

## SHOTEN HORIN

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Translated by Nobuko Kodama*

*Sawama sensei is a visiting minister from Osaka, Japan, here to study English. He gave the dharma message at the NYBC Dec. 3. The following is a translation and summary of his well-received talk.—Editor*

Buddha attained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree. But why did he hesitate to tell others of what he found about enlightenment? Buddha thought that it was almost impossible to convey to others the content of the enlightenment correctly. No matter how much Buddha tried to explain the content of the enlightenment, he thought that it might cause misunderstanding to explain it with words.

When we try to describe something with words, our own backgrounds are reflected in our descriptions. For example, when people talk about weather, they take into account their jobs or other situations.

Good weather does not necessarily mean the same for everyone. People in farming need rain to grow their crops, but people in the fishing business find it difficult to work when it rains.

As another example, just imagine that you see five apples and two bananas on the table. When you are asked to describe what you see, you may say, "There are five apples and one banana." Others may say, "There are two kinds of fruits"; "There are seven fruits" and "They look delicious."

In this way, even though people look at the same things, they interpret what they see differently, using their own points of view. In general, when we utter words, we conceptualize what we see and say them. For this reason, what you want to convey is not necessarily understood by others in the same way.

Another example is the Japanese expression, "Shiku-Hakku" (four sufferings and eight sufferings.) According to a Japanese dictionary, four sufferings refer to birth, aging, sickness, and death. Eight sufferings refer to another four kinds of suffering.

In our daily lives, we have to get along with people we do not like; we cannot get what we want; we have to part with people we are fond of; and we are disappointed when things do not work as we expect. However, the Japanese use this expression without really understanding the original meaning, saying "I am having Shiku-Hakku". This means that I have a difficult time.

In this way, the original meaning of this expression in Buddhism is interpreted differently. In Japanese there are many words that originally came from Buddhism, but people do not pay attention to the original meanings and use them in daily conversations. We need to be aware of the original meaning of words that reflect the concept of Buddhism.

When Buddha described enlightenment with words, he carefully selected words to precisely describe the content of enlightenment.

In gassho, Nobutaka Sawama 🙏

## ***Learning from Trees Growing***

*By Koichi Mizushima*

I remember when the trees were first planted in the brick courtyard of our temple. The frail wood structures supported by sticks were planted in the square dirt openings of the courtyard. The trees grew taller with each passing year. But they were not just growing taller above the ground ... the roots beneath grew as well. In time, the strong roots would continue to grow and cause some of the stone bricks to ... move. I couldn't tell you the exact day when the root moved the bricks, but as you can clearly see by looking at the courtyard today, it definitely happened ...

If we hope to continue growing as human beings, we must put forth right effort each and every day—just a little at a time, strong and steady. We must never allow the "stone" of ignorance and fear to halt our progress.

... The tree is our life, the life that we live and enjoy each day. The tree is our home, our cars, our possessions, our families, our careers ... all the important things that make up our everyday life. The roots are our true inner self, the true self that guides the decisions that shape our lives. No matter how large, extensive and busy our lives become on the surface, the true self will always be larger and more expansive than will ever be seen.

We must always continue to nurture our true self, for everything grows from there. The dharma is one very important ingredient that can help nurture our extensive root system. And like the tree, we must seek out the things that we need to grow. It is all around us....

We must never stop feeding our minds and hearts. We must never stop growing. We must always be strong enough so that our roots can push through any stone that may try to block our path. And we can do it slow and steady, just a day at a time.

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