev. Nihongi)-Japan Chronicle, 720 A.D.

II. THE CONCEPT SHINTO

1. Yasumaro worked under difficulty: he heard stories in Japanese language but he had no alphabet at his disposal in which to write them.
 - a) He selected Chinese ideograms to match the words of Japanese language.
2. Yasumaro was describing the Kami No Michi. So he selected matching words from written Chinese.
 - a) Chinese shin, for spirit. In Japanese kami
 - b) Chinese tao, for michi. In Japanese to.
 - c) Hence Shinto, from Chinese shin-tao.
3. Also: Buddhism came to Japan in 6th century A.D.
 - Hence, needed to distinguish Shinto from Butsu-do (the religion of Buddha)
4. Fundamental to Shinto experience is the conviction that there is a way-- a way of nature, a cosmic way, according to which men should walk.
 - a) That way is called Kami-no-michi--the Way of the Kami.
5. Other words which expresses basic mood of Shinto:
 - musubi--there is that which unites or links together - cf. Religion
 - seisei (growth); hatten (development); sozo (creation); shinka (improvement)
 - a) All these words have a dynamic connotation.

III. TWO POEMS WHICH EXPRESS WELL THE SHINTO VIEW OF LIFE

"Deem not that only in this earthly shrine
 The deity doth reign.
 The earth entire, and all the Heavens Divine,
 His presence do proclaim."--Shima Shigeoyu (Shinto priest)

English noun, Religion, has two verbal roots with a common stem. Classical Roman thinkers derived religio from religere; Ch. fathers from religare. Common stem is lig (ligere, ligare) suggests "binding" kind - also uniting.

No spot on earth but is a shrine,
 Be it the vast expanse of ocean waste
 Or highest mountain's summit, sun-caressed
 In all resides the power divine.--Senge Takazumi (Shinto priest)

THE ANCIENT MYTHS OF JAPAN

1. The myths related in Kojiki and Nihongi include most of the primitive traditions of the Japanese people.
2. The myths contain a mixed collection of various traditions:
 - a) some come from those who worship sea-gods; others storm-gods; others sun-goddess.
 - b) The sun-goddess group provided the central core of myths.
3. The Japanese people, by unifying their mythology, helped to unify themselves.
4. The functions of the myths:
 - a) explain nature of world and men and their relationships
 - b) enhance imperial prestige
 - c) through this central imperial line to give unity to the nation.

The Myth in a Coconut-Shell

Out of the primordial chaos, which was like an ocean of mud veiled in darkness, three kami sprang... Other kami sprang out of the primeval chaos spontaneously and independently of each other and they became invisible.

Finally, there appear Izanagi-no-kami, The Male who Invites, and Izanami-no-kami, The Female who Invites. The heavenly kami order these two to make, consolidate, and give birth to the drifting land. They are given a spear and, standing on the floating bridge of heaven, they push the spear down into the midst, searching for land as they stir the briny slit below. As they draw up the spear, the brine from its tip forms the Island of Onogoro.

Descending to this island, Izanagi and Izanami see to the erection of a pillar and a palace. Examining their bodies closely they notice their sexual differences and desire for sexual union comes upon them.

From their first union is born Hiruko, "Child of the Sun". This child and the next is repudiated. Therefore Izanagi and Izanami return to heaven to find out why their first offspring have not been good ones.

A divination is held in heaven. As a result of this, the divine pair are told that the fault lay in the female's having spoken first.

There immediately follows an account of the birth of the eight great islands (an ancient name for Japan) and then the smaller islands. After given birth to all the counties, they give birth to more kami. The last kami born from the pair is the Fire Kami. Izanami is burnt so badly in giving birth to him that she dies and withdraws to the underworld. (The end of the first portion)

Izanagi, in wrath, draws his sword and proceeds to cut the Fire Kami into pieces. In this process many other kami are born.

Then Izanagi decides to go to the underworld to seek his wife. He finds her dwelling place and talks with her, asking her to return to the upper world again. She pleads with him to wait but not to look upon her. In his impatience,

"
A myth is a metaphor, a mask, for what lies
behind the visible world! - Campbell

Myths are doors to an deepest spiritual potential,
abilities lead us to delight, illumination, & even
rapture.

A social philosopher from New York, say to a Shinto priest,
"we've been now to a good many ceremonies and have seen
quite a few of your shrins. But I don't get your ideo-ogy.
I don't get yoru theology." The Japanese paused as though
in deep thought and then slowly shook his head. "I think
we don't have ideology," he said. "We don't have theolgy."
We dance." *mythology paints to the music of the spheres" to we dance*

contrary to her request, he lights the end pieces from his comb and looks upon her, only to see a hideous sight.

Thereupon he flees, pursued by the ugly forces of the underworld, and finally, by Izanami herself. He flees and reaches the upper world where he has to purify himself from his journey.

Being polluted, Izanagi proceeds to purify himself at a river-mouth. Various kami are born in the process of his purification. Amaterasu-Omi-kami, the heavenly shining one--she is born from his left eye. From his right eye is born Tsuki-yomi-no-kami, Moon Kami. From his nose is born Susanoo-no-mikoto--Brave Swift Impetuous Male, often known simply as Storm God.

To Amaterasu was given the Plain of High Heaven to rule. Tsuki-yomi was given the realm of night to rule. Susanoo was sent down to rule earth. (Amaterasu became of central importance in later history of Japan).

Both the Kojiki and Nihongi devote a great deal of space to activities of Susanoo. Susanoo, instead of taking up his duties properly, becomes violent. So he is expelled from heaven and he descends to the land of Izumo. The Kojiki then includes a whole cycle of stories centering around Susanoo and his descendants.

Finally, Amaterasu commissions her grandson, Ninigi-noo-mikoto, to descend and rule. In her commission she says: "The Luxuriant Land of Reed Plains is a country which our descendants are to inherit. Go, therefore, Our Imperial Grandson, and rule over it. And may Our Imperial lineage continue unbroken and prosperous, co-eternal with Heaven and Earth."

After the descent of the heavenly grandchild, the records describe quite a series of adventures. Then the Divine Ages come to an end. Myth allegedly gives way to history. The first human emperor appears, Jimmu Tenno. He acceded to the throne in 660 B.C. According to the Kojiki, Jimmu was the direct descendant of the Sun Goddess, Amaterasu, through her grandson, Ninigi-no-mikoto.

A FEW COMMENTS ON THIS CENTRAL MYTH

1. This is not a creation myth.
 - a) Izanagi/Izanami are kami of procreation/production.
 - all things procreated sexually or appear spontaneously
 - all things produced are called kami.
2. There is no alienation, no estrangement.
 - a) Man is not turned against woman; or vice versa
 - nor man against God
 - no flood, no expulsion from the Garden of Eden
3. Accepts things-as-they-are; hence no need to seek justification for universe's shortcomings.
4. Kami are not all-knowing. They call divination in heaven--they don't know.
5. No sacrifice--only purification.

IMPLICATIONS OF THIS CENTRAL MYTH

1. It provides a sense of national unity in several ways:
 - a) Japan, the land of heavenly origin, is eternal.
 - b) The Japanese people are kami-produced.
 - c) Ancestors (e.g. on family altar) give continuity/loyalty to traditions/land.
 - d) Emperor, a descendent of the kami.
2. Principle of saisei-itchi (union of government and religion)
-teaches that the religious and political dimensions of life are essentially one.
3. The concept of creativity and growth--as a basic dimension in the Shinto interpretation of life.
 - a) Life, all Nature, is filled with vitality, growth, creativity.
 - b) The goodness of nature is seen in her productivity.
4. Human nature is fundamentally good.
 - a) Human beings are descendants of kami. They have the "flesh" of kami in their bodies.
-There is concrete continuity.
 - b) True, human life is imperfect, but humans are capable of growth.
-Man is capable of walking the way of the kami.
he is not called to an impossible task.
 - c) When man is "stuck", through rites of purification, he can return to his "original shape".
5. No dualism.
 - a) Basic Japanese life attitude is that there is no dualism--e.g. between spirituality and materiality.
-All things, including human appetites, are given gifts.
-The enjoyment of them is natural.

THE MEANING OF KAMI

The concept Kami stands for many things:

- that which is divine (in the Shinto sense, not the western sense)
- that which is everywhere present in varying degrees
may not be entirely present or visible to people
- mystery, the feeling of awesomeness, akin to the sense of "holy"
- something outside the ordinary, possessing superior power
- it is something to be respected
- it provides the power for all growth, for development, for creativity
- it is something to make man "walk on", to progress, to grow, to create

The word Kami is like a signpost which simply indicates that at this point the invisible, the mysterious, the power begins.

~~No claim is made to explain or to discuss.~~

THE WORLD OF THE SHINTO

1. Here we are viewing a Shinto shrine with its torii, the gently curved archway that led into the precincts of a shrine.
2. Then we see a person or family pass through the torii, wash hands and mouth in a basin, approach the shrine, clap twice, bow, murmur a prayer, and leave a small offering in a grill.
3. If we were to remain around and observe the shrine's activity, we would see things that would bring out four basic affirmations which implicitly undergird Shinto:
 - a) affirmation of tradition
 - b) of life in this world
 - c) of purity
 - d) and of festival.

Affirmation of tradition

1. Virtually every Shinto shrine has its unique set of traditions: what festivals are celebrated, what rituals are performed.
 - a) Some as ancient and some less so, but all strongly affirm the links of the present with the past.
2. For millions of modern Japanese, living in a rapidly changing and technological world, this role of embodying a traditional past they do not want entirely to lose is the most important function of Shinto.

Affirmation of life in this world

1. Shinto, the religion of clans and their communal spirit, of joyous festivals and bountiful harvests, affirms the good things of this world and the natural relationships.
2. Most Japanese tend to think of Shinto as religion concerned with the high and happy moments of this life, and Buddhism with somber and profound things, such as suffering and death.
 - a) People are married and babies are blessed in Shinto shrines; Funerals and memorial services are held in Buddhist temples.

Distinction between purity and pollution

1. Shinto shrines, demarcated off by their torii, represent pure spaces in the midst of a polluted world.
2. One entering the shrine precincts washes oneself, and rituals begin with the sweeping away of impurity.
3. What is fresh, lively, and bright is pure; what is stagnant, decaying, sick or dying is impure.
 - a) Blood, disease, and death are the most impure things.
 - b) A dead body would not be brought into a shrine.
4. Through its avoidance of impurity, Shinto affirms the persistence and superiority of life and joy.

Festival

1. In the matsuri, or Shinto festival, the full color and dynamism of the divine side of reality is manifested.

THE STRUGGLE FOR A PURE SHINTO

1. See this most clearly in the emergence of the National Learning School (17th century).
2. The key figures in the school were:
 - Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801)
 - Hirata Atsutane (1776-1843)
3. The achievements of the National Learning School of Shinto:
 - a) it provided the emotional, spiritual, and intellectual foundation of modern Japanese national consciousness
 - b) a logic of its own based on faith in the uniqueness of Japan and her people
 - c) it centered devotion and reverence to the unbroken imperial line, believed to be divine in origin.

MOTOORI NORINAGA (1730-1801)

1. He purged Japanese and Shinto thought from its Confucian and Buddhist influences.
 - a) He did it interpreting the ancient traditions in the Kojiki, Nihongi, and Norito.
 - These documents provided him with a basis for cultivating spiritual sentiment in the adoration of the Sun Goddess and the elevation of certain deities as symbols of life force.
 - b) He emphasized the intuitive, emotional side of the Japanese spirit in his attempt to displace the dominant Confucian rationalism.
 - He did it by emphasizing the mystery which lay at the heart of creativity in the ancient documents.
2. He asserted the superiority of Japan over other nations, pointing to the unbroken line of emperors as witness.
3. He suggested a messianic destiny for Japan, because she possessed the ancient way of the Sun Goddess.
4. He affirmed the Japanese natural love of life, therefore, truth lay in the expression of human feeling and sentiment.
 - a) Hence the Buddhist disciplines were in contradiction to the Japanese naturalness.

HIRATA ATSUTANE (1776-1843)

1. He represented the more intellectual side of the Japanese mind.
 - a) His Shinto theology was influenced by Chinese thought and contact with Christianity and western knowledge.
2. He exalted Shinto as the highest knowledge and was an exponent of the superiority of the Japanese people in all areas.
 - a) Particularly, the unbroken dynastic succession evidenced the superiority of the Japanese and their destiny to rule over all others.

3. According to Hirata the deities of Shinto were universal gods.
Superiority of the Sun-Goddess?
Did not the earth revolved about the sun?
4. He added a new dimension to Shinto thought on his conceptions of the afterlife.
 - a) For him, the world of the afterlife was not just a place of darkness.
Rather, it was a world as a place of testing.
 - b) Here, in this world, the dead individual became kami and possessed various capacities and powers to reveal the future.
 - c) He also believed that souls lived in the vicinity of their graves.
5. He contributed to the establishment of Shinto as a patriotic and national cult.
 - a) He did it by his interpretation of the genealogies given in the mythology and the association of the general ancestor worship of the Japanese to the worship of the deities of the Imperial House.