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Fujimatsuri Service 5/21/00
Wailuku Hongwanji
Sunday, May 21, 2000, 9:00 am

We have solemnly gathered
To learn the wonderful teachings
Of the Blessed one that *we may live*
life more meaningfully and courageously.
We have gathered to enjoy the
Fellowship of these many friends
And to encourage one another
to appreciate the Great Vow, the Great
Promise, of Amida Buddha.
Namoamidabutsu

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Courage of Shinran
a. Blizzard at Inada
b. Encounter w. Bannen

Good Morning Everyone:

Welcome to Fujimatsuri, our day of honoring the life of our founder, Shinran Shonin. It is so nice to have people from different temples come together to renew acquaintances and to be in oneness in Gassho. *Today May 21 is exactly 827 years since Shinran's birth. Today is his 827th birthday.*

Prominent in the news today is the tragedy of Byran Uyesugi, who shot and killed seven of his co-workers at the Xerox office. It is a tragedy of what anger can do and also it is a tragedy of a false sense of power that guns can give to people. For violence is not an act of courage, but an act of cowardice. Whether it be the Columbine massacre in a Colorado school or the kidnap and murder of innocent young people, they are cowardly acts of people who *find it difficult to* cope with the day to day challenges that life presents to them. *If these perpetrators had courage, they would not have committed violence.*

Today, as we honor Shinran Shonin, let us understand that he was not only a man of superior intelligence and deep spirituality, but he was also a man of courage, courage which I would say stemmed from his deep faith in the Compassion of Amida Buddha. Shinran's courage should be a model for us who have made it to the 21st century.

Buddhists
We are of a minority faith in a world of a billion Moslems, a billion Catholics, a billion protestants and *almost* a billion Hindus. It takes courage in this day to be a Buddhist, to be a member of a non-militant, non-evangelical, a compassion oriented religious group. Well, Shinran showed us the way of courage.

Shinran's courage did not deal with death defying acts, but dealt with perseverance in the face of discouragement and threats. He was not a quitter, and

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obstacles only spurred him to greater efforts. You may remember how the government banned the fledgling Nembutsu movement at the urging of the ^{established religions} Tendai and Nichiren ^{regions of the country} clergy and exiled Shinran and his teacher Honen in opposite directions. The elderly Honen was banished to the southern island of Shikoku while Shinran was sent north to the snow country of Echigo, which is present day Niigata. Separated from his leader, a lesser man would have given up the religious life under such harsh conditions of loneliness and freezing winter climate. A weaker man may have gone underground and practiced Nembutsu in secret. But instead, Shinran continued his studies and when the government's banishment ^{was lifted} after 4 years, he did not return to the comforts of Kyoto. He went on a one man mission to spread the teachings among the common people in the northern region – the farmers, fishermen and villagers. It is remarkable that he went on this one man crusade without any authorization or command from a superior or without any motive to create disciples or *start* a new religious movement. His motive it seems was to share the profound experience of his encounter with the Great Compassion of Amida Buddha.

What ^{he} did was not easy. There were no modern conveniences to make things comfortable for him. He took long journeys to spread the teachings. Once on his preaching tour, Shinran and three young companions reached a small village in Hitachi (the present Ibaraki prefecture) ^{a village -} called Ōuchi. It was late in the evening and the winds were picking up because a blizzard was approaching from the sea. They came upon a house where warm fire could be seen through the window. They asked for a night's lodging, but the man of the house was an uncaring person, who coldly turned them away. Shinran Shonin then decided to rest calmly in the snow using a stone as a pillow, while his companions made him as comfortable as possible. ^{He awoke from his} After a restless sleep, he ^{and} started chanting the Nembutsu softly and his companions joined him in the recitation. The night was dark, cold and windy, but their hearts were warm with Amida's compassion.

During the night, the man of the house was awakened by the chanting of the Nembutsu. He thought he saw a strange light shining in the snow. But when he looked out the window, what he saw was a scene of the master and his companions trustingly reciting the Nembutsu, disregarding the bitter cold blizzard. The Householder

suddenly felt ashamed of himself/and hurriedly invited Shinran and his companions to the warm fireplace in the house. The man and his wife apologized for their behavior. But Shinran and his companions simply continued to recite the Nembutsu with no self pity or anger,/but with ^a deep feeling of thankfulness for the hospitality of the couple.

Next morning, Shinran taught them/about the unconditional love and compassion of Amida Buddha/and they became devoted followers of the way of the Nembutsu. It seems that Shinran/was not a person prone to give in to anger/or to hold a grudge, but he courageously accepted what life offered him/^{no} matter how little/and continued to pursue his goal in life.

Shinran lived in dangerous times when there were sporadic clan war fares, roving bands of unemployed samurais, occasional pestilence and crop failures. He had to live carefully/in order to avoid dangerous situations and survive. But, sometimes danger pursued him. There was a Yamabushi called Bennen, who became angry at Shinran ^{because Shinran was discouraging involvement with} superstitious practices. A yamabushi is a mountain priest, actually an ascetic, who practiced incantation and black magic, and Bennen began losing disciples and he blamed Shinran for it. Being a former warrior skilled in the martial arts, he decided to kill Shinran along the roadways by means of an ambush. But when he waited for him on the mountain trail, Shinran would take a road in the valley. When Bennen waited for Shinran in the lowland, Shinran would take the path of the high ridge. Bennen became so angry that he decided to attack Shinran openly/in the hermitage where he preached to the people. With weapons at his side,

Bennen stood outside of the hall and yelled out to Shinran to come to the entrance and meet his death. ^{Shinran's disciples were frightened and urged him to remain inside} But when Shinran went out calmly to receive the intruder, Bennen was ^{glaring} struck by his noble and peaceful appearance. ^{when Bennen saw him, he was} The only thing Bennen could do was to

fall on his knees in great respect and ask for forgiveness. If there had been fear in Shinran's eyes, Bennen would have surely killed him. Shinran was not a proud man, but instead was a man of humility who respected all as equal. He was a man of courage who did not shrink from facing danger, or hide from social disapproval, but instead ^{he} saw what was true and real/and did what he had to do.

Shinran's courage did not come from himself, but came from his deep faith in the Vow or/Promise/ of the ^{in the Universe} Universal Power, called Amida Buddha. Through his own

This Other Power can ^{also} be our refuge, our source of courage when we entrust entirely in His Compassion.
Namu Amida Butsu

experience^s he realized the limitedness of the individual ego. And by the same token, he realized the ~~Infiniteness of the individual ego~~. And by the same token, he realized the Infiniteness of the Other Power and Amida's total commitment to our salvation. He wrote a song as part of his master piece ^{called} the Kyo Gyo Shin Sho, and in part it says:

"Happiness abounds, reverence grows deeper, because here are gathered the teachings of Shinshu (true teachings) and the essentials of the Pure Land are manifested. I am only mindful of the depth of Buddha's grace, and I am not ashamed at the ridicule of men."

Shinran wrote ~~a~~ ^{the} song of joy that in life and in death, he was secure in being embraced by Amida Buddha, never to be abandoned. His strength of character/ and courage to be who he was/ came from his sense of Oneness with Amida Buddha came from his sense of security and his sense of being the chosen one, which we all can share with him, once we too entrust in Amida's remarkable Vow or Promise.

Truly, Shinran's life gives us the courage/ for each one of us to live our unique lives in our unique ways. I wish to close my talk by again reading the passage I read at the beginning of my talk. *In gassho (pause)*

"We have solemnly gathered to learn the wonderful teachings of the Blessed one, that *we may live life more meaningfully and courageously.* We have gathered to enjoy the fellowship of these many friends and to encourage one another to appreciate the Great Promise of Amida Buddha.

Namoamidabutsu

Fujimatsuri

Story of Shinran's life
after banishment

Story of being left in
blizzard.

encounter of beaver