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Hearing and Gate

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"When you can feel the pain of your own existence, it opens your heart to the pain of others"

Miyagi Shizuka, Shin Buddhist Priest (1931–2008)



07 Enninji – The Site of Shinran’s Cremation

A Pilgrimage to Historic Sites Related to Shinran’s Life

Shinran (1173–1263) died on January 9, 1263 (the 28th day of the 11th month in the second year of the Kōchō era), at the Zenpōin temple in Kyoto, where his brother Jin’u was living, attended by Jin’u and his daughter Kakushinni (1224–1283). The situation at that time was recorded as follows in the Godenshō (The Biography, 1295), written 33 years later by his great-grandson Kakunyo (1271–1351).

“Shinran came to feel slightly indisposed from late in the 11th month of Kōchō 2 (1262). From that time on, he chanted the nenbutsu ceaselessly and spoke of nothing else. At noon of the 28th, he lay down on his right side with his head to the north and died facing west with the nenbutsu on his last breath. He was 90 years old. As the hermitage where he lived was south of Oshikōji and east of Madenokōji, his coffin was carried far to the east over the Kamo River. He was cremated at the Enninji, located south of Toribeno, in the foothills of Higashiyama.”

The first cremation in Japan was that of the monk Dōsō (629–700), who traveled to Tang China on an official mission, and studied directly under the famous Buddhist

pilgrim Xuanzang (602–664). The custom of cremation did not originate from Buddhist doctrine but just happened to be brought to Japan together with Buddhism. In fact, it was a custom in India from before Shakyamuni’s birth.

It takes time to perform a cremation by building a funeral pyre at the burial site, placing the body on top of it, covering the body with firewood, and then setting it on fire. Modern made-to-purpose crematories in Japan today use fuel oil to reduce the body to ashes in only 90 minutes, controlling the heat by computer. But for cremations in the olden days, the fire was lit at sunset and the ashes could not be gathered until the next morning. When done by people with no experience at cremations, the body might not be completely reduced to ashes, the fire might go out midway, or parts of the body might remain intact.

The Enninji mentioned in the Godenshō disappeared from history for a time, but reappeared again after many vicissitudes. The present-day Enninji lies midway on a sloping road in Yamashina. Shinran’s cremation site lies surrounded by a stone fence deep within a forest at the highest point of the slope that borders the Enninji graveyard, a vivid reminder of the past.

Enninji



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