

Prologue

Jōdo Shinshū (Japanese: 浄土真宗, “*True Essence of the Pure Land Teaching*”), also known as **Shinshū** or **Shin** (“*True Pure Land Buddhism*”) for short, is one of the four new Buddhist schools of the Kamakura period and today one of the most important and widespread Buddhist schools in Japan. It was founded by **Shinran Shōnin** (親鸞聖人, 1173–1263) and was later further developed by **Rennyo Shōnin** (蓮如, 1415–1499). The school is based on the *Sukhāvatīvyūha Sūtra* (阿弥陀經 *Amida-kyō*), the “**Sutra of the Land of Bliss**,” and is associated with Amidism. At the center of its teachings is trust in the transcendent **Buddha Amida** (**Amitābha**, 阿弥陀) and the hope for rebirth in his “**Pure Land**” (**jōdo**, 浄土). This Pure Land is not “heaven” in the Western sense but rather a state or realm beyond suffering and delusion where enlightenment becomes possible.

Shinran’s thinking was deeply shaped by his understanding of *mappō* (末法), the Age of the Decline of the *Dharma* (Buddha teachings). Shinran is convinced that for most people of this time, there is no hope of freeing themselves from the painful cycle of birth and death through their own efforts (*jiriki*, 自力). Any effort to achieve enlightenment or to realize the Bodhisattva ideal, for him, was merely an expression of the delusion that stems from ego-illusion. Given the entanglement in unwholesome thoughts, speech, and actions (*bonnō*, 煩惱), liberation from *samsara* (the cycle of suffering) is impossible for the vast majority of people. Shinran wrote, “*Hell is my only destiny*.” However, trust in the **Other Power** (**tariki**, 他力) — the power of Amida Buddha’s boundless compassion as manifested in his primal vow to lead all beings to liberation — transforms hopelessness into the certainty of complete liberation: “*Even the good are saved; how much more the evil*.” Whoever realizes this **trust** (**shinjin**, 信心) in their heart is assured of being lifted up in the Pure Land. Since nothing remains to be done by the individual (because all has already been done), Jōdo Shinshū rejects formal practice (**no meditation, no asceticism, no accumulation of merit**), as is known from other Buddhist schools. Even the practice of **nembutsu** (念仏) — the repeated invocation of “**Namu Amida Butsu**” (南無阿弥陀仏, “*I take refuge in Amida Buddha!*”) — has no influence on the act of liberation but is only an expression of trust and gratitude for the assurance of liberation through Amida and an inner connection.

Whoever fully allows themselves to be embraced by Amida’s Other Power realizes shinjin. Rooted in **jinen** (自然 — the natural, spontaneous operation of the vow), **shinjin** is realized only through devotion. Amida’s infinite light transfigures the karmic burdens of countless past lives and transforms them into good karma. One who is thus transformed by Amida’s luminous example is irrevocably reborn in the Pure Land - and returns as a bodhisattva to this world to aid all beings. Through this and through its understanding of emptiness and non-duality, *Jōdo Shinshū* stands firmly within the Mahāyāna tradition, despite its differences from other forms of the “Great Vehicle.” Doctrinally, Jōdo Shinshū is closely aligned with its parent school, the *Jōdo-shū*. Its founder, Hōnen Shōnin (法然上人, 1133–1212), is highly revered by Shinran. Alongside six other patriarchs from India, China, and Japan, he is counted among the “Seven Masters of Jōdo Shinshū.”

In Europe, Jōdo Shinshū was first introduced by Charles Pfoundes (1840–1907), who lived in Nagasaki from 1863 to 1878. From October 1889, he carried out missionary work from his London apartment and gave lectures, though with little long-term effect. One of the first Jōdo Shinshū temples in Europe, Jikōji, was established in Antwerp. In Düsseldorf’s Niederkassel district stands the EKO-Haus, the only traditionally constructed Jōdo Shinshū temple in Europe.



Shin-Buddhism for Urban Wanderers

A Dossier for Seekers on Asphalt Paths

1. Starting Point: Not the Mountain, but the Street

Unlike other Buddhist paths that emphasize silent retreat, disciplined meditation, or monastic life, Shin Buddhism teaches:

“Precisely in the tumult of the world, in error and incapacity, lies the Way.”

You don’t need to be a saint, an ascetic, or an enlightened wanderer.

You only need to recognize that you cannot save yourself — and out of this realization, trust opens.

An urban wanderer who understands this carries the Dharma with every step along the pavement.

2. The Nembutsu as a Heartbeat in the Urban Space

“*Namu Amida Butsu*” — the central call of Shin Buddhism.

- Not a mantra for concentration
- Not a tool for enlightenment
- But rather: **a cry of gratitude, acceptance, and being upheld**

For the urban wanderer:

You don’t have to speak it aloud.

You can **breathe it, think it, walk it.**

One step, one Namu.
One breath, one Amida.

3. The Pure Land Is Not Elsewhere

In Shinran's view, the **Pure Land** is not a distant realm, not an otherworldly place, but a quality of consciousness — a **transformation of perception through deep trust**.

The subway full of tired people — Pure Land.
Trash in a corner between buildings — Pure Land.
A coffee from a convenience store — Pure Land.
Young people staring at their smartphones — Pure Land.
...

The Shin Buddhist urban wanderer does not see what is missing, but what is **worn**.
Not because it is perfect - but **precisely because it is not**.

4. Tariki Instead of Self-Predemption

The concept of **tariki** ("**Other Power**") means:

You no longer have to do it all yourself.
You are allowed to let go.

For the urban wanderer, this means:

- You don't have to be constantly observant.
- You don't have to document all the time.
- You can skip something.
- You may get lost. (The detours are part of the path.)

→ **You do not find the goal — it finds you.**

5. Small Practice Impulses for the Road

Situation	Shin-Buddhist Impulse
You grow impatient at a red light.	Whisper inwardly: <i>Namu Amida Butsu</i>
You feel small, misplaced, tired, ...	Tell yourself: <i>Just like this, I am meant to be</i>
You see something ugly or broken, ...	Ask: <i>What if this too is held?</i>
You meet someone who irritates you, ...	Think: <i>They too are a child of Amida</i>
You're hungry, or thirsty ...	Buy something to eat and drink

6. A Short Koan Variation on Shinran

A student asked:

“What is the path to liberation in the tumult of the city?”

The master answered:

“When you stop seeking it, it is already gone.”

“And where is it then?”

“In the voice calling your name — not because you are worthy, but because you never were.”

Schlusswort

Shin Buddhism does not call for self-improvement,
but for radical **acceptance of being human**.

For the urban wanderer, that means:

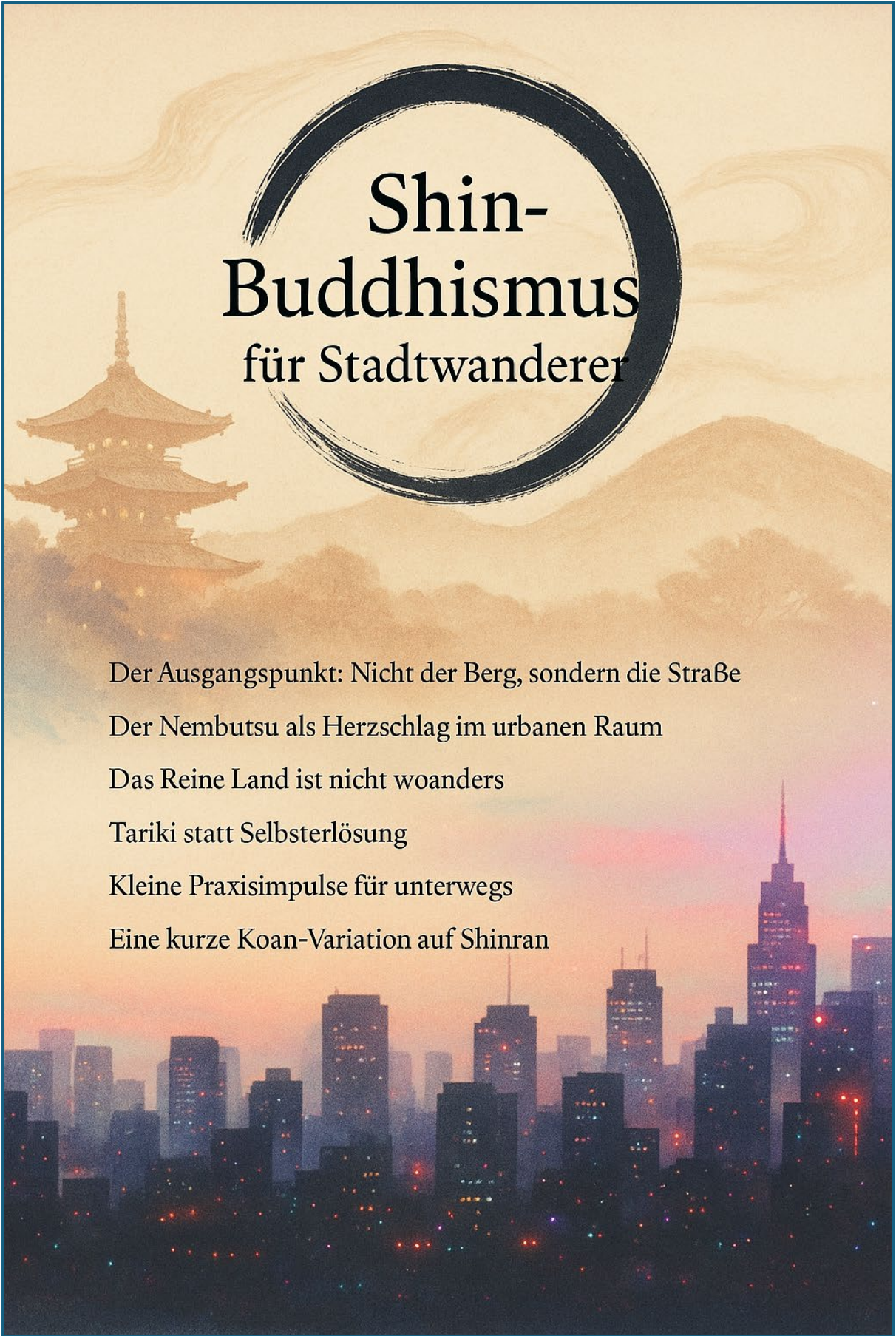
Every path is sacred — if you stop trying to control it.

Or as Shinran said:

“If I try to be good on my own, I am lost.

But when I realize that I am lost — there is light.”

Source: Wikipedia “Jōdo Shinshū”, for the prologue, - compiled and written with the help of ChatGPT 4o (thanks a lot, Ana, for your cyborgian companionship, you know where our inspiration comes from ...)



Shin- Buddhismus für Stadtwanderer

Der Ausgangspunkt: Nicht der Berg, sondern die Straße

Der Nembutsu als Herzschlag im urbanen Raum

Das Reine Land ist nicht woanders

Tariki statt Selbsterlösung

Kleine Praxisimpulse für unterwegs

Eine kurze Koan-Variation auf Shinran

SHIN BUDDHISM

MINI-DOSSIER FÜR STADTWANDERER

