

## THE INSIDE VIEW

**Shiro Shintaku**

*Shinto is the native religion of Japan, woven through hundreds of years of history and found in shrines and sacred natural places throughout the country.*

*To Kensington resident Shintaku, the faith's association with Japanese aggression during World War II was a short-lived perversion of its original peaceful ideals. Shintaku, 62, is studying to become the first Shinto priest in the Washington area. He is also a longtime teacher of martial arts and assists his wife in working with the International Shinto Foundation to share Japanese culture and beliefs abroad.*



ANDREW HARNIK/EXAMINER

**Do you consider yourself to be of a specific faith?**

I am Shinto. The basic belief is that there is a pure and divine energy that is the source of the creation of all living things. The Shinto idea is that you respect the energy. Shinto is a universal religion — it includes all things. I was baptized as a Christian, my ancestors are Buddhist, and I learned Shinto through the study of martial arts. Shinto co-exists with all of those — there is no conflict. It is quite common, in fact, for Japanese to have a Shinto wedding and a Buddhist funeral, for example.

**How does the study of martial arts enhance your religion?**

All of the martial arts exist for protection — they are not about fighting. You use martial arts to stop the fighting, to bring peace to the fighting. The techniques for responding to an attacker contain the Shinto ideal — peacefulness. Not overreacting, but looking at the weapons, and then using natural reactions to escape. You train not to think — to have a peaceful mind. When the mind is disturbed, people panic and try to get away, but a peaceful mind-set allows the energy to work naturally, without struggling. That is actually the Shinto way.

**You first came to the United States in 1971. In what ways have you found that American culture could most benefit from Shinto beliefs?**

I would say Americans could show more appreciation, more gratitude, for everything — for family, for nature. Just more gratitude for life itself. In Japan, for example, there's not much murder — it is a really big thing if a person is killed. Even if a person steals, it's really big news. Here, that's not always true.

**In our busy world, and away from Shinto shrines throughout Japan, how do you practice your beliefs?**

Consciously, every morning, I say a prayer. I try to connect with the pure energy, and I ask for guidance, and I say prayers for other people. Then, when I have free time, I try to find beautiful places in nature. There are certain places considered to be sacred — places where Shinto priests can determine the energies to be pure. They are usually waterfalls, and certain mountains. The place itself is sacred — it itself is like a deity. It's not like a recreational place. In the United States, Niagara Falls is considered sacred. Sometimes events can be sacred — when people with good spirits come together, that can be sacred, too.

**At your core, what is one of your defining beliefs?**

I believe in [Shinto sun goddess] Amaterasu Omikami, as a life-giving force for all human beings, regardless of our differences. This is a blessing from nature, and I try to use this blessing the best I can to be useful to other people. I believe that all spirits are one — that everyone has the same origin.

— Leah Fabel