

***Hoshimatsuri* and Festival of Stars and Planets**

JAPANESE PIONEER IN LAS VEGAS

2/6/2011

Recently when I was walking around the newly developed Sunset Park where there is an area which preserves the original desert and sand dunes of Las Vegas, I learned about a Japanese Pioneer of this city. His name is Yonemura “Bill” Tomiyasu. He migrated from Japan to California in 1898. In 1914 he moved to Las Vegas and purchased a property, east of Sunset Park. He was a skilled farmer, but despite his efforts, his first fields failed. After five years of trial and error, he learned what to plant and when to plant. Later he was able to harvest large crop of vegetables.

During the building of Hoover Dam, Tomiyasu produced the vegetables for stores in Boulder City. When major grocery stores came to Las Vegas in the 1950s, his farm became unprofitable, and became a landscaper and died in 1969. I believe he and his family donated his land to the school which named Tomiyasu Elementary School. Also a street, Tomiyasu Lane, was dedicated in his memory.

His most important legacies are his plant-list and plant-calendar which are still used by the Nevada Cooperative Extension Service.

Bill Tomiyasu proved that we can produce vegetable and fruits in the desert in early 1920s. When you do something, timing is very important especially farming. We can survive without money or gas nor electricity, but we cannot survive without food. Last year I harvested many egg plants, carrots, peas, green peppers, some strawberries, and green onions in my small back yard garden.

This morning we gathered here to celebrate Setsubun and the Festival of Stars and Planets. You see many *HEI-SOKU* like *origami* at the altar. They are representing the sun, moon, North Star, Venus, and other stars and planets. We appreciate the harmony of these planets and stars. With harmony and balance of these planets, we have morning and night, high

tide and low tide, new moon and full moon, and also the four seasons. Therefore we must learn that we too must have harmony and balance in our daily lives.

As you know the New Year of the Rabbit began on February 3. The Chinese celebrate the New Year according to the lunar calendar. Farmers in Japan also use the lunar calendar because it is easier to know the timing of what and when to plant and harvest.

With the Year of the Rabbit, many people think that those who were born are like rabbit that are gentle and quiet but run first. Actually the twelve zodiac animals indicate the time of the day and season of the year, as well as indicate directions.

Now look at the chart. The zodiac animal starts with mouse or rat that is under No.3 while the rabbit is the left hand side of No. 5. So the rabbit is 5 a.m.to 7 a.m. and also spring. Please read the Natural Phenomenon.

Because this year is the Year of the Rabbit which is spring and the time for sprouting, the economy should sprout but it still needs tender care because if you do not give tender care it may die just as a sprout may easily die if you do not give enough of water and sunshine.

Now look at the back side of the paper. It shows how to find your number of the Nine Stars that indicate your fortune in this year.

After finding your star, go back to the other side and find your fortune this year.

Buddhism teaches “Nothing is permanent.” Therefore, even though you are not in good fortune this year, do not worry because a good year is coming soon. On the other hands, even though this year is good fortune for you, you must be very careful to behave preparing for your next bad year.

Frankly speaking, Buddhism teaches that there is no good year or bad year. Good or bad is all up to an individual person on how they accept each situation. However, it is very true that winter is cold while summer is hot, so you must know how to adjust to the good time and the bad time and must learn what to plant and when to plant your seeds of good fortune.