

Master Genshin
Rev. Takahashi, May 2016

Every year, Mother's Day is celebrated on the second Sunday in May. Among some Buddhist scriptures and biographies of some Buddhist masters, there are different episodes about relationships between mother and child. Once, one of those stories made a deep impression on me. This story is about one of the Seven Masters, Master Genshin, and his mother.

Master Genshin was born about 1,000 years ago in the Heian Period in Japan. Since he was a really smart boy, he had a high popularity among people. When he was 9 years old, one person visited Genshin. He urged him to come to Mt. Hiei where the center of Japanese Buddhism was in those days and to become a Buddhist minister. Genshin left his home and started studying and practicing at Mt. Hiei.

He was outstanding for his study and practice even at Mt. Hiei. One day, he was given a tremendous honor to lecture on Buddhism for the Emperor. Through Genshin's excellent lecture, the Emperor was really impressed, then he gave Genshin a high rank and a reward which was a magnificent cloth. Genshin was so honored because the Emperor praised him. He wanted to tell it to his mother first of all. He wrote a letter and sent it to her with the magnificent cloth as a gift. Genshin's mother received the letter and the cloth. However, after she finished reading the letter from Genshin, she sent back the cloth to Genshin. She sent it back with a following message: "The idea of your leaving home was that you might enter the path of true enlightenment and not to gain any profit or make a name for yourself. Do not be led astray by these things. I thought you would be a bridge to connect this world with the next, but I am sad to find that you are only a monk of this world."

When Genshin left her for Mt. Hiei, she strongly hoped that he would become a minister who helps those who are suffering in this world through sharing the teaching of Buddhism. However, Genshin wrote a letter proudly, "I lectured for the Emperor." "I got the nice cloth." Therefore, she sent a really strict message to Genshin. When I imagine this situation, I think Genshin's mother must have been pleased and proud of him when she received the letter from Genshin, because anybody couldn't have a chance to lecture for the Emperor. She might have wanted to say "Congratulation!" at the bottom of her heart. However, she gave a strict lesson to Genshin. She may have thought that he would be up in the air if she praised him. She really thought about Genshin, so she sent back the cloth to him with her message.

Genshin received her reply with the cloth. However, since he was so smart, he immediately realized her idea. After this incident, he moved from the temple at the center of Mt. Hiei to the temple deep in the mountains in order to avoid fame and fortune. He really concentrated studying and practicing deep in the mountain. Also, he raised many disciples and wrote many books to spread the Dharma in his life. One of his writings became the leading religious literature in the history of Japan. He became a great master of Buddhism, and his writing later influenced Shinran Shonin. Shinran Shonin really respected him and said as follows:

Our teacher Genshin earnestly set forth, from among all the teachings of the Buddha's lifetime, the single gateway of the nembutsu, and spread it among the beings of this defiled world in the latter age.

(Hymns of the Pure Land Masters: Collected Works of Shinran, p. 384)

Remembering this story, I always think that the message of Genshin's mother was not only for him. Her message made me remember the purpose of listening to the teachings of Buddhism. Even Master Genshin was careful not to stray from the right path while remembering her message.

In the book written by Genshin, he called Amida Buddha the unsurpassed mother of great compassion. Also, when he received the letter from his mother and realized her idea, he said that my mother is like Amida Buddha. Her earnest hope certainly reached Genshin, then his teachings have been transmitted until today over 1,000 years. In this season, I always remember the Genshin's story. Also, it reminds me of the Amida Buddha's compassion which always leads us to the right path.

Namo Amida Butsu.