

HOW WE FLOWER: EASTER, HANA MATSURI,
AND THE FLOWER COMMUNION

Comments By
Rev. Susan Manker-Seale and Karla Brockie

Opening Words: Susan

Osho was a Zen mystic who said that of all the teachings of Zen, only one anecdote should not disappear. It goes like this:

Buddha was to give a talk one day, and thousands of disciples had come from miles around. When Buddha appeared he was holding a flower. Time passed, but Buddha said nothing, he just looked at the flower. The crowd grew restless, but Mahakashyap, who could restrain himself no longer, laughed. Buddha beckoned him over, handed him the flower, and said to the crowd, “all that can be given with words I have given to you; but with this flower, I give Mahakashyap the key to all the teachings.” (p. 18, *Zen: Its History and Teachings*, by Osho)

Introduction: Susan

How do we flower? That is the question today. What makes us flower? How are we like these flowers which are all around us, around the Hana Mido, and everywhere we look outside?

Spring is a time of flowers, a time for what was asleep in us or in the ground to wake up and grow tall and blossom. Human beings realized a long time ago that we are like flowers when we learn to become beautiful people, beautiful in all the ways that people can be: kind, helpful, careful, and thankful. Those are only four ways we become beautiful people. What are some others?

[to be loving, hopeful, trusting, generous...]

Spring is a perfect time to celebrate the ways we flower. Hana Matsuri is the Japanese Flower Festival celebrating the birth of the Buddha. The Buddha was a person who learned how to flower and taught others to flower, to become beautiful persons. It is said that he was born in a garden under a flowering tree and that, as he stood up (he was already six years old – that’s how stories go most-times), it rained sweet tea in the garden. That’s why we ladle the tea over the statue of the baby Buddha over there in the hana mido.

Now I can imagine some of you saying, “Hey! I thought this was Easter!” Well, it is, but Easter is one of those holidays that hops around March and April like a bunny rabbit. This year it hopped right onto Buddha’s birthday, which is today, April 8. But Easter is also a celebration of spring and flowers as much as it is a celebration of another great person, Jesus, and I’ll say more about that later. And Karla will tell you about

another flower ritual called the Flower Communion which was started by a Unitarian minister in Czechoslovakia, Norbert Capek.

So, we have a little play in honor of the Buddha, hot cross buns in honor of Jesus, paper flowers to make in honor of the Flower Communion, and some great songs to sing. Let's sing one of those now, song 98, "Loveliest of Trees."

[Song 98, "Loveliest of Trees" v.1)

Story: "A Flower from Buddhism: The Monkey King": Susan

The Buddha taught others to flower by telling them stories, stories about how to become better people. He is famous for his flower sermon, in which he simply held a flower in silence and waited for someone to laugh. We have a story for you today, which they say Buddha told. It's also about a tree, a mango tree, and how a human king learned from a monkey king how to be a better person. It's called "The Monkey King," by Demi.

We need story helpers, so if you'd like to be a monkey, come on up. There are also humans. Karla will help you act out the story as I read it.

[Story: "The Monkey King," by Demi]

The moral of that story is that we learn from the world around us all the time. We flower by allowing ourselves to grow into better people, like the human king learning from the monkey king.

How do we know what is important to learn? We look inside for truth. That is one of the greatest teachings of the Buddha, and a lesson Jeff Chamberlain turned into a song.

[Song: "Search for the Truth Inside" by Jeff Chamberlain]

[Celebrating Community]

[Song 203: "All Creatures of the Earth and Sky"]

Story: "A Flower from Christianity: Easter Joys": Susan

"All Creatures of the Earth and Sky" is my favorite Easter hymn. I love all those alleluias. Alleluia is an ancient exclamation meaning "praise the lord," and today we can use that to simply be an expression of joy.

Easter is a time when we also celebrate another great person. His name was Jesus, and he was a teacher who, like the Buddha, taught others how to become better persons. Some people say he was a Buddha, and others say he was the son of God. Unitarians and Universalists in our own Christian tradition taught that Jesus was a great man, and the son of god only in the way that we are all children of god or of the universe. We are all holy, precious flowers blooming on the earth.

Jesus said that the most important teachings are to love god and our neighbors, which today we can say means to love all of existence and each other, all the creatures of the earth and sky. The teaching that Love is the greatest power of all came from Jesus' tradition and his teachings.

What do we love about Easter and spring? What brings joy to us at this time of year? [renewal, sunlight, flowers, warmth, babies, bunnies and eggs, ...]

Many people believe that, after Jesus died on the cross, he rose up from the dead on Easter morning to be with God. You might see people wearing crosses to show they believe this. Unitarians and Universalists historically don't believe that he rose from the dead, but we do understand the desire to keep important people and teachings alive in our hearts. We can sprinkle tea on the statue of the baby Buddha, but that doesn't mean we actually believe that tea rained down when he was born or that he came out of his mother a grown boy of six years! We can celebrate Easter and the idea of rebirth in our own lives, but that doesn't mean we have to believe Jesus was actually reborn after he died.

But you can believe these things if they make sense to you. We are a congregation which teaches that, since love is the greatest teaching of all, we should learn to love our neighbors as ourselves and, thus, to respect what other people feel in their hearts is true. It is this love which, when truly practiced, allows us to see what is true in all faiths and to allow room in our lives for what is most beautiful about them. Every faith is like a flower in the world, adding color to our beautiful earth.

From our Christian heritage we have hot cross buns to pass around and eat during the offertory. You can see the symbol of the cross on the tops of the buns. That is another Easter joy!

Please give generously to support our UU community here, to keep our connections strong and our voice alive.

[Offertory: "Seashore of Morigasaki" and passing of hot cross buns]

Story: "A Flower from Unitarian Universalism: Capek's Flower Communion": Karla

Susan and I are going to show you how to make a big tissue paper flower today to take with you. To us, you are all big wonderful flowers, blossoming in new ways all the time, and you can remember that when you look at the flower you make. Take a piece of tissue paper and a pipe cleaner.

Norbert Capek was born in 1870, in southern Bohemia (part of what was later called Czechoslovakia, and at that time a part of the Austro-Hungarian empire). From childhood, he took to heart the historic heroism, and martyrdom, of Jan Hus, who had insisted upon the right of the people to a religious faith of their choosing. Capek's

religious path was, like many of ours, and like the Buddha's, a winding one through many twists and turns. He was a born leader, and outspoken. At the time of World War One, he was a Baptist minister (sometimes in trouble for the increasingly liberal views he was developing), and he and his family had to flee Europe in 1914 to take refuge in the United States because of his liberal religious views. It was there that he finally gained recognition from the American Unitarian Association, and finally he was sent back to a newly peaceful Prague to establish a liberal church there. In 1922, he established the Free Religious Fellowship, with a membership of 40 persons, much like our own congregation at its founding. It eventually grew to a membership of 5000, with 1000 attending on a Sunday, and with many seedling congregations established around them.

His ministry was also furthered by his music; he composed many new hymns for his Czech followers. June of 1923 saw the installation of the new ritual he created for this blossoming congregation, the Flower Communion Service. Everyone was asked to bring a flower to put in a common vase, the resulting marvelous bouquet representing the congregation made up of varied individuals coming of their own free will to accept and assist one another. The flowers were blessed, and upon leaving the service, the members each plucked a new flower from the vase to take home, signifying their acceptance of one another and of the receiving of the treasury of grace they had created by coming together.

Like Jesus, Reverend Capek died at the hands of an oppressive regime for his radical and dangerous message of freedom, in the concentration camp at Dachau in 1942. We now carry on the legacy of leaders like the Buddha, and Jesus, and Reverend Capek who called for listening to your own heart, following not what anyone else tells you to believe but what resonates with *your* mind and heart. We honor Reverend Capek and liberal religion all over the world with this flower communion, and with our own flowering.

Flower & Water Blessings: Karla

While Susan blesses us and the flowers with our sacred water gathered at the Water Communion Service in the fall, I will give you the words of the prayer (slightly adapted) that Reverend Capek used at the very first Flower Communion Service. The word Providence can also be thought of as the Universe, and the meaning of God is whatever you think of that connects us all to one another and to all the world.

“In the name of Providence, which implants in the seed the future of the tree, and in the hearts of all of us the longing for people living in brotherly love; in the name of the highest, in whom we move and who make the mother, the father, the brother and the sister what they are; in the name of sages and great religious leaders, who sacrificed their lives to hasten the coming of the kingdom of brotherhood—let us renew our resolution—sincerely to be real brothers and sisters regardless of any kind of bar which estranges person from person. In this holy resolution may we be strengthened knowing that we are God's family; that one spirit, the spirit of love, unites us; and endeavor for a more perfect and more joyful life leads us on. Amen.”

Our final song is a Buddhist prayer, number 1031, Filled with Loving Kindness. Pam will lead us.

[Closing song 1031: “Filled with Loving Kindness”]

Closing Words: Susan

Be as beautiful a flower as you can be. Please take a flower from the hana mido during the postlude, a different flower from the one you brought, remembering that everyone has different gifts and important teachings to share.

[Postlude: “O Filii et Filiae”]

