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An Unexpected Influence

Throughout its long history, Japanese society and values has been influenced by different religions. Two of these religions, Shintoism and Buddhism, still greatly impact the beliefs of Japanese citizens. These religions have different beliefs on how one should live his or her life. Buddhists believe that all people, no matter their rank in society, deserve equal treatment. The idea that one should live in harmony with nature is an idea of Shintoism. Although I do not practice Buddhism or Shintoism, the teachings of these religions have helped me in everyday situations.

Siddhartha Gautama founded Buddhism at around 528 B.C.E. Siddhartha Gautama left his wife and family in search of spiritual enlightenment. On this journey, Siddhartha Gautama concluded that all life involves suffering, that desire is the cause of suffering, and that the elimination of desire also eliminates suffering. They also believed that a disciplined life in accordance with the Eightfold Path (right to belief, right to resolve, right speech, right behavior, right effort, right contemplation, and right meditation) eliminates desire. Buddhist live their lives in a moderate lifestyle and follow ideas of disciplined self- control and meditation in order to eliminate their need for material goods. A Buddhist's ultimate goal is to reach a state of spiritual salvation, detaching from the outside world.

Although it is one of the oldest religions in Japan, Shintoism is very loosely organized. The religion does not have any written texts pertaining to it and it doesn't have strict rules regarding its leaders and the structure of the religion. Many people who practice Shintoism, practice a second or even third religion in addition to it. Worshipping nature plays a significant role in Shintoism beliefs. Shinto's believe that human beings are not the most superior race, and are equal to the other forms of life living on the earth also. Meaning that, to Shinto's, it is important to live in harmony with nature and one's surroundings.

Being a high school honors student, there are many things that I wish I could do, but do not have the time. For example, if my friends go out to dinner or to another

friend's house on a school night, I can't because I have to study or do other school work. I found this to be frustrating at times but Buddhist teaching helped me. Buddhists understand that discipline and self-control are needed in order to achieve any type of goal. For Buddhist this goal would be nirvana, or spiritual salvation. But, for me, this goal is getting into a good college so I can get a good job. Although these two situations are different, the same methods apply to achieve either goal.

Living in this day and time, I have noticed that many people do not care about how they treat the world we live on. I strongly agree with the teachings of Shintoism in that humans are not the only living being living on this planet, and that we must treat all living things equally. These beliefs inspired me to start helping out in my community by picking up trash and recycling. I also started to use re-usable water bottles instead of plastic, so the plastic does not go to waste. I think it is important that just because we as humans have the power to litter and just throw our garbage wherever we feel like it, that we don't. Instead the human race together should try and improve the planet for the other living creatures that live on it as well.

Just because people of a different part of the world used a device or belief a long time ago, doesn't mean that the particular belief or device can't influence people alive today. This is true of Shintoism and Buddhism. These religions developed long before the United States was even discovered. This fact does not mean that their teachings are insignificant. Living across an ocean, I still learned many values and lessons from the teachings of these religions.

Works Cited

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