



Reach

Newsletter of the Vedanta Centres of Australia

SAYINGS AND TEACHINGS

Sri Ramakrishna on a True Teacher

He alone is the true teacher who is illumined by the light of true knowledge.

Source: *Great Sayings: Words of Sri Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda*; The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture; Calcutta; page 9.

Sri Sarada Devi on Herself

Sri Ramakrishna left me behind to manifest the Motherhood of God to the world.

Source: *Great Sayings: Words of Sri Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda*; The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture; Calcutta; page 20.

Swami Vivekananda on Man

Take up one idea. Make that one idea your life—think of it, dream of it, live on that idea. Let the brain, muscles, nerves, every part of your body, be full of that idea, and just leave every other idea alone. This is the way to success.

Source: *Great Sayings: Words of Sri Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda*; The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture; Calcutta; page 35-36.

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by Swami Sridharananda

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We welcome you all to the Vedanta Movement in Australia, as epitomized in the lives of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda, and invite you to involve yourselves and actively participate in the propagation of the Universal Message of Vedanta.

1. NEWS FROM AUSTRALIAN CENTRES 11 SEPTEMBER 2020 TO 10 DECEMBER 2020

ADELAIDE

16 East Terrace, Kensington Gardens, SA 5068

Email: vedanta.adelaide@gmail.com

Contact: Dr Raman Sharma on (08) 8431 9775

Mrs Pathma Iswaran on (08) 8379 5336

URL: <http://vedantaadelaide.org>

Daily Activities

- The Centre functions from 7.30am-12.30pm and 4.00-8.00pm. The evening vesper service to Sri Ramakrishna is performed from 7.00-7.30 pm followed by *bhajans*, devotional reading and meditation.

Regular Activities

- Swami Manyananda conducted classes and discussions on the *Vedanta Sara* - 'Fundamentals of Vedanta' every Wednesday from 11:00 am to 12:00 noon.
- Swami Manyananda is also conducting classes on the *Narada Bhakti Sutras* on Sundays from 11:00 am.
- Every alternative Saturday, Swami Manyananda has been conducting a reading and discussion on *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* before the evening *aratrikam*.

Celebrations

- *Durga puja* or *navaratri* was celebrated on Saturday, 24 October 2020. The programme included *puja*, Vedic chanting, *bhajans*, *pushpanjali*, *prasad* distribution and a short talk on the 'Significance of Durga Puja' by Swami Manyananda. In the evening there was the chanting of the Mahisasura Mardhini Stotram and *bhajans*.
- *Kali puja* or *diwali* was celebrated on Saturday, 14 November 2020 with *puja*, *bhajans*, *pushpanjali* and *prasad* distribution.



Worship of Mother Durga in Adelaide



Some of the Devotees at the Kali puja / Diwali function

Other Activities

- The 15th Annual General Meeting of the Vedanta Centre of Adelaide was held on Sunday, 11 October 2020. Swami Sridharananda, Swami Manyananda, Swami Dhyanananda, Br Ram, the executive committee members and many devotees were present. Swami Sridharananda also gave two talks on 'The principles of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Movement for the present times' and 'Significance of Karma Yoga'.



The Annual General Meeting at Adelaide

BRISBANE

96 Vedanta Drive, (next to 2 Poppy Crescent),
Springfield Lakes, QLD 4300

Email: info@vedantabrisbane.org

Contact: Swami Atmeshananda (07) 3818 9986

URL: <http://vedantabrisbane.org>

Daily Activities

- Meditation and the chanting of hymns were conducted between 6:15 am and 7:15 am on all days except Sundays when it is held from 7 am to 7:30 am.
- Vesper service (aratrikam), bhajans, and readings from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* were held between 6:30 pm and 7:15 pm.
- Members were encouraged to visit the Centre and discuss topics concerning spiritual life.

Regular Activities

- Sunday mornings:- (a) Yoga class from 8:00 am to 9:15 am. (b) *Srimad-Bhagavad Gitā* Class (10:00 am—11:00 am). (c) *Bala Sangha* or children's classes and *Yuva Sangha* (10:00 am—11:00 am during school term).
- A class on the *Brahma Sutras* was conducted on Tuesdays from 11 a.m. to 12 noon.
- A Vedic Chanting class was held on Wednesdays from 8:30 am to 9:30 am online.
- Classes on *Meditation and Spiritual Life* from

7:00 pm — 8:00 pm at 134 Fleming Rd, Chapel Hill, Qld) on alternate Fridays.

- Chanting of the *Sri Ramanama Sankirtanam* was held fortnightly at the Centre on *ekadashi* days (7:30 pm — 8:00 pm).
- Devotees took turns in decorating and worshipping Sri Ramakrishna's image every week at the Sri Selva Vinayakar temple, South Maclean, Qld.
- Swami Atmeshananda conducted *Vivekachudamani* classes for the Vedanta Group at Toowoomba on the first Wednesday of every month.
- A class on the *Ashtavakra Gita* was conducted at 101 Sharpless Drive, Springfield Lakes, on a fixed day of the month.
- On the third Saturday of every month, the *Bhagavad Gita* was studied online by the Vedanta group at the Gold Coast from 5.30 p.m. to 6.30 p.m.
- On alternate Fridays, the Centre's volunteers cooked food at its soup kitchen for the benefit of the needy. An average of 100 meals per week are cooked by volunteers, packed into containers and frozen. They are distributed free of cost through the Westside Community Centre, Goodna Street Life shop, Queensland Youth and Families Support Services and the Base Youth Support Services.
- Every Friday the Centre's Food bank distributed groceries to the needy. An average of 12 grocery hampers along with cooked food and free bread was distributed to the needy.
- The Maa Sarada's kitchen prepares and sells food at a reasonable cost to people. On an average, about 120 persons avail themselves of this service. The kitchen is efficiently managed by volunteers.
- On Fridays, a Justice of the Peace (JP) renders service at the Centre from 10 am to 11 a.m. People needing the service access this free service.

Other Activities

- The Centre organized children's vacation programmes during school holidays on 21, 24 & 28 September & 1 October 2020. Meditation, Yoga, story-telling, painting workshop, positive affirmations, gardening and a creative writing workshop were conducted. 30 children participated in this programme.



Children's Vacation Camp in Brisbane

- The Annual Multicultural Programme of the Centre was conducted on 10 October 2020. A special stage was erected at the Centre's lower ground floor area to conduct the programme. Senator Shayne Neumann, Federal MP, Ms. Charis Mullen, MP (representing Hon. Stirling



Annual Day Multicultural Event

Hinchliffe, Queensland Multicultural Affairs Minister), Councillor Nicole Jonic, Ipswich City council and other dignitaries attended the programme. The event consisted of Welcome to the Country by Shannon Ruska, an Aboriginal representative, dances by Walker School of Irish

Dance, Nadananjali School of Dance, African Fusion Music, dance by The Thai Culture and Language School of Brisbane, dance by Eshwaralaya Kalaikoodam, dance by The Flamenco Studio and Drums by Toko-Ton Taiko Japanese drumming group. Swami Sri-dharananda's video message was played and Dr. Ashim Majumdar, Vice President of the Centre welcomed the audience. Ashneel Padarath gave the vote of thanks. Due to Covid restrictions, a maximum number of 60 persons were allowed to be present. However, the event was broadcast live on Facebook and Youtube. The Government of Queensland supported the event through their grants programme.

- On the occasion of the National Mental Health Week, the Centre organized a workshop entitled 'Mind your mind' on 18 October 2020. A panel of expert speakers and presenters on mental health conducted the day long workshop. Around 35 persons participated in this. The interactive sessions were informative and instructive and was much appreciated by the partici-



National Mental Health Week

pants.

- A devastating hail storm hit Springfield Lakes on 31 October 2020. The Centre distributed cooked meals to the YMCA, Springfield Lakes - who had set up a camp for people affected by the hail storm on 13 November 2020.
- A volunteer appreciation programme was organized on 13 November 2020. After evening prayers, many of the volunteers were recognized and acknowledged for their selfless ser-



YMCA, Springfield Lakes

vice to the Centre. A thanksgiving hamper was given to the family of each volunteer.

Celebrations

- During *navaratri*, *Sri Durga Saptashati* (*Sri Sri Chandī*) was chanted every day from 6 a.m. to 7.30 a.m. from 17 to 25 October 2020. A few devotees attended them in person and it was broadcast



Durga Puja

live on Facebook and Youtube.

- On Saturday, 24 October 2020, the *ashtami* day (the eighth day of *navaratri* festival), *Durga Puja* was conducted at the Centre. Considering the COVID-19 restrictions, a limited number of participants (60 persons) were allowed to attend the worship. The worship was broadcast live on Facebook and Youtube.
- *Shanti jal* (sprinkling of peace water) was conducted on 25 October 2020 after evening *aratrikam*.

Other News

- A sum of \$12, 500 was received by the Centre from the Community Energy and Efficiency and Solar Grants programme. This amount, along with a generous donation of \$15, 600 by a devotee helped the Centre to install a 30KW solar system at the Centre which was commissioned on 20 November 2020. This will help in reducing greenhouse footprints and the Cen-



The Vedanta Centre's Solar Panels

tre's power bills.

Forthcoming Programmes

- During the school holidays in December and January, the Centre will conduct holiday camps for children aged from 5 to 11. The dates for these are 14 to 17 December, 11 to 14 January 2021 and 18 to 21 January 2021.
- Christmas Eve service will be held on 24 December 2020.
- *Kalpataru day* will be observed at the Centre on 1 January 2021.
- Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi's birthday will be celebrated on 5 January 2021. In addition, a public programme will take place on 10 January.

CANBERRA

17 Bean Crescent, Mckellar, ACT 2617

Email: vedacanberra@gmail.com

Contact: Mr Jaishankar Venkataraman 62587612/0433593860

Regular Activities

- On account of the Covid 19 pandemic the Gita classes have been suspended temporarily. Friends and devotees are accessing the classes online. When the classes recommence they will be held at the Belconnen Community Meeting Room, 12 Chandler St, Belconnen, ACT. Monthly lectures are advertised by e-mail once

MELBOURNE

5-7 Angus Ave, Ringwood East, VIC 3135

scheduled.

Email: vedanta.melb@gmail.com

Contact: Swami Sunishthananda (03) 8684 9594

URL <http://www.vedantamelbourne.org>

Regular Activities

- The shrine was open from 7:00 am to 1:00 pm and 4:00 pm to 8:00 pm seven days a week.
- Vesper service (*aratrikam*), *bhajans*, reading from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and meditation were conducted between 7:00 pm and 8:00 pm daily.
- *Rama Nama Sankirtanam* on *Ekadasi* Days.
- A scriptural class on Sundays from 10:00 am to 11:30 am on *A Study of Swami Vivekananda's Karma Yoga* by Swami Sunishthananda which was conducted online from 5 April 2020 due to the restrictions brought on by Covid 19.
- Guided meditation followed by a class on Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* on Thursdays from 7:30 pm to 9:00 pm. This class was conducted online from 5 April 2020 due to the restrictions brought on by Covid 19.

Celebrations

- On the morning of Saturday, 24 October 2020,



Durga Puja in Melbourne



Kali puja celebrations in Melbourne

Sri Sri Durga Ashtami puja was celebrated online. The programme included worship, *homa*, offerings, *bhajans* and *pushpanjali*.

- On the evening of Saturday, 14 November 2020, *Sri Sri Kali puja* was celebrated online. The Bengali Association of Victoria collaborated to host the online event. The programme included *puja*, offerings, and *bhajans* and *pushpanjali*.

Other Activities

- Swami Sunishthananda participated in an online Inter-Spiritual Seminar organized by The Interfaith Centre of Melbourne on Sunday 13 September 2020. The theme of the seminar was "Uncertainty and the Possibilities of Hope".

- An online Spiritual Retreat was conducted on Sunday, 11 October 2020, which was attended by 50 participants.
- Swami Sunishthananda participated in an online Interfaith Seminar organized by Maroondah Interfaith Network on Saturday, 14 November 2020. The theme of the seminar was "Building Community".
- Swami Sunishthananda participated in an online Diwali Celebration organized by the Hindu Council of Australia on Tuesday, 17 November 2020. He started the session with Peace Chants and delivered a short speech on "Significance of Diwali". Hon Ros Spence, the Minister of Multicultural Affairs, Victoria, was the Guest of Honour for the online event.

PERTH

51 Golf View Street, Yorkine, WA 6060

Email: vedantaperth@gmail.com

Contact: Sumita Chetty (04) 3892 8136

Parthiv Parekh 0430 511 699

Regular Activities:

- *Aratrikam* was conducted each night by a person or family taking the responsibility for it.

Special Activities

- A prayer meeting was held on Sunday, 27 September 2020 in remembrance of Dr. Amrithalingam. Dr. Amrithalingam passed away peacefully at home surrounded by his family on Sunday, 16 August 2020 in Perth, Western Australia. Dr. Amrithalingam was a lifelong ardent devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda. He was one of the few pioneers who initiated the advent of Vedanta and the Ramakrishna Order into Australia. The prayer meeting included a special message from Swami Sridharananda, prayers, bhajans and talks by devotees and friends of his life's work. The meeting concluded with the distribution of *prasadam*.
- A *satsang* was held on 18 October 2020. The *satsang* included prayers, *bhajans* and the distribution of *prasad*.



Prayer Meeting for Dr. Amrithalingam

Forthcoming Activities:

- A busy bee has been organized for 13 December 2020.
- A *satsang* will be held on 22 December 2020.
- Christmas Eve.
- Holy Mother's birthday will be observed on 5 January 2021 with *aratrikam*.

SYDNEY

2 Stewart Street, Ermington, NSW 2115

144A Marsden Road, Ermington, NSW 2115 (Entry)

Email: vedasydney@vedantasydney.org

Contact: (02) 8197 7351

URL: www.vedantaaustralia.org

Daily Activities

- The shrine was open from 6:30 am to 1:00 pm and 4:00 pm to 8:30 pm seven days a week.
- Meditation from 6:30 am to 7:00 am and chanting from 7:00 am to 7:30 am.
- Vesper service (*aratrikam*), *bhajans*, and readings from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* were conducted from 7:00 pm to 8:00 pm. The times change on special occasions.

Regular Activities

- Swami Sridharananda conducted his study of the *Srimad-Bhagavad Gitā* on Sundays between

9:30 am and 10:30 am. Due to the current restrictions owing to Covid 19, the talks were pre-recorded and uploaded to the Centre's website and Youtube Channel.

- Swami Sridharananda conducted a class on the *Mundaka Upanishad* on Saturdays from 11:00am to 12:00 noon. Due to the current restrictions owing to Covid 19, the talks were pre-recorded and uploaded to the Centre's website and Youtube Channel.
- *Sri Rāmanāma Sankirtanam* was conducted on *ekadashi* days after the vesper service.
- Devotees also received spiritual counselling and guidance.

Celebrations

- Durga puja or *navaratri* was observed at the Vedanta Centre on 24 October 2020. Because of the Covid restrictions a simple puja was performed with devotees paying their respects in small batches. There were about 120 people

who visited the shrine at different times on the eighth day of the worship.



Durga Puja at the Vedanta Centre of Sydney

Obituary: Reflections on the Life of Late Dr. Amrithalingam

by Swami Sridharananda

I would like to share with you my reflections on the Sinnathamby family. So that at the end you will realize, how deeply involved this family is in serving the Vedanta Movement in Australia. You will also realize my personal, grateful association with this family.

Dr. Amrithalingam's father, Mr Sinnathamby, before he got married, entertained the desire of becoming a monk of the Ramakrishna Order along with his friend, commonly known as Mahavir. They reported themselves to Swami Shivananda ji, the 2nd President of the Ramakrishna Order, and a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. Swami Shivananda ji told Mr Sinnathamby unambiguously, "No, you have to raise a family and you will remain a very devoted loyal person to see the progress of the Vedanta Movement, wherever you

may be". But, he did ask his friend Mahavir to become a monk. He later became Swami Prematmananda ji, whom I happened to know personally, when he was the head of the Colombo Centre.

Due to his father's influence, Dr. Amrithalingam imbibed knowledge of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda from an early age. In early 1939 Dr. Amrithalingam accompanied his father to Belur Math. His father was the first person to be initiated by Swami Virajananda ji, who was a direct disciple of the Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi. Swami Virajananda ji was initiated into *sannyasa* by Swami Vivekananda and also went on to become the 6th President of the Ramakrishna Order.

I came in touch with the Ramakrishna Movement in 1945. At that time, this incident of initiation of Mr Sinnathamby, the father of Amrithalingam, was very much a point of discussion amongst the swamis. Mr. Sinnathamby was initiated under very auspicious circumstances and it had a great impact on me. I heard about it as a young boy. Somehow or other, I developed an attachment for the family and I wanted to know them very well, specially, Dr Amrithalingam.

Dr. Amrithalingam and his wife Savithiri Amma had a thirst to know more about Hindu thought and culture. Although he did not know him personally, Dr. Amrithalingam wrote to Swami Ranganathananda ji and invited him to come to Australia. In June 1971, Swami Ranganathananda ji graciously accepted Dr. Amrithalingam's offer and stayed for approximately 4 weeks in Perth at his home. During his stay, Swami Ranganathananda ji held daily *satsangs* and lectures at Dr. Amrithalingam's house and, also gave lectures at the University of Western Australia that Dr. Amrithalingam helped organize.

After Swami Ranganathananda ji's visit, Dr. Amrithalingam along with Mr Cecil Bethell were the pioneers who helped found the Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre in Perth. He and Savithiri Amma hosted numerous Ramakrishna monks at their home and helped organize *satsangs* and lectures.

I first came to Australia in 1993 on invitation for a speaking assignment, which was organized by Swami Damodarananda ji of Fiji to celebrate the Centenary of the Parliament of Religions, which was held in 1893. During both my onward and return journeys to Fiji from India, I had to stop over at Malaysia, Singapore, Australia and New Zealand. So, I had two visits to Australia in 1993. When I visited Perth I was a guest of the Amrithalingam family, where Dr. Amrithalingam and

Savithiri Amma took care of me. Apart from Swami Ranganathananda ji, they have also taken care of other Swamis who visited Australia, including Swamis Bhuteshananda ji, Gahanananda ji, Rudrananda ji, Damodarananda ji and others.

That was the first time I met Dr. Amrithalingam, and we became very close friends because there was not much of an age difference between us. During this meeting, I told him about what I had heard about his father's initiation, and he corroborated the information that I had. So, his father and myself, happened to be the disciples of the same Guru. So, my relationship with the family based on this fact, became stronger. That is how it all developed, and that is how the intimacy started.

I again visited Australia in 1997. I was in Perth twice as a guest of the Amrithalingam family. Savithiri Amma and Dr. Amrithalingam cared for me. They were wonderfully hospitable and affectionate hosts, who organized all the talks, etc. Later on, this family was a pillar to establish the Vedanta Movement in Perth when I was posted to Australia permanently in the year 2000.

The first official centre that started in Perth was at Bull Creek, at the residence of Mr and Mrs Sinnathamby. That house was donated by the family to start the Vedanta Centre activity in Perth. And after retiring from Fiji, Swami Damodarananda ji stayed in that house for a long time. And, I used to visit there regularly from Sydney to hold spiritual talks, and interact with the devotees.

Because it was far away from the main city, and it was a very small house, it was decided we move into the city, and by God's Grace and the guidance of Dr. Amrithalingam and his family, we bought the present Church property in Yokine, from the Anglican Church. Dr. Amrithalingam, Savithiri

Amma and the children all believed that this is the place that Guru Maharaj should be.

You all know how this family stood like a rock, and were a help and support to me through their counselling, by educating me about the conditions of this country, financial assistance, emotional help, and rational guidance. I have no words enough to express my gratitude to Dr. Amrithalingam and Savithiri Amma. You all now know how the Vedanta Movement has established itself in Perth with deep roots.

When the 150th year of Swamiji's Birth Anniversary was being observed, the Committee of the Vedanta Movement in Australia, wanted to honour the Amrithalingam family. Dr. Amrithalingam Sinnathamby and Mrs Savithiri Sinnathamby were declared the lifelong patrons of the Vedanta Centre of Perth. I had that great honour and privilege of handing over the plaque to both of them in Sydney.

I am told, and I knew that Dr. Amrithalingam loved to walk early in the morning before the break of dawn, all by himself. And that is how he started his daily routine, right in the morning. Now he is on a long walk. The destination is to be near Guru Maharaj and Holy Mother.

I am sure he has reached his destination after his long walk alone, and he is being comforted by Guru Maharaj and Holy Mother as their beloved child. May it be so.

May the blessings of the Divine Trinity give courage and forbearance to the family and friends. This is my unending prayer.

Thank you.

2. FEATURE ARTICLE

A. Shintō

Shintō, is the indigenous religious beliefs and practices of Japan. The name Shintō comes from Chinese characters for Shen ('divine being'), and Tao ('way') and means 'Way of the Spirits'. The word Shintō, which literally means "the way of kami" (generally sacred or divine power, specifically the various gods or deities), came into use in order to distinguish indigenous Japanese beliefs from Buddhism, which had been introduced into Japan in the 6th century ce. Shintō has no founder, no official sacred scriptures in the strict sense, and no fixed dogmas, but it has preserved its guiding beliefs throughout the ages. Shintō is a form of animism, where spirits are embodied in nature.

Nature and Varieties

Shintō consists of the traditional Japanese religious practices as well as the beliefs and life attitudes that are in accord with these practices. Shintō is more readily observed in the social life of the Japanese people and in their personal motivations than in a pattern of formal belief or philosophy. It remains close-

ly connected with the Japanese value system and the Japanese people's ways of thinking and acting.

Belief in Ancient Kami (Divine or God)

Shintō is polytheistic. *Kami* is like the Divine, God or spirit in Shintō. People found *kami* in nature, which ruled seas or

mountains, as well as in outstanding men. They also believed in *kami* of ideas such as growth, creation, and judgment. Though each clan made the tutelary *kami* the core of its unity, such *kami* were not necessarily the ancestral deities of the clan. Sometimes *kami* of nature and *kami* of ideas were regarded as their tutelary *kami*.

Two different views of the world were present in ancient Shintō. One was the three-dimensional view in which the Plain of High Heaven (*Takama no Hara*, the *kami's* world), Middle Land (*Nakatsukuni*, the present world), and the Hades (*Yomi no Kuni*, the world after death) were arranged in vertical order. The other view was a two-dimensional one in which this world and the Perpetual Country (Tokoyo, a utopian place far beyond the sea) existed in horizontal order.

Though the three-dimensional view of the world (which is also characteristic of North Siberian and Mongolian shamanistic culture) became the representative view observed in Japanese myths, the two-dimensional view of the world (which is also present in Southeast Asian culture) was dominant among the populace.

Early Chinese Influences on Shintō

Confucianism, which originated in China, is believed to have reached Japan in the 5th century ce, and by the 7th century it had spread among the people, together with Daoism and *yinyang* (harmony of two basic forces of nature) philosophy. All of these stimulated the development of Shintō ethical teachings. With the gradual centralization of political power, Shintō began to develop as a national cult as well. Myths of various clans were combined and reorganized into a pan-Japanese mythology with the Imperial Household as its centre. The *kami* of the Imperial Household and the tutelary *kami* of powerful clans became the *kami* of the whole nation and people, and offerings

were made by the state every year. Such practices were systematized supposedly around the start of the Taika-era reforms in 645. By the beginning of the 10th century, about 3,000 shrines throughout Japan were receiving state offerings. As the power of the central government declined, however, the system ceased to be effective, and after the 13th century only a limited number of important shrines continued to receive the Imperial offerings. Later, after the Meiji Restoration in 1868, the old system was revived.

The Encounter with Buddhism

Buddhism was officially introduced into Japan in 552 ce and developed gradually. In the 8th century there emerged tendencies to interpret Shintō from a Buddhist viewpoint. Shintō *kami* were viewed as protectors of Buddhism; hence, shrines for tutelary *kami* were built within the precincts of Buddhist temples. *Kami* were made equivalent to *deva*, or “gods.” According to Buddhist teachings, the *deva* are said to be undergoing the same suffering (*dukkha*) within the endless cycle of death and rebirth (*samsara*) that all creatures experience. Help was therefore offered to *kami* in the form of Buddhist discipline. Buddhist temples were even built within Shintō shrine precincts, and Buddhist sutras (scriptures) were read in front of *kami*. By the late 8th century, *kami* were thought to be avatars (incarnations) of Buddhas (enlightened individuals who had attained liberation [*moksha*] from *samsara*) and *bodhisattvas* (buddha-to-be). *Bodhisattva* names were given to *kami*, and Buddhist stat-

ues were placed even in the inner sanctuaries of Shintō shrines. In some cases, Buddhist priests were in charge of the management of Shintō shrines.

Shintō Literature and Mythology

Broadly speaking, Shintō has no founder. When the Japanese people and Japanese culture became aware of themselves, Shintō was already there. Nor has it any official scripture that can be compared to the Bible in Judaism and Christianity or to the Quorān in Islam.

The *Kojiki* (“Records of Ancient Matters”) and the *Nihon shoki* (“Chronicles of Japan”) are regarded in a sense as sacred books of Shintō. They were written in 712 and 720 ce, respectively, and are compilations of the oral traditions of ancient Shintō. But they are also books about the history, topography, and literature of ancient Japan. It is possible to construct Shintō doctrines from them by interpreting the myths and religious practices they describe.

Doctrines: Concept of the Sacred

At the core of Shintō are beliefs in the mysterious creating and harmonizing power (*musubi*) of *kami* and in the truthful way or will (*makoto*) of *kami*. The nature of *kami* cannot be fully explained in words, because *kami* transcends the cognitive faculty of humans. Devoted followers, however, are able to understand *kami* through faith and usually recognize various *kami* in polytheistic form.

Parishioners of a shrine believe in their tutelary *kami* as the source of human life and existence. Each

kami has a divine personality and responds to truthful prayers. The *kami* also reveals *makoto* to people and guides them to live in accordance with it. In traditional Japanese thought, truth manifests itself in empirical existence and undergoes transformation in infinite varieties in time and space. *Makoto* is not an abstract ideology. It can be recognized every moment in every individual thing in the encounter between humans and *kami*.

In Shintō all the deities are said to cooperate with one another, and life lived in accordance with a *kami*'s will is believed to produce a mystical power that gains the protection, cooperation, and approval of all the particular *kami*.

Precepts of Truthfulness and Purification

As the basic attitude toward life, Shintō emphasizes *makoto no kokoro* ("heart of truth"), or *magokoro* ("true heart"), which is usually translated as "sincerity, pure heart, uprightness." This attitude follows from the revelation of the truthfulness of *kami* in humans. It is, generally, the sincere attitude of people in doing their best in the work they have chosen or in their relationships with others, and the ultimate source of such a life attitude lies in one's awareness of the divine.

Although Shintō ethics do not ignore individual moral virtues such as loyalty, filial piety, love, faithfulness, and so forth, it is generally considered more important to seek *magokoro*,

which constitutes the dynamic life-attitude that brings forth these virtues. In ancient scriptures *magokoro* was interpreted as "bright and pure mind" or "bright, pure, upright, and sincere mind." Purification, both physical and spiritual, is stressed even in contemporary Shintō to produce such a state of mind. The achievement of this state of mind is necessary in order to make communion between *kami* and humans possible and to enable individuals to accept the blessings of *kami*.

Nature of Humanity and other Beliefs

In Shintō it is commonly said that "man is *kami*'s child." First, this means that people are given life by *kami* and that their nature is therefore sacred. Second, it means that daily life is made possible by *kami*, and, accordingly, the personalities and lives of people are worthy of respect. Individuals must revere the basic human rights of everyone (regardless of race, nationality, and other distinctions) as well as their own. The concept of original sin is not found in Shintō. On the contrary, humanity is considered to have a primarily divine nature. In actuality, however, this sacred nature is seldom revealed in human beings. Purification is considered symbolically to remove the dust and impurities that cover one's inner mind.

Shintō is described as a religion of *tsunagari* ("continuity or communion"). The Japanese, while recognizing each human being as an individual personality, do not take each to be a soli-

tary being separated from others. On the contrary, one is regarded as the bearer of a long continuous history that comes down from one's ancestors and continues in one's descendants. An individual is also considered as a responsible constituent of various social groups.

Motoori Norinaga stated that the human world keeps growing and developing while continuously changing. Similarly, Japanese mythology speaks of an eternity of history in the divine edict of Amaterasu. In its view of history, Shintō adheres to the cyclical approach, according to which there is a constant recurrence of historical patterns. Shintō does not have the concept of the "last day": there is no end of the world or of history. One of the divine edicts of Amaterasu says:

This Reed-plain-1,500-autumns-fair-rice-ear Land is the region which my descendants shall be lords of. Do thou, my August Grandchild, proceed thither and govern it. Go! and may prosperity attend thy dynasty, and may it, like Heaven and Earth, endure forever.

Modern Shintōists interpret this edict as revealing the eternal development of history as well as the eternity of the dynasty. From the viewpoint of finite individuals, Shintōists also stress *naka-ima* ("middle present"), which repeatedly appears in the Imperial edicts of the 8th century. According to this point of view, the present moment is the very centre in the middle of all conceivable times. In order to participate directly in the eternal development of the world, it

is required of Shintōists to live fully each moment of life, making it as worthy as possible.

Historically, the *ujigami* of each local community played an important role in combining and harmonizing different elements and powers. The Imperial system, which has been supported by the Shintō political philosophy, is an example of unity and harmony assuming the highest cultural and social position in the nation. After the Meiji Restoration (1868), Shintō was used as a means of spiritually unifying the people during repeated wars. Since the end of World War II, the age-old desire for peace has been reemphasized. *The General Principles of Shintō Life* proclaimed by the Association of Shintō Shrines in 1956 has the following article: "In accordance with the Emperor's will, let us be harmonious and peaceful, and pray for the nation's development as well as the world's co-prosperity."

Ritual Practices and Institutions

Shintō does not have a weekly religious service. People visit shrines at their convenience. Some may go to the shrines on the 1st and 15th of each month and on the occasions of rites or festivals (*matsuri*), which take place several times a year. Devotees, however, may pay respect to the shrine every morning.

Varieties of Festival, Worship, and Prayer

Each Shintō shrine has several major festivals each year, in-

cluding the Spring Festival (*Haru Matsuri*, or *Toshigoi-no-Matsuri*; Prayer for Good Harvest Festival), Autumn Festival (*Aki Matsuri*, or *Niiname-sai*; Harvest Festival), an Annual Festival (*Rei-sai*), and the Divine Procession (*Shinkō-sai*). The Divine Procession usually takes place on the day of the Annual Festival, and miniature shrines (*mikoshi*) carried on the shoulders are transported through the parish. The order of rituals at a grand festival is usually as follows:

1. Purification rites (*harae*)—commonly held at a corner of the shrine precincts before participants come into the shrine but sometimes held within the shrine before beginning a ceremony.
2. Adoration—the chief priest and all the congregation bow to the altar.
3. Opening of the door of the inner sanctuary (by the chief priest).

Presentation of food offerings—rice, sake wine, rice cakes, fish, seaweed, vegetables, salt, water, etc., are offered but animal meat is not, because of the taboo on shedding blood in the sacred area. In the past cooked food was usually offered to *kami*, but nowadays uncooked food is more often used. In accordance with this change, the idea of entertaining *kami* changed to that of thanksgiving.

1. Prayer—the chief priest recites prayers (*norito*) modeled on ancient Shintō prayers. These prayers were compiled in the early 10th century and were based on the old belief that spoken words had spiritual potency.

2. Sacred music and dance.
 3. General offering—participants in the festival make symbolic offerings using little branches of the evergreen sacred tree to which strips of white paper are tied.
 4. Taking offerings away.
 5. Shutting the door of the inner sanctuary.
 6. Final adoration.
- Feast (*naorai*).

In the olden days *naorai*, a symbolic action in which participants held communion with *kami* by having the same food offered to the deity, came in the middle of the festival ceremony. The custom is still observed sometimes at the Imperial Household and at some old shrines, but it is more common to have communion with *kami* by drinking the offered sake after the festival. Since World War II it has become popular to have a brief sermon or speech before the feast.

Most Shintō festivals are observed generally in accordance with the above-mentioned order. On such occasions, as the Annual Festival, various special rites may be held—for example, special water purification (*misogi*) and confinement in shrines for devotional purposes (*o-komori*), the procession of a sacred palanquin (*o-miyuki*) or of boats (*funa matsuri*), a ceremonial feast (*tōya matsuri*), sumo wrestling, horseback riding (*kurabe-uma*), archery (*matoi*), a lion dance (*shishi mai*), and a rice-planting festival (*o-taue matsuri*).

Types of Shrines

A simple *torii* (gateway) stands at the entrance of the shrine precincts. After proceeding on the main approach, a visitor will come to an ablution basin where the hands are washed and the mouth is rinsed. Usually he will make a small offering at the oratory (*haiden*) and pray. Sometimes a visitor may ask the priest to conduct rites of passage or to offer special prayers. The most important shrine building is the main, or inner, sanctuary (*honden*), in which a sacred symbol called *shintai* (“*kami* body”) or *mitama-shiro* (“divine spirit’s symbol”) is enshrined. The usual symbol is a mirror, but sometimes it is a wooden image, a sword, or some other object. In any case, it is carefully wrapped and placed in a container. It is forbidden to see it: only the chief priest is allowed to enter inside the inner sanctuary.

In the beginning Shintō had no shrine buildings. At each festival people placed a tree symbol at a sacred site, or they built a temporary shrine to invite *kami*. Later they began to construct permanent shrines where *kami* were said to stay permanently. The *honden* of the Inner Shrine at Ise and of Izumo-taisha (Grand Shrine of Izumo, in Shimane prefecture) illustrate two representative archetypes of shrine construction. The style of the former probably developed from that of a storehouse for crops, especially for rice, and the style of the latter from ancient house construction. In the course of time, variations of shrine architecture were adopted and additional buildings were attached in front of the

honden. The *honden* and *haiden* are in many cases connected by a hall of offering (*heiden*) where prayers are usually recited. Large shrines also have a hall for liturgical dancing (*kaguraden*).

Political and Social Roles

Until the end of World War II, Shintō was closely related to the state. Offerings to *kami* were made every year by the government and the Imperial Household, and prayers were offered for the safety of the state and people. The *matsuri-goto* (the affairs of worship) offered by the emperor from olden days included not only ceremonies for *kami* but also for ordinary matters of state. “Shintō ceremonies and political affairs are one and the same” was the motto of officials. Administrators were required to have a religious conscience and develop political activities with *magokoro*.

This tradition was maintained as an undercurrent throughout Japanese history. Villagers prayed to the tutelary *kami* of the community for their peace and welfare and promoted unity among themselves with village festivals. After the Meiji Restoration, the government treated Shintō like a state religion and revived the system of national shrines, which dated from the 9th century or earlier. In order to propagate Revival Shintō as the foundation of the national structure, they initiated the “great promulgation movement” (1869–84) in which the emperor was respected like *kami*. Although the Japanese constitution enacted in 1889 guaranteed

freedom of faith under certain conditions, priority was, in fact, given to Shintō. In elementary schools Shintō was taught to children, and most of the national holidays were related to Shintō festivals. Shintō of this nature was called State Shintō and came under the control of the Bureau of Shrines in the Ministry of Home Affairs.

State Shintō was regarded as a state cult and a national ethic and not as “a religion.” The free interpretation of its teachings by individual Shintō priests was discouraged. Priests of the national shrines were prohibited from preaching and presiding over Shintō funerals. By 1945 there were 218 national and approximately 110,000 local shrines. The number of Sect Shintō groups was limited to 13 after the organization of Tenrikyō. Legally these 13 sects were treated as general religious bodies, similar to Buddhism and Christianity, and came under the supervision of the Ministry of Education.

After the end of World War II, the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers ordered the Japanese government to disestablish State Shintō. All government financial support from public funds and all official affiliation with Shintō and Shintō shrines were also discontinued. State rites performed by the emperor were henceforth to be regarded as the religious practices of the Imperial family. These rulings were carried into the new Japanese constitution that was enacted in 1947. Presently, Shrine Shintō is faced with two serious problems. The first is determining how the traditional

unifying function of Shintō can be promoted in local communities or in the nation without interfering with freedom of faith. The second is the necessity of harmonizing Shintō with rapid modernization, especially in organizing believers and dealing with human problems or the meaning of life.

The number of Shintō shrines has been decreasing since the beginning of the Meiji era, in part because a municipal unification plan in 1889 called for the shrines of tutelary *kami* to be combined with the municipality. At present, about 99 percent of the shrines belong to the Association of Shintō Shrines, established in 1946, and most of the others are independent or belong to small groups.

About 15 percent of 16,251 Sect Shintō churches were damaged during World War II. Although they were not affected by the occupation policies after the war, many sects, in fact, went through difficult years because of unrest among the people and disunion within their own organizations. In 1966 Tenri-kyō proclaimed that their belief was not Shintō, and in 1973 they withdrew from the federation of Sect Shintō groups. On the other hand, numerous new religious bodies, including Shintōist groups, have emerged since 1945. How to adequately reclassify Sect Shintō, when combined with these new bodies, is a major concern of specialists on the subject.

Characteristics of Shintōism

- Shrine visiting and taking part in festivals play a great part

in binding local communities together.

- Shrine visiting at New Year is the most popular shared national event in Japan.
- Because Shintō is focussed on the land of Japan it is clearly an ethnic religion. Therefore Shintō is little interested in missionary work, and rarely practised outside its country of origin.
- Shintō sees human beings as basically good and has no concept of original sin, or of humanity as 'fallen'.
- Everything, including the spiritual, is experienced as part of this world. Shintō has no place for any transcendental other world.
- Shintō has no canonical scriptures.
- Shintō teaches important ethical principles but has no commandments.
- Shintō has no founder.
- Shintō does not require adherents to follow it as their only religion.

Ethics

Note: Because Shintō coexists with Buddhism and Confucianism and their ethical values, it's hard, and not very useful, to isolate the distinctly Shintō elements in Japanese ethics. Confucian values in particular have inspired much of the Japanese ethical code.

Specifically Shintō ethics are not based on a set of commandments or laws that tell the faithful how to behave, but on following the

will of the *kami*. So a follower of Shintō will try to live in accordance with the way of the *kami*, and in such a way as to keep the relationship with the *kami* on a proper footing.

But it's important to remember that the *kami* are not perfect - Shintō texts have many examples of *kami* making mistakes and doing the wrong thing. This clear difference with faiths whose God is perfect is probably why Shintō ethics avoid absolute moral rules.

The overall aims of Shintō ethics are to promote harmony and purity in all spheres of life. Purity is not just spiritual purity but moral purity: having a pure and sincere heart.

No Moral Absolutes

Shintō has no moral absolutes and assesses the good or bad of an action or thought in the context in which it occurs: circumstances, intention, purpose, time, location, are all relevant in assessing whether an action is bad.

Good is the Default Condition

Shintō ethics start from the basic idea that human beings are good, and that the world is good. Evil enters the world from outside, brought by evil spirits. These affect human beings in a similar way to disease, and reduce their ability to resist temptation. When human beings act wrongly, they bring pollution and sin upon themselves, which obstructs the flow of life and blessing from the *kami*.

Things which are Bad

Things which are usually regarded as bad in Shintō are:

- Things which disturb *kami*
- Things which disturb the worship of *kami*
- Things which disrupt the harmony of the world
- Things which disrupt the natural world
- Things which disrupt the social order
- Things which disrupt the group of which one is a member

Conclusion

The essence of Shintō is the Japanese devotion to invisible spiritual beings and powers called *kami*, to shrines, and to various rituals.

Shintō is not a way of explaining the world. What matters are rituals that enable human beings to communicate with *kami*.

Kami are spirits that are concerned with human beings - they appreciate our interest in them and want us to be happy - and if they are treated properly they will intervene in our lives to bring benefits like health, business success, and good exam results.

Shintō is a very local religion, in which devotees are likely to be concerned with their local shrine rather than the religion as a whole. Many Japanese will have a tiny shrine-altar in their homes.

However, it is also an unofficial national religion with shrines that draw visitors from across the country. Because ritual rather than belief is at the heart of Shintō, Japanese people don't usually

think of Shintō specifically as a religion - it's simply an aspect of Japanese life. This has enabled Shintō to coexist happily with Buddhism for centuries.

Source:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/shinto/ataglance/glance.shtml>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/shinto/shintoethics/ethics.shtml>

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Shinto>

<https://sites.google.com/site/doebelsreligionsoftheworld/shintoism/sacred-text>