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## Shinto faith statement

*This statement was prepared by the Jinja Honcho, the representative body of all Shinto Shrines in Japan.*

### The Kami

The ancient Japanese considered that all things of this world have their own spirituality, as they were born from the divine couple. Therefore, the relationship between the natural environment of this world and people is that of blood kin, like the bond between brother and sister.

"In the beginning of the universe there appeared various Kami, or deities from the chaos. A pair of male and female deities appeared at the end and gave birth first to islands, their natural environment, and then to several more deities who became ancestors of the Japanese."

An agricultural society based on rice cultivation like that of Japan cannot exist without unification and harmony among all things on this earth: mountains, rivers, the sun, rain, animals, and plants, not to mention cooperation among people. So, it was natural that people developed the idea that they could make their society flourish only when they worked together, fully performing their own role, but at the same time, helping and supporting each other. This gave rise to the spirit of revering various Kami, the land, nature, people, and, on top of that, the spirit of appreciation of harmony among all these aspects of Nature.

### The Children of Kami

Shinto regards that the land, its nature, and all creatures including humans are children of Kami. Accordingly, all things existing on this earth have the possibility of becoming Kami. Nevertheless, revered status as Kami is limited to those that live quite extraordinary lives beyond human wisdom or power and that have a profound influence, for good or ill, on human beings. As to natural elements or phenomena that have such enormous power, there exist Kami of Rain, Kami of River, Kami of Thunder, Kami of Wind, Kami of Mountain, Kami of Ocean. All these Kami are involved in the life of a rice-cultivating agricultural society.

Speaking of the reverence toward Kami of Mountain, it started with people's awareness of mountains as an important source of water for rice cultivation. Then, people came to regard the mountain itself as a sacred object. This mountain faith prepared the way not only for the preservation of mountain forests but also for conservation of the cycle of the ecosystem, given the fact that mountain forests supply rich nutrition to seas through the rivers, and support good inshore fishing.

In ancient times, reverence toward a holy mountain was expressed by paying respect directly to the mountain itself. Nowadays, Shinto has a building, or a compound of buildings, where Kami spirit dwells permanently, and people worship by performing Matsuri - a festival to offer prayers to Kami - in these buildings.

### Matsuri Festivals for Nature

There are many kinds of Matsuri performed in each locality throughout the year. Large or small, these Matsuri are mostly based on the agricultural cycle. Two of the most important festivals each year are the spring festival called Kinensai, a festival to pray for a rich harvest, and the autumn festival called Niinamesai, a festival to offer thanks for the successful harvest. People of each locality have been carrying out these festivals every year since ancient times. In this sense, it can be said that Shinto consists of reverence and gratitude to the land, its nature, and the life that these natural elements give to human beings.

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With the reverence of Kami, Shinto spontaneously developed through the way of life of the ancient Japanese. It has neither written dogma nor a teaching book, but people revere numerous deities who are figuratively described as "8 million different deities." A deity with a female form, Amaterasu Ohmikami, is revered most highly among them, but the idea of one absolute god or a hierarchy among numerous Kami has never existed, and still does not. Yet, each Kami has an individual character to which people offer their worship, believing in that as the virtue of each Kami.



Ise Grand Shrine,  
Ise, Japan

## Suggestions from Shinto

Shinto regards the land and its environment as children of Kami. In other words, Shinto sees nature as the divinity itself. These days, people often say, "Be gentle to nature" or "Be gentle to the earth." But these expressions sound somehow like the fault of putting the cart before the horse. We feel it is humanity's arrogance. It seems that humans can dominate nature as the master and ultimately "repair" nature, using technical-scientific means. But Kami are the origin of all lives, and the life of all things is deeply connected to them. This leads to an awareness of the sacredness of life and an appreciation for life given by Kami.

From ancient times, Japanese people have faced nature and invisible existence with awe and appreciation. And they used to have a principle: "*to return the thing given to the human as a gift of nature to its original place.*" Until the Edo era (1603–1867) this circulation system of Japanese society functioned very well. After that, with the development of modern industry, the level of Japanese life was elevated in material terms, and now people enjoy lives free of want.

But in fact, the Japanese spirituality inherited from the ancient ancestors has been gradually lost or hidden somewhere deep in our consciousness. It might not be an exaggeration if we said that not only environmental problems but also all problems of modern society have been caused by lack of the awe, reverence, and appreciation for nature that ancient people used to have and taught us.

## In Conclusion

Environmental issues, after all, depend on our self-awareness of the problems and our determination to take responsibility. We often say that things look different depending upon one's viewpoint.

So, Shinto suggests that we should shift our point of view and look at our environment with the spirit of "reverence and gratitude," that is, with the spirit of parental care for children or with the spirit of brotherhood. And if we can extend this spirit to our neighbors, to our society members, to our country members, to peoples of the world, and to nature, too, transcending differences of thought, ethics, and religion, then this spirit will serve to foster criteria and morals indispensable for keeping our human life healthy.

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