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Shinto

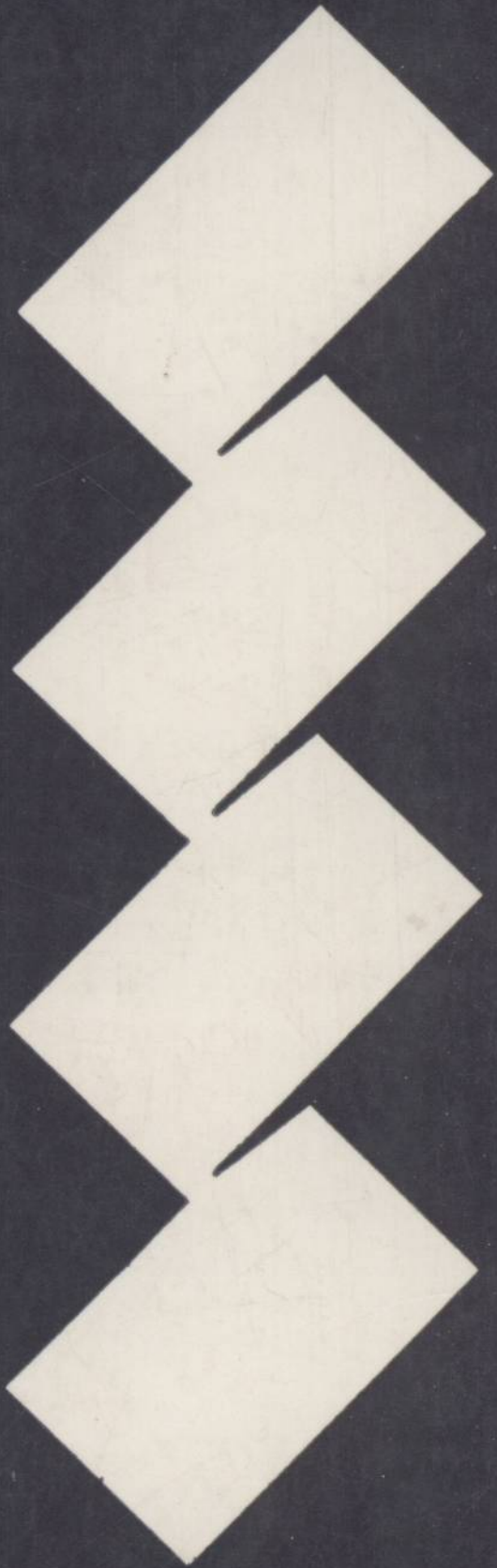
THE KAMI WAY



by Sokyo Ono

神道

小野祖教著



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Shinto

THE KAMI WAY

by

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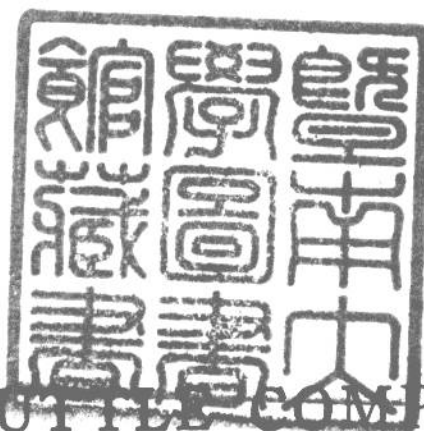
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PLATE 1 (see overleaf). OMIWA JINJA, NARA.
Front view of the worshipping hall showing
the offering box at the foot of the steps. In
the upper foreground is the sacred rope sus-
pended between the entrance pillars.



FOREWORD

This book was first published in 1960 as Bulletin No. 8 of the International Institute for the Study of Religions, Tokyo, under the title *The Kami Way: An Introduction to Shrine Shinto*. The author, Dr. Sokyo Ono, professor of Kokugakuin University and lecturer for the Association of Shinto Shrines, compiled the material as a modern presentation of the meaning of Shrine Shinto to one who has devoted his entire professional life to the study of this faith, and the enriched understanding of it by leaders of the shrine world. Mr. William P. Woodard, Director of Research for the Institute, served as collaborator and editor of the work. The illustrative sketches were prepared by Sadao Sakamoto, a priest at the Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo.

The International Institute for the Study of Religions is a non-profit, non-sectarian organization incorporated by the Ministry of Education of the Japanese Government. Its primary purpose is to assist scholars and interested laymen in gaining a better understanding of religions in Japan. To accomplish this purpose the Institute conducts research, promotes lectures and conferences, plans tours, arranges interviews with Japanese scholars and religious leaders, publishes directories, bulletins, and booklets, maintains a reference library on contemporary Japanese religions, and carries on related activities. The Institute also assists Japanese scholars and religious leaders in their study of religions in Japan and abroad.

It has indeed been gratifying to us in the Institute to see the

favorable reception enjoyed by this issue of one of its bulletins, and we are pleased that the work is now being published in a revised edition which will receive still wider distribution throughout the world.

Hideo Kishimoto
Director, International Institute
for the Study of Religions

PREFACE

Shinto, the indigenous faith of the Japanese people, has long been a source of fascination for both the casual visitor and old-timer. The strange symbolism, exotic rites, ceremonies, and festivals, and the mystic atmosphere of the shrines constitute a never-ending lure for those who would pry into the recesses of the religious faith of this people. However, except for the student who has the interest, ability, and almost inexhaustible resources in time for his investigation, Shinto remains practically a closed book.

Actually there are very few people, Japanese or foreign, who understand Shinto thoroughly and are able to explain it in detail. These scholars, including the author of this booklet, are the first to admit that there are many things which cannot be clearly explained because in some areas there is still no certain knowledge. To be sure, in the course of the centuries many Japanese have written extensively on Shinto but these are largely expressions of their individual points of view. Except for the relatively short three-quarters of a century of regimentation after the Meiji Restoration, when there was an artificial, government-created authoritative interpretation of Shinto, there has not been any large body of interpretation that is generally accepted.

Free, untrammelled, scientific research in this field is a post-World-War-II phenomenon. Consequently, it is not strange that, relatively speaking, much of it is terra incog-

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nita even to many scholars. Today, an increasing number of people are working in the area and it may be that as a result something in the nature of an accepted interpretation will emerge. There are, of course, some excellent scholarly pre-World-War-II books on Shinto, which all who wish to be informed on the subject should read; but these are all out of print and in some cases very much out of date. There is nothing available that discusses at all adequately the nature and state of Shinto, particularly Shrine Shinto, as it exists in Japan today.

In *The Kami Way*, the International Institute for the Study of Religions has attempted to provide a simple introduction to this subject. Dr. Sokyo Ono, the author, is eminently qualified to do this. As a professor of the great Shinto university, Kokugakuin Daigaku, he is training Shinto priests and scholars and, as a lecturer for the national Association of Shinto Shrines, he is endeavoring to clarify the faith for the active priesthood of the country. Dr. Ono has been a director and loyal supporter of the Institute since its foundation, and the Institute is indebted to him for the careful thought he has given to the preparation of his manuscript.

In *The Kami Way* Dr. Ono out of his rich experience has given the reader a very brief explanation of Shinto shrines and some basic concepts of the kami-faith. Of necessity much that he writes is the expression of his own personal faith. However, in view of his position in the shrine world, it is reasonable to assume that his general position is rather widely accepted. Thus, irrespective of the question of general agreement, the reader will find here an

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authentic presentation of the kami-faith by one who is deeply immersed in it and is devoting his professional career to its exposition.

In reading *The Kami Way*, some will no doubt feel the explanations are too simple. For them it is unfortunate that a more comprehensive work could not have been published. Others will appreciate the simple, straightforward explanations, but will be confused by what they will regard as a lack of clarity. They may even feel that more questions have been raised than answered. Perhaps most readers will feel this way about the explanation of the kami-concept and chapters four and five which deal with ideological matters. But as Dr. Ono says, "it is impossible to make explicit and clear that which fundamentally by its very nature is vague." (p. 8)

Every possible effort was made to avoid errors. After the original manuscript was translated by Mr. Chido Takeda, who was then a member of the Institute's staff, it was checked and edited by other staff members and parts were re-translated back into Japanese for verification. Finally, before being sent to the press, the revised manuscript was read by a competent Japanese Shinto scholar, whose suggested changes were incorporated.

In regard to the title, the editor must assume full responsibility. In the past *Shinto* has generally been translated as the "Way of the Gods," but to equate the term *kami* with the word "god" is to create a serious misunderstanding. In some cases, Izanagi and Izanami, for example, the kami are as much like people as the gods of Greece and

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Rome. In others, such as in the case of the phenomenon of growth, natural objects, the spirit dwelling in trees, and the forces of nature, the term is hardly applicable. Because of this, it is believed that the time has come when the word "kami" should be incorporated into the English language in the same way that Allah, Jehovah, Yahweh and other similar words have been.

In closing, a personal expression of appreciation is due to Dr. Ono not only for his manuscript, but for his patience during long hours of discussion regarding the meaning of certain expressions. The experience has been both pleasant and instructive.

Needless to say, the editor and collaborator is solely responsible for any errors.

William P. Woodard

Director of Research

International Institute for
the Study of Religions

— NOTE —

In writing Japanese names the practice of Japanese English-language newspapers is followed: the personal name is written first, then the family name.

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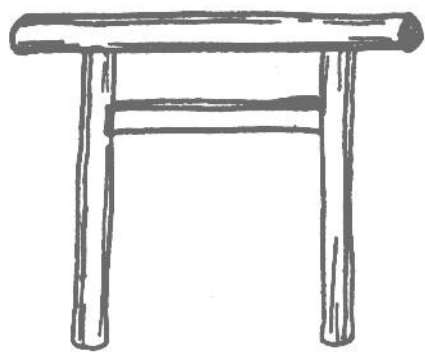
神 II 道

THE KAMI WAY

Shinto, the indigenous faith of the Japanese people, is relatively unknown among the religions of the world. Many people are familiar with the *torii*, the typical gateway to Shinto shrines, and some have a vague impression of the unique ornamentation which adorns many shrine roofs. Yet to all but a few, the shrines to which the *torii* leads and the Shinto faith which it symbolizes are very much of an enigma.

Introduction

From time immemorial the Japanese people have believed in and worshipped kami* as an expression of their native racial faith which arose in the mystic days of remote antiquity. To be sure, foreign influences are evident. This kami-faith cannot be fully understood without some reference to them. Yet it is as indigenous as the people that brought the Japanese nation into existence and ushered in its new civilization; and like that civilization, the kami-faith has progressively developed throughout the centuries and still continues to do so in modern times.



Torii

* See p. 6

THE KAMI WAY

The word *Shintō** (literally, the “Kami Way”), the modern term for this kami-faith, was not current in very primitive times. Nevertheless, it is relatively ancient. The earliest extant Japanese record of its use is in the *Nihon Shoki*** (“Chronicles of Japan,”) which was published early in the eighth century. There it was newly employed for the purpose of distinguishing the traditional faith of the people from Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism, the continental ways of thinking and believing, which in recent centuries had entered the land. There is no evidence, however, that the term in the sense in which it appears in the *Nihon Shoki* was in general use at that time, either among the people as a whole or among scholars.

Shintō is composed of two ideographs 神 (*shin*), which is equated with the indigenous term *kami*, and 道 (*dō* or *tō*), which is equated with the term *michi*, meaning “way.” Originally Chinese (*Shêntao* 神道), in a Confucian context it was used both in the sense of the mystic rules of nature, and to refer to any path leading to a grave. In a Taoist setting, it meant the magical powers peculiar to that faith. In Chinese Buddhist writings there is one instance where Gautama’s teachings are called 神道, and another in which the term refers to the concept of the mystic soul. Buddhism in Japan used the word most popularly, however, in the sense of native deities (*kami*) or the realm of the *kami*, in which case it meant ghostly beings of a lower order

* In this and the next paragraph *Shintō* is being treated as a Japanese word. Elsewhere in the text it is considered an English word and is not italicized.

** See p. 10

INTRODUCTION TO SHRINE SHINTO

than buddhas (*hotoke*). It is generally in this sense that the word was used in Japanese literature subsequent to the *Nihon Shoki*; but about the 13th century, in order to distinguish between it and Buddhism and Confucianism, which had by that time spread throughout the country, the kami-faith was commonly referred to as *Shintō*, a usage which continues to this day.

Unlike Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam, Shinto has neither a founder, such as Gautama the Enlightened One, Jesus the Messiah, or Mohammed the Prophet; nor does it have sacred scriptures, such as the sutras of Buddhism, the Bible, or the Qur'an (Koran).

In its personal aspects "Shinto" implies faith in the kami, usages practiced in accordance with the mind of the kami, and spiritual life attained through the worship of and in communion with the kami. To those who worship kami, "Shinto" is a collective noun denoting all faiths. It is an all-inclusive term embracing the various faiths which are comprehended in the kami-idea. Its usage by Shintoists, therefore, differs from calling Buddha's teaching "Buddhism" and Christ's teaching "Christianity."

In its general aspects Shinto is more than a religious faith. It is an amalgam of attitudes, ideas, and ways of doing things that through two milleniums and more have become an integral part of the *way* of the Japanese people. Thus, Shinto is both a personal faith in the kami and a communal way of life according to the mind of the kami, which emerged in the course of the centuries as various ethnic and cultural influences, both indigenous and foreign, were

fused, and the country attained unity under the Imperial Family.

Mythology

The Age of the Kami, the mythological age, sets the Shinto pattern for daily life and worship. In the mythology the names and order of appearance of the kami differ with the various records. According to the *Kojiki** the Kami of the Center of Heaven (Ame-no-minaka-nushi-no-kami) appeared first and then the kami of birth and growth (Takamimusubi-no-mikoto and Kami-musubi-no-mikoto). However, it is not until the creative couple, Izanagi-no-mikoto and Izanami-no-mikoto, appear that the mythology really begins. These two, descending from the High Plain of Heaven, gave birth to the Great Eight Islands, that is, Japan, and all things, including many kami. Three of the kami were the most august: the Sun Goddess (Ama-terasu-ō-mikami), the kami of the High Plain of Heaven; her brother (Susa-no-ō-no-mikoto), who was in charge of the earth; and the Moon Goddess, (Tsuki-yomi-no-mikoto), who was the kami of the realm of darkness.

The brother, however, according to the *Kojiki*, behaved so very badly and committed so many outrages that the Sun Goddess became angry and hid herself in a celestial cave, which caused the heavens and earth to become darkened. Astonished at this turn of events, the heavenly kami put on an entertainment, including dancing, which brought her out of the cave; and thus light returned to the world. For

* See p. 10

his misdemeanor the brother was banished to the lower world, where by his good behavior he returned to the favor of the other kami, and a descendant of his, the Kami of Izumo (*Ōkuni-nushi-no-kami*), became a very benevolent kami, who ruled over the Great Eight Islands* and blessed the people. Little is said in the mythology of the Moon Kami.

Subsequently, the grandson of the Sun Goddess, *Ninigi-no-mikoto*, received instructions to descend and rule Japan. To symbolize his authority he was given three divine treasures: a mirror, a sword, and a string of jewels. Moreover, he was accompanied on his journey by the kami that had participated in the entertainment outside the celestial cave. However, to accomplish his mission it was necessary to negotiate with the Kami of Izumo, who after some discussion agreed to hand over the visible world, while retaining the invisible. At the same time, the Kami of Izumo pledged to protect the heavenly grandson. *Ninigi-no-mikoto's* great grandson, Emperor Jimmu, became the first human ruler of Japan.

This, in very simple form, is the basic myth which explained for primitive Japanese their origin and the basis of their social structure. It is a description of the evolution of Japanese thought in regard to the origin of life, the birth of the kami and all things out of chaos, the differentiation of all phenomena, and the emergence and evolution of order and harmony. In a sense, the myth amounts to something like a simple constitution for the country. However, in the ancient records the account is not uniform.

* See p. 4