



Shinnyo-En at a glance

What is Shinnyo-En?

Shinnyo-En is an independent Buddhist order, which belongs to the “Mahayana” school of Buddhism in Japan. The complex Buddhist term “Shinnyo” (“reality”) designates the eternal and unchanging nature of the Buddha and his teachings, the sign “En” stands for a borderless garden. One of Shinnyo-En’s central teachings is based on the Buddha’s last teaching – the great Nirvana Sutra – which says that every person holds the essence of the Buddha within them and thus every person can achieve awakening and enlightenment. In contrast to other branches of traditional Buddhism, in Shinnyo-En this path is open to the spiritual and secular communities alike.

In Shinnyo-En, the Buddha’s teachings, religious instructions and training in Buddhist practices such as meditation or prayer are accessible to everyone, regardless of age, gender, ethnic or religious background. People from all different religions practise the Shinnyo teachings, without deviating from their original faith. One notable element of the teachings of Shinnyo-En is that they can be applied in daily life.

Shinnyo-En – Religious Background

Today, the faith founded over 2500 years ago by Shakyamuni Buddha on the Indian subcontinent numbers among the world religions. Over the course of its history, Buddhism developed into a multitude of different schools and movements, each corresponding to its cultural environment.

Shinnyo-En can be formally grouped under Japanese Mahayana Buddhism. The order’s religious roots include traditional Japanese Shingon Buddhism, whose Great Master founded Shinnyo-En, and the Great Nirvana Sutra, which has been passed down as the last teachings of the Buddha.

Shinnyo

The so-called “esoteric Buddhism” was brought from China to Japan in the 9th century by the monk, Kukai. In esoteric (also known as secret) Buddhism, teachings and rites leading to self-awakening and enlightenment are not taught as a theory, but rather passed down directly from master to student over centuries. A central part of the teachings of esoteric Buddhism is that enlightenment is not an unreachable far-off goal, but can even be realised in this life through patience and training under the instruction of a master.

The oldest and most significant school of esoteric Buddhism in Japan is Shingon Buddhism. Shinnyo-En was founded by Shinjo Ito, who as a holy man had received the highest consecration of Shingon. Shinjo Ito underwent his entire spiritual training as an ordained monk and all of the ascetic teachings in the Daigo-ji monastery, the high temple of Shingon Buddhism, and became a great master of these teachings – a “Dai-Ajari” of Shingon. It was on this religious basis that he eventually founded the Shinnyo school of Japanese Buddhism. There are still close contacts between Shinnyo-En and Daigo-ji – now a UNESCO World Heritage Site. In 1997, the Daigo-ji constructed their own prayer hall in honour of Shinjo Ito and the Shinnyo branch of Buddhism which he founded.

In Mahayana Buddhism, the Great Nirvana Sutra is passed down as the Buddha’s last teachings. These scriptures explain that it is not only monks, leading the life of a monastic order according to strict rules, who can achieve awakening and enlightenment. The Buddha dedicates his last teachings to a secular pupil and in it he emphasises the equal value of Buddhist spiritual and secular practices.

This Nirvana Sutra is a central part of the teachings of Shinnyo-En. Through the combination of the traditional practice of esoteric Buddhism as it was reserved for the ordained with the teachings of the Great Nirvana Sutra, the founder of Shinnyo-En, Shinjo Ito,



wanted to create an open Buddhist path of faith which is accessible to all people in their daily life.

One of the passages in the Great Nirvana Sutra emphasises the special importance of constructing temples and creating sculptures dedicated to the Buddha. Shinjo Ito worked his whole life according to these words, creating likenesses of the Buddha. Alongside sculpting, he also dedicated himself to painting, photography and calligraphy. Today, his works are exhibited all over the world.

Religious Practice

In three ways, the Shinnyo doctrine leads the way to a harmony between the religious practices passed down within the Buddhist faith and the individual conditions of daily life:

- Learning
- Teaching
- Service to the community

'Learning' includes religious practices such as participation in Buddhist ceremonies, reciting from the Buddhist Sutras, meditation and understanding the content of the teachings – that is to say Buddhist history, theory and practice.

The second aspect is to share the wisdom of the Buddha with others, stand by them and offer them advice, or introduce them to the Buddha's teachings for their own well-being.

Serving your neighbour and the community as a whole is a means of training as well as expressing selflessness and is valued and taught by Buddhism as a path to self-awakening.



Meditation (Sesshin)

One of the goals of the spiritual exercises in Buddhism is achieving a profound realisation of the Self and implementing the Buddha's teachings on intellectual understanding in daily life. Shinnyo-En offers special meditation techniques which can be practised by anyone. These exercises are called *Sesshin* and are carried out in the temple under the direction of a spiritual mentor.

This meditation training helps with the realisation of the extent to which our own subjective view of things is determined purely by the pursuit of our own well-being. In this way, the Self can be engaged in a more open-minded way and apparent contradictions between our own lives and cohabitation with others can be brought into harmony with one another.

Social and cultural Commitment

For decades, Shinnyo-En has been engaging in social and cultural projects across the world, committing itself to the welfare of all people and following the Buddha's teachings. The order works closely with international charitable organisations such as the Red Cross, the United Nations, the organisation "Médecins sans Frontières" and other international and local organisations.

With its own projects, Shinnyo-En gets involved on a local level, giving people concrete help on the ground, with development projects to promote sustainable local economies, for example, and support for social facilities for young people and those in need of care.

The IZUMI Foundation, founded by Shinnyo-En, is specifically dedicated to the prevention and treatment of infectious diseases in the developing world. In addition to this, Shinnyo-En also engages in countless projects to protect regional cultural heritage and protect the environment, such as Shinnyo-En's support for the excavations



of the Angkor Wat temple site in Cambodia and reforestation projects, in China for example.

**Inter-religious
Commitment**

Ever since the first meeting between the order's founder, Shinjo Ito, and Pope Paul VI in the Vatican in 1967, Shinnyo-En has been working towards enhancing the harmonious exchange between cultures and religions.

There are various projects devoted to this goal: in 2002 religious concerts with Buddhist prayer rituals ("Shomyo") were put on for the first time in five European Catholic churches – Krakow, Cologne, Paris, Milan and Rome. In February 2008 Shinso Ito, the current Head of the Shinnyo-En order, performed a Buddhist Saisho ceremony in St. Peter's Church in New York as a prayer for world peace.

Through ceremonies with participation by representatives and leaders of all different religions, including Buddhism, Christianity and Islam, Shinnyo-En is making small steps towards common cooperation between peoples, cultures and religions.

**Shinso Ito – The religious
head of the order**

Shinso Ito completed the comprehensive Buddhist training, became a Great Master of the teachings of Shinnyo-En and became eligible as the successor to Shinjo Ito. In 1989, after the founder's death, Shinso Ito became head of Shinnyo-En. In 1992, the Daigo-ji monastery – the High Temple of Shingon Buddhism – bestowed upon her the highest priestly rank as a "Dai-Sojo".

In the history of traditional Buddhism, it was extremely rare for a woman to hold a leading position. Today, Shinso Ito is the only female head of one of the great Japanese Buddhist orders.



She constantly encourages women – and men, too – to use initiative and take on responsibility in religion and in society.

Under Shinso Ito's leadership, Buddhism, too, has been able to open up a path which extends beyond traditional social roles. This is evident, for example, in the fact that Shinso Ito is the only woman in the over 1100-year history of the Daigo-ji temple of Shingon Buddhism to have ever performed a ceremony in the main prayer hall. The occasion for this was the consecration of the "Shinnyo Sanmaya Prayer Hall", which is dedicated to the founder of Shinnyo-En and his teachings.

Shinnyo-En in Germany

Shinnyo-En has been represented in Germany since the end of the 1980s. In 2000 the first temple was consecrated in Munich, the temple in Hamburg in 2007. All in all Shinnyo-En has around 1000 followers in Germany.

Spread

Founded in Japan in the 1930s, Shinnyo-En is now represented on all five continents and has almost a million followers.

Temples

There are currently 100 temples which have been built across the world, including ones in Japan, the USA, the UK, France, Italy, Spain, Belgium, Brazil, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Korea, Singapore, Australia and Germany.

For any questions:

Shinnyo-En Germany
c/o Kohl PR & Partner
Peter Rall
Tel: +49 (0)30 22 66 79 21
Email: p.rall@kohl-pr.de