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Hearing and Gate

Free

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Cherry Blossoms 桜

## Can you want to stop wanting ?

The basic premise of Buddhism is that suffering arises from attachment: our basic tendency is to want things perpetually, and we experience only a brief moment of satisfaction after we get what we wanted — because after this there will be another desire we want to be satisfied. It's interesting to note that even the very word "want" originally has the meaning of "lack": if we want something it's because we don't have it, and if we have it, we start wanting something else that we don't have.

Buddhism has the ideal aim of releasing us from suffering by eliminating our various attachments. In order to stop suffering, we are supposed to stop wanting; and for that we must willingly adopt and adhere to a rigorous lifestyle of training and denial of pleasures. This is said to be the only

path to enlightenment and nirvana.

But if you think about it for a while, you'll notice a paradox. How can anyone want to stop wanting? If the relentless quest for happiness is indeed the cause of suffering, then the Buddhist quest for total happiness can only mean... total suffering. How can we get around this paradox? The answer is as simple to say as it is hard to put into practice: the only way is to stop wanting without wanting to stop.

This is obviously not something that can happen just because we command it to. It can only happen by realizing the truth and letting it work its way on its own into our mind.

Receiving enlightenment, instead of pursuing it, is the defining feature of Shin Buddhism. And it's not as different from original Buddhism as it may seem at first. The historical Buddha reached

his enlightenment by rejecting extreme methods and engaging in meditation, which means looking clearly at the facts of life and drawing honest conclusions. He didn't want to stop wanting; it happened spontaneously as the result of his insights into the cause of suffering.

Since life is always around us, anything can become an opportunity for the kind of meditation and reflection that help the truth find its way into the mind, and *nenbutsu* (reflection on the Buddha) is the clearest expression of this. If you forget about suffering, attachment, and enlightenment, and instead focus on exploring the path created by past Buddhas and teachers, you have already received much more than you realize.

(Dan Bornstein)



## Leaves of Scripture

We are beings filled with ignorance and blind passions.

*(Notes on Once Calling and Many Calling)*

## Awareness of ourselves as ordinary unenlightened beings

Milan Kundera once said, “The stupidity of people comes from having an answer for everything.” The word stupidity is usually used in the sense of not knowing the answer to a given question. However, what stupidity truly means is the blind belief in our ability to find answers to everything. For example, don’t we sometimes find ourselves judging people around us—our children, parents, partners, or friends—based simply on the notion that “I know who they are”? Once we put such a label on them and see them with such prejudiced eyes, we automatically shut ourselves off from our true understanding of who they are. Only when we are mindful of how really difficult it is to understand each other, are we at last able to encounter one another in the true sense.

If we make judgments based on our limited point of view and too quickly assume that we have the right answers, we invariably lose sight of what is important in life. Buddhism teaches us that this is the state of *mumyō* 無明, the darkness of ignorance.

*(Dōbō, December 2014. Kyoto: Higashi Honganji Shuppanbu, p. 33.)*





## Things Worth Knowing about Shin Buddhism

### Hanamatsuri

Hanamatsuri is the celebration of Śākyamuni Buddha's birth, which occurred about 2,500 years ago and is typically observed on the 8th of April. It is called Hanamatsuri 花祭り, or Flower Festival, due to the fact that the baby Buddha was born in the flowery Lumbini Garden, which was located in present day Nepal. The following story about Śākyamuni Buddha's birth is often shared at temple Hanamatsuri observances.

Śākyamuni Buddha's given name at birth was Siddhartha Gautama. He was born as a prince to King Suddhodana and Queen Maya. Prior to the prince's birth, the king was visited by a hermit seer named Asita who predicted that the baby would either become a great king or

become a holy man who would free people from their sufferings.

During the last month of her pregnancy, Queen Maya decided that she wanted to enjoy the spring day outside and took a walk in a flower garden. This garden, called Lumbini Garden, was filled with trees in full bloom that gave off wonderful fragrances. Suddenly, but yet peacefully, Queen Maya leaned onto the branch of an aśoka tree and gave birth to the baby Siddhartha Gautama from her right side. Following his birth, it is said that the baby took seven steps in each of the four directions and proclaimed, "In heaven above and on earth below, I am the most honored one. I shall dispel the sufferings that fill this world." His birth was followed by sweet rain that

fell from the sky and bathed the newborn baby.

The story of baby Siddhartha Gautama's birth may sound amazing and impossible. However, this story illustrates the birth of the human child who would later become the Buddha. His proclamations as an infant also exemplified his wish to free all beings from the cause of their suffering when he attained Buddhahood.

The observance of Hanamatsuri is often accompanied by a ritual called *kanbutsu* 灌仏. A special flower altar is created and a statue of the baby Buddha is placed inside it. Participants of the service are welcomed to come to the altar to pour sweet tea over the statue to celebrate the Buddha's birth.



## Shōsei-en

Just a short stroll away from the temple Higashi Honganji, the garden Shōsei-en, also known as Kikoku-tei, offers an escape from the hustle and bustle of the area surrounding Kyoto Station. Shōsei-en spans an area of about 33,000 square meters (8 acres) of land, which was donated to the temple by Tokugawa Iemitsu, the 3rd shōgun, in 1641. In 1643, master calligrapher and landscape gardener Jōzan Ishikawa was commissioned to design the garden.

About two centuries later, the garden was destroyed by fires in 1858 and again in 1864 leading to restoration efforts spanning years well into the Meiji period. The Shōsei-en that exists today is a striking version of the original design including the wooden structures, pond, and stone wall. In 1936, Shōsei-en was designated a National Historic Scenic Site.

Throughout the year, Shōsei-en is home to a variety of colorful blossoms and leaves including those of plum trees, cherry blossom trees, and maple trees. The changing colors of the scenery transform the garden each season and seamlessly accent the enormous pond that is the centerpiece of the landscape. Shōsei-en also boasts architectural delights such as reception halls, stone structures, two wooden bridges, and four tea houses.

Though not nearly as bustling as Osaka or Tokyo, the city of Kyoto is filled to the brim with places of scenic beauty and historical interest, and being only ten minutes walking distance from Kyoto Station and also easily accessible by public transportation, Shōsei-en makes for the perfect quick getaway. Shōsei-en's unmistakable beauty and unique history make it an ideal stop for travelers hoping to flee the streets lined with taxis and tour buses for a peaceful moment.

