



Briefing note: **Shinto**

Shinto is often referred to as the 'Japanese Religion' and has an influential impact on Japanese culture, values and traditions for over 2000 years, and reflects the Japanese way of looking at the world – hence the claim: 'more than just a religion'. Shinto is based around rituals rather than any concrete beliefs. Although Shintoism has been part of Japanese life and culture throughout its history, it has also shared its ethical, spiritual and cultural vision with Buddhism and Confucianism. The origins of Shinto belief are unknown but legends and folk beliefs points to its beginnings from the imperial emperors of Japan.

Beliefs

Kami – Shinto is the 'way of the Gods' - not necessarily Gods in the traditional sense, they can be 'spiritual beings' or 'enlightened humans' They can also be symbols of nature, that is why it is sometimes translated as 'The Way of the Awesome'. Honouring the Kami is said to bring good fortune. Worshippers honour the Kami by putting a small offering in a collection box – and then bow and recite a short prayer at the Shrine of the Kami.

Shinto Prayer – Shinto prayers are deeply personal. Community worship takes place at a shrine in villages and towns.

Texts

The holy books of Shinto are the Kojiki – The records of Ancient Matters (712 CE) and the Nihon-gi – Chronicals of Japan (720 CE). These books are collections and anthologies of ancient myths and tradition learning that were previously passed down orally.

Holy days and festivals

Shinto festivals are celebrated at shrines and are a combination of quiet rituals and loud celebrations. The key Shinto festivals are:

- **Matsuri** – anytime for giving thanks and praise to a deity at a shrine.
- **Oshogatsu** (New Year) – This is a huge festival, where people come to thank the Kami and make New year resolutions.
- **Seijin Shiki** (Adults Day) – This is a coming of Age ceremony, for people who have just reached their 20th birthday.
- **Haru Matsuri** (Spring festivals) - this is a time for many festivals, mostly involving involving the planting of crops.
- **Aki Matsuri** (Autumn festivals) – a time for thanking God for a good harvest
- **Shichigosan** – a festival where parents give thanks for their children's lives and pray for their future.
- **Rei-sai** (Annual festival) – this is celebrated at a date which is relevant to the shrine where it occurs. It involves a procession with musicians and dancers.

Ethics

The Shinto faith revolves around ideas of purity of the body. That is way followers are opposed to organ donations and organ transplants. They believe that the relationship between the dead person and those bereaving will be spoiled.



Q For further information on faith dates and religious festivals follow this link: <http://www.equality.leeds.ac.uk/for-staff/good-practice-guidance/faith-calendar-and-dates-of-religious-festivals/>

Q This information sheet was produced using information taken from external faith bodies, diversity organisations and national faith calendars, including information found in the 'Faith Communities Navigator' by the Faith Regen Foundation.