

MATSUYAMA OUTLOUD, November 2022

—Voices of the WGO? Staff and Members of the Volunteer Guide Seminar—

Pilgrimage to Autumn

In early October, I walked the pilgrimage route from Misaka Pass in Kuma-Kogen Town to Joruri-ji Temple, the 46th temple on the pilgrimage route. Misaka Pass is a 720-meter-high mountain pass on the border between Matsuyama City and Kuma-Kogen Town.

Listening to our guide's explanation, we walked through the dimly lit forest toward Joruri-ji Temple. Nowadays, it is a road used by pilgrims and hikers, but in the past it was also a route for traders and travelers, and the guide recounted that the mountain paths were steep in places and horses sometimes slipped and fell over the cliff to their deaths. There are also tombstones along the pilgrimage route. Though some are now almost indistinguishable from rounded mounds of earth. Walking the pilgrimage route in the old days was very difficult and life-threatening.

Walking along the mountain path, we noticed messages posted along the way encouraging pilgrims along their journey. The messages were hung from tree trunks, written in English by students of Sakamoto Elementary School. For example, "Please don't give up until the end." "Good luck to the end." One of them was written in English, French, German, Spanish, Korean and Chinese. Pilgrims must be encouraged by these cute messages. It's an example of wonderful "omotenashi" hospitality.

The forest used to be all coniferous trees, but now there are many broadleaf trees as well. I was happy seeing all the trees. After emerging from under the forest canopy, the blue sky came into view. We stopped for lunch around Sakamoto-ya. Then we arrived at Joruriji-Temple. We had a pleasant hike in the mountain, blessed with fine weather.

Today's souvenirs are three large chestnuts and two bright vermilion crow gourds.

(Hiroko.T)

On a muddy street in a war devastated town, crowds surge forward in a stampede towards a skinny man carried on a Believer's shoulders. The man hands out paper slips on which the name "Amitabha" is inscribed to the excited crowd. His face is sunburned and his clothes are torn.

Saint Ippen, (1239-1289), born in Matsuyama, was an influential and radical monk. He traveled on foot all around Japan eventually attracting a very large cult, the Ji-shu sect of Pure Land Buddhism. In those years, society was plunged into civil war and the central government, without a shogun, suffered from political instability. A Mongol invasion, natural disasters and famine made both aristocrats' and commoners' lives hard. How did this ragged monk's teaching become so popular and influential around this time of widespread social turmoil? And why is he called the Dancing Saint? After achieving enlightenment, that is the extinguishing of disturbing emotions and desires; and the attainment of Buddhahood, Ippen decided to preach to common people in a more understandable way than previous priests had done. His practice was simple. "Recite the name of Amida Buddha once, and you can go to Paradise." What he intended to say is that even if one tries to do good deeds in order to be "saved", one can't necessarily go to heaven. However, if a follower can throw away his earthly desires, he will reach the Pure Land. Thus, he equated heaven with a state

of mind, not a geographical place or concept.

People believed that the paper slips he handed out would have the power to enable them to atone for the wrongs they had committed in the present world and would let them be reborn in Nirvana.

Why Dancing Saint? One day Ippen was chanting Amitabha in front of his uncle's grave, when he and his followers felt an impulse to move their arms and legs. Finally they began to jump up and down frantically. Afterwards, he and his followers started to perform "dancing invocations".

This eventually became the origins of "Kabuki" and "Bon dance".

Whenever he arrived at a village square, his group would build a hut where his band of followers, around 20 men and 20 women, took off their clothes and danced deliriously on the makeshift stage. Locals were drawn into this religious exultation and soon joined the dancing circle. However, having witnessed his dance, the conservative Buddhist aristocracy condemned Ippen's methods. "Priests should chant sutras in a low voice. They shouldn't dance." Ippen didn't care about such opposition. Instead he sang a song, "If you want to jump, you can jump like a colt in a spring field. If you want to dance, you can dance. Those who have hearts would understand the true path of Buddhism."

He was radical and charismatic because he convinced both the rich and poor to give up their greed and possessions.

A drawing by his follower shows how his journeys popularized Buddhism among ordinary people. He is surrounded by women, beggars, and farmers in addition to samurai and aristocrats. Like some hippie rockstar. It is said that Ippen's disciples lost their way after his death, because the itinerant monk donated only a few of his documents to a temple and burned all the rest.

Still you can visit his birthplace, Hagonji Temple in Dogo which displays a statue of the saint.

(Miwa N.)

What is your taste in autumn?

In Arkansas now, our daughter texted me that she enjoyed having a cinnamon roll with a cup of cappuccino as she walked through the farmers' market downtown.

Our new ALT comes from South Carolina and misses sweet potato pie, a sort of regional fall soul food in her state. For me, having a piece of apple pie or pumpkin pie with afternoon tea is supreme bliss. But regardless of the season, homemade carrot cake, cherry pie and light and fluffy angel food cake instantly take me back to my time in the U.S. and remind me of how people treated me there. In more than 15 states, people easily invited me, a young girl, into their homes for a cup of tea or even a big holiday feast. More than two decades ago, while living in Minnesota, I signed up for a Thanksgiving dinner at the Alliance church. Our cooking-class director worked hard to arrange for American families to host international families for holiday dinner.

One day before Thanksgiving Day, a nice woman doctor called and gave me directions to her home. We drove to their elegant mansion carrying homemade *sushi*. Their two super-smart kids and a cute toy poodle welcomed us. Of course, her husband showed us how to carve and serve the turkey and stuffing turkey with their family's traditional cranberry sauce. For a while, we talked about the first Thanksgiving feast between the Native Americans and the surviving pilgrim fathers.

This is one of the most unforgettable dinners I've ever had and not just because we had an autumnal Thanksgiving covered in fallen leaves instead of snow, something extremely unusual in that part of the world. And when I got home Eiko, my best friend, gave me a special birthday call from Japan. Hopefully, our girl will have a special Thanksgiving with nice people there!

(kazuyo Kajiwara)