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Introduction to

Shin Buddhism



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Shin Buddhism: The Path of Gratitude and Humility

There are many traditions of Buddhism, but one of the most compelling paths of Buddhism is the Shin Buddhist path, the path of gratitude and humility.

While other schools of Buddhism seek to “attain”, or “realize” enlightenment, the Shin Buddhist path is one of simply listening and opening one’s heart to receiving it. The pursuit of enlightenment can become something like chasing after a mirage in the desert, you think you have arrived, only to find it disappear. Trying to grasp at or attain enlightenment can be like trying to grab a snowflake that falls. Once you grab it, you have crushed it. But if you open your hand and allow the snow to gently fall into your hand, the snowflake becomes yours, without any effort in grasping.

Rather than pursuing enlightenment, we simply listen to the Dharma and receive it...

This is the Shin Buddhist path. Rather than pursuing enlightenment, we simply listen to the Dharma and receive it, and allow it to unfold into our hearts and minds. This does not require any particular lifestyle. You don’t have to become a monk or sit for hours in meditation. You can listen to the Dharma in your everyday life, no matter what you do or where you are.

Listening to the Dharma can mean listening to sermons or lecture, but it can also mean listening or talking to anyone. You never know who might be your teacher of the Dharma, if you have the ears and heart to listen. A taxi driver could be a teacher, or a bartender, or your worst enemy.

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Shin Buddhism’s founder

Shinran Shonin, the founder of Shin Buddhism (1200’s in Japan), lived a life as a monk for twenty years, but could not find enlightenment in that setting or environment. He met a wonderful teacher, named Honen, who was teaching that the Dharma can be received whether one is a monk or lay. The lifestyle did not matter as much as having the right attitude in listening and receiving the teaching. Honen taught Shinran that the Dharma is “received”, and that we must simply open our hearts and minds to it in gratitude. Shinran discovered this way of gratitude, the way of humility, through Honen’s compassionate teaching. Now the light of the Dharma began to permeate his heart and mind, illuminating and penetrating into even the darkest corners of his ego self.

The Life of Humility

The life of humility is the most powerful and dynamic life. In the west, we think humility means being weak, or passive, but humility is the true strength of life. We think that an oak tree is tall and firm, but in a strong wind, the oak tree breaks. A willow, or bamboo, however, is soft and flexible, and can bend and not break in a strong wind. A humble person is truly strong, whereas a rigid, stubborn person, is actually weak.

Everything in life is a gift ...

When we begin to look at life from the perspective of the recipient, that everything in life is a gift, what we know, what we own, what we have achieved, they are all in a sense gifts, because nothing can be accomplished on one’s own. The successful businessman is successful because of his customers, because of his employees, because of his business knowledge that he has learned from others. Even the Olympic Gold Medalist of course trains and accomplishes an amazing athletic feat, but in reality, it would not have been possible without coaches and teammates, family and supporters.

The Shin Buddhist way of life is the life of unending gratitude. The more one becomes grateful, the more one becomes humble. The more one becomes humble, the less one needs in life. The less one needs in life, the more one truly has.