

Study Session 10/12/2025. Edited version of AI summary

The group engaged in an in-depth discussion about Buddhist concepts, particularly focusing on suchness, Nirvana, and the role of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in spiritual liberation. The conversation ended with conversations about Pure Land Buddhism's teachings and traditions, including its universalization of Dharma symbolism and the concept of Amida's compassion.

Buddhist Suchness and Interconnectedness

Gary, Gordon, and Matthew discussed the concept of suchness in Buddhism, contrasting it with the void or emptiness. They explored how suchness is more incorporative and not nihilistic, suggesting it better explains the interconnectedness of samsara and nirvana. Matthew humorously noted that nobody truly knows what happens after death, and Gary agreed, emphasizing the importance of understanding suchness as a dynamic and passionate nature rather than a simple void.

Buddhist Concepts of Liberation

The discussion focused on the concepts of Nirvana and the role of the Buddha in spiritual liberation, particularly in Pure Land Buddhism. Gary explained that while Nirvana represents a state of bliss, the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas work spontaneously to liberate all beings through their spiritual influence. The conversation also touched on the debate between self-power and other-power in Buddhism, suggesting that there is ultimately only one power - that of the absolute - which can be accepted by conforming to the Dharma. The discussion concluded with a reflection on the misuse of the term "ignorance" in describing not knowing, rather than an inherent lack of knowledge or intelligence.

Shinran's Tendai Monastic Legacy

Gary and Matthew discussed the significance of Shinran and his 20-year tenure as a Tendai monk on Mount Hiei, where he likely practiced the eternal walking tradition. Gary emphasized the importance of provisional learning and keeping an open mind when studying new concepts. They also touched on the ascetic practices of Tendai monks, including their strict dietary restrictions and the story of Shakyamuni Buddha's austerities.

Pure Land Teachings and Compassion

The group discussed the Pure Land School's teachings, particularly focusing on Amitabha Buddha and the concept of a formless Dharma body. They explored how Shinran universalized the symbolism behind the Dharma story by grounding it in fundamental Mahayana principles, making it accessible to ordinary beings. The discussion touched on the idea that Amida's compassion is unconditional and always available, despite the inherent unknowability of such concepts.

Study Session 03/12/2025. Edited version of AI summary

Gary and Brandon discussed the logistics and format of an upcoming Shin Buddhist service, including arrival times and the presence of a priest conducting the ceremony via Zoom. They explored the setup of a home altar for Shin Buddhism practices and discussed various rituals, including the Nembutsu practice and the use of incense. The conversation concluded with Gary sharing insights about Shin Buddhism's approach to merit and practice.

Shin Buddhist Service Logistics Discussion

Gary and Brandon discussed the logistics of an upcoming Shin Buddhist service. Gary explained that the formal part of the service starts at 8.15PM, with participants arriving earlier for informal meet and greet. Brandon mentioned having access issues that caused him to log on early, but he did not miss the service. Gary also mentioned that a couple of people had contacted him recently expressing an interest in attending future meetings. Brandon had never attended a Shin Buddhist service before.

Home Altar for Shin Buddhism

Gary and Brandon discussed setting up a home altar for Shin Buddhism practices. Gary explained the importance of involving participants more in the rituals, including lighting incense and candles. They talked about the use of a butsudan, a traditional Japanese Buddhist altar, and its appropriateness for home practice. Gary shared a historical anecdote about how children's curiosity led to the resurgence of Shin Buddhism in America after World War II, further suggesting that a butsudan in the home can have a similar effect.

Incense and Nembutsu Practice Discussion

The group engaged in a brief discussion about incense burning and the Nembutsu practice, with Gary explaining the different forms of Nembutsu and their approach to using incense. They encountered some technical difficulties with the camera during the meeting, which Gary addressed by switching to a different camera setup. The conversation was primarily focused on introducing Brandon to their practice and sharing information about their religious rituals.

Understanding Shin Buddhism's Nembutsu

Gary discussed the Nembutsu, a fundamental practice in Shin Buddhism, emphasizing its simplicity and importance. He explained different forms of Nembutsu, including the Ichinen Nembutsu, and highlighted the need to avoid trivializing it by using it casually or as a response to agree with something. Gary also described a specific ritual involving strident tones and prostration, which he and others had practiced. He noted that Shin Buddhism, unlike other forms, does not seek merit through practice but instead focuses on returning any merit to Amida Buddha.

Study Session 26/11/2025. Edited version of AI summary

Buddhist Concepts of Reality and Enlightenment

The group discussed concepts related to Buddhism, focusing on the nature of reality, enlightenment, and the role of faith and symbolism. Gordon emphasized the importance of being open to experiences that awaken one to the truth, while Gary highlighted the challenge of understanding ultimate reality. They explored how different Buddhist schools, including the Pure Land and Tendai traditions, sought to make the absolute more accessible to practitioners through rich symbolism and teachings. The conversation touched on the idea of returning merit and the use of evocative imagery to inspire spiritual aspiration.

Beauty, Respect, and Creative Expression

The group discussed the symbolism of jewels, music, colours, and fragrances, emphasizing that beauty can be found in mundane things. Gary and Gordon explored the concept of respect for all sentient beings and the idea that harming others ultimately harms oneself. They also discussed the Pure Land Patriarch T'an-luan, his musical abilities, and the imagery associated with him. The conversation touched on creativity, its connection to communication, and the use of resources in creative processes.

Exploring Personal Faith Perspectives

The group discussed the concept of faith, with Gordon sharing his perspective that faith is presented to him rather than something he actively seeks, describing it as a connection to Amida's faith. Gary and Matthew explored how faith developed in their lives, with Gary recalling his father's reaction when he expressed interest in becoming a priest.

Nembutsu and Upcoming Service Plans

Gary and Brandon discussed the significance of the Nembutsu, an expression of gratitude, and emphasized the importance of sincerity in its recitation. Gary shared an experience from a temple service where his sincere reading of a letter caused a positive reaction from the congregation. They also discussed the schedule for upcoming meetings, including a study session next week and the last Buddha service of the year. Brandon expressed his enjoyment of the current service and his intention to attend future sessions.

Study Session 19/11/2025. Edited version of AI summary

Religious Service and Cultural Insights

Gary discussed the setup and conduct of a religious service, emphasizing the importance of sincerity and adherence to traditional practices. He read from Rennyō's letters, highlighting their poetic language and stern tone, and explained the significance of the service's visual elements, such as the arrangement of shrine and calligraphy. Gary also shared insights into Japanese cultural practices related to the service, such as the cinematic scale of shrine areas and the symbolic placement of religious scrolls. The discussion concluded with Gary expressing gratitude to Luke for attending the service.

Study Session 12/11/2025. Edited version of AI summary

Buddhist Metaphysics and Form-Emptiness

The group discussed the "[Awakening of Faith](#)" in Mahayana Buddhism, which Gary described as a concise yet influential text attributed to [Aśvaghoṣa](#). Gary explained that the text serves as a reliable compendium of Mahayana metaphysics, offering sophisticated teachings on the nature of reality and the relationship between form and emptiness. The discussion touched on parallels between Buddhist metaphysics and modern Western philosophy, as well as the Zen concept of form being emptiness and emptiness being form. Matthew and Gordon contributed insights about perception and the interplay between observer and observed, highlighting how form and reality are shaped by one's perspective.

Philosophical Explorations of Nembutsu

Gordon and Gary discussed philosophical concepts, including the nature of the absolute and the relationship between self-power and other power. Gary shared his thoughts on modern philosophy and the incalculable effect of causality. The group explored the concept of Nembutsu, discussing how it relies on both the individual and Amida. Matthew expressed confusion about some of the philosophical concepts discussed, prompting the others to offer explanations and clarify their understanding.

Buddhist Concepts of Interconnectedness

The group discussed philosophical concepts related to Buddhism, focusing on the idea that absolute and concrete worlds are interconnected rather than separate. Gary read and explained passages from a Buddhist text, highlighting the concept of "suchness" as both empty and not empty, which he compared to the a circle metaphor wherein there is the top half and a bottom half; a there is the whole circle.

Study Session 29/10/2025. Edited version of AI summary

Buddhist Concepts and Interpretations

Gary and Gordon discussed Buddhist concepts, including the Dharma body, ultimate reality, and various terms for expressing the same fundamental ideas across different traditions. They explored the notion of emptiness and its interpretations in different philosophies, noting the challenge of conveying profound ideas. Gary shared his thoughts on the lifecycle stages and the interconnectedness of all conditions, while Gordon reflected on the similarities between different expressions of the same universal concepts.

Understanding Aging and Self-Identity

Gary and Gordon discussed the concept of aging and how people's attitudes towards birthdays change as they grow older. They explored the idea of self-identity and how Zen Buddhism challenges individuals to look beyond their own selves. Gary shared his understanding of the Buddhist principle "form is emptiness, emptiness is form" through an experience he had long ago when at art school when the teacher suggest they do not

attempt to draw the objects, but concentrate instead upon the space between the objects. He also commented that emptiness can sometimes feel present despite being inconceivable.

Non-Duality and Human Perspective

Gary and Gordon discussed the concept of non-duality, where everything in the world is a mixture of the conditioned and unconditioned, and the unique human perspective of perceiving the world differently from animals. Gary emphasized the importance of reading texts rather than just listening to them.

Buddhist Philosophy and Academic Critique

Gary and Gordon discussed philosophical concepts related to Buddhism, particularly the nature of the absolute and its relationship to the phenomenal world. They explored ideas about change and constancy, using metaphors like gold becoming a ring to illustrate how the absolute remains immutable despite apparent transformations. Gary expressed concerns about the European academic approach to Buddhism, noting that it might not be suitable for everyone. They also discussed the cautionary tale of individuals who became overly focused on Japanese forms of Buddhism, potentially losing their freedom.

Study Session 13/10/2025. Edited version of AI summary

Cultural Interpretations of Pure Land Teachings

The group discussed cultural differences in reading directions between East and West, with Gary explaining how Japanese writing and art perception differ from Western traditions. They explored the significance of Shinran and Rennyo's teachings, with Gordon noting that while Shinran's personal character is important, the Dharma and teachings should be placed on a pedestal rather than the individual. The discussion touched on the Pure Land Masters and how their teachings have been interpreted across different cultures and time periods, with Gary emphasizing the need to make our own cultural interpretations while maintaining respect for the original Japanese tradition.

Buddhist Interpretations and Dharma Body

Gary shared insights from a sermon on Vulnerability and Nirvana, emphasizing the complexity of articulating the relationship between absolute and relative realities in Buddhism. The discussion explored the concept of the Dharma body and its implications for understanding ultimate reality, with Gordon and others reflecting on the challenges of grasping and expressing such profound ideas. The conversation ended with plans for upcoming study sessions and a reminder of the importance of reading materials in advance.

Study Session 01/10/2025. Edited version of AI summary

Existential and Religious Narratives

The group discussed existential concepts and religious narratives, with Gary and Gordon exploring the distinction between Nirvana and Enlightenment, and the idea that enlightenment is a living reality that pervades everything. They examined how religious stories, like the Buddha's birth and Jesus's virgin birth, serve as narratives rather than literal truths, and Gary shared personal reflections on his collection of religious artifacts and photographs and suggesting that if a person remained in our thoughts, they remain in our lives. The conversation touched on how stories can be used to teach children, and the importance of understanding them as metaphorical rather than factual.

Exploring Shin Buddhism Concepts

The group discussed concepts of Nirvana and Buddhism, particularly focusing on Shin Buddhism's teachings about Amida Buddha and the Pure Land. They explored how Nirvana is both a state of enlightenment and a dynamic, personal dimension that reaches out to sentient beings. The discussion touched on the relationship between karma, suffering, and rebirth, with Gary emphasizing that Buddhism teaches acceptance rather than striving for enlightenment. They also discussed the importance of "entrusting" in Shin Buddhism, and how this should not be confused with 'blind faith'

Study Session 14.01.2026. Edited version of AI summary

The meeting focused on discussing Shin Buddhism and the life of Shinran, including his teachings and the composition of the Kyogo Shinsho. Gary led the discussion, exploring themes such as Shinran's selection of teachings from various sutras, the concept of Shinjin (faith), and the role of Amida Buddha's vow in salvation. Participants examined Shinran's emphasis on entrusting faith and his focus on the Nembutsu as a means to enlightenment. The group also touched on the idea of the Dharma-ending age and the significance of the Pure Land teachings in contemporary practice. The session concluded with a reflection on the importance of helping others understand and embrace Shin Buddhism, emphasizing the role of Amida's compassion in liberating beings from suffering.

Jikoji's Shin Buddhism Leadership

The discussion focused on the history and leadership of Jikoji, including Fonz Martin's ambitions for it to become a European headquarters for Shin Buddhism but his inability to advance to the Kyoshi level of ordination. The conversation then explored Shinran's life and teachings, particularly his emphasis on ordinary individuals achieving salvation despite their blind passions. The group also discussed the role of academic qualifications in Shin Buddhism, noting that many early practitioners were illiterate, and the concept of Shinjin, or deep faith without learning.

Shakyamuni and Amida's Teachings

The group discussed the relationship between Shakyamuni Buddha and Amida Buddha, with Gary and Gordon exploring how Shakyamuni's teachings point towards Amida's Pure Land as a path to salvation. They examined how Shakyamuni's enlightenment and teachings represent different aspects of Buddhist wisdom, with Gary suggesting that Shakyamuni might serve as an aspirational figure for practitioners. The discussion concluded with Matthew sharing insights about Shinran's perspective on becoming a Buddha, and the group reflecting on the unshakable faith in Amida's Pure Land despite differing interpretations.

Shinran's Teachings on Simple Faith

The group discussed Shinran's Kyogo Shinsho, a six-volume work that selects essential teachings from various sutras and Pure Land masters to enable ordinary people to attain enlightenment through simple faith in Amida Buddha. They explored Shinran's original contribution of emphasizing the single Nembutsu recitation with genuine faith, rather than requiring multiple repetitions. The discussion concluded with Gary expressing concern about the focus on numerical growth in Shin Buddhism, emphasizing instead the importance of helping others find liberation through understanding that they have already been saved by Amida Buddha.

Study Session 28.01.2026. Edited version of AI summary

Understanding Shinran's Historical Impact

Gary discussed his study of Shinran, a historical figure from Japan, and his initial skepticism about Shinran's significance compared to how he is revered in Japan. He explained Shinran's background, including his academic upbringing and eventual exile, and highlighted Shinran's contribution to tying together the seven Pure Land Masters by distilling their essential teachings into one unified concept. Gary encouraged the group to read the provided text before meetings and suggested that Shinran's work could make an interesting Hollywood film. Matthew asked for clarification about the context of the year 1173, but Gary did not provide a direct answer.

Shinran's Life and Teachings

The group discussed the life and legacy of Shinran Shonin, focusing on his humble nature and resistance to forming a following despite the later development of Jodo Shinshu. They explored how Shinran's teachings, particularly his emphasis on the sufficiency of one sincere Nembutsu, distinguished him from his mentor Honen. Gary provided background on Shinran's birth in 1173 to a prominent family in Kyoto, his early loss of parents, and his upbringing by his uncle before being brought to Mount Hie for Buddhist training.

Shinran's Ascetic Path to Enlightenment

Gary discussed Shinran's early life and ordination as a monk at Mount Hiei, a renowned center for Buddhist teachings in Japan. He shared stories about the mountain monks' extreme ascetic practices, including the "eternal walking" ritual, which involves walking around temples for 9 days and 9 nights without food or water. Gary also mentioned his own experiences with lucid dreams after quitting smoking and weed. Luke shared his understanding of how ultra-endurance activities can strip away worldly concerns and lead to spiritual clarity, though he noted that Jodo Shinshu doesn't see asceticism as a realistic path to enlightenment.

Path to Spiritual Awakening

The group discussed spiritual practices and enlightenment, with Gary sharing insights about Shinran's 100-day retreat and his eventual disillusionment with ascetic practices, leading him to seek out Master Honen and embrace the Nembutsu. Gordon explored how meditation and spiritual practices can transform how we perceive thought, while Matthew noted the difficulty of such extreme spiritual practices in modern life. The discussion concluded with reflections on historical figures like Shotoku and Lao Tzu, emphasizing that spiritual truth may not always align with historical facts, and the importance of finding personal meaning in spiritual practices.

Pure Land Buddhism's Historical Challenges

The group discussed the lives and historical context of Honen and Shinran, two Pure Land Masters who lived during the same era. They explored the challenges Shinran faced, including being stripped of his monkhood and exiled to a remote province in Japan due to the growing influence of the Nembutsu teachings. The conversation also touched on the political and religious conflicts of the time, with Luke providing context about the lack of a centralized government and the constant civil wars. Despite the harsh conditions, Shinran continued to spread his teachings

among the rural population, choosing to live as a lay person with a family, which was a significant departure from the monastic and celibate practices of Theravada Buddhism.

Shinran's Religious Text Development

The group discussed the teachings of Shinran and the development of his religious texts, particularly the Kyogo Shinshu. They explored how Shinran's return to Kyoto around 1273 provided an environment rich in Buddhist texts that enabled him to focus on writing, including the Shoshini within the Kyogo Shinshu. The discussion included a visual representation of Shinran's teachings and their relationship to other Buddhist works, highlighting the significance of the Shoshini as a small but profound part of his collected works.

Pure Land Teachings and Practice

The group discussed the teachings and writings of Pure Land masters, focusing on how Chinese masters documented Indian masters' teachings. Gary explained that they would study the Shoshini, a text with 80 verses of four lines each, and mentioned that reading the complete Kyogo Shinshu requires daily commitment. Gordon inquired about the practice of reading the Kyogo Shinshu continuously, to which Gary confirmed this practice exists and emphasized the importance of training, practice, and realization in spiritual development.

Buddha Service talk 18.02.2026. Edited version of AI summary

The meeting focused on a Buddhist study group's discussion of their religious practices and rituals. Gary explained their service book traditions, including the Nembutsu chants and refuge practices. The group discussed the importance of routine in their religious practices, similar to how musicians set up their equipment in the same way each time. The conversation ended with plans to continue their study of the life and legacy of Shinran Shounen in future sessions.

Study Session 25.02.2026. Edited version of AI summary

The meeting began with technical difficulties as Gordon experienced issues with his camera, which were eventually resolved. Gary mentioned that Luke would not be attending, and they discussed the potential arrival of a new member, though he was not present at the start of the meeting. Matthew joined the call later, and they discussed the challenges of managing multiple email addresses and passwords, as well as the potential risks of phishing emails. Gary also shared an email exchange with a prospective member about the history and lineage of their Buddhist group, emphasizing its cultural adaptation in the UK.

Understanding Shin Buddhism's Core Concepts

The group discussed Shin Buddhism, focusing on the concept of Shinjin (true faith) and Nembutsu. Gary suggested that Shinjin is not about logical belief but an intuitive awareness of Amida's presence, which can be experienced without conscious effort. They explored how faith in Amida and his vows leads to participation in his Dharma body, where individuals become part of Amida's eternal activity.

The group also discussed the role of the Sangha in Shin Buddhism, including both the sangha of Buddhas and holy sages in the Pure Land, as well as teachers and friends in this world.

Gary encouraged the group to study Shinran's Wassan, and suggested that they visit <https://www.shinbuddhistfellowship.uk/dharmaarchive.html> where the text of six Wassan and associated mp3 audio files have been recently uploaded as entry # 30 and 31