

5

Makawao Hongwanji Eshinni Day
April 9, 2000, 10:15 am

✓ a. What sort of person
Eshinni was.

The power of faith
Could never be extinguished,
On the mountain of Kurisawa
Now stands the stupa of five tiers.
NamoAmidaButsu

Good morning everyone:

Thank you for having this special service to honor Eshinni. Eshinni Day is not an old tradition. ^{in Hawaii.} It began only in 1976 when at the World Fujinkai Conference, a resolution was passed stating that all Fujinkai organizations in various countries in the world will observe Eshinni Day in April. In this way, it has created more awareness of the important role Eshinni^e has played in the history of Jodo Shinshu. If Shinran Shonin is the father of Jodo Shinshu, then Eshinni is the mother. The poem I read at the beginning of my talk is carved onto a monument written by the late Professor Umehara Shinryu, a Buddhist scholar and former president of Toyama University. The poem honors Eshinni who had wished to have a five tier stupa built in her memory in the vicinity of Kurisawa in Niigata prefecture. The stupa represents for Professor Umehara the power of faith which is perpetual, which is without an end. In 1996, Mary and I joined Dr. Taitetsu Unno's Monpo Tour of Japan and spent several days in Niigata to visit the locations where Shinran spent time when he was exiled. At that time we also visited Eshinni's stupa and made offerings at the temple nearby.

Eshinni was a devout Nembutsu follower, having learned the teachings directly from Shinran. She was dedicated to the missionary efforts of her husband and willingly subjected herself to the hardships and sacrifices which came with itinerant missionary work. In other words, ⁱⁿ spreading the teachings by going house to house, village to village. We know that she worshipped Shinran and Shinran worshipped her because they both had dreams which the other was an incarnation of Kwannon, the Buddha of Mercy. Can we speculate that without the support of Eshinni, Shinran would not have been able to accomplish as much in his religious pursuit?

We know that Eshinni dedicated her life to the efforts of Shinran and that she was nourished by the Light of Amida's Vow as an ardent Nembutsu practitioner. However,

do you know what kind of a person Eshinni was? Very little was known about Eshinni until 1921 when ten letters written by Eshinni to her daughter Kakushinni were discovered in the archives of Nishi Hongwanji. ^{until then many thought Lady Tamaki was Shinran's wife. Now we know she probably did not exist.} From those letters which ^{Eshinni} she had written at her estate in Echigo, present day Niigata, and sent to Kakushinni who was living with her father, Shinran, in Kyoto, we get a glimpse of Eshinni the person.

First, she had a strong vigorous personality. The former Lady Ohtani, author of the book, The Life of Eshinni, wrote that Eshinni ^(quote) "seems to have been clear-headed and bright, giving in to no man, and therefore, she was able to live in far away and unfamiliar places, such as Kanto and Kyoto, helping her husband and raising their many children." ^(unquote) So we can see that she was a courageous person.

Secondly, Eshinni was intelligent and educated having received training at an early age as a woman-in-attendance ^{called} (uneme) at the imperial palace in Kyoto. And to be accepted into that position, she probably came from a we'll-to-do family related to the powerful Miyoshi clan in Echigo. Unlike most women of that time, she was able to read books, religious and nonreligious, and write sensitive and intelligent letters.

Thirdly, Eshinni was an organized person who was meticulous and methodical in the way she did things. If she were alive today, she would make a good administrator. That is why when she was staying in Kyoto with Shinran and heard that things were falling apart at her family estate in Echigo she felt only she could make things right. She probably felt no one else could provide the strong overseer skills needed to straighten things out.

Eshinni's personal characteristics of having a strong personality, being intelligent and educated, and having administrative skills, made her an ideal help ^{for} mate of Shinran. And, as they say, behind every good man, there's a good woman pulling the strings. So to repeat, if Shinran is the father of Jodo Shinshu, surely Eshinni is the mother.

And so there is a monument, a five tiered stupa which stands on a ^{monument} hill in Echigo, commemorating a great personality in Jodo Shinshu. Eshinni was a woman of faith, in the right place and ^{at} the right time, to provide support and comfort to a man who found the true spirit in religious awakening. And on that

monument is written, "The power of faith could never be extinguished. On the mountain of Kurisawa, now stands the stupa of five tiers." NamoAmidaButsu.

Eshinni Day

History

Life

1921. ten letters ✓

Lady Otowa's bk -

The Life of Eshinni