

# WHAT IS SHINTO ?

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Shinto is one word, but it includes a variety of types of belief. It may be divided into State Shinto, Popular Shinto, Shrine Shinto, and Sectarian Shinto. Though powerless now, historically Shinto has been very important. What is more, Shinto is the result of various changes in the long course of history. Let me explain in rough outline the fundamental point of what Shinto is ; then I shall discuss the historical changes that have occurred.

The word Shinto did not exist at first. In fact it is a comparatively new technical term, which was coined about the middle of the 7th century in order to distinguish it from Buddhism, a foreign religion. The word meant then the existing type of faith embraced by the Japanese, that is, the religion peculiar to them. In other words, Shinto is the racial religion which the Japanese originally possessed and which has been developing with the Japanese race. The invention of the word was new, but the substance was very ancient.

Here arises the question as to how far back its origin can be traced. In order to answer this, we must first decide the basic point, which is the time when the Japanese people first began to live in these islands. However, the most learned circles have not yet established a satisfactory theory. Therefore, I cannot make a decisive statement. However, it was

not so recent as 3,000 or 4,000 years ago, as thought by a certain group of scholars. It appears to be very much older, probably traceable back to the Neolithic age. Moreover, it is impossible to solve the problem of the origin of Shinto in any true sense unless we go back to the religious ideas of the ancestors of the Japanese. This cannot be done in a moment. But, I should like to explain my hypothesis.

A thorough study of the problem cannot be made within the limits of Japan alone. It must be made from the point of view of all the religious ideas in countries around Japan especially those most closely related, such as Korea, the Loochoo Islands, and even the continental countries, or rather all East Asia. In my opinion, Shinto originated and developed as a phenomenon in such a wide religious circle.

For long ages up to about the 7th century, it had been making a very natural development. By natural development, I mean that it had advanced and progressed with the march of the times, always meeting the needs of the people by some natural power coming from within the Japanese themselves. However at all times there was some contact with the outside world. Of course it was not so frequent and as wholesale as it became in the 8th century. Nevertheless communication with foreign countries was steadily maintained. Therefore we must think that there was more or less foreign influence in the field of ideas as well. Consequently it cannot be concluded that Shinto ideas in general, even in those primitive days, were absolutely free from foreign influence.

Towards the end of the so-called "ancient age," Buddhism was imported via Korea. The exact date is still to be ascer-

tained. Certainly, there must have been considerable awareness of the existence of Buddhism in earlier centuries, but it is said that the religion was formally introduced to the Imperial Court in 552 (Present-day scholarship favors the date 538 A.D. *ed.*) About 100 years after its introduction, or in the beginning of the Nara period, that is, from the latter half of the 7th century to the first half of the 8th century, Buddhism was established firmly among the upper class, and then for the first time it touched Shinto, the old racial religion. This also constitutes a problem too great to be treated as limited to Japan only. To understand this first contact it is necessary to understand what happened in India, China and Korea as Buddhism came into contact with the indigenous religions there. The first step was to acknowledge such religions as they were, and to interpret their teachings from the point of view of the Buddhist doctrine. The second step was to include them in the Buddhist sphere of influence and to make them some part of Buddhistic belief. Any other alternative than the above was impossible. The most suitable example is the relation of Buddhism to Taoism, the religion peculiar to China. The deities who up to then were enshrined as deities of Taoism in sacred places (*Rei-ku*) or in noted mountains of China became believers who praised and were converted to Buddhism. They came to be worshipped as the guardian deities of temples or patron deities (*garan-shin*) who were thought of as possessing the ability to protect Buddhism. Sanno-gen-hitsu-shin-jun, the deity of the earth at Kokuseiji, the head temple of the Tendai sect, is an example.

Such being the case, it is not very difficult to make a general

survey of the development of Buddhism after its introduction into Japan. And from the practical point of view too, the course of affairs was the same as in China. The first step was a new interpretation of the kami of Shinto from the point of view of the doctrine of Buddhism. Briefly, the existence of the kami of heaven and earth (*tenjin chijin*), Japanese deities, was accepted without any objections. Moreover, the kami were regarded as having a particular significance. In the light of Buddhism they were thought of as beings born in the world of kami, which means that they were far above the human world but had not yet attained the absolute state of the Buddha or enlightenment, and were under the control of the law of cause and effect, and not free from endless transmigration. Therefore, though being kami, they had to enter the Buddhist priesthood, listen to the teachings of the Buddha, learn the Way, and do good. Then they would surely be able to obtain enlightenment and attain Buddhahood finally. Consequently man's approach to the kami is through his effort to help the kami attain Buddhahood. This effort is regarded as the joy of the kami. Such a way of thinking is quite understandable from the standpoint of the doctrines of the Buddhist sects then prevailing in Japan, such as Hosso and Kegon. It was in the Nara period, or the 8th century, that a close, practical connection was set up between Buddhism and the existing kami. At this juncture, sutras were chanted and copied, Buddhist priests were initiated into shrines, and stupas were erected for the kami. Moreover the custom of establishing shrines within temple precincts for their protection came into existence. In time the custom became popular all over the country. This is

called the idea of hearing the law (*mon-bo*), salvation (*gedatsu*) and protection of the law (*yogo*). In short, the kami were included among those people (*shujō*) who accept, embrace, and protect Buddhism. The title "Hachiman Daibosatsu" originated from this idea.

Within 100 years or by the middle of the 10th century, this great development had flowered and the summit of ideological progress had been reached. The kami are temporary figures, appearing in this world, the substance of which is the Buddha himself never changing throughout the three worlds (*san-ze*). In order to save people the Buddha appears in various form at any time and any place. His appearance in Japan is no other than as the kami. In this sense, the Buddha is the substance (*honji*) and kami the form (*suijaku*). Such is the theory of incarnation. Thus, for example, the substance of the kami of Hachiman is Amida Butsu and the kami of the Inner Shrine of Ise an incarnation of Dainichi Nyorai. A respective avatar was decided for each kami. Kami came to be considered merely as certain manifestations of Buddhist deities. Subsequently in the ideological field of this country, the above ontological view and the theory of incarnation have always been present.

From the doctrinal point of view, the relation of Shinto and Buddhism may be explained as above. Then, what was the effect upon Shinto of this relationship? In its development, Shinto itself was influenced by Buddhism and appears, as it were, to have committed itself entirely to Buddhism. From a certain point of view, one cannot help thinking that Shinto gave shelter to Buddhism only to have the entire house oc-

cupied by the latter. On the other hand, Shinto gained to no small extent by adopting the high and rich teachings of Buddhism. To cite a few examples it cannot be denied that Shinto acquired a basis as a religion of the world not limited to the Japanese alone, and, at the same time, the contribution to the religious culture of the individual was great. Moreover, the completion of the character of the kami was achieved. The kami attained a *raison d'être* and became omnipotent as a part of the Buddha, the absolute existence, and never as individual separate existences. However, it was not necessary that such a difficult theory be understood by the people in general. To them the greatest effect was the implantation of the ideas that both the kami and buddhas are equally objects of faith and answer prayers. Even today it may be said that most of the people are under the control of such ideas. Moreover it cannot be denied, in my opinion, that the adoption of the teachings of Buddhism has made prayer increasingly important in Shinto.

Onyōdō (Chinese Dualism) must also be taken into consideration. Onyōdō is not complete as a religion and it is more properly to be regarded as magical rites practiced in order to attain supernatural power (*hojitsu*). In Onyōdō, nature is regarded as personified and as having the will to rule the world. This will is revealed in natural phenomena such as the movements of the sun, moon and stars and the changes of the four seasons. Thus man must foresee this will in order to act in conformity with it. Such is the fundamental idea of Onyōdō. This manner of thinking naturally developed into astronomy and astrology and contributed much to the progress of culture. Meanwhile Onyōdō in its religious application was

concerned with the setting up of the fundamental principles of human conduct. Onyōdō was introduced into Japan in the beginning of the 7th century. Since then, its ideas have permeated all classes, high and low, and gained great popularity. Its relationship to Shinto was even closer than Buddhism. Both Onyōdō and Shinto are founded upon worship of natural power and are essentially similar in placing human life under its control. Consequently, Onyōdō, after entering Japan, adopted customs, rituals and what not of Shinto, becoming as it were a Japanese Onyōdō, and acquired a position as a sort of offshoot of Shinto. At the same time, however, there is evidence that in many cases Shinto itself was transformed into a form of Onyōdō. For example, Chinese customs were added to the old Shinto practices of purification. Onyōdō rituals such as exorcism and festivals to banish devils were adopted. And what was more, the custom of seeking the lucky hour, day or direction was introduced. Such customs permeated not only the limited sphere of Shinto but also into the daily life of the people in general. Thus the influence of Onyōdō was far greater and more natural than that of Buddhism.

Then during the Kamakura period to the middle of the Edo period or approximately the 600 years from the end of the end of the 12th century, Shinto became syncretized with Chinese ideas and learning, or more precisely with Confucianism and especially with its theory of reason and spirit (*rikisetsu*) of the Sung Dynasty and also with philosophical theories adopted from Laotze and Changtze. This brought about the rise of such schools as Watarai Shinto, Yoshida Shinto and finally Suika Shinto. The theories advocated by such schools

were not faith but rather systematized learning, which prevailed among intellectuals as Shinto philosophy, the main object of which was to explain the characters of the kami and the principles of Shinto by applying these newly imported ideas along with Buddhism.

To expand on the nature of these schools: The orthodox and proper teaching based upon the fundamental principle running through what was called by ancient sages Heaven, Earth and Man (*Ten Chi Jin*), or in a word the world is none other than Shinto. The deification of these conceptions are Ameno-Minakanushi-no-Kami and Kunitoko-tachi-no-Mikoto who are referred to in classic literature, all other deities being their divided spirits (*bunshin*). The Japanese people who are pure manifestations (*gyo-gen*) of the above can become kami after cultivation, for the fundamental principle is within themselves. Such being the basic emphasis, special stress was laid upon ontology or how to interpret the character of Ameno-minaka-nushi-no-Kami who was regarded as the fundamental divinity. It may be said that the main efforts of Shinto scholars from generation to generation were concentrated upon this problem. Therefore the existence of these schools is distinguished from Buddhism by the strong autonomous tendency centering around Japan and the fundamental importance attached to self reliance in the culture of human beings.

Later Fukko Shinto, or Renaissance Shinto, which was the school of Motoori and Hirata came into existence. This school insisted on severance from the long dependence upon foreign ideas. Later having received government support this objective was achieved. The separation of the kami and Buddhist deities

was ordered and a break was made with Chinese ideas.

At this juncture I should like to state my opinion on what is pure Shinto, free from the above mentioned foreign influences.

In the first place, I believe that prior to the beginning of relations with Buddhism, Shinto had a consistent form as a religion and had sufficient strength and content to attract belief and be mental pabulum for the Japanese of those days. When, however, we go back to the primitive ages several thousand years previous, it cannot be denied that it was bordering on an inferior animism. The study of such points is yet incomplete ; so I shall speak on the condition of Shinto in the ages when a somewhat advanced religious sense had developed. The custom of nature worship was universal. All things around men which deserved wonder, special trees, rocks, stones and even animals and vegetables were respected as deities, not to mention natural objects such as the sun, moon, and natural phenomena such as wind, rain and lightning. These were made the objects of daily worship and were believed to be closely connected with human life. It may be said that such was the entire scope of religious life. Yet the form of nature worship does not remain forever what it was in the beginning. Through objects people come to think of the activities of the spirits lurking in them. They think that everything is in the possession of some spiritual essence known as *tama*, which has its respective activities. Then they come to believe that this *tama* moves about freely apart from the object. In such a manner, progress and development are made gradually. For example, the most conspicuous object in nature worship is the

sun. Japanese mythology centered around the Sun Goddess, Amaterasu-Ō-Mikami. Consequently it can be said that at one time worship of the deity of the Sun was the most powerful central influence. At first the sun itself was believed to be the deity or in the case of Mt. Fuji, the mountain itself was the deity. But in a following period, it came to be thought that a worthy *mitama* was in the sun and that, on that account, the sun acts as it does. In a third period, this *mitama* came to be accepted in a human form. The idea that in Mt. Fuji lives a beautiful goddess who controls the mountain is an example.

Thus we must consider the acceptance of a deity in the human form. This is common to all the countries of the world and is not to be regarded as a special custom limited to Shinto only. Incidentally the ideas of ancient people, concerning the activities of *tama*, were that there was a difference as to quality and strength. The more superior a man was, the stronger and continuing was the activity of his *tama*. Such was the belief. Hence it was possible, though very rarely, to worship a living person as a deity. Meanwhile the custom became prevalent among influential clans to deify their ancestors as having the most powerful and superior *mitama*. This cannot be completely explained merely as a religious phenomenon. The ancient state of society which was organized upon the clan system centering around the Imperial Family must be taken into careful consideration. This was the cause of the appearance of ancestral deities in Shinto in the wake of natural deities. By brisk activities ancestral deities assimilated the natural deities who formerly had been regarded as human deities and included them

into their own category. To cite an example, the identification of the Sun deity, who in the remote antiquity had occupied the premier position among the numerous deities, and the Imperial Ancestral deity, that is, Amaterasu-Ō-Mikami was completed. It is possible to give other examples of similar phenomena. Thus, natural deities became human deities and then ancestral deities. Among the ancestral deities, Amaterasu-Ōmikami took the supreme and highest position. The control of the numberless other *kami*, in the words of ancient people, the *yaoyorozu-no-kami* was realized. Thus, the divine geneology was completed. Among the *kami*, a relationship of parent and child, brothers, ancestors and descendants came into existence. This took place towards the end of the ancient ages. A description of it in writing is to be found in the stories of the divine ages in the Nihongi and Kojiki. Therefore Shinto is not to be regarded as mere polytheism.

I have been speaking from the point of view of the current of historical development. Therefore I believe that Shinto was the result of natural development free on the whole from foreign ideas. There are many other things on which I must speak, such as Ameno-minakaunshino-Kami who is the *kami* of creation, rituals, customs and manners, and the moral ideas of Shinto ; but I shall speak on them some other day.