

HANA MATSURI: FLOWERS AND FLOW

Comments By
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Today we are celebrating the birth of the Buddha partly as it is done in Japan. Hana Matsuri means “Flower festival” in Japanese, and Susan’s father brought this statue of the baby Buddha back from Japan, along with the wooden ladle and the tea. The arbor around the Buddha represents the garden into which he was born. We cover it with flowers like those that bloomed around him and his mother that beautiful spring day. It is said that sweet showers fell at his birth, so the tea represents the sweet showers and we ladle it over the Buddha to bring blessings upon life on earth.

One of the most well-remembered stories of the Buddha tells of the day he was to give a talk, and thousands of disciples had gathered from all over. But when the Buddha came out, he merely held up a flower, and said nothing. Everyone expected him to speak, and they became agitated, but one disciple finally burst out laughing. The Buddha gave him the flower, saying to the thousands gathered that he had already given them all he could with words, but to this disciple, with this flower, he had given the key to all the teachings. (—p. 18, Zen: Its History and Teachings, by Osho)

How is a flower the key to all the teachings? Perhaps it is a truth that cannot be taught. Existence is, in itself, an immense mystery, and human beings choose to value one way of being over another, whether that is busy-ness or stillness, speaking or contemplating. What the world values, or life values, may be completely meaningless to individuals, including the way we spend our time and the worries we allow to dominate our moments. In the Buddhist tradition, emptiness is as valuable as busy-ness, maybe more so. And thus, the flower can represent the beingness of life, without purpose or regret or angst.

In order to break free of the patterns of our lives, we need to create spaces in which to receive wisdom and insight. The importance of such spaces has been documented by the researcher Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in his books on *Flow* and *Creativity*. In interviewing hundreds of creative people, the author found that creative solutions come not through forcing them, but through moments when we let go, are distracted, idle, unfocused. Having time for nothing, for being like the flower, is the way we allow our inner wisdom to do its work in its own mysterious way.

The truth which Csikszentmihalyi rediscovered is that “the control of consciousness determines the quality of life.” (p. 20, *Flow*)

In other words: know thyself.

Or, as the Buddha is said to have done:

[hold up a flower.]