



## THE STORY OF OUR WHITE HANAMATSURI ELEPHANT

Each year in April, we celebrate the birthday of the Buddha Shakyamuni. A Hanamido decorated with flowers is placed upon the back of a white elephant in accordance with the myth of the Buddha's birth.

In Buddhism the white elephant is a symbol of spiritual power and authority. The image of the baby Siddhartha stands in a basin filled with sweet tea. This sweet tea is poured over the image.

At Senshin, as we enter the Hondo for the Hanamatsuri service, the

first thing that we notice is the white elephant, decorated with garlands of flowers. The white elephant looks almost real and everyone cannot help but notice and admire the beautiful elephant.

Each time that I see the elephant, I began to wonder how many knew or remembered the story of our white elephant, and how Senshin happened to have such a wonderful elephant.

To my surprise, I discovered that very few members knew or remembered the story of the white elephant. So, for the benefit of those who did not know, and for the younger and newer members who also did not know, and for those of us who are getting forgetful, I tried to gather information to help us learn more about the story of the elephant.

The white elephant was created and made by Mr. Tsuneo Imanishi. He was a gardener and lived in Culver City. Though he and his wife were Nishi Betsuin members, he attended services at Senshin in the 1950's and 1960's. He worked for the Parks and Recreation Department and also the Los Angeles School District. He was a very quiet and modest man, but it was evident that Mr. Imanishi was very clever, talented, and also artistic. His mother was a flower arranging teacher, which may account for his artistic skill.

The story goes that he actually made two elephants. The first one he built was a smaller one. Senshin used it for several years

until it was damaged somehow. Mr. Imanishi was never satisfied with his first attempt and so instead of repairing the damaged one, he began to build another, larger elephant.

After forming the body of the elephant, he asked a few of the ABA members to help him apply and cover the elephant with papier mache, which is a mixture of paper, water, pulp and sizing and glue. It was a difficult and time-consuming process.

When he finally finished, he had created a beautiful elephant that looked almost real. After more than fifty years, the elephant is still holding up well, and looking good. So thank you Mr. Tsuneo Imanishi, Senshin is so fortunate to have such a beautiful white elephant for our Hanamatsuri.

Thanks should also go to all who helped Mr. Imanishi in making the elephant, those who continue to take care and maintain the elephant and also to the Dharma teachers and students who help decorate the elephant each year.

There is a sad note to the story, when we learned that Mr. Imanishi had passed away about 4 or 5 years ago. Also his wife Mitzie passed away recently.

*Submitted by Sangha member  
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## HANA MATSURI

What baby's birth isn't magical? For the moment, a perfect human being, riding on an auspicious animal and showered with flower petals, it's every movement and sound received with a smile and parent's dreams of its perfection. An earthquake event forever changing one's schedule, lifestyle, values, and definitions of truth, beauty, and light. All the positive energies of a people focused in on a single baby; yours, mine and everyone's.

Hanamatsuri is the enactment of a birth that took in every way - a world-honored one, a supremely awakened one. And we follow that path, sharing in the joy, humor, and good appetite.

Happy birthday Siddhartha!