

SOUL of JAPAN

An Introduction to Shinto and Ise Jingu

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An Introduction to Shinto and Ise Jingu

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神
道









What is Shinto?

SHINTO is the indigenous faith of the Japanese. It is a way of life and a way of thinking that has been an integral part of Japanese culture since ancient times. It is the foundation for the yearly life-cycles, beginning with the New Year's Day visit Japanese pay to a Shinto shrine to wish for good luck.



Observing the Shinto faith means worshipping ancestors as guardians of the family. It also means showing respect for the myriad *kami*—a word that corresponds to ‘deity’ in English—residing in the natural world. There are *kami* of the mountains, and *kami* of the sea. *Kami* are all around us, in every thing and every person. They may be worshipped anywhere, but many people visit Shinto shrines, called *jinja*, to pray, cleansing their hands and mouth at the entrance to purify the body and mind.

Shinto places great value in the virtues of purity and honesty, yet as a faith, Shinto has no dogma, doctrine, or founder. Its origins can be seen in the relationship between the ancient Japanese and the power they found in the natural world. It is a relationship that continues to this day, defined by a great reverence for nature's strength, and gratitude for nature's bounty. Only by both receiving the blessings of nature and accepting its rage can we maintain a harmonious connection to the world around us.

Shinto has shaped the past as an integral part of Japan's cultural heritage. It will continue to shape the future through the deep influence it exerts on Japanese thought. Yet, as a fundamental aspect of daily life in Japan, the focus of Shinto is on the present. For honoring the *kami*, and receiving their blessings, there is no time but now.

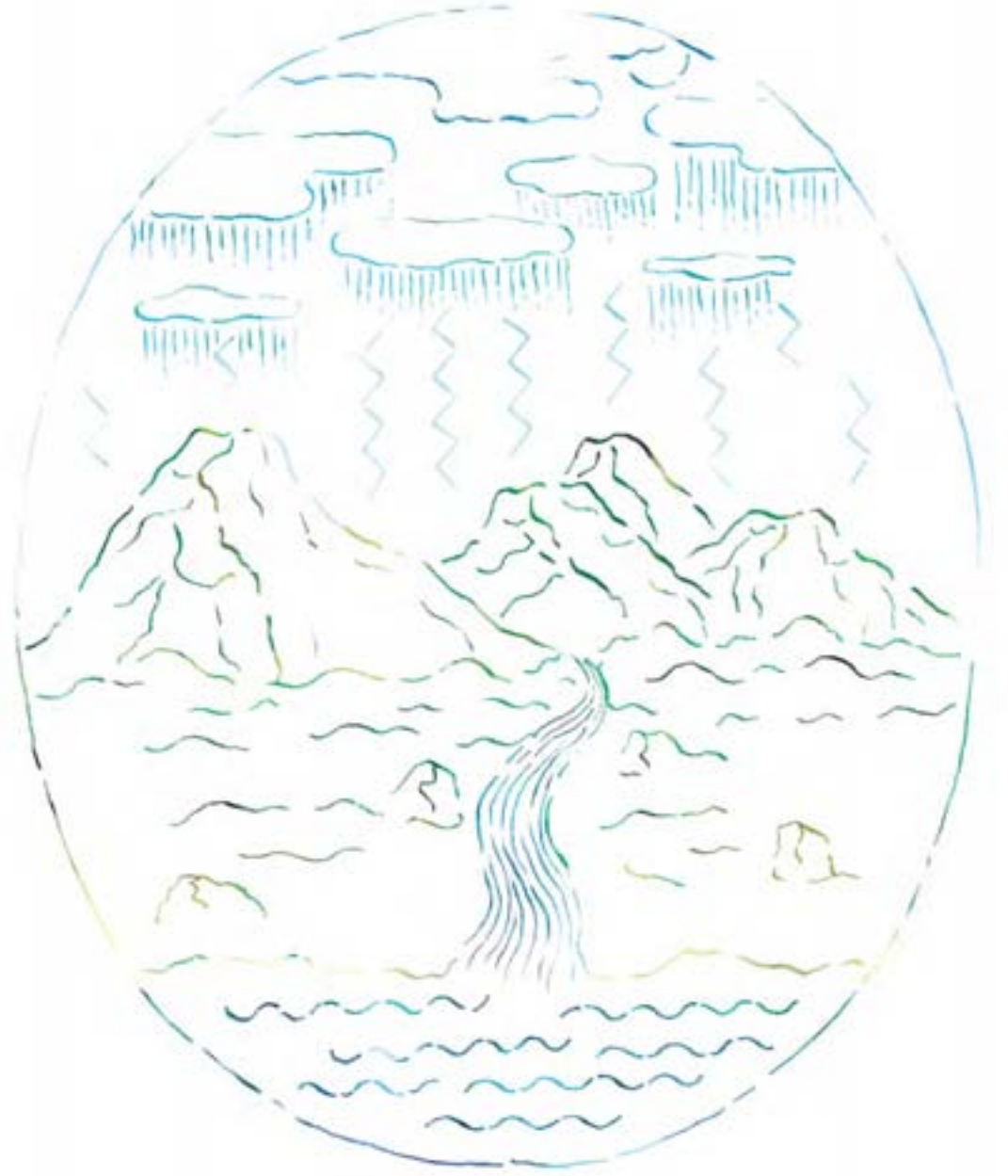




Kami

SINCE ancient times, Japanese have expressed the divine energy or life-force of the natural world as *kami*.

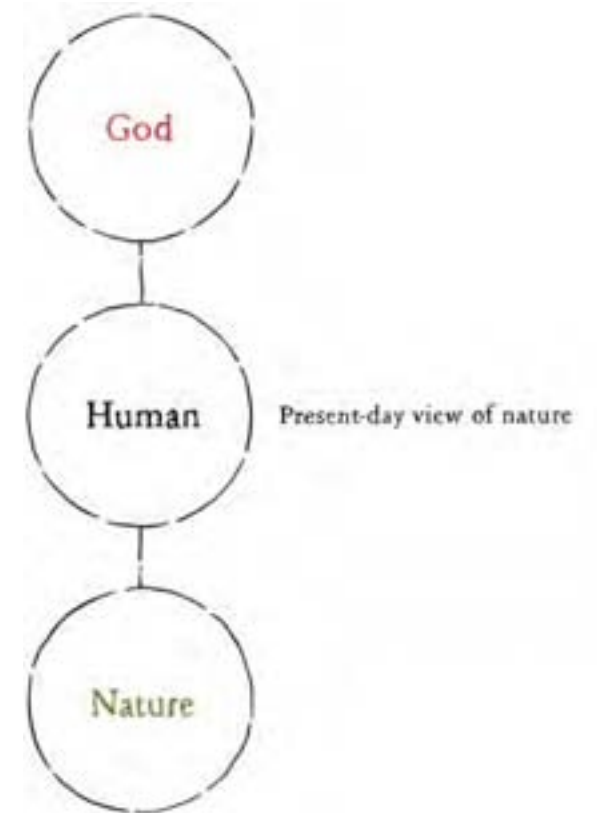
Kami derived from nature, such as the *kami* of rain, the *kami* of wind, the *kami* of the mountains, the *kami* of the sea, and the *kami* of thunder have a deep relationship with our lives and a profound influence over our activities. Individuals who have made a great contribution to the state or society may also be enshrined and revered as *kami*.



Nature's severity, does not take human comfort and convenience into consideration. The sun, which gives life to all living things, sometimes parches the earth, causing drought and famine. The oceans, where life first appeared, may suddenly rise, sending violent tidal waves onto the land, causing much destruction and grief. The blossom scented wind, a harbinger of spring, can become a wild storm. Even the smallest animals can bring harm—the mouse that eats our grain and carries disease, and the locust that devastates our crops. It is to the *kami* that the Japanese turn to pacify this sometimes calm but at times raging aspect of nature. Through ceremonies, called 'matsuri', they appease the *kami* and wish for further blessings.



Traditional Japanese view of nature



Shinto observes no one single, omnipotent Creator. Each *kami* plays its own role in the ordering of the world, and when faced with a problem, the *kami* gather to discuss the issue in order to solve it. This is mentioned in records from the 8th Century which tell the story of the Divine Age before written history began, and is the basis for Japanese society's emphasis on harmony, and the cooperative utilization of individual strengths.



Matsuri

SINCE ancient times, Japanese have gathered at sacred places—a great boulder, or ancient tree—in order to commune with the *kami*. There, they made offerings and prayed for the safety and prosperity of their communities. This is the origin of the festivals, ceremonies, and rituals collectively known as *matsuri*. Many *matsuri* are tied to the yearly calendrical cycle of events and are held in spring to offer prayers for a bountiful harvest, and in autumn to give thanks for providing the season's crops.



Matsuri are symbolic of ancient Japanese traditions and customs, sacred rituals that come in two aspects: One is ‘*matsuri* as religious service’, and the other is ‘*matsuri* as entertainment for the *kami*’. The former refers to the solemn rituals conducted in front of the *kami* by Shinto priests as representatives of local communities, while the latter are lively, festive events sometimes involving *mikoshi*, or portable shrines, where an often-raucous procession ritually transfers the *kami* to a new resting place. Many traditional performing arts, such as sumo and Noh, are also dedicated to the *kami*—another example of *matsuri* as entertainment. Although these two aspects of *matsuri* may seem quite different, the blessings received from the *kami* remain the same.

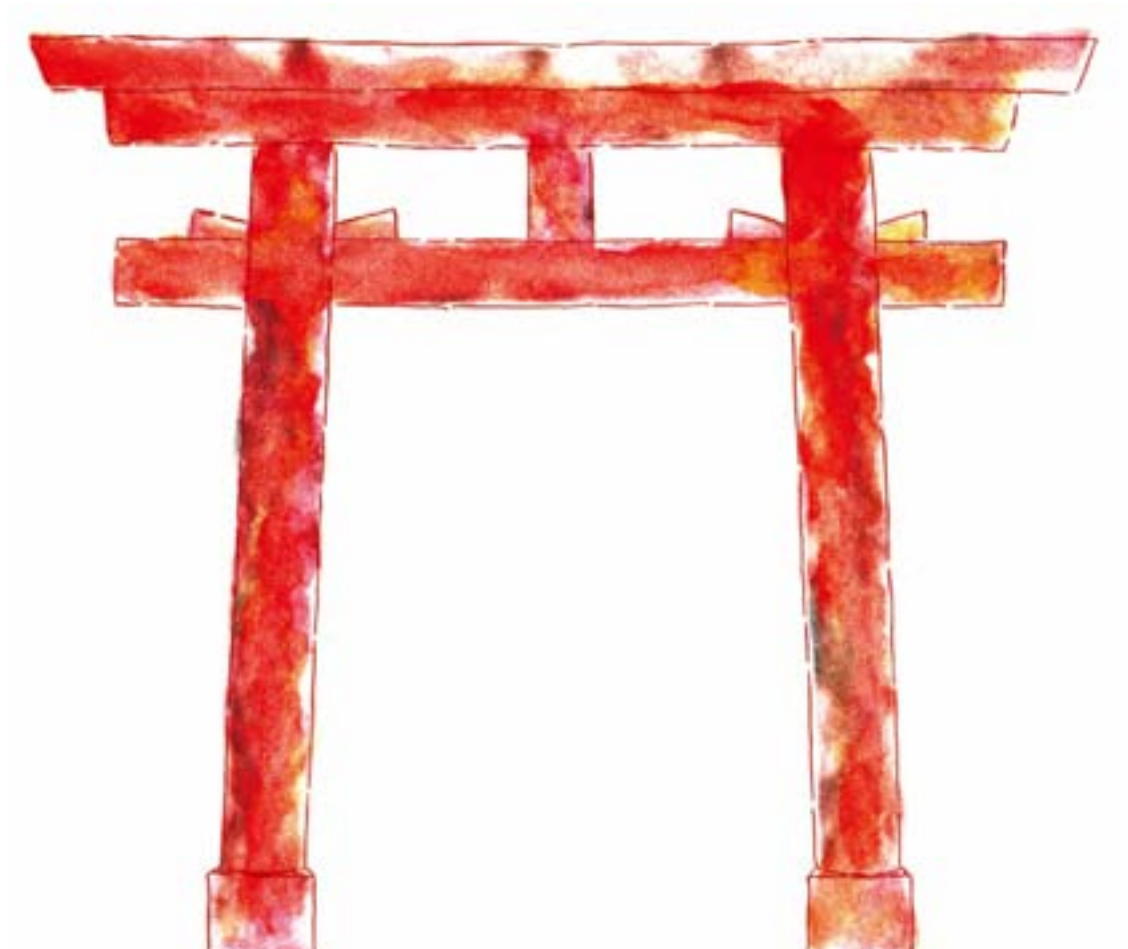


Through *matsuri*, the Japanese celebrate and pray for the *kami*, and together both *kami* and participants are rejuvenated. *Matsuri* are rituals to both strengthen the bonds and solidarity within a community and connect that community to the *kami*.

四 Jinja

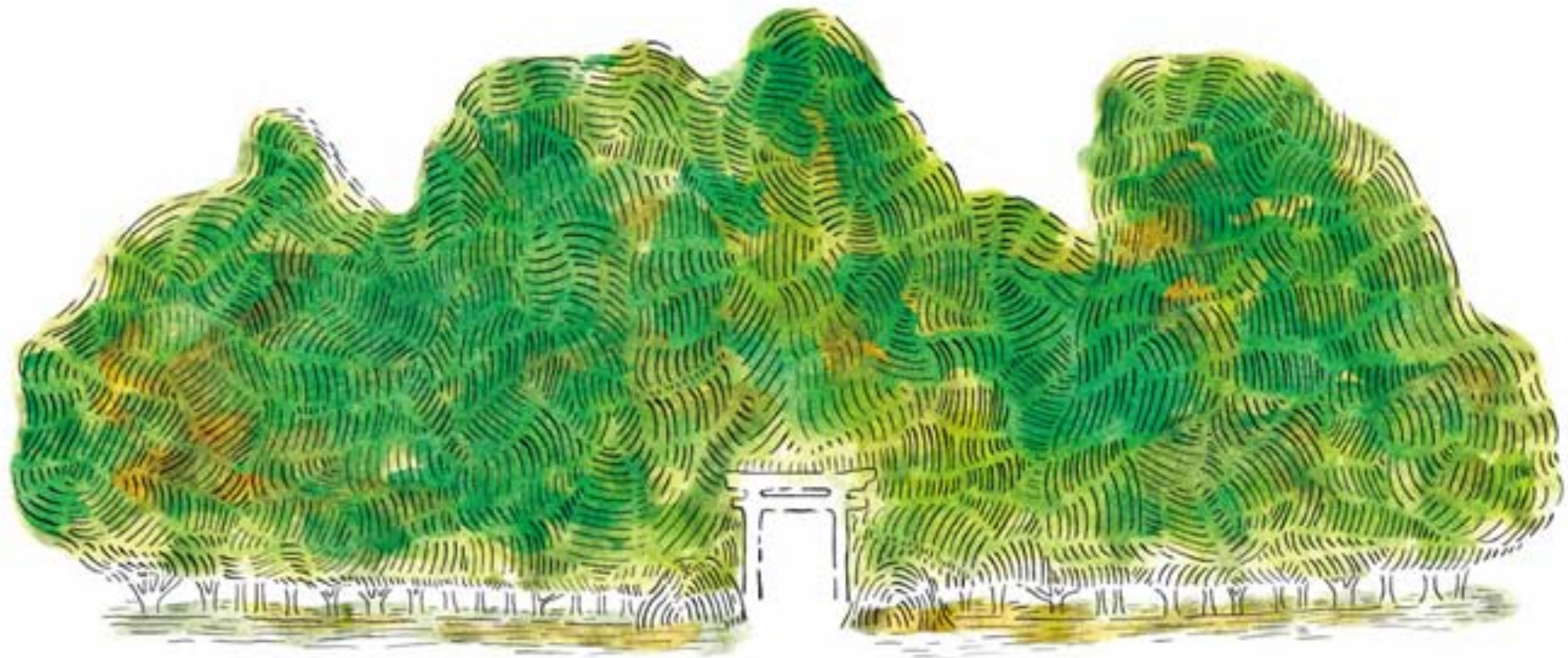
JAPANESE regard the sea, the mountains, the forest, and natural landmarks as places where the *kami* reside. In ancient times, these were regarded as sacred areas, without the need for special buildings, as the *kami* were believed to exist everywhere.

A practice also arose of decorating evergreen trees in sacred courtyards to which the *kami* could be summoned in order to perform rituals. Later, dwellings were built for the *kami* in the forests, structures to be renewed in perpetuity where rituals could be conducted. This is the origin of the shrines known as 'jinja'. There are more than 80,000 jinja in Japan today where various *kami* are enshrined, particularly those who appear in the story of the Divine Age or historical figures known for their great achievements.



Rituals to pray for the peace, security, and prosperity of the nation and community are conducted at jinja throughout the year. Prayers may also be dedicated at a jinja for the well-being of the local parishioners and the guardian *kami* of the community. While these observances are typically handled by members of the Shinto priesthood, individuals will often visit a jinja to participate in the yearly cycle of *matsuri*, and on commemorative occasions throughout one's life, in order to make wishes and offer prayers of appreciation to the *kami*.

Jinja are sacred places and are always kept clean, and pure. Often surrounded by trees, jinja are infused with the divine energy of nature. They are places to worship, but also places to relax. Visiting a jinja, we feel physically and spiritually rejuvenated. Jinja are special spaces for us to reflect on ourselves and express our gratitude to the *kami*.

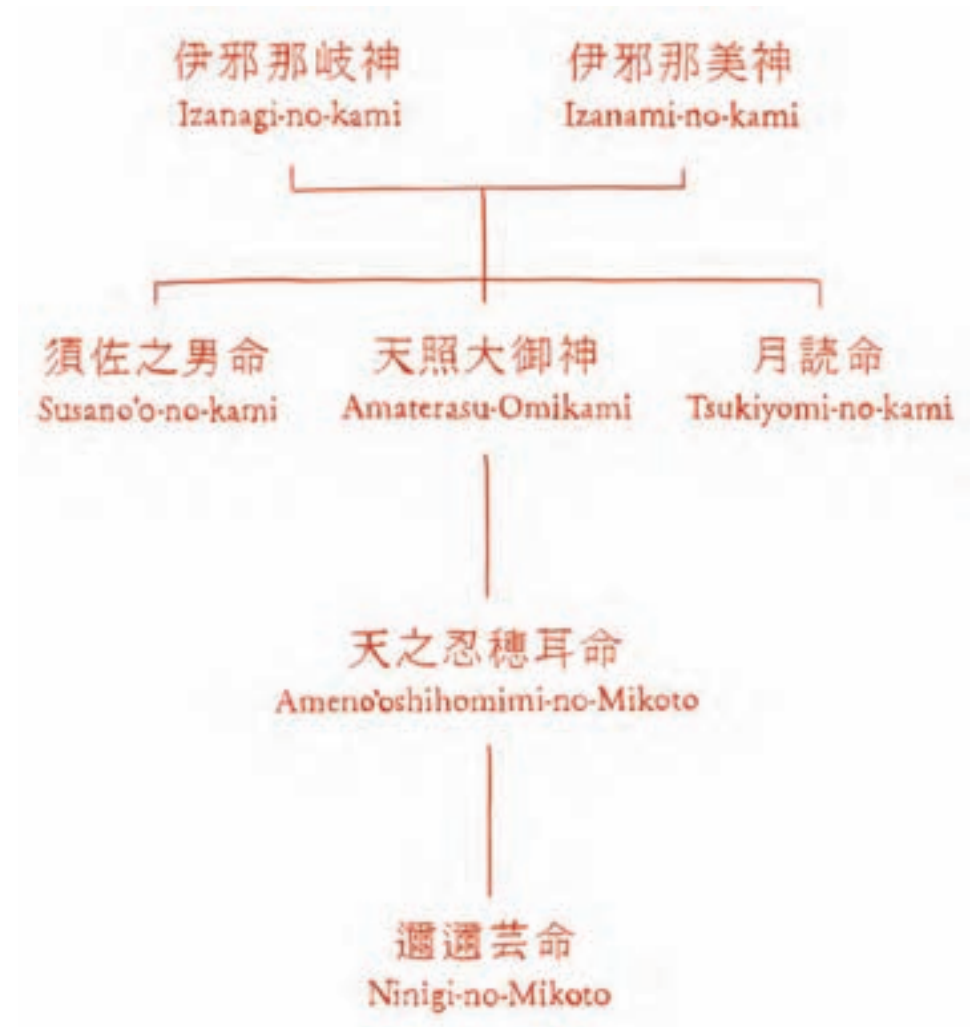


五 The Divine Age

ALTHOUGH Shinto lacks a doctrine, two early 8th century historical records, the *Kojiki* and *Nihonshoki*, name certain individual *kami* of great personality, and relate the tales of their various doings and achievements. These records are regarded as an essential part of the Shinto faith.

Another important text compiled in the early 10th century, the *Engishiki*, is in part a collection of codes concerning the proper form of Shinto rituals. *Kami* named in these codes are enshrined in jinja throughout Japan today.

The following is a brief summary of two stories first appearing in the *Kojiki* and *Nihonshoki*.

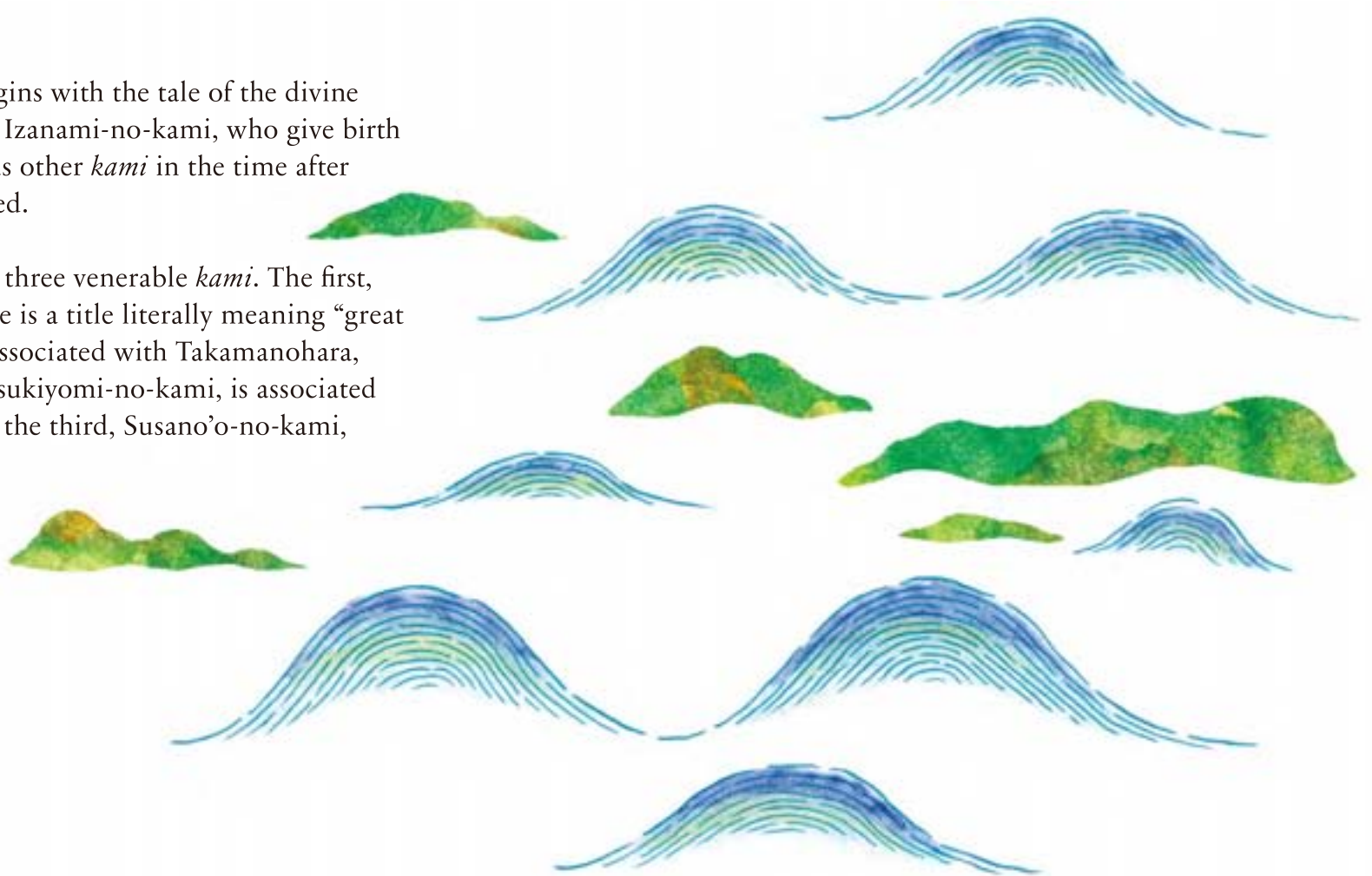


六

Amano-Iwato, The Celestial Cave

THE story of *Ama-no-Iwato* begins with the tale of the divine couple, Izanagi-no-kami and Izanami-no-kami, who give birth to the Japanese islands and various other *kami* in the time after heaven and earth become separated.

Among their descendants were three venerable *kami*. The first, Amaterasu-Omikami, whose name is a title literally meaning “great *kami* who lights the heavens”, is associated with Takamanohara, the Celestial Plain. The second, Tsukiyomi-no-kami, is associated with the moon and the night and the third, Susano’o-no-kami, is associated with the sea.

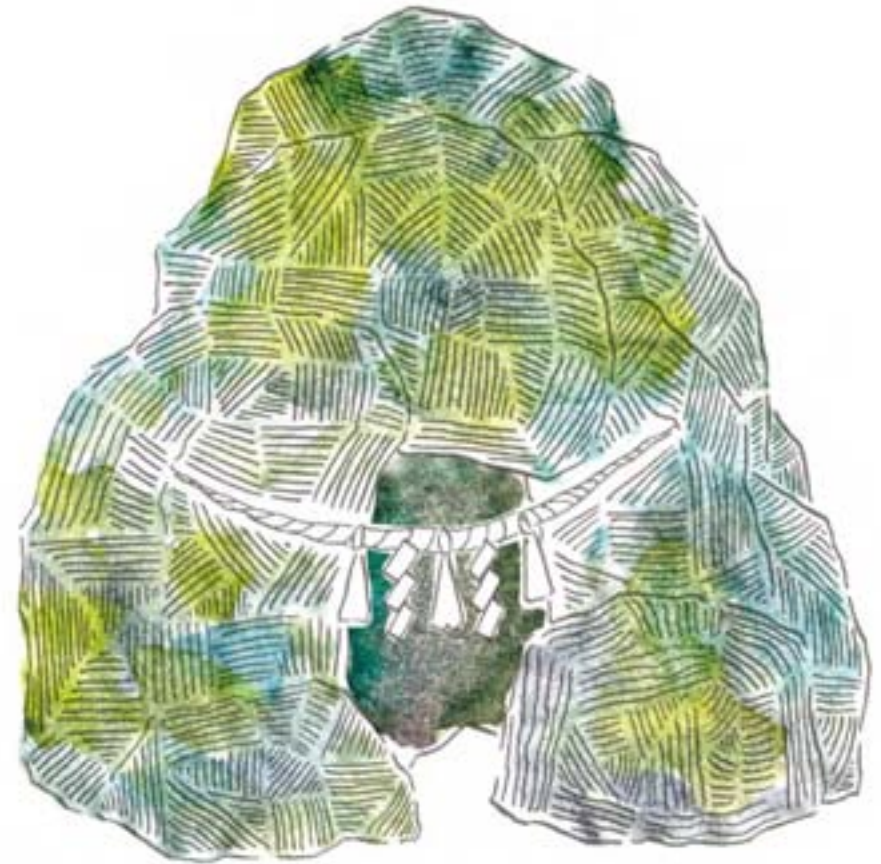


Of these three, Susano'o-no-kami did not properly tend to his duties and abandoned the sea, despite being admonished. He then ascends to Takamanohara where he causes much mischief.

Amaterasu-Omikami cannot bear his troublemaking, and takes refuge, hiding herself in a celestial cave. Bereft of Amaterasu-Omikami's natural brilliance, the celestial and terrestrial world become dark and gloomy, and there is much confusion in the land.

The *kami* gather to discuss how they might work together to solve this grave problem. To coax Amaterasu-Omikami out of the cave, they fashion a jewel, the Yasakani-no-magatama, and a mirror, the Yata-no-kagami and decorate a tree with these sacred objects. Then they hold a *matsuri*, and performed a sacred dance in front of Amaterasu-Omikami's cave. Intrigued by the merriment, she peeks outside and eventually agrees to return to the world, bringing back her peaceful light that harmony and order might be restored.

Susano'o-no-kami, regretting his mischief, descends to earth and slays the Yamata-no-orochi, a monstrous, eight-headed serpent, freeing many from its devastation. After the serpent's death, Susano'o-no-kami dedicates a special sword he discovers in the serpent's tail, the Ameno Murakumo-no-tsurugi, to Amaterasu-Omikami.



七 Ninigi-no-Mikoto

AMATERASU-OMIKAMI is considered the most revered ancestor of the Tenno—the Emperor of Japan—and symbolizes the unity of all *kami*. The tale of her grandson, Ninigi-no-mikoto, begins with her sending him to pacify the terrestrial world. For this task, she endowed him with the mirror, the jewel, and the sword that appeared in the Ama-no-Iwato story. These are the Three Sacred Treasures, which comprise the Imperial Regalia of Japan and have been inherited to this day by the Imperial Household. Of these, she instructed him to place the sacred mirror in the Imperial Palace and worship it as he would her.

Amaterasu-Omikami also granted Ninigi-no-mikoto an ear of rice to give sustenance to the people. Ensuring that Japan would forever be looked after by her descendants and that her lineage might last in perpetuity, she sent Ninigi-no-mikoto to the terrestrial world with several distinguished *kami* to assist him. Landing on the island of Kyushu, Ninigi-no-mikoto built his palace and there began the establishment of the nation of Japan.



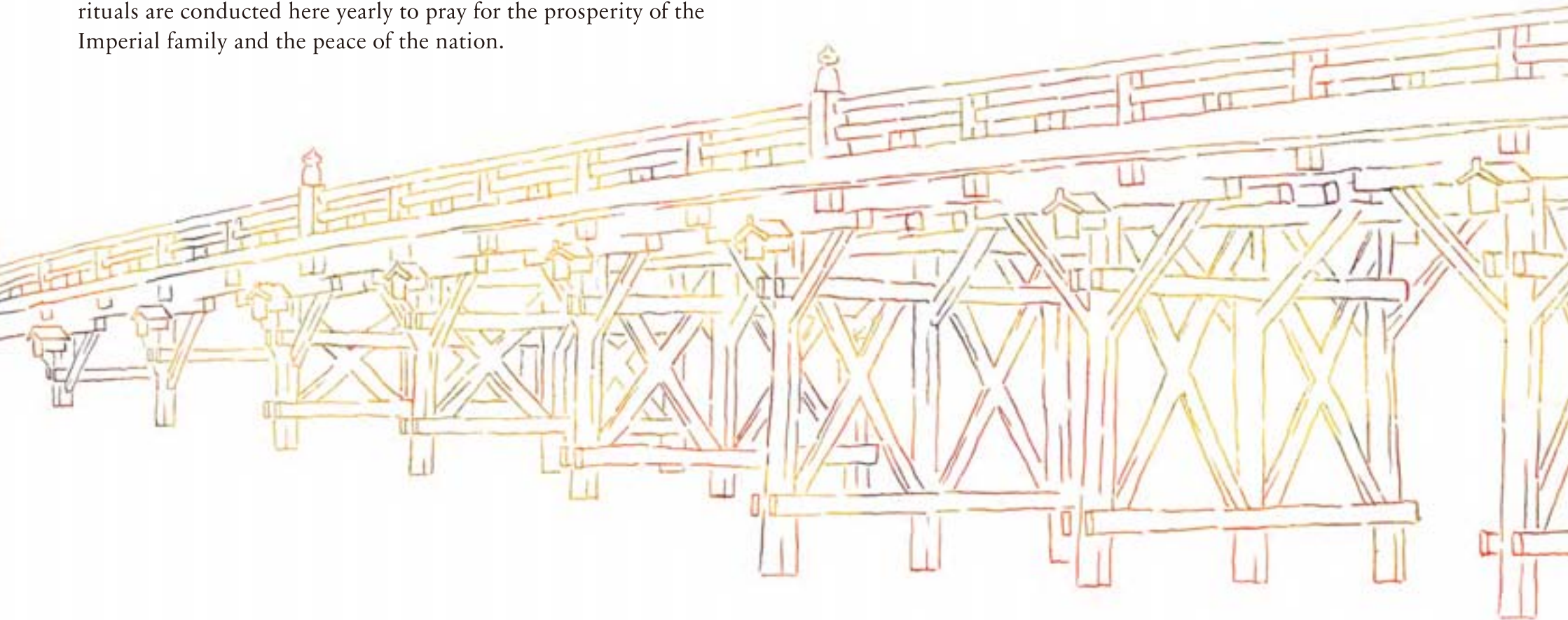


In later years, the great-grandson of Ninigi-no-mikoto chose present-day Nara as the new site for the nation's capital. There he was enthroned as the first Tenno and proclaimed Japan a nation. The modern Tenno is the 125th in an Imperial lineage which can be traced directly back to Amaterasu-Omikami. Today, the Tenno exists as a symbol of the national character and traditions of Japan.



Ise-Jingu

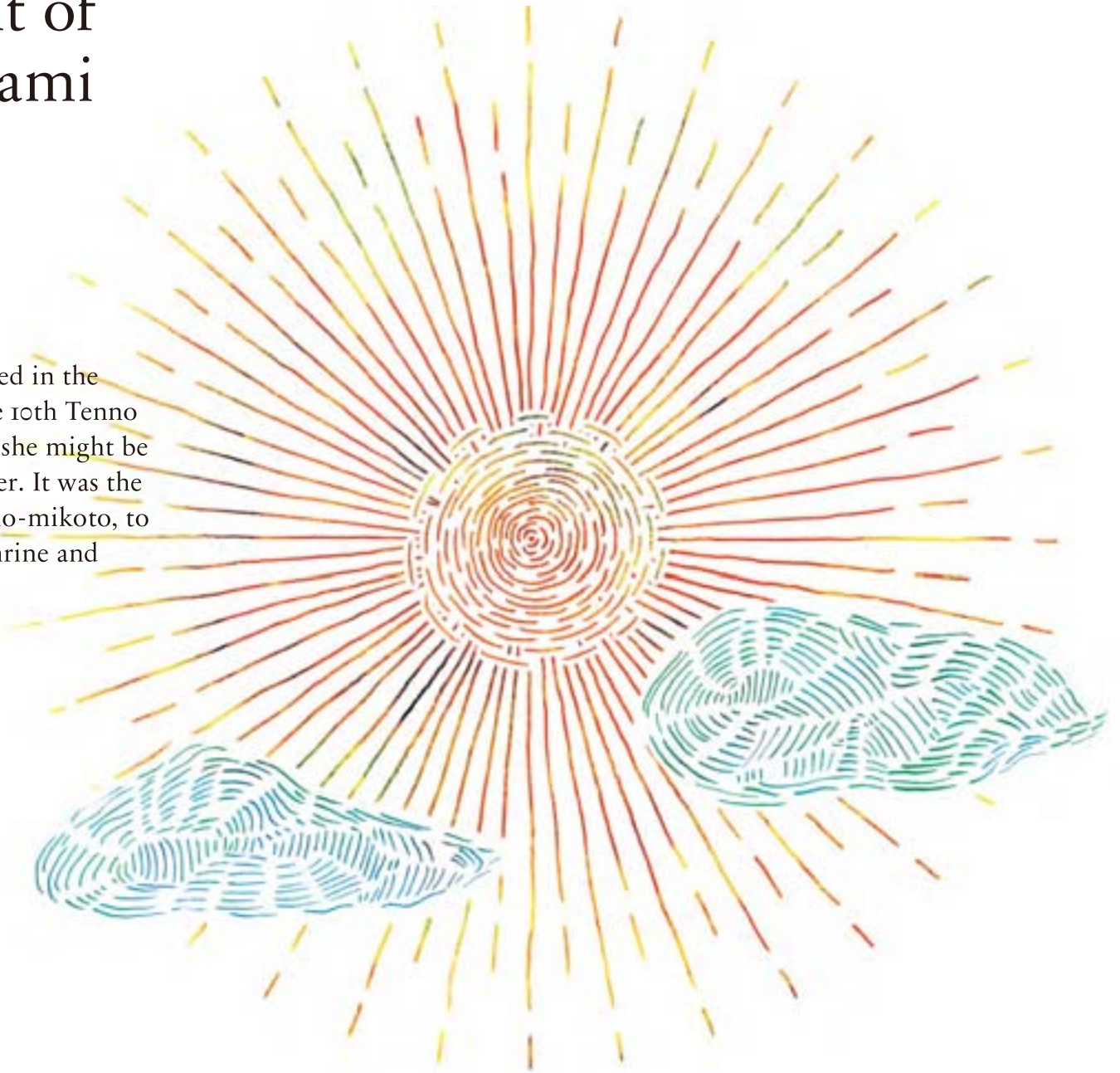
ISE JINGU, officially 'Jingu', includes 125 jinja, centered around Kotaijingu (Naiku), dedicated to Amaterasu-Omikami, and Toyo'uke-daijingu (Geku), dedicated to Toyo'uke-no-Omikami. In land area, Jingu is roughly the same size as Paris. More than 1,500 rituals are conducted here yearly to pray for the prosperity of the Imperial family and the peace of the nation.



九

The Enshrinement of Amaterasu-Omikami at Jingu

AMATERASU-OMIKAMI was formerly worshiped in the Imperial Palace, but following an epidemic, the 10th Tenno decided to move her symbol, the sacred mirror, that she might be worshiped more respectfully and thus end the disaster. It was the 11th Tenno who ordered his princess, Yamatohime-no-mikoto, to seek the most appropriate place to permanently enshrine and worship Amaterasu-Omikami.





It is said the princess traveled the land searching for this special place until she received a revelation by the banks of Isuzugawa River. This is the origin of Naiku.

In the era of the 21st Tenno, some 1,500 years ago, Toyo'uke-no-Omikami was, in accordance with another revelation from Amaterasu-Omikami, summoned from the north of Kyoto prefecture and enshrined in her present resting ground. This is the origin of Geku. Toyo'uke-no-Omikami joins Amaterasu-Omikami in Jingu as her provider of companionship and sacred foods. She blesses us with abundant harvests and is the guardian of well-being, providing cloth, food and shelter.

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Matsuri at Jingu

EVER since the enshrinement of Amaterasu-Omikami in Ise 2,000 years ago, the priesthood of Jingu have conducted rituals and prayed for a peaceful world. These rituals and ceremonies are performed under the direction of Amaterasu-Omikami's direct descendent, the Tenno himself. Thus the rituals conducted at Jingu can be referred to as the Imperial rituals.



Matsuri at Jingu can be divided into three groups. The first includes regularly conducted daily and annual rituals, such as Kanname-sai in October and Tsukinami-sai in June and December. The second are exceptional rituals, which are conducted on special occasions for the benefit of the Imperial Family, the nation, or Jingu. The third are rituals for Sengu conducted every twenty years.

Tenno sends the Imperial Envoy to Jingu to dedicate textiles called *heihaku* for certain important rituals. Some rituals feature the sacred dance and music called *kagura*.

Annual rituals are based on the cycle of rice cultivation, the staple food of the Japanese. The most important ceremony of the year is Kanname-sai, during which Jingu priests offer the first rice of the year harvested in Jingu and dedicate a prayer of gratitude to Amaterasu-Omikami for presenting the first rice to the terrestrial world through her grandson.

At Kanname-sai, an ear of new rice grown by the Tenno is also dedicated to the *kami*. Furthermore, ears of new rice collected from rice farmers throughout the country are hung along the fence of the main sanctuary.



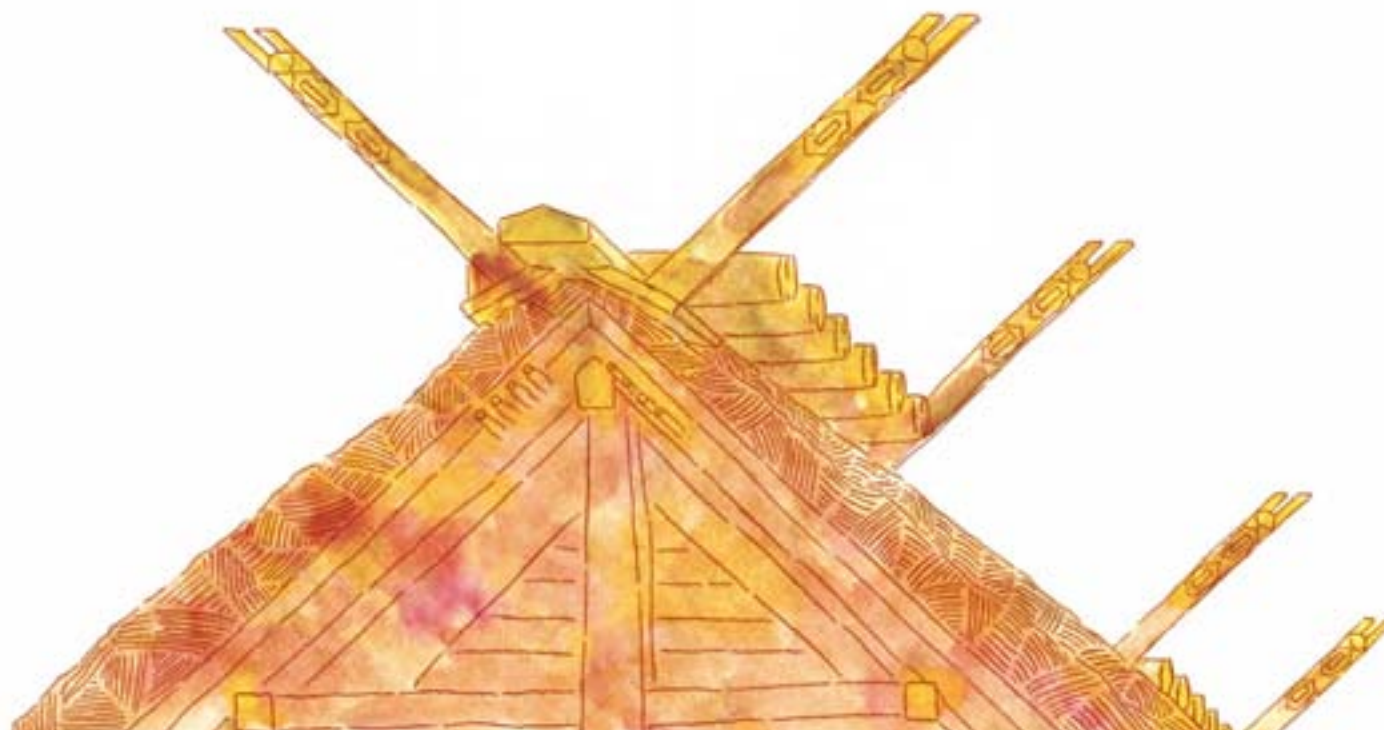


Shikinen Sengu

ADJACENT to the main sanctuary where the sacred palace of Amaterasu-Omikami stands, is a site of exactly the same size. A new building with the same dimensions as the current one is constructed at this alternate site every twenty years. The divine treasures to be placed inside the sacred palace are also remade. Once they are prepared, the sacred mirror, symbol of Amaterasu-Omikami, is moved to the new sanctuary by the Jingu priests. This ritual is called Shikinen Sengu. It is carried out at Geku and other jinja as well.

The first Shikinen Sengu was conducted 1,300 years ago. Although the Shikinen Sengu tradition has been temporarily suspended at times due to warfare in the 15th and 16th centuries, it has continued to be an important part of Jingu to the present day.

Shikinen Sengu involves thirty-two rituals and ceremonies beginning with the ritual cutting of the first trees for the new buildings, and continuing until the transfer of the sacred mirror eight years later.



Wood is central to Japanese civilization. The concepts of sustainability and reutilization, and the maintenance of know-how and skills are considered more important than the actual physical existence of a structure or building. This is the essence of ‘eternity’ as it is expressed at Jingu, and the reason for choosing to build and rebuild dwellings for the *kami*, instead of permanent structures of stone.

To this day, we are able to participate in the same *matsuri* as performed by our ancestors and share a common spirituality with them through the cyclical re-enshrinement of Amaterasu-Omikami. Shikinen Sengu is a temporal and spatial return to origins that spans generations. It resonates in the souls of our ancestors, and is a gift to the future.

Shikinen Sengu plays one other very important role by enabling the transfer of our technical skill and spirit to the next generation. This transfer maintains both our architectural heritage, and over 1,000 years of artistic tradition involving the making of the divine treasures—including 714 different kinds of sacred objects. After Shikinen Sengu, the previous sanctuary building is disassembled and most of the timber is granted to other jinja across Japan to be reused. The main pillars that support the roof of the main sanctuary are traditionally reused for the sacred *torii* gate on Ujibashi Bridge at the entrance of Naiku.



Visiting a Jinja

Temizu (How to purify your hands and mouth)

When visiting a jinja, pass under the *Torii* (sacred gate) and proceed to the *Temizuya* (purification font usually consisting of a stone water basin) to cleanse your hands and rinse your mouth. This is a simple act of purification before approaching the main sanctuary.

1
Take the dipper with your right hand and fill it with water. Pour some water over your left hand to rinse it.



2
Shift the dipper to your left hand and rinse your right hand.



3
Take the dipper with your right hand again, and pour water into your left cupped hand and rinse your mouth. Please do not touch the dipper directly to your mouth.



4
Finally, rinse your left hand once more and tilt the dipper so that the remaining water trickles down the handle to cleanse it.



Praying Etiquette to *Kami*

1
Bow twice deeply.



2
Clap your hands twice.



3
And bow once more deeply.



Glossary

BETSUGŪ 別宮	14 affiliated jinja of Ise Jingu closely connected with the main sanctuary (<i>Shogu</i>).	MIKOSHI 神輿	A portable jinja where <i>kami</i> are carried in a procession during festivals.
DAI-GŪJI 大宮司	Supreme priest of Ise Jingu.	MIKOTO 命	A suffix to indicate divinity.
EMA 絵馬	Small wooden plaques at jinja on which worshipers write their prayers or wishes.	MISOGI 禊	Ritual purification through bathing or ablution.
ENGLISHIKI 延喜式	Japanese book of laws and regulations from the early 10th century which regulates Shinto rituals and has a list of important jinja.	NIHON-SHOKI 日本書紀	The second oldest book of classical Japanese history after the <i>Kojiki</i> with a focus on the lineages of the Japan's Imperial rulers and their deeds. Contains stories from the divine age.
GOSHINTAI ご神体	A sacred object that is worshiped at or near shrines and represents the spirit of the <i>kami</i> . It may be a natural object such as a stone, mountain or waterfall or a man-made object, commonly, a mirror, sword or jewel.	NORITO 祝詞	Shinto liturgy recited during a ritual.
GŪJI 宮司	Chief priest of jinja.	OFUDA お札	Talisman issued by a jinja symbolising the presence of a <i>kami</i> to protect a household.
GOSHINPŌ ご神宝	Sacred treasures. Related to the enshrined <i>kami</i> or dedicated to the <i>kami</i> .	OMAMORI お守り	Protective amulet or charm to ward off evil or danger and bring good luck.
HARAI 祓い	General term for Shinto purification rituals of the mind and body. Often performed at the beginning of ceremonies to cleanse the participants before presenting offerings to the <i>kami</i> . Referred to as <i>Shuhatsu</i> at Ise-Jingu.	OMIKUJI おみくじ	Fortune sold at jinja written on strips of paper. Bad fortunes are often seen tied to tree branches at many jinja where the belief is that the <i>kami</i> will exorcise the bad luck.
HEIHAKU 幣帛	Ritual offerings of textiles.	SAISEN 賽銭	Monetary offering when people pray at jinja.
HIMOROGI 神籬	A temporarily erected branch or tree which summons the <i>kami</i> and defines a sacred space.	SAISEN-BAKO 賽銭箱	Monetary box where offerings are tossed prior to worship.
JINJA 神社	This word is often translated as 'Shinto shrine' or 'Shinto temple'. However, both words do not express its exact nature and using 'jinja' instead is recommended in order to express its unique characteristics.	SAISHU 祭主	Sacred priestess unique to Ise Jingu. Saishu is appointed according to the will of the <i>Tenno</i> .
JINGŪ-TAIMA 神宮大麻	Special talisman of Ise Jingu.	SAKAKI 榊	Sacred evergreen tree whose branches are often used in rituals and ceremonies.
KAGURA 神楽	Ancient dance and music dedicated to <i>kami</i> .	SHIMENAWA 注連縄	A length of braided rice straw rope placed around objects/trees to indicate the presence of <i>kami</i> , often attached with zigzag paper called <i>shide</i> .
KAMI 神	Shinto deity. Also defined as sacred spirits found in the natural world. Refer to page 14–17 for detail.	SHINSEN 神饌	Food offerings to the <i>kami</i> , including staples such as rice, fish, sake, salt, water etc.
KAMIDANA 神棚	A miniature altar that houses the protective <i>kami</i> of a house or shop. An <i>ofuda</i> as well as offerings such as rice, fruit and water are placed on the altar.	SHŌGŪ 正宮	Main sanctuary of Naiku or Geku. A prefix 'go' is usually added for politeness and respect.
KANNUSHI 神主	Standard term for a Shinto priest. Alternatively called <i>shinsboku</i> and <i>shinkan</i> .	SHŌ-GŪJI 少宮司	Assistant to the Supreme Priest.
KOJIKI 古事記	Text written in the 8th century outlining the mythical origins of Japan and the role of <i>kami</i> in its foundation.	TAMAGUSHI 玉串	A sacred sprig of evergreen <i>sakaki</i> offered to the <i>kami</i> during rituals by a priest or worshiper.
KOMAINU 狛犬	Stone lion-dogs that stand guard outside the entrance gates to jinja to ward off evil spirits.	TEMIZUYA 手水舎	Fountain at the entrance to jinja where worshippers can purify themselves by washing their hands and mouth.
MIKO 巫女	Jinja maiden or attendant who supports Shinto priests and performs rituals at jinja such as <i>kagura</i> .	TORII 鳥居	Shinto gate which indicates the entrance and border to the jinja sanctuary.
		UJIGAMI 氏神	Community or clan deities who are venerated ancestors of the clan. In present day, they are commonly the local guardian <i>kami</i> of villages and communities.
		UJIKO 氏子	Parishioners of a local jinja.

SOUL of JAPAN

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© Public Affairs Headquarters for Shikinen-Sengu
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