

Mirror Flower Water Moon

鏡花水月

FALL / SPRING

2021 - 2022



DHARMA REALM
BUDDHIST UNIVERSITY

On the cover art:

Most of this piece was spent going with feeling, honestly. I wanted to draw something I could get lost into. What's happening, what do all these images mean? I don't know. I just like them that way; I've taken inspiration from the things I've seen while at DRBU whether on walks or in meditation. There's no correct answer as to what this drawing is saying; sometimes it is good for art to exist on its own, outside of the small moment I have captured. Art should be alive in this way. Interpret the symbols how you wish, but know there is no "pure nature" of the drawing. My only intention with this piece was to show the theme of cycle and to explore a new art style, attaching objects in places they don't belong. I hope, when people see this, they think "that's nice," and begin to look for an artistic way to express the things around them and the things they are learning.

—Tehya Jackson

Dear readers,

Welcome to the Fall/Spring '21-22 edition of *Mirror Flower Water Moon*. As the cycle of the seasons turn, bringing us closer to the conclusion of another school year, we offer you this collection of works from our students, staff, and friends. From the well-loved halls of our school to distant homes in far-off lands, these pieces have traveled far to be in your hands today.

I've always been of the opinion that art is more important than a commodity or frivolous pastime. It is a language, one which transcends other languages. Through it, we can communicate ideas, experiences, and wisdom that otherwise would remain hidden in our hearts forever. To share your writing and your art is to share a piece of yourself—and so, I thank all our contributors for their kindness and courage in choosing to share.

It is our sincere hope that you will all enjoy the collection we've compiled for you this semester. May it bring you peace, comfort, and a sense of solidarity. Time moves on, but for now we are here, and we can share with one another. That is the greatest power of mankind.

Thank you for reading, and many blessings to you,
Your editing team

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A recently uncovered fragment

Layman Blake Plante

The young layman Blake was from Southern California. When he called on the Master, he said,

“Master Huineng, I have asked myself where I am at in my spiritual progress, and I discovered in myself a verse. It goes:

*To be with
and to be without
That is to be.*

Yet I am sure that I am wrong. Where am I stuck?”

The great Master answered,

“‘To be without’ means that you must have had something in the first place. Listen to my verse:

*There is no being with,
No being without,
Not even being.
Where is there to be stuck?”*

“So I have nothing?” layman Blake interjected.

“How can you possess nothing?” said the Master. “Listen:

*Not to have a single thing, still holds on to ‘having’ nothing,
Much like extended arms blocking out the face of the sun.
Not to be a single thing, still holds onto being ‘nothing,’
Like a wanderer who refuses to show his face.*

*Pointlessly setting up notions of ‘having, being,’ and ‘not-having, not-being,’
You seek for Bodhi attached to appearances.
If you can immediately realize your error,
Your own spiritual light will always shine forth.”*

When the layman Blake heard this verse, another thought rose in him, and he shared, “Master Huineng, I am experiencing something odd in my practice, but I feel that if I just apply myself to the practice it will pass.”

“What are you asking me for, permission?” said Master Huineng. “There is no permission to be given. Just apply yourself in the realization of the way, and the fruit of bodhi will ripen on its own.”

Blake bowed in gratitude, and departed intent to practice.



Two Sticks and a String: Knitting as Spiritual Practice

Susan Rounds

Properly practiced, knitting soothes the troubled spirit, and it doesn't hurt the untroubled spirit either.

—Elizabeth Zimmerman, *Knitting Without Tears*.

I have been knitting for over 60 years. I have knit hats, scarves, shawls, blankets, sweaters, and toys. I have made gifts for friends, for relatives, for babies, for my grandchildren, for charity, and for myself. I can't even begin to calculate how many individual stitches I have formed over these 60 years of knitting, but I would not be surprised to find that it was well over a million. Knitting for me has been more than a hobby. It has served as an instructive metaphor—for spiritual practice, and for life.

What do I do when I knit? It starts with two sticks and a string. I put loops of yarn on a pointed stick, or needle, that I hold in my left hand. With another pointed stick, I push a strand of yarn into one of the loops, form another loop, and slip that loop from the left hand needle onto the right-hand needle. That is one stitch formed. Then I do the same thing with the next loop, and the next, and the next. When I have finished one row, I turn my knitting around and work back across the row, one stitch at a time.

During the 60-plus years that I have been knitting, the individual moments of my life have passed in something of a blur. But when I am knitting, my mind slows down as I form each stitch and slip it to its place next to all the others. Each of those stitches takes a moment of concentration. This is akin to what happens when I sit in meditation, when each moment of recitation, linked to my breathing in and out, becomes a moment of awareness, a space to practice stillness. As one member of the DRBU Knitting Club remarked, "Knitting is a kind of active meditation. I can listen to my thoughts and reflect on what's going on internally." The fingers may

be busy with needles and yarn, but the mind is calm and reflective.

I have discovered that I can fit the rhythm of forming a stitch to the recitation of "Gwan shr yin pu sa" or "Na mwo gwan shr yin pu sa." When I am knitting something for a particular person, I like to think that I am embedding the protection of Gwan Yin into the garment with every stitch. There is a tradition in Christianity of making "prayer shawls" for people who are grieving or suffering in some way. In the book *Knitting into the Mystery*, authors Susan Jorgensen and Susan Izard describe a practice of "contemplative knitting" in which knitters knit a prayer for well-being and peace into every stitch of the shawl they knit for someone who is suffering. While the book describes a Christian practice of prayer, I have my own Buddhist practice of contemplative knitting. I have knit shawls for four dear friends who have lost a beloved partner. As I knitted each shawl, I recited with each stitch. When a recipient wrapped the warm shawl around her shoulders, she was wrapped in physical warmth, with the reminder of my affection and support, and with the healing power of Gwan Yin's grace.

You don't knit because you are patient. You are patient because you knit.

—Stephanie Pearl-McPhee, *Things I Learned From Knitting*

Knitting has also helped me learn patience. Getting started on a project often involves having to undo my work and start over—frequently more than once—until I get everything just right: the number of stitches, the way the pattern is developing, the

feel of the fabric I am creating. I remind myself to keep my mind on the process, learning to enjoy each step, rather than feeling frustrated or upset that it is taking so long to get it right.

Patience is needed not only with the actual knitting process itself. Yarn can provide its own challenges. Yarn gets tangled up. Yarn forms into knots for no obvious reason. The English word "knit" actually comes to us from Old English and German words for "knot." And I have learned the hard way that there is no shortcut to untangling a knot. You have to work at it gently, tracing the patterns of the strands, undoing each wrong crossing before going on to the next. Any attempt to hurry the job only brings disaster. Patience must persist even when you get to the very end. You may see that there is just one small place that needs untangling and think, "I can just pull this tight and it will fall free." I can assure you that it never happens that way. I think of the lessons learned untangling knots in yarn when trying to resolve an issue or problem that arises in other areas of my life. Rushing in with what seems like an obvious resolution is not usually the most effective way forward. Instead, I try to practice careful and patient attentiveness, thinking through each step before moving on to the next.

There is another aspect of knitting which has helped me understand something I was learning about in a DRBU class a couple of years ago. We were studying *The Hundred Dharmas Shastras*, a text which I found to be quite difficult. It delineates and describes one hundred different kinds of mental states or dharmas, some of which are wholesome or beneficial, others of which are considered indeterminate, meaning that they can be either wholesome or not wholesome, and finally, some which are clearly afflictions. In this text, **regret** is considered a state which is "unfixed" because it can be either wholesome or unwholesome, depending on conditions. But **remorse**, which seems very similar, is actually identified as a wholesome dharma or state, because it carries with it the meaning of repentance.

As I knit, I am creating a piece of fabric that gets longer and longer as I complete each row.

At some point, as I look back at what I've done, I might notice a place where I have made a small error, breaking the pattern in some way. I say to myself, "Uh oh! That isn't right. Do I care enough to take out all the stitches back to that point, fix the mistake, and then reknit? ...Will anyone notice?... It's actually quite small.... I really don't want to take the trouble to go back. I'm going to keep knitting." Inevitably, when I do that, as I keep going, there is a nagging feeling that I should reconsider my decision. Depending on my mood, I may go through this process again, or even several more times: stopping, looking at the mistake, calculating whether I care enough to take the effort. And almost always, I eventually end up

taking the work off the needles, ripping it out to the point where the mistake was made, fixing the mistake, and starting again.

As I see it, when I notice my mistake but decide to keep going, I am experiencing "regret." I wish

that I hadn't made the mistake, but I am too lazy to take the initiative to do what is necessary to fix it. I understand how in that sense my regret is an affliction. I remember the "uncomfortableness" I feel as I continue to knit knowing that something isn't right. When I finally make the decision to go back and "make it right," the "uncomfortableness" disappears. Similarly, when I identify a wrong action or thought, and then repent and resolve to change, that process leads me to experience a wholesome state. My mind feels at ease and "comfortable," because I have taken action based on my feeling of remorse.

I am not the only person who has found that knitting can offer something more than the simple pleasures of a well-executed craft. There are a number of books about the relationship of knitting to spiritual practice, including *Knit One, Purl a Prayer: A Spirituality of Knitting*; *The Knitting Way: a Guide to Spiritual Self-Discovery*; *Knitting, Praying, Forgiving: A Pattern of Love and Forgiveness*; and *Zen and the Art of Knitting: Exploring the Links Between Knitting, Spirituality, and Creativity*. Like the authors of these books, I have found more than I ever expected when I first picked up two needles and some yarn and began to knit.

And I have learned
the hard way that
there is no shortcut
to untangling a knot.

CIRCLES

Sanju Kattel Baral

1.

Each year, we are moving round and round—physically and psychologically. Except it's never a perfect circle. It's a spiral that either grows outward or collapses within itself.

2.

Something about circles seems sacred. The pupil of the lover's eyes, mother's bosom, full moon, flower in full bloom, rainbows. All things deeply felt are circular. Circles feel complete. If I were to ever picture a god, my God would probably look like a Circle.

3.

What's more important to a circle—the center or the circumference? Without a center, there would be no circumference. Without circumference, there would still be a point. But the point would no longer be a center.

4.

Euclid defines a point as 'that which has no Parts'. All things, as I know so far, have parts. What does it mean for something to exist without any parts? Does a point even exist? Doesn't a point look like a circle whose part (area) has been taken away?

5.

Samsara is often portrayed as Circular. If Samsaric journey was the circumference, would 'I' be the center? Without a center, there would be no circumference. Without circumference, there would still be a point. Without 'I' there would be no Samsara. Without Samsara, would 'I' be like a point that is no longer a center?

6.

To be in a woman's body is truly grounding. Every monthly cycle comes to remind you of the interconnectedness of your body to the body of the Earth and the Moon and the Universe.

7.

Form is emptiness. Emptiness is form. A perfect circle!

8.

Why is a Zen circle (Enso) incomplete? How can something be incomplete and still remain so beautiful and sacred?

9.

Hindu couples are formally wed after they circle the altar seven times. It is believed that they will be together for seven lifetimes. The ritual is quite strict—if they circle the altar six times, it doesn't work. It has to be seven. An interesting example of how the arbitrary becomes the real!

10.

Mathematicians say, 'the ratio of circumference of a circle to its diameter is always going to equal the irrational number π (Pi)!' Sadly, there won't be anyone to attest to this fact after eons and eons in future. When there is no one to affirm, will this still be an objective fact?

3636 Washington Street

Terri Nicholson

I climb the white stone steps to the front door and use my key to let myself in. My eyes are immediately drawn to the grand staircase at my right and the sun filtering through the Tiffany stained glass windows. To my left a young Anglo nun, head shaved and wearing Buddhist robes, sits in lotus position on a rough-hewn square bench. She is staring intently at a line of Chinese characters in a book propped up next to her Royal typewriter. Padded headphones hug her otherwise bare head, and she wears fingerless gloves, which allow her to continue typing in the unheated room.

At my entrance she looks up and smiles, revealing twin dimples, and switches off the reel-to-reel tape recorder at her other side. “Hi. How was school?” She pushes one earphone above her ear so she can hear me.

“Okay. Do you realize it’s colder in here than it is outside?” I rub my hands together for emphasis, discarding the idea of hanging up my jacket and zipping it up instead. “What are you working on?”

“*Shurangama Sutra*,” she says. Her eyes stray back to her work, and I take the hint.

“I’m going to put my things away,” I say, indicating my backpack. She nods and turns back to her task, switching the tape recorder back on and replacing the earpiece over her ear.

I entered the living-room-turned-worship-hall. A large gilded, many-armed statue of Guan Yin Bodhisattva enclosed in a glass case adorns the front of the room. A teardrop-shaped chandelier made of hundreds of crystals hangs in front of it. The light from the front windows illumines it, sending rainbows dancing on the walls.

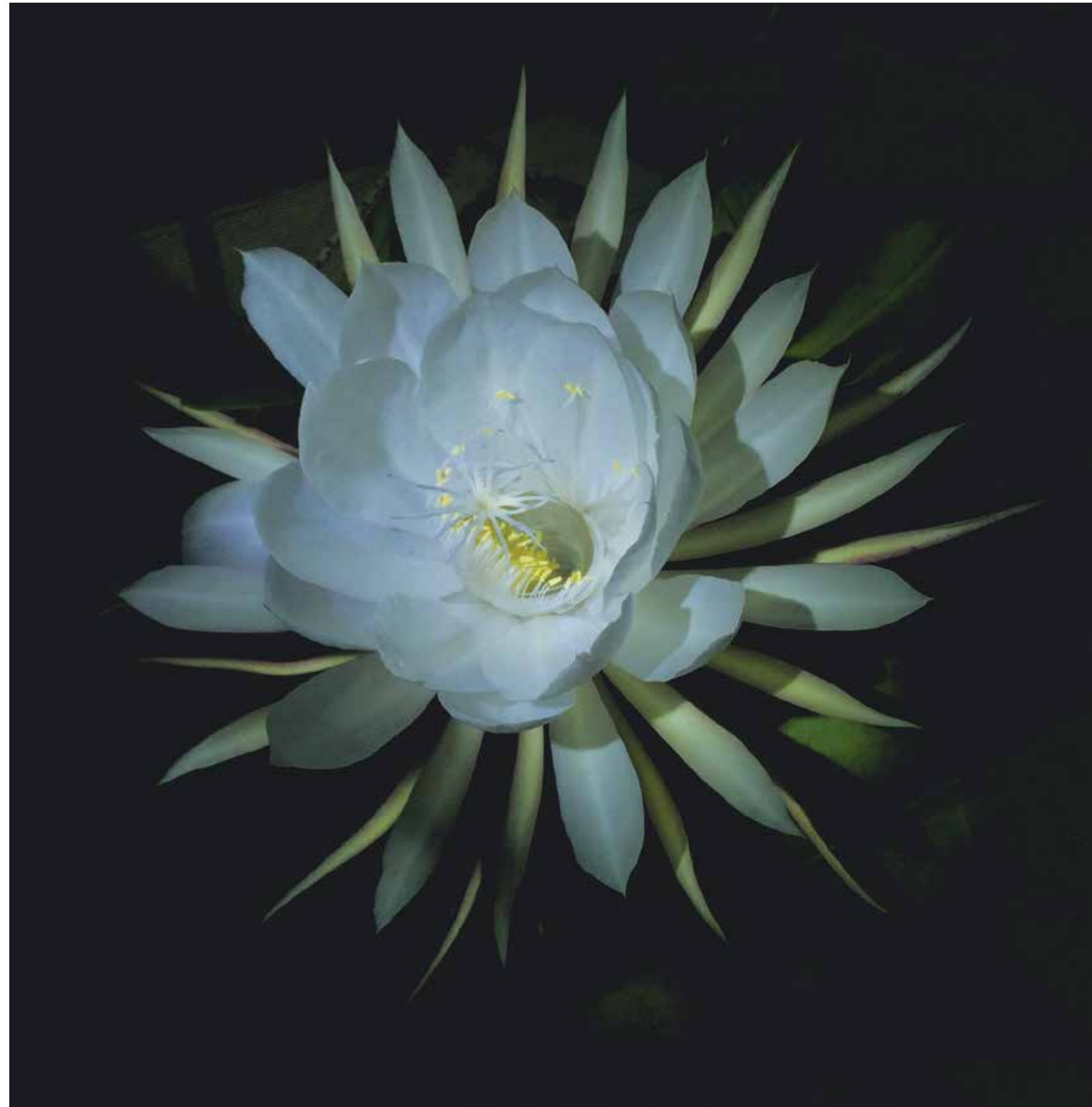
I set down my things next to a yellow cushion and bow three times, then pick them up again and head to the stairway that leads to what used to be the servants’ quarters in the basement, then change my mind and enter the kitchen to make a cup of tea. There will be no dinner, since the nuns eat only one meal at midday. I try my best to do

the same, but my stomach protests loudly that the tea, even with several teaspoons of honey, is no substitute for a meal. Sipping the hot, sweet liquid, I try to ignore my stomach’s rumbling and scan my surroundings. My eyes light upon a maple chopping block sitting on a small metal table. Each leg is set in a cup of water to discourage the resident cockroach population from climbing up. *Ahimsa*, non-harming, is a fundamental Buddhist teaching and we try our best to live in harmony with all living creatures. I do find it a bit disconcerting, however, when several of the cockroaches eye my toothpaste greedily, when I’m trying to brush my teeth.

Between the cold and my empty stomach, I decide my best option is to take a nap, especially since I’ve been up since morning ceremony at 4 a.m. So I retreat to my room in the basement. Since I’m also trying to master the art of sleeping in a sitting position, supposedly a great aid to one’s meditation, I climb onto the pillow I’ve arranged in one corner with a cinder block in front of me to discourage my legs from coming uncrossed while I sleep. I pull a sleeping bag around me for warmth and am asleep within seconds, awaking in semi-darkness to the sound of the Chinese gong which signals ten minutes until the evening service. Given that both my legs are asleep and only beginning to tingle, it looks like I’ll be late.

Once my legs are working again, I don my layperson’s robe and sash and take the stairs two at a time, pausing at the top to enjoy the last of the evening light on the Golden Gate Bridge, which I can see through the huge window at the back of the hall. A single band of wood, six inches wide swoops down from one corner, looping in the middle to form a ship’s porthole and then climbing to the far corner.

The gong sounds again, followed by three short notes from the higher pitched yen ching bell, and I turn to take my place at a bowing cushion behind the rows of nuns.



Photography: Alex Wang



Photography: Ernie Waugh

A Lost Note found unto thy Mysterious Way

Norbel Casas

Why art thou concealed from thy world?
'Tis not like the sublime mystery that propels every great adventurer to
awe-inspired striving.
Yet what is fathomable is akin to that radiant splendor of thy illumination off the
oceanic surface.

"How can it be that this mind can not reach Thee?"
Says the Oblivious one.
Though they are ever knowledgeable, it is like comparing crumbs of bread to those
exquisite
Colors of the sunset on Mount Horeb.

Could it be?... that only in *Silence*:
Doesn't one hear the melodies of thy heart, the whisper of thy soul and of *Thy* Soul?
Can the soul embrace the One, and not lose it?

Peace, inspiration, happiness, and contentment are what humankind deep down
longs for,
Yet the *Angelic* melodies of grandeur fail to reach a complacent heart who murmurs
little dreams,
And wonder why one isn't in that exquisite and wondrous presence of Thy
Heavenly countenance?

Daddy's Church

Bhikshuni Jin Rou

We had only one church in the county where I grew up. The Baptist had been preaching there one week and the Methodist the next week—with the same preacher. On the Methodist preaching day, Daddy drove us all in the wagon three miles to church. He never went inside to hear the preaching, but stayed outside and grazed the mules. I figured he was a heathen, because that's what the preachers called people who don't go to church. I didn't hold it against Daddy or against the preachers—it was all the same to me.

By and by, the Methodists wanted to build their own church and get their own preacher. My daddy said he'd build it himself, for the heathens. I thought that at last he would go to church and get saved, him being a heathen and all. Building was nothing to Daddy. He built our barn and our funny looking house from scrap lumber from the lumber mill where he worked in-between planting and harvesting the cotton crop. So it didn't surprise me when he built that church, and even when he did it for free. That's the way he was.

With the new church came a young, new preacher who was called by God to preach. The first visit he made was to see my daddy and pray for him for build-

ing the church. His hopes were up, thinking my daddy was a regular church-goer.

I could tell my daddy liked him right away. He said, "Preacher, come outside and I'll show you my church. I'll show you where God is. He's not in

that church I built." And they walked to the corn field, with the three of us kids following, quiet as mice. "He's right here in the corn field and in the sugar cane. He's in the pine trees, in the blackberry patch, and in the running creek. God don't belong to the church. God don't belong to no one. Now, heathens belong to the church, but not God. I can't read or write, but I don't need no Bible to tell me about God's creations. His creation is in my hands that work the cotton and pull the corn.

"Look here, Preacher," said Daddy and pulled an ear of corn and shucked it. "Nobody but God could make anything so clean and perfect. Now Preacher, if you come here before church on Sundays, we'll pray together in God's church—under the sky. And I'll save the biggest watermelons for you, and the ripest tomatoes."

This is the first and last time I ever heard my daddy say anything about God. He wasn't a

big talker, but a doer. And I was sure glad that he wasn't a heathen, but a church maker.



Daddy and Mama with my older sister, younger brother, and me in the sundress.

"Preacher, come outside and I'll show you my church. I'll show you where God is. He's not in that church I built."



Photography: Tehya Jackson

Postscript (July 14, 2021)

Martin Verhoeven

I gaze over at the green canoe pulled up on the shore, rub my shoulder, and remember. . . attend, attend. . .

Junior was already advanced in age when I met him over 25 years ago, my first time to Maine camp. Like his father and grandfather before him, Junior was a certified Maine guide, someone who grew up in this wilderness, lived here year-round, and knew the joys and hazards first-hand of these mountains, forests, lakes, and solitude. I knew nothing. As I jumped into the canoe and then promptly spilled right out into the cold lake, he laughed, pulled me out and showed me the proper way to slip into a canoe. I had my eye on a special piece of shoreline across the lake, the Cranberry Bog, a shallow, winding inlet frequented by moose. I started to slap and pull on my paddle, but could not move. Junior was holding my stern. I turned and looked at him. Then with an attention-grabbing look of stern directness he said,

“Son, out here nature is boss. If you listen to her and accord, you will be fine. If you insist on having your way, you will get badly hurt, or die. No two ways about it. Pay attention to everything, all of the time! Keep your eye on the sky, know where the wind’s coming from and going, if it slouches or gets its back up. Watch the waves, if they smooth or slap at your bow. Don’t let the sun leave you before you can spot home dock. Each step you take, each swing of an ax, crossing a stream, climbing a rock. . . think, consider, pause. Be slow and deliberate and patient and you will live long. Nature is a kind and powerful mother, but she doesn’t suffer fools. You understand?”

I nodded. He let go his grip on the back of the canoe, and off I paddled to meet the moose.

Paddling over was a breeze; light tail winds eased me along smooth waters like sliding on milk. I entered and then lost myself in the bog. Deep in, a moose breached from under the water, nearly spilling me out of my boat. Ten feet away, face to face, eye to eye. I could smell its breath, hear its

heartbeat. I was totally out of my league. He was boss; I was at his mercy. He squared off with me. I had no place to retreat. And then after about ten very long tension-filled seconds of sizing me up, he slowly turned and ambled toward shore. My heart was racing, sweat beading on my forehead, hands shaking. Maybe it was the shock of the encounter, but I suddenly noticed the sun was starting to sink below the tree line, the wind was picking up, I was getting chilled, and I was still sewn into a labyrinthine of twisting water ways, far from home.

By the time I emerged from the bog, the sun was just a wisp of light on the western horizon. The stars were lighting up. The winds had shifted dramatically and were now pummeling me crossways. The milky smooth waves of my outbound journey were now whitecapping and slapping my bow,

throwing up spray in my face. I could still see the faint light of camp in the far distance, so I set course for it. Problem was, I could not alternate right-left stroking because the cross wind was too strong, so I had to paddle like hell just on starboard, again and

again, hard pull it just to stay on a straight tack. This was no longer a leisure jaunt, but a fight for survival. If I did not make shore or if I spilled over, I would drown or die of hypothermia. I was above ninety feet of cold, dark water, on a lake ten miles long. And of course, I hadn’t tossed in a life preserver in my eagerness to go moose hunting. Careless! NOW I understood what Junior meant.

I was exhausted, in adrenaline burnout, and puny by the time I reached the other shore. Turns out the light I was honing in on was Junior standing on the dock with a lantern in hand. He pulled me alongside, reached his weathered, strong hand down to lift me out, and told me to go in by the fire, have a hot drink and call it a night. No words of mockery, no scolding or “I told you so . . .” He knew I knew; and I knew he knew.

I woke in the morning, spent, humbled and aching sore. I had torn out my left shoulder rotor cuff, but I was alive. Lesson learned: attend, attend!

I had my eye on a special piece of shoreline across the lake, the Cranberry Bog, a shallow, winding inlet frequented by moose.



Clockwise from top: Moose, Bald Eagle, Common Mergansers, Marten

Photography: Martin Verhoeven



Photography: Jiaying Chen

The Echo of the Forest

Norbel Casas

Not a single word is said.
Yet the forest speaks to me.
Hundreds of branches
Sway to and fro.
Wait. Could it be?
The music of Earth,
Surrounded by green fields
And redwood trees.
A timeless feeling
Reverberates, as if...
The scenery, words
cannot accurately describe it.
The best attempt is
—Nature's Beauty

Listening to the Nature

I'm sitting on the green glimmering grass.
I use a stump as my table waiting for companions to arrive.
The clouds sway telling their own stories with their various
shapes as fluffy clouds do.
It's getting late and still no sign.
I fall asleep as a herd of deer
from a distance looks at me curiously like a child in sus-
pense at a magician's show.

I fall asleep... then I hit my head on the stump.
Ouch! That hurts!!
As I rub my head vigorously
And I see I'm not alone.
I have guests!
A Dharma Master, A Daoist Immortal, and a Confucianist
(in his proper attire).

Wow! What a beautiful face!

Man, I wish I had that face!

OMG! Where is my face!!!!

In the shurangama Sutra, the Buddha established that ignorance has no basis by giving a parable of a mad man ...


I HAVE NO HEAD OR FACE! AHHHH!!

? ?

? ?

Basically, something moved because we thought we needed understanding. Yet, the wonderful enlightenment is whole and complete. It lacks nothing.

Wow, Jacked Jack, that was very insightful! Let me write that down. By the way, have you seen my pencil?



The luminous understanding of wonderful Enlightenment is perfect. How could there be basis for any delusions?

We are all subjected to this ~ ~
Actually try to practice what you learn

by Gavin Ding



Photography: Huali Yuan



In the Heart of Guan-yin Bodhisattva

Daniel Nguyen

Handfuls of light break through the five-coloured glass in this heavenly terrace,
Jade stems and ivory petals adorn the forty-two hands,
Brahma's sounds linger through these wooden halls,
Who is it that witnesses this mountain of treasures?

Aligning the breath to touch Vairocana's seven points,
Quick, pick up the vajra-sword, do away with the monkey mind!
The white-whisk transforms the myriad obstacles into bodhi,
Movement and stillness untie in the light of Naga samadhi.

Great compassion and great joy, we unite with the vows of Guan-yin.
The white lotus blossoms carrying aloft a cloud of merit and blessings,
Gently showering the Rose-apple continent.
This auspicious boon pervades the Dharma Realm.

From Resistance to Release: an Awareness-Based Healing Method

Jianqiu Wu

“**T**heir stomachs are enormous, but their throats are as thin as needles...Food will burn them and water will hurt them.” These are very graphic descriptions of hungry ghosts from the Buddhist tradition. According to this tradition, hungry ghosts suffer from starvation for their entire lives because they can hardly find any food or water to satisfy themselves. Even if they do, these foods and water will be indigestible and harmful to them.

“This is too mystical, too out-there! Where can we see actual examples like that in our lives as humans?” one may ask. But actually it is not as far from human experience as one might think: I myself went through a similar experience this past summer!

It started a few years ago, when I slowly began to notice that if I meditated after a big, satisfying meal, my stomach would feel very uncomfortable. So in order to meditate better, I had to be very vigilant of how much I ate. Eating in moderation like this was fine in the beginning, but soon it went towards the other extreme: I ate less and less because even if I ate in moderation, my stomach continued to feel uncomfortable. My body was becoming increasingly irritated by food and drink. As a result of this I kept losing weight until my parents became very concerned about how much I ate and how skinny I looked. I looked more and more like a hungry ghost even though I lived in affluent America. Food is abundant, but my capacity to ingest it is minimal.

This trend continued to aggravate me until this past summer when this resistance to food or drink completely broke out and my body reacted

very severely to even very little amounts of food or drink. A glass of water wounded me internally for an entire evening and blood came out of my nose that night. Even a little bit of food would cause nausea or a burning sensation for a long time. I was going through what the hungry ghosts go through, but in a human body!

In the past, during times of crisis like this I had always turned to Guanyin Bodhisattva for help. This time was no exception. I recited Guanyin all day long. I also bowed to Guanyin’s image, but this time I felt so weak that my ability to bow was extremely limited. I asked and I asked...his responses also came to me multiple times during moments of doubt and despair. His instructions were always to look within myself and find the solution in my recitation. It was the right direction: every time I sat down to recite I felt relief from the mixed feeling of simultaneous hunger and bloatedness of stomach. However after I finished reciting and stood up, those feelings would come back. I was thrown into doubt: is this only a temporary relief or a permanent solution?

I kept looking for a solution that would permanently help me out of this digestion crisis. I kept reciting and asking Guanyin everyday for help. I sought consultation from a Chinese doctor as well as our nurse practitioner. They kindly offered me medicines from Chinese medicine and Western medicine, respectively. They were based on different ideologies and both seemed to help with my symptoms to a certain degree. But neither was able to completely cure my illness.

Is there an ultimate cure for this? How can I help myself? Do I have to understand all the

different types of qi in Chinese medicine or the various chemical reactions in Western medicine to find a solution? What role can my spiritual practice play in healing processes in general?

These questions were followed by many worries and fears. I even wondered whether I would be able to survive this, given that even drinking a little bit of water would cause so much harm in my digestive system.

However, amidst all the uncertainty and fear, I was still able to maintain the inner space of faith, of confidence that Guanyin is able to help me in any difficult situation. The *Lotus Sutra* says, “The power of Guanyin’s wondrous wisdom can rescue the world from suffering.” I believe this rescue is not limited to temporary reliefs.

Slowly but surely, responses from Guanyin trickled in until the answer to my questions finally

arose one day when I sat down to begin my evening recitation. This answer did not come in the form of images or sounds. It arose within me in the form of an inner realization. I just knew what was the right thing to do: totally accept these feelings. Do not try to avoid these feelings. Instead I could welcome these feelings and totally experience them for what they are. Be patient with them.

After I had this realization I also realized what was unskillful in my approach to this illness

before: I objectified this illness as a hostile entity and tried to use my spiritual practice to combat against it and dispel it from my system, just like soldiers driving enemies out of their country by force. This idea that people could use meditation as a way to drive out undesirable energies and toxins came from the Chinese martial arts novels and other fantasy novels I had read before. They

I was thrown into doubt: is this only a temporary relief or a permanent solution?



had inspired my interest in spiritual practice because it conveyed the message that our mind has the potential to generate some kind of spiritual energy called qi through meditation which then can be used in an infinite number of ways, including the healing of oneself and others. This idea of generating qi through meditation and using it for self-healing carried me a long way in my spiritual journey. But this time, in order to carry out the healing process to its completion, another conceptual breakthrough was needed: a breakthrough that allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the nature of qi and why it is able to cure illnesses.

The crux of the problem is reification: **our mind has a tendency to construct imaginary entities out of consistent and enduring patterns of experience, which in turn further solidifies and perpetuates these patterns.** In my case, the “illness” (as I’m typing this word, I can see how our language plays an important role in reinforcing this tendency) presents consistent experiences of unpleasant bodily feelings. So far this is nothing more than a pattern: a pattern of unpleasantness that lasts for some time. However, if my mind makes a thing called “illness” out of these patterns, resistance arises, as well as anxieties, worries and an infinite array of proliferations. All of these produce the human experience of “suffering.” If I am somehow able to not follow these proliferations and simply experience these unpleasant feelings the way they are, then they actually become interesting, rather than afflicting. In other words, they do not lead to suffering unless I give them permission to do so through taking them to be something more than they actually are: a pattern of experience. **Through persistent practice of mindfulness we become more and more able to become aware of and disrupt this tendency to take patterns of experience to be more than they actually are.** This way these patterns gradually subside and lose power over us. The effect is felt as a sense of freedom, well-being, greater vitality and higher energy. Because

of these effects, some spiritual traditions call this process “cultivating the qi.” Some other traditions that emphasize insight and wisdom recognize that although these effects exist, they are nothing but consequences of maturing wisdom. They see the conception of qi as an expedient means to summarize these effects. At a certain stage, this concept can become an impediment to one’s spiritual progress if one reifies qi into an actual entity. For this reason, they may say that qi actually does not exist!

After this realization my effort to deal with this illness became much easier. The mental burden has been relieved by realizing that this “illness” is nothing more than the unpleasant feelings that were presented to my awareness. I

was able to become more patient with them and experience them for what they are. The anxiety and desire to push them away subsided significantly. All these attitude changes led to the eventual release of

the energies that contributed to the illness. Now I am feeling much better than in the summer. I am able to eat much more and have gained a lot of weight as a result.

Besides this obvious outcome of overcoming my illness, the consequences of this realization are much more far-reaching. I can use it for any unpleasant feelings that arise, experience them the way they are and untie whatever ties there are in my physical-mental apparatus. This is why I feel like sharing this experience and insight with others. However, the success of this method will depend on the depth of one’s mindfulness. It is not meant to totally replace Western medicine or Chinese medicine. If the illness is too severe and the unpleasant feelings too overwhelming, the mind might not have enough capacity to use this method. In this case, one should still rely on conventional medication or whatever therapy that is available to bring the intensity of the illness down to a manageable level before one can use this method. Thus this method is most suitable for chronic illnesses that are long-lasting but not too intense.

dependent origination

sjon ljós

I became aware of the cycle at Feeling/Craving: **Craving** (8) was the most apparent: the craving to escape my body, my life. I would escape into video games, or experience a loss of consciousness (dissociation), or experience an obsession with refraining from eating. I experienced the escapism of suicidal ideation. I chain-smoked like a chimney; sometimes, I would sit in my car rolling one cigarette/spliff after another for *hours*. This was a form of **Clinging** (9), attempting to extend my stay in the realm of indulgence. I would extend the number of hours I hadn’t eaten; I would extend the number of games of Overwatch I would play. In escaping my own experience of life, I became unknown to myself. As my choices narrowed, so did I. I simply *became* fear. This was a form of **Becoming** (10). Thus was planted the seed, the **Birth** (11) of my new reality: of my imprisonment by the cause of my own narrow mind. Such a seed bore the fruit of **Death** (12) to my conception of freedom. So by my own hands I witnessed the death of my freedom, of my ease.

Knowing I was not free, I was not at ease, quickly I slid into the **Ignorance** (1) of selfhood. Knowing I was not free meant I knew that ‘I was’. And thus sprouted the notion of having selfhood or being self. Naturally, the mind constructs **Volitional Formations** (2). So it came to be that my mind determined that having selfhood meant *something*—something like freedom, or ease. Yet the memory of my pain, my trauma, reminded me that I did not have ease, that I did not have freedom. This **Consciousness** (3) of my pain affected the way I moved through the world: carrying pain-consciousness of no-freedom, I interacted with the world from a place of acute terror and helplessness. My **Mind-and-Body** (4) contorted around terror. My mind conceived all strangers as threats, and my body learned to hold itself as if it were always ready to take a blow. This kind of mind-body conditioning extended through the **Six Sense Bases** (5): like prey, I could hear extremely

far away; in this body of terror, I found myself often mute; my eyes were constantly scanning environments and gestures in search of threat; if a person were to touch me on the shoulder I would feel as though ice water were running down my spine. Each time these senses made **Contact** (6) with the world, they encountered an unknowable, a variable—in other words, a threat. This contact, viewed as a threat, would trigger an acute **Feeling** (7) of fear and utter terror. Uncomfortable with fear, for it is difficult to actually live in a state of extended fear, I would quickly experience **Craving** (8) for an escape. So the cycle continues.

How does one get out of such a cycle? Perhaps we can unwind backwards.

Should we start again at Craving?

Within the body there is health. This health for me looks like moving my body, interacting with nature, and early mornings. I began to take walks through a reservoir in the morning before work. When I was walking, my mind was at ease. It could wander and it was not stuck on my addictions or cravings. So I lessened the need for my **Cravings** (8) not directly, but rather by expanding the amount of time and dedication I spent on cultivating my innate health. Over time, I created choice for myself (choice being another word for freedom): I would choose to walk through nature rather than chain-smoking in my car. I would choose to go to bed early so I could walk in the morning rather than stay up late playing video games. Cultivated by the ritual of walking through nature in the mornings, a **Feeling** (7) of temporary peace began to become familiar to me. Even when I was faced with uncomfortable feelings, and continued to feed my addictions, I was able to continue to hold this peaceful feeling astride my habits. This gave my habits a soft place to land, and so did not lead to clinging.

Thus temporarily feeling at peace, even for a moment, allowed me to stay in **Contact** (6) with the chaotic wild of my feeling. Instead of moving from

feeling to escapism, I would backtrack from feeling to contact. When encountering a feeling, I would sit or go for a walk. *What does this feeling feel like?* So contact solidified my self in myself. I could use my **Six Sense Bases** (5) as touchstones for relating to my feeling. *What are my senses doing? What is my mind doing?* I became curious with myself: what is it that is at the root of my health? What are these layers of pain that have shielded me from my innate wisdom? Thus, from a place of **Mind-and-Body** (4), I began to observe myself as if I were not my emotion, my pain, but rather a witness to it. Witnessing myself, **Consciousness** (3) arose: *what do I want to do? How do I approach this feeling, this pain?* I began to ask myself, Who am I beneath my pain?

When asking, Who am I beneath my pain?, I had to question the rationalizations and reasonings that I had constructed to support my habits, addictions, and cravings. I had to confront my **Volitional Formations** (2). To point at my rationaliza-

When asking, Who am I beneath my pain?, I had to question the rationalizations and reasonings that I had constructed to support my habits, addictions, and cravings.

tions meant to understand them as separate from myself. What is beneath these rationalizations? And therein lies the knot, the empty mind of **Ignorance** (1), the origin of my self: it's love. It was all a twisted scheme of trying to become lovable.

With this empty mind, loosening the knot of self-worth, I experience the **Death** (12) of my identification with my pain. Who was I before I was afraid? Something new emerges from such an inquiry: the **Birth** (11) of a new concept of self divorced from identity-seeking. Who is this? Then the question arises, Who do I want to become? How do I want to retrain my mind and body away from its conditioned responses to pain and craving? In **Becoming** (10), I become aware that **Clinging** (9) to my understanding of self is how I caused myself pain in the first place. So I must become myself in every moment, and let go of myself in every moment. Forgetting the self, letting it go, is like walking through nature in the early morning. I am no longer my **Feeling** (7).

361 Degrees

Justin Lee

Dawn disappears into dusk,
and the sun fades to moon.
Flow fades to stagnation,
and soil into bloom.

Love fades into seasons,
And newborn into tomb.
Nostalgia fades to nothing,
And isolation into solitude.

Laughter fades to theatricality,
And tyranny into goodness.
Truth becomes hypocrisy,
And seen becomes unseen.

Amid all these, I



Sistine Dharma Chapel
Composition by Blake Plante and Sehen Gamhewa
Photography by Stan Shoptaugh

PTSD?
Fight!
1 up
0 down
Y fight!
E up
A down
R fight!
S
.
.
up
.
down
.
fight!
.
up.....
...freedom?
inhale
<<SMACK>>

Depression, anxiety?
Fight!
2 up
Y down
E fight!
A up..
R down.....
S *sigh.....*

.....Love?
Love. e
up
down s
love.
.
.
peace. a
r e l e

New Cycle
by Rachel Croft

repeat.





Cultivating Nothingness

Tehya Jackson

Cultivating nothing is immeasurably more difficult than cultivating anything. Every moment of my life is an act of endless shifting. However, the cultivation of nothing is a practice that has been with me since birth. The moments where I decided directly or indirectly to cultivate nothingness have had a huge impact on my life. In what little time I have spent at Dharma Realm Buddhist University, I have learned about this process, and what nothingness means. Nothingness is the absence of everything, while simultaneously encompassing it. To cultivate this, you must quiet the mind and open it to whatever may pass. Truthfully, I feel how late in life I am coming to this realization, and my limited understanding of it seems infantile in comparison to the knowledge and experiences of my peers here. So maybe that's where I should start, infancy.

My first time quieting the mind was probably at birth, in the womb. What exactly goes on

in an infant's brain? Surrounded by darkness, the infant gradually develops thoughts and sensations, awareness, and desire. Then the mother goes through labor and the baby is born: crying, or desiring in one form or another. I have been repeating this process daily since I was born. When I wake up, I am an empty slate, the version of me yesterday I can never truly replicate. For a less than a split second, I am enveloped in a state of nirvana, and in that same split second I am filled with thoughts, biases, attachments, and memories, "Me." Arguably this happens every second. Each second I spend in thought, I fall further from the self I was only a minute ago. The cultivation of nothingness is the origin and end to all things, or at least it has acted this way for me thus far.

But this is not the sole way *nothing* has manifested in my life. One of my first languages was silence, silence, as in the absence of speech, the absence of body language, the absence of

listening, the absence of mere presence. Growing up, I was often met with silence. Silence from adults, silence from God, silence at school, and silence from myself. The silence from myself was twofold: my subconscious seldom spoke to me, and I hardly spoke at all. Silence, much like nothingness, is difficult to understand. It has taken me years—nearly seventeen years—to understand it as well as I do now. And even that understanding is shallow.

Silence, for me as a child, was inseparable from violence. It was better understood as the absence of affection. From second grade to my freshman year, I held a strong disdain for silence because of what it represented in my then present situation. Even now I sometimes struggle with changing my perspective around it—in part due to how vividly physical and emotional of an experience it is for me. I began changing my perspective after freshman year. I started opening up, spending time with more people, and reflecting on my thoughts. Silence began to transform into a large and wonderful language. Silence became patience.

It became understanding. It became love and forgiveness. Depending on who spoke it, silence could be acceptance too. The past four years of my life, I have gained a deep appreciation for silence and its unique method of conveying messages. English, I find, falls short when it comes to connection and communicating. This is certainly due in part to my lack of trying, but regardless of the fact, silence as a language still holds a lot of power. In silence we can listen to what wants to be said. We can listen to life and nature all around us; it is both overwhelming and strikingly clear.

I truly knew the power of this language on the day of my senior speech, when I spontaneously felt there was more to be said before I graduated. I quickly added a moment of silence at the end of my speech because I couldn't find the words to express what I was trying to say, the emotions I was experiencing. When this part of my speech came, my family and I cried together. The power of whatever I was trying to say in the room that day I do not have the vocabulary to describe. It washed over my heart and

mind like the water pulling rocks from the sand as they hold desperately to their place. I cried tears from sadness, tears from happiness, and tears from nothing which somehow expressed everything in a way I never could've imagined.

Another way I began cultivating nothingness was through meditation, though the end goal I have yet to accomplish in its entirety. I first look around at my surroundings. What do I see? What do I hear? What do I smell? What do I feel? What does it mean to experience *here*? Next, I close my eyes and try to block out light if there is any. I do this by imagining a paintbrush going over a wall in my mind, painting it black or white, until the light is out of mind. Then I (mentally) get rid of the paintbrush and try to tune into my ears. I spend time with each sound, sounds that are prominent and sounds that I often unintentionally block out. Where is this sound coming from? I visualize everything I can independently, and then all together. Then I begin to let go of it all, repeating the same process in which I used to block out the light. My goal is to concentrate so deeply that everything else disappears, my mind becomes empty. Even the emptiness of my mind ceases to exist. Then too, does my intentional effort. The ultimate goal, as I see it, is to reach a state of effortless quietness and nothingness. When I am able to achieve this goal, I imagine that state will be nirvana.

The last method I'll talk about is intention. Most of the time when we picture setting intentions, what we think of are virtues we wish to embody. I have come to realize there is more to this process. Recently, I began choosing vices I wish to abstain from; fear, embarrassment, desire. When we say we wish to embody

something we are also saying we wish to cast out its opposite. Looking deeper, the opposite itself, in some aspect of its definition, is built on the absence of said virtuous characteristics. This goes both ways. This practice of setting intentions is difficult not only in the sense that I am striving to abstain from thoughts or actions that lead to affliction, but also because I must learn to let go of everything. To truly cultivate nothingness in an effective way I must also let go of the so-called good characteristics I have been cultivating. My actions (and thus non-actions) have an infinite number of outcomes both beneficial and harmful to others regardless of their

indented or direct nature.

There is no way to account for all outcomes from the actions I choose to do and to not do. When I limit goodness or badness by explicitly defining it, I close my eyes to

other possibilities and remain in a cycle of close-mindedness. This is why it's essential to also let go of what is good.

The concept of nothingness is an incredibly difficult thing to define—the existence itself resists definition. This is why the process in which you cultivate something is immensely easier than cultivating nothing. Which is to let go of everything, while rejecting the idea of being separate from that same everything. To both encompass everything and be encompassed by such. A process so natural yet ungraspable. I have much to learn and unlearn about these moments that have changed my life. How can I further this cultivation as I progress in my understanding? How can I put these lessons into practice? This cultivation has dramatically changed my perspective of the world as I mature and I'm sure will continue to do so in the future.

The concept of nothingness is an incredibly difficult thing to define — the existence itself resists definition.



Lotus Gathering by Yanik Davison

Interview with Tehya Jackson (BA'25)

Tehya Jackson, 18-year-old, is a new BA student this year. Before coming to DRBU, they saw themselves in a role as an activist for the Native American and Black communities. What do they think of this new community which seems so different from where they came from? How are they doing a month after they arrived? This interview was done on a warm Saturday evening in the backyard of the DRBU C-Dorm on CTTB campus.

Q: How do you feel at this moment?

Like a creek, still flowing, but very subtle. I had a question that occupied my mind lately, but now I don't remember what the question was. :)

Q: What brought you to DRBU?

My yearning for a different type of education. I did very well in middle school and high school, but struggled a lot in the college I went to for two years. I found DRBU very different when I read the website. During the interview, I felt a sense of caring and support. But I did worry that what if this community is too small for me to fit in. (laugh)

Q: Do you think you've made the right decision to come to DRBU?

Yes, for sure! I missed my family initially, but soon I felt natural. I feel home here because of the close relationships between community and students and academics. I think these close relationships should be the foundation of education because you are raising the future. You are helping them understand. You help them cultivate. That's a very personal thing. Everyone learns differently; everyone grows differently. That's why it's so essential to have these close relationships.

Q: What part of the DRBU's education fosters those close relationships?

Shared inquiry between students and how faculties are open to students' ideas. I was curious



Self portrait by Tehya Jackson

about the shared inquiry where people can have different perspectives. In other schools, there may be a two hour long lecture and hardly anyone asks questions. Some people don't even know what questions to ask because they don't understand what has been said. DRBU is not lecture-based. The faculties may not have the answer but take the time to consult someone who might have the answer, or read something and then get back to you. They will always support you when you need advice or something. In most of our classes, we do check-ins and meditation.

Q: How do you usually feel when you wake up in the morning?

It depends on when I wake up. If I wake up for the morning ceremony at 4, I usually feel a

bit tired, and also anxiety. *Did I wake up early enough? Will I make it on time? What kind of experience will I have at the morning ceremony?* Sometimes if I wake up later, around 6 or 7, I may feel, *I should've got up earlier so I can do some type of practice.* Sometimes, I feel, *well, I am glad I woke up. I slept in because I also need to listen to my body.* That's also essential in cultivation. Listening to our body. That's how I feel when I initially wake up. But eventually, I wonder what will happen today. It's also not setting expectations.

I never thought I shouldn't set any expectations, but since I came here, it's been so much easier to let go of them. And it makes my life so much easier not having expectations for most things. When I do find myself setting expectations, it doesn't turn out well. I need to just step back and say, okay, I need to let go of this expectation. And I need to start thinking about how I can solve this problem because it didn't meet my expectations. I need to change my perception.

Q: How about at night when you look back at the day, how do you feel?

On a weekday, I feel good; I feel I've learned a lot. And I feel excited for what's gonna happen next week when we have those same classes.

I wanted to help raise youth so that they didn't have to go through the struggle that I've seen so many of the present and past generations have to go through.

Or I feel very grateful, the sense of wholeness in myself. Because maybe the meditation I did was really good, or even when I'm in the kitchen washing dishes, that's also very meditative for me. I'm able to go into this trance and I feel very peaceful. While in the past, I hated doing dishes. But now I really enjoy doing dishes! (laugh)

Some days, there will be instances where maybe I'm not able to get through to people, and I'm just thinking about, why doesn't anyone

understand what I'm saying? Or why am I not able to communicate this message with this person? It's the cycle of anger. Sometimes I go to sleep like that. But then in the morning, I try to let go of that. It doesn't always happen. Sometimes it will pop up in the middle of the day. It's just a practice trying to let go of them.

Q: Are there any challenges so far?

Sometimes in shared inquiry. I'm getting more used to it now. But like the first week, when I was still adjusting. What if I don't have anything good to say in shared inquiry? And then going into shared inquiry: What I'm thinking might be totally different from what everyone else was thinking. Maybe what everyone else was thinking seems much more unified than what I was thinking. Am I right? Are they wrong? Or is there some kind of middle ground? And even speaking up can sometimes be a challenge. But it's definitely getting much easier, especially because my classmates, during lunch or whenever, would come up to me and say, "Hey! I really liked what you said. I really wish you would speak more because I really enjoy hearing what you have to say. And it really changes the flow of the conversation and how I'm thinking about it." I think that's very encouraging.

Q: When you decided to come to DRBU, did you see DRBU as a stepping stone or were you planning to completely dive into the unknown?

Honestly, I'm not sure. Before coming here, I was looking through all the videos [on the website], and I saw everyone saying, this is the place if you want to change yourself. This place is going to change you, no matter where you are at. I was like, "Hmm, I wonder where that's gonna take me because it's so hard to view myself in my present state." That makes it so much harder to view myself in a changed state. If that makes sense.

Q: Before you found out about DRBU, did you have any dreams?

Before DRBU, I actually wanted to go to art school and I wanted to become an illustrator, probably for children's books. Or I wanted to be

an expressive art therapist. Helping other people is my passion. Whether it's through books or through therapy. And especially I was leaning towards expressive art therapy because mental health is so lacking in the indigenous community, and in the community of color in general. And I wanted to be able to give back to my tribe, but also the tribes that have raised me, helped me, and I wanted to help raise youth so that they didn't have to go through the struggle that I've seen so many of the present and past generations have to go through. I want to make life a bit easier for them. I want to let them achieve happiness, less painful than what I and so many others have to go through, things that aren't necessary to...hmm...how should I put this? They are not necessary in your process of learning and growing as a person. If that makes sense.

Q: Do you think DRBU can help you go toward that direction or are you completely open now? Do you still hold that vision?

Yeah, I think it's not the main focus of my life as much as before coming to DRBU. I was stuck in the state, "That's what I have to do in my life. I have to become a better person so I can make things easier for people." But I was neglecting myself. And so I came to DRBU, hoping that I would learn to communicate with myself and take care of myself better here. So that I can also do that for other people. Because I've come to learn that, unless I start taking care of myself, I can't take care of other people, not in the most efficient way. So since I came to DRBU, while in my everyday life, I'm still thinking about other people or things that I can do to help. I let go, in some elements, the bigger picture, which seems to stress me out outside of DRBU. And now I'm focusing on myself.

Q: Is there anything in your heart that you want to express but nobody has ever asked you?

Not at the moment. Because if I feel there is a burning question, especially in this environment, I will go ask someone, or talk to someone about it. So for most things that came up, I have been

able to settle. So I don't have any burning questions as of now.

Q: Can you give me an example when you feel being cared for in this community?

I think the example that comes to mind first is my Classical Chinese Teacher, Yihuan. She is just really caring. And she is always asking, "How are you doing? Is there anything I can help you with? Did you drink lots of water?" She is also my Buddhist classics teacher. When I am going through something, I think she is someone I feel most comfortable talking with. Because I think

Start to unlearn everything that we've learned and start to stop limiting everything in our lives and really open up our minds.

she just understands me. So it's very easy to be open with her. And she is very insightful. When she doesn't have the answer, she talks to someone who does and makes sure she always gets back to me.

Q: How about your cohort? You have a very tiny cohort. :)

[Editor note: there are two people in Tehya's BA cohort]

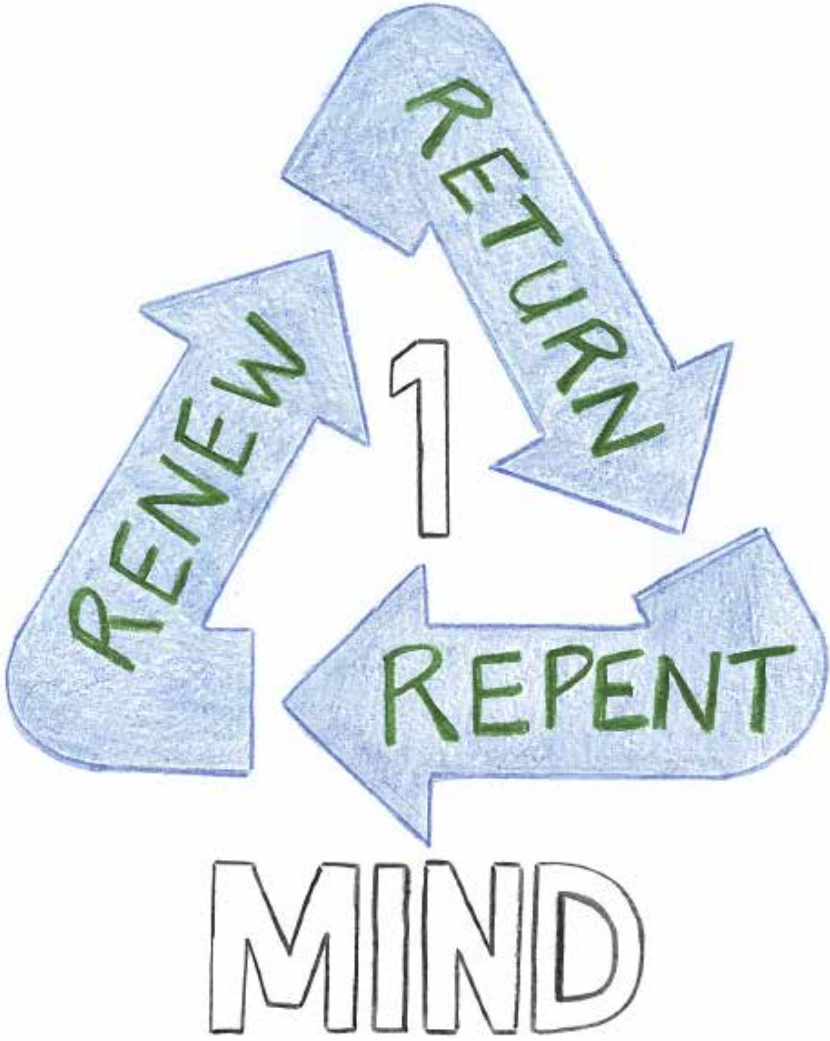
(laugh) Yeah, Sehen. He is very caring in a different way. Something that I'm growing to understand. When we did our first paper in Rhetoric and Writing, I was very curious as to what he thought of my paper. I felt the sense of care when he was giving me feedback because it was like he was listening to what I was saying, and he was resonating with what I was saying. I think that was a very wholesome feeling. And then you know, whenever he sees me, he asks, "How are you doing?" I am a very forgetful person. I forget things all the time. (laugh) So I email him or text him, "Huh...what are we supposed to do for class?" He'll tell me, "Oh, we are supposed to do this and this." I say, "Thank you, and sorry I ask

these questions." He says, "No, no. We are in the same cohort. It's okay to ask these questions."

Q: Did you have any spiritual practice before coming across Buddhism?

No. My first spiritual practice is going to the morning ceremony and evening ceremony at DRBU—more formal practice, I guess. Actually, I was just writing this paper about the cultivation of nothingness, which is something we learned

a lot about in the first week here. We are still learning about it. Basically, learning to let go. Start to unlearn everything that we've learned and start to stop limiting everything in our lives and really open up our minds. And that, I think, is something that, not just me, but everyone has been doing since birth. When you are a baby, what does a baby think in a womb? What does a baby perceive? At one point, I am sure there is nothing that a baby perceives, which is, you know, the beginning.



Artwork: Justin Howe

How do we get home

When the wind blows, sky darkens, and rain falls,
How do we get home?

How do we sustain the energy
How do we sustain the love
How do we not get lost in this frenzy world
How do we be at peace

How do we see the beauty in big and small
How do we be the change we want to see

How do we smile when the sun rises
How do we smile when the evening joins

Can we just close our eyes and breathe in
Can we just open our eyes and shine

Can we just care for each other with a gentle
presence
Can we just listen with a boundless heart

Cycle/ Mirror Images

The lighter we are,
the deeper we can go.
Floating with clarity,
diving with equanimity.

The lower we put our ego,
the higher we let our spirit fly.
Bowing with humbleness,
standing up into a grand world.

All mirror images.
All divine messengers.

It's all just a cycle you know.

We met,
then we say goodbye.
We left home to come here,
then we return back to where it all started.

feb 3 2022

maybe the wonder of poetry
is that it opens a space for
our hearts to experience

not to analyze, but to listen and feel

what is there is beyond words

maybe we feel different things
maybe we feel the same

it is okay and
you do not have to explain

just be you my friend
we can take a walk in the mountains
we can go for a surf in the ocean
we can lie down under the sun and do nothing
and maybe we can also find ourselves

now I realize
not only are rows of written words poetry
but also that high five you gave when I was down
that silence you gave when I was off
that mistake I made
and that pot of coffee we shared

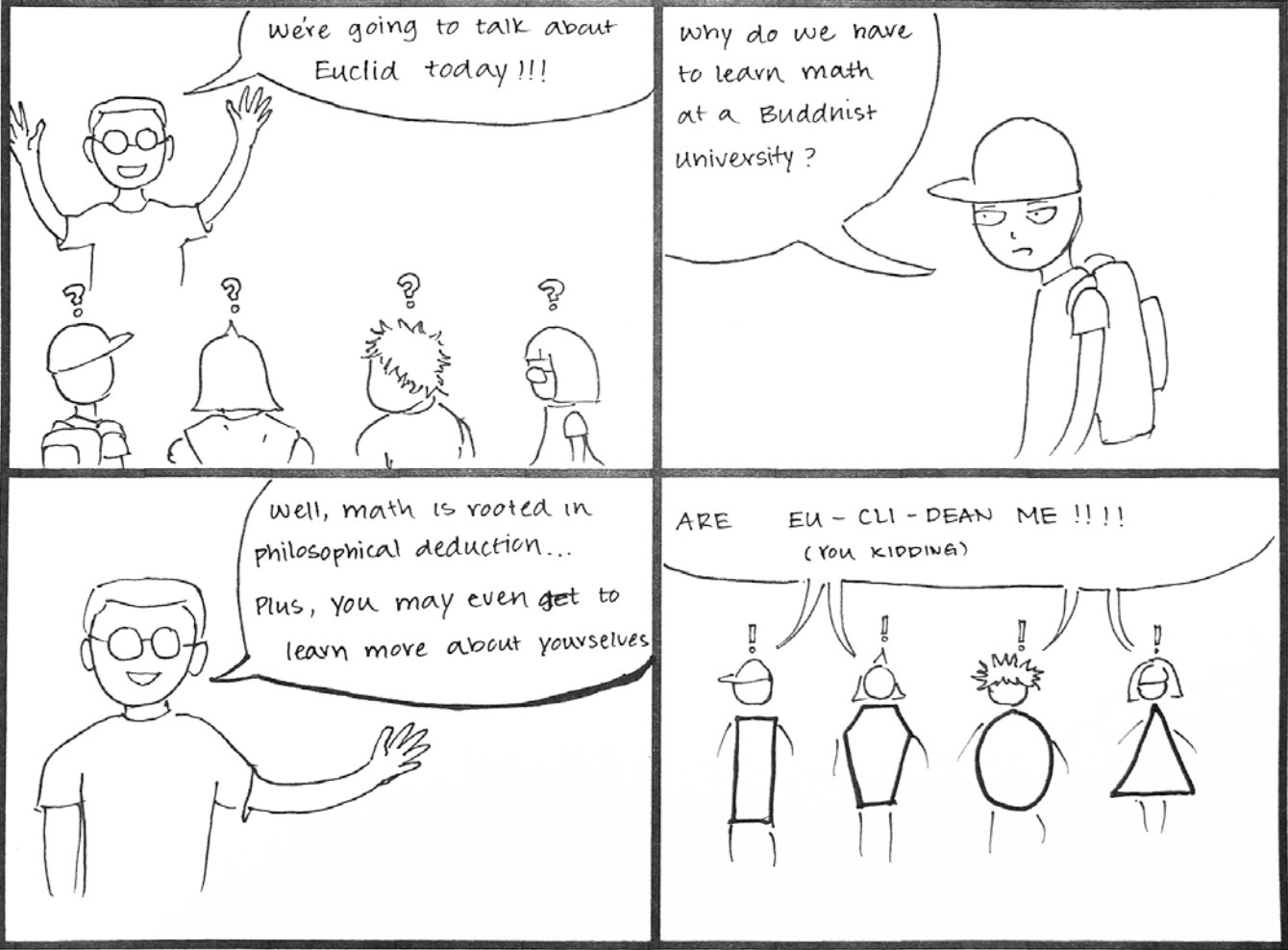
—Ziqian Feng



Photography: Quinn Anderson

BackPack Bob's
DRBU Adventure!

Week 3:
Math - Euclid $\Delta\Delta\Delta$



*Pun by Tomas Fletcher (BA 2022)

by Gavin Ding



Photography: Rachel Blythe



Photography: Bhikshuni Jin Xiang

On the Flavors of Doubt

James Nguyen

As part of the Dharma Realm Buddhist University program, we explore profound but challenging texts from different wisdom traditions. Sometimes, the difficulty of the texts come from complicated concepts, dense vernacular, or translation issues. The hardest challenges, however, are when these teachings shine light into unknown parts of our own mental processes and rattle deeply-held assumptions in ourselves. The words on the page might actually be very simple

It's a willingness to let go of the known and try out the unknown.

to understand, but the willingness to be open to deeply consider them is not.

We're looking at very foundational things in our very being, around elements like identity, faith, morality, desire, and truth. These are so fundamental to the 'world views' that we use to navigate our existence, so it's not surprising that when we start poking around at these undergirdings, only to find gaps and holes in them, that these doubts might threaten the very stability of our lived experience.

Feeling through the experience of Doubt

I've found doubt to be a potent force in this process of learning, and over the years, my relationship with it has changed. Originally, it was just a raw force that I couldn't understand. I only seemed to see how at times it benefited me, but at other times seemed to harm me. All I knew was that it felt really unsettling and that it made it hard for me to figure out what was happening. When the ground keeps shifting beneath my feet, it makes it hard to keep going.

With a bit more time however, I'm finding more familiarity with the experience of doubt, and its different flavors in my mind.

A Doubt that Opens

The first flavor of doubt opens the space of possibilities, so that I am not so attached to my current way of thinking. It lets me go, "Hmm, this idea makes me feel uncomfortable, and I don't fully understand why, but I'm willing to suspend disbelief for a bit. I'll let myself steep in this new way of thinking and explore wherever it takes me." It's a willingness to let go of the known and try out the unknown. More subtly, it is supported by a sense of fearlessness that is willing to jump headfirst into something blindly, and a willingness to surrender to whatever emerges from it.

A Doubt that Closes

The second flavor of doubt does the opposite; it closes the space for exploration. It hardens and tightens, blocking out anything that threatens the status quo of who I am. I wall out the threat, saying, "This idea is wrong. It is not right. It doesn't make sense. It can't be that way. That way of thinking is dangerous, and will get me hurt. I reject it, and I will pretend that I never even heard it." It's a refusal to even entertain the possibility of something different from what is already known, a fear of the new challenging old, and a violent rejection that looks to protect something deep within myself that I may not be willing to acknowledge.

It's funny to see how it's still the same doubt, sharing the same underlying essence, but taken in two radically different directions for very different results. With these reference points though, I can better understand how I'm reacting in a given situation, and observe, "Ah! I'm being really defensive. What is it that I'm so afraid of? Why do I feel so threatened by this?" Many times it's only after the fact and the situation has passed that I make the recognition, such as when I'm taking a shower or spending some time in

meditation. But other times, I'm able to catch it earlier in the moment, and use this self-recognition to more skillfully react to the conversation.

Pragmatically using Doubt for discovery

For me at least, the reality of doubt ends up being a mix of these two flavors. I'm exploring some pretty core parts of my experience, and it's not so easy to jump into the deep end of the pool. The fear and worry arises, but I'll try to at least dip a foot in to see what happens. After the shock of the cold subsides (and I find that I haven't drowned yet), I let myself immerse more fully, more deeply. I'm fortunate that I'm surrounded by the lifeguards of good teachers and friends in the DRBU community that have gained my trust over the years, so I'm able to now push forward more aggressively.

Nevertheless, even when I'm encountering new teachers and teachings unvetted by past experience, I can work through this same process, albeit more slowly and more cautiously. It would be reckless to pretend that there aren't rocks underwater out there; I have seen that there are some teachers and teachings that

don't always have my well-being foremost in mind. But the accumulated experience of going through these gradual, deeper experiments has given me at least some sense of where the shallows are, and where I need to go more deliberately. The alternative, of never willing to venture out beyond the familiar, seems so much more limited now after times of discovery. How can one grow, without roots going into new soil, and branches into new spaces?

The journey of understanding through Doubt

There's an old adage from the founder of DRBU that paraphrased goes, "Small doubt brings small wisdom, but a big doubt brings big wisdom." The journey to understanding is an everlasting one, and while it isn't an easy process, my experience thus far has been that it's way more preferable to not walking that path. The steps I've taken so far have been personally challenging but deeply rewarding. Any false illusion of walled security no longer has its previous appeal. And while I don't fully know where the path will take me, I'll try my best to keep walking forward, one doubt at a time.

existence. And even for those on some "spiritual" path, they also face the same mundane, unpleasant difficulties that everyone deals with: the aching joints of old age, a bad bout of food poisoning in sickness, and the eventual dissolution of bodily existence in death. Trying to find food, shelter, and safety is plenty enough of a "struggle" for much of the world as it is, an underlying ache that all of us living beings face.

But the "struggle" of the spiritual path seemed to point to a tension at a different layer of existence. There's a sense of resolve or

purpose beyond simply securing the requisites of survival, which might drive a different set of priorities and create its own sets of challenges. There's a transformation in lifestyle, changes in profession and family, metamorphosis of thoughts, opinions, and the very functioning of mind. There's a sense of a journey in changing the "self" from where it is today, into something profoundly different. So what is this type of "struggle," and where does it arise in this journey? Here are some categories and sample narratives around them I've found in my own experience.

Struggling to understand the destination.

I know I don't want to be where I am today, but I am not sure where I want to go in the future. Where is this destination? What is this destination? I can't understand the map, I can't find the final location. I am not entirely sure I am heading

The path of spiritual practice has seen me through valleys of difficulties and doubt, and also hilltops of peace and understanding.

in the right direction, or if I even understand what direction to go to get there. What does it even mean to get there, how would I even know when I arrive? Is there even a destination to get to?

Struggling to even want to go to the destination.

I have a sense of a direction to go, but it seems so distant and difficult, that its successful attainment is seemingly impossible. Or I question if the destination is worth the journey, or that perhaps there is a different destination that might be "good enough" or even "more enjoyable." Maybe I can go to that other destination instead. Or maybe I don't even need to go anywhere at all, and just be ok with things as they are.

Struggling to make progress to the destination.

Assuming that I am heading to the right destination, and assuming that I want to go there, I am struggling to make progress in that direction. I try to step forward, but I sink in the mud. Or I am encumbered by heavy weights from decisions I have made in the past, weights I am not able to relinquish, or am unwilling to relinquish. Or I try to step forward, but step sideways instead, sending me on a completely different path than intended (even as I try to head directly to the destination). Or I drunkenly stumble on a meandering path that is long and convoluted, even trying to go straight step-by-step. Or I get completely lost, and I have no idea where I am or what direction I am heading. Or I completely stop, and am unable to move. Or I decide to turn around and head back from where I came, perhaps only further losing my sense of where I am trying to go.

I've found that all three categories are deep, and none of them can be taken lightly. Going astray in any of these areas can be problematic, and I've spent plenty of time wandering around them lost. But teasing this apart within my own experience has helped me improve my bearings and get a better sense of the different things that I've encountered along the way in my spiritual development, so that I can not only better recognize them, but also move past them. The path of spiritual practice has seen me through valleys of difficulties and doubt, and also hilltops of peace and understanding. And it's been during those times when I've been able to see farther and clearer, that I've been able to realign my compass, refill the battery, and prepare for wherever the path takes me next. While I certainly have a long road ahead of me, I've walked enough of it to want to keep going, fully knowing the ups and downs that I've vaguely glimpsed ahead. And perhaps someday, it might find that the destination of the path was where I have been all along.

On the Struggle of the Path

I think we're all familiar with how life has its ups and downs, and while my personal cultivation has been a precious refuge on some days, there are others when it brings a lot of difficulty. It's made me reflect—what does it mean to "struggle" in our progress forward on the path of spiritual practice?

There's no lack of suffering that people experience, including for the large number of people who have no intentional form of faith, religion, or philosophy that compels them to activities beyond the "conventional" flow of



The Realism of Chan is Freedom

Quinn Anderson

It's likely that I have Bipolar II disorder. Bipolar II is characterized by fluctuations in hypomania (a less severe mania) and depression. The manic highs are periods of high-energy productivity, sometimes accompanied by euphoric and grandiose visions and goals. The depressive lows are periods of unshakeable sadness, hopelessness, and loss of interest in life and the world. For some, there is what is called "mixed state," in which both the heightened energies and the low and disruptive moods present themselves.

Bipolar is a condition that causes a lot of instability and a lot of delusional ideation. A person often lives in extreme views and experiences of what we call reality. Many people will experience slow or long cycles—months of either manic or depressive states—and others will experience rapid cycling, wherein the highs and lows can come and go as quickly as a matter of hours. One's view on one's self and life can change just as rapidly and drastically. At its worst, I would fluctuate in minutes from a euphoric upswing to crushing anger or sorrow. The emotions would burst out of me before I could even recognize what was happening. Most of those extremities I can manage through lifestyle. Some, however, remain.

Over the years, I've continued to find myself wrapped deeply into the delusions common to bipolar disorder: grandiosity (believing I'm famous and important), jealousy/paranoia (being followed, being haunted, being betrayed, being hated), somatic illness (believing I have all kinds of unlikely illness), depressive delusions (believing I've done something irreparably horrible to others), delusions of control (that

something is in control of me). Some of this is bipolar disorder—in that bipolar can take a thought and turn it into "reality" quite swiftly—and some of this is life's experiences, ingrained in me from a young age. All of the delusions I've had, I truly believed—and have had material, actual, in-my-face realities which I could reference to validate them.¹

Our recent chan retreat at DRBU (Spring '22's Contemplative Exercise Immersion) opened up a space for me to see more clearly how these delusions persist throughout my day. They take on new narratives as my circumstances have changed, but their fundamental taste or character remains. They

All of the catastrophic, aggrandizing, and excessive emotional response is all tied to this fundamental, yet ultimately shapeless, imbalance.

show up in my understanding of myself at school, as a cultivator, as a student, or a friend. How desperately

this part of my mind clings to them. I'm not sure what function it has—why do those of us who have these conditions, who experience severe delusions, end up down these roads? Many of our starting thoughts are quite normal: He must be irritated; I got that right instead of her; I wonder if so-and-so likes me? Everything starts out from those little seeds, but something about the grasping of our minds will turn those small moments into a full-blown reality. "He must be irritated" becomes "everyone hates me." "I got that right instead of her" becomes "I'm the

¹ For a time, when I had regular panic attacks, I believed either I was possessed by a spirit or that the feds were shooting soundwaves at me! I couldn't decide which one was more likely: an evil spirit, or secret government weapons! So many more, however, are quite mundane, quite believable (in my own head, anyway), and probably still unknown to me.

smartest person.” “Does he like me?” becomes “He loves me.” And it happens with such a pernicious subtlety in the confused mind, that it’s hardly noticeable. Behind it is a loud symphony of feelings which point to something. What are these thoughts basing themselves on? Why do they have so much energy? What are they trying to validate? I struggle to see what it is. Though, isn’t that the nature of confusion, to not understand the source?

I started strongly considering my delusions more thoroughly this winter after some insightful conversations with different people. I can now more easily see that I have these superiority and inferiority complexes, and these paranoid and excessive responses, which, no matter what Reason has to say, I rarely can shake. Listening to myself, and saying, “That’s batsh*t,” isn’t enough; I still cling so tightly to it all as real. Knowing the tendencies are there doesn’t quite disarm them. But after the 4 day chan session, I had a breakdown (breakthrough!) around some of this. I had fallen into despair at the end of the session, worrying and wallowing, feeling that life had no meaning and direction, as often happens. But something kicked through a wall this time: it occurred to me that I have to look at my bipolar again.

I honestly haven’t looked closely at it. And without this session, I’m not sure I would have done so. I thought I had found enough stability, but that stability was based on a constructed life, with close friends in a clearly defined environment, which supported my understandings. Here at school, life’s stresses compound and expand, and it’s up to me to determine what is real or not. Chan gives you the space and clarity to look at that—at how you are constructing and relating to your imagined world. As I panicked that night after the session, worrying about the future and the sense of powerlessness in the face of confusion, I recalled some recent advice to look into caring for mental health and decided to visit some websites on bipolar. I found a page on delusions and, as I read, it seemed that a dark

cloud lifted from my vision. “Oh,” I thought. “It really is just the delusional thinking associated with my highs and lows.” All of the catastrophic, aggrandizing, and excessive emotional response is all tied to this fundamental, yet ultimately shapeless², imbalance.

I remember now what it felt like the first time I had this breakthrough, starting to realize the freedom to let go of the gravity of it all. It was at 18 or 19, somewhere around there, when I realized I could balance my emotional body and find some peace from the obsession and overwhelm that arises in bipolar conditions. It was deeply empowering. All of this reality, it’s really not so bad; I just forgot along the way to be aware of and careful towards that part of my neurochemistry. I am now having these moments where I remember my delusions, both

Chan gives you the space and clarity to look at that—at how you are constructing and relating to your imagined world.

past and present, and see them more clearly for that: not real, but imagined. I can look at my mind and watch it. I can see: “Oh, that’s not some profound

insight, it’s an impulse.” This or that idea about my life is just my madness running after its own tail. Those mundane things we all do do not have to have an extraordinary character. The groceries are just groceries; cleaning is just cleaning. Depression is just depression; fear just fear. Now, after sitting with this chan, and seeing how I can relax and observe through a clearer lens, I am beginning to recognize aspects of the structure of my thoughts and feelings and, hopefully, can adapt my behaviors to that. As I type now, I have a question on my mind: is that the hypomania? Is that what’s real?

A part of me is so comforted by this. Both to know that acknowledgement and awareness are sometimes what it takes to slow down, but also that chan *really can* affect profound changes in your life. Becoming more realistic is so important to living with a disorder characterized by delusion, whether a mood, a psychotic,

2 Shapeless: it’s not about *what* I believe, but the fact that everything compounds into a particular mode of thought.

or a personality disorder—or PTSD (and really, to everyone). Just being able to find what’s real and know it—even if that “real” is just that my thoughts and feelings are the products of extremities and distortions—is uplifting and clarifying. On the surface, it’s simple: a fledgling insight into how the mind works, into self-grasping and freedom from such, combined with the developing ability to relax and let go. That can become a foundation for working through those states.

I owe a lot of this not just to the chan session, but all that supports it, from my time as a student so far, the support of family and friends and community members, the time to study

and understand the meditation texts, and the support of good teachers and mentors. Many layers of learning have contributed, and many more will come. My sister, a teacher, told me this year that she thought the most important and life-changing theory she learned in her Masters program is that all learning is collaborative and contributive. Everything we know and are comes from the whole collective of our peers, relatives, and teachers. There is no “I” in education, no “I” in chan, and no “I” in this process of discovery. Yet, here “I” am, with the outcome, which is both personally liberating, and, I’m sure of it, will also have a positive impact outside myself as I become more real about the “who” that I am.



Photography: Alex Wang

“My nose isn’t broken but I think there’s
something wrong with my eyes.”

*What I’m saying is that I can’t stop buying paperback books and broken phones
Because all my bookcases burned and people keep sending me emails
There used to be a bird who fought his reflection every year
in the shining metal chimney of my father’s house
Bang bang bang
I always wondered how he didn’t crack his beak
Bang bang bang
I used to laugh at him for thinking he was fighting an equal
Bang bang bang
When I got my first migraine I was afraid I was dying
Bang bang bang
I haven’t looked in a mirror in a while
—Phoenix Winters*



Artwork: Jiaying Chen



The Schopenhauer Fly as Educator

A fly was dead,
By the side of the window near Chan Hall.
Its death did not stink,
Neither was its last buzzing moan.

It wanted so bad,
The light, redolence, and bonking,
On the other side of the mesh,
Whose tiny holes draw the end of the
world.

Only if it had torn its wings,
Torn, and born,
A wingless maggot.
But why would it?

A fly was dead.

—Xi Xue

萱草花 [Daylily]

Hui Xuan Ooi

The great irony in my life comes from my name, given to me by my paternal grandfather. It was only this past year that I was aware that, in a way, my life's purpose was written on my birth certificate. I graduated from Dharma Realm Buddhist University (DRBU) in May 2021, with my commencement ceremony held on Zoom. After my classes ended, I sent off some letters of gratitude and farewell, including one to my classmate Gavin, who checked in on me privately throughout the year. My transparent face has always been a crystal clear window into my mind, and Gavin had a knack for noticing when I was feeling frustrated and down. To my surprise, Gavin wrote me back. Most people don't. In his reply, he drew an incredible, photo-realistic image of my namesake: *Hemerocallis fulva*—the orange daylily, 萱草花 (xuān cǎo huā). In describing his illustration, he added that this flower is also known by another name: 忘憂花 (wàng yōu huā). Now for those who already know what this means, let me explain it for those who need a little help.

Breaking it down literally:

忘 means to forget

憂 means worries, anxiety, concern, sorrow

花 means flower

Gavin rendered it as “forgetting worries,” and it paired perfectly with his direct words of encouragement to me.

Before, I would always say that my “xuān” character was the one with the grass radical on top. While that was true, and enough to get that recognition of, “Oh yes, that one,” from other Mandarin speakers, there was so much more. All along, embedded within my name “Xuan” was that daylily—the flower of forgetting worries; or, how I shaped it to my understanding, the flower of letting go of my fears, my stress, my unshakeable tension that stiffens my shoulders too often. What's more is that I had come across this meaning of the “plant that ‘allows one to forget one's sorrows’”¹ before in the Classical Chinese dictionary used in class at DRBU, but I ended up dismissing it after a while because I had

1 Page 518 in Kroll, Paul W. *A Student's Dictionary of Classical and Medieval Chinese*. Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2017.

misinterpreted the dictionary symbols under the 萱 entry. Knowing its meaning invigorated me, just like it did the first time I read it in the dictionary. This time I knew I didn't have to discard it as untrue.

It was especially difficult then—and still is—to let go of what I was worrying about. If anything, I had the most worries I had ever had in my life, the kind that ate away at my hopes and aspirations, that contorted my thinking to be paranoid and hypersensitive. The worst part of it was that I was too busy trying to push through everything that broke my heart every day and instead just do my class work for the entirety of that year. When it all finally came to an end and I graduated, I fully and completely burnt out to an extent that I had never experienced before. Days turned into weeks into months where I was unable to do anything except eat, do the dishes, lay in bed, and do my daily recitations.

All along, embedded within my name “Xuan” was that daylily—the flower of forgetting worries.

The fretting and worrying leapt out of my mind and buried themselves into unrelenting tense patches on my chest, dwelled in my aching knees, and poured out into tears. While I would like to say that this is all in the past and I'm all better now, I can't. This all still happens, but I'm working on it every day.

I bemusedly say to myself that it is only because I am bad at listening to my own self—my mind, that is—that only when my body has taken a toll do I truly listen and tune into what I need to pay attention to. You would think that in the time of the ongoing global pandemic, making my health my number one priority would be more common sense, but I've learned that everyone learns things the hard way too.

I wanted to share one of the activities that I started in October 2021 and continued until today that has been one of the many things that has helped me peacefully, with loving-kindness, begin to live up to my name—my life's purpose of letting go of my undercurrent of sorrow. It started when one of my former cohort members lost a close family member. I wanted to give something to go along with a letter of my condolences. There wasn't a second thought, really, as I beelined to the crafts section of Target and picked up my first packs of cardstock, ready to make my own bookmarks for my classmate and others. And with

that, it all began. I started to dive into paper art, done in the way that I thought of—slowly, piece by piece, arranging bits of paper until they turned into much more than that. My headaches subside while I cut out the preliminary shapes; my confidence bolsters because I can always alter what I have and try again; and with focus on something that brings me inklings of joy, my pain fades on its own, though it revisits every now and then.

After my bookmark project, the first thing I made was my namesake, 萱草花, which accompanies what I wrote here. I sent it to my friend I met in my

undergraduate studies who recently lost her grandfather. All of my paper art projects start with someone in mind and end up in his or her hands via the United States Postal Service.

...with focus on something that brings me inklings of joy, my pain fades on its own, though it revisits every now and then.

While there always seems like there is more and more to worry about in life, it has been comforting to realize that through engaging a wholesome type of joy, everything else unfolds

from that place: hope, resilience, peace of mind, and a renewed sense of self-confidence and love. With that, we can all get one step closer to forgetting our worries too. May you all be well, and take care!



Practice of Patience, Illuminated by Kids

Jason Tseng

One of the more famous studies in the field of Psychology is the “marshmallow” study. In this famous 1960s study, the experiment placed snacks right in front of 4-year old kids, who were rewarded with extra snacks if they were able to wait 15 minutes. A May 11, 2009 New Yorker magazine article by Jonah Lehrer interviewed the original researchers and provided good commentary on the study, illustrating a lot of different, subtle aspects of patience.

In the study, most kids didn’t wait very long, but a small group of kids were able to delay their gratification. The researcher started correlating patience with increased possibilities. Much of the experiment’s fame comes in this correlation of delaying gratification with the experimenters’ observation of kids’ future success. This is also where subsequent follow-up studies get a bit more into debate into this correlation and the definition of success. I would like to focus more on two other insights brought forward in the study and article.

“Young kids are pure id,” Mischel says. “They start off unable to wait for anything—whatever they want they need. But then, as I watched my own kids, I marveled at how they gradually learned how to delay and how that made so many other things possible.”

After further observation, the researcher realized that self-control came from “strategic allocation of attention” and not sheer willpower. The successful kids avoid thinking about the snacks by deliberately placing their attention somewhere else, for example, doing a familiar activity and forgetting about the snacks.

“If you’re thinking about the marshmallow and how delicious it is, then you’re going to eat it,” Mischel says. “The key is to avoid thinking about it in the first place.”

With that realization, willpower becomes not gritting one’s teeth and bearing it, but a skill that is practiced and improved.

“Once you realize that will power is just a matter of learning how to control your attention and thoughts, you can really begin to increase it.”

I see that the *śamatha* (stopping/slowing) aspect of Buddhist meditation has many parallels. During meditation, as one's scattered thoughts arise, the meditator gently brings his/her attention back to their meditation topic (no matter how fascinating, how emotionally powerful, or how habitual those thoughts are). Every thought that the meditator doesn't go toward, but remains on his/her topic, is one extra bit of practiced freedom or possibility.

Similarly, when talking about adults, the article makes a similar observation about how self-control benefits us in daily life:

as an ability to direct the spotlight of attention so that our decisions aren't determined by the wrong thoughts.

After further observation, the researcher realized that self-control came from “strategic allocation of attention” and not sheer willpower.

Lastly, Mischel noted teaching technique and skills for patience are not enough:

...it's not enough just to teach kids mental tricks—the real challenge is turning those tricks into habits, and that requires years of diligent practice.

In fact, I would add that it takes a regular, nearly daily practice, since our habitual patterns of thinking are so strong.

Special Note for education:

Although our education system and by extension our society has been focused on intelligence and knowledge, Mischel concludes that:

“Psychologists have focused on raw intelligence as the most important variable when it comes to predicting success in life. Mischel argues that intelligence is largely at the mercy of self-control”

And the article ends with a teacher at a charter school, which emphasized developing character.

“I gradually became convinced that trying to teach a teen-ager algebra when they don't have self-control is a pretty futile exercise.”

But meditation and cultivating self-control isn't just so we can all study better (although it is very important), but it's to improve every small moment within our lives. There's a lot to write on this issue of education.



See, Salt

See, Salt.
The taste of Chan is way too salty.
Whose recipe is this?
Ingredients: everything you've ever done.
Combine in the ground.
Let sit. Do not stir.
Taste Chan.
Who put this in here?

—James Roberts



Photography: Quinn Anderson

My Encounter with the Sixth Patriarch

Priscilla Feng

The laywoman Qin Yi was from Alberta Province, Canada. She came to DRBU on a quest to find the Great Perfection of Prajna that Goes to the Other Shore. With the guidance of professors, she read a lot of philosophy books including the *Platform Sutra*. Some of her questions and curiosities were satisfied, but there was one question that she still could not answer.

One day when Qin Yi was sitting in meditation, the question came up again: at this Dharma Ending Age time, how do I identify a proper Dharma from the improper ones? Master Huineng, would you please clarify my confusion?

Suddenly, she saw Master Huineng sitting in front of her. She was so excited that she even forgot to bow to the Master. She said to Master Huineng, "Master, how wonderful! I have been praying to get your teaching and remove my confusion. Can you please give me guidance?"

"What is your name? What question do you have?" the Master asked.

"My name is Qin Yi. I learned your teaching from the *Platform Sutra* at DRBU, and noticed you told us never take refuge with demonic cults and outside Ways (57). I am still dull and confused; I don't know how to verify whether a teaching is proper or not. Can you elaborate more?"

"The only proper Dharma is right within you. Your original nature is the proper one to rely on." He continued, "'Proper Way dwells with proper mind. Bodhi is just the purity of your own nature. Attend only to this and you will straightaway achieve Buddhahood' (7). Remember, a Good and Wise Advisor is free of three poisons: greed, anger and stupidity. The Triple Jewel provides protection and great guidance for people who are not awakened yet. Have you taken refuge with the Triple Jewel?"

"Yes, I have," Qin Yi replied.

"Where and when?" Master Huineng asked.

"I took refuge at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas in California, USA, over 10 years ago," she replied.

"Tell me more, why did you take refuge at this place?" Master asked.

"CTTB was established by Venerable Master Hua in the 1970s. He set up the six principles for all monastics and lay practitioners to follow as guidelines for cultivation. They are: no fighting, no greed, no seeking, not being selfish, not pursuing personal advantage, and not lying. I admire what he has done for Buddhism and love listening to his talks. Master Hua taught and explained sutras, established schools for children to learn virtues and knowledge, and also asked his students to translate sutras so that more western people can learn Buddhism."

"Qin Yi, you do not need to look more. In your past lives, you planted good seeds so in this life, you are fortunate to be where you are. This Master Hua expounded Buddha's teaching without manipulation or seeking for personal benefits. His disciples uphold precepts strictly and practice in accordance with the Buddha's regulations. I can see Buddhism has been flourishing in the west because of his contribution. But, good and wise friends, remember: if one does not cultivate themselves, it will be as though they were never there." After Master Huineng said this, he disappeared.

Listening to Master Huineng's kind words, Qin Yi felt ashamed and confessed with the following verse:

How foolish and blind I am,
Looking for a bright pearl while it's right in
my hands.
Stop seeking and dwell at ease with
confidence,
Paddling with the ten kind deeds moment by
moment,
Heading towards the other shore in this
Proper Dharma boat!

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Photography: Stan Shoptaugh

3 Steps 1 Bow

Stan Shoptaugh

I was making photographs of the Contemplative Exercises Immersion on the first day, September 27. Marty had given a talk in Wonderful Words Hall. His talk included a demonstration of how to bow in place using the provided yellow cushions as well as how to do the 3-steps-1-bow correctly: that is, to keep the legs apart so that the tummy can drop down between the legs as one goes down. Not doing this is what caused me to become so out of breath in the Buddha Hall years ago when doing a session. It was so helpful to watch Marty demonstrate.

At some point after the talk and demonstration, we exited the Wonderful Words Hall to walk in silent contemplation to the long walkway out in front of the Buddha Hall. This was where we were to engage in 3-steps-1-bow. I had been taking photos all along the way. The men and women were separate from one another, but walking in single file lines parallel to each other. I always enjoy seeing and photographing the patterns of single file walkers at CTTB. On this day, I would run ahead to get some distance from the monastics leading the two groups and then turn around and take a few pictures. When we finally arrived out front, Jin Chuan Shi instructed people to allow sufficient space between themselves and the person in front of them so that when each person would go down to a full bow with their arms extending forward, they didn't bump into the person in front of them. I made a number of pictures of the two lines circling round doing the 3-steps-1-bow. Then I noticed that the last person in the line of men was Marty, and that there was some distance between Marty and the leader (Jin Chuan Shi), coming up behind him.

I've always been interested in the practice of 3-steps-1-bow. I've known Marty for thirty-plus years and knew about the pilgrimage that he and Rev. Heng Sure made decades ago from Los Angeles to CTTB. It sounded like a most arduous undertaking, certainly not something I would ever do.

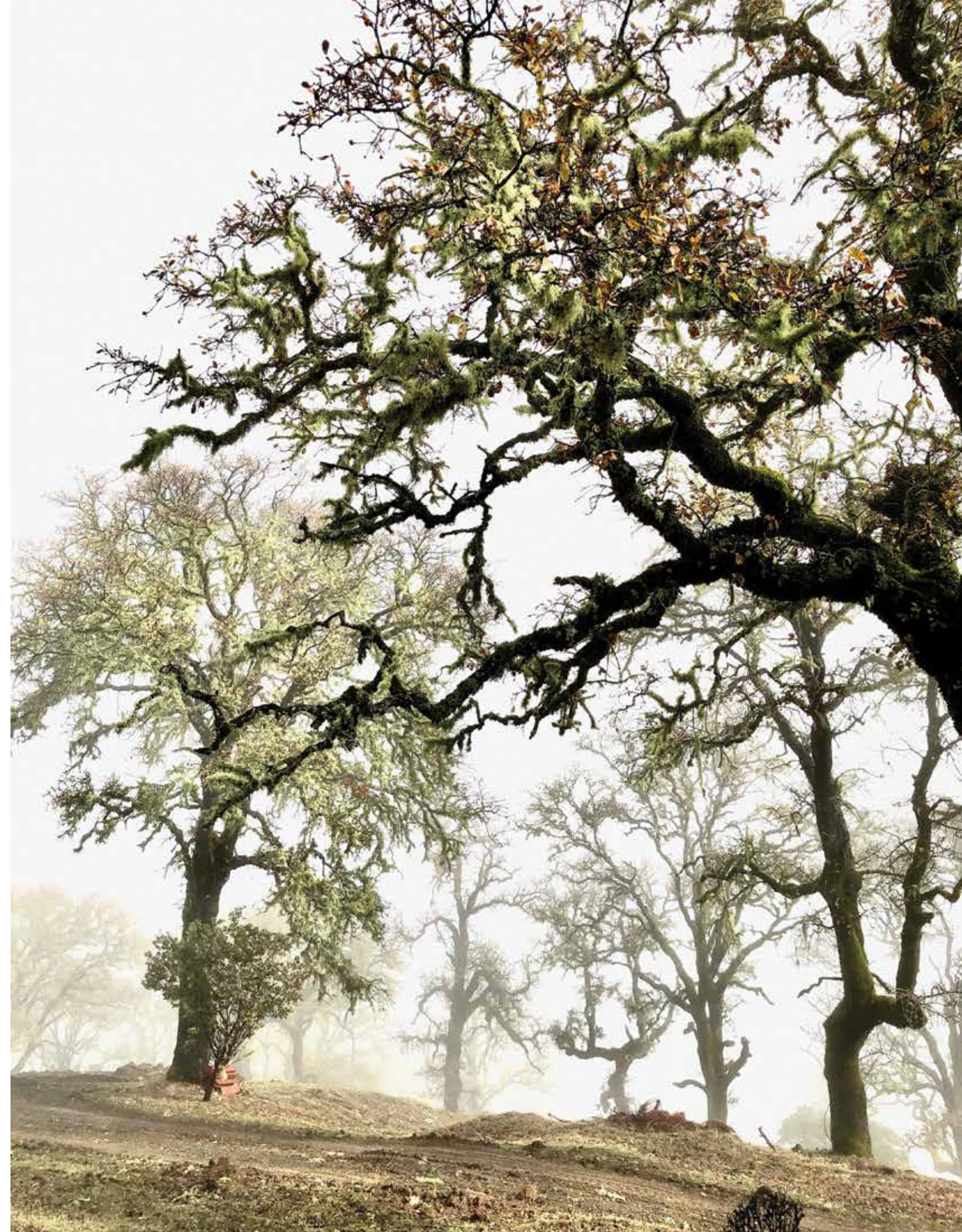
On the first morning of the CEI, while photographing, I had been having problems with my glasses fogging up while wearing my COVID-19 mask. As I watched the some sixty participants bowing, I felt drawn to be more a part of it than just making pictures. I knew I had to wear the mask, but I sure didn't need my glasses! I always wear my glasses unless I'm sleeping. I removed my glasses and put them in my camera bag. I also had some trepidation about my history of heart disease,

having had triple heart bypass three years ago. I certainly didn't want to provoke a heart attack. But watching Marty and the others, it looked like something I could do, and it was something I had always wanted to attempt. So do it! If I drop dead doing this, what better place could I die than here with these fellow travelers? I would just take my position at the end of the line behind Marty. And so I did.

As I said, the first epiphany I experienced was that I could do the bowing without needing my glasses. My sight sans glasses was perfectly adequate. As I engaged in the bowing, I then realized that I was exactly where I belonged. I had always been exactly where I had belonged. All of my life, I had been headed to where I was at this moment. Further, this 3-steps-1-bow was not difficult, was not tiring. I was doing it. I didn't feel old; I was not out of breath; I was just present. As I bowed down onto my hands and knees, a strong feeling welled up in my whole physical being that I was going to burst into tears and even start sobbing. I was afraid that if I gave myself up to this it would be disruptive to the others, so I made an effort to not give myself up to that feeling. I believe that this feeling of movement to crying/sobbing was growing out of that sense of being right where I needed to be, amongst these fellow cultivators. I was now letting go of something, some self-definition. It was okay to be a part of this. This in contrast to how I had always kept myself back on the periphery, on the border. Part of my self-definition? Yes, hanging on to the self-definition of separate-self requires energy. I think that the inclination to cry/sob was manifesting from the relaxation of a limited self wanting to return to the original nature.

Another interesting thing for me was the experience of seeing the other participants as they were going past me doing the 3 steps, the returning line of women on the one side and the returning line of men on the other. Without taking my eyes off of the back of Marty or his feet, I was seeing and knowing each person as they came past me without actually looking at them. There was nothing magical or mysterious about this. It was just that usually, when I look directly at people, I'm zeroing in on their facial expressions. This practice made it okay to not look at people. We were all unique and separate but together. Old and young together. Monastics and lay people. Fellow travelers.

I was now letting go of something,
some self-definition. It was okay
to be a part of this.





Treatise on the Way and Virtue

Excerpt from 道德經 *Dao De Jing*,
Laozi, 6th Century BCE

Translated by Bhikshuni Heng Chih

聖人不積。
既以為人已愈。
既以與人已愈多。
天之道. 利而不害。
聖人之道. 為而不爭。

A sage does not accumulate things.
The more he does for others, the more he feels he has.
The more he gives to others, the more he receives.
The Way of Nature is to benefit and not harm.
The Way of the Sage is to be as he is and not contend.

Sheeple

Jackie Farley

I have a neighbour who thinks I'm one of the "sheeple" because I'm vaccinated and wear a mask when in close contact with others (you probably have a neighbour like that too).

So how do you respond? I tried for months to share well-researched articles from legitimate sources but to no avail. In return I received yet more "off the wall" theories not only about Covid, but also about all the "False Flag" events that have happened in the past—even school shootings, and about the chemtrails that are spewing poisonous gasses upon us!

How many of us have had to terminate friendships because of this madness? It's disturbing to think that there are so many who have disappeared down this rabbit hole of misinformation. The difficulty is that in every conspiracy theory there are grains of truth, and those who have a propensity for paranoia focus on them exclusively.

This divisive thinking is tearing apart the fabric of society—what to do about it?

We know the pharmaceutical industry is profit driven. We know that crops get sprayed with harmful chemicals and that there are bad, scheming people out there. However, in these challenging times, is it not more helpful to focus on what is positive and healing to ourselves and our community? This divisive thinking is tearing apart the fabric of society—what to do about it?

Take care of our own hearts and minds and resist spreading misinformation that creates suffering and anxiety. Most of all, don't put others at risk.

Recently I've been looking at the teachings of the Buddha, Lao Tzu and other great sages for inspiration and a way of alleviating my own angst at all this conflicted and divisive thinking. How can we as a society move towards not only acting as a united front, to deal with this virus but also to unite and help solve global warming? It seems that not only humanity is at risk but the entire planet as well.

Here is a case from *The Blue Cliff Records* (#3) that has been on my mind. It begins:

Great Master Baso was not well. The head monk asked him, Master, how have you been these last few days?

The master answered, Sun Face Buddha, Moon Face Buddha

So what was the master getting at? This is the pointer from this case (translated by Thomas Kirchner):

An action, a contrivance, a word, and a commentary temporarily intended as a point of entry. Still, this is gouging a wound in healthy flesh; it can become a hole or a pit. The great function appears without regard for rules, in order to reveal the existence of the transcendent. It covers heaven and earth and yet cannot be grasped. Magnanimous teachers say, "This way will do, not this way will also do." Strict teachers say, "This way won't do, not this way also won't do." Without taking either of these paths, what would be right?

The verse on this case reads:

Sun Face Buddha, Moon Face Buddha
What of the Three Sovereigns and the Five Emperors?
For twenty years I have struggled, going down into the blue
dragon's cave
So many times for you!
This adversity is worth describing. Clear eyed monks mustn't
take it lightly.

I wish I had the wisdom to fully understand this case, yet I sense it contains a message about the folly of dualistic thinking, of clinging to views, of not being able to accord with circumstances... After all the four practices of entering the Way have to be manifested:

1. The practice of accepting Adversity
2. The practice of accepting circumstances
3. The practice of non-seeking
4. The fourth practice of according with the Dharma

I sincerely wish for the fulfillment of these practices for myself and everybody else.

Amitofo

Chan Tasted like Water

Chan tasted like Water.
When I held it, it took the shape of my mind.
When asked 'whose' mind?
It disappeared into the sky.

— Sanju Kattel Baral

Photography: Stan Shoptaugh

Meeting a Labyrinth on Your Spiritual Path

Peggy Brevoort

Labyrinth! How confusing! What could that have to do with meditation and mindful practice? Well as it turns out, these concepts are very connected.

I “discovered” labyrinths when I was drawn to a book, *Walking a Sacred Path: Rediscovering the Labyrinth as a Spiritual Practice* by Dr. Lauren Artress. As paths often do this one led me to taking a series of classes with her, learning to lead groups in walking a labyrinth and then to constructing a labyrinth on my property in Hawaii as well as helping other friends do the same.

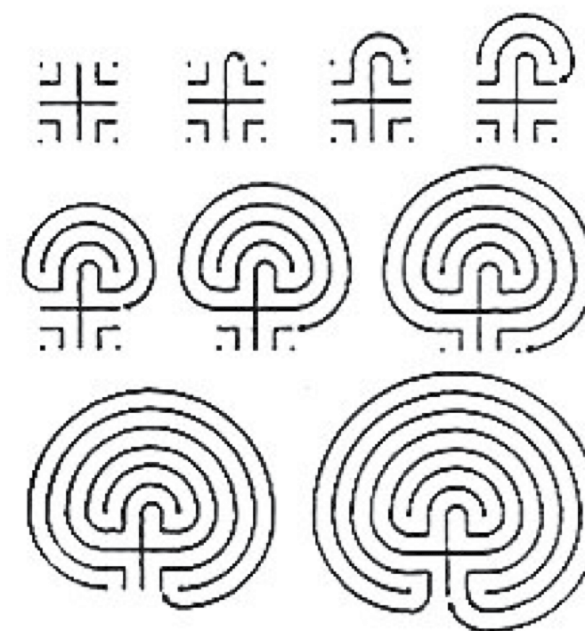
Let's begin with a definition: A labyrinth (unlike a maze) is defined as a single circuitous path leading to a center and then returning by the same route. Begins to sound like a meditation practice already!

Labyrinths have been found in various sites around the world, often constructed thousands

of years ago. There are drawings on stone in the Southwestern US, carvings in Greece and Italy, a carving in one of the Egyptian pyramids, and more recently (circa 1000 CE) elaborate labyrinths incorporated into the design of Medieval churches in Europe. One of the most well-known is the labyrinth at Chartres, France, laid into the floor of the Chartres Cathedral there. It has been in use since around 1000 CE.

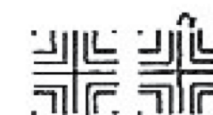
Although there are many variations on the layout of the labyrinth, there are two main designs. One is called a Classic 7 Circuit, consisting of one circuitous path leading to the center via 7 circles. The other is called The Chartres and consists of a design laid out in 11 circles. Many labyrinth designs incorporate elements of Sacred Geometry in their proportions.

The Classic pattern can be drawn anywhere. Here is a simple explanation of how to do this!



Drawing Labyrinths

The 7-circuit labyrinth is drawn as shown. To draw an 11-circuit labyrinth, add an “L” in each corner and follow the same plan as for 7:



How to begin an 11-circuit labyrinth

You can draw this 7 Circuit labyrinth in the sand at the beach, on your driveway with chalk, or on paper so that you can trace the path with your finger. People often meditate by tracing the path in this way.

Some of the power of the labyrinth lies in the design of the path that leads you to the center without you having to consciously think about getting there. By closing off that “analytical” portion of your mind and letting your feet take you forward, you allow more of your subconscious to emerge. The path to the center is not a “straight shot.” If you let your finger follow the pattern above, you’ll see that you go back and forth, in and out. Sometimes you think you are almost there, and then you are far away again (a bit like a spiritual practice). Because you are going back and forth you begin to engage both “sides” of your brain. Engaging and alternating left-brain/right-brain activity has been shown to be helpful in reducing stress and promoting creativity.

When preparing people for a walk, I begin by telling them, “There is no right or wrong way to walk a labyrinth.” You can go fast or slow. You can stop. You can crawl. You can dance. You can “cheat” and cross lines if you must (but I don’t

encourage that!). Just let your feet guide you and open your mind. Traditionally we are taught there are 3 phases to a walk:

The first, as you enter and make your way to the center, is a time to reflect and release.

Secondly, the time you reach the center (which will generally be a slightly larger circle) becomes a time to receive. I encourage people to pause in the center and take time to be still.

By closing off that “analytical” portion of your mind and letting your feet take you forward, you allow more of your subconscious to emerge.

Third, as you return by the same path (this time In reverse), it becomes a time to reaffirm and re-enter the space you left, perhaps a bit calmer and wiser. I call this the 3 R’s of walking the labyrinth: reflect/release, receive, and re-affirm/re-enter.

Besides use as a meditative tool, labyrinths are also used in many other ways. A group may



choose a theme and walk the labyrinth together. Special occasions or holidays are great times for a labyrinth walk. Marriages are performed. Rites of passages are celebrated. Labyrinths are found in hospital settings as well as churches and churchyards, schools, parks, and private settings.

In preparing for your own personal walking experience, I might suggest choosing a theme, such as forgiveness or love. You might pose within yourself a question that has been on your mind. Maybe there is a challenging situation to consider. Or perhaps just a time to “stop thinking” and let the universe speak to you. Each walk is unique. It may be simply a 20-minute stroll, or a deeply profound understanding, or anything in between! Trust yourself and let your feet lead the way.

Again, I think this labyrinth journey could be analogous to the experience of your daily

meditation: to still yourself, allow your thoughts to slow and stop, be open to receiving from the universe, and then to return to your daily life again—perhaps a bit calmer and wiser.

If you are interested in learning more about labyrinths, I would suggest going to www.veriditas.org, The Home of the Labyrinth Movement. If you want to find a labyrinth to walk nearby, look up the World Wide Labyrinth Locator: www.labyrinthlocator.com. Another good resource is The Labyrinth Society: www.labyrinth.society.org.

I hope you find and experience some of the “magic” of this meditative walking tool in your own life.

Peggy Brevoort is a DRBU Trustee and a Veriditas Certified Labyrinth Facilitator

The Argle-Bargle

Claire Robb

In René Descartes' *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, he poses a question which has caused him much doubt and, as he describes it, has him "falling into a deep whirlpool." The question being, "What can I know for certain?" After much internal debate, he comes to the conclusion that his ability to think gives him the reasoning to know he exists. He recognizes that he has a body and senses but states that,

"I now know that even bodies are not, properly speaking, perceived by the senses or by the faculty of imagination, but by the intellect alone, and that they are not perceived through their being touched or seen, but only through their being understood, I manifestly know that nothing can be perceived more easily and more evidently than my own mind."

Hume in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* tells us that there is a considerable difference between the perception of the mind and the human experiences felt by the senses. He states that, "The most lively thought is still inferior to the dullest sensation." According to Hume, though the mind and thought seem to possess unbound liberty, if we take a closer look, we can see that the mind is very limited. He proclaims, "All the creative power of the mind amounts to no more than the faculty of compounding, transposing, augmenting or diminishing the materials afforded us by the senses and experience." Each thought, memory and idea is only made possible due to the experiences we have, through our senses, which contribute to our understanding of who we are.

The following is a debate between Mind and Spirit representing these two ideas.

On a overcast day,
in a little town not far away,
Body's head hung low,

The cause we have yet to know.
Stirring a pot of stew,
While mumbling what to do,
A thought struck the heart,
A riddle to impart.
Mother's eye caught sight
Of Body's terrible plight
And offered her ear
To the tale you're about to hear.

Body: I've been quite befuddled lately, which has thrown me into a state of doubt that I can no longer ignore but I can't seem to resolve. It is as if I have fallen into a deep whirlpool; I am so tossed about that I can neither touch bottom with my foot, nor swim up to the top. I feel like I cannot do anything, sleep has left me and along with it, my desire to eat. I fear I will remain this way until I make sense of and understand this one question that has me terribly troubled—what can I count on to be certain? I will stay on this course until I know something certain, or, if nothing else, until I at least know for certain that nothing is certain. Things that I thought would be a constant, which I could rely on, are now soaking in a bath of doubt. I am at a loss and am beginning to question everything, even that I exist.

It would give me hope to go on if I could succeed in finding just one thing, however slight, that is certain and unshaken. Some tell me that death is for certain, but how can I be sure? When I am dead, will I know that I am? My morning brew is my one constant, but only because I make it so and believe it to be. I can't even count on that, or any of my daily functions for that matter, which makes me think that everything is false. Then what about my memory? Has it deceived me this whole time, pretending to exist? I am forced to admit that there is nothing among all the things I once believed to be true which are not now bathing in doubt. What then

will be true? Perhaps just the single fact that nothing is certain.

Understanding Body's great despair,
And hoping to clear the air,
Mother thought of a plan,
That might be of help to all men.
She called a meeting for all three,
Spirit, Mind and Body,
Each would have a chance to say
How they could save the day.

Mind: Oh Body, why are you fretting so much? Of course you exist, the very thought of me makes it so. I could give you more evidence than you can imagine; my knowledge is vast and never ending. You need only rely on me! You seek to know what is certain—well, what about thinking? The fact that you can think at all is a real thing. Thought exists, I exist, you and I are one, therefore you exist. This is certain. For as long as you have me, you have proof that you exist. I know that nothing can be perceived more easily and more evidently than myself. If you cease all your thinking then you would cease to exist. Therefore I am the most important proof of your existence.

I fear I will remain this way until I make sense of and understand this one question that has me terribly troubled—what can I count on to be certain?

Spirit: Of course Body is feeling confused, Mind has crammed way too many ideas in his head. It would do him good to lounge in his hammock observing nature around him with little to no thought. Ideas are good and all, don't get me wrong. They are useful to Body in many ways, but we can all see that there is a considerable difference between the perceptions of the mind and the actual sensations afforded by me. Take for example when Body feels pain or pleasure, excessive heat or cold, or is feeling energized or tired, which are all very real sensations, and compare them to when Mind tries to remind Body of these events. They make for

good storytelling, but, let's face it, nothing beats living the experience. Experiences are real! Mind may try to mimic or copy the perceptions of the senses, but Body can never entirely reach the force and vivacity of my original sentiment. All the colors of poetry, however splendid, can never paint natural objects in such a manner as to make the description be taken for the real thing. Mind can only, at its best, employ color with faint and dull hues, compared to the original experience I bring. Body needs not worry about Mind, with its thoughts and ideas, to be a reason for existence. The most lively thought is still inferior to the dullest sensation, therefore I can bring Body to life each and every day with most certainty. I am often known as the breath of life; therefore I am the proof.

Mind: Spirit says that she is the one Body can count on to be certain, but it doesn't take a genius to know that emotions are like the waves of the sea and not everyone does well at sea. So how can she be reliable? I find it most amusing that Spirit also says that my thoughts, ideas and memories are nothing to be compared with her live experience and yet, with one thought I can recall those experiences, over and over again, with all their emotions, causing a reaction that has Body believing it's real.

Spirit: Yes, yes, Mind, you do tend to cause Body to relive experiences over and over again, but what does Body gain by constantly dwelling on past events? When Body analyzes thoughts and ideas, however complicated or sublime, he will always find that they resolve themselves into such simple ideas as were copied from a preceding feeling or sentiment. Body has a slender hold on thoughts, which I've found causes him to become easily confused, wondering which are his own thoughts and which ones are given to him by another. All ideas, especially abstract ones, are naturally faint and obscure, contrary to all sensations, either outward or inward, which are strong and vivid. Take dancing for instance, the idea of one doing so, no matter how vivid the imagination, can never compare to the body in motion, feeling the vibrations of the music. Or when someone is describing a distant land, far different in culture

then what is commonly known to them. They lack the true sensations offered by such experience, dwelling on their own ability to create in the mind what could not be lived. Very similar to reading a book. Much is left to the imagination. Mind can serve the purpose to help Body function but cannot and should not be the reason for its existence.

Mind: I would say the same to you Spirit, you may be able to help Body live a more spontaneous life, enjoying moments of pleasure far beyond what words can express but those sensations come and go as quickly as I can produce one thought after another.

On through the night they went,
Neither Mind nor Spirit bent.
Each for their cause they fought,
While Body was lost in thought.

Body: I realize that none of what I can grasp by means of the imagination pertain to the understanding I have of myself. I must take great care and be most diligent about withdrawing my mind from these things so that I can perceive its nature as distinctly as possible. But

But still the thought remains,
“What am I?” A thing that
doubts, understands, affirms,
denies, wills, refuses, and
also imagines and senses?

still the thought remains, “What am I?” A thing that doubts, understands, affirms, denies, wills, refuses, and also imagines and senses? I breathe, I laugh and cry, I love and hate, I give and deny and yet where does all this come from? I am meant to believe that I am all of these and more, the sum total of my thoughts and of my feelings. Indeed it is no small matter if all these things belong to me. But why should they not belong

to me? I doubt almost everything, yet believe some things. I affirm that one thing is true while denying the validity of other things. I desire to know more, but wish not to be deceived. I imagine many things, even against my will, and notice others which appear to be strongly provoked by my senses. What is there in all of this that is not but proof of my very existence? Mind, through thought, takes form, and Spirit through senses gives them life, which I am to then carry out through the very existence of my body. If I hold no thought, it cannot receive the breath of life. It is late. I will now lay my head to rest so that my dreams might present to me more truly and clearly what I am.

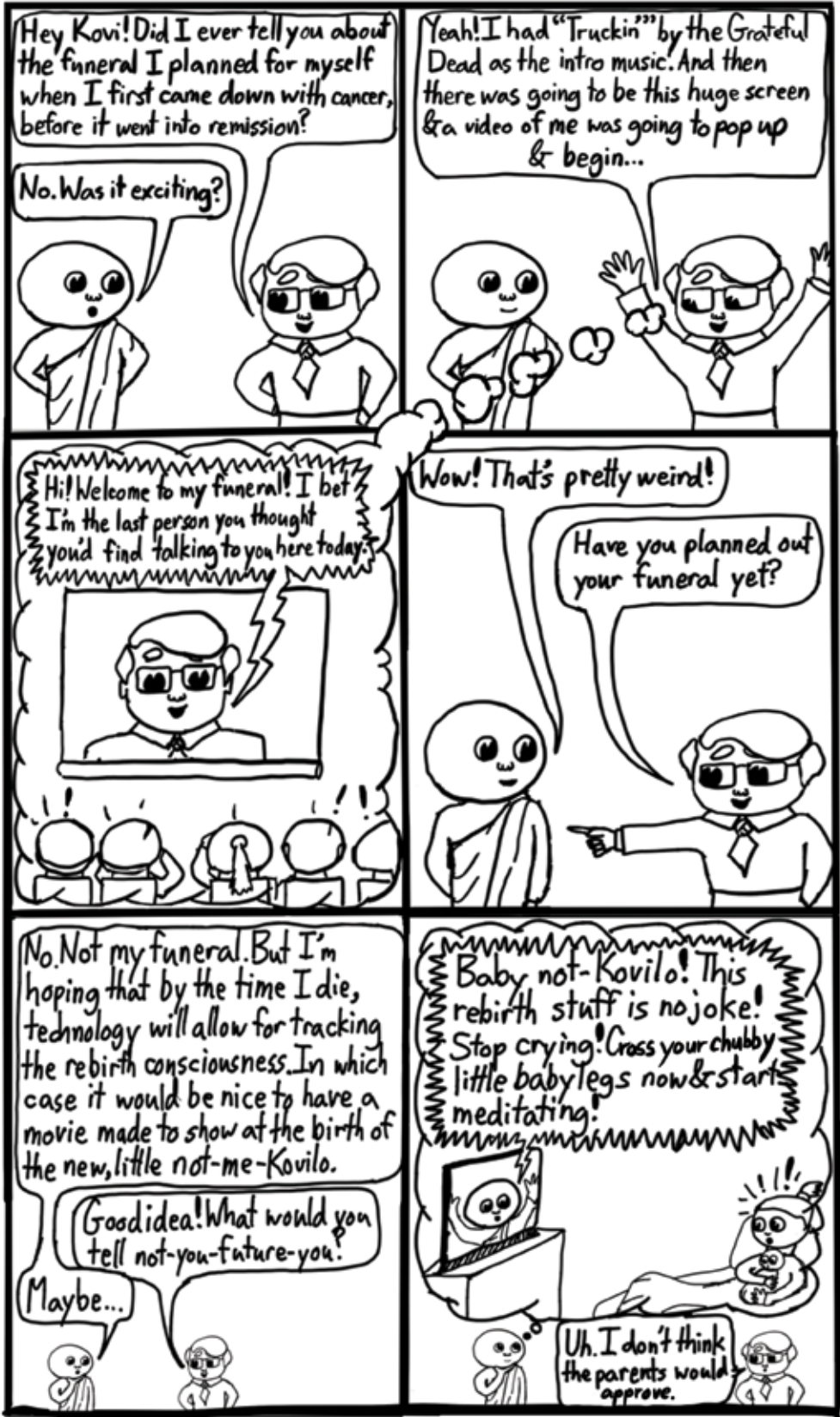
With Body fast asleep,
Mother motioned all to leave.
Mind and Spirit followed way,
To hear what she had to say.
Neither was all right or wrong,
The choice was theirs to get along.
Each had a place under her roof,
But make no mistake, she was the proof.
Mother’s words rang out loud and clear,
A message for all to hear.
“Who is the master of Body?
The King of reason?
The Queen of hearts?
I say let the Jester be.
For the sake of all the greater fools,
Convinced they hold the key”.

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Photography: Quinn Anderson



by Kovilo Bhikkhu

The Sixth Patriarch’s Dharma Jewel Platform Sutra

A recently uncovered fragment

Layman Blake’s Second Encounter with Master Huineng

Master Huineng,
I am finding that the past consolations no longer console,
that what I once thought was full really is empty.
Those things which I sought, now, I have.
What have I hidden from myself?

“You have not yet fully committed to a path, Blake,
and so you are caught in states of past and future.
Once you can finally ripen your resolve,
Your fear will have been attenuated,
And like a night sky freed of pollution,
Your original nature will shine through.”

I want to get to the place where I’m no longer trying to explain my past.

“That is what I am saying.
What needs explaining? Ripen your fruits, that is all.”

And my future?

“As long as your past rules you, your past will be your future. What you are concerned about is not your future.”

You’re right, I don’t have much worry about my future.

“How could you, when you’re still worrying about the past?
Simply let your demons go. Why do you want them? They have no need for you.”

How can I just let go of my past?

“By accepting your path.”

And what’s that?

“You’ve known. Stop forgetting.”

How can I?

“You’re in a good place for it. Just learn not to escape from your good place, and the five skandhas will unattach on their own.”

How do I let go?

“You have no forgiveness to seek. For that which you have done, you are already forgiven. For that which you have not been forgiven, it is not you who have done it. You are not that; you are not this, either. You are nothing. What is there to forgive?”

But I am something. I’m a brother, a son, friend, partner, student...

“Intrinsically, you are nothing. What you seek forgiveness in is only your conscience, all the externals you use are only means to this. Why grasp at externals? Simply wash your conscience free.”

And then what?

“And then the past will be free.”

At this, Blake experienced a profound awakening.

How amazing! How wondrous! All this time I’ve been grasping at expedients when the means have been within me all this time!

“What means? There are no means for anything. What is there to gain?”

Excellent! Excellent!



Photography: Alex Wang

Christmas Tree Night

Walking in the night,
relax your vision, just a little,
and see
how the world becomes
your christmas tree;
clear your mind, and wander through its branches,
marveling, drinking in its sparkling, evanescent splendor,
as scene upon unforeseen scene of shifting, kaleidoscopic vision
unfolds
in film-like procession
upon the crystalline screen of your unblinking gaze.
Drink in its fractured beauty;
wonderstruck,
sate your thirst on its inimitable perfection,
as the ebb and flow of moisture-laden warmth upon your lip
imperceptibly merges
with the universe's surging tides
and the softly resounding sound of your footfall begins to mark time
for the cosmic swirl of the world around you,
and all boundaries nearly vanish.
And should you choose to give yourself up
definitively,
in that gentle embrace of the night
– oh –
surely you will not have lost
anything.

—Sean Kerr

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KEY:

DRBU - Dharma Realm Buddhist University

IITBT - International Institute for the Translation of Buddhist Texts

TC - IITBT Translation Certificate Program

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Upadhi [oo-pah-dih] - Denotes anything for which one might have a sense of "I" or "mine" that consequently one would accumulate and carry around as mental baggage.