

Nigra sum et Formosa

Rev. Master Jiyu would often speak about the importance of being careful how you use "and" or "but" in a sentence - including and excluding - sameness and difference. It was one of the ways she taught us to be aware of our attitudes of mind in daily life.

In the original Hebrew of the Song of Solomon in the Bible the text says "I am Black and Beautiful, O Ye daughters of Jerusalem." The early translations into Latin say "Nigra sum et formosa" (Black am I and Beautiful).

When a later translation was done the word "et" (and) was changed to "sed" (but) making the phrase read "Black am I but Beautiful". The "but" has remained in almost all translations of the Bible to this very day.

Consider carefully the consequences of that simple change of just two letters ("e" remained constant, "t" was removed, "s" and "d" substituted).

This phrase from the Song of Solomon is not as obscure as it might seem and indeed, was well known and quoted especially in defense of slavery in the American South.

I first became aware of this from a movie in which a black slave woman is mistress to a white man. In the bedroom she stretches up to her full height and says aloud "I am Black and Beautiful, O ye daughters of Jerusalem!" The man replies "In my Bible it says "but"." The woman just stretches herself again and proclaims, "I am Black and Beautiful, O ye daughters of Jerusalem!"

That woman truly made a lions roar.

I think every one can see my point