***Shintoism***

At the core of Shinto beliefs is the mysterious creating and harmonizing power (*musubi*) of kami and in the truthful way (*makoto*) of kami. The nature of kami cannot be fully explained in words, because kami transcends the cognitive faculty of man. Devoted followers, however, are able to understand kami through faith and usually recognize various kami in polytheistic form.

The **kami** began as the mysterious forces of nature associated primarily with permanent features in the landscape, such as unusual mountains, rocky cliffs, caves, springs, trees and stones. Many folk tales evolved around these holy places, which often refer to animal possession and chiefly involve foxes, badgers, dogs and cats betwitching people. Celestial bodies play only incidental roles as Shinto kami.

Today, parishioners of a shrine believe in their tutelary kami as the source of human life and existence. Each kami has a divine personality and responds to truthful prayers. The kami also reveals ***makoto*** to people and guides them to live in accordance with it. In traditional Japanese thought, truth manifests itself in empirical existence and undergoes transformation in infinite varieties in time and space. In Shinto all the deities are said to cooperate with one another, and life lived in accordance with a kami's will is believed to produce a mystical power that gains the protection, cooperation, and approval of all the particular kami.

Shinto holds a generally positive view of **human nature**. A common Shinto saying is that "man is kami's child." First, this means that a person was given his life by kami and that his nature is therefore sacred. In actuality, however, this divine nature is seldom revealed in man, which gives rise to the need for purification (see Practices, below). Second, it means that daily life is made possible by kami, and, accordingly, the personality and life of people are worthy of respect. An individual must revere the basic human rights of everyone as well as his own.

**Shinto beliefs: community**

Shinto is described as a religion of *tsunagari* ("continuity or **community**"). The Japanese, while recognizing each man as an individual personality, do not take him as a solitary being separated from others. On the contrary, he is regarded as the bearer of a long, continuous history that comes down from his ancestors and continues in his descendants. He is also considered as a responsible member of various social groups.

Motoori Norinaga stated that the human world keeps growing and developing while continuously changing. Similarly, Japanese mythology speaks of an eternity of **history** in the divine edict of Amaterasu. In its view of history, Shinto adheres to the cyclical approach, according to which there is a constant recurrence of historical patterns. Shinto does not have the concept of the "last day": there is no end of the world or of history. From the viewpoint of finite individuals, Shintoists also stress *naka-ima* ("middle present"), which repeatedly appears in the Imperial edicts of the 8th century. According to this point of view, the present moment is the very center in the middle of all conceivable times. In order to participate directly in the eternal development of the world, it is required of Shintoists to live fully each moment of life, making it as worthy as possible.

Historically, the Shinto beliefs and rituals of each local community has played an important role in **harmonizing** different elements and powers. After the Meiji Restoration (1868), Shinto was used as a means of spiritually unifying the people during repeated wars. Since the end of World War II, the age-old desire for **peace** has been reemphasized. The General Principles of Shinto Life proclaimed by the Association of Shinto Shrines in 1956 has the following article: "In accordance with the Emperor's will, let us be harmonious and peaceful, and pray for the nation's development as well as the world's co-prosperity."