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Farming by **David M. Valadez**

Deshi: Sensei, do we plant these flowers and these vegetables because the Founder spoke of the importance of farming in his spiritual training?

Sensei: I suppose we can say so.

Deshi: Why are you not so sure?

Sensei: Well, farming and its connection to spiritual cultivation have a dark past in Japanese history. That past goes back to at least the time of Suzuki Shosan. During Shosan's life, a rebellion started in Shimabara. This rebellion was sparked by heavy taxes and by the distance that always exists between a central authority and a peripheral power-base. The rebellion was being fueled by both samurai that did not buy into the notion of a singular political power with the Shogun at the top and by a religious movement that had posited that a kind of "new Christ" had returned - a millenarian movement. However, unluckily for these people of Shimabara, they were quite productive agriculturally. Due to their local weather patterns, many of their crops could be harvested twice a year. Thus, though far from the capital of Edo, Shimabara was not allowed to withdraw from the growing Tokugawa hegemony.

Deshi: What did the Shogun do?

Sensei: He amassed one of the largest recruited armies Japan had seen up until that point and had them march on Shimbara. This army killed everyone - man, woman, and child, until the area was quelled into passivity. The final bastion of Shimabara defense was slaughtered to the last life. After the army, the government sent Shosan - a Zen monk. Shosan used the local Zen temple networks to establish avenues of surveillance regarding any potential rebellious thought or action. At these temples, because the rebellion had used elements of Christianity in its discourse, the local populace was forced to periodically show up to perform acts of desecration on Christian images - in order to demonstrate that they were not or were no longer Christians. A whole other series of practices went along with this anti-rebellion policy. With this went Shosan's position that the local farmers should stop thinking about political matters, economic fairness, and/or social freedom. Instead, they should just farm - they should seek to see the great spiritual cultivation that can take place in farming (i.e. farm and produce the required taxes). Shosan started to preach the idea that farming was a noble and spiritual pursuit, one by which a farmer himself could achieve Awakening. It was all a matter of, "if you really want to be free, then shut up and farm, experience the Awakening that is in farming - pay your taxes." This is how Shosan used the philosophy of the Buddha and of the patriarchs - to quell men into accepting their status quo.

Deshi: Is this where Osensei's understanding comes from?

Sensei: Undoubtedly so - we can trace it back to Shosan.

Deshi: Then why are we farming?

Sensei: Not to pay the taxes - of course. We plant these flowers because they are beautiful. Man should bare witness to the beauty that is all around Him.

Deshi: Is that the same thing as Shosan's farming?

Sensei: I should hope not. For us, then, our gardens should be different. Our spiritual gardens should not just be of things flora. Instead, let us see the growth cycles and needs of nurturing in Man. Let us see the gardens of children that are all around us - children that need our support, love, attention, and care. The world is a kind of "kindergarten," and thus this world is always in need of gardeners who will not tire or falter. Children are the little flowers of our world - we gain much from tending to their needs. Let us be nurtures of our fellow human beings - let us tend to all of their needs. Let us see to flowers because we can appreciate their beauty, and because we are kind in spirit and hold a deep love for Nature in our hearts. However, let us be nurturer of Man, Woman, and Child - so that we can never make the mistake of siding political repression and religious oppression with spiritual practice. We should practice this farming – caretakers to all of Mankind.