

The Talk of the Flower

This year we will all be observing Hanamatsuri service from the comforts of our own home. We will miss going to our respective churches and temples and being able to hold a Hanamatsuri service to celebrate the birth of the historical Buddha. We will miss seeing the decorative Hanamido altar and to pour sweet tea over the statue of the baby Buddha.

Hanamatsuri literally means “Flower Festival” stemming from the flowers that bloomed in Lumbini Garden when the baby Buddha was born. Today I would like to reflect on what we can learn from a single flower.

I would like to share with you a favorite poem of mine, written by a Zen Buddhist master by the name of Zenkei Shibayama. In his book “A flower does not talk” is the following poem:

*Silently a flower blooms,
In silence it falls away;
Yet here now, at this moment, at this place,
The world of the flower, the whole of
the world is blooming.
This is the talk of the flower, the truth
of the blossom;
The glory of eternal life is fully shining here.*

Once, Shakyamuni Buddha gave a sermon in which he spoke not a word. Instead he stood before his followers holding a single flower. They all looked in puzzlement, wondering when the Buddha was going to speak. Five minutes passed. Ten minutes passed. Twenty minutes passed. Still the Buddha did not speak. Finally, one disciple, Mahakasyapa, smiled in response to the Buddha. That day, only he understood the Buddha’s message.

To me, what the Buddha was trying to say to his disciples that day was, “Look at what we can learn from a single flower! Look at how radiantly it blooms. The flower does not complain about the heat or the cold, the wind or the rain. It does not complain that the stocks are down, or that we have to stay at home. The flower does not complain that we cannot go to a restaurant or to the movies. The flower just lives its one life, deeply, fully.”

I’ll never forget, some years ago we went to the Grand Canyon. As we were standing at a viewpoint, looking over the majestic canyon, I noticed a little tree growing out of the rocks on the edge of the canyon in front of our view. How does that little tree survive, I thought? There was hardly any dirt there, mostly rock. How does it get enough water and nutrients from what little soil there is to survive? It has to endure the heat of summer and the cold of winter. It was probably much older than me. What a will to live this tree must have. More than looking at the Grand Canyon that day, I couldn’t take my eyes off of that tree on the edge of the cliff.

The last line of the poem by Zenkei Shibayama states,
The glory of eternal life is fully shining here.

To me, the “eternal life” that is spoken of in this poem is the same as “immeasurable life” that we speak of in Shin Buddhism. Eternal life or Immeasurable life doesn’t mean to live forever and ever. It is an expression that is pointing to an essence of life, our true life, our awakened life. The flower in full bloom is manifesting that eternal life, that immeasurable life with the totality of its being.

This year for Hanamatsuri, let us reflect on the dynamic life of a flower. I should live my one life with the vibrancy of a flower. What is there to complain about? What is there to be despondent about? Live. Live this one life that we have been given. Whether it is short or long, no one knows, but no matter what its length might be, if I am able to live this life with a sense of depth, with a sense of radiance, with a sense of meaning, then the glory of eternal life is fully shining here.

Namuamidabutsu,

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