

The Life and Legacy of Master Shinran, as it appears in **Article 3** in a new publication entitled **THE CALL OF BOUNDLESS COMPASSION, A Collection of Articles – Edition 1**, by Heng Ng.

Life and Legacy of Master Shinran

Shinran Shonin (1173–1263), the venerable founder of Shin Buddhism, was born in Kyoto, Japan, into the distinguished Fujiwara Clan. After losing both his parents at the tender age of nine, he was cared for by his uncle Noritsuna, who later brought him to Mount Hiei, the most renowned centre for Buddhist teachings and practices in Japan at the time. Following his own wish, Shinran was quickly ordained as a monk and diligently practiced Tendai Buddhism under the guidance of eminent Buddhist masters.

Despite devoting 20 years to rigorous study and disciplined practice, excelling in both meditative and non-meditative disciplines, Shinran became profoundly disillusioned. Upon deep introspection, he concluded that, as a deeply foolish person with strong blind passions, his scholarly achievements and arduous efforts were insufficient to bring him any closer to enlightenment in his lifetime. With great courage, he made the painful decision to leave Mount Hiei in search of another path to enlightenment.

In a state of mental anguish, Shinran undertook a 100-day retreat at Rokkaku-do, a temple in Kyoto dedicated to Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara. The temple was built by Shotoku Taishi, the Japanese prince who introduced Buddhism to Japan. During this retreat, he fervently prayed to Shotoku Taishi, who was revered as a manifestation of Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, for guidance to find an appropriate path to enlightenment.

On the 95th day, Shinran experienced a revelation in a dream, instructing him to seek out Master Honen, who was actively propagating the Pure Land teaching centred on the exclusive practice of Reciting the Buddha's Name (Nembutsu – 南無).

After listening deeply for 100 consecutive days to the Dharma teachings of Master Honen, who was profoundly learned in all aspects of the Buddha Dharma, Master Shinran became fully convinced that he had found an excellent teacher and a true Dharma friend. Under Master Honen's mentorship, he resolved all his doubts and entrusted himself wholeheartedly to Amida Buddha's Primal Vow.

At the age of 29, upon receiving the Buddha's inconceivable Gift of Salvation, he realized with certainty that he would attain Buddhahood in Amida Buddha's Pure Land at the end of his physical life.

However, in the year 1207, when the Japanese authorities began persecuting the Nembutsu teaching, Master Shinran was stripped of his monkhood and exiled to Echigo Province, a remote area in north-central Japan. Despite the harsh conditions, he continued spreading the precious Nembutsu teaching to the humble, rural folk, while living a simple life as a layperson, married with children.

After four years of exile, he was pardoned in 1211 but chose not to return to Kyoto. Instead, he devoted himself to propagating the sacred Amida Dharma among the people who needed it most.

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In the year 1214, he relocated to the Hitachi Province in the Kanto region (modern-day Tokyo area). There, he tirelessly spread the teachings of Faith and Nembutsu. During his nearly 20-year residence in the area, the number of common, illiterate individuals and devoted householders who earnestly embraced his teachings likely reached tens of thousands.

Around the year 1232, when he was about 60 years old, the Venerable Master decided to return to Kyoto. The probable reason for this move was the abundance of Buddhist texts, sutras, and commentaries available in Kyoto, which provided an ideal environment for him to focus on writing. He sought to document the teachings he had received, his realizations, and his profound experiences on the True Pure Land path.

Fully confident that the wondrous Amida Dharma offered the only assured path to salvation, he was driven by a passionate desire to preserve these teachings for the benefit of others. His writings were intended especially for evil and foolish beings like himself and others, who yearned to be permanently freed from the pain and suffering of this world.

These Pure Land Dharma expositions by the Venerable Master meticulously and eloquently illuminate the 'White Path,' or the 'Easy Way,' which has become the sole viable route out of samsara for wretched beings like us who are overwhelmed by suffering and delusion.

The magnificent and exceptionally challenging task of accurately collecting and systematizing the essential teachings relevant to this "Easy Path" out of samsara, took Master Shinran over 30 years to accomplish. Alongside his vast treasury of remarkable writings, poems, and letters to his followers, he developed a complete and coherent approach that reflected his profound realization of the path of Faith and Nembutsu, which he eagerly sought to share with others.

Although Master Shinran devoted his entire life to spreading the pristine Amida Dharma, the path of salvation for all suffering beings through Faith and Nembutsu, he never intended to establish a separate sect. He humbly considered himself merely a follower of his teacher, Honen. Nevertheless, the compelling appeal of his marvellous and eloquent writings, eventually crystallized his realization of salvation, into what became, the Jodo-Shinshu Buddhist tradition.

Having endured a life of tormenting trials and tribulations, both as a monk and a householder, Master Shinran ultimately receive awakening by the Light of the Buddha's Boundless Compassion. His life exemplified the truth that even ordinary individuals, consumed by blind passions and seemingly without hope, could realize salvation.

He was deeply grateful to the Buddhas and the seven Pure Land Masters for their boundless compassion and kindness.

In transmitting the precious teachings of Faith and Nembutsu to him. Therefore, with heartfelt devotion, he dedicated himself to encourage others to listen deeply to the

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Pure Land Dharma, pristinely passed down from Shakyamuni Buddha through the ages, and to accept Amida Buddha's gift of salvation.

Truly settled in mind and heart, and immersed in the Nembutsu of gratitude, Master Shinran lived with the clear knowledge that he would become a Buddha at the end of his life of delusion. On January 16, 1263, at the age of ninety, our Venerable Master peacefully entered the Land of Peace and Bliss. He left behind a luminous legacy, entrusting us with the sacred Nembutsu teaching—the sole lamp illuminating the Path of Salvation in this dark Dharma-Ending Age—especially for wretched beings such as myself.

The Kyo-Gyo-Shin-Sho A Spiritual Pilgrimage Spanning the Ages

Motivated by a deep compassion to benefit both himself and others, for his generation and those to come, Master Shinran meticulously composed The Kyo-Gyo-Shin-Sho (Teaching, Practice, Faith, and Realization of the Pure Land Way). Written in classical Chinese, this six-volume literacy masterpiece encapsulates the complete teaching that enables ordinary, imperfect people to attain enlightenment through simple Entrusting Faith (Shinjin – 信心) in Amida Buddha and His Primal Vow.

This marvellous work is a spiritual pilgrimage and journey of discovery spanning many ages, from the Enlightenment of Shakyamuni Buddha, through the dissemination of the Pure Land Dharma by the seven Lineage Teachers, to Master Shinran himself, and now to wretched sentient beings like us.

Master Shinran, after carefully sifting through the vast array of teachings from each of the seven Pure Land Masters who came before him, selected only those passages essential to his own awakening to the wondrous workings of Amida's Vow of Great Compassion, leaving aside what he deemed irrelevant.

The Venerable Master's method of quoting only, specially selected passages from the Sutras and the expositions of the Lineage Teachers, served to affirm the Absolute Truth of Salvation for all suffering beings, that flowed freely and entirely from Amida Buddha's Vow-mind.

Unconcerned by the criticisms of those whose minds were not truly rooted in Amida Buddha's Salvation, Master Shinran remained steadfast in his benevolent aspiration to benefit future generations. This aspiration now reaches miserable beings like us through his Kyo-Gyo-Shin-Sho, poems, and other heart-felt writings.

Listening Deeply to Master Shinran's expositions

Those who listen deeply to Master Shinran's expositions will undoubtedly recognize the profound systematization of the teachings on True Pure Land way. His own spiritual awakening and focus rest entirely on the inconceivable gift of Salvation bestowed by Amida Buddha through His Primal Vow. Expressing his single-hearted

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refuge in this wondrous Compassionate Vow, which effectively saves all beings in pain and suffering, Master Shinran passionately wrote:

“My heart and mind stand rooted in the Buddha-ground of the Universal Vow, and my thoughts and feelings flow within the Dharma realm...”

Master Shinran earnestly urged us to abandon completely all non-Buddhist paths, as they are false teachings that inevitably bind us to samsara. He also exhorted us to set aside other self-power Buddhist paths, classifying them as provisional teachings incapable of fully liberating us from suffering in this Dharma-Ending Age.

With deep compassion, he calls out to us, foolish beings drowning in the ocean of suffering, to Listen Deeply to the Dharma of Amida Buddha. This listening leads us to accept the inconceivable gift of salvation, freely given to us by the Buddha.

After countless dreadful transmigrations in samsara, those among us with the good karma of past deeds, should earnestly utilize this precious human birth, which grants the rare opportunity to listen deeply to the Venerable Master’s teachings. The moment we abandon all self-power practices, whether meditative or non-meditative, and fully entrust our karmic destiny to Amida Buddha, we are grasped by the Light of Boundless Compassion, never to be forsaken.

By Listening Deeply to the incomparable True Pure Land expositions of Master Shinran, which are grounded exclusively in Faith and Nembutsu, even inept beings like us, will benefit immeasurably from his benevolent guidance and be freed from the hindrance of doubt.

I sincerely hope that even one more person may be inspired to listen wholeheartedly to Master Shinran’s True Pure Land teachings and be moved to entrust themselves fully to Amida’s fulfilled Vows that unfailingly bring a definitive end to the suffering of samsara.

May all our Dharma friends, drawn here by the merit of their past good karma, continue to recite the Buddha’s Name in deep gratitude, for as long as they dwell in this imperfect and unsatisfactory world. The Name surpasses all conceptual understanding and serves as the verbal expression of true settlement and thankfulness to the Buddhas.

Namo Amida Butsu