

Guidance from Departed Loved Ones  
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Obon season is fast approaching now. I'm sure that many people are looking forward to this Bon Dance season. Lihue Hongwanji will be holding its Bon Dance on August 7 and 8.

During this season, we will hold not only the Bon Dance but also different services relating to Obon, like Bon Service, Hatsu Bon Service, Graveside Services and Columbarium Services. We observe these services through remembering departed loved ones. In our life, we cannot avoid parting from those we love. When we encounter a separation, we would have different emotions. Needless to say, this is a sorrowful event. However, the teaching of Buddhism gives us the guiding principle for such a situation. When I think about it, I always remember the story that would give us some lessons.

This episode is about Izumi Shikibu who was a famous Japanese poetess of the Heian Period. She lived in Japan about 1,100 years ago. When she was living she had a sad experience. She had a daughter, but when her daughter was a child, she suddenly passed away. Izumi Shikibu suffered great sorrow, then she wrote a poem to express her feeling. **“My child passed away. I want to trace her final journey to the other world. I don't know where she is now, but I wish she would come back to my home.”**

Her poem shows that she deeply grieved for her daughter and had difficulty in accepting the reality. Even after her death, she was worried what her daughter was doing. We would have a similar feeling when we encounter a parting from immediate family or friends.

After some time, she made another poem about her daughter. However, her expression in the second poem was different from the first one. It is said that her feeling changed after she started listening to the teaching of Buddhism. Her second poem is: **“My life is transient in this dreamlike world. I must be aware of this reality. This important guidance was given by my daughter.”**

In the first poem, Izumi Shikibu just lamented her daughter's death. On the contrary, in the second poem, she regarded her daughter as her teacher. There is a big difference between the two poems. She thought that her daughter gave the important guidance to her and tried to teach the truth of this world.

This is the story that I heard before. As the story shows, we have a sad feeling when we experience separation. However, we would be able to understand the parting differently through listening to the teaching of Buddhism.

Shinran Shonin said: **“Those who reach the Pure Land of happiness return to this world of the five defilements, where, like the Buddha Sakyamuni, they benefit sentient beings without limit.”**

(Hymns of the Pure Land: *Collected Works of Shinran*, p. 329)

He teaches us that, when our life is over in this world, we will be born into the Pure Land and become a Buddha through Amida Buddha's working. In addition, those who become a Buddha will return to this world to save others as Bodhisattva. Through listening to this teaching, we would be aware that departed loved ones are guiding us right now as Izumi Shikibu felt.

When we part from those we love, we would reflect on the meaning of this life and the impermanence of this world. We will have the Obon observance which is held in memory of departed people. We would consider this opportunity as the important lesson to walk the right path and to live each day to the fullest, given by departed loved ones. Let us continue listening to the teaching of Nembutsu. Namo Amida Butsu.