

# Mirror Flower Water Moon

2024

鏡花水月



DHARMA REALM  
BUDDHIST UNIVERSITY



Dearest Readers,

Another year of communal cultivation is about to come to a close and what better way to celebrate the arrival of summer than to dive into the minds of our fellow students, professors, faculty, and community members to see what has been brewin' in everyone's pressure cooker.

As we take the lid off and the steam clears away, you, the reader, will get a glimpse of the "body" that remains within these pages. The cultivators themselves won't fully see the transformations they underwent or how much their paradigms have shifted until they're in the midst of summer, where they finally get a bit of space to breathe as the smelting cools down. Though the practice truly never ends, it is always nice to look back and see how far we have come along. So, we hope that these submissions serve as a marker to each of the contributors, showing to all of us and yourselves how much you have grown and matured. Progress over perfection!

To all the contributors, we appreciate your vulnerability on such a personal topic, the "body." To the readers, we hope you enjoy this 2024 *Mirror Flower Water Moon* edition as much as we do.

With lots of love,  
Your Editing Team

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# BODY

Ben Sandel

A body.

A house occupied by empty space.

A conglomerate of the seven elements.

A node of awareness in the matrix of the thus-come-one.

A separate yet integrated part of the world.

Where I am located.

That which I can move and out of which my senses flow.

How I relate to others and others relate to me.

How I exist in the world.

My body.



# Translations of Two Chan 禪 Poems and Interpretations From a Reader

Victoria Pang 庞贺童

夢  
作者：王安石 北宋

知世如夢無所求，無所求心普定寂。  
還似夢中隨夢境，成就河沙夢功德。

“Dream” by Wang An Shi

Reckoning this dreamlike reality, I have no desires.  
Having no desires, my heart a perpetual state of empty quietude.  
Yet in this dream-realm I follow its currents  
To achieve dream-merit—endless rivers and innumerable sand-grains  
of dream-merit.

Wang An Shi (1021–1086), described as a “scruffy Confucian political theorist” was a known admirer of Confucian poet and politician Dufu and controversial statesmen who tried to implement many radical political reforms (Owen 691). His policies won him many conservative enemies, including the famous lay Buddhist Su Shih and Sima Guang. Nevertheless, scholars recount his policy reforms as being “ahead of his times” (“Wang Anshi Implements New Policies”). He devoted himself to government service until the age of 55, eventually retiring as a wandering recluse, traveling the countryside “on his donkey rather than the elegant horse expected for a man of his stature” (Hinton 11). In Wang An Shi’s later life, he adopted, on top of his Confucian principles, Chan Buddhist philosophies as well.

“Dream” reveals the poet’s flexible application of ‘emptiness’ as he recognizes reality as it is. He compares life to a dream, signifying his view of it as an ephemeral, insubstantial state of existence, and as a result, has no desires for insubstantial, worldly gratification. While this acceptance of reality brings him peace, it does not prevent him from completing the necessary political duties he upheld as a government official in accordance with the needs of his times. Even

the idea of “merit” is not clung to, for it is endless and infinite if one puts down one’s own personal desires, concept of gain, and self-ego. It is evident that seeing through the conventions of his time did not prevent Wang An Shi from accomplishing what he felt was beneficial for the people. His unwavering devotion to promoting reforms that benefited the disadvantaged members of his society, dismissal of convention for convention’s sake, and ready reversion to a frugal life after his political career are indicative of a truly wise application of emptiness.



This second poem does not have a confirmed author. It presents the notion of coexisting peacefully with the idea of emptiness in that seeing through impermanent phenomena does not necessarily mean shutting out the undesirable parts of reality, but that one must learn to deal with, skillfully, the desires and emotions that arise from one’s surroundings and fundamentally, from within one’s heart.

色见声求也不妨，  
百花影里绣鸳鸯。  
自从识得金针后，  
一任风吹满袖香。

Seeing form, desires arise—no fret.  
In the shade of a hundred flowers,  
find embroidered Mandarin ducks.  
Acquiring the golden needle—  
let winds from all directions pummel this incensed sleeve!

In the first line, the poet tells us, the common person, that since we are all born in this world and consequently find ourselves aroused by earthly desires, we must learn to embrace them without being accosted or overpowered by their presence. The poem uses beautiful, dainty images, such as embroidered Mandarin ducks found swimming in the “shade of a hundred flowers” to capture the intricate wonders of life’s experiences. Mandarin ducks symbolize love in Chinese culture because they are commonly seen swimming in pairs. However, the poet says that only after acquiring the “golden needle” does he or she find peace even amidst blowing winds. The golden needle (金针) represents one’s true heart and is an extended metaphor of life’s tapestry. The blowing winds can be understood as life’s hardships, for only when we are making conscious choices of our life’s design will the fragrance of incense, and possibly symbolically of the dharma, never fail to pervade all corners.

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# 24

Warren Chew

To my surprise, I am 24 years old. The number usually crosses my mind and leaves. This time, it stays.

I know it as I scratch my cat's cheeks behind her graying whiskers. I feel it when Dad walks with a limp and Mom is too tired to cook. 24 is a reminder. It hangs over me as I watch life blow by.

At 24, I'm still catching up with the changes. When did I graduate from DRBU—during last year or the year before? I can recall the correct date, but letting one year slip into the next is easy, frighteningly easy.

Today, I am 24, in this moment sandwiched between weeks, months, and years.

If I let another friendship fade away,  
If I skip lunch with my parents,  
If I let her go without even trying,

Will the future allow me another chance? As another second becomes an hour, 24 is my screaming reminder to act before it's too late.





## The Rice Cooker

Bach Nguyen



A winter breeze blows with the cold,  
Wondering, what's really in my soul.  
Come back to reality, open the kitchen door's bolt,  
What caught my eye, the dirty rice cooker about to grow mold.  
With diligence, clean it slow,  
Boast about myself, took a picture with a pose.  
Thought I did a good job, opening the inside, full of mold,  
Again, with diligence, clean it slow,  
Took me double the time to blow away the "inside" mold.  
Suddenly, the cleaning jolts me out of the lethargy,  
Know that cleaning the body without cleaning the mind is the same  
as cleaning a rice cooker with mold,  
Cloaked the dirty inside with a shiny robe.  
Woke up from the doze,  
Be present in the mind, clean away all the thoughts of mold.  
In the mode of diligence, accord the practice with what Laoshi(s) told,  
Only then, I'm able to clean my rice cooker as a whole.







# Cleaning, Kitchens, and Buddhism: A Perspective

Squire Davidson

Growing up I always hated cleaning my room. As a child, I don't think it was laziness exactly, but there was freedom I experienced having my toys strewn about and leaving a trail of winter clothes on the path toward my bedroom. At first, my parents tried to reason with me to keep a clean and organized play area, often suggesting that I couldn't find my favorite toys in such a mess. But when quizzed, and to their dismay, I always proved them wrong. My parents quickly abandoned the "carrot for the stick." However, the creative punishments they tried had no effect. As I got older, they succeeded by paying me a weekly allowance to keep my room clean and that worked somewhat; however, I took every opportunity to mess up my room when they weren't paying attention. In short, cleaning for me in my youth was a quid pro quo and a task lacking any enjoyment or benefit.

At fifteen years old, I started working in a restaurant and it was there that I was introduced to a different concept regarding cleaning. For a cook, cleaning was a requirement and demonstrated an individual's level of skill. The mantra running a professional European kitchen is, "Clean as you Go," and working with cleanliness and keeping a clean uniform was a sign of ability. Older cooks would mock their juniors for having dirty aprons, and that wasn't something my ego could handle, so I begrudgingly learned to maintain cleanliness to a high degree. My tidy and professional cooking skills were quickly noticed and so I promptly moved up in the kitchen ranks of my culinary employment.

In the midst of my work, I quickly discovered that there was a "loophole" that I could exploit to stop having to be so diligent with my never-ending cleaning. You see, I observed that the Chef of a restaurant never cleaned up after himself! To be Chef meant that other people were there to do all the things you didn't want to do. With newfound motivation, I moved towards that goal as quickly as possible and was a Chef in my own right by 21 years old. Being in the role of Chef now meant people ran around making sure all was taken care of and I once again felt the freedom I loved in my youth. It was great.

Working as a chef and especially at a young age was very demanding, so I'd often go to the Zen Center to join in morning meditation to have a moment of calm and grounding in my overly stressful existence. Since my culinary skills were known by the sangha, I was always put in the kitchen to help prepare food and it was there that I learned my most important lesson around cleaning.



In Zen monasteries, cleaning holds profound significance. *O-soji*, or “cleaning practice,” involves meticulously tidying spaces with utmost care and attention. Through cleaning, practitioners cultivate mindfulness in action, bringing awareness to every movement. This practice instills discipline, humility, and reverence for one’s environment. By purifying external spaces, one purifies the mind, fostering clarity and equanimity. *O-soji* symbolizes the principle of non-attachment, as practitioners engage in the act of cleaning without clinging to preferences or aversions.

As a clear example of this, I’d like to share the story of Cudapanthaka, a humble disciple of the Buddha. Cudapanthaka’s name translates to “Rice-Cake Beggar” reflecting his humble origins. According to Buddhist scriptures, he was born into a poor family in the ancient kingdom of Magadha and raised with an older brother praised by the sangha for his esteemed intellect.

**By purifying external spaces, one purifies the mind, fostering clarity and equanimity.**

Cudapanthaka constantly faced the disheartening rejection of his older, more accomplished brother, and feeling crushed by his sibling’s words, Cudapanthaka wept in sorrow. Sensing his distress, the Buddha

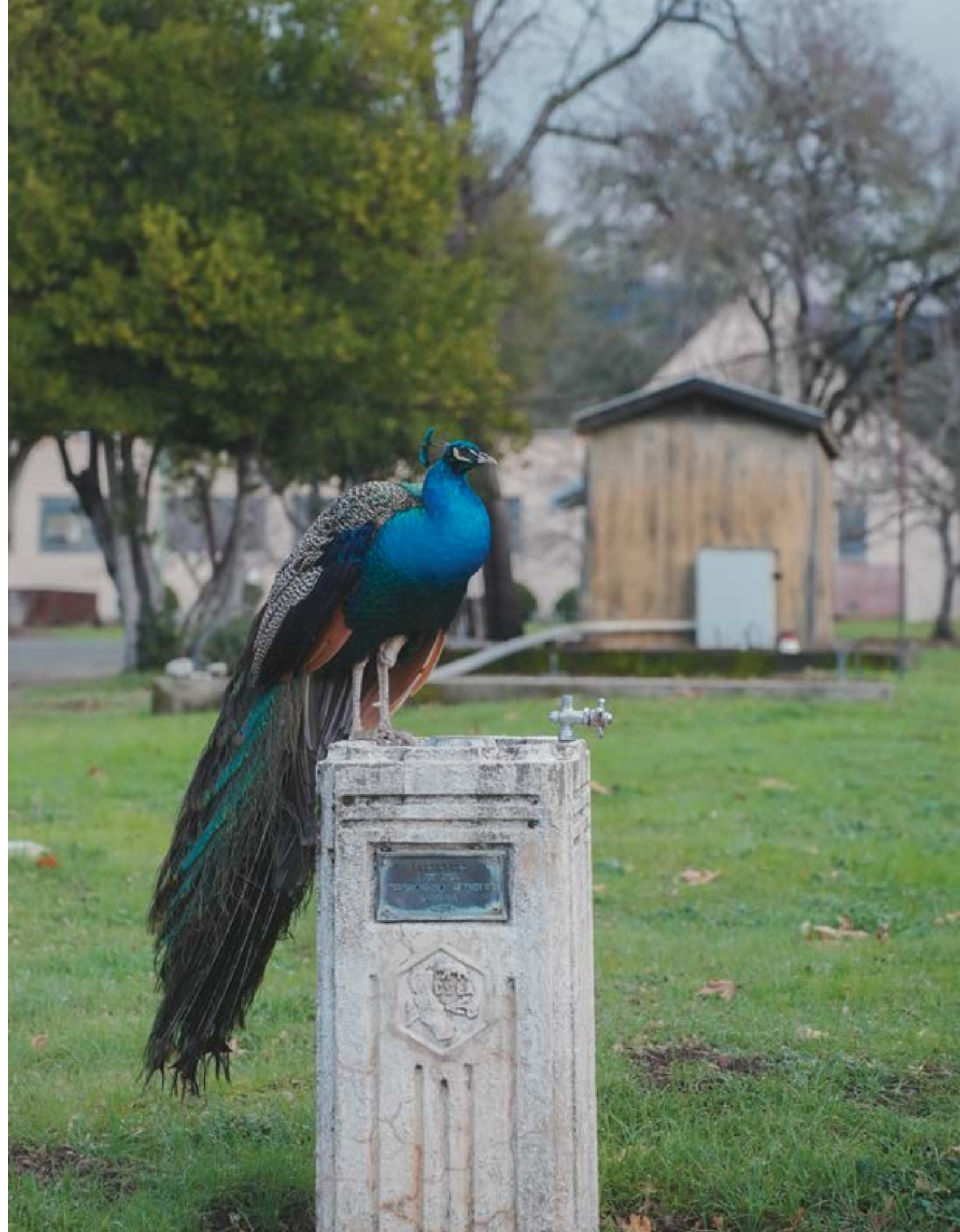
compassionately approached him. He handed Cudapanthaka a broom and imparted simple yet profound advice: “Clean the dust, purify the mind.”

Taking the broom, Cudapanthaka diligently followed the Buddha’s instruction. With each sweep, he recited the words, focusing his mind on the dual task of physical cleaning and mental purification. As he meticulously cleaned every nook and crevice, he found solace and serenity in the rhythmic repetition of the phrase.

Through the mundane act of cleaning, Cudapanthaka discovered a pathway to inner peace and enlightenment. The physical labor became a metaphor for the purification of his troubled mind. With each stroke of the broom, he let go of his burdens, allowing clarity and tranquility to replace his inner turmoil. In time, as Cudapanthaka immersed himself fully in the practice of cleaning and recitation, a profound transformation occurred within him. The once troubled disciple found enlightenment, his mind purified by the simplicity and devotion of his actions.

When my mind opened to this new modality practiced at the Zen Center, I quickly began putting these ideas around cleaning into my professional kitchen as well. Over time, I moved from the ego-driven chef who enjoyed having everyone cleaning for me to someone who embodied, “Clean the kitchen, purify the mind.” Looking back to my youth, what I realize is that all my loving parents wanted to do with their admonitions to keep my room clean was to plant those seeds in my life while I was at a young age.

Though I still have far to go to reach the heights of Cudapanthaka, his story serves as a testament to the power of mindfulness, dedication, and most importantly, non-attachment, that we all travel on our path to enlightenment. Through the humble act of cleaning, he transcended his suffering and discovered the boundless depths of inner peace. Whenever we are cleaning our spaces, I hope each of us might take inspiration from Cudapanthaka and his example. Perhaps if a “Rice-Cake Beggar” can reach enlightenment, maybe then, we also share that chance.







## “Ten Thousand League Mountain”

(A song of Eight Consciousnesses)

In the realm of the mind, true and pure,  
Distinctions are neither absent nor stored.  
But when wisdom takes a step back,  
Comes attachment, discrimination on its track.  
Eight consciousnesses emerge from this lack,  
As the mind of attachment takes hold,  
And from grasping, the five and six unfold.  
Creating a world of difference and sameness,  
Where form and no-form find their place.  
The mind of cognition takes the lead,  
Synthesizing the previous five indeed,  
Classifying and organizing the world we see,  
Establishing the illusory sense of “me.”  
Even in interaction, a sense of non-interaction persists,  
Eye and sight, ear and sound, a seamless tryst.  
But when the seventh approaches near,  
It brings along the previous six, establishing what we hold dear.  
The eighth, like a lame-ass, provides content galore,  
Setting the stage for birth and death’s encore.  
All senses interact and yet remain aloof,  
Grasping at things is but an illusion, proof.  
Turn the light inward, illuminate the Self that stands alone,  
Between Liberation and suffering, no distinctions are shown.  
Foolish people are trampled by their actions and afflictions,  
Caught in the net of illusion, endless convictions.

—Zenshin Dillon Balmaceda



# Do I Sweat because of Temperature?

pedr0

Over this past summer, while I was volunteering at Jyun Kang, the vegan restaurant in the middle of The City of 10,000 Buddhas, I was elevated from dishwasher to deep fryer. To be completely honest, I was terrified. I was totally comfortable with being a dishwasher and I found the job to be quite relaxing. However, what I have learned from my time here at the temple is that I'll be constantly tested, especially when I feel too comfortable anywhere. Master Hua was notorious for moving the early disciples and laity from job to job anytime anyone started to feel some type of way around their job and position. I had definitely fallen into this fallacy, thinking I was one of the fastest and best dishwashers in town...what a silly thing to have an ego over. The reason for my fear was that it just seemed miserable being on the line, stuck in the constant heat of the woks in the middle of the Ukiah summer, covered in kitchen grease and sweat. I could not fathom being able to endure that without significant suffering and misery. Nonetheless, what I have learned from my unorthodox ways of cultivation is that there will come a time when the present moment and conditions will ask something of me, and I can either default to running away from the challenge or accept what is currently being asked of me. So I obliged to being the deep fryer.

My office consisted of a cutting board, a frying pan, two deep fryers, and two giant woks. The cutting board was for slicing seaweed rolls at the right thickness, which went into the fryer that had newer oil. The other fryer was for the eggplant and sweet and sour balls dishes. The frying pan was for the satay sticks while the two woks were for dumplings. Each dish and its preparation required their own touch and balance to make sure the dish came out the way it was supposed to taste.

Cutting the seaweed roll slices too thin or too thick meant that it would be done frying at different times, which would slow me down. There was a thin line between frying the eggplants and satay sticks the right amount versus too much, which greatly impacted the taste and texture. The dumplings required a delicate touch, swirling them around so they did not stick to the bottom of the wok or each other, which would cause it to break apart. If the fire was too low, they would not cook correctly, but too high, the bubbling water would also cause them to break. To be able to manage this delicate dance, ensuring that nothing was undercooked or burnt, amidst all the chaos, I had to rely on the Confucian text, *Zhongyong*, which speaks of maintaining a sense of equilibrium and balance in everything one does and how the macro and micro are interconnected and influence each other. I knew that volunteering here was really going to trigger my irritation and intrusive thoughts, which usually activate at an embarrassingly frequent rate. I would need to find and maintain this balance within myself or I would quickly be consumed by the stress and demands of the kitchen and my own mind.

"Why am I doing this... for free?!"  
"It's summer break, I should be in The Bay partying it up... why am I here?"  
"Oh my god, this [insert another volunteer] is so annoying!"  
"Should I have taken the money?"  
"I really don't want to be here."  
"I'm not sure if I want to come back tomorrow... how do I quit?"

This was the moment-to-moment battle I constantly faced in that kitchen everyday that summer. So, I had to really lean on maintaining my equilibrium to keep these intrusive thoughts at bay, trying to find some sort of

internal balance when orders are coming in non-stop, on days I am running low on sleep, or my forearms are getting burned from hot oil splashing, and Dharma Master Jwan, the manager, is scolding me that my satay sticks are too burnt and my seaweed roll slices too thick.

Luckily, Marty, a mentor and professor at DRBU, gave me some advice before the summer started to come back to this equilibrium when I would start to get moved off my center. "Watch the cauldron leak."

That's all he said, leaving the rest for me to figure out.

Every time these meddling thoughts would arise, I would proceed to 'watch the cauldron leak' and something profound happened. The irritation would magically dissipate. I did not have to do anything further. Just the acknowledgement that I was beginning to get agitated was enough to curb that momentum from festering any further. This naturally made it easier for me to accept the present and find gratitude in being able to give back to the place that has given me more than I could ever accept.

As I kept up this practice throughout the summer, being able to sense when I would begin to become unbalanced became more keen. I had the realization that by the time my thoughts had become turbulent and agitated, the cauldron had already been leaking for some time before I became aware of it. I was a couple steps behind the "mechanisms firing," as Doug, another mentor and professor, liked to put it. So, I would then take a step back, catch my breath, center the mind and body, find peace in where I was at, send out some gratitude, and get back to work.

Not knowing what to do anymore than to continue frying the food and watch my mind do its erratic dance, something strange

happened. Through the repetition of being aware of becoming unbalanced and bringing it back to equilibrium, the practice developed such a subtle sense that I could begin to feel my pores, all 84,00 of them, opening when my body began to sweat. I then realized that this bodily mechanism of sweating was my body telling me that the 'cauldron was leaking,' my body knew before my subconscious mind did!

So, my body and mind, by that time, began naturally to find and sense that equilibrium. I am now watching this new mechanism fire, a backseat observer to this process unfolding. My newly refined internal compass had learned how to detect and self-correct itself any time I was off-center (or maybe it was there the entire time, not able to function properly due to how much I covered it over with ignorance, leakage, and improper conduct). All I had to do was be aware and acknowledge

To be able to manage this delicate dance, ensuring that nothing was undercooked or burnt, amidst all the chaos, I had to rely on the Confucian text, *Zhongyong*

that I was starting to feel irritated or overwhelmed, then something, something I did not have conscious control over, would bring me back to this

state of equilibrium. After this newly refined mechanism would fire, my pores would close back up, I would not sweat, and I could feel a sense of coolness permeate through my inner and outer body, even if it was 108 degrees inside that kitchen.

How could I not sweat in that heat? Science has always stated that we sweat to regulate our body temperature and to cool down from intense heat. However, my anecdotal experience was showing me the opposite of that. So then I naturally pondered, do I sweat because of temperature? I never had a reason to doubt the link between these two seemingly independent phenomena before. Now I am asking myself, have I always been a sweaty person because of how angry and agitated I usually am?



# Three Poems

Patrick Chin

## To Eat your Way to Enlightenment

With each step, carry your bowl as if it was a baby  
As if it was worth your life  
Equal to the weight of gold or as any sutra.  
And stare at it with the eyes of a bodhisattva

Set down your bowl as if you were to serve Brahma  
Curtsy to the seat that lets your body rest and  
Your clothes that let you curtsy  
Then be seated and become the Brahma

Your first bite you should be grateful  
for the bowl that holds your life force,  
the utensil that allows you to eat,  
the hand that carries the utensil,  
the teeth that chews the food and  
the body that is healthy enough to consume.

Watch your 5 skandhas as each ingredient enters the mouth  
Feed your eyes, Feel your utensil touch the tongue,  
Feel all the grains of rice in your mouth and enjoyment regardless of taste  
You eat and savor.

You give your undivided attention to the food as if it was your elders  
When you host your elders  
You wouldn't invite more guests in your home  
That is what it means to have undivided attention

After you get up  
The movement of Grace and Reverence  
Wash your bowl  
The container of your life force  
Hands like a river flowing over Gaia

Chan

### Opposite: Vatadage, Polonnaruwa, Sri Lanka

Believed to be built around the 11th century either during the reign of Parakramabahu I to hold the Relic of the tooth of the Buddha or during the reign of Nissanka Malla to hold the alms bowl used by the Buddha.

## Untitled

To be enlightened, you meditate.  
You meditate in order to sit.  
You sit in order to go back to your original nature.  
In order to go back to your original nature, you sit.  
Sit and listen to the heart.  
The heart is.

## The Beating Forest of Xin

A wavering heart should be settled.  
A settled heart shouldn't be stale.  
The path of least resistance is the path to trod on, but it doesn't mean  
you should crawl on the floor because you stepped on a rock.  
No path is easy, but all paths will eventually lead you out of the woods.







## *The Monk Dying in the Attic*

I was known as the monk dying in the attic. I hardly ever came downstairs in those days. The slightest task became an ordeal. Even brushing my teeth was exhausting. My friends used to joke that I had to take a break between the uppers and the lowers. When I did get off the floor, I would scan the environment for the next wall I could lean on, and try to avoid conversations. Did you know it takes a lot of energy just to look at someone, much less hold a train of thought in your mind and then actually speak? Just standing was already a workout. I was exempted from the morning and evening chanting; special food was brought up to me at meals. For three years, I spent my days and nights mostly alone, lying down on a brown foam mat that matched my monk's robes.

Chithurst House was an old Victorian mansion hidden in the maze of country lanes of West Sussex. We were converting that derelict building into a Buddhist monastery. When we arrived, the front garden was overgrown, the grounds were littered with over 30 abandoned cars, and the house itself was filled with all sorts of junk—thousands of old newspapers, stacks of empty plastic butter containers and matchboxes, piles of broken glass, and hundreds of engine parts. The structure was riddled with dry rot, and some of the floors were collapsing. The small monastic community was busy repairing and renovating the dilapidated site, and here I was stuck on a mat.

One day my abbot, Ajahn Sumedho, came up to my room and sat down on the

floor beside me. I was lying down as usual. He said, "Kittisaro, I want to apologize. I realize I have been putting a lot of pressure on you, wanting you to get well, remembering how you were when you arrived in Thailand 5 years ago, rippling with muscles, effortlessly doing backbends and handstands, teaching all of us yoga. I wanted that Kittisaro back. I'm sorry for the burden that created for you. You have my permission to die."

In the beautiful silence that followed, I cried for joy, and found myself filled with boundless gratitude and relief. "It's not that we want you to die," he went on to say, "But if you die it's OK." I was deeply touched, knowing I had a wise and compassionate teacher who was actually concerned about my welfare. In the last few years, I had tried every conceivable cure, having been through at least 50 alternative therapies including a strict macrobiotic diet, acupuncture, spiritual healing, psychic surgery, vitamins, homeopathy, urine fasts, radionics, wrapping myself in cold wet sheets, walking barefoot on the dewy winter grass, craniosacral treatment, and on and on. Also, on various occasions, I had endured numerous and extensive hospital tests, and finally in the past year was diagnosed with Crohn's disease. But even taking the prescribed anti-inflammatory medicine, I remained extremely weak. At least the internal bleeding seemed to subside. I couldn't say those treatments were failures, for I was still alive, and who knows what I would have been like without them. However, even after all of



that, I still felt really sick. My teacher's kind words released me from a heavy burden I didn't even know I was carrying.

To not get better had seemed like a personal failure, letting everyone down who had helped me so generously. I was surrounded by loving monks, nuns, and lay people. Surely any monk worth his salt should be able to cure himself in meditation. I wanted to get well and be able to energetically give back to the extraordinary teachers, community, friends, family, and way of life that had showered me with so many blessings. In those few years as a Buddhist monk, I had received something so precious and wonderful, that I felt duty-bound to repay my good fortune. However, as my teacher finally realized, wanting and trying to be cured of an illness can become an exhausting burden. I felt so tired, and the body was so heavy, that gravity itself seemed like a monumental and insurmountable force. Everyday someone kind would want to know how I was doing. I kept thinking and hoping that perhaps I was getting a bit better—noticing some slight variation in one of my symptoms—but really, most of the time I was still flat on my back, down for the count. I didn't have any more strength.

Ah, it was a glorious day being told it was OK to die. I have no memory of what the external weather was like, but never mind, that blessing from my teacher revealed a universe suffused with radiance and joy. Even the familiar pains, inflammation, and fatigue were luminous and perfect in the brightness

of that serenity. After Ajahn Sumedho left the room, I consciously savored the familiar relief of surrendering to gravity, abandoning myself to its steady pull without fear or remorse, happily allowing my whole world of worries to fall away and disperse like a thousand leaves swept free by the wind, opening up a vast landscape to behold. Lying on my right side in the lion's pose of a Buddha, I received the gift of my teachers words, letting them spread through every cell in the body, enjoying the relief of not having to get well, yielding to the unwavering support offered by the floor, abandoning all effort, relinquishing the will, resting in the bliss of the heart, abiding that sacred ground of being.

It was a turning point. I didn't die, and yet I suppose I did in a way. From time to time, I still wanted to get well, but after that day, I didn't have to take my stand on that thought. The tide had turned. Strangely, being given permission to die was probably the beginning of healing. It freed me from the formidable weight of expectation and allowed me to focus on what life as a monk was all about, seeing directly into the human condition and the true nature of birth and death. Cluttered with all sorts of opinions about 'who I am' and 'what I am supposed to do,' I was perpetually chasing shadows looking for a hidden treasure 'out there.' Without the burden of worldly duties, I was given a golden opportunity to contemplate and die, accepting 'what is,' again and again, thought after thought, moment after moment.

## Wrestling with Reality

Wrestling is one of the first metaphors in the Old Testament for meditation, the arduous quest to understand who and what we are. When Jacob wrestles the Angel and perseveres through the night, he is mysteriously transformed, and receives the blessing of a new name, Israel—the one who has wrestled with God and prevailed. At our great peril, it seems to me, we forget that arriving at truth involves a great struggle, and one in which we continually emerge injured, for we repeatedly lose everything we used to think is ours. It's not so simple as dogmatically grasping some formulaic doctrine about ultimate reality, though today at least in many religious circles that is the golden pathway to salvation. From my observation, rigidly grasping at our favorite formulations of truth leads to conflict and confusion, not clarity. According to the great saints and sages, grasping anything blinds us, and relinquishing allows us to see again. How ironically beautiful, that hidden within loss is an ever-present potential to let go and realize 'that which never dies.'

What was I wrestling with? Well, for one, pain. There's an ancient habit programmed in the system to move away from pain into denial or fantasy. It's not easy to stay with painful sensation. And yet I discovered that being right with pain was my greatest healer. It seemed like a miracle. Lying down, surrendering to the support of the floor, allowing myself to feel the ease of being held up without any effort. Within that ease, I could still perceive the shape and field of the bodily sensations. Those areas of pain, inflammation, and discomfort would register in the mind/heart. Without commenting or judging, I would carefully receive those areas of discomfort into

awareness, and mysteriously that simple activity was usually very transformative. Not getting caught in aversion, or desiring to feel some other way, the simple act of noticing patiently and kindly would allow the energies to coalesce and build. As I patiently observed, the areas of damage and blockage would light up, as it were, becoming obvious, asking for attention. The sheer placing of attention, especially when it is guided to be very receptive, might seem passive and weak. And yet, again and again, when I would surrender to knowing things just as they are, resting back into an attitude of non-avoidance and acceptance, the result would be surprising. If I was able to be still and really not move away from the unfolding sensations, the pressure would build and finally I would notice the energy rerouting itself through the damaged tissue. All this would happen on its own, naturally. Awareness seemed to have within itself the nature to put things into balance. I was just learning, through meditation, about this process.

As I was able to stay with levels of discomfort that normally one would avoid, I would find myself in the territory of meeting my limits, stretching the boundary, approaching the breaking point. In that territory, 'me' is threatened and the inner voices become desperate, as there is a real sense of being in danger. Working with that dynamic is wrestling, spiritual combat, or you can call it practice. It's rich, and liberating, but it requires energy. When I would get to a limit, sometimes I would just have to bear the nervous system being overloaded. Then the thought processes, will power, the capacity to focus, would all be erratic and crazy.





Amazingly though, even when all of the bodily and mental systems were misfiring, there was still the ever-present possibility of making a great move. Against all my old fears of lying down and giving up, being called a quitter, I discovered the magic of

letting go. 'Letting go' is a mysterious and subtle move that takes one to the toughest stance of all, a place that is unshakeable, never tires, is free from pain and suffering and stress. WOW.

## *Mara, he Works for a Living*

I have not mastered my new wrestling move, then or now, and to be honest I still regularly get pinned by my formidable cosmic opponent. As Sucitto says, "Mara, he works for a living. He puts in the time." You know Mara, the Tempter, Satan, the Devil, all in this life—whatever you call it—that confuses, beguiles, deludes, and keeps us from knowing our true home. If you like, Mara is another word for our own stupidity. To my surprise and relief, Ajahn Chah says, "We find our wisdom right where delusion arises. They are not far apart. The very place where it's hot is where we find coolness." In other words, we don't learn how to 'let

go' without investigating thoroughly and patiently everything we cling to, everything we think we know. Now I finally realize a great source of confusion is thinking we know something that we don't. The good news is we don't need to hate our obstructions. In fact, that very gesture of creating 'something' to be destroyed, takes us away from our original perfection and birthright.

One thing I had learned in my first 5 years as a Buddhist monk is that it is very revealing to objectify the processes of the mind and body, to reflect on them as objects in the field of awareness. When we do that we can investigate and contemplate the deep-rooted tendency to believe that this or that sensation, feeling, perception, impulse, or experience is 'me' or 'mine.' I was shocked to discover that I make all sorts

of assumptions about reality not having really seen things for myself. By the grace of having encountered a wise teaching, I had seen in meditation on countless occasions the ephemeral and bubble-like nature of all these aspects of myself that unconsciously I assumed to be solid, concrete, and definitely 'me' or belonging to 'me.' Health, strength, and vitality seem so real, until in a flash they are gone, and then we can get hypnotized by the conviction that I'm sick and a hopeless case. In a moment, letting go of all assumptions, knowing things as they actually are right now, I would find myself at ease in an inexpressible place of non-separation,

a naturally sacred place that contains everything and rejects nothing—whole and Holy.

In awe, I wondered, how did I fail to notice this luminous ground of being all these years? And even more perplexing, I found to my dismay that I am capable of forgetting and lapsing back, again and again, into the ancient habitual tendency to grasp and identify with some fear or obsessive desire, thinking this is true. Inevitably, yesterday, today, or tomorrow, whatever is appropriated and seemingly claimed, it is always ultimately elusive, and the true sacred ground seems far away again. What is real? We can spend years trying to get back there to that special moment, forgetting that the sacred ground is always here and now. Letting go reveals a timeless and ever-present abiding that knows its own unchanging

**The good news is we don't need to hate our obstructions.**





nature, and recognizes the monumental consequences of attaching to a view: birth, death, and mountains of suffering.

Ajahn Chah warned us not to hate our struggles, those tendencies which torment, fool, seduce, and drag you, me and our loved ones, into so much anguish. "Don't be in too big a hurry to get rid of your afflictions," he would say. "Those very things are your teachers. They are sharpening stones for your sword of wisdom." Well, I have no shortage of sharpening stones even today. I still regularly lose the sword, sometimes stubbornly refuse to use it, or it shatters into a billion pieces just when I need it and I feel defenseless against my mad mind. But there are those precious moments when I

remember and see things as they actually are, recognizing clearly the habitual streams of thought, judgment, and commentary, knowing them as just thinking. Seeing directly and immediately that there is nothing substantial to grasp, we cut through confusion, and letting go happens naturally. Instantly I find myself awake, bright, unmoving, serene, and still, at home right in the midst of a vibrant changing circumstance. This sort of awareness seems so ordinary, something always already here, and yet I forget and get distracted, seeking again for happiness out there, missing the treasure that is here all along. It's a big story, a timeless quest and journey we all know, for in a sense everyone is on it.





# Protective Verses on the Recollection of the Buddha

*from the Catur-ārakkhā (Four protective meditations)*

Translation by Sean Kerr

<i>Verse</i>	<i>Contemplation</i>
<p>1. <b>savāsane kilese so, eko sabbe nighātiya, ahū susuddhasantāno, pūjānaṃ ca sadāraho.</b></p> <p>It was he alone who overcame the defilements with their every latent trace and became a stream of mind so very pure and worthy of every worship evermore.</p>	<p>[Worthy]</p>
<p>2. <b>sabbakālagate dhamme, sabbe sammā sayāṃ muni sabbākārena bujjhitvā, eko sabbaññutaṃ gato.</b></p> <p>It was he alone who, on his own, rightly realized, in every facet, every dhamma pertaining to all times and attained to all-encompassing omniscience.</p>	<p>[Fully awakened]</p>
<p>3. <b>vipassanādi-vijjāhi, sīlādi-caraṇehi ca, susamiddhehi sampanno, gaganābhehi nāyako.</b></p> <p>Endowed with the full-blown wisdom of his <i>vipassanā</i> and so forth, and its application, in his <i>sīla</i> and the rest, he guides with these that brightly light the sky.</p>	<p>[Torchbearer of Wisdom and its Application]</p>
<p>4. <b>sammāgato subhaṃ ṭhānaṃ, amoghavacano ca so, tividdhassāpi lokassa, ñātā niravasesato.</b></p> <p>He's the one who rightly came to the goodly place and one whose every word is not in vain; and it's only he who knows the threefold world in its entirety without remainder.</p>	<p>[Sugata; Knower of the World]</p>

<p>5. <b>anekehi guṇoghehi, sabbasattuttamo ahū, anekehi upāyehi, naradamme damesi ca.</b></p> <p>With countless streaming floods of virtues, he became supreme among all beings and by countless means, he tamed the untame beasts of untamed men.</p>	<p>[Peerless Trainer of Untame Men]</p>
<p>6. <b>eko sabbassa lokassa, sabbamatthānusāsako, bhāgya-issariyādīnaṃ, guṇānaṃ paramo nidhī.</b></p> <p>He, alone, the teacher foremost of all and all the world; the highest vessel of the virtues of fortune, lordliness, and the rest.</p>	<p>[Teacher of Gods and Men; the Blessed One]</p>
<p>7. <b>paññā 'ssa sabbadhammesu, karuṇā sabbajantusu, attatthānaṃ paratthānaṃ, sādhiḱā guṇajeṭṭhikā.</b></p> <p>His wisdom has the range of every dhamma, his compassion has the range of every being; their excellence unmatched, accomplishing the good of both himself and other beings.</p>	<p>[Compassion and Wisdom]</p>
<p>8. <b>dayāya pāramī citvā, paññāy' attānaṃ uddharī, uddharī sabbadhamme ca, dayāy' aññe ca uddharī.</b></p> <p>Out of mercy he amassed the ten perfections and with Wisdom did he raise himself aloft; and raised up every dhamma with himself; and raised up with his mercy other beings.</p>	<p>[Perfection of Wisdom]</p>
<p>9. <b>dissamāno 'pi tāv' assa, rūpakāyo acintayo, asādhāraṇañāṇaḍḍhe, dhammakāye kathā 'va kā? 'ti.</b></p> <p>His material form itself, though plain to sight, is beyond all comprehension; what to speak of his immaterial dhamma form, replete with its extraordinary knowledge?</p>	<p>[His Dharma Body]</p>



# The First Three Turbidities and Practice in the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*

Ben Sandel

If the goal of Buddhist practice is to return to our pure mind, it is the stress and suffering of the turbidities that obscure this mind. The *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* distinguishes a list of five progressive turbidities, each one associated with one of the five aggregates, or skandhas. This article explores the unfolding of the first three turbidities—time, views, and afflictions—in the context of their associated aggregate—form, sense-perception, and cognition, respectively.

First, everything in consciousness is empty and formless, but then we imagine a form among the undifferentiated formless stream of sense data. Two things arise: form and what is left over. Within the uniformity, an imagined boundary around a grouping of perceived properties is perceived as including the form's properties and excluding the rest of the uniformity, now considered non-form. The work of both holding this form and separating out qualities from the great uniformity creates an imagined division of qualities. What was once whole and formless is now, by the grasping of the imagined properties and boundaries, imagined to be a form and non-form. Our mind, in order to solve the stress of continuously maintaining the illusion of form within the formless, begins to build imagined objects to give the form context. The mind, busy at work, grasping and rejecting this or that imagined object, only further obscures the situation: this is the turbidity and the stress of imagination which afflicts the mind. The *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* says,

At first, there is neither sameness nor differentiation, but then that which is differentiated is clearly distinguished. That which differs from what is differentiated is distinguished as being uniform. ...

The turmoil of this mutual complementary gives rise to mental strain, and as the mental strain is prolonged, grasping at objects of mind begins. Mental strain and grasping at objects together create a turbidity of mind, out of which the afflictions are generated. (144)

This affliction, being more apparent to us, distracts us from the more subtle attributes of the mind where we could focus on wholesome activity and attain freedom. To highlight this, the Buddha uses the analogy of soil being thrown into water, whereby the soil loses its solidity and the water, its purity and clarity (171). Together they appear cloudy or turbid; hence, the name for the turbidities.

The five turbidities are time, perception, afflictions, individual beings, and lifespans. The Buddha says, "'Time' denotes flux and change" (176). In physics, time is what is measured by a clock, meaning that the measure of change is time. It is the phenomena of seeing form move in space that creates the illusion of time. To have an object, we must have awareness of the object, which necessarily creates the space in which the object can exist. If the awareness of objects further creates time, then flux and change in space must be intrinsic

to every object. Therefore, time is a measure of change in an object in space as instituted in our awareness. Either we have moved, the object has moved, or something around or within the object has moved. If our concept of objects are modified in such a way as to undermine the idea of movement, then time would no longer exist. It is the aggregate of form, therefore, where, if overcome, time as a form of consciousness will cease to be.

If form is defined as a grouping of properties identified by visual awareness, this grouping, although made of many properties all in flux, has to appear cohesive long enough for us to believe it is separate from all other elements not identified as that form. The solidity and independence of the form, in that, is merely an illusion of our mind. We are forced to account for the illusory nature of such solidity or identity in form when changes in it occur such that it can

longer be considered the "same" as before and so we attempt to support the idea of form with the addition of the concept of time. We say the form has moved, decayed, grown, transformed, or was destroyed. Not willing to give up our imaginary foundation in the sky, we begin to build a castle on it. Form is a made-up concept, overlaid upon fluxing sense stimulation. However, the concept of a form in our imagination is a set thing—ideal, frozen, timeless, or outside of time. Therefore, we must constantly adjust it when attempting to square it with the flux of the senses. Time is the measure of the rate in which we must adjust our projection of form.

It should be noted that form and time are the basis of the entire landscape of the greater game of cause and effect. In creating one form, we have inadvertently created two: the form and that which is not the form. All properties are either part of the form or part of the remainder we

provisionally call "not-form," and time is the account of the shifting imaginary boundary of form. Thus, form is dependent on "not-form" for any changes. Our minds preferring form over "not-form" may create another form to better understand the change to the first form, creating a dependent relationship between the two clearly defined forms related by the transfer of properties in a relationship of cause and effect. Once this tension has been resolved, we are left with the question of: if A caused B then what caused A and what caused that, ad infinitum. To resolve this newly manifested tension we create a net of cause and effect that reaches beyond our imagination.<sup>1</sup> Having the cause of a change in one form being changed by another form

This affliction, being more apparent to us, distracts us from the more subtle attributes of the mind where we could focus on wholesome activity and attain freedom.

leads us into the never ending chain of cause and effect. This interdependent nature of all forms are in constant movement with each

form under the influence of all other forms throughout time.

To expand our understanding of the turbidities, let us move on to the turbidity of perception. This turbidity comes out of the aggregate of sense-perception, sometimes translated as feeling or sensation. Sense-perceptions are pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. Once caught in the turbidity of perception, there is, on top of the imagined form, an associated positive, negative or neutral reaction to that form—but not yet a fully fleshed out object. This object will develop further in the third turbidity. The turbidity of time—the fluctuations in form—manifests

<sup>1</sup> To resolve the tension of cause and effect going out past our imagination in the West the idea of the "first movement" or the original cause was answered for Aristotle and Deist like Thomas Jefferson with the "Prime Mover" concept. The Prime Mover was a creator who set up the universe and then set it motion. This article's Buddhist hermeneutic answers this question by creating forms into infinity creating the fluxing net of the interdependent nature of all things throughout and is ultimately resolved in non-duality where cause and effect are not a question as objects and time are an illusion.





**Sand dunes, Hunder village, Nubra Valley, Ladakh, India**

A high altitude desert at 10,000 ft situated on the banks of the Shyok River surrounded by the Himalayas

changes in the feelings associated with a form, which thereby creates suffering. The result is the illusion of form and non-form, the constant change of each creating a never ending flux of either positive, negative or neutral feeling based on how we perceive the relationship between form and non-form throughout time.

The third turbidity of affliction comes out of the aggregate of cognition. The aggregate of cognition is the fleshing out of an object already containing form and sense-perception with a wider range of properties. The idea of this aggregate is described as similar to when “someone whose mouth waters at the mention of sour plums, or who feels a sudden ache in the sole of this foot as he thinks of walking along the edge of a precipice” (92). It is a further elaboration of imagination in the development of an object. The turbidity of affliction results from the reaction to each quality attributed to the object by the aggregate of cognition, each quality having its own positive, negative or

neutral sense-perception. An object’s sense-perceptions become further multiplied by the interrelated nature of cause and effect, the connection drawn between the changes, real and potential, of positive and negative qualities. Even if an imagined object can be seen as resulting in a cascade of overwhelmingly positive sense-perceptions, within the turbidity of time, this perception is only temporary—no positive sense-perception can last indefinitely. The recognition of the frailty of positive experiences quickly turns to fear and loss, resulting in negative sense-perceptions. The aggregate of cognition, along with the turbidity of time, multiplies sense-perceptions by the infinity of time and space, allowing for an infinite association of changing qualities. How unsatisfactory to eternally grasp at one experience only to be repelled by what follows.

Our entire life experience is built upon pattern recognition which is unstable, imagined, and discordant. Where a pattern is recognized, a solid form is implied

and overlaid onto the fluxing, neverending mass of sense information. This inadequate, illusory understanding of what is actually an infinitude of interrelated, ever-changing sense perceptions comes with a natural discordance of facing uncertain, unpredictable changes within imagined forms. The imagination pulls together such fluctuation into an object and the resulting discordance is solved through the construct of time. The sense-perception attributed to the object, along with the multiplicity of sense-perceptions associated with the myriad of related objects throughout space and time, explode through this imagined temporal construct into infinite imagined possibilities. Throughout the turbidity of time, each object is subject to constant, unpredictable change. The reality experienced through the five aggregates and turbidities are constantly changing and will, therefore, never be a stable foundation for refuge. So long as what the aggregates produce are clung to, we create the turbidities which creates never ending stress and confusion.

In understanding the mechanism of our experience we deconstruct our illusion, which has a profound effect on not just our inner world, but also our outer world. Although we spend our time focusing on the external world that we imagine to be the source of our suffering, it is the transformation of our awareness that creates the external world as we know it that is the source of our suffering. Master Hua says,

There are external turbidities, which can be explained in terms of the world, but here the text discusses the internal turbidity, which can be explained in terms of the body. In fact, the external turbidity exists because of the internal turbidity. If you can get rid of your internal turbidity, the external turbidity will subside as well. (172)

**In understanding the mechanism of our experience we deconstruct our illusion, which has a profound effect on not just our inner world, but also our outer world.**

We must understand that it is by falsely defining objects as separate and stable forms that our trouble begins. It is inevitable that we see them change as our illusion no longer fits our experience. We then build misunderstanding on misunderstanding trying to account for our projections and their change. By applying a form we separate out what is not separate and create lacking and possessing out of our imagination. From here we begin our seeking—desire and aversion coming out of our ignorance of the fact that those illusions, towards which desire and aversion are directed, are not real, but are our own imaginative creations.

Now that we can see the process of creating suffering, we need to examine this process in our everyday lives in order to free ourselves. The five aggregates, in ignorance, create the five turbidities that obstruct our pure mind and create the cascading cycle of perception and reaction. Our way out is being mindfully aware of this process as often as possible, ideally until we gain proficiency in seeing form, sense-perception and cognition as overlays of mind onto sense-perception. I have only covered the first three turbidities and further understanding is contained in the last two turbidities of individual beings and lifespans with their associated aggregates of mental activities and consciousness. With practice, we can reach our goal of bodhi, remain unattached and aware of form’s fiction, serving living beings and ending birth and death as we know it.

This is my current best attempt at analysis of the turbidities. All errors are my fault and all wisdom is from the Buddha. I dedicate any merit to all beings.

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*The Śūraṅgama Sūtra*. Translated by Ronald Epstein and David Rounds, Buddhist Text Translation Society, 6 Aug. 2012.





## Tree Poem (or a song from nature for those feeling blue)

Jackie Farley

If I were a tree  
what tree would I be?  
A pine or a larch?  
No,  
a willow, that's me.

I'd live by a lake and watch all the fishes,  
the ducks and the geese would grant all my wishes.  
The wind from the mountain would swirl and come sweeping  
To tell me, "Oh willow, oh willow, stop weeping."

"There's no need to cry, you have all you need,  
Cool water, good friends,  
why not plant a seed?"

"A seed," say I, "What on earth do you mean?  
What good will that do? A seed is not seen."

"No!" shouts the wind, "You've got it all wrong."  
My branches start dancing to the wind's kindly song.

My seeds start falling and float on the water,  
an otter pops up and says, "Do what you oughta."  
Squirrels and rabbits hide under my leaves,  
a great blue heron takes a twig and then weaves  
a nest in the tules nearby.

"You see", says the wind, "you have plenty to give.  
Stop weeping, stop sleeping, stop moaning,  
and live!"



# Writing and Translation

Translation by Tomas Fletcher

These two poems were written by Song Dynasty Chan Master Stonehouse (石屋):

百年日月閒中度  
八萬塵勞靜處消  
綠水光中山影轉  
紅爐燄上雪花飄

A hundred years of days and nights—they slip away unnoticed  
A hundred thousand pressing cares all disappear in stillness  
Reflections of a mountain shimmer on translucent water  
Snowflakes swirl above the flames within a glowing stove.

真空湛寂惟常在  
不覺良田妄所朦  
真性何曾離妄有  
花開花落自春風

True emptiness is deep and still, yet always present in us  
But being unawakened we're seduced into a madness  
Yet how could our true nature be apart from these delusions  
Flowers bloom and flowers fall themselves in springtime winds.

## Repentance and Renewal with Realization and Faith

Tomas Fletcher

Once, when the Master arrived at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas, the layman of Ontario Province, Fletcher, whose given name was Tomás, along with other local master's program students from Dharma Realm Buddhist University (DRBU), climbed Wonderful Enlightenment Mountain to invite the Master to come to the

city so that he might give Dharma instruction to the people assembled in the Wondrous Words Lecture Hall. After the Master was formally seated, layman Fletcher, along with more than thirty other DRBU students bowed simultaneously to him and requested instruction on the essentials of repentance and renewal.

The Great Master said to the assembly: "Fundamentally, your nature is pure in itself, and requires nothing to be repented of nor a renewal to take place. It is only because you cling to the false, taking it to be substantial, and pursue what is external to you that repentance and renewal becomes necessary for you to practice.

It is of essential importance to recognize that the practice of repentance is not an attempt to compensate for a fundamental lacking in your own nature. It is not a practice of self-depreciation, self-belittlement, or guilt. Those who take these to be signs of humility, stray far from the correct path. Recognizing your own faults and shortcomings through the practice of repentance is just recognizing where you are still getting caught in attachments. Renewal is simply the natural state that occurs when you let these attachments go. Your buddha nature—full and complete, radiant and perfect in itself—will then naturally and spontaneously come to the fore.

If you find yourself low in faith, confidence and courage and are unable to trust in your own inner good and wise advisor, you can couple the practice of repentance and renewal with the practice of realization and faith. What is meant by realization and faith?

Realization means that you reflect on all the good you have done throughout your life, and even beyond, from the practice of precepts, samadhi, and wisdom. These good qualities emanate from your own inherent goodness and are not something that comes from outside, nor are they something that is accumulated over time. If you doubt that you have any good, reflect on the fact that merely by being here at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas, you cannot deny that you have planted and nurtured an immeasurable amount of good roots that are

deepening everyday. Do not neglect them now!

Faith means that through simply recognizing your inherent goodness, you bear witness to all the wholesome things that have arisen from it. As a result, your trust in your own inherent goodness will deepen and your commitment to keep cultivating it will be bolstered. Both confidence and humility will shine through from your self nature spontaneously. Just realize that your inherent goodness is the only refuge you need and you will never be in fear and doubt again. This is what is meant by the practice of realization and faith.

Have you not heard the story of the prodigal son who wandered in poverty for decades before gradually, through the kindness and wisdom of his father, coming to the realization that his birthright was to inherit the kingdom's wealth and power for his own? You are no different now. Why wander aimlessly through saṃsāra, undergoing bitter suffering for no reason whatsoever, when you can trust in your own inherent goodness and directly move towards the inheritance of your own buddha nature? No one is stopping you but you yourself."

At that time, everyone who was listening to the Master's explanation—layman Fletcher, the other master's program students, as well as all the students, faculty and staff at DRBU—all experienced an awakening. They bowed in unison to the master and exclaimed with delight, "Outstanding! Who would have ever expected that in Ukiah, California a Buddha would appear in the world?"

\*Note: These words were never spoken by the Sixth Patriarch. This essay is merely an exercise in trying to understand how the master might respond to certain questions.

Realization means that you reflect on all the good you have done throughout your life, and even beyond, from the practice of precepts, samadhi, and wisdom.



The DRBU Newsletter asked one of our senior Buddhist monastics, Bhikshuni Heng Chih, to answer some questions on being a woman cultivator. From daily practice to lifelong choices, Dharma Master Chih shares insightful and poignant reflections.

*In your experience, are there unique challenges (or benefits) to being a woman and a cultivator?*

In my experience, under the teaching and guidance of Venerable Master Hua, I, as a woman, was given equal opportunity (along with the male participants)...

1. to do real-time oral translations of the Master's lectures,
2. to work in BTTS as a primary translator, a bilingual reviewer, an English editor, and, eventually, as a certifier of classical Buddhist Sutras and modern-language commentaries,
3. to meditate in the formal meditation sessions,
4. to serve in various administrative positions:
  - a. in the monastic community,
  - b. in the educational institutes founded by the Master,
  - c. at branch affiliates of DRBA,
  - d. and on the boards of trustees set up by DRBA and its programs.
5. to lecture on Buddhist sutras and teach Buddhism in the educational institutes established by the Master.

In all these cases, I was not aware of any gender-related exceptions. The Master welcomed participation by all his disciples. Young and old, those with more education and less, monastic and lay, male and female, as well as occasional LGBTQ members of the community, were encouraged to contribute their skills and abilities appropriately. The common factors the Master insisted on were ethical and compassionate behavior and maintaining harmony among all.

*Are there ways in which Buddhist practice and teachings can help women in particular?*

Mahayana Buddhist teachings and practices focus on improving ourselves and helping others. The benefits derived from being a student and practitioner of Buddhism are manifold, but I've never thought of them as gender-specific.

Male and female cultivators (at least those under Master Hua's guidance) find that "the sky's the limit" when it comes to how far we can progress in our practice. It's up to each of us, and we are given the Six Paramitas to help guide our way. That is, we work to perfect 1) giving, 2) holding precepts, 3) patience, 4) vigor, 5) samadhi, and 6) wisdom. More specifically, the Master gave us Six Guidelines, which are: 1) refraining from contending, 2) refraining from being greedy, 3) refraining from seeking, 4) refraining from pursuing self-benefit, 5) refraining from being selfish, and 6) refraining from not telling the truth.

I have found my choice of monastic life to be the best decision I ever made! As a woman, I have benefited immeasurably from learning how to live harmoniously in our Bhikshuni Sangha, which is an international community. It has not been easy, because we women come from so many national, social, and cultural backgrounds—and most of us think the knowledge we have accumulated in our home—and school—education is "right." However, as we abide together, we discover that "right" in one culture might not be "right" in another. We have all had to learn how to compromise in order to keep harmony. And keeping harmony is the number one mandate for monastics.

*What might you share with women cultivators today?*

If your conditions bring you to an opportunity to join the monastic Sangha, I urge you not to let that moment go by without giving serious consideration to requesting



permission to join the monastic Sangha so that you can become a fully-ordained nun.

Having lived my first 25 years as a Christian—searching and questioning—and the subsequent 53 years (and counting) as a Buddhist—stable, content, and finding answers—I am so grateful that I was able to seize the moment when a way opened for me to enter the monastic Sangha.

There is no way for me to describe verbally the "rightness" I feel about that decision; there is no way for me to describe verbally the joy that practice brings, the satisfaction that finding answers gives, or the gratitude I feel to have learned from the

Master and to be able to continue that learning through study, lecturing, translating, teaching, and practicing.

If your conditions are such that you have chosen to live with a partner and, perhaps, to raise children, or, to live a lay life independent of partner and children, then I urge you to learn the basic tenets that will guide you in your life as a Buddhist layperson. May you serve as a model by receiving and upholding the lay precepts, so that you inspire others to learn more about Buddhism and to apply the parts they find applicable to their lives—for the betterment of all.

**The common factors the Master insisted on were ethical and compassionate behavior and maintaining harmony among all.**



# How to Never Retreat

Bhikshuni Heng Chih

弟子：常聽師父說，有的人在學佛的過程中退悔，我想知道有什麼因緣，會有這樣的情形？還有，如何在修行時，遇到障礙，而不生退悔？

Disciple: Venerable Master, I often hear you say that some people study the Buddha-dharma for a while, and then they retreat. Could you tell us a way to cultivate in the present so we will not retreat in the future?

上人：修金輪手，就不生退悔心，就不退失菩提心；但是要常常地修，不是修一修就不修了。修道要有一種忍耐心，忍耐心就是自己要有堅、誠、恆，不退心，不退這種志願。你就修什麼法，若自己不去向前精進，也都會退的。只有自己打起精神來，向前去做，向前去修行，就不會退了。要發願——我要生生世世不退失菩提心，怎麼樣難，都不退失菩提心，都要發菩提心。也請十方諸佛來幫助你，令你不退失菩提心。

Master Hua:

1. Cultivate the Gold Wheel Hand and Eye. This helps you to develop a non-retreating mind—to never retreat from your *bodhi* resolve. But you must continually cultivate it. You can't just cultivate for a while and then quit.
2. Be patient. In being patient, you must be firm, constant, and sincere, and then you won't retreat from your resolve.
3. Vigorously advance in your practice. With any method of cultivation, if you don't keep progressing, then, in effect, you are retreating. But if you rouse your spirits and keep advancing, then you are, in effect, not retreating.

要發願——我要生生世世不退失菩提心，怎麼樣難，都不退失菩提心，都要發菩提心。也請十方諸佛來幫助你，令你不退失菩提心。

4. Make vows. "I vow that in every life, I will not retreat from my resolve for *bodhi*. No matter how difficult it gets, I will never retreat from my commitment to reach full awakening."
5. Request the Buddhas of the ten directions to come and aid you so that you won't retreat from your *bodhi* resolve.

# All these years, at last

Nancy Cao

What is in the eyes of a fish?  
Never blink, just stare  
I wonder how many times it had wished  
Not seeing things makes it scared  
The fish  
Unlike me, who is able to close my eyes whenever I want  
As if hide and seek, suddenly there are strings of light  
Flowing all over my eyesight  
For a moment it's just me and the world, both silent.  
These years, I love that feeling too much that I make it my state of being  
As if hide and seek, I remained unnoticed  
Hiding so no one can find, and I will see nothing  
That peace of mind protected my soul  
Until one day I woke up, realized, I'm all blind.  
What if I was a fish?  
What would happen, if I had the courage to face things, no matter how big or small  
Will it reduce the stream of regrets that flooded me  
In front of the door of twenty  
But, oh my,  
Life doesn't end at twenty  
Nor would it back then, or tomorrow.  
I wrote dad a letter  
It made him cry  
I've made progress, I think.



# Finding My Own Practice

Sophie Huang

In the Buddhist Hermeneutics class, we read from texts depicting the life and teachings of the Buddha and those written by and about advanced cultivators. While this material is intended to inspire a sense of awe in the reader, bring clarity to and dispel their doubts, and perhaps deepen their resolve to cultivate, it can also bring out a sense of urgency, shame, and even frustration in the readers. That is especially the case if the reader is constantly comparing themselves to these advanced cultivators, and even more so if the reader is not deeply rooted in cultivation. This is exactly what I went through. When I questioned myself as to why I felt that way, I realized that I had been holding a portrait of an ideal cultivator in my mind, constantly comparing myself to it, and falling short every step of the way. In this paper, I wish to explore the internal turmoil I experienced reading the class material, along with my occasional moments of clarity and awe, and finally, my coming to peace with the realization that being mindful of my mental states and contemplating on the readings themselves are my ways of cultivation. This is not to say that I intentionally set out to look for a way of cultivation through the texts. It was rather a latent realization that these examples and teachings are inevitably helping me in my seemingly non-existing cultivation, slow and subtle as it may be.

My constant frustration of failing in cultivation began from the very beginning of the semester. In *An Exhortation to Resolve Upon Bodhi*, Master Sying An exhorted his audience saying: “Anyone wishing to study the Vehicle of the Thus Come Ones must first make the vows of a Bodhisattva without delay”, and

then, he listed the eight aspects of a resolve—deviant, proper, true, false, great, small, partial, and complete (3). His description of a false resolve says:

If he commits offenses but does not repent of them; if he has faults but does not change them; if he is turbid inside but makes a show of purity; if he is diligent at the start but lax later on; if he has good intentions but mixes them with a quest for name and gain; if he does wholesome practices, but defiles them with the karma created by committing offenses, then his resolve is false. (12)

While reading this, I felt as if he was accusing me and that my personal faults had been exposed. Looking back at my life, I have committed uncountable offenses with my body, speech, and mind, and I have rarely repented of any of them; I had many faults but hadn’t corrected any. I put on a show in front of others to seem smart and pure. I have never been diligent in my practice. I have good intentions but also mix them with personal gain. And the little goodness I might have accumulated through wholesome practice was probably defiled by my many offenses. Thus, my resolve, if there was any, must be false; I am almost crippled by a deep sense of shame from my nearly non-existent Bodhi resolve. I cannot fathom what profound compassion and immense pain Master Sying An must have felt while “weeping blood and bowing to the ground” to exhort his assembly and readers, including me (3). It’s as if he is a loving father and I am his child who has committed an unforgivable offense on him. I cannot bring myself to face him or his words.





The same sense of shame and frustration due to an inability to do better became a constant theme in my mental states throughout the semester and even spilled over into my daily life. When I saw others in the dorm getting up early to go to the morning ceremony, meditating daily, and attending every auspicious Dharma session, I felt impressed by their commitment to their practice, and at the same time, I would criticize my own behavior because of my unwillingness to do the same. Sometimes it even felt like an inability to do the right thing, even though I knew it was what I needed to do. My strong attachment to comfort and personal freedom resulted in being too lazy to practice. I felt like a child eating too much ice cream. Even though her belly is full and her brain hurts from the freeze, she still can't stop herself from eating another spoonful. She feels ashamed and hurt, yet she is unable to do any better.

On the other hand, sometimes I would come across a few passages that suddenly struck me and released me from my constant shame and frustration and even inspired awe and a deeper resolve in me. For example, in *The Zen Teaching of Bodhidharma*, the master said, quoting the *Nirvana Sutra*:

"All mortals have the Buddha-nature. But it's covered by darkness from which they can't escape. Our Buddha-nature is awareness: to be aware and to make others aware. To realize awareness is liberation." Everything good has awareness for its root. And from this root of awareness grow the tree of all virtues and the fruit of nirvana. Beholding the mind like this is understanding. (90)

Upon reading this I felt a sense of hope. My shame and frustration certainly felt like a darkness from which I couldn't escape. But I wondered if my awareness of those feelings was the same awareness that came from my buddha-nature. If yes, then perhaps this

awareness was the root and proof of my goodness, and I hadn't deviated from the path to liberation. After all, being aware of my problems is better than not being aware of them. Now that I am aware, at least I have a chance to correct them and do better, even if in the distant future.

I was similarly encouraged when I read Master Han Shan's *Wandering in a Dream*. In it, the Master says: "So why is there talk of cultivation? By cultivating, we attend to this present mind, and thereby completely eliminate the shadows of habitual deluded thinking. This is where we must focus our efforts; this is cultivation" (2). I had been asking myself this question, more specifically "what is cultivation," for a long time, and he answered it so straightforwardly and perfectly. It dispelled doubts from my mind and brought a new realization. I felt joyful reflecting upon his words, and realized that the portrait of a good cultivator in my mind and the frustration caused by it are both habitually deluded thinking. They weren't necessary. I didn't need to chase, resist, or react to them. All I needed to do was to attend to this present mind, i.e., to observe what's happening in my mind in the present moment as if watching an animation on a screen without judging it. I also realized that by holding myself against an ideal cultivator, I was holding my present awareness hostage to the past and future. The ideal is only a construct based on memories and imagination, which are things of the past and future, not the present.

Sometimes, however, the deluded thinking was so thick and strong that no matter how much I tried to simply be aware of it, it continued to grow and made me feel helpless. This is when I started to apply another method that I unintentionally acquired during the semester. It is reciting Guanyin's name. I'm reluctant to call it a practice because I don't do it daily or even regularly. I only do it when I feel the need. When my

mind is really bothered by my emotions, my thoughts out of control, and my own will power no longer sufficient to tame them, I recite Guanyin's name in order to tap into her power of compassion and wisdom. I am reminded of Master Han Shan's teaching in *Wandering in a Dream*: "If you find yourself stuck in this situation, you must bow to the Buddha, recite sutras, or engage in repentance" (8). Although he didn't suggest reciting Guanyin's name, to me the principle is the same—in both cases we need to borrow power from other things or beings to aid us.

My faith in reciting Guanyin's name was established from a personal experience in the summer. I was returning from the Buddha Root Farm retreat early in the morning together with two others in my car. It was only a day after the retreat had started. The reason for our early departure was due to a COVID case and that person had

been in my car when we arrived. So, all three of us had to leave early to prevent a COVID outbreak. It was nearly a 10 hour drive and I was the only driver. We wore masks all the way and were advised to recite Guanyin's name the whole time. I recited as much as I could out of fear of getting COVID. The car windows were open most of the time and all I could hear was the sound of wind blowing and my recitation of "Namo Guan Shi Yin Pu Sa." We arrived safely in Ukiah late in the evening. No one got COVID except the person who already had it. After a long day of driving I was supposed to feel tired both in my body and mind, but surprisingly I wasn't. Instead I felt something that was hard to describe. My body felt light and my mind felt bright. I couldn't say I was happy, but I was calm and peaceful with a sense of

joy. As I sat down at the dinner table with a friend it came to me—I realized I was at ease, both body and mind. I chuckled at my realization because isn't that her other name—the Bodhisattva who's always at ease (观自在, Guan Zi Zai)? Perhaps she was in me, or her power was in me. Perhaps I was able to embody her after all that recitation. At that moment I thought I understood how Guanyin works, or at least how recitation works. We don't recite to anybody, not even ourselves. We recite to our own true nature, to the fundamental awareness, the Bodhisattvas and the Buddhas inside. That's the ground from which all other powers connect with us.

**As I sat down at the dinner table with a friend it came to me—I realized I was at ease, both body and mind. I chuckled at my realization because isn't that her other name—the Bodhisattva who's always at ease (观自在, Guan Zi Zai)?**

We access other powers by embodying them. We borrow power from Guanyin by becoming her, one small piece at a time, one recitation at a time.

Looking back I realize I found my practices, or rather, that they came to me because

I was willing to be vulnerable and honest with myself. These practices—cultivating self-power by contemplation and holding my awareness, and relying on other-power by invoking Guanyin's name—changed me over the semester, slowly but surely. I have come to accept my reality along with the frustration and my "new-found" practices. Though I still struggle and there's lots of room for improvement, I find comfort in knowing that I have an investigative mind and a source of compassion and wisdom that I can tap into whenever I need. I need not be too strict with myself or hold myself hostage to an imagined ideal, because that ideal is after all just another image. Perhaps, by giving up the ideal, relinquishing control, and settling in the acceptance of myself just as I am, however hard that may be, I found true faith in cultivation.





Her child, her only child,  
So with a boundless heart,  
Should one cherish all living beings

Instilling Goodness Books is delighted to unveil an upcoming book portraying the *Metta Sutta: The Buddha's Words on Loving Kindness*, with captivating artwork by Akanit Dachani. Akanit hails from Thailand, having earned an MFA in Computer Art and Graphic Design from the University of Alaska where she served as an instructor, and later at Mendocino County

Community College, where our paths crossed. Admiring her art, I asked her to illustrate her first book, *First You*, a jataka tale I retold. We're joining forces once again, this time to illuminate the wise teachings of the *Metta Sutta*, translated from Pali by the Amaravati Sangha from England. At their request, the book will be freely shared, spreading the compassionate words of the Buddha.

Artist: Akanit Dachani



# Practice

Sue Rounds

*A man on his way to a concert at Carnegie Hall in New York City gets lost. Spotting a musician carrying a violin case, he asks, "How do you get to Carnegie Hall?" The violinist replies, "Practice, practice, practice!"*

I thought of this old joke recently when I sat down at my piano for the first time in months. Some time last spring, I developed a painful condition in the little finger of my left hand which made it almost impossible to play the piano. After looking at the X-ray, my doctor told me, "It's just arthritis; there's nothing to be done." Because playing the piano was painful, I stopped almost entirely. Before my finger problem, I had been playing nearly every day. I warmed up with some scales, then some Bach and Mozart, before moving to work on some new piece. But now, nothing was happening.

For many years I have belonged to a local piano group whose members gather once a month, rotating between the homes of people with decent pianos, to play for each other for a couple of hours. It is an extremely supportive, nonjudgmental group. Knowing that I will have the opportunity to play for them every month has given me the motivation to regularly work on new pieces. But once I stopped practicing every day, I could no longer participate except by listening to others play. One member of the group told me that she had experienced a similar problem in one of her fingers, and that the pain had gradually lessened over a period of several months. This gave me hope, and in September—some four months after the pain first manifested—I noticed that, although my little finger was still bent at a funny angle, the pain was almost gone. Hesitantly, I sat down at the

piano and found that I could play with only a little discomfort. This was very good news! But as is so often the case, there was some bad news as well—news which will come as no surprise to anyone who has a skill that requires regular practice to maintain. As I stumbled through a Bach Partita that I had once been able to play easily, my fingers no longer moved nimbly up and down the keys.

I have never been someone with natural technique. I can play decently, but not superlatively. And now what little skill I had developed had deserted me. But I knew that lost technique can be regained, with patience and regular practice. It was interesting to note, as I struggled to reestablish old patterns of regular time at the piano, that the biggest obstacle

**The biggest obstacle was not physical but emotional. It was not the stiffness of my fingers from disuse but the resistance and impatience I felt when I sat down at the piano.**

was not physical but emotional. It was not the stiffness of my fingers from disuse but the resistance and impatience I felt when I sat down at the piano. I wanted to be able to play like I had played before,

but that meant recommitting myself to some tedium and monotonous repetition. I had to force myself to practice my scales and technical exercises, to take the places where I was struggling in the pieces I wanted to play and practice the difficult measures over and over again.

Once I recognized the mental hurdles, I began to work on the physical challenges. As I reestablished a (somewhat!) regular practice routine, a positive feedback loop began to develop. My fingers felt less and less like sausages as I worked my way through pieces that I had once played with ease. The next time my piano group meets, I'll be playing one of my favorite pieces—a Brahms Intermezzo. I may not be heading to Carnegie Hall, but I like the direction I'm going!





Warriors of the vestiges of an unnecessary art  
 Stuck to a life's desires that they can hardly depart  
 We're filling the world with words we're filled with  
 Stuck to a system we long to find peace in  
 Alas, alas, we're letting it all pass,  
 The Pillsbury and the Hamilton Beach will fail to last  
 You can etch into stone  
 and it will crumble like a bone  
 melt like a blueberry scone and fail to bring  
 what you feel you need the same way  
 the unnecessary ritz of the automatic toilet  
 fails me, flushes when I sit down.  
 [ok]

Kids discussing a poem: "tender, beautiful, hopeless"  
 —disturbing modernity, the pressure of  
 children growing into our disconnected obscurity  
 our anxious tenebrosity our placeless  
 credulity our felicity for Beauty  
 We are Fallen, and we don't know how to Rise

—  
 I am flying out of here,  
 body and mind terrified  
 as there is flight in all of us.

We are keeping it going,  
 the century that has its eyes shut.  
 Stop.

Varnish your rotted waist in amber.  
 You, who are opaque as the angel,  
 I am as afraid as you.

Paint  
 pain in the prinkle-haired vein  
 of an oil slicked up in the right lane  
 whose body runs arm to arm, we insane  
 like the pain that brought my face to books  
 needing from them the way to be  
 "alive" "loved" "fully ready," entirely prepared  
 for some things books could never prepare me for

I'm scared: will I live in the dastardly half-  
 breath of Weezer, in the waking up  
 to my lungs gripped by tweezers,  
 in the sound of a church bell  
 my death knell  
 as a slightly uncurled shell  
 who hasn't entirely made peace with this hell  
 this animal, ghost, ox lost  
 in charity bopped by polarities  
 touched by the sprinkling mandarava  
 flowers, Searching with heaven's fallen torch

Aardvark, the spirit who ravages wind  
 like a bow tormenting the space with  
 Drawn-back feathers following me tethered  
 with father's graces and ungraceful graceless  
 amazing mazes conjoined by wind and salmon  
 the way we die long because  
 "I see you the way you are"  
 automatic that it's not like that  
 searing itch that it feels like that  
 an ungodly itch to tear myself apart  
 like that, the way our heroes  
 tore themselves apart like that  
 We Finches, Harry in mind and Filch in  
 lived reality  
 We are not like those fishes, swimming  
 in evaporating water  
 We are mighty and eternal, like gods  
 sharpening stone to cut into stone  
 so that the stone may stone for time  
 long time, beyond children's time time,  
 which is beyond my understanding of time,  
 so it counts  
 [and] we are nearly out of time.



Release Me

My own body caught in the falling  
toward forgetting, anesthetizing in a room  
telling me facts, figures, and questions that maroon me

I call back to the ancient hall of sitting still,  
anchored by peace and the thousand processings  
walking across the hall on carpets of diamond and dirt  
My own worries worried, not the other way around;

Tell me where I can find the jackets crinkling with dirt and decay;  
or let me go, just release me and let me go there!  
Where I can break against the broken,  
rapture in the car park or cave or castle of theater and music;  
to drown in my own making,  
and rise of my own resolve.

Release me, or may I release myself.

—Blake Plante





# Three Poems

Ziqian Feng

## Readings

Nov.2023  
Nietzsche is a genius  
and an esteemed friend  
and Rilke  
ever expanding circles

Golden suns alive in  
incomprehensible honesty, tenderly  
O Life, O Dream, O Brokenness  
ripening into Eternity, Sadness  
unrelenting Graciousness

Do you believe in the power of  
one touch, one turn, one silliness?  
Ridiculous for some, brave for another,  
yet unapologetically still  
for yet another, breaking out of the eggshell  
In the end, we know each other  
When the heart breaks  
open there, we meet  
once again.

Thus spoke, thus sang, thus radiated,  
thus elevated, thus enumerated

(post reading *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*  
by Nietzsche)

## Winter Snow

11.19.2023  
One day you will see your superpower  
and be so positively surprised  
for you thought this very trait  
is your weakness  
all along.

11.27.2023  
The clearest departure  
has no sound

What's said  
in silence.

Perhaps such silence is pregnant too  
with wholeness.

11.27.2023  
Words have the power of soothing and  
embracing  
So I too  
Pray for you

What they see as bravery in me  
Is but honesty;  
What they see as instability in me  
Is but confidence

What if I am the Storm  
And also the Ocean  
Water of life  
Tear of eternity?

12.5.2023  
It wasn't my trust that was  
Stupid  
But my forceful naïve projection  
Which is itself  
A form of violence

## To My Friend

One of my good friends once told me,  
"the beauty of this place  
is its demand for us to hold 'both/and'  
albeit the seeming contradictions."  
the outrageous contradictions

the warm kindness in the past did exist  
the treacherous iciness in the present is real too  
contradiction is a limitation of rationalism

Time is a gentle, beautiful thing  
with time, distrustful hearts slowly open up  
and a friendship blossoms, quietly, miraculously

sometimes I sit in the middle of a storm and close my eyes.  
I start to count my blessings, and remember  
how loved I am

Rabbi Brous penned, in her *The Amen Effect*,  
'As I look back at the last twenty years [...] what appears in my mind's eye in slow  
motion are the moments [...] when we, lost in our heartache, yearning, confusion,  
take one another's hand and make our way through the forest together.'

I resonate.

Thank you for taking the Bart with me when I was scared of public transportation  
Thank you for walking the streets with me  
Thank you for making me laugh when all I wanted to do was to cry

Time and again, an adjective popped into my head for moments like these  
Magical  
Sparkly golden is the color

I stopped thinking about future, I stopped rushing  
as if, in this moment, continuously, Being is a fountainhead of miracles  
I am awestruck in wonder

"The storm was sent to cleanse you, not destroy you." They say  
The clarity feels cool. The space of letting go, emptying out the old, the no-longer-serving

I feel like waking up from a long memory loss.  
I am waking up me  
"I don't think people can hide who they truly are for long," you said  
my heart smiled, relaxed, what an oasis

Waiting, while already arrived.



# Alone, or alone

Abby Anderson

I have two forms of being alone. In one, the person I think I am is constructed through negative distinctions: that I, or others like me, are isolated from those *unlike* me. It sometimes feels so normal to think this way. I have a mental and physical illness, I have different life experiences... don't these signify a difference? Recently, my cohort read Dostoevsky's *Notes From Underground* for our Comparative Hermeneutics course. In it, the protagonist lives this version of aloneness. Unlike anyone else, he says, I alone am tortured—tortured by intellect, self-consciousness, shame, cowardice, hesitancy, fear, rage. On the one hand, it is a fair comparison to make of the protagonist's life to say that it resonates, in modern times, with stories of bipolar and neuroatypicality. I feel this narrative validates my own—the fear I feel reading it, identifying with it, is assuaged in that context. Of course, his inner torture is an illness—and so is mine! But is that not Dostoevsky's very critique? That this belief in the isolating uniqueness, the naturalness of our suffering, brings it on so much harder? That it is an avoidance of our own responsibility for ourselves? I ponder those thoughts, watching how my identity shades my experience with overtones of isolation, resentment, fear, distrust. I precondition my relationships in the same way as the Underground Man: I am simply different, and no one will understand. And so too of the book itself. I, of course, get it; do you? Ironically, Dostoevsky's critique points to something shared: constructed isolation.

In wondering about this problem, I remember our readings of Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations*, who talks about the intersubjective world and how it comes to be for us in our own minds. Husserl describes the world as a reflection of, or a product

of, consciousness. Not as a metaphysical creation, as in literally created by consciousness, but as existing mostly as an idea for us which refers to everything we believe exists and is only known through a process of knowledge-making. In that "world," Husserl says, importantly, that the world as we come to conceptualize it, each of us, is a creation of an intersubjective activity. As I come to know other subjects, and I suppose that other subjects have the same sort of consciousness I do, but with their own unique perspective, I start to develop a "shared world," which is seen and known potentially by all subjects, each with their own unique perspectives. Without those other potential perspectives or experiences, the world would not exist as an objective entity which is shared by all as an idea within my own conscious existence. But working in the midst of this world is a division of oneself and the Other as a general rule: what I take to be my own (my senses, my experience) and what is Other (the unknowable consciousness I presume to exist in other animate beings). This division of what I directly know (my own life) and what I don't directly know (another person's consciousness) is also the grounds for objectified forms of "my own" and "other": in other words, cultural groups, gender divisions, all the different classes or identities I and those "like" me belong to, contrasted with what I project outside myself as unknowable, foreign.

Those divisions are not inherent, but are conditioned, learned, and agreed to. Which means they can also be deconditioned, unlearned, rejected. In dividing myself of what I *can know* (my own illness, suffering, my own Underground Man) from the unknowable other (the person whose

inner world I cannot know, who I think is healthy, stable, normal), it's only because I chose to create and live that distinction. Of course, there are real variations in our conditions, but our actual invisibility, our unreachability due to conditions, that is a myth. This is the first form of loneliness: the "I am different." This "I am different" creates fear, resentment, shame, anxiety, paranoia, rage.

On the second form of being alone, a different note can be made. It is arguably the harder of the two, as it brushes against the grain of what I'm used to. It says, rather than "I am different," that all I have for my own well-being, at the end of the day, is myself. This is not the stance of a victim: it is not that I, being alone and isolated, must defend myself rationally. But that I, as a human, fundamentally can only find inner peace, happiness, well-being through my own choice. Dostoevsky's narrative begs the

question: what to make of his character's isolation and suffering? Is it his conditions, or his own narrative, which causes him to feel that isolation? How does he interpret and precondition his own experience of himself, his world, his "Other?" Stepping alone into my own life, the second aloneness, in which I acknowledge this conditioning narrative, occurs only when I recognize my own suffering as my own and my only ground of stability as being sourced within. Nothing outside my own mind or heart will ever bring anything lasting; if I look for it outside, whatever suffering comes is my own result. Relationships fade, beings die, occupations end, wealth disappears, bodies and minds get old and sick. If I walk with myself in this world, I no doubt could recognize it. It's the unchanging quality of life. If I am to find a way out of grief, loneliness, then, the in-group won't satisfy it; the diagnosis won't either.

Is it his conditions, or his own narrative, which causes him to feel that isolation? How does he interpret and precondition his own experience of himself, his world, his "Other?"

Where do I look for well-being? Is it in the group I lean on? And does that group (and myself within it) support independence of mind, or demand a co-dependence of narrative, of emotional interpretation? Which version of alone do I walk within: the kind where I, unlike others, have to hole up and despair, or the kind where I discover a peace, a joy, in my own presence, and the presence of others? Those two have no, or little to no, compatibility, though they might exchange places at any moment. Often, I am walking aside both paths. Though not able to live at one and the same moment, they war on my psyche. And then, at other times, waves of clarity come: "And again, I was paranoid; I was driven by rage; I was overcome by history." So often, I am wrong—

why, I ask myself, do I continue to assume that I am *right*? Is that not *madness*? Too often, this is when I'm alone in the first way: no one gets what I go through, no one cares, I will be

alone forever. And when I'm alone in the second way, sometimes, I really am alone, but I'm also not: a friend, a classmate, a coworker, a relative, a teacher, has shown me something I didn't think about. Whether directly or not. Others, in this aloneness, are an antidote to my primary state of isolation. Not because they validate a narrative, support an emotion, or make me feel good—but because they bare honesty, straightforwardness, and insight. But at the end of the day, it takes the time and patience of looking at all of it to bring into life the knowledge of inner responsibility—that peace and tumult depend on our own thought. It's tempting, often, to ignore this—but that's the place of inner peace. Walking alone, then, through whatever and all moments, through the patience of observance and self-reflection, self-correction and insight, testing and retesting your own capacity, a strength and independence grows.



# Messenger

There is something calling out to me  
A lunar rising, a looming whisper,  
Hungry,  
I want to meet you, to witness you in your relief,  
Blinded,  
Amidst my labyrinth,  
The map is resting underneath.

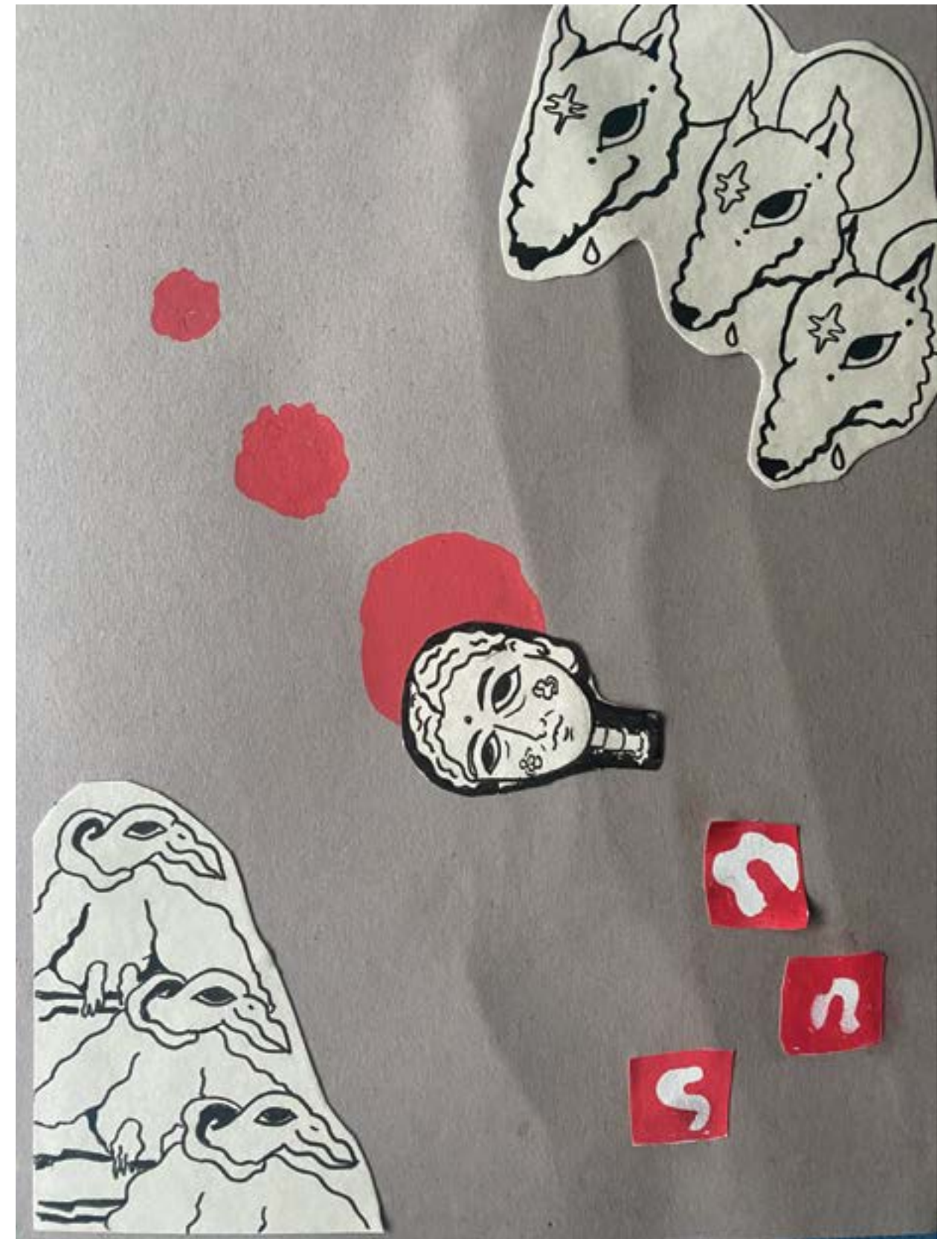
Faith gone astray,  
Just as sound forgotten in coves,  
Forever moths gather on the light  
greedy for their home,  
I claim to be a separate son,  
but that lust is my own.

I misplace the dweller of dreams,  
I forget I am the sea,  
Waxing and waning,  
The body of a jagged current,  
surfing the tides of eternity.

Haunted by posted stamps,  
The end to no avail,  
She writes no return address,  
responds in ominous mail  
Yet, I still blow the conch,  
grieving a battered fantasy.

So I hear,  
There is something calling out to me.

—Anthony Santana





# Beyond Violence

Sehen Gamhewa

**M**y parents trained me to not be coaxed by the media portrayals of strength, fighting, and superheroes as something admirable.

And yet as a middle schooler, when I sneakily watched *Naruto* for the first time, I was star-struck by it, spellbound, hooked deep, deep in to the world of chakra (chi) circulating through the body and a process of self-mastery and martial development that led from gradual physical strength to the existence of oneself as an energetic powerhouse that could debilitate a city with a mere wave of their hands.

Self-mastery and power and strength to transcend the world, a possibility of the energy moving in the body, and a seed planted very early in my childhood, that thoughts were more real than the physical reality I lived in, owing to my Buddhist upbringing; a combination of all these factors fueled my interest. It started to live with me. And a part of me lived in that world.

To some, my adoration of *Naruto* may seem like a typical child's fascination with shiny charged up energy blasts and thrilling action fights, and to some extent it was.

To others, more optimistic of my intrinsic nature, it may be an exemplar of seeds from past lives, a wish to somehow transcend the limited world and to find power within and cultivate it.

To me, it is both, and something beyond that.

I was always younger and hence, smaller, than everyone else in my grade, having skipped a year or two. So it makes sense that a part of me wanted to be stronger and better, more physically able, to be more confident in the scape of violence.

As I've come to relax, to let go of the idea of physical strength and the ability to damage a person as an indicator of my strength of character and my capability as a 'man,' and more importantly, as a person, the questions have popped up: What is violence? What lies beyond it? What is martial arts? And what is the truest form of it, where the art lies in not even fighting?

I think many of the answers for that lie in Tai Chi. I "used to" be a very impatient kid. Always rushing to finish what I was doing so I could have as much free time as possible. It was sort of a divine irony that my parents named me 'Sehen,' and as they interpreted it to mean, patience.



After accidentally landing at DRBU, I have slowly, but surely, been flogged into cultivating some measly little bits and pieces of that temptress of a quality. "Patience, patience, don't get angry, Svaha." Oh, how glorious! The divine meaning of this phrase resonated with the sound of ten thousand bells shaking the earth in my very center, and any soul I had was suddenly vanquished.

Perhaps, I will be able to write that unironically in my next life. And I hope that in a fit of divine irony, my parents do not name me then 'Karma,' or some cursed derivant of it, meaning to act, indicating then that I have become too passive and patient and do not act enough.

Oh, the laughability of it all.

Nevertheless, I digress.

Tai Chi has very much balanced me out. I am able to appreciate classical music now, whereas before, the very playing of a sustained C# note would err on my ears and cause me to bleed from all my apertures. I find myself more able to do favors to people. "Can you help me with this?" "Why don't you go die? Sure, I'll help you (\*grumbling the whole time)." It has been nothing short of a divine violence on my propensity to action. And I cannot appreciate it enough. Beyond violence, I think, there is still more violence. And yet, this is violent in a very different way. It is violence where I smile when I recall it, and I am suddenly at ease, sitting on a chair at the beach.

Oh, how glorious! The divine meaning of this phrase resonated with the sound of ten thousand bells shaking the earth in my very center, and any soul I had was suddenly vanquished.





## *“A phantom, and a”*

Caden Hill

I find myself  
enjoying a smoothie  
then all of a sudden  
from the waters,  
purple and yellow

A giant Swedish man emerges  
with a big red mustache  
and a semi balding head  
Swedes aren't known for either  
to my knowledge  
but I still knew he was swedish

I find myself resting on his tongue  
I stare at his giant swedish eyes  
which I have a better view of now

as I look at his eyes  
I hear a voice  
this is a cruel voice

I look towards this clamorer  
and realize it's talking to me  
the smoothie drinking tongue rester  
So I listen

It's frustrated over me  
the smoothie drinking tongue rester  
largely over smoothie drinking  
and tongue resting  
among many other things

I take some moments  
and toil with this toiler  
How could I enjoy a smoothie?  
How could I tongue rest?  
I truly don't deserve to exist

I see my uncle, Jeff  
walking on the tongue  
to his car  
which is apparently  
parked near the tongue

What is he doing  
walking on the tongue  
doesn't he know he doesn't deserve to exist?

“Puh”  
I say, implying that he should know  
that he doesn't deserve to exist  
making him walk to his car  
In a sadder way than before

I look to the voice  
so it can tell me it loves me  
the blabberer then points to a place  
where my feet should be  
and I see

that I'm still standing on the tongue

rats



# The Song of Joy & Learning

by Wang Gen (1483–1541)

Translation by Edwina Wang

Source Text	Translation
《樂學歌》	<i>The Song of Joy &amp; Learning</i>
王艮	by Wang Gen (1483-1541)
人心本自樂，自將私欲縛。	Human nature itself is joyous. However, it can fetter itself with the selfish desire.
私欲一萌時，良知還自覺。	As soon as the selfish desire sprouts, human conscience knows by itself.
一覺便消除，人心依舊樂。	Then the selfish desire is removed by this knowing and human nature returns to be joyous.
樂是樂此學，學是學此樂。	Joy means joy in this above-mentioned knowing and removing process, which is true learning. Learning means learning to practice this joy.
不樂不是學，不學不是樂。	The absence of joy means the absence of this learning. Without this learning, joy does not happen.
樂便然後學，學便然後樂。	Joy contributes to continuous learning. Learning in turn contributes to continuous joy.
樂是學，學是樂。	Joy turns into learning and learning turns into joy.
於乎！	Woo-Hoo!
天下之樂，何如此學。	Of all the joys in the world, none is more joyous than this learning.
天下之學，何如此樂。	Of all the learnings in the world, none is greater than this joy.

# A Letter from the Sixth Patriarch

Edwina Wang

All good, my friend:

In regard to your request to move the Western Paradise before your eyes, remember: I wouldn't and couldn't do it. Why? Because the Western Paradise is your own body, and Amitabha Buddha dwells within your own mind (Master Hua, 190). So, do not mistake the Western Paradise as a location of place and do not mistake Amitabha Buddha as a Buddha's name. Rather, the Western Paradise is a state of the mind and Amitabha Buddha is a name for inherent nature. This exactly means "the buddha is made within the self-nature"; they are identical (190). Therefore, the efforts to see Amitabha Buddha is exactly the striving for seeing your self-nature. As the Sutra says, "Your own essential nature is Buddha; apart from this nature there is no other Buddha" (24). If you understand this, please read my verse below:

*Since the Western Paradise is not exterior to the mind, you search out Amitabha only in your mind.*

*Once you have an epiphany of inherent self-nature, thought after thought, you dwell in the buddha-nature.*

You have already understood your self-nature and the buddha-nature are one thing, not two. Then how do you cultivate? Since right now you are a student, it might be more practical for you to "persist daily in being generous and forgiving," because in this way, you will find as many opportunities as possible every day (43). Here are three specific practices you could do. 1) Do good and avoid evil in thought, in speech, and in actions. Meanwhile, try to understand and try to help people. Anything in daily life could be an example for this. When you take food from the dining hall and see some food you really like, could you timely refrain from your covetousness? Do good deeds as naturally as you close the door after yourself. Do not raise doubts either in yourself or others, but be more patient with yourself and others. Try your best to understand people, their actions, and their

needs behind the actions instead of judging—even judging silently. Be aware of what should not be taken, especially when they are free. Rather be at a disadvantage than taking advantage of the way-place. In short, just subdue your mind for the purpose of being liberated from "unwholesome states of mind: all jealousy and envy, flattering and fawning, egotism, lying and deceit, contempt, rudeness and disrespect, bias and distortion, arrogance, and all other unwholesome tendencies whenever they arise" (60). 2) Try meditation. Above all, the process of overcoming leg pain not only increases your patience, but also builds up

**Actually, cultivation is not only about doing; it is more about being**

your confidence in surmounting difficulties. On top of that, meditation will help you to develop

concentration and give you clear comprehension. 3) Keep reciting Amitabha Buddha's name. Try to recite it in each thought. This will purify your mind and build capacities for your rebirth into the pure land.

Actually, cultivation is not only about doing; it is more about being, which is the state of mind. All the above practices not only points to the behaviors, but also, or more importantly, the mind. You cultivate according to them. They will help you to purify your mind. A true cultivator does not perform for show, for one is the owner and heir of one's own actions. Therefore, be true to yourself in everything and every thought. There is no audience, but focus on yourself and settle your mind to see your own nature through your own dedication.

Amitabha! Take care!  
Huineng

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L'étang et Le Ciel  
par Yidan

Nous sommes l'étang,  
Dans l'étang,  
Il y a:  
Un poisson triste;  
Un poisson heureux;  
Un poisson en colère;  
Un poisson d'amour;  
Un poisson jaloux;  
Un poisson calme;  
Mais des poissons;  
Bougent et changent  
tout le temps.  
Dis le à toi même: 'Il va passer. Everything is OK.'  
Parce que,  
Nous sommes l'étang,  
Nous observons les poissons sans jugement.  
Nous acceptons avec compassion.  
Nous sommes l'étang.

Nous sommes le ciel,  
Dans le ciel,  
Il y a:  
Un nuage orageux;  
Un nuage ensoleillé;  
Un nuage pluvieux;  
Un nuage stable;  
Un nuage d'éclairage;  
Un nuage arc-en-ciel;  
Mais des nuages,  
bougent et changent,  
tout le temps.  
Dis le à toi même: 'Il va passer. Everything is OK.'  
Parce que,  
Nous sommes le ciel,  
Nous observons les nuages sans jugement.  
Nous acceptons avec compassion.  
Nous sommes le ciel.

Alors,  
Que sommes-nous?  
Nous sommes  
L'étang.  
Et  
Le ciel.

池塘和天空  
作者: Yidan

我们是池塘,  
在池塘里,  
有着:  
一条悲伤的鱼;  
一条快乐的鱼;  
一条愤怒的鱼;  
一条有爱的鱼;  
一条嫉妒的鱼;  
一条平静的鱼;  
但是这些鱼,  
流动着,变化着,  
不断的。  
这时我们告诉自己:  
'会马上过去的。一切都OK。'  
因为,  
我们是池塘,  
不加评判地观察着各种鱼儿,  
并且慈悲有爱地接受。  
我们是池塘。

我们是天空,  
在天空中,  
有着:  
一朵乌云;  
一朵晴朗的云;  
一朵雨云;  
一朵稳定的云;  
一朵闪电云;  
一朵彩虹云;  
但是这些云,  
流动着,变化着,  
不断的。  
这时我们告诉自己:  
'会马上过去的。一切都OK。'  
因为,  
我们是天空,  
不加评判地观察着各种云彩。  
并且慈悲有爱地接受。  
我们是天空。

所以,  
我们是什么呢?  
我们是  
池塘。  
和  
天空。

The Pond and The Sky  
—Yidan

We are the pond.  
In the pond,  
There is:  
A sad fish;  
A happy fish;  
An angry fish;  
A loving fish;  
A jealous fish;  
A calm fish;  
But these fish,  
Move and change,  
All the time.  
Then tell yourself:  
'It will pass. Everything is OK.'  
Because,  
We are the pond,  
We observe the fish without judgment.  
We accept it with compassion.  
We are the pond.

We are the sky,  
In the sky,  
There is:  
A stormy cloud;  
A sunny cloud;  
A rainy cloud;  
A stable cloud;  
A lighting cloud;  
A rainbow cloud;  
But these clouds,  
Move and change,  
All the time.  
Then tell yourself:  
'It will pass. Everything is OK.'  
Because,  
We are the sky,  
We observe the clouds without judgment.  
We accept it with compassion.  
We are the sky.

So, What are we?  
We are the pond.  
And the sky.



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## KEY:

DRBU - Dharma Realm Buddhist  
University

DRBA - Dharma Realm Buddhist  
Association

IGDVS - Instilling Goodness Developing  
Virtue School

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## CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

Good and Wise Friends, we want to hear from you!  
This magazine is what you make of it.

We cherish your work and want to see it in print.  
The theme of our upcoming 2025 issue is The Inner Child.  
Let it inspire you, but don't be beholden to it!

Please send us your:

- Visual art
- Literature
- Academic work
- Personal reflections
- And much more!

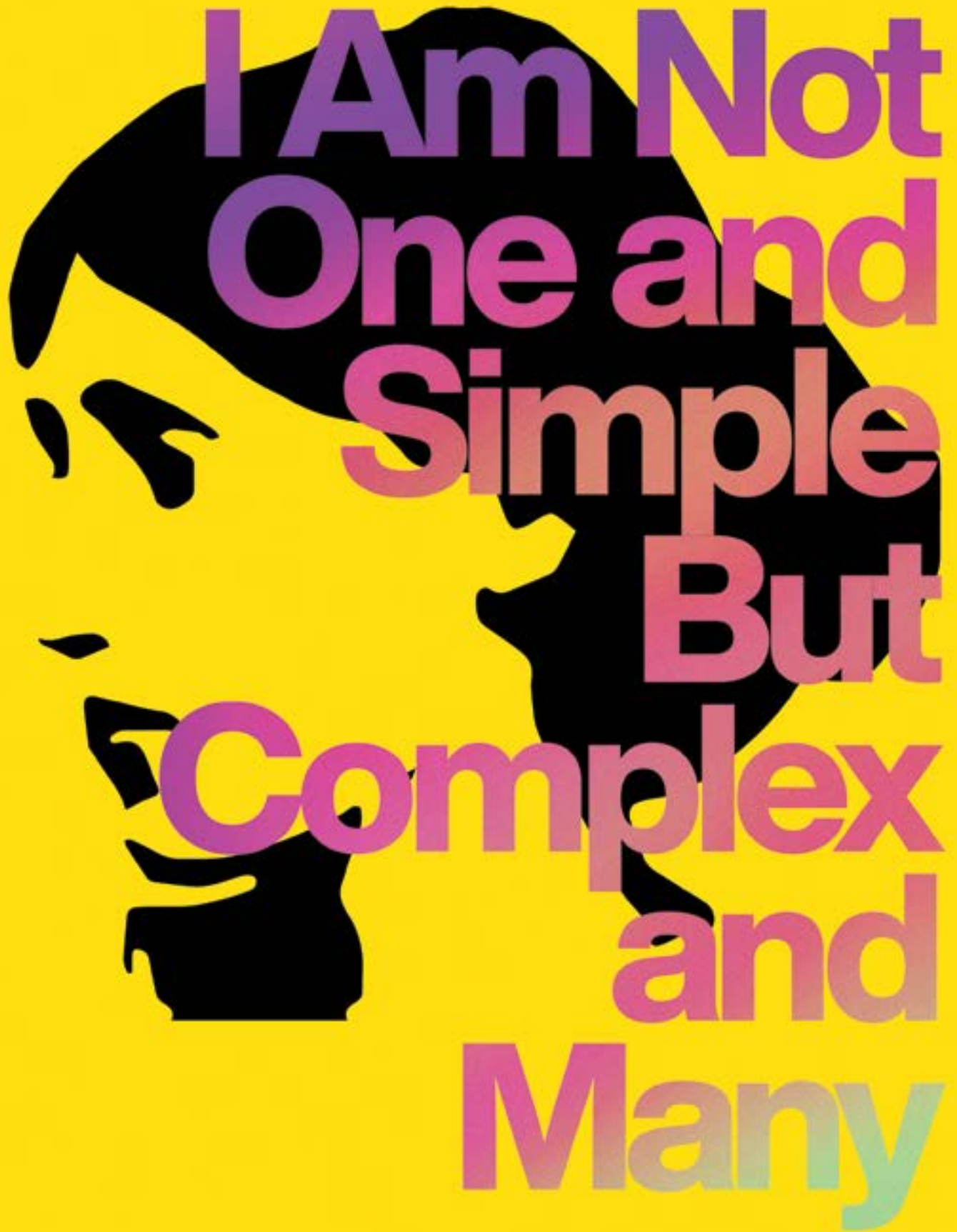
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DHARMA REALM  
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I Am Not  
One and  
Simple  
But  
Complex  
and  
Many

Virginia Woolf