

My name is Taisuke Kadosaki. I am a Shinto priest of Meiji Jingu. Today, I am very happy to be here to talk about Shinto. Thank you very much for your precious time. I am a very young priest. Please excuse my inexperience.

I would like to express my understanding of Shinto as a Japanese and as a priest.

What is the most important point that Shinto and Budo have in common?

I suppose both are “the way”. Shinto is the way of Kami. Budo is the way of Bu.

Shinto is the indigenous faith of the Japanese people. It is a way of life and a way of thinking that has been an integral part of the Japanese culture since ancient times. In Shinto, we do not have anything like the bible, or founders, or dogma or doctrine. We have been cultivating this faith for more than 3,000 years. So, What is the most important idea in Shinto?

I suppose that it is the concept of Kami. It corresponds to the divine souls, spirits, deities and so on. If we translated Kami as God in English, it would be misunderstood. So, I would like to use the Japanese word “Kami”.

It is said that there are 8million kami in Japan. It means not exactly 8million, but countless numbers of Kami are in Japan. All natural things are regarded as Kami. Also, lots of Kami can be found in mythology such as in the Kojiki, in the Nihonshoki and so on.

And other important ideas are “浄明正直(Jyo-Mei-Seichoku)”. These words represent the character of Japanese people. 浄 means purity. 明 means brightness. 正直 means honesty. It is our attitude towards the Kami, others and our selves. Nobody set up these ideas, but they grew naturally and unconsciously in the process of cultivating rice and respecting Kami.

In the 6th century, Buddhism came from china via the Korean peninsula. At that time, Japanese people accepted Buddhist deities as foreign Kami into Japanese culture.

On the other hand, Christianity was not accepted by the Japanese. I suppose monotheism was not suitable for Japanese people.

However, after World War 2, we accepted lots of western customs like Christmas. We enjoy it very much. And, lots of weddings are performed Christian-style.

I would like to explain some statistics of religious activities in Japan. According to a survey by the Agency for cultural affairs, the Japanese population is 126million, and among them, Shinto followers are 90million, Buddhists are 85million, Christians are 2million, and others are 9million.

The numbers do not add up. It shows that most Japanese follow the customs of more than one religion at the same time.

I would like to explain Japanese life cycle. Firstly, parents bring their new born baby to a Shinto shrine, it is called 初宮詣(Hatsumiya-Mode). Secondly 3, 5 and 7 year old children visit a Shinto shrine, this is called 七五三(Shichi-Go-San). Thirdly, people reach 20 years of age and they visit a Shinto shrine. I suppose the biggest event for us in our lives is our wedding. According to a survey, more than 50% of the couples in Japan get married in the Christian tradition, although most of them are not baptized Christians. Shinto style weddings are only less than 20%. Lastly, most funerals are carried out in the Buddhist tradition. Shinto style funerals are very rare in Japan.

Furthermore, we enjoy Christmas very much. Just having a party with family or friends, especially a date with our boy friend or girl friend. There is no religious meaning. On Christmas day, there is a long queue in front of each KFC in Japan because we buy chicken for our Christmas dinner. However after that, we immediately remove the Christmas decoration, and get ready for the celebration of the New Year according to Japanese tradition. It is said that more than 90million people visit a Shinto shrine or Buddhist temple on New Year's Day.

You may feel that Japanese culture is very weird. However it is Japan. Our culture is tolerant for better or worse. We try to pick up ideas and customs from other countries. And we try to understand them. On the other hand we have been keeping our authentic culture for ages. I suppose this attitude might be based on Shinto.

We respect nature and power that is beyond human wisdom. Acts that disturb the harmony were regarded as destruction of the rice farming community. It is necessary that we reach balance and harmony with nature and with each other in our lives.

There are 80,000 Shinto shrines in Japan. Wherever you go in Japan, you will see Shinto shrines from very small shrines to huge shrines like Meiji Jingu.

And in many houses you will find house hold shrines called 神棚(Kamidana).

Meiji Jingu is one of the big shrines. It was established on November 1st 1920 to enshrine the divine souls of Emperor Meiji and his wife Empress Shoken. As you know, Meiji Jingu is surrounded by 70,000 m² of forest. Actually this forest is not a natural forest, but it is completely artificial. I mean it was planted by hand.

At that time people wished to commemorate the Emperor and the Empress forever in Tokyo. 100,000 trees were donated from all over Japan, 110,000 young volunteers gathered to help with the construction of Meiji Jingu.

At that time, it was said that it was impossible to grow a forest there.

But the experts in forestry who studied forestry at Munich University made a huge effort. Now Meiji Jingu's forest is regarded as a treasure of life.

10million people visit it every year, among them 3million people visit within the first three days of the new year.

Their majesties the emperor and the empress and lots of world leaders come to Meiji Jingu to show their respect to Japanese Culture.

The famous American politician Hilary Clinton said, "Show respect for the

history and culture of Japan. The harmony and balance represented by the shrine would set the tone for the foreign policy of the USA”

I suppose Shinto or Shinto shrines are part of every day life in Japan. Shinto lies at the heart of the Japanese people. It also represents the very core of Japanese culture. To know Shinto means to know the spirit of the Japanese people. I can say Shinto is our way of life.

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