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 CHAPTER 2
 

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## Everyday Connectedness

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In the preceding chapter we analyzed Shinto spirituality in its generalized experiential form—thereby establishing a terminology and conceptual framework for the rest of the book. Chapter 1 sometimes used the first person in its phenomenological descriptions for two reasons. The first purpose was to demonstrate there is nothing in the ordinary experience of Shinto spirituality so alien from the experience of most people that they cannot understand it. The type of spirituality discussed in the previous chapter need not be exotic, alien, or simplistic. Second, the first-person anecdotes illustrate how even a non-Japanese might engage the tradition on some level. This point is important because most accounts of Shinto explain it as a *Japanese* religion. Of course, this is true in most respects. Almost all people identifying themselves as Shinto are Japanese; almost all Japanese see themselves as affiliated with it in some way. Shinto was not simply a direct import from the Asian mainland but developed its character within the Japanese cultural and geographical context. In short: as a religion, Shinto is undeniably of and by the Japanese people. Does this mean that the kind of spirituality emphasized in Shinto is for the Japanese people alone? Let us leave this as an open question until we address it again at the end of the book.

Yet the fact that Shinto is practiced as a religion almost exclusively in Japan makes it vital to explore the presence of Shinto in everyday Japanese life. Whatever general spiritual characteristics Shinto might have, we need to understand its particularities as well. Such details take us more deeply into the Japanese culture that has both nurtured, and been nurtured by, Shinto. When considering the function of Shinto spiritual values in the daily lives of the Japanese people, it is helpful to

consider two different aspects of ordinary spirituality found in probably every religious tradition as it is commonly lived. The first aspect includes areas of life in which Shinto values resonate invisibly with ways of thinking, speaking, and behaving. For the most part, spirituality in this domain functions as second nature. People are not conscious they are doing anything special. What they think, say, and do is what they have always thought, said, and done. It is the warp and woof by which they weave their daily lives. The second facet of spirituality in daily life, however, is distinguished by an explicit sense of specialness or at least of being self-consciously "traditional"—observing calendrical holidays (such as New Year or various regional festivals), engaging in rituals marking life stages (such as marriage or children's reaching a certain age), or taking journeys to a special place (a famous shrine, for example). This chapter explores both aspects of everyday Shinto spirituality. We begin with the Shinto values that have become second nature to most Japanese.

### *Rice: A Holographic Entry Point*

When Jesus taught his followers to pray, he asked for "our daily bread." Today many people interpret Jesus' use of the word "bread" to mean "food" in general. This reading is probably acceptable, but it drops some of the original cultural context. At the last supper with his disciples, Jesus identified his own body with that bread. Since then Christians have made "breaking bread together" a fundamental ritual of bonding people to God and people to people. For Jesus and the people of his time and culture, bread was the staple of nourishment and the focus of communal eating. On a more mundane level, even today's idioms suggest the fundamental aspect of bread in American culture. "Bread" can be slang for "money" ("Got any bread?"), possibly an extension of the idea of money as "dough." What is basic or fundamental is said to be "bread and butter," and people who pay attention to political pragmatics are said to know "where their bread is buttered." The stomach is referred to as the "breadbasket." Bread is the "staff of life." Yet from the spiritual standpoint, Jesus also reminded people that they "do not live by bread alone." For the Christian, only by being spiritually infused can bread become identified with the "body of Christ," the tissue of Christian life.

Rice has an analogous function throughout Asia, including Japan. An anecdote illustrates the point. While a graduate student at the East-West Center in Honolulu three decades ago, I regularly ate lunch at the center's cafeteria. Every day I would share a meal with fellow students from various parts of Asia and the Pacific as well as the United States. We discussed politics, economics, religion, even dating. The discussions were always remarkably civil, no matter how much we disagreed. Only once did I think fisticuffs might break out. The topic that day? The right way to prepare and eat rice. Somehow the differences in how to cultivate rice (wet or dry rice culture), prepare rice (polish or leave brown), cook rice (boil or stir-fry), and eat rice (with fork, chopsticks, or scooping it up with bread) were paradigmatic to the differences in Asian cultures. The lesson gleaned from that experience: rice may function as a holographic entry into a whole array of Japanese values, especially those linked with Shinto spirituality.

The Japanese may associate tea with Zen Buddhism, but rice is unquestionably the province of Shinto. In a formal ritual, the emperor plants the first rice seedlings of the year; in another, he eats the first grains of the annual harvest. *Sake* (rice wine) barrels stacked on high at Shinto shrines represent (usually symbolically) gifts from donors. At a Shinto altar, rice and *sake* are common offerings to the *kami*. The sacred rope discussed in chapter 1, the *shimenawa*, is typically made from rice straw. Because Shinto and rice enjoy a most intimate ritual connection, it is hardly surprising that as an entry point in Japanese culture, rice carries with it values commonly associated with Shinto as well. So let us examine more closely rice's role in ordinary Japanese life.

A frequent Japanese word for "meal" is *gohan*, that is, "cooked rice." Rice, not bread, can be called the staff of life in Japan. Besides its granular state, it is also pounded into flour so it appears in the form of crackers, noodles, and a gooey dessert or snack called *mochi*. Rice served as the unit of taxation and fiscal exchange for much of Japanese history. For most Japanese, rice has a deep ethnic significance—so much so that the state heavily subsidizes rice farming. Japan might import soybeans, for example, another staple of the Japanese diet. But there would be something amiss, apparently, if Japan could not locally

sustain its consumption of rice. Therefore, as passengers zoom along the bullet-train railways linking one Japanese megalopolis to the next, they pass one small valley after another, each populated with hamlets nestled among a sea of rice paddies. Without subsidies and high tariffs on rice imports, such small communities could never survive in today's Japanese economy. Wet rice culture is an inseparable part of much of the Japanese landscape, and for many natives Japan would not be Japan without it.

The Japanese polish their rice to the white luster of a cultured pearl. When preparing it, the cook carefully preserves some of the granules' glutinous coating so the boiled product will be sticky. No individual grain is left unconnected to at least one other grain and, by transitive relation, to all the other grains. At a traditional meal, such rice is usually served in its own bowl of muted elegance or simplicity, unadulterated by contact with other foods. Even when rice is mixed with other foods, it often maintains its character by being the layer underneath the other food. We find this in the various *donburi* (rice bowl) dishes as well as in *nigiri-style* sushi. When rice is stir-fried together with vegetables or meats, the result is generally considered an assimilated form of "Chinese," rather than "traditionally Japanese," cooking. Japanese often eat their rice with disposable (which is to say, virgin) wooden chopsticks. The pair of sticks typically comes stuck together, but the diner (no one else) breaks them apart as if making the utensil out of two twigs from a tree. The most common style of disposable chopstick is rather short and leaves the points square rather than rounded (as is more typical of the Chinese style). The Japanese version is not only more rustic but also more practical for picking up a small or slippery item of food.

The appropriate accompaniment for the traditional meal is *sake*, which is to say, rice wine. Most often served heated to a little above body temperature, its warm flow down the gullet gives the drinker a head start on the "feeling good" function of the alcohol. It is said that the warmth is the most efficient temperature for getting the alcohol into the bloodstream as quickly possible. Unlike Chinese cuisine, the main courses of most traditional Japanese meals are served in individual portions, not family style. The large rice bowl and *sake* pitchers,

however, are often left on the table and individual portions distributed as needed. That is: the most communal part of the meal centers on rice and rice products.

If the meal is eaten in a traditional Japanese room, moreover, the diners sit on a tatami-covered floor. Between the outer layers of woven reeds, the filling for the tatami mats is typically composed of straw left over from the harvested rice plants. For the sake of cleanliness, people remove their shoes before stepping on it and the tatami itself lends a subtle scent of rusticity to the room. If the room is in a traditional restaurant, the menu's specials of the day would probably be written in a fine calligraphic hand on a piece of rice paper. Because chopsticks sticking upright in a bowl of rice is an offering to the dead, one takes care not to place them so at the dinner table. It would suggest someone at the table is dead or about to die. In Japanese gangster films, the act can be equivalent to Al Capone's looking someone in the eye and saying "I'm talking to a dead man" - not the best tone for a quiet meal among friends.

The romantic poet William Blake claimed to see a world in a grain of sand. Given its holographic function in Japan, a grain of rice might show us at least something of the world of Shinto. Our description has opened us to an array of Shinto themes: naturalness, simplicity, purity and taboo, purification, separateness and communal solidarity, and intoxication. Let us now explore this cluster of traditionally Japanese Shinto values in more detail by considering them in succession.

#### NATURALNESS

Naturalness is a prominent theme in almost every serious discussion of Shinto - and rightly so. Many traditional *torii* and shrines of Shinto are made of unpainted wood. (Some were originally painted, but after the paint wore off, someone decided they looked better that way.) The groundcover, if there is any at all, is usually just white gravel, although as a concession to the stability of the visitors' ankles, there may be a paved walkway running through it. There are few adornments in most Shinto sites (although there are many important exceptions - the extravagant Toshogu shrine that the Tokugawa shoguns built in Nikko to honor themselves is probably the most extreme counterexample).

In general, "naturalness" has two senses for the Japanese: either a

close connection between humans and nature or the cultivated ability to *make* things natural. The first sense is fairly obvious and follows from the idea that *kami* are an intimate, inseparable part of the natural world. As discussed in the previous chapter, natural objects and events often inspire awe. Certain natural objects may be designated holographic entry points of concentrated *tama*, but for Shinto, in the final analysis, they only help us realize that *all* nature is *kami*. The second meaning of naturalness, however, might surprise some Western readers who think of human artifice as by definition not natural. Yet if we join Shinto in considering human beings as part of nature instead of separate from it, even human inventiveness can be natural - at least if performed with the genuine mindful heart.

Consider, for example, the tatami floor in our description of the traditional Japanese meal. Obviously, tatami is not natural in that it is not found in nature; a dirt floor or even a floor covered with loose straw would be more natural in this sense. Human beings have to manufacture tatami. But the goal is to bring the natural smell, sight, and feel of the straw into the home. The layering of the tatami with its woven, reeded cover makes the straw durable and able to be cleaned in a way loose straw cannot. Yet much of the sensory experience of straw remains. The disposable wooden chopsticks display such naturalness, too. Like many *torii*, they are left unadorned and unfinished. The *snap!* in breaking apart the chopsticks accentuates the point. Though manufactured with machinery, the chopsticks await the personal touch before they are allowed to contact the food.

The rice in the traditional Japanese meal described here was unadorned, too, without any added flavoring. There is a story of two chefs, one Chinese and one Japanese, who were boasting of their respective skills. The Chinese chef was trumpeting his talent for making sauces, using spices, and controlling texture, so that he could make chicken taste like duck. The Japanese retorted he could make a carrot taste more like a carrot than any other carrot anyone has ever eaten. The Japanese chef exemplifies the virtue of "making something natural." That is: the value in this sort of naturalness is not leaving things untouched but working to bring out something of their natural state. Leaving the *torii* and shrine unpainted makes visible the grain of the wood - the natural life patterns of the original tree. To show the nat-

uralness in a manufactured object highlights the shared *kokoro* of nature and humanity.

#### SIMPLICITY

Simplicity as a primary value follows from Shinto's emphasis on naturalness. Shinto priests and women attendants dress in white with little of the adornment common among the garb of Buddhist clergy. Furthermore, the shrines themselves generally lack the elaborate artistic expressions (paintings, sculptures, statues, gold-leaf furnishings) decorating Buddhist temples. Some Shinto shrines display on the altar no artifact at all, not even a mirror. Indeed, in many Shinto shrines the visitor does not enter the main building itself but stands instead at a gate in the open air in front of it. Furthermore, this outdoor area typically lacks the gardens commonly seen on Buddhist grounds. The natural surroundings of the shrine may be groomed, but the landscaping usually does not have the planned design associated with "Japanese gardens."

In describing rice as part of everyday Japanese life, most of what is "natural" is also simple: the unspiced rice, the unadorned chopsticks, the simple bowls. The best way to make something natural is to keep it simple. The idea is that the natural expresses itself through the simplicity of materials and artist. If simplicity is valued, the natural will be able to express itself most directly through the hands of the cook, the potter, or the chopstick maker. Only the person's *makoto no kokoro* can open itself so egolessly as to create together with nature. The plain clay may speak for itself, but its voice is so soft that the potter of the mindful heart amplifies it so we all can hear it.

Many commentators associate the Japanese emphasis on naturalness and simplicity with Zen Buddhism rather than Shinto. In such books as *Zen and Japanese Culture*, D. T. Suzuki popularized this view in Japan as well as in the West. Suzuki was correct to point out that many arts associated with Japan have a close connection with Zen Buddhism, especially through the tea ceremony and all its accoutrements including ikebana, calligraphy, poetry, gardens, and pottery. Suzuki accurately portrayed Zen's historical significance in the development and institutionalization of these arts. At times, though, he seemed to imply more—namely, that Zen Buddhism *introduced* the

aesthetic of simplicity and naturalness to Japan. This claim, if he indeed meant to make it, is wrong.

Simplicity and naturalness were part of Japanese culture and represented in Shinto practices centuries before Zen's emergence in the thirteenth century. The kind of grand simplicity found in many Shinto shrines such as that of the sun *kami* at Ise is an obvious example. Zen prospered through its connection with the Japanese arts, not so much because it was introducing something totally new to the culture, but because it resonated with something old. The so-called Zen simplicity in many drinking bowls used in the tea ceremony, for example, can also be seen as far back as some of the unglazed pottery of the Yayoi period, a millennium before Japanese Zen developed and tea plants were cultivated in Japan.



*Small Outbuilding at Ise Shrine*

*This structure for preserving important properties of the shrine exemplifies well the Shinto values of simplicity and rusticity.*

One can argue, therefore, that the Zen aesthetic was similarly a return to a simplicity predating the Heian court's aesthetic of elegance. This aesthetic of courtly elegance predominated among the aristocrats of the Heian period (794-1185) and reflected the high arts from China, including those from esoteric Buddhism, rather than Shinto. The power of the nobles had waned, however, by the time Zen blossomed in Japan. Zen melded with the Kamakura period's (1185-1333) tendency to go back to the ideals of a simpler, less refined, sometimes even rustic, lifestyle. This aesthetic fit the military mentality of the new political leaders, many of whom had come from the outlands distant from the cultural capital of Kyoto. By this process, Zen values and practices became the center of aesthetic development in the thirteenth through sixteenth centuries.

We can use the example of *nō* drama to illustrate an aesthetic relation between Zen and Shinto. *Nō* (often spelled "Noh") is a traditional Japanese dramatic form known for its wooden masks, solemn chanting, precisely choreographed slow movements, bare stage design, and plotlines of the ghostly or heroic. Such innovators as Zeami (1363-1443) formalized and institutionalized *nō* in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, elevating it from folk art to the most rarefied aesthetic heights. In training his actors, Zeami drew extensively from Zen Buddhist principles of discipline and spiritual progress. In so doing, he wove together a distinctive theory of both performance and audience appreciation. Thus it is appropriate to emphasize *nō's* connections with Zen Buddhism.

Yet we should not overlook *nō's* relation to Shinto as well. First, the storylines often deal with *kami*, with the transformation between animal spirits and humans, and with the interaction between ghosts and events in this world. These themes antedate not only the introduction of Zen Buddhism into Japan but probably even the formal introduction of any other form of Buddhism as well. *Nō* plotlines often present us with a *kami-filled, tama-empowered* world. Certainly many *nō* plays integrate into their storylines Buddhist themes and values as well, but in so doing they reflect the Buddhist-Shinto syncretism so prevalent in the medieval period (see chapter 4). The storylines are not the only obvious connection between *nō* and Shinto, however. For a Japanese audience, the *nō* performance resonates with ritual forms as

much Shinto as Buddhist. The *nō* stage has a main section resembling a Shinto shrine, and many outdoor *nō* stages are found in Shinto compounds. The stage, even when indoors, is separated by a small dry moat filled with gravel, much like the gravel in a Shinto precinct. Some movements in *nō* trace back to sacred dance forms, many with ancient Shinto connections. The *nō* music too is historically associated with these ancient Japanese ritualistic dances. The music has unmistakable resemblances, for example, to the ancient court music one still hears in Shinto festivities such as the parade for the Gion festival in Kyoto every summer. For such reasons *nō*—one of the most refined of the Japanese arts—is frequently resonant with Shinto as well as Zen associations in the experience of its Japanese audience.

In summation: it is true that many of Japan's most famous arts flourished because of Zen Buddhism. It is also true that the development of these arts was closely linked to the ideals of Zen training and spiritual cultivation. It is not true, however, that Zen introduced a totally new aesthetic sensitivity for simplicity and naturalness. For the latter, enduring Shinto values have played a crucial role in establishing a cultural basis for the later acceptance of Zen Buddhist ideals.

#### PURITY AND TABOO

Purity and taboo were two other elements highlighted in our analysis of rice. Purity is a value that obviously complements both naturalness and simplicity. We found purity emphasized in the whiteness of the rice, the use of virgin chopsticks, the rice's not being intermixed with other foods, and the removal of shoes before stepping on the tatami floor. As for taboo behavior, we discussed in the family dinner scene the prohibition against sticking chopsticks upright in a bowl of rice. Forbidden behavior brings about impurity, pollution, or defilement (*tsumi*). *Tsumi* (or the more ritualistic term, *kegare*) denotes something offensive to be cleansed. If one acts the wrong way in relation to *kami*, the point of connection and overlap between the sacred and the human is itself defiled.

The Western idea of sin generally involves intent; sin usually cannot be accidental. The Shinto idea of defilement, by contrast, is more akin to what we find in taboo cultures—that is, the contact itself is the polluting factor regardless of whether the person knew about the

offense or undertook the action voluntarily. In chapter 1 we used the analogy of salt in seawater to exemplify an internal relation. We also noted that if the seawater comes into contact with fresh water, the saltiness diffuses through both. As the positive *tama* of the emperor may diffuse through a tree he planted, so too can something negative pollute a pure mindful heart just by contact. In the symbolic language introduced in the previous chapter, we could say the mirrorlike mindful heart is soiled (perhaps through no fault of its own) and cannot reflect the *kami-filled* world. Things will not go right from this point forward—the only solution is a purification ritual to eradicate the pollution or defilement. Before turning to the purification rituals themselves, though, let us consider in more detail what constitutes defilement. Here we will find further resemblances between the Shinto treatment of defilement and the behavior associated with taboo-based religions.

One of the main Shinto taboos is contact with the dead. In Japan before the eighth century, it was common to build a new palace upon the death of the emperor or empress. The death of the former sovereign was considered so polluting that the successor would want to have a fresh start. Blood, probably as the carrier of life, is a defiling substance when it leaves the body via wounds, disease, or even menstruation. Violating such a taboo calls for purification. In premodern Japan, for example, menstruating women were not to enter shrine precincts and there were purification rituals for women to perform after their monthly cycles. Such rituals are rarely performed today (other than by women having a role in presiding over shrine rituals), but the taboo technically remains. Indeed Shinto tradition dictated that when a newborn was introduced to the *kami* at a shrine, the mother, having been recently defiled by the effluence of her blood in the childbirth, could not attend. The exclusion of the mother at this ritual is no longer the norm—but more by people's ignoring the prohibition than by any official rethinking of the Shinto position.

In summation: if death and menstruation are examples of defilement, or *tsumi*, we can see how wrong is the common translation of "*tsumi*" as "sin," "crime," or even "offense." Death and menstruation are not intentional acts; indeed they are not even avoidable. There is no judgment that *tsumi* suggests moral wrongdoing and, conse-

quently, no issue of forgiveness involved in eradicating it. With its emphasis on purity, Shinto's concern for *tsumi* is mainly an issue of spiritual cleanliness—of cleaning the dust off the mirror of *kokoro*.

The death and the blood taboos also suggest how strongly Shinto is focused on life and its processes. There is a saying that Japanese are born Shinto and die Buddhist. We will explore the Buddhism-Shinto relation more fully in later chapters, but the point here is that Shinto is strongly associated with life: fertility, physical health, creation, and abundance. Therefore its taboos are often associated with its opposite—death. *Tama*, as the life-defining energy, leaves the body at death and the effluence of blood maybe associated with this. In fact, the connection between death and blood is so strong that most Japanese films still portray the moment of a person's demise with a trickle of blood escaping the mouth, regardless of the actual cause of death. Blood leaving the body indicates the exit of life-energy.

While discussing the affirmation of life, it is worth noting in passing another common term sometimes occurring in Shinto contexts: "*ki*" (vital force). This term has a long history in China (where it is pronounced "*qi*"), and certainly much of the Japanese notion can be traced there. The meaning of *qi* in China and *ki* in Japan is so extraordinarily complex that we can barely touch the surface of that topic here. In general, we can say *ki* is both spiritual and physical. It is both a force in nature and a life-giving power within humans. It is a matter-energy that is associated in various ways with both breath (or air) and electricity, having applications in both Chinese medicine and physical sciences. The goal in practices related to *ki* is first to recognize its presence, both within and outside oneself, and then to work with it. (The notion of the "Force" in the *Star Wars* films is said to be based on the idea of *ki*.)

Our interest here is that the notion of *ki* sometimes appears in Shinto discourse, especially in the modern period. When it does, it is associated with life and health, both physical and spiritual. In this respect it seems to blur into the traditional Shinto idea of *tama*. Some Shinto-related "new religions" that arose in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries explicitly include the notion of *ki* in their teachings and practices. The term also pervades the discourse of the Japanese martial arts. In fact Ueshiba Morihei (1883-1969), founder of the distinc-

tively Japanese martial art of *aikido* (the way of mutual harmonization with *ki*) was a member of one of those new religions called Omotokyo. He explained the origin of his technique as being communicated to him by a *kami*. The training he developed for his students includes Shinto-related chanting and purification rituals.

Finally, given our discussion of rice, it is noteworthy that the Sino-Japanese character used to write "*ki*" has a connection with the character used for "rice." Specifically, the single character for *ki* is composed by combining the character for "vapor" with the character for "rice." (Not all philologists are happy with this common folk etymology, but there is no denying that when anyone looks at the character this is what one sees in its construction.) Thus, on the graphic level at least, *ki* is associated with the steam rising from boiling rice. Anyone who has boiled Japanese rice knows that the released steam is not only water vapor. When it dries, it leaves a sticky residue—evidence that the vapor had been almost invisibly permeated with rice gluten. Pursuing this metaphorical line of thought, *ki* is the invisible nourishing life-force permeating the air and charging it with power. Given their common connections to a universal spiritual/material force, it is easy to imagine how the traditional idea of *tama* and the imported idea of *ki* could become linked.

#### PURIFICATION

The appropriate response to pollution is purification. Shinto purification rituals commonly involve water, salt, or fire. Of these three, water is the most widely used. In Japan, fresh water comes either directly from the heavens or from mountain streams winding their way down to villages below. Since both the heavens and the mountains are common sites of *kami*, the association between *kami* and water is understandable. In chapter 1's analysis of a typical shrine visit, we mentioned the water troughs used by visitors to purify themselves before approaching the front of the shrine. One of the most dynamic practices of water purification, however, takes place in the ritual called "*misogi*." While walking mountain paths, one may sometimes happen upon a secluded waterfall and witness the ritual. Although it has levels of complexity and variation, the basics of *misogi* are simple. Usually dressed entirely in white, the participant enters a mountain pool at the



*Shrine Water Trough*

*The ladles are lined up ready to be used for washing mouths and hands of shrine visitors.*

base of a small sacred waterfall. With the water pounding down on his or her head, the devotee stands beneath the waterfall and chants a formulaic incantation. Through the *tama* of the sacred water and the *kotodama* (the *tama* of words) in the chant, the person's impurities are washed away.

As we will see in chapter 4, the coalition with Buddhism was important to Shinto's development and it is easy to find practices blurring the distinction between the two. A good example related to purification by water is found at the Temple of Pure Water (Kiyomizu-dera) in eastern Kyoto. This Buddhist temple is probably best known to tourists for its stunning perch on the hillside of Higashiyama. With its main hall standing on colossal wooden stilts to support it on the sharp incline, the temple enjoys a marvelous view of the city below. As the name suggests, however, the site was originally chosen in ancient times for its small waterfall shooting out of a rocky cliff. Today visitors rinse out their mouths with its water or drink it as a purifying act. As was the case with many ancient Buddhist temples, Kiyomizu-dera was built on a site already full of *kami* and energized with *tama*. The Shinto and Buddhist elements are now so interlaced in their internal relations that they are virtually inseparable.

The use of water as a purifying agent is visible, too, in many everyday Japanese practices. A wet cloth is given to diners and travelers to clean their face and hands—a tradition so civilized that it has become a standard practice on many airlines around the world. Shopkeepers typically use a hose or buckets of water to rinse off the sidewalks in front of their establishments at the start of the business day. The traditional Japanese bath has its own rituals of cleansing and purifying. Although neighborhood public baths are rapidly disappearing in favor of baths built into personal homes, some of the traditional protocol is still followed within the household. The order of bathers, for example, may reflect the hierarchy in family relations starting with the head of the household. When entering, each bather first showers off all dirt with soap and water and then, once clean, steps into the hot bathwater to soak. This procedure suggests that the purpose of the bath might be something more than just getting clean. Since the water is often so hot that any movement will sting, the bather sits in the water motionless, relaxing all muscular tension before retiring for the night. The

same hot bathwater remains clear for the next person so that family members, one by one, share the same purifying warmth. The experience brings a calm feeling of interconnectedness with the surroundings of home, family, bath, and bed.

At first glance, some of this water-related behavior may seem no more than simple attention to sanitation. Certainly airline passengers using the wet cloths distributed before meals do not think of themselves as doing something Shinto. It is, after all, good hygiene to wash one's hands before eating. Yet the Japanese practices long antedate any knowledge of modern sanitation. Visitors to Japan from China seven centuries ago and from Europe five centuries ago commented on the Japanese people's distinctive love of bathing. In Japan bathing is not just to cleanse, but also to purify. Of course, most Japanese do not give such behavior much thought. The Shinto values behind the behavior have become so ingrained that people do not usually reflect on them.

Although water is probably the most common purifying agent in Shinto rituals, salt or fire is also used. Salt is white and associated with the sea and with life. It repels demonic or defiling presences. In the Japanese sport of sumo, for example, the wrestlers use salt in this way. As they approach the ring, they throw handfuls of salt in the air to purify the area of the contest. The Shinto resonances in the ritualistic setting of this sport are unmistakable. In choosing their professional names, the wrestlers usually include references to natural objects such as mountains or trees. The ring itself is marked off by a *shimenawa* shaped into a circle—designating the area as sacred space. The match determines who stays within and who is pushed out of this circle. The sacred nature of the contested space is heightened by the presence of a Shinto shrine roof suspended above the ring. The referee waves a fan to ward off disruptive spirits and signal the stages of the bout. In receiving the winner's prize, wrestlers make a waving gesture resembling that used in Shinto ritual to ward off evils from the four directions. However subliminal some of the symbols may be, the entire event is resplendent with Shinto imagery.

Sometimes fire, too, may be used to purify. Some Shinto festivals feature participants running through the forest carrying fiery torches. Fires of purification in formal Shinto ritual must be ignited from a



spark created by rubbing together sticks of sacred wood or by striking a flint. (No matches or cigarette lighters allowed.) The sacred shrine at Ise follows the ancient tradition of using a wooden mortar and pestle. The ignition techniques obviously draw on the idea that the purifying power behind the fire—in this case the spark—is being released from nature rather than created. The fire, therefore, burns off impurities and returns the person to the primordial spark of spirituality always present in nature.

There is one further way of achieving purification—namely, by starting afresh. The disposable chopstick is suggestive of this strategy. When a fork is dropped on the floor, people will get another one that has been cleaned or will rewash the old one. When the disposable chopstick is dropped, by contrast, the person gets a new pair. In Shinto freshness can mean renewal. The chief shrine of imperial Japan is that of the sun *kami* at Ise. To maintain its purity, the old shrine building is dismantled every twenty years and a fresh one erected. This practice is reminiscent of how in ancient Japan, before the eighth century, a new palace was built for each new emperor or empress. In both cases purity is assured through newness.

#### SEPARATENESS AND COMMUNAL SOLIDARITY

Separateness and communal solidarity, although seemingly opposed, actually work together. The holographic paradigm of the whole-in-every-part makes this possible. In our description of the traditional Japanese meal, each person was served with his or her own *portion*—rather than with common dishes shared family style as would be expected in a Chinese meal, for example. The chopsticks were to be split apart only by the person using them. Yet the entire setting was in another respect strongly communal—as exemplified by the rice and *sake* being served from a common bowl or pitcher. The Japanese meal is not a group of solitary people who congregate for a collective meal. Unlike the Western notion of society as a contractual connection established among individuals, in Japan people find their solidarity by recognizing the internal relations binding them with others. For Japanese, in being individual one is intrinsically communal: the whole is in every part. This idea is difficult for many Americans and Western Europeans to appreciate, so let us explore it a bit further. A fruitful

way to understand this dynamic, especially if we are to apply it to Shinto, is to consider the Japanese interplay between regionality and nationality.

Much is made of the idea that the Japanese are homogeneous or at least see themselves that way. This is only partially true. The Japanese are intensely regional as well. Part of the reason is topographical. Imagine taking a bullet train from Tokyo to Kyoto. Outside the train window, the volcanic genesis of the Japanese archipelago is obvious. A geologically young landmass, Japan is a string of volcanic mountain peaks rising from the ocean floor. Because of its youth, Japan's landscape has not been thoroughly eroded and the mountains drop down rather precipitously into the sea in the vestige of ancient fingerlike lava flows. Most Japanese live in the small plains and valleys between these flows. This pattern is visible as our train passes a succession of window scenery alternating between dark mountainous terrain and bright pockets of towns, cities, and rice-paddied hamlets. If the train were slower and we were observant biologists, we could see that from one valley to the next there is often some variation in vegetation. Each valley is a little biosystem of its own. This is because Japan is generally laid out on a southwest-northeast axis while the major weather patterns are on the perpendicular northwest-southeast axis. (The direction along the axis varies with the season.) Hence the weather fronts hit the coasts and are directed differently into the various spaces between the old lava flows, creating subtle differences in temperature and moisture. Because of these hilly and mountainous fingers, until the development of modern transport systems it was difficult to travel from valley to valley by land. Regional differences in foods, modes of cooking, types of handicraft, and linguistic dialects developed. Regional difference is critical to *sake*, too. There are literally thousands of brands of *sake*. In effect, except for a few national brands, *sake* is a microbrewery phenomenon with the water and fermenting process varying from one region to the next.

Even today the Japanese celebrate their regional differences with television segments on the daily early morning news and talk shows. Each day takes the viewer to a different locale where the commentators report on the local foods, handicrafts, customs, and tourist sites. Department stores and large supermarkets often showcase the goods

from a different district of Japan each week. Even the bullet-train staff may sell varying foodstuffs in the aisles as the train travels through the different regions. In short: regional differences are part of Japan's homogeneity. In being regional, the person is sharing in being Japanese. Since the particular reflects the whole holographically, by being regional one simultaneously celebrates the communal whole of Japan. Shinto celebrates this sense of regionality. Most shrines are local or regional, rather than national, in character. The shrines celebrate the *kami* of a particular place or region, yet in so doing they open people to *kami* everywhere. By the special function of the holographic, the more deeply one enters the particular, the more inclusive the connectedness. Therefore one may feel most connected to all other Japanese even when—maybe *especially* when—participating in the most local of Shinto events.

#### INTOXICATION

Intoxication, the final rice-related theme, arises from our repeated references to *sake* in this chapter. *Sake* plays an important role in Japanese ritual: small bowls are offered to the dead or to the *kami*; a new barrel of *sake* is ceremoniously opened to celebrate the beginning of a new business or political enterprise; and *sake* plays a central role in certain purification rituals. The ancient myths and numerous folktales inform us that the *kami* deities are fond of *sake* and love parties. We have already mentioned that the prominent stacks of *sake* barrels at Shinto shrines symbolize the donations of patrons. In most examples of this kind, one must add, *sake's* intoxicating character is of little relevance. Drinking *sake* does not necessarily mean being intoxicated in the sense of getting falling-down drunk. Alcoholic spirits are, after all, linked with spirituality in other religious traditions as well without necessarily entailing drinking to the state of inebriation. The Christian Eucharist, for example, often includes the use of wine as part of its sacramental celebration of Christian community. Wine serves a similar function in certain Jewish rituals.

Yet *sake's* intoxicating qualities should not be ignored. The consumption of alcohol in Japan—and historically this has meant *sake*—has played an important role in Japanese social negotiations through-

out history. Japanese (males especially) are noted for drinking alcohol as a release from the country's rigorous social norms. In the workplace, the Japanese hierarchical system places heavy demands on individual behavior. One is expected always to defer to superiors and to attend to the needs of subordinates. During after-hours drinking with one's coworkers, however, the strict social rules tend to evaporate. Stories are legion of intoxicated lower or mid-level managers in Japan who directed highly critical comments to their superiors only to be forgiven the next morning when their apology was accompanied by a reference to having drunk too much. Psychologists, anthropologists, and sociologists have commonly analyzed Japanese drinking as a safety valve for releasing pent-up pressures from restrained anger left over from the rigid daily routine.

Furthermore, communal drinking is a form of bonding found in many cultures. The German sense of *gemutlichkeit*, for example, is nowhere stronger than in beer halls. When two Germans formally celebrate the transition from using the polite *Sie* to the familiar *Du* form of address toward each other, it is traditionally celebrated with a toast of beer amidst interlocked arms. Communal drinking may dissolve the social walls between people, allowing them to discover their more intimate overlaps. *Sake's* prominence in Shinto ritual cannot be fully understood without taking this function into account.

Of course, it is not always easy to distinguish when drinking *sake* is ritualistic and when it is simply the most direct route to getting drunk. When it comes to second nature, people seldom have a clear reason in mind for doing what they do. The spiritual values we have been discussing in this chapter are second nature to most Japanese. That is: since they are acculturated through repetition and tradition with little explanation, they get buried below the ordinary levels of self-reflective consciousness. Therefore, for some behavior, it is as difficult for Japanese to articulate true motivations as it would be for an outsider to surmise them. In sorting out the cultural significance of *sake* in Japanese culture today, a recent shift in Japanese drinking habits may give us a clue, however. Beer has replaced *sake* as Japan's most popular alcoholic beverage, and whiskey is finding its own niche as well. This includes drinks taken with meals. Even when about to partake in a

traditional Japanese meal, the guest of honor is usually asked "beer or sake?" This phenomenon suggests *sake* might have lost its privileged status in everyday life.

Or has it? Many Japanese insist that beer should not be drunk while actually eating rice at a meal. When asked why, the most common answer is that "you will get sick." I know of no physiological basis for such a claim. People in other cultures commonly mix the two. Yet this does not mean the claim is untrue for *Japanese*. There may be psychosomatic forces at work. If *sake* and rice have the complex associations discussed in this chapter, it is possible they still function, perhaps on an unconscious level, with "being traditional" in Japan. Even though no longer the alcoholic beverage of choice, *sake* maintains its special associations within the Japanese value system. Perhaps rice and *sake* together function as a kind of cultural, if not Shinto, holographic entry point into "feeling traditional." If so, perhaps it seems wrong or unfitting that such an entry point should be adulterated with a "foreign" element like beer. Breaking a taboo (or fear of breaking a taboo) can make a person feel queasy. This psychological interpretation of the continuing status of *sake* is, of course, highly speculative. But we should not underestimate the way traditions become second nature and how the open violation of them can have an uncomfortable visceral effect for the person who grew up in that tradition.

In discussing Shinto values inherent in everyday Japanese affairs, we have thus far analyzed what we have called the "second-nature" level of cultural assimilation. These ideas, values, and practices are so embedded in Japanese tradition that they are seldom reflected upon or given an explicit rationale. Children learn them as part of the process of growing up—learning how to think, feel, and behave by modeling themselves after their elders. By examining the Japanese culture of rice, we were able to see how many of these Shinto values come to bear on the most ordinary affairs of daily life. In general we could say that, in much of what we have discussed up to now in this chapter, many Japanese are connected with Shinto in ways they themselves may not even immediately recognize. Of course, this is not the whole story. In the ebb and flow of life, most Japanese do sometimes think, feel, or behave in a way they themselves might label as "being Shinto."

### *Shinto Practices in Japanese Life*

To appreciate the context of everyday Shinto-related behavior, it might be helpful to consider first a parallel situation from a Christian context in the West. Many Christians do not think much about their Christian identities in the course of their daily affairs. Suppose, however, we scrutinized these affairs as we have just examined those from the Japanese Shinto context. We could probably unearth a host of second-nature thoughts, feelings, and behavior reflecting Christian ideas or values such as guilt, forgiveness, charity, and hope. Most of these ideas would function so automatically that the people in question might only recognize their Christian roots if they explicitly looked for them. We could say the Christian inhabits a world of Christian habits. Yet such Christians may also, for example, regularly attend church services on Sundays. We could say this too is a Christianity-related habit, but there is a difference from the second-nature habits we have been discussing. On Sundays their going to church is intentional. They decide how to dress for church, think about whom they might meet there, and are generally aware that all these anticipated experiences will occur in a decidedly Christian context. If their Christian commitments are deeply spiritual, they may understand their church attendance as "practicing their Christianity." Even if this is not the case, the churchgoers would still see the behavior as "Christian" by association.

Returning to Shinto, let us now consider common practices in Japan that are analogous to our churchgoing example from Christianity. That is: let us examine experiences that may be habitual but involve a more self-conscious mentality than the second-nature behavior we have been analyzing. For some Japanese, such experiences may cluster around a strong self-identity with being Shinto. In other words: they might be seen as a religious practice central to their spirituality. For others, however, these same activities may be done more out of a sense of tradition, of preserving the continuity of family practices across the generations, or of meeting social expectations in a pro forma manner. For both groups of Japanese, it is important to note, they enter into such activities with awareness that their actions are connected in some way with Shinto. So let us call these "identifiably Shinto practices." We