

# “PLEASE DON'T PROPAGATE SHINTO “

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## *1. A Meeting with Dr. Herbert*

It was the spring of 1955 when I met Dr. Herbert for the first time. The French Embassy asked the Ministry of Education to introduce some good adviser for a professor to research into Shinto in Japan. Then, Prof. Fujisawa, was chosen as the most suitable, and called some chief Shinto professors and representative Shintoists(priests) to introduce that professor from Europe. Dr. Herbert proclaimed on the occasion that he would like to carry out his researches in Shinto in terms both of its peculiarity and its universality, and indicated five points of his investigation:

- 1) Whether Shinto (mythology) is still breathing among Japanese people.
- 2) How Shinto ceremony is applied to the modern life in Japan.
- 3) About the relation of Shinto festival to the people.
- 4) Changes of Shintoism in Japanese history.
- 5) About the spiritual training of Shinto.

Usually, most of Western approaches to Japan focus only upon its peculiarity; for example, André Malraux concentrated upon Bushido, the *Samurai* spirit as Japanese peculiarity while he estimated it quite highly.

On the other hand, Dr. Herbert was trying to see Shinto in the light of comparative religion, which impressed us greatly.

He had already read the English version of *Kojikie* and *Nihon-Shoki* by Chamberlain as preknowledge of his research. And we heard he was acquainted with Prof. Maruyama, the great scholar of Chinese philosophy of Tokyo University through study of Confucianism, Taoism or I-Ching.

So it was not long before we learned he was not a touristlike professor. However, while listening to his talk, we wondered at the same time how on earth we could help such an advanced study and answer his questions properly and simply.

## *2. Misogi, or Purification of Society*

We made research tours all over Japan together.

He never forgot anytime, I remember, to make precise notes wherever we went. We visited the total number of 1000 shrines. It was not seldom that we or the priests of the shrines were amazed by his -proper, intellectual questions.

Obviously, he was not a scholar kept merely in a study, but, rather, his intellectuality was corroborated by his own experiences. Owing to this attitude he could understand most deeply the core of Shinto --- 'Purity of Nature'.

As he was interested to do Shinto spiritual exercises, we went together to Mt. Mitsumine. Then he seemed impressed that Shinto was similar to Hindu or Yoga. But I explained that Shinto was essentially different from them.

It is true that Shinto, alike Hindu or Yoga, aims at making man pure and 'transcendental' in a sense through the exercise of *Misogi* in order to reach the spiritual awakening.

But Shinto insists that man should come back to society after that and purify the people as well. That is the significance of *Misogi*, Purificatory exercises.

The professor understood the idea easily in spite of my poor English, and with insight indicated that the prosperity of modern Japan might be based upon this concept.

### 3. *Natural-Spirit Zone*

To show that Shinto is so closely related with Nature, I thought it vital to take him to some natural sacred place, somewhere deep in the mountain as the archetype of Shinto shrine, where there were but some rocks.

He was sensitive enough to feel the natural vibrating energy; when he sensed the incredible energy coming out

of such a 'purified' place for the first time, he looked greatly surprised, just asking "why .... why ... why..."

"Because this is a Natural-Spirit Zone." I said.

"We didn't feel such a strong vibration in the shrines we visited." he said.

"Because their buildings are what man made. They are not natural or pure.

Then he asked: "Why, man should be Child of Kami according to Shinto."

"In its radical sense, Yes, however, man has a lot of *Kegare*, spiritual pollutions.

And who do you imagine comes and prays here, far away from the town? They come and pray for thanks..." "Thanks for what? It

"Thanks for --- that I am fine, happy today. Their prayer is never for selfish desires. But most of people visiting big shrines in the town will often give bad vibration with their egoistic praying. So I admit not all shrines in Japan are purified."

"Hindu is also 'natural', isn't it the same as Shinto in this sense?" he said.

"No." I answered.

"Why?"

"Because some deities of Hindu are 'hand-made'(artificial)."

Dr. Herbert smiled, then.

But in fact it is not only in Nature but also somewhere in the city that Natural Shinto is still breathing, secretly. We went to a very small shrine called "Karasumori-Inari", situated in a back street surrounded by taverns in the middle of Tokyo. It was so small that no priest took care of it. But, once he entered its space, he could feel that 'purifying' vibration, which created a sacred place, different from the surroundings. He was amazed to find that 'Natural Shinto' is alive still in the middle of Japan.

Since he learned to feel the Natural-Spirit vibration, he tried by himself to examine every shrine we visited.

When we reached the area of a shrine, he as a rule stood for a moment to feel its vibration, good

or bad. and then asked me if his sense was right or not, to make sure.

Such practical, deep experiences made a great contribution to his penetrating the core of Shinto. the natural power of purification.

#### *4. A Gift for Shintoists*

Dr. Herbert interviewed a number of Shintoists and priests of the shrines.

To his great surprise, he found everyone had his own idea of Shinto. That was not understandable for him first.

In the chief religions in the world like Christianity, Islam or Hindu, which have the Bible, Koran or Sutras, everyone would tell about his religion in a similar way.

But this cannot be applied to Shinto. which has no definite dogma's.

But afterwards when he rearranged the notes, he realised that there was the big flow of water in the bottom; each one was a partial stream which would make the whole river of Shinto; or Shinto was indeed a "fountain-head", from which each one would take the water of his own.

And, this led him to the confirmation that Shinto was not primitive as some European scholars had thought, but rather a highly developed form of religion with great generosity, although the individual philosophy had a danger to be narrow-minded in an aspect.

One day he said to me in the train;

"Please don't propagate Shinto, though I admit it is good enough to be universal ..... People will come to Shinto surely when necessary." I remember his words sounded to me rather shocking and I contemplated them for a long time.

Indeed, a religion is inseparable from natural features, climate, custom or language of the people. If we propagate a particular religion to a foreign people, we may not avoid to neglect their native originality with insisting upon our superiority, and finally to fight. What is worse, the religion itself might be distorted..

He meant to give us the most earnest warning because he was most afraid of the distortion of Shinto, for his great respect for it.

Yet I should say I may not have understood the full significance of what he said, until now when I see European youth in fact come to Japan and learn Shinto, more people turn toward Shinto.

I realise now the reconfirmation of universality in Shinto was the most appropriate gift from Dr. Herbert to us, Japanese Shintoists; while reflecting upon his final words "Please don't propagate Shinto..."