



At the beginning the universe was immersed in a beaten and shapeless kind of matter (chaos), sunk in silence. Later there were sounds indicating the movement of particles. With this movement, the light and the lightest particles rose but the particles were not as fast as the light and could not go higher. Thus, the light was at the top of the Universe, and below it, the particles formed first the clouds and then Heaven, which was to be called Takamagahara (“High Plain of Heaven”). The rest of the particles that had not risen formed a huge mass, dense and dark, to be called **Earth**.



*In heaven three deities—followed by two others—appeared. These five became the Separate Heavenly Deities. They were followed by the Seven Generations of the Age of the Gods, two single deities and five male and female couples. **Izanami** and **Izanagi**, the last couple to appear, went on to give birth to the **Japanese Archipelago** and a large number of **kami**.*

In order to comprehend the concept of **kami**, it is important to erase the preconception caused by the word god, an English translation that is often used for the word kami. In **Shinto**, there is no faith in the concept of an absolute god who is the creator of both human beings and nature.

It might be best to quote the opinion of Norinaga Motoori, a scholar in the late 18th century who wrote, “Whatever seemed strikingly impressive, possessed the quality of excellence and virtue, and **inspired a feeling of awe was called kami.**” Here “the quality of excellence” refers to an enormous power which has great influence over many things. It is **beyond human power** or human capability and **brings good fortune** and happiness to man but at the same time it **may bring misfortune** or evil as well.

The ancient Japanese **never divided spiritual and material existence**, but considered that both were inseparable, seeing everything in a spiritual sense. In other words, they did not draw a border between a certain object and the work of that object.

**Shinto has always
made one of its highest
priorities **coexistence
with nature.** *It could
even be said that Shin-
to could not exist apart
from nature.* In Shinto,
we believe that both
humans and nature
are **children of kami,**
*and live together as
members of the same
family.***

Deeply indebted to the blessings of nature, the Japanese people came to acknowledge its spiritual powers that brought forth life, fertility, and prosperity. Divine spirits dwell in all of nature, and bring joy and bounty to our lives. Mountains, deep valleys, and the wide ocean are viewed as dwellings for the divine. Other natural objects such as majestic trees and special rocks are considered to be symbols of divine spirits as well. Through this intimate contact with nature and the divine, the Japanese people have continued to respect and draw inspiration from its spiritual beauty. At the same time, the Japanese people have long revered their ancestors who contributed enormously to the goodness of society.

In ancient times, rites were primarily performed outdoors and it was rather rare to have a house-style building as a place for performing rites. In those days, a plot of purified land was chosen and roped off in a square. Following the ceremony a stand of trees was erected as an object to which kami were invited. However, when Buddhism was introduced to Japan, people began worshipping images of Buddha placed in buildings. It is thought that Shinto, being influenced by this style, began to enshrine the kami spirit in a building and this became the popular custom as time went on.

At various turning points in an individual Japanese person's life, visits are made to a shrine to pray for divine protection and to give thanks for the deities' blessings. These rites of passage for the Japanese begin with hatsumiya mode. This is a ceremony celebrating the first visit of a new born baby to a shrine to be recognized by the local deity as a new member of the community. The next is a festival called shichi-go-san. Boys at their fifth year, and girls at their third and seventh year, visit a shrine in order to report their healthy growth and to receive divine blessings.

Special rites of purification and blessing are also sought at the time a young person reaches his or her maturity. The most radiant occasion in life, however, is the marriage ceremony, when the bride and groom exchange ritual toasts of sake in front of the deity and pledge their vows as husband and wife. Rites of purification and prayer are held on many other occasions as well. Through the repetition of such life-cycle rites, Japanese people seek a way of life full of peace and joy in communion with the divine.

to wo

temizu (purification)

Wash your hands and mouth at a pu

This p

worshipping at a shrine

Now you
At

tamagushi hoten (offering

Tamagushi is a “sakaki” branch
In the official manner of v

Worship

purification font, a stone or wooden water reservoir.

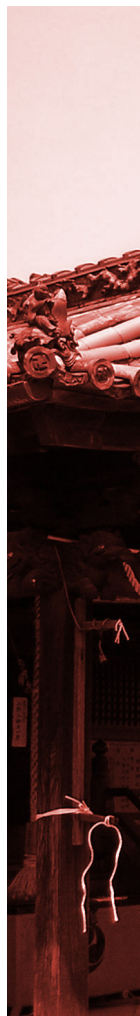
Clean water is believed to remove impurity.
process is a simplified version of full body bathing.

are pure and clean to stand in front of the deities.
the hall of worship, please worship with sincerity.

a ritual branch)

h with “shide”, a zigzagged white stripe of paper.
worshipping, tamagushi is dedicated to the deity.

*At the entrance to a Shinto shrine st
indicates that the space within is sa*



Shrine
ferent
aries f
some s
divine
a build

stands a shrine gate, or **torii**, which
sacred ground.



sanctuaries throughout Japan have several different styles. Some shrines have more than two sanctuaries or enshrining different deities at one location, and some shrines do not have a sanctuary building since the deity symbol is **too large (i.e. a mountain)** to enshrine in a building.

festivals **of** **the** **four** **seasons**

Spring

Festivals (Matsuri) are offered in thanks to the deities for their bounty. An incredible number of festivals are conducted by each Shinto shrine throughout the year. Shinto festivals are not only limited to

autumn

Spring Summer

shrines but are also conducted by families. People set up altars in the center of their homes. This is the spiritual residence of their ancestors, to which they give thanks for daily life and pray for

peace. Respecting deities and cherishing ancestors have been important aspects of faith for the Japanese. These are household beliefs inherited from ancient times and practiced up until the present day.

Autumn Winter



hinamatsuri	<i>hinamatsuri</i>
hinamatsuri	<i>hinamatsuri</i>
hinamatsuri	<i>hinamatsuri</i>
hinamatsuri	<i>hinamatsuri</i>

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shinto

kami-no-michi

way of the gods