

Mirror Flower Water Moon

2023

鏡花水月

シャフトさんならやってくれるよね、
という信頼感がすでにあります。

蒼樹



Monica
2022/1/23



DHARMA REALM
BUDDHIST UNIVERSITY

dearest eternal children of mirror flower water moon,

thank you for finding us, yet again!

it is with great delight that i, the editor of the cosmos, make my reappearance in the form of this rather wonderful editing team to present with great depth, light, and grace, the /23 issue of mirror flower water moon

; the year’s theme is dreams.

the magazine itself came together rather interestingly, in the fashion of a reverse spontaneous combustion, where at once there are ashes and then all of a sudden there is a great fire that appears, burns for a minuet dancing second, disappears and it (the magazine itself()) comes out, wreathed in golden light ;

deed, it is a dream, an unstated happening, and every and each of our contributions weave this minor dream together. inspired by a great honor and presence,people, i can almost see this page flicker in your hands, (with_) articles, poems., conversations transcribed, based on and from, i think especially around these parts; dreams are great, fragile creatures that dance with the ether of hope, and yet contain to them, the truth that interpenetrates the essential.

a great thanks to the community for sustaining this form, for submitting their raw hearts for measuring, scaling, grammatical accuracy and the enjoyment of the average mfwm reader.

again, we present to you, mirror flower water moon, and we hope, as always, that the living wisdom within you penetrates your heart at each turn of the page. Godspeed.

alternately to the speak of the bible: as god said, word.

your editing team <33

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Dreams Have Borders of Forgetfulness

Ben Sandel

Sleeping, I forget myself, and waking, my dream fades away. Sometimes I get caught up in thought and forget I am here, now. Imagining I am “me,” do I forget my true life? Am I constantly forgetting the next moment? Sometimes, I have moments of clarity where I remember, “Yes! This is the true life! What was going on before was an illusion, a dream.” And then I forget – caught up in a dream again.

Sometimes, if we have a nice dream, our drowsy waking self will try to fall back asleep to reenter the dream. Sometimes, we enjoy dreams. Sometimes, we are tortured by them. Dreams are stories. The unconscious reaches out to us to show what is on its/our mind. Sometimes, dreams seem to be going nowhere, the world transforming around us where strange things happen that we would not accept in waking moments but are taken for granted in a dream.

Is daydreaming a nice way to spend our time? A waste of time? An important exercise? An unnecessary drama? Sometimes, we initiate them. Sometimes they pop up and take us over. The New Age and self-improvement folks tell us we can bring our daydreams into reality if we make them detailed enough. Are you excited or afraid of your dreams coming true? Do we want what we daydream? How often do we daydream all the way to the end of life or into the long term effects it will have on others? We don’t know if anything we dream of will make us happy in the end. Life, like a dream, seems chaotic and unpredictable.

Are we dreaming now? How would we know? Does it matter? Dreams parallel our

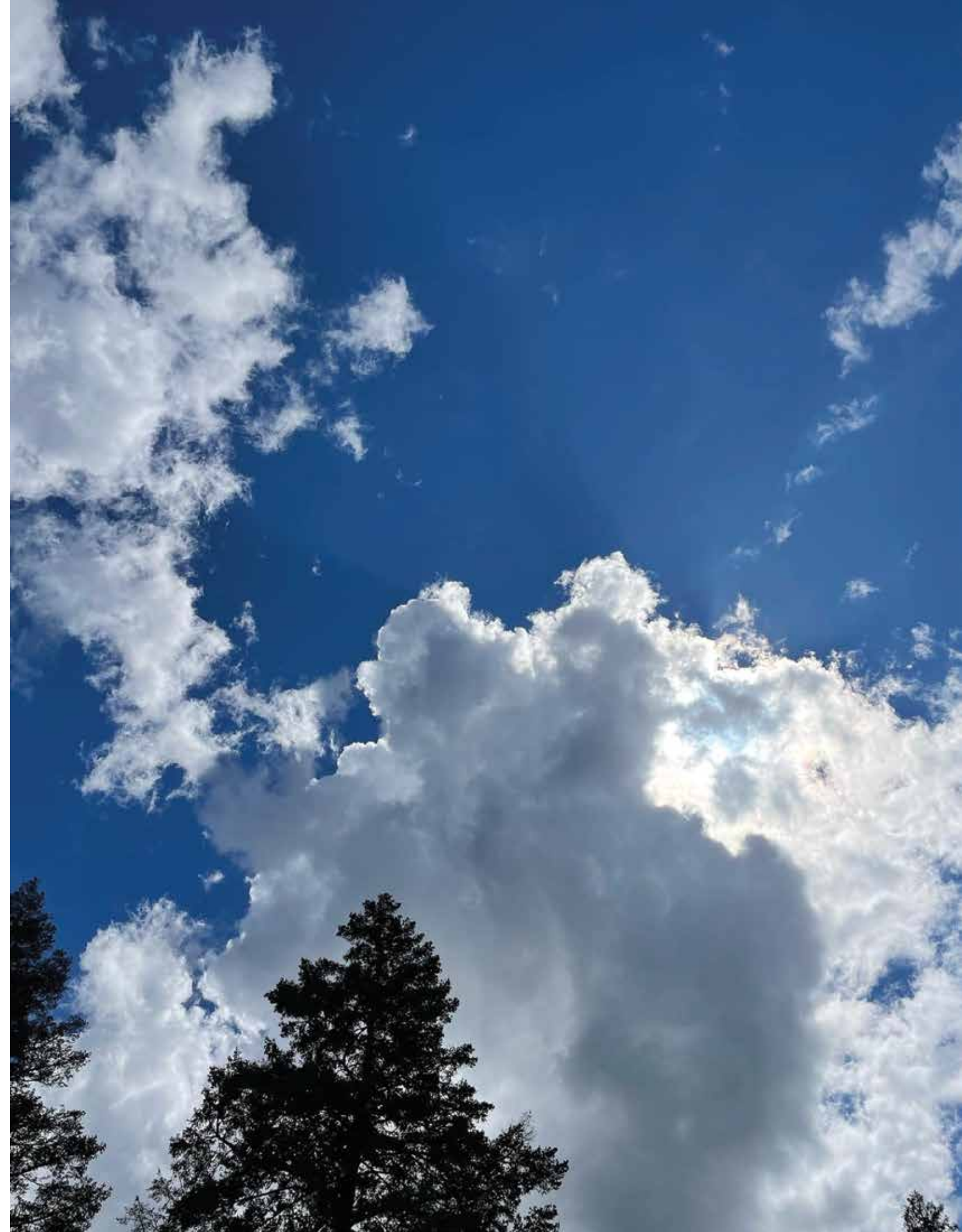
waking selves, using symbols, analogies, and metaphors. Do you see what is going on in your mind around you in the world? Is not everything we create and interpret in the world humanity externalized? We group and name and build. Our thought made real. Or, is that just how it appears? A dream within a dream. How many layers can dreams within dreams within dreams go? Are you in the chaos of the dream or centered, watching it unfold around you? If you are dreaming, are you not all the characters and the landscape? Isn’t everything done to you, even if indirectly?

If you punch your enemy in the face, are you not hurt and scared? If you clean up the park, don’t you feel cleaner? If you give to someone in need, don’t you also feel enriched?

We feel confident; then, our world is solid and clear. We feel shame; then, our world becomes flaccid and murky. We feel angry; then, everyone is an enemy. We feel loved; then, everyone is family. Actions shape the world, but emotions make it. Sounds like a dream to me. The “me” is always dreaming. The “me” can wake up no more than any tool. Put down the tool and see.

But just a few more minutes. My “me” is such a great tool. Don’t you love your “me?” Doesn’t it feel like a nice cozy comforter? The rhythm of “me” may not always be enjoyable, but it is familiar and predictable. We synchronize it with the rhythms of the world when we are predictable and stick to our roles. It is so easy; we can do it in our sleep.

Actions shape the world,
but emotions make it.





UNTITLED POEM

Justin Howe

i.

Oh, I have been the host of sorrows;
see them dangle from the chandelier.
Scooping grapes up by the fistful,
they dash the china to the floor.

Morning at the window
beside the kitchen sink
(its glazed and listless chorus
of resentful little panes
tending rather to be looked
not at but through)
is muffled egg-colored
like an ailing umbrella.

My shoes are not shoes
I normally own: anxiously
in season, pale blue cotton
canvas outwardly seamed.

Out there somewhere is a bicycle
just for me. Its pilot bar spans the heaven
of my clavicles; writ within its cushion
is my tailbone's maiden name.

Awestruck pilgrims, you and I,
come before the image of the saint,
its intricate silverwork stained
by centuries of tallow smoke.

Carry me up, o angel of anger,
where the rain no longer falls,
where the air is as thin as a cobbler's soup
and thunder drubs the anvil sky.

I will recline there, on a Tuesday
afternoon, ankles crossed
on the bathtub rim, with a cavalcade
of little pink piggies on parade.

ii.

You are a blimp in the backyard.
I cut you loose, you blimp,
so you tiptoe in your ungainly grace
over the rooftops of the housing development.

Around us now, the pulse and hum
of a subtle, ceaseless vitality
turning over like an engine
somewhere far below.

Today is the day for putting away
the kiddie pool, for collecting cigarette butts,
for hosing down the flagstones
in the narrow back patio.

Happiness is all the history
of life on earth, from
a single cell, growing
by compromise and invention.

A candle is louder
than the sun. Events
of tremendous moment
transpire in silence.

The other night I saw the moon,
like a thumb or a worm or the moon,
fat and full, yellow with ash,
hung above the purple hills.

Too, I saw another moon,
smaller than the other moon,
down below the other moon:
the lantern of an outbuilding

peeking through the trees.



The Last Time I Saw Him

Terri Nicholson

“If you only feel that we are together when we are physically in the same place, then you will always feel bereft when we are apart,” Shifu (Sure-fu) told me. “If we are together in our hearts, then we are always together, and distance makes no difference at all.” It was 1977 and I was off on my own to Ukiah, a small town north of San Francisco, to hold Instilling Goodness Elementary School’s first summer camp at the newly purchased City of Ten Thousand Buddhas (CTTB). I was used to seeing the Master almost every evening when he lectured at the monastery in San Francisco, and I was fretting about being so far away from everyone.

Though I grew up steeped in the Jewish tradition—my grandfather was an ordained rabbi—I was fascinated with other religions yet frustrated by the

‘we’re right and everyone else is wrong’ attitude of many of their followers. When I encountered Buddhism and the Master, it opened a whole new world of ideas to me, vast and exciting, and deepened my connection with other religious traditions as well. As I studied with him my heart and mind grew more open and inclusive. I became less self-absorbed and more public spirited. And though at first we didn’t even speak the same language, I had never met anyone who understood me so well, even better than I understood myself. When I graduated from college in the mid-nineteen seventies, I moved to the Bay Area and became a part of a small community, mostly young Americans, who studied and practiced the Buddhist teachings under the Master’s guidance.

Now, almost twenty years later, the Master had been ill for a long time, and by this time a large portion of our Buddhist community was living at CTTB. One of the last times he gave a lecture he said:

I want to tell you what to do after I’m gone. All of you should prepare yourselves psychologically. I may depart at any time. Nothing is fixed. All people have birth, old age, sickness, and death. Even the Buddha entered Nirvana when the time came... Now I feel that my illness is getting worse day by day...I can’t be together with you all your lives. Every person has a time for coming and a time for going. Don’t be sad. Act the same way you do in ordinary times. Resolve to apply effort diligently.

Those of us living at CTTB had not seen him for at least six months and all I knew was that he was in Los Angeles somewhere and that he was very ill. But I had made up my mind to go see him

and now here I was at the Burbank Airport, standing at the car rental counter.

“May I have your credit card please?” asked the agent.

Credit card? I hadn’t brought a credit card. “I have the money to pay for the car right here,” I told the agent. “I didn’t bring my credit card.”

“I’m sorry, ma’am, we can’t rent you the car without a credit card even if you have the money to pay for it. We need it as insurance. What if you don’t bring the car back?”

I felt so stupid. Neither my husband Alan nor I had traveled much, and we didn’t realize I’d need one. I’d never rented a car before.

“You do have one?” he queried.

“Oh, yes, but my husband has it and he’s in San Francisco.”

“Why don’t you call him and get the credit card number from him? You can use our phone.”

He put the telephone on the counter where I could reach it. This was 1995 and there were no cell phones yet.

But I had no idea where Alan was. He had dropped me at the airport and was going to take the kids somewhere until it was time to pick me up. There was no way to reach him now. “He’s not at home,” I said. “I don’t know how to reach him.”

“I’m sorry, ma’am,” he said again. “Perhaps you can take a taxi.”

I didn’t think I had enough money for a taxi. They were expensive. “Okay, thank you, Sir,” I said and wandered away, wondering what I would do next. The man at the car rental counter would probably tell his coworkers, “You wouldn’t believe the lady who came in and tried to rent a car today...”

Would I really have to turn around and go back home without seeing Shifu? I didn’t even have the phone number where he was staying to call and tell him I couldn’t get there. I guess I could find a payphone and call the office at CTTB. “Namo Guan Shr Yin Pu Sa,” I chanted, asking for help from Guan Yin, the Bodhisattva who rescues those in need, and trying desperately to calm myself down. My hands felt like ice cubes, though it wasn’t very cold out. “Deep breaths, Terri. What kind of Buddhist are you anyway?” I muttered to myself. “Everything’s a test, remember?”

I could at least ask a taxi driver how much it would cost. I did have the address and a map with the route from the airport highlighted. This was way before Google maps, way before Google even. I made my way outside to the sign that said Ground Transportation and stood at the curb, waiting for the next taxi, continuing to recite, “Namo Guan Shr Yin Pu Sa, Namo Guan Shr Yin Pu Sa.” In just a few minutes a large van with a hand-painted sign on the side that said something like Airport Shuttle pulled up in front of me.

“Need a ride?” the driver asked.

“Can you take me here?” I asked, handing my map to him through the open window. “How much would it cost?”

The price he quoted was much less than I expected, certainly less than a taxi would have been. I’d have enough money for the return trip as

well. Maybe I would get there after all. “Can you pick me up and bring me back to the airport later today?” I asked.

“Sure, I can do that. I’ll give you my card. Just call the number on it when you’re ready and I’ll come back and get you,” he assured me. “Hop in.”

I climbed in and the driver pulled away from the curb. Within just a few minutes, he pulled up at a locked gate. Later, I would learn that it was called a gated community, but, at the time, I had never heard of such a thing. At home we didn’t even lock our doors.

“I’ll have to leave you here,” he said. “Call when you’re ready to go back to the airport.”

“Thank you.” I paid him and he drove away.

At the sight of the locked gate, I panicked again; how would I get in? Finally, I realized that must be what the code I had been given was

for. I punched in the numbers and, much to my relief, the gate opened. I found the house quickly, but still felt unsure. Was the Master staying in one of his disciple’s homes? Usually, he lived in a mon-

astery. The front door opened and there was Guo Ying, the woman who had been caring for the Master since his illness. A familiar face!

“Come in, come in,” she said. “Did you have a good trip? You didn’t have any trouble finding us, did you?”

I babbled on about how I hadn’t realized I would need a credit card, then stopped myself abruptly, remembering why I was here. “How’s Shifu?” I asked.

Guo Ying’s smile disappeared. “He is not very well today, but he is expecting you. Come, bow to the Buddha and I will tell him you are here.” She pointed to the small altar in the corner of the living room, and I went to pay my respects.

Soon Guo Ying returned. “He will see you now,” she told me and led me down the hall to his room.

A young monk opened the door. “The Master is not well enough to sit up,” he told me. “He asked me to tell you not to bow,” my usual greeting to him, but did not explain why.

I took in the room. Shifu was lying on a hospital bed in the center. The head of the bed was raised only slightly. I could smell the faint scent of

sandalwood that always surrounded the Master. I walked over to the bed.

“Guo Tsan,” he said, using the name he had given me when I became a disciple. “You are here.”

I put my palms together. “It’s been too long, Shifu. I wanted to see you again.”

“I am not well,” he said and went on to describe the excruciating pain that prevented him from sitting up.

Like a tsunami washing over me, I realized he was dying; he would not get better this time. The words hung between us. There was no need to say them aloud. Fighting tears, I fumbled in my bag for the drawings and get well cards my children had made for him.

For the first time, he smiled and took them from me. “Put them up on the wall where I can see them,” he told his attendant. Then we were left with silence—my beloved Shifu was dying. What was there to say? I would never look into those kind, unfathomable eyes again, at least in this lifetime.

As usual, he knew exactly what I was thinking. He took my hand in his and squeezed it. “Duo nian fo,” he said. Recite the Buddha’s name more. Be mindful. Those were his last words to me.

I nodded my head, but my entire being was focused on my hand in his and the bond between us, deep and profound.

I don’t remember leaving him, just sitting on the couch in the living room trying very hard not to cry and failing miserably.

“He isn’t always this bad,” Guo Ying said gently. “Some days he is up and around and even greets his guests here in the living room,” she explained, trying her best to comfort me.

I made a Herculean effort to pull myself together. “May I use the telephone? I need to call that man who drove the van to pick me up.” I

wasn’t fooling Guo Ying, though. She could tell how upset I was.

“Let me get someone to drive you back to the airport. It’s not far.” Before I could protest, she had picked up the phone and made the arrangements. “He will be here in ten minutes,” she said.

“Thank you,” I said meekly, still wrapped in misery.

She chattered on about all the disciples who had come to pay their respects. “You should bring Alan and the children. Shifu would love to see them.” She walked outside with me. “Tell your brother to come too,” she said as I got into the car.

“I will. Thank you for everything, Guo Ying,” I said, and we both put our palms together in farewell.

At the airport I still had quite a while to wait until my plane. I felt displaced, cut loose from my anchor in a stormy sea. The world would never feel the same again. I found a family chatting quietly in

Mandarin and went to sit nearby.

Often lately I had complained that everything at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas was in Chi-

nese these days, but right now it felt familiar and safe, and I clung to the connection. The irony was not lost on me. Then, in a daze I boarded the plane and returned to my family.

A few months later, the Master slipped into unconsciousness and then was gone from this world.

The Shifu in my heart is still there, though, vivid as ever. At least he is when I am mindful. His favorite aphorisms pop into my mind spontaneously. “Everything’s okay, no problem.” “Turn the light within; recognize your own faults.” “Don’t believe in me; believe in yourself.” He is a vibrant part of me, always nudging me to see what’s true, not to “ignore the roots and grasp at branch tips” and to be the best I can be.

Like a tsunami washing over me, I realized he was dying.



Chinese couplets written by Ven. Master Hua that were hung in front of the CTTB's dining hall and the Administration Office during this Lunar New Year.

Translated by Lian Dui. Translations edited by Bhikshuni Jin Xiang.

瑜伽風吹芬芳笑
達摩雨潤草木欣

Blown by the breeze, sweet-smelling plants in Ukiah are all smiles;
Moistened by rain, trees and grasses in Talmage rejoice.

菩提泉湧甘露水
般若雲封龍樹林

Sweet-dew water flows from the spring of Bodhi;
Clouds of prajñā cover the woods of Dragon Tree.

Note: These lines were originally written for Bodhi House and Dragon Tree, the residences at CTTB.

The Piano Keys

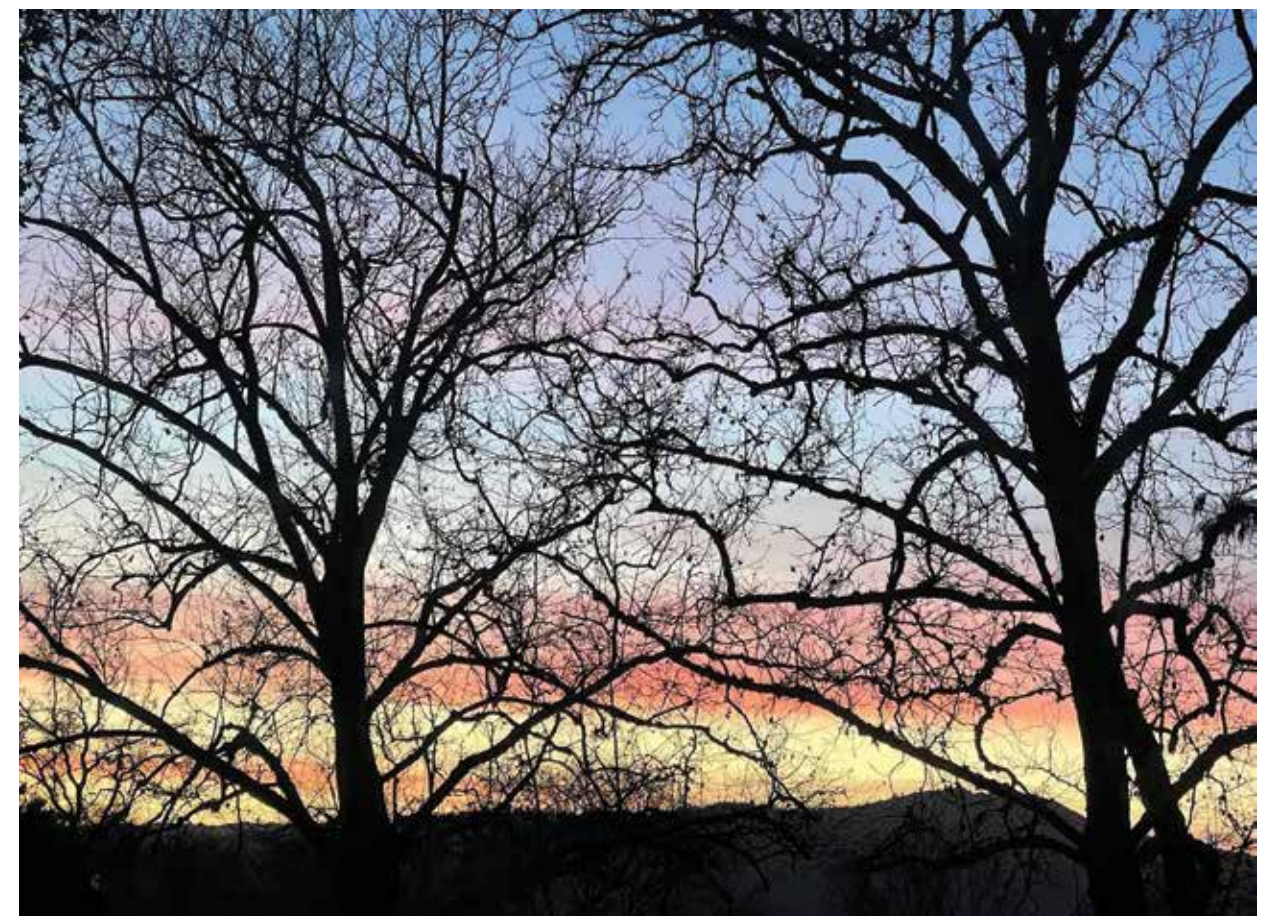
Ti la so la do ... The opening notes of Piano Sonata No.11 by Mozart

As I play a piece of music my memories carry me back to one of the first musical experiences of my childhood. I am sitting at the piano and get a strong (compulsion?) feeling, telling me to open it and start playing. I open the lid with a shaking hand and press down on a random key—"Do." The wonderful sound washes over me, and I think, "I love the piano."

Each of the eighty-eight keys on the piano has a unique sound. When the notes come together it is like people working in harmony—so wonderful! But if we fight with each other and hurt people when they are weak, it's like when the piano notes are clashing. It's awful.

No one is the same. We all have different lives, thoughts, and challenges. Piano, the king of instruments, is calming to people like me. I love the piano. It's the best instrument I have ever played.

—Victoria Yu
Instilling Goodness Girls' School
Sixth grade



Doubts/Sulfur Shelf

Kathleen Irby

Back in the fall of 2020, September of that year was scorching hot. The wild fires surrounded CTTB—it seemed as if all of Northern California was on fire. In addition the Covid-19 pandemic was raging throughout our world. We were wearing masks for the dense smoke as well for protection from the virus. Yet, we were still blessed as DRBU accorded with conditions and carried on, never closing! DRBU held classes using conference calling technology. We all adjusted to the new norm of shared inquiry over zoom.

In the MA1 class studying *The Sixth Patriarch's Dharma Jewel Platform Sutra*, the important topic of doubts came up. We were assigned to reflect on a doubt that we had regarding Buddhism and report back to the class the following week. My reflection was "Can modern people sit under a tree and become awakened, as the Buddha did thousands of years ago"?

My doubts stemmed from the current conditions of culture, climate, and location. At that time, the September weather felt like midsummer. The temperatures were around 110 degrees Fahrenheit with a humidity of only 10 percent. The smoke from the fires choked the air. These extremely dry conditions in a forest makes a person wonder if sitting under a tree could bring enlightenment. There was no food or water to speak of and the people of the United States frowned upon its citizenry not working. The capitalist system is set up so that people work in order for them to spend money. The government is supported through the taxes on spending and the health of our nation is not measured by enlightenment but the gross national product spending numbers. Thus Americans do not understand alms rounds. They donate but do not understand putting food in a monastic's bowl.

This was my doubt for the Platform Sutra class. Can a modern person be supported while sitting under a tree and become awakened in this culture, location and climate?

As instructed I meditated on this topic over the week as preparation for the next class when the most extraordinary phenomena happened. During my family's daily walk through the forest I spied a gigantic sulfur shelf fungus. Normally they are only the size of a fist or smaller, but this one was the size of a human head. It was

dripping water to boot!

Amidst adverse conditions the forest was providing food and water! Amazing! I interpreted this manifestation as an affirmative answer to my doubtful question.

Yes, the sulfur shelves are edible especially in the first week as shown in figure 1.

Figure 1



Sulfur shelves grow from the scars of oak trees. This one grew out of the side branch we cut off the main trunk about ten years ago. Can you see the water droplets in Figure 2.

The health of our nation is not measured by enlightenment but the gross national product.

Figure 2



September 17, 2020 is the sulfur shelf's 12th day. Its size has expanded as the shelves become apparent. Water is now dripping continuously watering the moss growing beneath it as displayed in figure 3.

Figure 3



On the sulfur shelf's twenty-second day, September 27, 2020, the shelves of the fungus for which it is named are in full bloom. Although no longer considered edible for human consumption, the squirrels have taken bites out of it, yet not disturbing the sulfur shelf's magnificence as featured in figure 4.

Figure 4



We noticed some signs of decay on the twenty-fourth day, September 29, 2020, as pictured in figure 5.

Figure 5



The shelves had started to harden and become porous. The water no longer dripped, but its shell lasted for several more months before falling off its perch onto the forest floor.

As for my doubts of a modern person being able to become awakened in our current conditions of drought, capitalism, and locations of forest, city and between; the sulfur shelf's auspicious appearance taught me, my answer is a resounding YES! People of this day and age can become awakened if we accord with conditions and other guidelines, like precepts and asceticism. I no longer have a doubt; I have confidence in the Sixth Patriarch's advice that dharmas and the mind are non-dual; "Setting up appearances is 'mind'; and being free from them is 'Buddha'" (*The Sixth Patriarch's Dharma Jewel Platform Sutra* 66).

An immersive translation between three minds, eras and cultures

Alone

Edgar Allan Poe

From childhood’s hour I have not
 been
As others were—I have not seen
As others saw—I could not bring
My passions from a common spring—
From the same source I have not
 taken
My sorrow—I could not awaken
My heart to joy at the same tone—
And all I lov’d—I lov’d alone—
Then—in my childhood—in the dawn
Of a most stormy life—was drawn
From ev’ry depth of good and ill
The mystery which binds me still—
From the torrent, or the fountain—
From the red cliff of the mountain—
From the sun that ‘round me roll’d
In its autumn tint of gold—
From the lightning in the sky
As it pass’d me flying by—
From the thunder, and the storm—
And the cloud that took the form
(When the rest of Heaven was blue)
Of a demon in my view—

naps & stuff

by pedro tranito

On this cold gloomy day,
Brings up memories of my youth from The Bay –
Mhm, is this a memory or a dream?
I cannot distinguish between,
 nevertheless, a smile I beam
 with my cat in my lap,
 as we took a peaceful nap
 & i think of that po’(e) fella
If only he could see
 that life is hella

Full of beauty
&
Wonderful

A Dream Within a Dream

Edgar Allan Poe

Take this kiss upon the brow!
And, in parting from you now,
Thus much let me avow —
You are not wrong, who deem
That my days have been a dream;
Yet if hope has flown away
In a night, or in a day,
In a vision, or in none,
Is it therefore the less *gone*?
All that we see or seem
Is but a dream within a dream.

I stand amid the roar
Of a surf-tormented shore,
And I hold within my hand
Grains of the golden sand —
How few! yet how they creep
Through my fingers to the deep,
While I weep — while I weep!
O God! Can I not grasp
Them with a tighter clasp?
O God! can I not save
One from the pitiless wave?
Is *all* that we see or seem
But a dream within a dream?

The Butterfly Dream

Zhuangzi

Translated by
Burton Watson

Once Zhuang Zhou
dreamed he was a butterfly,
a butterfly flitting and
fluttering around, happy
with himself and doing
as he pleased. He didn’t
know he was Zhuang Zhou.
Suddenly he woke up, and
there he was, solid and
unmistakable Zhuang Zhou.
But he didn’t know if he
were Zhuang Zhou who had
dreamed he was a butterfly
or a butterfly dreaming
he was Zhuang Zhou.
Between Zhuang Zhou and
a butterfly, there must be
some distinction! This is
called the Transformation of
Things.

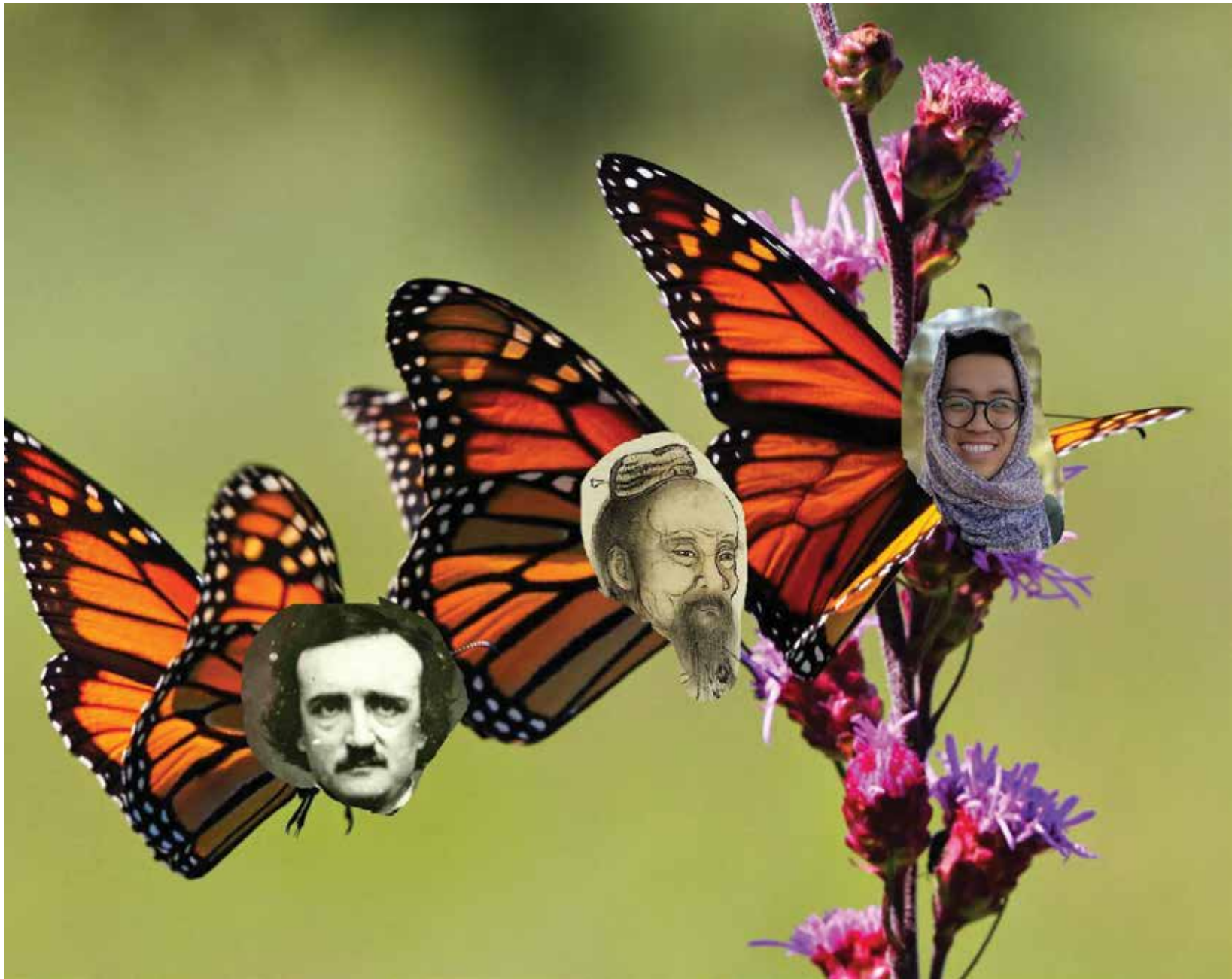
So, let it *all* go,
And remember that *you’re* not alone
Cause you are I,
And he is me...
Or was it the other way around?

But *none* of that matters anyways
Because we’re all the same when you get *there*

& all this talk of the Heavens & the Hells
to the snowy mountain caps & the dried up wells

Are all just distractions from the fact
that we’re all on the same team

& distinctions only exist in dreams
within a dream.



Artwork: Peter Tran

Yan Hui's Embodiment of Learning in the *Analects*

Xiaojuan Shu

Yan Hui is represented as foremost in learning among Confucius' students. After he died, Confucius said, "Now that he is gone, there are none who *really* love learning—at least, I have yet to hear of one" (6.3). What type of "learning (*xue* 學)" is being referred to in the *Analects*? What did Yan Hui love about learning? What motivated him to pursue learning so wholeheartedly? Passages in the *Analects* in which Confucius discusses learning and Yan Hui's embodiment of learning give us possible answers to these questions and may inspire us to reflect on our own motives for learning.

MOTIVES FOR LEARNING

Often our motives for learning stem from external goals, such as material wealth and social recognition. But many of us also pursue learning for inner fulfillment. What was important to Yan Hui in his pursuit of learning?

Letting Go of Material Non-Necessities

In the *Analects*, Confucius emphasizes learning without regard for material comfort. This is expressed in teachings promoting simple living. He says, "*Junzi* [an exemplary person] devotes his effort in the Way, not the food" (15.32). He also says, "Eating plain food and drinking water, having only your bent arm as a pillow—certainly there is joy in it!" (7.16). When Confucius and the students who followed him were besieged in impoverished conditions in the State of Chen, Zilu complained, "How could *Junzi* also have to encounter hardship?" Confucius replied, "Of course *Junzi* would encounter hardship. The difference is that those who have less virtue would give in to the hardship and give up on themselves" (15.2). Confucius seems to emphasize that *junzi* would remain unmoved regardless of hardships, such as lack of material comfort, and instead, they find joy in simple living.

Yan Hui certainly embodied this teaching of "eating plain food and drinking water"

in the way he lived: "Living in a narrow alley, subsisting on a basket of grain and a gourd of water—other people could not have borne such hardship, yet it never spoiled Hui's joy" (6.11). This passage vividly describes how Yan Hui was able to live joyfully with just a few essential material necessities. Clearly, pursuing material wealth was not Yan Hui's motive for learning, and his "impoverished" situation may even be a contributing factor to his joy.

Detaching From Social Recognition

If material gain seemed trivial to Yan Hui, what then was important to him? It's not uncommon for one to desire for social recognition that would bring one admiration by others as the result of learning. How much did Yan Hui care about how others viewed him? Yan Hui seemed to take little interest in impressing others. When Confucius asked two of his closest students, Zilu and Yan Hui, what their aspirations were, Yan Hui answered, "I would avoid boasting of my goodness and making a display of my meritorious deeds" (5.26). Yan Hui did not seem to seek external validation for his own worth, not even from Confucius, whom he deeply respected. As Confucius says, "I can talk all day long with Yan Hui without him once disagreeing with me. In this way, he seems a bit stupid. And yet when we retire and I observe his private behavior, he is in fact worthy to serve as an illustration of what I have taught" (2.9). Yan Hui makes no attempt to impress Confucius. For most of us, if we had a teacher whom we greatly revere, we would naturally long for that teacher's appreciation of our effort and achievements by trying to get the teacher's attention. In Confucius' description, Yan Hui appears "a bit stupid," but in fact, he is regarded by Confucius as a worthy illustration of his teachings. This quote seems to suggest that true learning is not reflected in demonstrating to others what one knows, but in how one actually lives the teachings. Clearly, Yan Hui puts

no effort into seeking social recognition when it comes to learning.

To link back to Confucius' teaching, how does Confucius view the relationship between social influence and learning? Isn't Confucius' whole life dedicated to influencing governance and teaching others? In the passage where Yan Hui says he would avoid talking about his own merit quoted above, Confucius also tells us what his aspirations really are: "I wish all the elders are comforted; all friends can trust each other; and all the youth are cared for" (5.26). Could this aspiration be the reason why he took the position as the prime minister of the State of Lu and later traveled from State to State for over a decade, trying to encourage rulers to establish virtuous governance? Imagine if he were born in a harmonious world, where all elders and youths were being cared for and integrity prevailed among all people, how would he spend his time? He definitely would not mind simply enjoying springtime, "bathing in the Yi River, feeling the breeze upon the Rain Altar, and singing on the way home!" (11.26). Confucius does not come across as getting involved in governance for his own social gains; that was not his goal.

Inner Motive for Learning

If it wasn't Yan Hui's intention to pursue either material wealth or social recognition, what then could be the reason that motivated him to learn? Confucius spoke highly of those who study for intrinsic reasons, instead of extrinsic ones. He greatly valued those who learned for learning's sake, not mixed with other motives, as expressed in his lament: "It is not easy to find someone who is able to learn for even three years without a thought given to the official salary" (8.12). Confucius greatly valued the intention of learning for oneself. He says, "In ancient times scholars learned for their own sake; these days they learn for the sake of others" (14.24). It seems likely that Yan Hui's love for learning was powered from within. He was a rare treasure in the sense that he truly embodied learning for learning itself, sought no material gains nor social influence, and didn't try to impress anyone, even if all he had to sustain his life were some grains

and water. Confucius applauded him, "What a worthy man Yan Hui was!" (6.11).

Yan Hui's intrinsic love for learning is also evident in his diligence in learning from those he met and with every opportunity. Whomever Yan Hui encountered, he would find something to learn from them. As Zengzi, another influential student of Confucius, spoke of him: "Able, and yet inquiring of those who were not able; more knowledgeable, and yet inquiring of those who were less" (8.5). We can only imagine what kind of learning spirit one must have in order to learn as Yan Hui did. Regardless of how his teacher and peers respected and applauded him, Yan Hui remained humble and ready to learn from anyone. This is consistent with what Confucius famously says, "When walking with two others, I always find something to learn from them. I

emulate their good qualities and correct myself for the bad ones that I see" (7.22). Propelled by that inner motive to learn, Yan Hui kept advancing and never stopped (9.21). For Yan Hui, learning had no beginning or end, and he could pursue learning anywhere, anytime, from anyone.

WHAT TYPE OF LEARNING AND HOW DOES ONE LEARN?

It is important to distinguish between learning and accumulating "knowledge" though. In Yan Hui's case, he was actually dedicated to unlearning, dropping all that was not conducive to his learning or his embodiment of the teachings, such as not looking at, listening to, speaking, or acting what is not aligned with the highest goodness that he intended to cultivate (12.1). After dropping everything that is *not*, one may begin to see more clearly what it is.

What type of "learning" is being referred to in the *Analects*? Confucius once said to Zengzi, "All that I teach can be strung together on a single thread." Then he left the room without saying anything further (4.15). Another time, Confucius asked Zigong, another student, "Do you see me as someone who learns through studying a wide variety of things and keeping them in memory?" Zigong asked, "Is this not the case?" Confucius said, "No. I bind it all together

True learning is not reflected in demonstrating to others what one knows, but in how one actually lives the teachings.

with a single thread” (15.3). What is that “single thread” in learning? How does Confucius convey that “single thread” to his students and how does one learn?

“A Single Thread”

Although there are a few places in the *Analects* that suggest a possible answer to that single principle that Confucius might be referring to, the point is that learning is not about the *quantity* of things that one studies. If one grasps the “single thread” that underlies all Confucius’ teachings, one can trace all teachings by following that thread, and apply them based on different situations.

As the best student of Confucius, Yan Hui must have understood the “single thread” that runs through all Confucius’ teachings. When Confucius asked Zigong, “Who is better, you or Yan Hui?” Zigong answered, “How dare I even think of comparing myself to Hui? Hui learns one thing and thereby understands ten. I learn one thing and thereby understand two.” Confucius says, “No, you are not as good as Hui. Neither of us is as good as Hui” (5.9). As a highly regarded student of Confucius himself, Zigong would not dare to compare himself to Yan Hui when it came to learning because, “Hui learns one thing and thereby understands ten.” In Classical Chinese, “ten” can imply “many.” With that unifying “single thread,” Yan Hui was able to extend his understanding of “one” to “many.”

Furthermore, Confucius made his teaching method clear by saying, “I will not open the door for a mind that is not already striving to understand, nor will I provide words to a tongue that is not already struggling to speak. If I hold up one corner of a problem, and the student cannot come back to me with the other three, I will not attempt to instruct him again” (7.8). What did Confucius try to spark in students? He wanted to help them start their own self-powered “learning engine,” so that they could engage in learning for their own sake and for learning itself. In other words, he intended to train his students to think on their own, so he resisted spoon-feeding them with what he knew. Confucius was open about his own love for learning too. “In any village of ten households

there are surely those who are as sincere and honest as I am, but there is no one who matches my love for learning” (5.28). Confucius wanted to spark the same love for learning in his students from within.

“What Does Heaven Ever Say?”

Besides hinting at “a single thread” and encouraging students to think on their own, Confucius also explored the idea of not speaking with any words at all! “I would rather not speak,” one day

he said to Zigong, who responded with concern, “If the Master did not speak, then how would the students receive teachings from you?”

Confucius replied, “What does Heaven ever say? Yet the four seasons are put in motion by it, and the myriad creatures receive their life from it” (17.19). What does he mean by asking “What does Heaven ever say”? Without words, nature runs its own cycle. Wordless teaching can reach much deeper places than words. Confucius often encouraged his students to be “slow to speak, but responsive to act” (4.24).

YAN HUI’S LEARNING AS REFLECTED IN THE TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP

Confucius and Yan Hui had profound mutual respect and care for each other. Yan Hui spoke very highly of Confucius’ teaching, “The more I look up at it, the higher it seems; the more I delve into it, the harder it becomes. Catching a glimpse of it before me, I then find it suddenly at my back. The Master is skilled at gradually leading me on, step by step...” (9.11). Because of Yan Hui’s exemplary embodiment of his teaching, Confucius could see how his teaching was put into practice and lived. Yan Hui once said to Confucius, “As long as you are still here, Master, how could I dare to allow myself to die?” (11.23). But he only lived to age forty and died about two years earlier than Confucius, according to some records. The well-known phrase by Confucius comes to mind, “Having in the morning heard the Way, I could die that evening without regret” (4.8). Did Yan Hui “hear the Way”? Was that why he loved learning so much, because it allowed him to “hear the Way”? I could only hear back—the echoing *silence*. After Yan Hui

After dropping everything that is *not*, one may begin to see more clearly what it is.

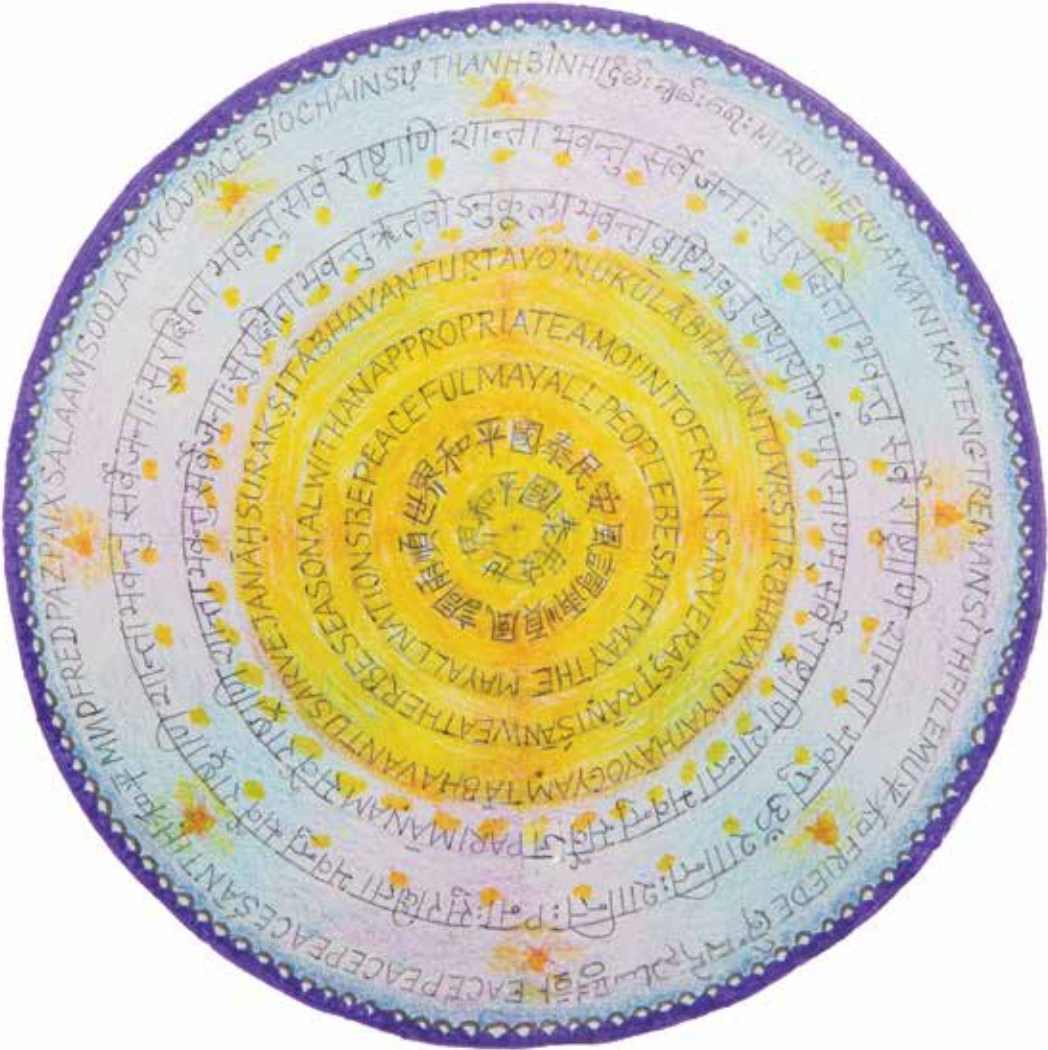
died, Confucius wept openly and said, “Oh! Heaven has bereft me! Heaven has bereft me!” When the other students said to him, “Master, surely you are showing excessive grief!” He responded, “Am I showing excessive grief? Well, for whom *would* I show excessive grief, if not for this man?” (11.10). The depth of their teacher-student relationship transcends most father-son relationships.

CONCLUSION

Yan Hui had the purest intention to pursue learning and he strived to live a life that was aligned with that intention. Learning itself made all the other things in life appear trivial to him. Having spotted the “single thread,” the root of things, he let go of the *branches*, unmoved by

either hardships or praises. Even though he was applauded by his teacher and peers, he remained quiet and humble, so alive and content was he in his learning. Neither having made a penny nor taken any government position in his short life, he was put at the top among Confucius’ three thousand students. “What a worthy man Yan Hui was” indeed! His unwavering intention to *learn* will certainly continue to stand still as a beacon in a world besieged by accumulative trivialities.¹

1 Translations of the *Analects* passages quoted in this paper have consulted the following two sources with modifications: Edward Slingerland, trans., *Confucius Analects with Selections from Traditional Commentaries*, (Hackett Publishing Company, 2010) and James Legge, *The Chinese Classics, Vol. 1: Confucian Analects*, retrieved from <https://ctext.org/analects/zh?en=en> on Dec. 8, 2022.



“This mandala drawing was an inspiration from the prayer circle, a ServiceSpace pod, that I attended in April, 2022. The mandala consists of the dedication of merit used at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas (in Chinese, English, and Sanskrit), surrounded by ‘peace’ in different languages.”

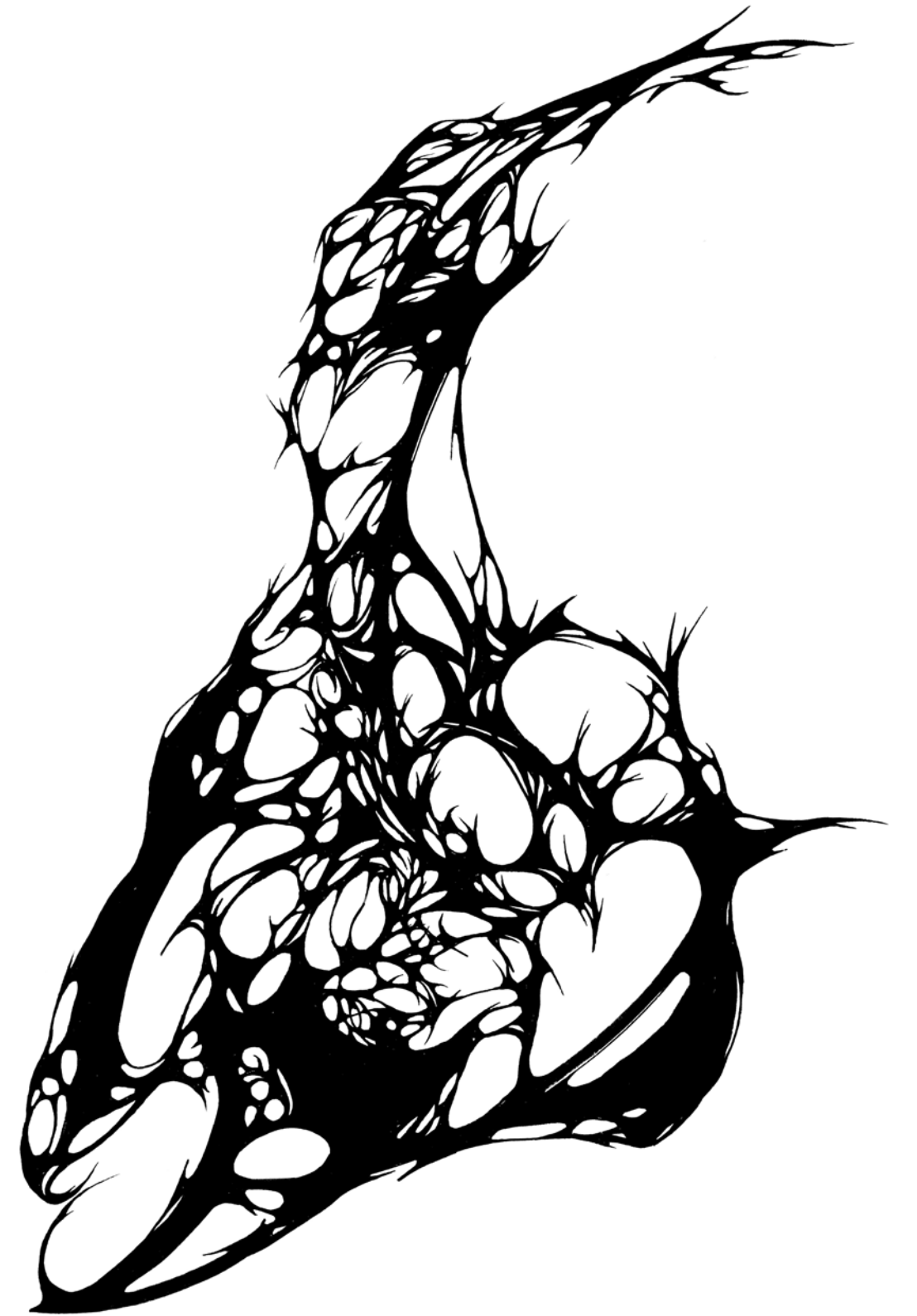


Like the Great Earth

Based on the Earth Store Sutra

Verse by Dana Green (a pen name meaning “giving to Earth”) and Terri Nicholson

His wishing pearl brings happiness and peace;
 Wishes take wing and dreams come true.
 Like Earth Store, we can be kind and wise too;
 Making the earth a better place, me and you.



Classical Chinese II Couplets

compiled by Instructor Yihuan Shih

Venerable Master Hua, the founder of DRBU, began to teach a Chinese Couplet Matching class back in the 1970's at Gold Mountain Monastery, SF. In one of his talks, the Ven. Master mentioned that matching couplets could express the wisdom of the human race and the loftiness of Chinese culture; it was an excellent way to learn Chinese as well.

By 1980, his Matching Couplets class had become one of the most expected and popular events in CTTB. It was also included in DRBU's

curriculum in order to develop and activate students' intrinsic wisdom.

In 2023, the students in Classical Chinese 2 learned to appreciate the art of Chinese matching couplets and tried to match couplets on their own. None of them had composed Chinese matching couplets before. Let's take a look at the students' works. They used Master Hua's line as the first line and composed their own second line as matching lines.

1 Master Hua's first line:

Master Hua's first line		
你	我	他
Nǐ	wǒ	tā
you	me	he

Students' matching lines:

BA1, Irina Passar 向靈杉		
上	中	下
Shàng	zhōng	xià
up	middle	down

BA1, Bach Nguyen 白聖川		
老	病	死
Lǎo	bìng	sǐ
old age	sickness	death

BA2, Sehen Gamhewa 史懷哲		
一	二	三
yī	èr	sān
one	two	three

MA1, Sheryl McIntyre 孟詩卿		
佛	法	僧
Fó	fǎ	sēng
Buddha	dharma	Sanga

MA1, Nhut Huynh 陸陽		
紅	藍	綠
Hóng	lán	lǜ
red	blue	green

2 Master Hua's first line:

靜	坐	常	思	己	過
jìng	zuò	cháng	sī	jǐ	guò
quietly	sit	often	contemplate	one's won	fault

To sit quietly and often think about one's own shortcomings.

MA1, Nhut Huynh's match

勤	學	漸	修	吾	德
qín	xué	jiàn	xiū	wú	dé
diligently	study	gradually	cultivate	my	virtues

To diligently study and gradually cultivate my own virtues

3 Master Hua's first line (1971):

移	山	填	海	真 ¹	大	地
yí	shān	tián	hǎi	zhēn	dà	dì
move	mountain	Fill	ocean	Ascend to	great	ground

Moving mountains and filling up the ocean, one ascends to great ground.

MA1, Nhut Huynh's match

斷	惡	修	善	行	實	德
Duàn	è	xiū	shàn	xíng	shí	dé
Cut off	evil	cultivate	goodness	practice	true	virtues

Cutting off the evil and cultivating the goodness, one practices true virtues.

¹真's original meaning is to ascend.



Winter Chan at Earth Store Hall (17 December 2022)

Practice According to the *Platform Sutra*

Priscilla Feng

The *Sixth Patriarch's Dharma Jewel Platform Sutra* was composed by the students of the Sixth Patriarch during the Tang dynasty in China around the 8th century. It is often considered as one of the important foundational texts of Chan Buddhism. In the Buddhist tradition, sutras are regarded as records of oral teachings of the historical Shakyamuni Buddha from India. The *Platform Sutra* is the only text composed in China that was given the title of a sutra. This sutra is written in simple and straightforward language and has provided enlightening and clear guidance for generations of cultivators in Asia. Any reader, given the opportunity, may find something instructive and resonant from it. People may wonder what the teachings are in such a famous sutra and how Master Huineng's teaching helps us in daily life.

To respond to people's curiosity, let us start with the core dharma with which Master Huineng instructed his disciples. In the first two chapters, "Where it All Began" and "Prajna," his teachings on the "Great Perfection of Prajna that Goes to the other Shore" stand out as an important aspect of his teachings. Prajna means wisdom in Sanskrit, and this wisdom is within every sentient being, foolish or wise. Master Huineng explains that every person possesses the pure Buddha nature; there is no need to seek externally; instead we should look inside for this perfect jewel. With proper practice, this precious jewel can be found within. When this precious jewel, the great perfect Prajna is realized and functioning, "It knows all" (*The Platform Sutra*, 25). With this "knows all" wisdom, practitioners can see things' true nature clearly and handle them with skillful means. This is the Prajna he introduced in this sutra which can help people to relieve suffering and end rebirth, eventually leading us to the other shore which represents the ultimate liberation.

The Sixth Patriarch's own story is a good example that everyone, young or old, wise or foolish, has the bodhi nature, the great Prajna. In the beginning of the text, we learn that Master Huineng was immediately awakened by just hearing people reading the *Diamond Sutra*, though he was from a lower class and without education. Later on, the Fifth Patriarch entrusted him with the Direct Teaching because of his well-known verse:

Basically, Bodhi has no tree,
Nor any mirror-stand bright,
Originally there's not one thing:
Where could dust alight? (14)

Please note, "Originally there's not one thing" is the key idea of the Sixth Patriarch's Great Perfection Prajna teaching which is in accordance

with the *Diamond Sutra*, “Let your mind be unattached, clinging to nothing” (15). Suffering is caused by an afflicted and attached mind which does not recognize the impermanent nature of all things. Both Master Huineng and the *Diamond Sutra*’s teachings emphasize the nature of impermanence and emptiness. By constantly being mindful and practicing, every sentient being has the wisdom to break attachments, dissolve suffering and attain true liberation which is the end of suffering.

All of us would love to live a happy life without suffering, but where is Prajna? In the beginning of the text, Master Huineng told us: “Bodhi is just the purity of your own nature. Attend only to this and you will straightaway achieve Buddhahood” (7). Bodhi here means Prajna, the pure nature, and is sentient beings’ inherent nature, which is always within

ourselves, not outside. When the Fifth Patriarch planned to transmit the robe and Dharma to his disciple, he asked the disciples to “draw upon your wisdom and use the prajna-essence of your original mind to compose a verse to show me” (9). The Fifth Patriarch wanted to test which student had

seen his own pure nature and understood the great meaning. From both Patriarchs’ teaching, we can know that our own nature is no different from prajna, the Bodhi nature.

Why is it that we cannot see the Prajna within our own nature? The text explains that it is because of confusion. In the beginning of Chapter Prajna: “All people originally possess the profound knowledge of Bodhi and Prajna within them, but they cannot realize it themselves because their conditioned minds wander and become confused. That is why they must rely on a Good and Wise Advisor who can lead them to see their intrinsic nature” (23). As Master Huineng said, because the inherent knowledge of Bodhi and prajna are covered by a conditioned mind, they are not able to emerge. That is why it is important to have a wise advisor’s guidance and teaching. Hence in Chan Buddhism, traveling and visiting a wise advisor is an important part of cultivation.

Both ordinary people and awakened ones possess Bodhi nature; the difference between them is addressed in the verse below:

Ordinary people are themselves Buddhas, and affliction itself is Bodhi. In one past moment of confused thought you are just an ordinary person. If the very next thought is awakened, you are a Buddha. Previous thoughts clinging to sensory states are afflictions; and succeeding thoughts unattached to states is bodhi (27).

Most of us might think that the distance between an ordinary person and a Buddha is far and wide, just like traveling from the earth to the sky. But the Sixth Patriarch implies that this seeming distance dissolves when one can be unattached and recognize the inherent wisdom within.

If recognizing the inherent prajna nature is key in this process of self-transformation, one might ask how ordinary people recognize their Bodhi nature inwardly. In the text: “What is prajna? In our language, prajna means wisdom. In every place and in every moment, in thought after thought, never becoming muddled and constantly acting wisely – just this is practicing prajna” (26). Master Huineng points out that it is important to constantly be mindful and prevent tangled thoughts. Wisdom and stupidity

Suffering is caused by an afflicted and attached mind which does not recognize the impermanent nature of all things.

are like darkness and light: if there is light then there is no darkness. In the same way, whenever wisdom exists, then there is no stupidity. Whenever stupid and confused thoughts are on one’s mind, wisdom exists nowhere. He taught his students to uncover the prajna of their own nature by being mindful and responding wisely “in every moment, in thought after thought” (27).

How then are we to realize the Bodhi nature according to the *Platform Sutra*? Sentient beings inherently possess the wisdom to end the cycle of suffering and rebirth. Cultivation to realize it should also focus on watching one’s own mind constantly. For example, when the Sixth Patriarch led disciples to repent, they were to say:

May I from the preceding moment of thought, the present moment of thought, and in the following moments of thought, in *every moment of thought*, be free of any stupidity and confusion; I now completely repent of all previous stupidity, delusion and unwholesome, unskillful karma done in the past, and may their effects be wiped away, and may I never do them again.

May I from the preceding moment of thought, the present moment of thought, and in the following moment of thought, in *every moment of thought*, be unstained by arrogance and deceit. I now completely repent of all previous unwholesome, unskillful karma I have created out of arrogance and deceit in the past. May their effects be wiped away, and may I never do them again.

May I from the preceding moment of thought, the present moment of thought, and in the continuing moments of thought, in *moment of thought to moment of thought*, be unstained by jealousy and envy. I now completely repent of all previous unwholesome, unskillful karma I have created out of jealousy and envy. May their effects be wiped away, and may I never do them again. (54-55; emphasis added)

The Sixth Patriarch teaches that repentance starts from observing our initial intention and thought, not the resulting consequence, because the root of karma is from greed, arrogance and stupidity. Once people identify and become aware of these unwholesome and unskillful behaviors, it is not difficult to be detached from them and recognize the purity of our inherent Bodhi nature.

To conclude, where is prajna? Prajna is right here and now. Sentient beings are at full capacity of intrinsic wisdom. Due to afflictions caused by greed, arrogance and stupidity, the pure nature has been covered up and is unable to reveal itself. The Sixth Patriarch emphasized the importance of practicing in daily home life. He guided us to contemplate with wholesome thought and perform skillful actions at every moment of thought: being filial and supporting parents, being sympathetic to the less fortunate, not gossiping, not fault-finding, being respectful to all, practicing generosity and forgiving. If sentient beings constantly put these teachings into practice, the quest to the other shore is not in vain—it is actually reachable.

The root of karma is from greed, arrogance and stupidity.

WORKS CITED
The Sixth Patriarch’s Dharma Jewel Platform Sutra. Translated by Buddhist Text Translation Society, 2014.

Translations of Poems by Master Han-shan (“*Cold Mountain*”)

Bhikshuni Jin-Xiang

#174

秉志不可卷，須知我匪席。
浪造山林中，獨臥盤陀石。
辯士來勸餘，速令受金璧。
鑿牆植蓬蒿，若此非有益。

My will can't be rolled up;
I'm not a mat, you should know thus.

Having roamed through mount'ns and woods,
I lie down on a rocky bed, in solitude.

Babblers come to bribe me
To accept their jade and gold—

Cracking open a wall to plant weeds
Is of no use at all!

#279

千雲萬水間，中有一閑士。白日遊青山，夜歸巖下睡。
條爾過春秋，寂然無塵累。快哉何所依，靜若秋江水。

A thousand clouds, ten thousand streams:
In their midst, a man lives at ease—
In daytime, roaming the mountains,
At night, returning to sleep under cliffs;
Letting springs and autumns quickly pass,
Mind at peace, no wearisome dust.
What a joy, not relying on anything,
Like the river waters in autumn, unmoving!

NOTES AND SOURCES:

These were part of the final assignment for Reading Seminar II in Spring Semester of 2022. Adapted from the translations of Burton Watson (1970), Robert Henricks (1990), and Red Pine (2000).

Watson, Burton. *Cold Mountain: 100 Poems by the T'ang poet Han-shan*, Columbia University Press, 1970, pages 72, 79; <https://terebess.hu/zen/chang/ColdMountain.pdf>

Excerpt from <天目中峰廣錄 Tianmu Zhongfeng Guanglu>, 示伊吾顯月長老(梵名烏鉢刺室利) To Elder Utpalaśrī

Translation by Ziqian Feng

佛法无商量分无湊泊分无安排分。但是拌得一切。打开万般绝计较。单单只是靠取一个话头。自今日守到个悟底时分。方许你取气。你若未到桶底子自脱之时便欲取气。直下蹉过了也。只此一蹉过便是百蹉千蹉。甚非小缘。做工夫最要紧是把得住。最要紧是放得下。最要紧是不随逆顺境转。最要紧是做得主定立得脚牢。最要紧是耐得枯淡守得寂寞。最要紧是识得眼前破不被世间一切境界惑。最要紧是寒不思衣饥不求食眼不随色耳不逐声。最要紧是一个身心如铁橛子。不受一切禅道佛法穿擊。最要紧是尽生不悟明决不起第二念。更有一件是最要紧处。口未开时已说了也。笔未动时已写了也。参未透时已悟了也。你还知么你还会么你还信么。如今大事为你不得。小事各自支当。

Buddhadharma has no bargaining, no scraping together, and no arrangement. Just interpenetrate everything and open up ten thousand realms without calculation. All you rely on is picking up this huatou and holding it from today on until the moment you are awakened to the bottom of it all, and then will you be allowed to take a breath. Should you want to take a breath before the bottom of the bucket falls out by itself, then you are missing it at this very moment. Missing it for this one moment is missing it for tens of thousands of kalpas—it is no small condition at all.

Regarding deepening the gongfu, what is most important is being able to hold it; what is most important is being able to let go; what is most important is not being turned by the conditions, pleasant or unpleasant; what is most important is being able to firmly make one's own decisions and securely stand on one's own feet; what is most important is being able to withstand dullness and blandness, and being able to abide in solitude; what is most important is being able to recognize and pierce through what is in front of one's eyes and not be confused by all the worldly states; what is most important is not to think of clothes when feeling cold, not to seek for food when feeling hungry, not to have eyes following after the forms, and not to have ears chasing after the sounds; what is most important is to have a body and mind like an iron peg, not accepting any penetration of Chan theories or of Buddhadharma; what is most important is, till the end of life, so long as one has not awakened to enlightenment, to resolutely not give rise to any second thought. Further, there is one more area that is of utmost importance: it is spoken before the mouth is opened; it is written out before a pen is held; and it is awakened before the investigation is through. Do you still know it? Do you still understand it? Do you still believe in it? Right now, you are not yet ready for the big things; as for the smaller things, let us all be responsible.

The light in the end of the tunnel

*T*his realm, the Buddha once said, Samsara Sea,
*W*here living beings are struck with blindness by desires.
*S*wimming in the deepest anguish and sufferings with no exit
and the sole savior is ourselves,
*R*elax and float on the sea's surfaces.
*D*on't let the mind cling to the waves of appearances and form.
*I*nstead, use the raft of Dharma as a vehicle to find our Way,
being mindful of every single action with the mind of letting go
and loving-kindness,
*T*hat is when,
*T*he Buddha's light appears within the mind.

—Bach Nguyen



Photography: Sheryl McIntyre



Celestial Gathering: Abigail Setera

“Meta-cognition of argument formation”

Journal #2 “Making an argument”

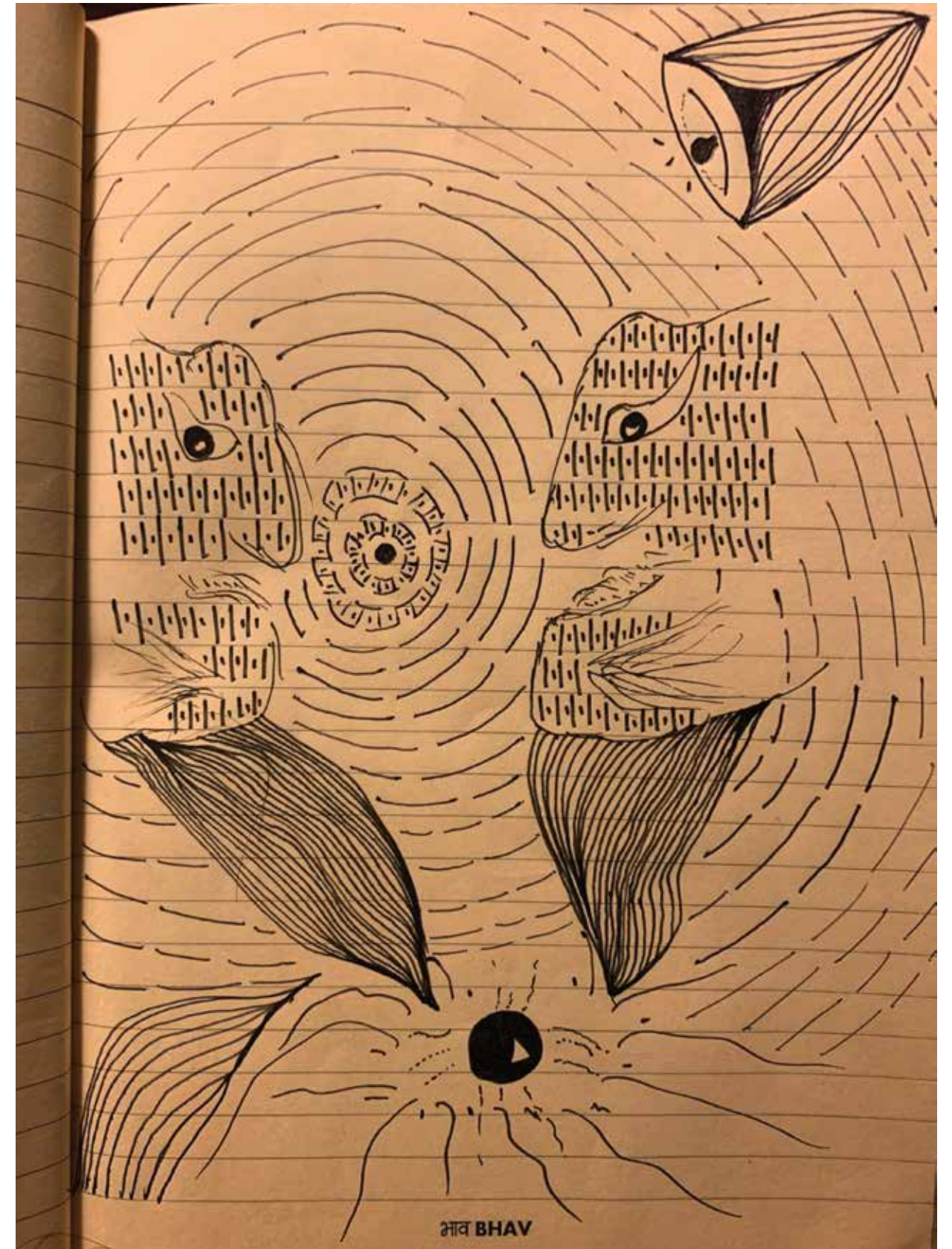
Alex Valdes

In my mind a thought arises, supposing something to be true. Creating connections to preconceived notions, structures of ideas forming views of understanding and knowledge. When does a thought become true? When does logic and the thought process collide toward imminent arguments explicitly stated for the purpose of righteousness? Open ended arguments are too vague. Let's be direct. Let's get it together. Find supporting evidence, state facts, be objective. In the philosophical context, a paradox arises, two opposing thoughts fight for proof and the friction between the two burns away the true and the false; coexistent synthesis distills an idea into the essence of pure wonder.

I wonder, what is it like to lose belief all together? Step into the true wordless argument born of Contemplation, the Logos speaks from the depths of being, urging sentience towards the real. Beyond thought processes, continuing evolution of consciousness, separating arguments from the knowing, knowing oneself, knowing infinite realms of possibility. Mathematically intertwined in landscapes of mind. Linguistically articulated. Symbolically located in the field of quantum activity. Neurologically stimulated into future memories.

I argue that what is true will be, whether we know it or not. For us to discover again and again, for us to remember again and again, and for us to forget again and again.

what is true will be,
whether we know it
or not.





On Truth and the Buddhadharma

James Nguyen

What is truth? How do we define truth? Does the term in itself carry potential connotations that can interfere with the very ideas it seeks to proclaim?

In Buddhism, we often talk about the “Four Noble Truths,” which is a translation of the Sanskrit term *catvāri āryasatyāni*. We can explore the root of *satya* as true, real, actual, genuine, sincere, honest, truthful, faithful, pure, virtuous, good, successful, effectual, valid. The most common translation of *Truth* carries with it some cultural, linguistic, and hermeneutic baggage that is worth exploring.

In today’s postmodern mindset, we can find that *truth* has adopted seemingly contradictory interpretations. In some ways, truth has become highly individualized and relativistic, with a sensitivity toward not territorializing each individual’s given truth and beliefs, though this has eroded the ground of a common truth for shared discussion. And in other ways, truth has been very fundamentalist, in which people forcibly look to impose their values on the world around them as a means of self-expression and identity, even to the point of violence. These trends are part of a larger polarization of discourse, as well as the compromised standing of truth in our current society.

Another concern about the term *truth* was a certain “fixedness” and “staticness” that comes from the usage of this word. The Buddha spoke of the expedient nature of his teachings—in the Alagaddupama Sutta, he describes how it serves as a crucial raft to cross the sea of suffering, yet ultimately needs to be abandoned when one gains realization. It does not exist dogmatically unto itself, but only as a tool to fulfill a larger purpose. Given this, if something explicitly prescribes itself to be ultimately abandoned, how much can we call it a truth? In addition, the term has a way of enabling a sense of “clinging” to the *truth*, which risks leading to the creation of a calcified dogma

that runs counter to the very spirit of what the Buddha taught.

We can extend this to the larger body of teachings as well. Words sourced as spoken directly from the Buddha are held in particularly high regard as a form of truth, yet we can also see that the Buddha frequently had disciples lecture on key principles in his stead, providing silent confirmation of their own realized wisdom. In the Mahāpadesa Sutta, the Buddha even outlines an approach for taking the words of other monastic teachers, evaluating their alignment to the Buddha’s teachings and practices, and accepting these too as the word of the Buddha. Given this self-directed broadening of authority, how much is truth a “thing”? How might it instead be a function of understanding, a “truthing,” of continually seeing things as they are?

As a learning practitioner on this side of samsara, I’m still very prone to making mistakes, and very much need the raft of the Buddhadharma. It’d be rather foolish for me to abandon the efficacy of the teachings and jump back into the sea of suffering.

But it’d also be mistaken to attach to this *truth* as a persistent dogma in a way that it self-referentially and explicitly tells me not to.

Perhaps we can instead see *truth* in the Buddhist sense as less of a **noun**, and more of a **verb**. Instead of it being **what is gotten**, how much is it **what is done**? This gives the term a more applied, operative, and practical sense, something that is actively lived. Teachers have used terms like appropriate, centered, attuned for this activity, to enliven it in a way to make it functional, dynamic, and responsive. Instead of being a given destination, it becomes the direction of a journey; instead of being a presented dogma, it becomes an embodied faculty. And maybe at some further point, perhaps it goes beyond even these coarse distinctions, to a place beyond the limits of what words and language can describe.

How much is
truth a “thing”?



Poems

Bhikshuni Jin Run

七言絕句：靈山道場

大嶼靈山湧古刹
金龍伏虎勢崢嶸
般若禪修智慧開
苦行持戒慈興振

Lingshan Way Place

Ancient monastery welled forth from the Lingshan Lantau.
Golden dragon and subdued tiger; their energy is extraordinarily big and strong.
Cultivating Prajna and Chan meditation, wisdom is opened.
Through ascetic practices and adhering to the precepts, Tze Hing Monastery revived.

五言絕句：千人齋

山寺日寂寂

法會足音頻

齋筵滿千座

聖賢聚成林

A vegetarian feast for a thousand people

The monastery in the mountain is quietude every day.
On the ceremony day, the hurrying of footsteps can be heard.
The thousand seats at the vegetarian feast are full.
All Sages come, gathering like a forest.



七言律詩：登彼岸

香江寶地立講堂
頓超繁塵弘眾生
莊嚴玉佛悲引攝
禮拜金經佛法身
法輪常轉度愚迷
甘露潤澤有緣人
忍辱持戒修心地
直上蓮邦見慈尊

Ascend to Amitabha Buddha's land

Establishing the Lecture Hall at a precious place in Hong Kong.
Suddenly transcend trivial worldly matters to teach living beings.
The majestic jade Buddha compassionately guides and gathers people in.
Bowling to the golden sutras: the Buddha Dharma body.
The Dharma wheel is constantly turning to cross over the foolish and the confused.
Sweet dew moistens those with affinities.
Practicing patience and adhering to the precepts to cultivate the mind-ground,
One directly ascends to the Lotus Land to see the compassionate Buddha.



The Hermeneutical Lens of Non-Duality Through a Nun's Cultivation

Fei Shan Chong

This paper is a quest to delve deeper into the meaning of non-duality, and to unravel its association with reality, which is seen as the “Truth,” as its source. The topic idea came up during the shared inquiry in class with the hermeneutical questions: How do we interpret “Non-duality”? Does “Non-duality” come from the same source (from which all phenomena emanate)? The paper will feature Daughters of Emptiness by Beata Grant on the nun Lianghai (量海)’s best poems, which are said to reflect a conviction of the truth of non-duality, without making distinctions between the practices of Pure Land and Chan or between different genders (Grant 223). Further hermeneutic interpretations will be drawn from the Ch’an and Zen Teaching by Charles Luk in chapter one on “Pre-requisites of the Ch’an Teaching (From Master Xu Yun’s Discourses and Dharma Words,” and other relevant supporting texts. The purpose of this paper is to elucidate the hermeneutics of non-duality through the lens of past cultivators, and to explore how it can be adopted and applied into the spiritual practice that leads to true liberation and joy by practitioners like myself.

Apart from my hermeneutical quest, Lianghai (量海)’s best poems stood out among many other nuns for me because she is such an exemplary spiritual role model and female leader for women to emulate. I greatly admire Lianghai’s courage and determination to leave home, rising above the difficulties and breaking away from the traditional Chinese convention and the confinement to the inner quarters expected

of women in her era. What’s more, it happened during a time when a woman’s choice and decisions were not up to her to make; and even more challenging, it happened during the tumultuous years of the Taiping Rebellion. Indeed, going against the flow was certainly not an easy path for women during that period when women’s rights had not been recognized, not only in China, but also in other parts of the world.

For these reasons, her story and spiritual attainment, reflected through her poems with a similar buoyancy, are particularly inspiring to me. Moreover, her practice of the Pure Land Dharma door also resonates very well with my own. The quote below is extracted from the third verse of Lianghai’s “Poems of the Pure Land (Seven of Forty-Eight)” (Grant 224). The verse below speaks of her inner freedom, independence and joy that she has found through the practice of the Pure Land Dharma door in her spiritual journey.

“Rubble and ruin, brambles and briars: this is the true Pure Land,
Seeing, hearing, knowing, feeling: these are the Ancient Amitabha.
All you need to do is stay where you are—
but forget all distinctions,
Clapping your hands with a “Ha! Ha!” and singing out a “La! La!”

From the verse above, she saw through the conditioned world with “rubble and ruin...” and “forget all distinctions” when cultivating in the conditioned world, as both the conditioned and unconditioned are two sides of the same

coin—they come from the same nature. The clapping of hands with an exclamation of delight “Ha!Ha!” could indicate an expression of awakening on non-duality, and “La!La!”, a joyous satisfaction of that realization—from the fruit of her practice.

To begin with, it is worthwhile to draw some reference put forth on the hermeneutics of non-duality that can be relied on for interpreting her poems, and that aligns with the Buddha’s teaching. This step will help to shine light on the hermeneutical terms used to identify non-duality in Lianghai’s poems, and also to find the consistency in how other cultivators with the spiritual attainment see non-duality. Drawing on one of the four references given in the Mahapadesasutta, I choose to rely on the authority of a learned monk Master Xu Yun’s discourse in order to unpack what he means by non-dualism in the passage quoted below.

“In reality, the real and the false are the same (in nature); the living and the Buddhas are not a dualism; birth-death and Nirvana as well as enlightenment (bodhi) and distress (kleśa) all belong to our self-mind and self-nature and should not be differentiated, should not be either liked or disliked and should not be either grasped or rejected. This mind is pure and clean and fundamentally is Buddha. Not a single Dharma is required (in the quest of enlightenment). Why so much complication? Ts’an!” (Charles Luk 28)

Interpreting Master Xu Yun’s words above, in reality there is no distinction between the real and the false; they are “the same (in nature)” —they are of the same substance. Both living (beings) and the Buddhas are non dual. How are they non-dual? They are non-dual in the same way between birth-death (refers to living beings) and Nirvana (of the Buddha) as well as between enlightenment (of the Buddha) and affliction (kleśa of living beings). They belong to the self-mind of living beings and self-nature of the Buddha, and should not be differentiated because they come from the same substance by nature—as of the real and the false. What is this same substance? This same substance is the

mind that is pure and clean, and fundamentally, that is Buddha.

In fact, the reality is that they are non-dual in nature as all the above belong to the same source, that is fundamentally the Buddha nature. Therefore, there is nothing to be differentiated about, be it liked or disliked, and grasped or rejected. The only way to put it into practice is “forget all distinctions”, as Lianghai puts it. In other words, she told us not to make distinction between the conditioned world and the unconditioned; and to see them as they come from the same nature—of emptiness. This is my hermeneutical understanding of non-dualism based on Master Xu Yun’s Dharma discourse. This insight is helpful as it sheds light on the non-duality of existence and non-existence—they are not the same, but they are not different either; nor are they are neither. This is the reality that is seen as the “Truth.” In return, this “Truth” reveals the source, i.e. true substance of the Buddha nature, of which all phenomena come from.

Next, the question that follows is why would Lianghai’s work be captured in the Daughter of Emptiness? Why are they called Daughters of Emptiness to begin with? Whose daughters were they? What “emptiness” is being referred to? As monks are disciples of the Buddha, they belong to the Buddha’s family and so are nuns. Perhaps, they are referred to as daughters of the Buddha as the monks are referred to as sons of the Buddha. According to the Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, the word “emptiness” could be explained based on the Chinese characters “一色邊” (pinyin: yīsebiān), i.e. the extent of a single color, which is the fundamental principle free from the distinctions of existence and non-existence. This principle reveals the non-dual nature of existence and non-existence—i.e. emptiness. In this light, for the fact that they were left-home nuns who were on the Path of Awakening the Mind, and the Path they were walking is the Middle Way, which is the “True Emptiness,” reaching the paramita of non-duality of true emptiness and wondrous existence, they are called “Daughters of Emptiness.”

Moving on to Lianghai’s Poems of the Pure Land, similar hermeneutical traces of non-duality can be found in the fourth to seventh

verses (Grant 224). The fourth and fifth verses are quoted below.

“Keeping the precepts and discipline, your reward will be truly good.
On the grounds of the golden sands, the jade towers are in spring.
All one need do is meditate on one’s self-nature, the Amitabha Buddha,
Who for eons has never been sullied by the slightest speck of dust.

In order to ensure a rebirth in the Western Paradise, the Pure Land,
Right and wrong, oneself and other must be completely overturned.
From toe to heel and heel to toe is the land of lotus flower;
What need, having reached the shore, to go in search of a raft?

In the fourth verse, Lianghai exhorts us to hold the precepts and discipline well—in the Chinese version, the characters “嚴身” (yánshēn) refer “discipline” to disciplining the body — for it will be rewarding to uphold them well. According to the Buddha Speaks of Amitabha Sutra, in the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss, the grounds are covered by golden sands; and the jade towers in spring could imply that the springing up of residential towers as more and more beings obtain rebirth there. One just needs to meditate on one’s self-nature—be it practicing the mindfulness of the Buddha or reciting the Buddha’s name—and one’s self nature is Amitabha Buddha and Amitabha Buddha is one’s self-nature; there is no distinction between them as they are non-dual. The “Who” refers to Amitabha Buddha, representing one’s self-nature that is fundamentally clean and pure, and the rest of the line “...for eons has never been sullied by the slightest speck of dust” describes the Buddha, for a long period of time, has never been defiled even by a speck of “dust”—the sense-objects living beings seek and attach to (Ten Dharma Realms 17).

In the fifth verse, she says that in order to ensure rebirth in the Western Paradise of the Pure Land, one must overthrow or stop making distinctions between oneself and others by either thinking about or discussing right and wrong—again, these two pairs, i.e. oneself and other,

and right and wrong, are non-dual in nature. The (muddy) land of the lotus flower is where we are in the conditioned world; and the blooming of the lotus flower indicates rising above the conditioned view or dualistic perception. When the discriminating mind stops, one reaches the Pure Land. One needs not go searching for the raft—holding on to the “tool” or Dharma door of practice—as when one reaches the shore, i.e. paramita of the spiritual attainment, the “raft” is to be let go; so one needs not go searching for it.

“Buddha’s words and Chan mind; no difference between them,
Peach blossoms are pink, pear white, both are blossoms.
Across the floor of porcelain are scattered grains of gold.
In front of the agate stairwell are spread granules of jade.

Sitting alone in deep seclusion, the myriad cares forgotten,
My whole body feels completely absorbed into that of the Dharma King.
Don’t use “delusion” and “enlightenment” to obscure the mind’s eye,
When the flower of true awareness opens, its fragrance will circle the world” (224).

In the sixth and seventh verses quoted above, she indicates that there is no difference between the Buddha’s discourses and the mind in Chan meditation as they are “tools” or skill-in-means to help one attain liberation. There is no need to differentiate the myriad things in the world. When sitting alone in deep seclusion, the myriad things one usually cares or worries about are forgotten. Recounting her experience, Lianghai was able to fully absorb her mind into that of the Dharma King—referring to the Buddha—and she could completely tune in into her Buddha nature. She cautions about making distinctions between delusion and enlightenment—they are non-dual—as this will obstruct the Dharma eye of the mind. When the flower of true awareness—Buddha awareness—comes to fruition, its fragrance will circle the world—which could be a marker for spiritual attainment. In explaining the above-mentioned four verses, I could see through Lianghai’s lens her true conviction of non-duality in walking the

Path of the Middle Way, especially her transcendental non-distinctive way of expressing her message lucidly through her poems.

In one of her sermons, with reference to the Avatamsaka Sutra, she addressed her female disciples to go forth with determination and without reservation. Her message about a single nun who bore the title of “lion” in the Sutra serves as an encouragement to all her female disciples to go forth. When they entered the homeless life, they would be able to plant the seeds of the peerless, i.e. Buddhahood, and wonderful Dharma, i.e. Buddha wisdom; and abandon all bad habits (that keep them revolving in samsara). In the course of doing this, one would be able to change one’s present conditions by planting the seeds of Buddhahood through cultivating the Path to reach the unconditioned (mind)—i.e. the Perfectly Awakened Mind. She urged them to enter the way of the Buddha with great determination and with their hearts filled with repentance, clean and pure; and to devote themselves fully to awakening the compassionate mind and carry out the work of liberation—her message on how to “enter the way” serves as a great hermeneutical tool for practice for both laity and monastics. In this way, they would be looked upon as role models throughout the ten directions by all for inspiration.

Again, her words in the sermon project a sense of the non-dualistic hermeneutical lens in that females too, like males, can achieve the awesome and peerless attainment of the buddhamind without discrimination and distinction in gender. The respective hermeneutical tools for the practices of non-distinction and non-discrimination are to stop differentiating oneself from another, and to treat or see oneself and others as equal, regardless of female or male—as all have the potential to realize the Buddha nature. Through Lianghai’s hermeneutical lens of non-dualism, this is the right view of seeing things as they are—between all living beings and enlightened ones or the conditioned and unconditioned.

To summarize, the hermeneutical tasks of reading, investigating and interpreting Lianghai’s story and best poems are some interesting ways to understand the meaning of non-duality

through a past cultivator’s lens, but nothing beats a direct experience of my own, which goes beyond the intellectual mind. Until one has that direct knowing of non-duality, it would be wise to suspend judgements and be patient with all arising conditions, while keeping the precepts and discipline together with the Pure Land or Ch’an practice, according to Lianghai. In Lianghai’s model, one of the markers that I would use if I am practicing the method correctly is the experience of spiritual buoyancy—that uplifting state of mind with simple joy—which is similar to the experience that I had every time after participating in the Amitabha recitation session in the past. In going about practicing non-distinction in my daily life, I could use Venerable Acariya Mun’s marker of the attainment of the state of calm in the mind to determine if I practice the correct method (Nanasampanno 9), and vice versa, the marker would be an afflicted state of mind or the mind that is not at ease if I practice the wrong method.

Having said that, I found similarity in her Pure Land practice, and her experience that I could relate to here and there; a solace in her, as a genuine cultivator of the Path, whom I could emulate; and her advice on spiritual practice, which I could follow and adopt as my own. Although she lived during the bygone era of China, her works speak of the spiritual buoyancy of the right attainment, which truly unravels the essence of non-dualism and true emptiness, and her wisdom is still very much relevant and applicable to our spiritual practice in the modern time.

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The (muddy) land of the lotus flower is where we are in the conditioned world.

Crossword puzzle

Omar Masera Astier

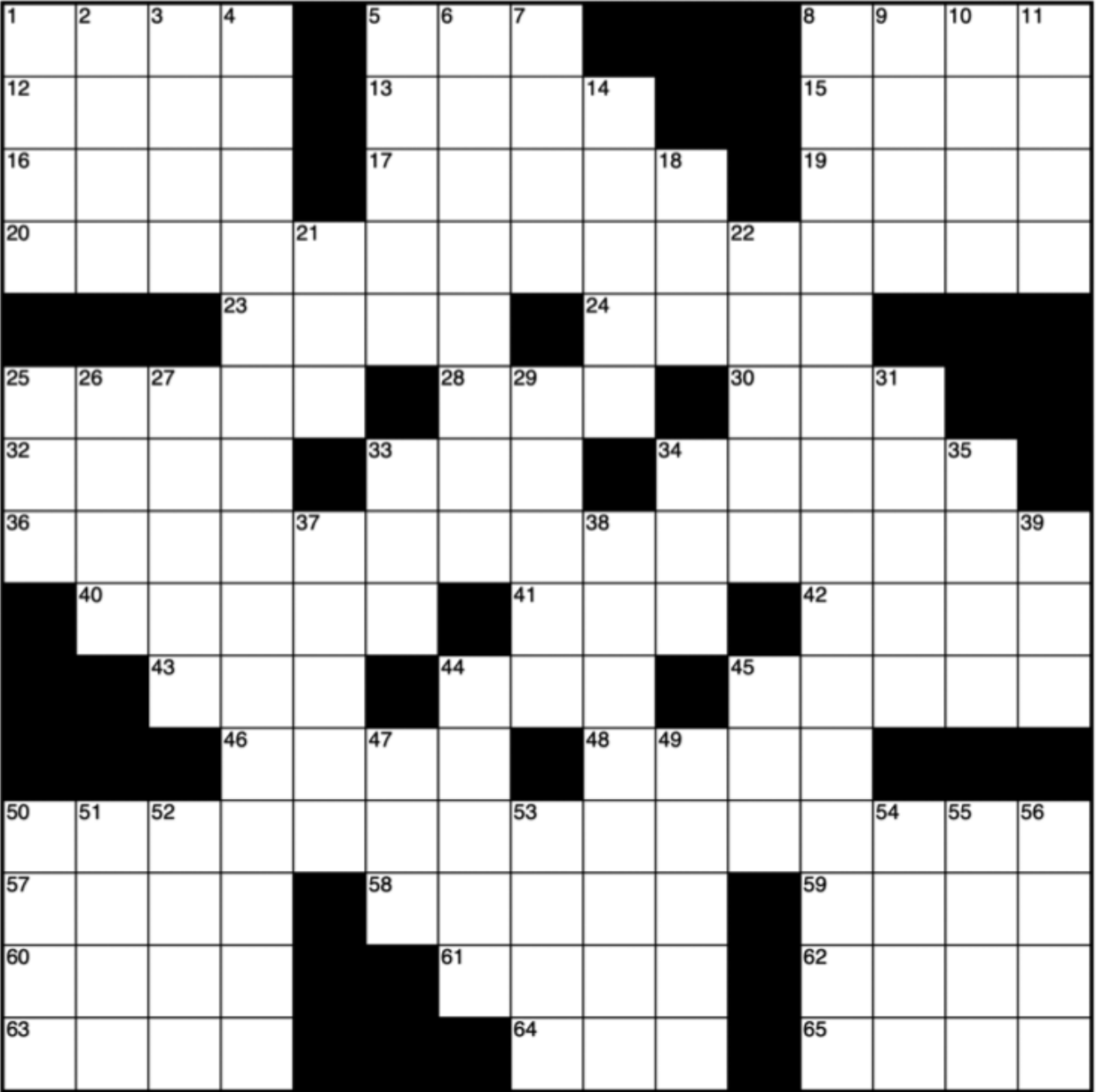
Across:

- 1. Yeah, right!
- 5. What you get when age is reversed
- 8. Send to the calaboose
- 12. This one takes Noble Silence extremely seriously
- 13. A young salmon
- 15. The ____, famous guitar player
- 16. Another one in Spanish (fem.)
- 17. Not to be eaten per 20 across
- 19. Words of a villain when their plans are close to being fulfilled
- 20. It will tell you everything that can go right in meditation, and everything that can go wrong
- 23. One kalyanamitra? Informally
- 24. They don't get anatta
- 25. Psychic-type Pokemon that evolves from Drowzee
- 28. According to me, that is
- 30. __ Cabos, popular touristic destination
- 32. Commend
- 33. It's in the habit of hugging its meal
- 34. Commercial agreement between all three North-American countries
- 36. What his monastery was, according to the Ven. Master Hua
- 40. Presumably you will need one of these if you want to get to Rome
- 41. Max's counterpart
- 42. The most destructive race
- 43. Individual components of 48 across
- 44. A subtly violent kind of lighting
- 45. The pyramids they built are quite impressive; they may even touch your heart
- 46. How Daffy Duck addresses his superior?
- 48. Really funny
- 50. महायाने सर्वमाता
- 57. The purple fruits of the frozen bowls
- 58. Was the daughter of Tantalus and wife of Amphion

- 59. Diotima's area of expertise
- 60. If you find or have found yourself in this condition, get ready for some dukkha
- 61. French composer Édouard ____.
- 62. Exhaust
- 63. You may see one at CTTB if you are lucky
- 64. Oh, certainly, for short
- 65. Seize

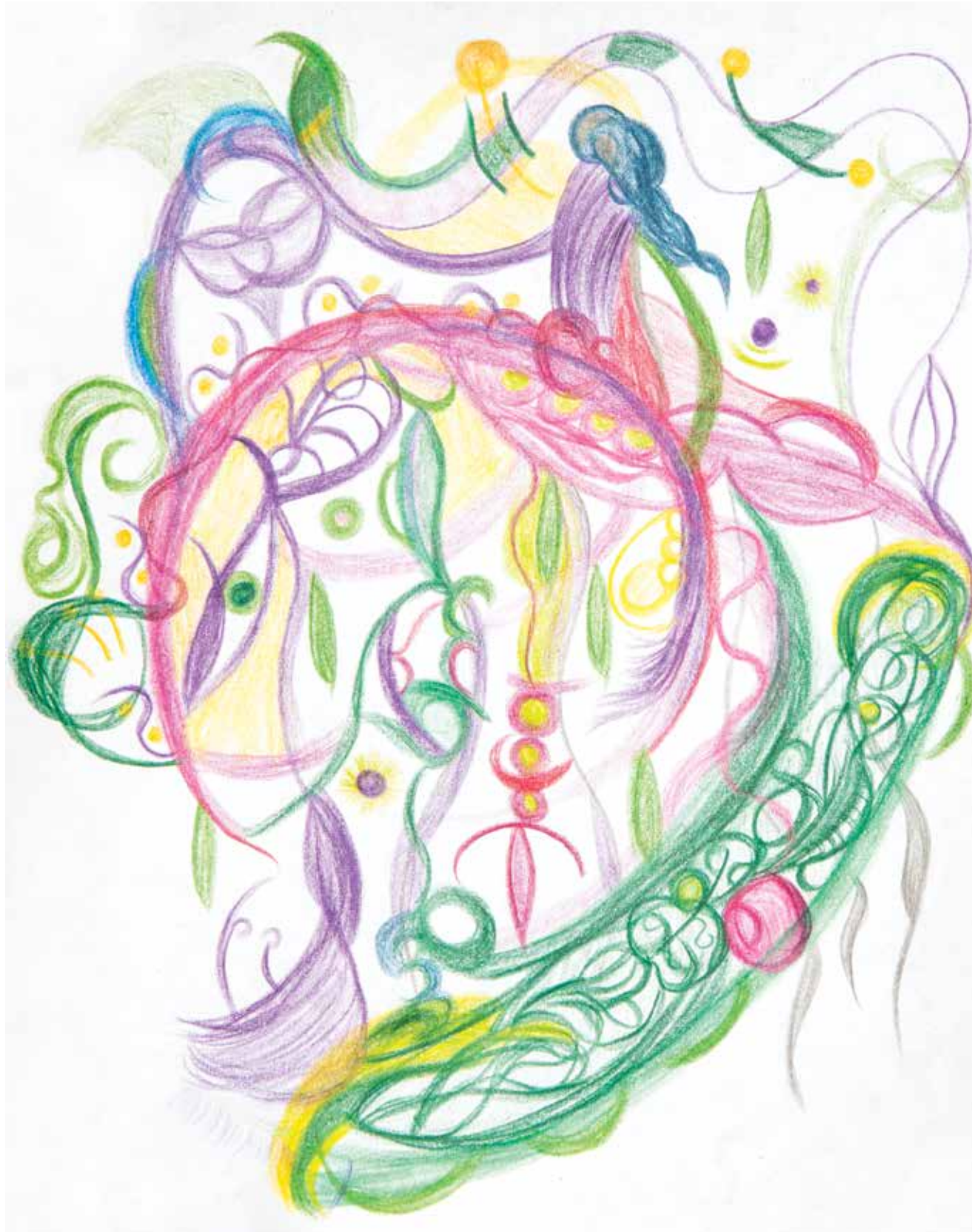
Down:

- 1. Minor prophet in the Old Testament who wrote a book
- 2. In the Star Wars universe, 20 across probably warns against taking them as teachers
- 3. 我是, 你是嗎? Informally
- 4. Kleshas native to Las Vegas, per a popular novel
- 5. Link's horse
- 6. A band and a big cat, but most likely a clump of nerve cells
- 7. Noble in Sanskrit? —no, just a song
- 8. A famous son of a carpenter (not Pinocchio)
- 9. Arizona's transportation department, for short
- 10. Hunchback usually found helping out gothic villains
- 11. ____ Headey, actress from Game of Thrones
- 14. Died because of 59 across
- 18. Pester
- 21. Prefix Greek in origin meaning 'away from' or 'separate'
- 22. CTTB's power, mostly
- 25. In graphic design, three properties that make up a color, abbr.
- 26. King of the underworld
- 27. One Tea Club signature
- 29. Earth's hot sauce
- 31. Dawn
- 33. Order
- 34. Bhikshuni
- 35. Manufacturer of flashy but ineffective bird-disposal devices



- 37. Abbreviation of common Slavic female name
- 38. If you take the Five Precepts, you won't say this of water creatures
- 39. Tends to be pressed frenetically
- 44. A cup most coveted
- 45. A moment of realization
- 47. A well-known magazine that reviews video games
- 49. ____ Empires. If you are a millenial, you know it
- 50. Are usually found on web browsers
- 51. What you get when your friend doesn't have a proper bed for you
- 52. Deity or mercy in Tibetan Buddhism
- 53. Kissable swamp-dweller
- 54. ____ Larson, a soft type of cheese
- 55. French wind instrument
- 56. Yes, but does it exist independently of its parts?

For the solution, email
crosswords.drbumagazine@gmail.com



You're Already Dead, God is a Graveyard, and You Should Drink Your Brain

Phoenix Winters

Shaivism is one of the non-dual schools of Indian spirituality, resulting in an interesting set of practices and worldviews that include, among other things, the practitioner aiming to become Shiva—or rather to realize that they already are Shiva. Shiva is everything, and everything is Shiva, but the human practitioner's mind is clouded by delusion (which is, somewhat ironically, also Shiva), and so one must cultivate in order to understand Shiva, oneself, and the nature of everything.

In "The Paramarthasara of Abhinava-Gupta," many practices for attaining understanding of Shiva are described, mostly through descriptions of what Shiva is and does. Shiva himself is a practitioner, and his practices can be mapped into methods the human practitioner may find use in. I have chosen to focus on a specific practice, described in the following passage: "... he views the totality of being in a vision of unity and beholds his Consciousness wholly resting in the cemetery of the universe and marked by the token of the skeleton of the body, and he drinks from the skull of the finite cognition, that lies in his hand full of the draught of the universe's essence" (741).

This is a short but dense passage and requires careful unpacking to understand. "He" in this passage is Shiva, though if the passage is to be viewed as instructions for practice, "he" could also be interpreted as a human practitioner, or even the reader themselves. As for what "he" is doing, I will attempt to break it down phrase by phrase.

"[T]he totality of being in a vision of unity" serves somewhat as the thesis statement of Shaivism. Everything in existence is in unity, is one thing, is non-dual and interpenetrating. This is followed by a description of the practitioner's consciousness "resting in the cemetery of the universe," which is quite a striking image. It paints the consciousness as a dead thing, or at least, a thing which dwells with the dead, sleeps between grave markers. To say the entire universe is a cemetery is not even necessarily a metaphor, for where in the universe can death and destruction not be found? Something is dying here on Earth during every breath you take, and even in the cold vacuum of space, stars and planets are meeting their ends constantly. So it is within this swirling mass of endings that the consciousness supposedly rests. The use of the word "resting" is also interesting—resting as in sleeping, or resting as in dead? It is difficult to say, though given the nature of Shiva, I am inclined to say both at once; a sleep-like death, and a death-like sleep.

Resting in this cemetery, the consciousness is said to be "marked by the token skeleton of the body," again implying that the practitioner is, in some

way, already dead. Our bodies are mere tokens, our physical forms nothing grander than a skeleton stripped of flesh and personality. And yet the skeleton includes the skull, from which the practitioner must drink of the finite cognition. This consumption of the mind is the heart of this practice, the key to unlocking the understanding of Shiva.

It might be tempting here to dismiss the finite cognition as something small, insignificant, or even unwanted, a pittance in the face of Shiva's great Consciousness-with-a-capital-C. However, the passage ends by describing the contents of the skull as "the draught of the universe's essence." This may, at first glance, seem contradictory—after all, if the finite cognition is indeed finite, how can it be the whole universe's essence? But here again the logic of Shiva comes full circle. The totality of being is held in unity, and thus the finite cognition is all of the universe, and all of the universe is one's finite cognition. One cradles the skull in one's hands and drinks from it, not to destroy the finite cognition (that is, the practitioner's own mind), but to swallow it, to take it into one's self and digest it. In doing so, one consumes the essence of the universe itself.

But how is such a thing possible?

We have considered the most literal interpretation of the passage—that the physical universe is a graveyard, and the body a mere skeleton. However

the metaphor can also be applied to consciousness itself. Once we accept that the mind is the essence of the universe, we can then loop that logic around and see that the mind is, then, also a cemetery full of dead thoughts and dreams and memories. The "skeleton" that mind rests inside

of is the frail, temporary identity which we see as so fundamental to who we are, but is in fact just as finite as our cognition (which is to say, as finite as the universe itself, though we do not realize that).

Of course, simply following the logic is not enough, as the practitioner must also practice what the passage describes. But how exactly one consumes the mind and comes to understand the universe is beyond my personal understanding. This passage is many-layered, and I surmise I could spend a lifetime meditating on it without fully understanding it. Therefore I leave off on a simple message:

Finding one's way to understanding of Shiva is an individual process, and the paths are as myriad as the practitioners who walk them. Since Shiva is everywhere, he can be found in the most unlikely of places—from the back of your mind, to behind the cemetery gate. He waits for you, even as you wait for him. Enlightenment is not a matter of reaching for something beyond, but a matter of finding what is already inside and around you. Discover your mind, take hold of your skull in your hands... and drink.

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Enlightenment is not a matter of reaching for something beyond, but a matter of finding what is already inside and around you.



Photography: Daniel Nguyen

An excerpt of a conversation between people at DRBU. The punctuation has been left half done so as to carry the basic tone of actual conversation: adbupt, jerky, interruptive, and fluid.



The Sweater in question (the happysad face), and the participants of the conversation.

Sehen: So like what are your thoughts on my sweater?

Hasan: Bro

Sehen: Bro?

Blake: A conjoined cyclops?

Sehen: So you are proposing that my sweater is a depiction of a conjoined triplet cyclops

Blake: It's a missing chapter of the Odyssey

Sehen: So this is, like, actually, like, a historical art piece sweater?

Blake: As one would expect at a Great Books university

Sehen: Wow, so you think I'm a great fit for the Great Books Model.

Blake: I think you're already there.

Sehen: You think I'm already there? Do you like the way I'm repeating everything you're saying, that proves I'm really listening to what you're saying?

Blake: Um, I think it, um, shows the understanding of theoretical knowledge, but it requires a little more humanness in order to become embodied humanity

Sehen: Oh, so you're saying I require humanity?

Blake: Yeah

Sehen: Are you saying I'm a conjoined triplet from a cyclops family?

Hasan: This got boring

Sehen: Well you guys can feel free to say your ideas about my sweater too.

Hasan: I feel like it's talking about the Dao. The Dao is neither happy nor sad.

Sehen: Is it in-between? Or is it not in-between either?

Hasan: Both.

Alfonso: I think it's talking about the sacred three, that there's no such thing as duality, there's always been a third that has been neglected.

Sehen: Oh. What's a sacred tree?

Alfonso: There's like three aspects of the universe and not two.

Sehen: Oh. The sacred three. I thought you said the sacred tree. I was wondering about a tree.

Alfonso: I mean, it may be related to that.

Hasan: Isn't the triangle the most stable structure?

Alfonso: It's the most stable structure, mhm.

Blake: Are there any triangles in that piece?

Alfonso: Yes.

Sehen: I think there's three sides to the piece.

Hasan: What would this look like in three dimensions?

Alfonso: It cracks me up. I imagine like it spinning slowly

Sehen: Trying to picture it. Yeah, it would be like two tennis balls mashed together.

Blake: Not three?

Sehen: No.

Blake: Hmm, you're right.

Alfonso: Ahhh.

Hasan: The third thing is always the synthesis of the other two things

Alfonso: Yes. The synthesis is also—by definition it's also its own thing. Because of that.

Sehen: So it's its own thing because it's neither separate nor is it joined?

Blake: It's conjoined.

Alfonso: No actually because it's also a separate thing.

Sehen: Well I say it's separate because it's not separate but it's not joined, right? As in it's not actually like a separate thing, but it is separate because it's not this or this.

Alfonso: Right, but it's only that because it's only those two things. It would not exist without the other two. It can't exist on its own.

Sehen: Are you saying this is a trilism?

Alfonso: I don't know what that means

Sehen: It's like my interpretation of what's after dualism, because you have unism, monism, dualism, trilism, I don't know.

Alfonso: God the father, the spirit and the—

Sehen: Which one's the spirit?

Alfonso: The middle one

Sehen: Oh which one's God?

Alfonso: Oh one of those two. Probably the happy face and then the sad face can be Christ the son.

Sehen: Oh, okay. Do you guys like this interpretation of the Bible? Do you think my sweater is very Biblical?

Blake: I think it's archetypal.

Sehen: It's archetypal? Oh.

Hasan: But, if you wore the sweater upside down, then the happy one would be the sad one and the sad one would be the happy one.

Blake: Would the happy-now-sad-one still be God the Father?

Hasan: Hmm.

Sehen: So, we're speaking of the Dao and of God here, so does that make God kinda Chinese?

Alfonso: Dude I have an image of the Chinese Virgin Mary with the Chinese baby Jesus outside my door.

Sehen: So are you Chinese now?

Alfonso: Not now.

Sehen: Oh, you've always been Chinese? Wow, you look really Arab for someone who's Chinese.

Alfonso: No no, I'm turning Arab now.

Sehen: Oh you're turning Arab now? It's like postmodern

Alfonso: Yeah, postmodern art

Sehen: So what made you turn Arab? Was it my sweater?

Alfonso: It was definitely not your sweater.

Sehen: Oh, I thought we were talking about my sweater.

Alfonso: No no, it was definitely you.

Sehen: Oh it's me? So I came in...

Alfonso: That sweater is not there unless you're there. We would have never seen that sweater unless you were there.

Sehen: Hmm.

Alfonso: You see?

Sehen: I'm seeing the sweater.

Alfonso: Yes. You are seeing the sweater. How can you see the sweater without you?

Hasan: Oh. When you're wearing the sweater, when you look at it, since it's always upside down when you're wearing it—

Sehen: Oh that's true

Alfonso: That's also true

Hasan: Does that mean it's opposite?

Alfonso: Does that mean you're not wearing it?

Sehen: No, no, no. But his eyes are still like above or below.

Hasan: But maybe those are mouths. And maybe what we think is the mouth is the eyebrow.

Sehen: Oh. That's cool. It's like morse code.

Blake: What if the mouth is the—

Hasan: The face?

Blake: The black—

Sehen: This—this is the mouth

Blake: The empty space that surrounds it

Hasan: Oh.

Alfonso: Oh.

Sehen: Oh this is the mouth? So then what's west?

Hasan: So it's just an opening to like, a beyond? So it's actually like two moons?

Sehen: It's two moons?

Blake: Why not three?

Hasan: And something else in-between. I don't know what that is.

Alfonso: Well what would we call that?

Sehen: Oh is that like Earth?

Alfonso: What is a moon without phases?

Hasan: What is a moon without phases? What is a moon without phases? How am I not myself?

Alfonso: Yeah.

Hasan: How am I not myself?

Blake: Can you be yourself without phases?

Hasan: I don't know

Alfonso: What is your original phase?

Blake: Who is mindful of the sweater?

Alfonso: Where do your knees go when you're standing?

Brandon: Yo yo. What are you guys doing?

Sehen: We're uh. We're discussing the Dao.

Hasan: We're doing a shared inquiry on his sweater.

Brandon: I feel like. I feel like. Oh man, whatever that is that looks heavy.

Sehen: Do you want a sweet roll?

Brandon: Uhh. You're sweet enough, baby. But you roll. I like the way you roll when you're sweet, so we'll just, stop there. But thank you for offering.

Hasan: No one wants your sweet roll.



Mindfulness and Late-Stage Capitalism

Omar Masera Astier

*“Those who are mindful never die;
Those who are heedless are as if dead already.”*

—Dhammapada

As Byung-Chul Han has shown,¹ the main psychological feature of late-stage capitalism is that in it, individuals come to internalize the mechanisms of repression and exploitation into their own psyche, so that they perform the tasks that society demands from them (an endless drive for productivity, perfectionism, ruthless competition, and so on) *while being convinced that they are doing so out of their own free choice* (“being an entrepreneur,” “hustle culture,” etc.). It is no longer necessary for there to be an outside structure, such as the factory check-in clock, that will ensure compliance, ever-rising demands for productivity, and the all-consuming irruption of work into all aspects of life, for individuals will freely perform these tasks out of their own volition. In practical, psychological terms, this simply means that in late-stage capitalism, the individual experiences himself as *no longer belonging to himself*. All of his resources—his body, his energy, his talents—have all been subordinated to a *superego of productivity*. To show that this is the case, we only need to point out the classic example of the “workaholic,” who immediately feels anxious and restless *as soon as he is not being productive*. Here, we can quote the old Buddhist adage of, “If your body truly belongs to you, why can’t you prevent it from getting sick, growing old, and so on?” and ask, “If your desire to produce, your ‘busy-ness,’

¹ Byung-Chul Han, ‘Burnout Society,’ Stanford Briefs, 2015.

truly belongs to you, why can’t you freely put it down?”²

Furthermore, this superego is increasingly disembodied. It no longer reflects the concrete demands of a palpable agent (the father or the boss); it is simply the drive for *productivity for its own sake*, the demands of a faceless, ghastly presence we cannot really point to. A clear example of this is the frantic pursuit that a large proportion of people find themselves in on social media, toward which they devote a sizable portion of their time, energy, and attention for the sake of “likes” or “views”: the recognition of an anonymous, meaningless mass of strangers which reflect the approval of “the Other.” Thus, social media companies don’t need to give any palpable incentive for users to generate content (profit) for them, because *they will do it for free*, as a free, individual choice—and they will even punish themselves if they fail to reach an arbitrary quota (of “likes,” of “views”).

Furthermore, we also have a proliferation of cliques whose members base their identity around their common *victimhood*, their common experience of being oppressed by a “big Other” (in Lacanian terms). This is not to say that there

² On the other extreme, we find the *chronic procrastinator* (another common condition nowadays). Aren’t these two sides of the same phenomenon? Whereas the workaholic *becomes identified* with the driving superego, the procrastinator is frozen in a constant state of passive rebellion against it, for which he has to *punish* himself—proving that he is as much in its grasp as the workaholic.

are no social structures in place that oppress certain groups or that exert violence on them (it would be foolish to deny this), but the point here is that as soon as we define ourselves *in opposition* to these forces, in a position from which our *anger and bitterness are justified*—as soon as we do this, these “evil forces” have in fact already “triumphed” over us. To assert that anger and violence (symbolic or otherwise) *are the only means available to us* already assumes that the “forces of evil” are so all-powerful and all-pervading that *I can only exist as long as they are overthrown*, that I cannot be happy or free (alive) as long as the “enemy” continues to exist. In short, I have defined my entire existence as conditional upon the satisfaction of a series of demands that I make of the world, and

by which I in fact acknowledge the all-power that these forces have over me. In other words, like the workaholic and the procrastinator, one who attaches to the role of “victim” as the primary marker of their identity experiences themselves as *a subject who does not own themselves*.³

Thus, we can summarize the tremendous irony of late-stage capitalist society as follows: In a traditional society, the individual must symbolically “decide” to obey the “Law of the Father.” He must renounce his instinctual drive, his incestuous impulse; but in return he can join the

³ Another way to think about this, to undermine the “logic of victimhood,” is to look closely at the question of *who is to blame* for my problems, to which invariably the answer will be some version of the “Man on Top,” those “up there” who make bad decisions and care only for their own benefit and thus “screw everyone else.” To take a trending example: the billionaires, who concentrate the wealth in their own persons, engage in all sorts of exploitative practices and so on. However, isn’t the billionaire himself a victim of this very same “superego of productivity”—even perhaps more so than the “common person”? Hasn’t he hollowed himself out the most in his relentless pursuit of material riches, resulting in a state of paranoia and isolation from the world around him? (We should contrast here the position of the *king*, who, as opposed to the billionaire, is the axis around which a given society revolves. The billionaire exists only as a “dark object” onto which the rest of society projects both their expectations and their resentment. Anybody can be a billionaire, but there’s only one king). In short, isn’t the billionaire the *ultimate victim*? So if we ask *who is to blame*, we are forced to respond: *the superego of productivity itself*, which, as we have seen, has no point of reference outside of itself, not even “the boss” or “the politicians,” who are themselves even more *in its grasp*.

community. He gains a place within it; he “gets” something from this exchange (he/she becomes the “man of the house,” or an “employee,” or a “housewife”; whether this is a favorable exchange is beside the point here). In late stage capitalism, on the other hand, the price of entry is *everything*, the individual’s every waking moment, which his job and social media presence increasingly demand from him. And what he gets in return is *nothing*, quite simply because there is no longer a coherent social structure, a shared community that he can belong to; there is only the ghastly, invisible Other, which manifests as the “likes” and “views” he receives on social media, and as the insatiable, disembodied drive for productivity that commands his life. Thus, in modern society

the individual pays *everything* for *nothing*, at every single moment, of his own free will.

It is in the context of this *impasse*, which is everywhere experienced as generalized anxiety, depression, despondency, and cynicism, that people begin to turn to so-called “internal practices,” of which we see a real surge in the West: yoga, meditation, mindfulness, and the like. It has become so clear to the individual that the social order of things as it is *has nothing positive to offer to him* that only one alternative remains: to seek the positive in his own internal experience, to somehow “change himself” in order to resolve the nameless crisis that pervades his life. However, it becomes clear very quickly that as soon as he engages with these practices, he brings to them the very “ethos of productivity” from which they were supposed to aid his escape. This is inevitable, for he knows no other way of being in the world. As a result, we see a proliferation of courses of “mindfulness to increase productivity” and so on, which seem unaware of the deep irony they represent. Even if the practitioner wishes to sincerely engage with the original, “sacred” spirit of the practice, it is almost inevitable that he will have to confront this experience of *not owning himself*. For example, he may incorporate meditation into his daily routine, and then sit mindlessly for some

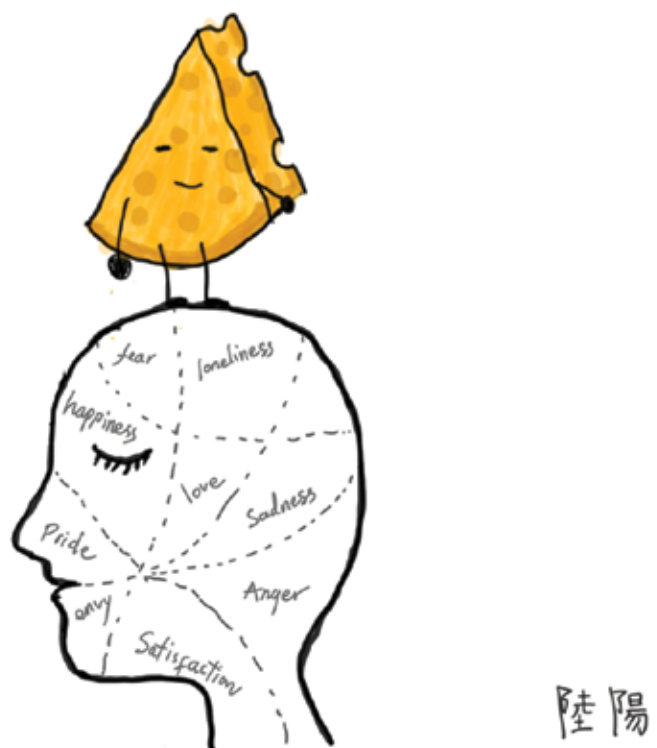


minutes every day, more or less “tuned out,” but convinced that “something will happen”; or he may practice yoga and “make” himself go through the motions, while he attempts to “produce” concentration, peace, enlightenment, and what have you. The symptoms of all these attempts will be the same as the general experience of late-stage capitalism: a vague sense of unease, self-blaming, forcefulness, or avoidance.

However, it is precisely here (and only here) that the individual can finally become aware, in his innermost psyche, of the experience of *not owning himself* that pervades every other part of his existence. By reproducing the conditions of his life in the controlled space of a contemplative exercise, and by being thus encouraged to “pay attention,” he can *know* (rather than escape from), in his own immediate experience, his alienation from himself through the “superego of productivity.” It is precisely here that he can fully expose the inherent emptiness of the situation that he finds himself in, and *come to possession of what was already his* (his body, his energy, etc.). This is the experience of “mindfulness” once it has been liberated from the urge to “produce” concentration, insight,

or happiness: the open field of acceptance, in which even the superego tendencies can be seen fully for what they are, along with all other components of experience. What I’m pointing at here is just, for example, the difference between, on the one hand, feeling like you “have” to do yoga and putting yourself through the postures (the default attitude of “busy-ness”) and, on the other, experiencing yourself as an active agent, fully “feeling” and “willing” yourself through each pose, and accepting each movement as “something I choose to do.” This moment of “fully being here,” of fully *willing* myself to be here, is sufficient to obliterate the “bleak marsh of productivity,” for its *superego* (the workaholic), its *id* (the procrastinator), and its ego (the victim) are all constructed from this ongoing experience of being *someone who does not own himself*, an experience that accounts for the persistent sense of unease and powerlessness over one’s own life that pervades contemporary society. It is in this way that I believe that *mindfulness*, as long as it can be freed from the language of productivity, is, perhaps more than ever, the only avenue left for man to be free and to be truly himself.





- When I see a cheese I can't afford . I'm sad
- When I can afford a cheese I like . I'm satisfied .
- When someone stole my cheese . I'm mad .
- When I eat so much cheese . I'm full .
- When my friends have cheese while I don't have . I'm jealous .
- When I'm the only one who has cheese . I'm full of pride .
- When my mother knows I hid some cheese in my drawer . I'm scared .
- When I consume less cheese . I'm fit .
- When I'm eating cheese alone . I'm lonely .
- When we eat cheese together . I'm happy .

✱ I love cheese like a baby loves hugs.
Give me a good hug , I'll give you my cheese .

How much of my happiness is disembodied
and how much worry-free indifference

(Feb 2023)

Trees and forest and camping and spring water
Hills covered in wildflowers, fragrant breeze
Evening is a time for looking up, stars and moon and light in darkness
Radiant harmony, clarity, serenity, patience, hope

A

Perhaps the darkest and the brightest aren't exclusive
Even the loneliest may not be alone at all
Universe orchestra, or, symphony
This morning I decide to let go of all the self-defeating narratives
I remember sitting in Black Oak watching giant California snowflakes pouring down,
Cup of matcha latte shared, oat milk

Prayer.

(Feb 24 2023)

How many times we ask a question
Already knowing the answer
deep down

(Feb 2023)

I didn't know why it was so difficult for me to read
I didn't realize I was in a dream

(Jan 9 2023)

I'm just exhausted
Cocooning in the whiteness of the space
In my room

The white canopy
Shielding and protecting

Buddhas and Bodhisattvas
Family

(Jan 15 2023)

—Ziqian Feng

And that is how I love you

Hui Xuan Ooi

No matter how people shrink away love —
“Cut off love,”
“Sever love,”
Somehow, I keep it close to my heart.

Every move I make comes from this love.
Life is too short to do otherwise.
To me, love is the deepest care.
Love pays attention; love blossoms from togetherness.

Love makes you think,
Makes you understand.
When everyone else stops caring,
Love is there, where it always was and is.

From my family, I learned:

Love is support that defies death,
Even when you’ve been gone for ten years,
“You can try something hard first, and then, do what you love.”

Love is when you don’t yell at me for crying,
Even after I accidentally broke the ceiling,
“It’s okay, we’ll fix it when it stops raining.”

Love is when you wake up earlier than I do
To make me breakfast to take to the airport.
“Bye, Xuan. I love you.”

Love is when you went to the store
And bought us matching journals,
“I got you one. They were on sale.”

Love is when you burst into my room, and catch me dissociating from anxiety.
You finish singing your refrain, and then say,
“Let’s go eat now.”

I keep going because of their love,
Embodying love in each exhale.
Because, what can I say?
These few years have been hard.

In turn, love flows through me:

In my dreams, I still see you,
And that is how I love you.

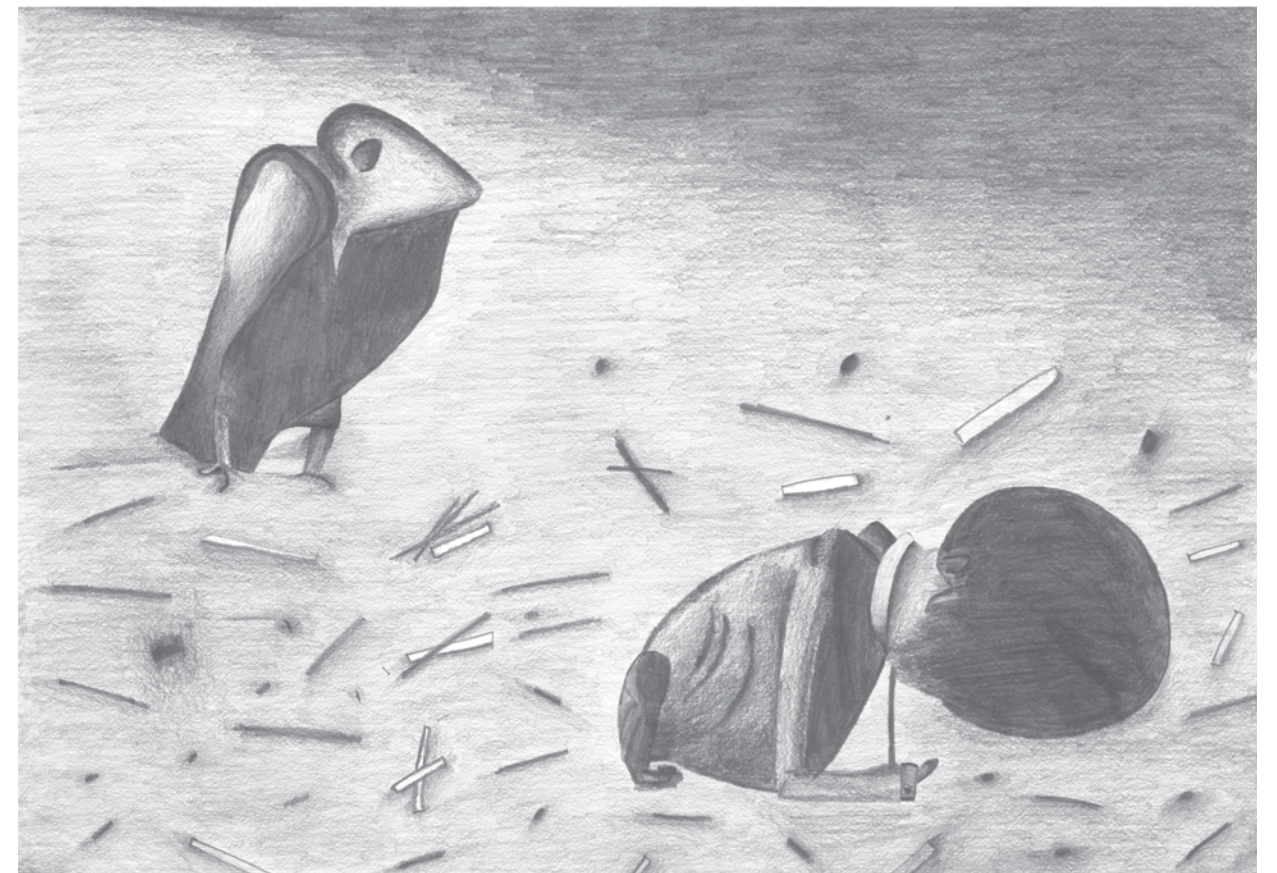
I open the mail and translate what it says for you,
And that is how I love you.

I answer your sporadic calls and listen to you for hours,
And that is how I love you.

I hand you tissues while you cry, hug you to my chest,
And that is how I love you.

I clip your gloves to your coat pocket so you don’t lose them,
And that is how I love you.

Dedicated to my family. I love you more than words can express.



This drawing is of an original photograph by Kevin Carter, published in the New York Times, entitled "A vulture watches a starving child in southern Sudan, March 1, 1993." This picture was drawn to count my blessings. As we pursue our dreams, expand and reach out.

Song title:
《遠遠地》 Far far away

Yihuan Shih

遠遠地
Far far away

天上一滴水
a drop of water up in the sky

遠遠地
Far far away

地下一塊青
a slice of green on the ground

遠遠地
Far far away

屋上一隻雞
Chicken on the roof

遠遠地
Far far away

世界和我的距離
The distance between the world and me

山丘
Hills, oh hills

遠遠地
Far far away

好想爬上去
How I wish to climb your way

溪水的消息
The whisper of the spring

夢

遠遠地
Far far away

這裡聽不清。
I can barely hear thee

遠遠地
Far far away

肉桂不香
Cinnamon is unscented

遠遠地
Far far away

茉莉不開
Jasmine not flowering

遠遠地
Far far away

鸚鵡不語
Parrots do not say

遠遠地
Far far away

永遠美麗
Distance creates everlasting beauty

遠遠地…遠遠地…遠遠地
Far far away...far far away...far far away



i dream in cartoon

What is real is what we seek. When seeking ends, the real is awakening. When awakening begins, the clouds of exaggeration and saturation decay with joy. This is a cartoon.

This is a dream.

I dream I was teleported to a world within this universe where everything was a cartoon. Not only was it a cartoon realm, but it was a nondual realm where polarities met and married with alchemical contemplations. Sun and Moon. Dog and Cat. They were all unified. Grass and Ground. Soil and Toil. Sky in Marriage. This was a cartoon.

This was a dream.

All beings in this realm were unified in harmony of nonduality and complete separation. If I cried, it was of joy. If I laughed, it was of sadness. Exaggerated love affairs between the rainbow and the darkness. This was a cartoon. What was this place? I wish I could know. An anthropomorphic bag showed up and told me “This world is nondual... as you can see.” I said, indeed. The cows love the grass.

Dreams don’t separate from reality for dreams are happening. Knowing what is and is not a dream, no dream and no reality is baked into an oven. Consciousness.

The anthropomorphic bag took me into its home. From its home, I could see day and night mingle and the animals fusing into one another

like infinite mythical chimeras. Come to think of it, it wasn’t far from the likes of Zhuangzi. This Zhuangzi anthropomorphic bag thing said “Do you wish to experience this nonduality you are observing?” I said, “Of course, what is this place?”

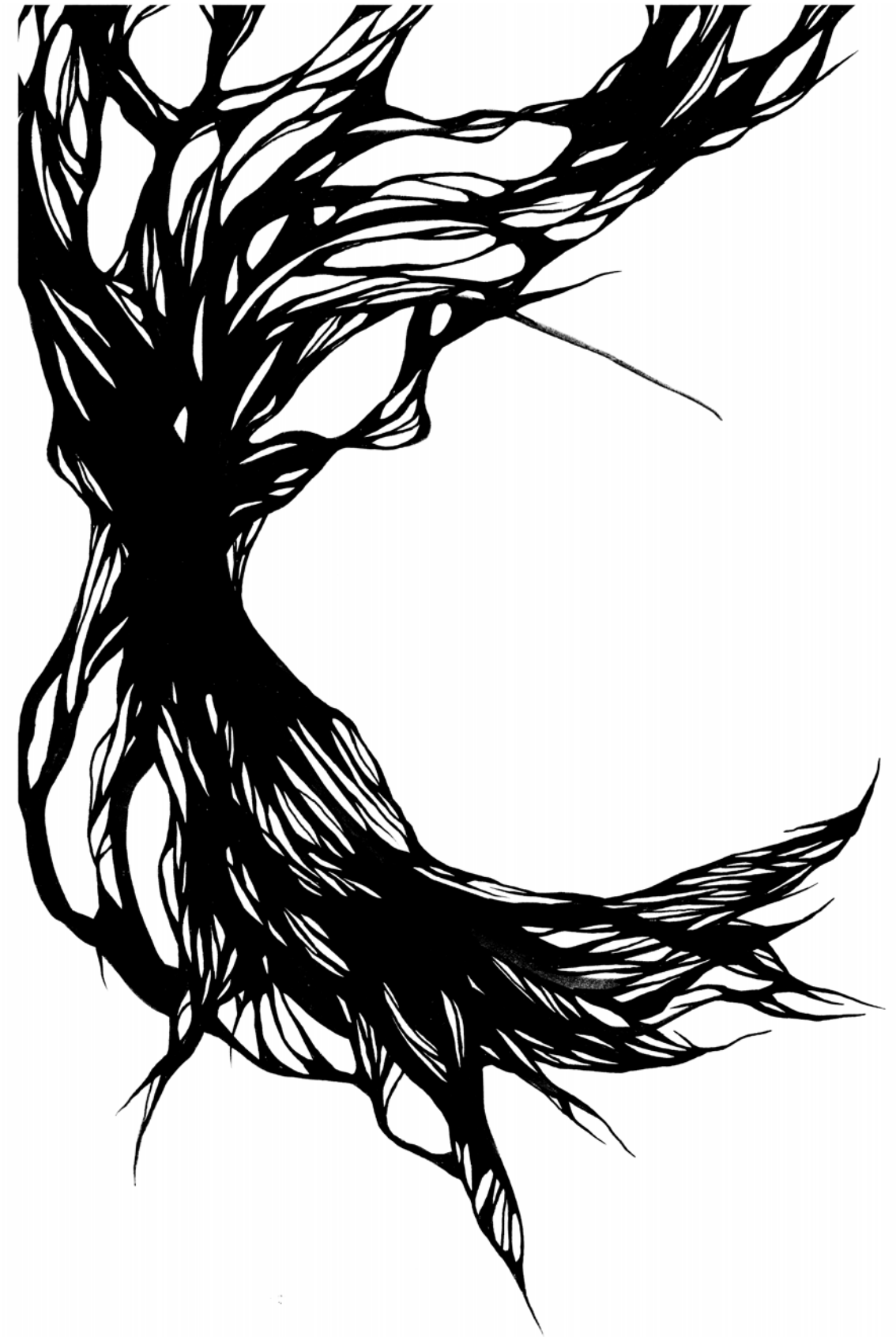
I intuitively knew that all beings residing in this world existed through this kind of nondual reality and awareness. The bag thing opened up its mouth and swallowed me. I was certain to have died. What happened next however was that I was now the anthropomorphic bag. I could see, hear, and think just like it. I was the bag, and I was gone. I awoke to the dim sun and reflected...

One day, years ago, I went to a talk at Stanford, at the church there. There, a Tibetan Lama spoke. I forget most of what he said, but I remember the last of which he said when asked how to sum up his speech, “It’s all a dream. That is the secret. You just need to understand that.” The rainbow of reality and the darkness of dream.

song that captures this:

Track: “One More Cartoon, Please” (2020)
Artist(s): Niki Estrefi & Anetha
Album: Body Changes Are Natural
Label: Mama Told Ya

—Alphonse Malagone



This poem is the result of a classroom activity in Indian Classics III, a fourth-year DRBU BA course. Students were studying a unit on Sufi and Hindu poetry and were free to create their own stylistic writing that is inspired by these enlightened poets. The goal is to capture the student's internal contemplation in the form of poetry. Students were not required to follow a rigid format or style, but to explore and encapsulate the genuine words of their spirit.

A Drop of Rain

Gavin Ding

I'm a drop of rain,
Wishing to return to the ocean —
Yet, I am afraid.
The journey is tough, with many hardships along the way.
I might land on a rigid rock and quickly dry away.
I might land on the cold earth and be mixed with the muddy array.
I might land on the myriad creatures and become their bodily waste.
How could I ever return to the ocean when I die midway?
Only if I could enter into a stream and be carried along
Uniting with the lakes, rivers, and seas
Finding my home—the place where I belong.
It's the water's tendency to flow downwards towards the ocean,
Yet, in this hopeless journey, there are so many obstructions.
But wait, I've got it all wrong
My deepest longing is what obstructed my arrival
Confusing me with the appearance of an unsupportive world
No matter what I become, I'm always with the whole
The ocean is water and so is my soul
Whether falling on a rock, mixing with earth, or ingested or spewed,
I'll always find my way back into the clouds and start anew
Water always changes, transforming into ice, dew, or vapor
Yet, the pathway back home is always remembered
The transformation is not the issue,
The reluctance to act is.
I wish to fall on a rigid rock, so I may erode its surface
Paving a riverbed for the raindrops of the future
I wish to fall on the cold earth, so I may nourish the plants
Supporting the vessels that cycle the water through transpiration
I wish to fall on creatures, so I may wash away their dust,
Purifying their bodies and be taken a little further.
Again and again, I will return in different forms.
My task and accomplishment may seem insignificant,
But my union with the ocean will surely happen.



《一滴雨》
我是一滴雨，
渴望重归海洋，
却对归途恐惧。
这趟旅途必定坎坷，充斥着艰辛
或许我会飘落在坚硬的石头上，快速蒸发。
或许我会飘落在冰冷的大地上，混入泥泞。
或许我会飘落在芸芸生灵身上，化作体液。
我怎么可能重归大海；当我半途消亡？
或许我错了，
我最深的渴求障碍了我的回归。
让我沉沦于一个刻薄世界的幻象。
不论我变为何物，我终归是母体的一部分，不可分割
汪洋的本质是水，而水是我的灵魂。
无论是落在石头上，混入泥泞中，或被饮用，或被唾弃，
我终究会于云朵结合，重新开始。
水无时无刻不在变化形态，或为冰，或为雨露，或为雾气。
但回家的路是不变的记忆。
变换并非问题所在，
怯懦和不敢为才是。
我愿化作击打岩石的瓢泼大雨，用我的身体侵蚀岩体，
为未来的雨水冲刷出一条宽阔的河床。
我愿化作飘落尘埃的濛濛烟雨，成为春泥，滋养花草，
孕育一棵棵循环雨水的参天大树。
我愿化作轻抚众生的绵绵细雨，洗净他们身上的尘埃，
在净化之余被带往更遥远的地方。
一次又一次我将再度归来。
虽然我的成就看似渺小，
但我终究会与大海相融。

Movement in the stillness, Stillness in the movement

Bishnu Bhatta

“The flow of life runs very deep.” These were the words that Kit had been hearing after he woke up every morning. He didn’t know where he had heard it the first time, or whether he had read about it. However, it would come to his mind the way sunlight comes through his window, not letting him know in the morning. These words felt warm, tranquil and liberating to him. When these words started coming to him recurrently for a week, he became curious if he had ever heard about them before in his life. The desire to know where these words came to his mind from, became very urgent.

Kit’s usual morning starts with a cup of coffee, however, on this day, he decided to make hot chocolate from a new packet that wasn’t opened before (which he had bought in a store in the corner of the highway in Santa Rosa). It was drizzling outside. As he started pouring hot water into a cup of hot chocolate in a small cabin deep into the woods far away from the city noise, he looked out the window. The hills covered by mist were breathtaking to watch. When the mist slowly started clearing away, he stretched his eyes far into the distance from the bottom to the top of the hill, and he could see that it was snowing.

With the hot chocolate in his hand, he decided to grab a thick, red jacket and warm snow boots and walk outside. As he was walking, he came across a path that he had never seen before. On the path, he could see the footprints of deer that used to roam around the place. He decided to walk further, and the forest became thick as he approached the hill. He could hardly feel the snow falling through the leaves and reaching him. He had never encountered this much thick forest in his life. ‘How could I have never been on this path?’, he questioned himself. Nevertheless, he repeated to himself that he was there and that was all that mattered. He walked deep into the forest. After ten minutes of walking, he came across these two big giant and old looking trees. There was also a small tree in between those two trees. As he approached those trees, the

air in the atmosphere suddenly started to change and shift. He could sense a cool breeze in the air. He closed his eyes and hugged the breeze. He realized that had never felt this alive in his life before. He felt tranquil and joyful. He felt like he was born again and was ready to see the world again. As he opened his eyes, he saw that some of the leaves that were out of the reach of the snow were starting to fall down in the air merrily. It seemed like they were dancing away from the trees onto the ground.

As Kit stood there watching, he remembered a memory of himself being between his grandmother and grandfather. It was autumn and leaves were falling the same way. His grandfather told him about how they settled to live in this place. It was perfect for them. There was a river flowing from where his drinking water supply was connected to. His grandparents told him that they were trying to find the source where water came from and they ended up reaching a place where the water seemed to be coming out from the Earth’s surface. “The flow of life runs very deep” were the words he felt he heard as the river was flowing downstream from that source. As they were walking he said the same words.

Kit suddenly came out of this memory lane, it felt like he and his grandparents were there, right in front of him. He looked at his watch for the time and date, and he also realized that it had been exactly one year since his grandparents had passed away. They passed away on the same date.

Kit started heading back to his small cottage, in the middle of the forest that his grandparents left for him. As he reached his cottage, he played the song “River flows in you” which was their favorite on the Vinyl record. He picked up more hot chocolate and sat back on the sofa and started staring out the window at the rain. He sat there thinking about what happened today and he didn’t have any answers; his mind started repeating “the flow of life runs very deep” and went to sleep.

Life is a verb

As posted on instagram

Bishnu Bhatta

~

When I say life is a verb, I mean ‘being’ or ‘becoming’ or ‘happening’. Of course, it doesn’t have to match with what life means to someone else, but to me, life is ‘happening’.

To this point, the human age I have arrived at: 28 years old, I’ve seen the ebbs and flows of humans, animals, plants, rivers and many more things. These humans—some I loved, some I sought inspiration from, some I never met and yet they lifted up my toes from the ground, two humans who gave birth to me and a few others whose energies were troubling for me, animals—some dogs I ran my fingers over their heads, cats that ‘meow(’ed)’ and slept on my lap, the dog whom I witnessed growing up and much more, plants—trees I hugged and felt connected to, indoor plants my father bought that I couldn’t keep alive for longer than two years, a rose flower that I had to prune so it could bloom more than before, rivers—some polluted to the verge of never being alive again, while others flowing with tranquility. All these forms were, are and will be energy to me. Energies that were happening over the course of years while my own energy form was evolving and witnessing.

~

A few years ago, I felt that the world was moving with an immense speed that I couldn’t keep up with; I failed to keep up with its pace. I had been trying for years, but I couldn’t match the speed of the world.

I failed...

But here’s what I have learned. I have learned to slow down in the moments where I watched a gentle breeze pass through my face and rush through tree leaves, while at other times, I saw

when the wind would rage, and trees would dance to the rhythms of wind the way one would dance at parties.

I learned to slow down.

I learned to observe.

~

There are also times when things happen. We are, to some extent, caught up by things, for example, what to do during the weekends, or how to get a job, or what to wear when there are parties and what not. When one realizes that there is some time span between when one starts thinking about certain things and when they actually happen, these spans can be broken down into moments. They can generally range from hours to days and even months, but when one breaks this span in small chunks, they are just minutes or seconds or say small moments.

In these small moments, things happen, flowers bloom, bees travels from one flower to another, someone might say ‘f**k off’, *laugh laugh*, or ‘thank you’ to people for no reason, I might write a poem or I could go into the kitchen and brew some lemon tea.

These moments that we label as good or bad, aesthetically pleasing or ugly, are just happening and one is just being.

~

So, when someone comes up to me and asks me what life is, my answer would be: Life is a verb. It is being, folding and unfolding, blooming and withering, living and dying, loving and hating... Life is just being.



12:59 AM, entry

I'm about to go to bed,
Suddenly I think of a yoga mat,
It's been waiting for me,
Since a couple of days.
Flat on the ground, inviting,
A downward dog or a corpse.

I didn't know,
A yoga mat could inspire a poem.
But I will tell you how it is.
The pink yoga mat lies on the ground,
In the lounge, waiting for me.

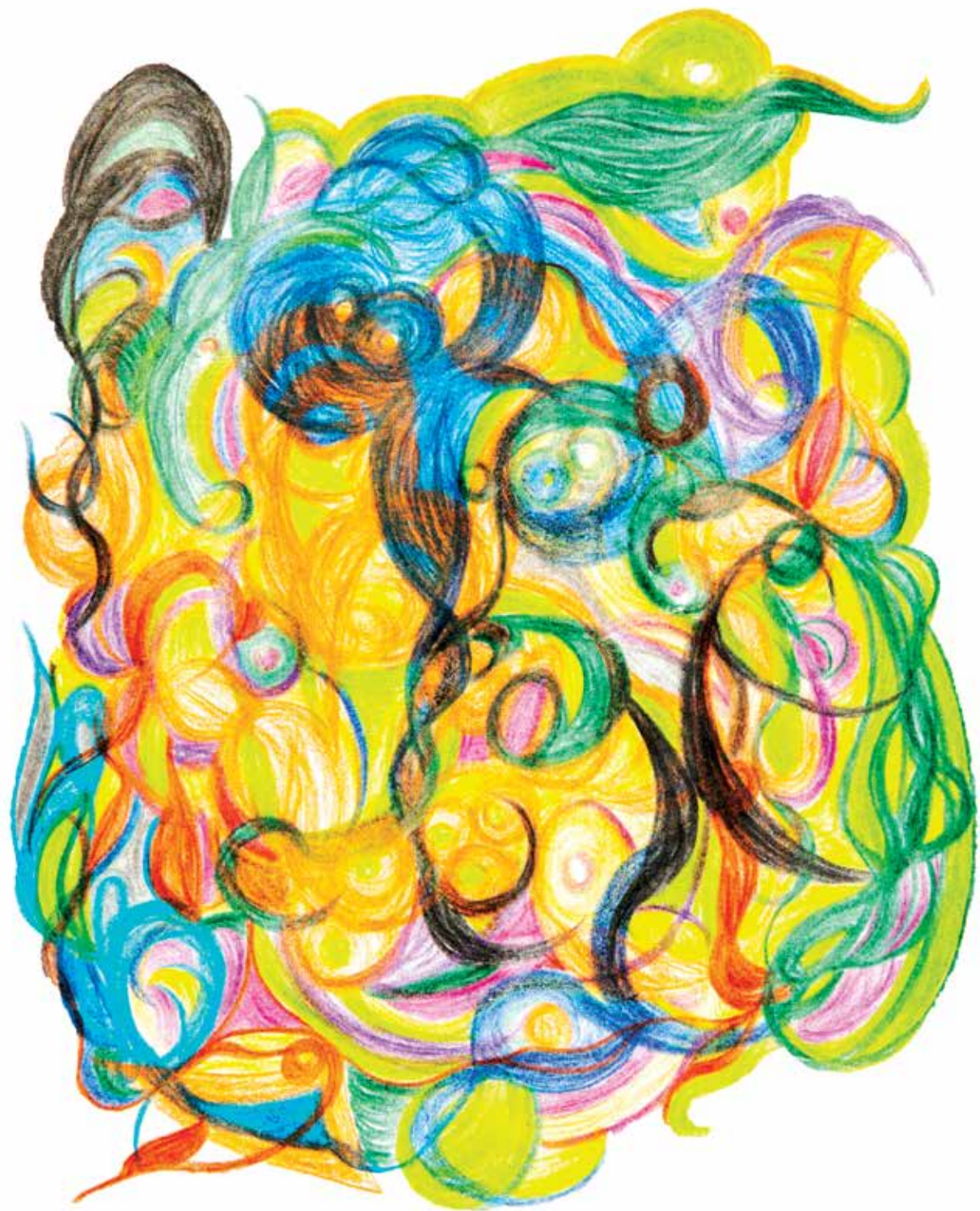
My dorm mates probably walked by,
Wondering what it's about,
A yoga mat, untouched, unfolded,
On the ground, it's been out.
For many days now.

Whose deed, indeed, could it be?
That no one's dared to mend,
A yoga mat, where no one's sat,
For days on row, laying low.
With no one there to tend.

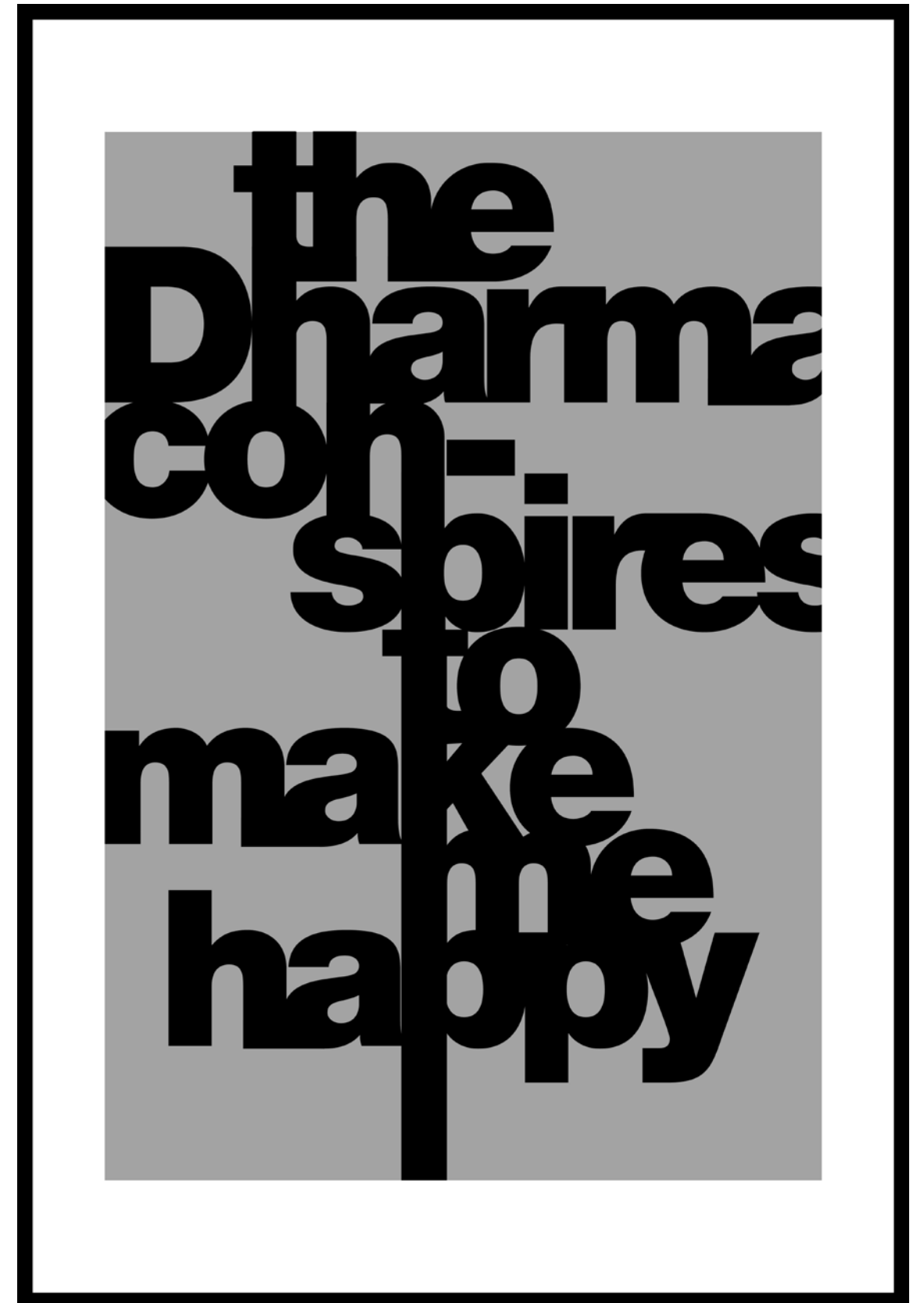
The C-dorm lounge is dark and cold,
In winter or in spring.
The yoga mat, sad and old,
Sits there awaiting.
My return.

'Begin again', 'begin again'
I tell myself, 'begin again'.
But, what's my intent?
What's my intent?
Let's wait! And reflect.
Before I begin again.
The folding and unfolding of yoga mat.

—Sanju Baral



Artwork: Vajra La Mar



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CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

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

We cherish your work and want to see it in print. The theme of our upcoming 2024 issue is The Body. Let it inspire you, but don’t be beholden to it! Please send us your:

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

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