



The 106th Anniversary of Shojushinin's Birth

May, the month of change and transformation, offers an opportunity to redouble our efforts in giving expression to our true selves—shinnyo—through sharing the Dharma (Jpn. otasuke); a veritable "sea of harmony" awaits when we guide others to our path of boundless spiritual liberation and awakening.

Carnations for our Dharma Mother

FRAGRANT BREEZES WAFT through the fresh verdure of spring in this month of May as we celebrate the birth of Shojushinin, the Shinnyo Spiritual Source. In line with the special services we held [in March] honoring Master Shinjo's arrival in the world, we have entitled the May 9 service "Celebrating the 106th Anniversary of Shojushinin's Birth." In the March issue of my monthly guidance I explained how we came to celebrate Master Shinjo's birth following encouragement from an honored guest backed by the passionate desire of the practitioners. Similarly, the first celebration for our Dharma Mother was held in 1959 at a ceremony entitled "The First Celebration of Enshu's¹ Birth in conjunction with the Service in Gratitude to the Shinnyo Spiritual Faculty." On this memorable occasion, befitting as Shojushinin's birthday celebration often coincided with Mother's Day, I was chosen to represent the practitioners in offering a bouquet of carnations² to our Dharma Mother. I was in my second-to-last year of high school and performed the offering in my school uniform with my hair in braids. After Shojushinin's passing, the tradition of celebrating her birth continued. Members of the youth association and temple volunteers would prepare a space with her photo or image before the carved wooden plaque [crafted by Master Shinjo on the façade of Shinchoji] that reads "Tokeizan."³ Practitioners would then offer carnations throughout the celebration.

¹ *Enshu* (苑主, lit. "head of [Shinnyo-Jen]") was Shojushinin's title as administrative head of our sangha and the name she was known by during her lifetime, just as Her Holiness today is often referred to by her title of Keishu (継主, lit. "successor").

² In Japan, as in other nations, Mother's Day is strongly associated with carnations; mothers will often receive bouquets of carnations on this day.

³ Lit., "mountain to uphold the light," the prefix to Shinchoji's official name, Tokeizan Shinchoji. In her 2018 Annual Guidance, Her Holiness recalls Master Shinjo's hopes in naming *Tokeizan*

Upon further reflection, I am reminded that on May 11, two days after this first [public] celebration of Shojushinin's birthday, we prepared a cake and gathered in Master Shinjo's study on the second floor of Shinchoji for a small family celebration of my parents' birthdays. In those days we rarely had the opportunity to enjoy Western confections [such as cake]. I recall one Christmas when I was in elementary school, a practitioner who ran a confectionery baked a cake and brought it for us to share. Shojushinin exclaimed, "This is such a rare treat! Let's slice it carefully so that we can share it equally with everyone tomorrow, too." She cut it into fine slices and I fondly remember how happy we all were to enjoy such a special delicacy. I recall an endearing gesture my mother made, waving both hands in front of herself excitedly as she exclaimed, "I just love cake!" A child at the time, I said, "When you die then, Mom, I'll put a cake on the altar for you," to which Shojushinin quipped, "You don't have to wait until then, Masako!" The room erupted in laughter. Shojushinin was so kind and quick to ensure those around her were enjoying themselves. I believe she continues to exist for all time in the hearts and minds of practitioners who trust in the Shinnyo Path, her great lovingkindness extending equally to all.

The upcoming 106th anniversary celebration of her birth will be held at the Yuon Sanctuary. Here, in the Kansai region [of western Japan], we will celebrate her birth at the place of her passing. Doing so is a tribute to the entire course of her life. She experienced so much pain and difficulty in life, yet she channeled these experiences in such a way that allowed her to connect more deeply to, and help, others. This ceremony presents an opportunity for us to express our resolve to follow her example. On this day, my sister and I, together [in spirit] with all Shinnyo practitioners, will offer bouquets of carnations [to our Dharma Mother]. We will do so with the sincere vow to redouble our efforts in

Shinchoji: "May this place serve as a beacon of Dharma for all generations to come, radiating its truths and clarity to all corners of our world."

the Three Endeavors⁴ before expanding them fully to include the Three Practices⁵ advocated by the Shinnyo Parents.

The Beginning of Shinnyo-en: A Time of Change and Transformation

MAY 20 THIS year also marks the 60th anniversary of the Sesshin Training Hall's dedication at Oyasono. Having overcome the pain and suffering of the Dharma Crisis to bear witness to our new temple's consecration, it was a tearfully emotional day of joy for all: for Master Shinjo in the officiant's seat; for Shojushinin, who joined him on the chancel; and for the many practitioners in attendance. May 20th has long been a day of great historical significance for our sangha, for it was on this day in 1951 that our community—having survived the turmoil that followed false charges brought by a disciple whom the Shinnyo Parents loved deeply—made a fresh start, changing its name from the Sangha of Truth (Jpn. *Makoto Kyodan*) and beginning anew as "Shinnyo-en" with Master Shinjo Ito as *Kyoshu* ("founding dharma master") and Master Tomoji Ito as *Enshu* ("sangha head").



Master Shojushinin Tomoji (left) and Her Holiness Shinso (right)

⁴ Sharing the Dharma (*otasuke*), gathering with fellow practitioners, and engaging in sesshin meditative training

⁵ Giving the Dharma (*otasuke*); giving of one's material blessings to support our sangha and its many philanthropic activities around the world (*okangi*); and giving time in service to others (*gohoshi*)

In 1953, May 20th was also the day that we completed, at the national level, the registration of our new organization as a religious corporation. Spiritual Source Shojushinin once spoke of this new name as follows: "We decided on the name 'Shinnyo-en' through Shindoin's spiritual faculty while he was still alive...I always kept the conviction in my heart that we must safeguard the newly-reborn sangha which goes by this name, and it is a sentiment that has only deepened over time through our many [subsequent] services as Shinnyo-en." I am struck by the thought of how Shindoin seemingly traded his life for our community, for our application to be approved as a religious corporation was accepted [by the then-Ministry of Education] just a day before his passing. Indeed, our sangha of "Shinnyo-en" has become what it is today thanks to so many foundational efforts: the tireless drive of the Shinnyo Parents to make spiritual liberation and awakening accessible to as many as possible; the precious life [and legacy] of Shindoin; and Kyodoin, whose premature passing formed the bedrock for the establishment of Shinchoji [in 1938].

For the Shinnyo Parents, the new name "Shinnyo-en" was utterly consistent with their intentions behind the original naming of our community as the Sangha of Truth:

Truth (Jpn. *Makoto*) = Shinnyo

Sangha (Jpn. *Kyodan*) = En

And so it came to be, our borderless garden (Jpn. *en*) where people of all backgrounds—men, women, lay, and monastic of every national, linguistic, ethnic, and cultural group—are welcome with open arms to come together and be part of a sangha where all can experience *shinnyo*, the universal truths [of the cosmos].

It was from this time [in 1951] that the Shinnyo Parents came to refer to May as the month of "change and transformation." Shojushinin once spoke of its significance as follows: "Only through our actions do we give expression to our buddha nature and only through practice [of what we believe] can we effect change within ourselves." Master Shinjo also taught, "We change our hearts and minds so that we can then dedicate ourselves completely to helping others [in their lives]." The true aim of "change and transformation" is the altruistic practice of *otasuke*, helping others through sharing the Dharma and our Shinnyo Path, and connecting them with the awakening wisdom of the Shinnyo Parents and our spiritual lights Ryodoji. We do so not just for ourselves alone but so that as many people as possible may find everlasting joy and happiness in their lives. I wish ours to be a sangha constantly brimming with the fresh vitality of new members and that we make the most of our environment to challenge and encourage one another in our quest to bring out our unadulterated [true] selves and the lasting happiness that this engenders.

From May 18 to 20, in commemoration of the ordination ceremony undertaken by founding Master Shinjo on May 19, 1936, the year of our sangha's establishment, we will be holding ordination ceremonies at the Ogen Center for those who will newly take their vows to officially become disciples on the Shinnyo Path. In parallel, the Remembrance Service on the 19th and the Feast of Kasanori on the 20th—the 60th anniversary of the Sesshin Training Hall and the day Shinnyo-en began anew—will be held at the Yuon Sanctuary, our extension of Oyasono, and broadcast to temples around Japan.

[Finally, May brings to mind the elements of sea and water,] for it was in May 1970 that we enshrined Seiryō Dai Gongen, a deity from the Esoteric Buddhist tradition with origins [in China] across the sea from Japan. In the same year of 1970, during a trip to Hawaii and the North American mainland to share the Shinnyo teachings, it was the oceans of Hawaii that Master Shinjo gazed upon

pensively from the window of his hotel room. Recalling the trip to Europe and Israel [three years earlier] and the difficulties he and our Dharma Mother had shared, he said, "How I wish I could have shown these azure waters to Shojushinin." These same waters played host to the first lantern floating there in 1999, during Shojushinin's 33rd memorial year;⁶ this year will be the 20th lantern floating in what is now a statewide event.

Our lantern floating tradition has its roots in the first *obon* period following Kyodoin's passing, when a spiritual consolatory service was conducted at a small stream [near Oyasono]; this led to holding a merit transfer ceremony on Lake Kasumigaura beginning with Shindoin's passing in 1952 that today has evolved to become a very special service on the seas of Hawaii during Memorial Day in the U.S., when all those who have fallen in combat are remembered. In this way, our traditional [Japanese] ceremonies have undergone their own process of "change and transformation" and now reach out to the entire world. I hope you can join me in prayers of utmost sincerity that all life and existences—both seen and unseen—should find their way to ultimate happiness and that mankind, the earth, indeed the entire cosmos, may be guided to spiritual liberation and awakening. As we chant the *Jojusan* ("Praise of the Ever-Present") and the *Goreiju* of benevolence and liberation in the hopes that the supportive workings of *saisho*, *shoju*, and *bakku-daiju* reach out to touch all life, may we redouble our efforts this month in sharing our Shinnyo Path with those around us.

This Month's Point of Reflection:

- As we look towards celebrating the 106th anniversary of our Dharma Mother's birth, acting upon our gratitude by engaging in the altruistic practice of sharing the Dharma (*otasuke*) in an effort to extend spiritual liberation and awakening to all realms, both seen and unseen

⁶ The year of someone's demise is counted as the "first" memorial in Japan, hence Shojushinin's 33rd memorial occurring in 1999, 32 years after her passing in 1967.