

7.27 Shinto vs Buddhism Webquest

Watch the video on my website and read the information on Shintoism and Buddhism to complete your Webquest questions. The answers to the questions may not be in order with the video or the text. Be sure to follow all the directions on the Webquest worksheet.

Geography of Japan and What Makes the Shinto Religion Unique?

The waters that surround Japan have protected it from invaders. Unlike China and India, Japan has never been conquered by foreign armies. Yet these same waters brought ideas to Japan from Korea and China. The Japanese changed these ideas to fit their own way of life. This resulted in a unique Japanese culture.

For example, the Japanese adopted the Chinese system of writing. This allowed them to read Chinese books about medicine, mathematics, and science. The Japanese copied Chinese art and literature, wore Chinese clothing, and used the Chinese calendar. For a time the Japanese adopted the Chinese civil service. Later, they changed this system so that nobles, rather than scholars ran the government.



The religion born in Japan is Shinto. Historians do not know who founded it. It has no holy books like the Vedas, the Bible, or the Qur'an. Shinto followers love nature and worship kami, or spirits. They believe that these kami control the forces of nature. The word Shinto means "way of the gods". The Japanese people worship thousands of gods and spirits. The goddess of the sun is the most important Shinto god. In fact, the Japanese call their country Nippon, which means "source of the sun".

All About Shinto

Shinto is the native religion of Japan, and was once its state religion. It involves the worship of kami, or spirits. Some kami are local--the spirit of a particular place--but others represent major natural phenomena like Amaterasu, the Sun goddess, or Mount Fuji.



The word Shinto is a combination of two kanji (Chinese characters): "shin", meaning gods of spirits, and "tō" meaning a way or path (like Tao in Chinese). So Shinto is often translated as "The Way of the Gods".

Shinto can be seen as a form of animism. The afterlife, and belief, are not major concerns in Shinto; the emphasis is on fitting into this world instead of preparing for the next, and on ritual and observance rather than on faith.

The religion has no fixed book, no holiest place, no person or kami regarded as the holiest, and no defined set of prayers. Instead, Shinto is a



collection of rituals and methods meant to regulate the relations between living people and the spirits.

The main theme of the Shinto religion is love and reverence for natural artifacts and processes. So a waterfall or a special rock might come to be regarded as a spirit (kami) of that place; so might abstract things like growth and fertility. Sacred objects, such as rocks or trees, can be recognized by the special ropes (shimenawa) and white paper strips attached to them.

All About Buddhism

Buddhism is one of the world's great religions, and has deeply influenced the character and evolution of Asian civilization over the past 2,500 years. It is based on the teachings of a historical figure, Siddhartha Gautama, who lived around the fifth century BCE. As it moved across Asia, Buddhism absorbed indigenous beliefs and incorporated a wide range of imagery.



The historical Buddha-to-be, Siddhartha Gautama, was born around the 6th century BCE into royalty at Kapilavastu, which lay in the foothills of the Himalayas near the present day Nepalese-Indian border. For most of his youth, the prince led a sheltered existence within the palace, where he enjoyed court life, married a princess, and had a son. Venturing forth from the palace, he finally witnessed disturbing sights he had never before experienced: sickness, old age, and death. Deeply unsettled by what he had seen, the prince finally renounced his worldly life, and set out on a quest for truth, to

confront human suffering and the continuous cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (samsara).

The Buddha declared that he would meditate under a banyan tree until he achieved enlightenment. This phenomenal event occurred at Bodh Gaya which is one of Buddhism's great pilgrimage sites. As a result of his attainment of enlightenment, the prince Siddhartha Gautama was now truly the Buddha, the Enlightened One. The Buddha distilled the principles of enlightenment into a doctrine known as The Four Noble Truths:



- Life is suffering.
- Suffering is caused by desire, and by clinging to the notion of self.
- It is possible to end suffering. To end the suffering caused by desire and ego, one must eliminate the cause.
- Suffering can be ended by following the Noble Eightfold Path, a set of resolutions characterized by a concern for morality, concentration, moderation, positive action, and wisdom.

