

# WHEN SHALL I BE ABLE TO ATTAIN SPIRITUAL LIBERATION ?

Eison and the Worship of Mañjuśrī

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**E**ison was responsible for memorable achievements in the history of the worship of Mañjuśrī (Monju) during the 13th century, but he was deeply tormented within his own heart. In the prayer-petition (*ganmon*) dedicated to the statue of Mañjuśrī at Hannyaji, which contains a colophon that is dated from the third month of the year 1265, one sees the lament in which Eison pleads to know, “When shall I be able to attain spiritual liberation ?”

These words seem to reflect Eison’s thinking, which was also expressed in his agonized statement on having “lost the path on the way to spiritual liberation in the long, dark night” found in the prayer-petition from Ebaradera, which is dated from the ninth month of 1245.

Eison worshipped Mañjuśrī not as a high-ranking prelate but as a tormented human being who concealed in his heart the agony of not knowing when he himself would be spiritually liberated. At the same time he was applying himself to the salvation of abandoned individuals suffering alone in poverty.

In terms of his achievements in saving the faithful, Eison spared no effort in deepening his faith in Mañjuśrī: he continued his exploration of esoteric Buddhism and the Buddhist precepts, conferred the bodhisattva precepts on 97,710 individuals, and promulgated the production of a type of sculpture known as the Eight-Character Mañjuśrī (Hachiji Monju). Eison’s worship of Mañjuśrī was deepened and enhanced by the torment of not knowing when he himself would be spiritually liberated.