


[About the URI](#)
[World Religions](#)
[Stories](#)
[Activities](#)
[Buddhism](#)
[Christianity](#)
[Hinduism](#)
[Islam](#)
[Judaism](#)
[More...](#)


Shintoism

What does Shinto mean? What do its followers believe?

Shinto means the way of the gods. Shintoism is an Ancient religion of Japan. It started at least as long ago as 1000 B.C.E. but is still practiced today by at least five million people. The followers of Shintoism believe that spiritual powers exist in the natural world. They believe that "spirits" called kami live in natural places such as in animals, plants, stones, mountains, rivers, people and even the dead.

Where do Shinto followers worship?

Shinto places of worship are called shrines and are usually found in beautiful natural settings. The shrine contains an Inner Hall which is only entered by Shinto priests since it is believed kami are present. Shinto priests can be either male or female. Purity is important to Shinto followers and therefore they rinse their mouths and wash their hands and hang up wooden tablets with prayers on them before entering the prayer hall. Once inside, the kami is summoned with a bell and offered rice or money. After which the worshiper bows twice and claps twice to welcome the kami then bows again.

Shinto shrines are marked by a special archway called a torii. This archway is believed to separate the sacred world of the shrine from the world outside. There are about 80,000 shrines all over Japan. Each shrine has a yearly festival in which people pay their respects to the kami and celebrate with food and drink.

Worship also happens in homes and at work through simple offerings of rice and tea and prayers. The rice and tea is placed on a special shelf called a "godshelf" . Prayers are often addressed to the family ancestors.

Who is the most important kami?

The most important kami is Amaterasu, the sun goddess. She

is believed to be the ancestor to the emperors of Japan. Her shrine is at Ise and is the most important shrine in Japan. Inari, the rice producer, is also an important kami since rice is such an important food in Japan.

Is it possible to be practice both Shintoism and Buddhism?

Yes, it is and many Japanese people practice both. The beliefs are very compatible and not contradictory.

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