GUIDE · SHINTO

A guide for people of the Shinto tradition.

Shinto has no founder, no single scripture, and little formal ethical doctrine, and it does not teach that life is a test. Its core concerns are kami, ritual purity, gratitude, and the harmony of the community; the old chronicles are mythic and historical records, not moral codes. Related ideas appear around the edges: purification after wrongdoing or pollution, makoto (sincerity or genuineness, a value with Shinto associations), and harmony among neighbors.



In your own tradition

> "...it is meet that I should cleanse my body from its pollutions."
>
> NIHONGI, BOOK I (AGE OF THE GODS), IZANAGI AFTER YOMI · W. G. ASTON, NIHONGI: CHRONICLES OF JAPAN FROM THE EARLIEST TIMES TO A.D. 697, 1896 · READ IT IN CONTEXT

> "But when those above are harmonious and those below are friendly, and there is concord in the discussion of business, right views of things spontaneously gain acceptance."
>
> NIHONGI, BOOK XXII (SUIKO), CONSTITUTION OF PRINCE SHOTOKU, ARTICLE I · W. G. ASTON, NIHONGI: CHRONICLES OF JAPAN FROM THE EARLIEST TIMES TO A.D. 697, 1896 · READ IT IN CONTEXT

> "When Heaven establishes a Prince, it is for the sake of the people. The Prince must therefore make the people the foundation."
>
> NIHONGI, BOOK XI (NINTOKU), 7TH YEAR · W. G. ASTON, NIHONGI: CHRONICLES OF JAPAN FROM THE EARLIEST TIMES TO A.D. 697, 1896 · READ IT IN CONTEXT

Five things to do this week

- [ ] **Pause and cleanse**
  Rinse your hands and mouth, as at a shrine basin, before an important task, and take a quiet moment to begin fresh.

- [ ] **Tidy a shared place**
  Sweep a stairwell, sidewalk, or common room that is not yours alone. Communities traditionally keep shrine grounds clean together.

- [ ] **Say only what you mean**
  Practice makoto this week: keep one small promise exactly, and avoid saying what you do not mean.

- [ ] **Help a neighborhood event**
  Offer a hand at a local festival, cleanup, or gathering so community harmony is built by work and not only by wishes.

- [ ] **Give thanks quietly**
  Before a meal or at a place you love, pause in gratitude to the unseen powers and people who made it possible.

Questions to bring to your own teacher

- How does our shrine or priest teach makoto in dealings with strangers and with people who cannot repay us?
- How do we understand the kami's regard for us, as watching our conduct, or as presences to be honored and thanked?
- What does purification mean in our practice, ritual cleansing only, or also making amends for wrongdoing?

What this guide is not claiming. Shinto is diverse (shrine, folk, and sectarian forms, and a modern history of State Shinto), and many people practice it alongside Buddhism. The passages here come from 8th-century chronicles whose later parts show Chinese and Buddhist influence, so this guide offers resonance only and does not claim Shinto teaches that life is a test. I am not a scholar of your tradition, and no tradition or its leaders have endorsed this site. Ask your own teachers and community what these passages mean to them.

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A free message about how we treat each other. Nothing to buy, nothing to join. One person’s hypothesis, not advice. Woodcut images were made with AI tools; the words are Keith Adler’s. Share freely.