

Mirror Flower Water Moon

SPRING 2021

鏡
花
水
月



DHARMA REALM
BUDDHIST UNIVERSITY

“It’s good that my pot has broken.
I am relieved of filling it with water.”
—Kabir

Table of Contents

To our readers, both new and returning,

We welcome you with open arms to the Spring 2021 issue of *Mirror Flower Water Moon*, where our contributors explore our theme of “Habit” while in quarantine all over the world. When there are fewer places to go to, one inclination we have is to—maybe reluctantly—turn our attention inwards to reflect on ourselves. We may wonder, “Have I always been like this?” We may face frustration with the way we always seem to make the same mistakes. We contemplate how to face overbearing circumstances.

Through their heartfelt, inquisitive, and explorative pieces, our contributors open a window into their very own hearts and minds, sharing the ways they hold space for such questions and beyond. Whether it be looking back to where they came from, centering themselves in the present amid swirling emotions, or pondering how to move forward with a dynamic shift in perspective, our contributors often emerge from a place of quietude.

We wish you a wonderful journey alongside our contributors as you read and absorb their work, perhaps finding a little of yourself there too.

As always, we wish you only the best and good health!

Warmly,

Your editing team

Wind-Caves
Zenshin Kakudo 2

Back in Time, Back in Tune
Martin Verhoeven 4

A.I. Art
Meghan Sweet 7

On Habit and Rationality
Jianqiu Wu 8

Sorry I'm Too Habituated
Gavin Ding 10

*Measuring in "... Poetically
Man Dwells ..."*
Franklyn Wu 13

Reverie
Warren Chew 16

Thursdays
Thao Phi 18

A Tribute to My Father
Xiaojuan Shu 21

Where I Come From
Terri Nicholson 26

Love, Good, God, and the One
Claire Robb 28

Rock Wall
Alan Nicholson and
Ernest Waugh 31

New Year's Resolutions
Kovilo Bhikkhu 32

The Buddha's Jackal Birth
Sean Kerr 33

Entertraintment
Lauren Bausch 34

Christmas Morning, 2020
James Roberts 38

*On vowing to stop
electronic entertainment*
Omar Xavier
Masera Astier 39

Covid Poems
Jackie Farley 43

*Carving and Undoing the
Wheel Ruts of the Mind*
James Nguyen 47

The Other Half
Amy Liu 50

From My Heart
Hui Xuan Ooi 53

Lockdown Diamond Doodles
Bhikshuni Heng Chih 57

Worriment (Why Worry?)
Quinn Anderson 60

*The Disciples' Reluctance
to Visit Vimalakirti*
Abigail Setera 62

*When Spring Comes,
So Does Hope*
Bhikshuni Vien Trung An 64

Chex Mix
JJream 66

sjon & quinn & xxxxxx
sjon ljos 69

What is a Memory?
Phoenix Winters 70

Returning to Spring Exercises
Bhikshuni Heng Chih 73

WIND-CAVES

Stillness and quietude in the center of a dense cloud,
Sitting with strangers no longer now.
Intimacy piercing through the deepest part of our being,
No handshakes,
No hugs, no smiling, no speaking.

Today I thought I had it all figured out,
It was not on how to deal with pain somehow.
On a whim, I asked about the Wind-Caves, so I began the journey.
The days pass by like clouds,
And it is cold in the mornings.

The night stars here are endless,
Tonight the crickets sing everyone to sleep.
The moon shines bright and lights the path,
As I make my way to my cabin on the mountain peak.

—Zenshin Kakudo



Back in Time, Back in Tune

Maine Journal, 7 July 2021

Martin Verhoeven

From Berkeley to backwoods: 5 hours in a plane 30,000 feet covering 3000 miles, then 6 hours in a car at 70 mph from Boston to the boonies, zipping through micro-environments that make the body spin, as it rightly should because no animal except *homo irrationalis* would subject itself to such stress and strain of forced fitting in. Two hours on a coal-black forest road, encountering no other car, truck, or being (except an occasional moose loping along the shoulder); and then the “driveway” to camp: a mile-long winding dirt, potholed lane where the only visible space that exists shrinks down to the tiny frame of light the headlights expose, the rest eclipsed in complete blackness. We stumble into a cold sheetless bed, breathing stale air undisturbed for over 9 months of boarded-up winter. The only other sound is the wind outside, one’s heart beat within. Strange dreams.

In the morning, with first light, the work begins: to reclaim human habitat, reestablish the small “civilization” we have been able to carve out of the wilderness @ 1460 feet, 44.53.56 N & 70.55.13 W. But every summer, it must be reclaimed, recarved again or we lose it (in truth, we never won it, never owned it; just borrow it for a while on its own harsh terms and whimsy-like caprice).

I want to make a cup of coffee, but there’s no water. The water has to be hauled up from a spring nearby. Muscles complain. Other water for bathing, dishes, flushing has to be pumped up from the lake to a water tank in the attic, to then run down on gravity to the main cabin. The pump is ornery, cranky; it needs priming, coaxing, pulling and re-pulling before turning over. The intake pipe to the lake needs to be inspected up close, under water to see if it’s off the bottom free from the silt. This means a “swim” in cold water, a dive down, and repositioning the intake. Timing is essential: an inch of water every 15 sec. up to full at 30 inches. Too much and it will flood the entire cabin, attic

to basement; a nightmare if and when it happens. Then take down clothes, quilts and bedding from winter storage; make a bed, put on jeans, boots, flannel shirt for the work ahead. Ripped out screens need to be repaired to keep out the bugs; cobwebs and pine needles swept away; firewood split and stacked; trails cleared from vines, brambles, fallen trees. This means sharpening tools, gassing and oiling the chain saw (cutting through a 20-inch birch makes the saw smoke and groan, muscles too).

And, most of all: focus, concentration, full attention, slow steady pacing. A mistake with a blade, a falling branch, misstep on rocks, slip into the lake—all could prove disastrous, even deadly. There’s no cell phone service except in special nooks at times; no doctor or hospital for miles (nearest:

Colebrook, New Hampshire). Margin of error is razor thin; samadhi is the most valuable skill; not the zone-out false-samadhi, but the alert, fully-present encompassing kind.

The senses shift, repurpose, realign to this new world. Not to peoples’ moods, looks, emotions, vagaries, but to wind, light, tree and water sound. Gone is the artificial imagined canvas of “breaking news” bursts, status measuring, style and fashion, anxiety about winning and losing. The ego of course cries out for attention, acknowledgement, but no one listens, or cares or answers. The call of the loon is arresting, solitary, impersonal. The dog doesn’t talk. Nothing comforts or confronts, postures or pretends. It is just as it is.

An eagle swoops down to seize a fish without anger or remorse or maybe even a thought as we know it. I lie down on a granite rock in the sun, a stone older than America itself, and for a moment I meld and disappear into this ancient here-and-now interweave of trees, water, wind, and earth. Lost and found in the same moment. “Everywhere engaged; nowhere attached.” Empty yet full of wonder.

The ego of course
cries out for attention,
acknowledgement,
but no one listens,
or cares or answers.



Photo taken in Northwestern Maine on the Canadian border. I actually see this photo as illustrating a very closely related idea to “water mirror”—the experience of what are called “thin places.” A “thin place” is a locale where the distance between heaven and earth collapses and we’re able to catch glimpses of the divine, or the transcendent or, as I think of it—the true nature. It is an Avatamsaka state where worldly and world-transcending interpenetrate without obstruction.



A.I. Art

Meghan Sweet

When we read theory or philosophy, are we not immersed in abstraction? The word abstraction comes from the Latin *abstractus* meaning “drawn away” or “alienated from.” Reading abstract texts can feel like an alienation or escape from the ‘real’ or ‘everyday.’ But I’m curious—how can we read theory that evokes more complex and embodied aspects of our imaginative facilities?

I was inspired by poetry because poetry is a richly affective experience. The visual references in poetry cue an inner experience that can open the mind to new thought. I asked myself—what visual cues might I be missing when reading theory?

To study this, I came up with an experimental method of close reading called ‘producing a visual landscape.’ On each page of a philosophical essay, I chose one word to draw. Page by page, I chose additional words and drew them, grafting it to what I had drawn previously and producing a ‘visual landscape.’ The seeming arbitrariness of the choice of word to draw acts as an invitation to look at all the words on the page more closely and notice what visual cues they offer.

At one point, I asked myself if a computer could do the drawing for me based on natural language captions. Turns out, A.I. (artificial intelligence) image generation is becoming powerful. You can now describe something like “an illustration of a baby daikon radish in a

tutu walking a dog” and an A.I. program, such as Open A.I.’s DALL-E, can output remarkable visual options for you to choose from.

I made this image during that research phase of my process using a photo I supplied and an image-generating program called MUNIT. I was struck by the novel and artistic nature of the outcome. However, it didn’t really help me read theory poetically. Poetic thinking is still more creative and complex than anything the A.I. can output in an image—even with six billion

Poetic thinking is still more creative and complex than anything the A.I. can output in an image—even with six billion image inputs to index.

image inputs to index. I can also see that over time, the quick and fast nature of digital representation could stimulate the visual senses and create novel images, but erode the imaginative and poetic faculties of mind

which allow for other important capacities such as community building and compassion.

This art project and experimentation in visual close-reading allowed me to dialogue with myself and a text in new ways and explore aspects of its visual-conceptual composition. Turns out there was a lot of visual content at play in abstract language, and naming the ‘visual shape’ of a word or thought allowed previously hidden assumptions to come to awareness. I’m curious about doing some version of this methodology on additional books on my bookshelf.

Image Source: Author’s photo run through a program at <https://app.runwayml.com/models/dvsmethod/MUNIT>

On Habit and Rationality

Jianqiu Wu

I would like to begin my discussion on habit with a contemplative exercise. I used this contemplative exercise in the Lotus Sutra Class. I related it to Chapter Four of the *Lotus Sutra* called “Herbs.” You may either just read through it or try to follow the instructions and contemplate on it.

CONTEMPLATIVE EXERCISE

Situate yourself in a comfortable position and be ready to imagine the following two scenarios.

Scenario 1: Imagine yourself coming home after a long day of school or some demanding work. After you come home you think to yourself: “I have done so much hard work today. I must be very tired. So let me give myself a reward and relax.” Then you decide to go towards your object of desire. It might be watching TV or YouTube videos, playing games, socializing, etc. Just something that you enjoy and turn to when you feel bored.

Unaware of the passing of time, you have spent nearly an hour on this activity. When you finally realize how much time you have spent on it, your eyes already feel very tired. Your body feels exhausted and you feel empty inside. You regret that you have wasted so much time.

Scenario 2: Imagine the same scenario as before: you come home after a long day of school or work. After you come home, your habitual thinking pattern tells you that you have done so much hard work today and you deserve some recreation.

However, this time before you go towards your object of desire, your awareness intervenes and makes you think: this might not be what I really need. So instead of going towards this object right away, you decide to settle down your mind first to see what you really need. So you use your favorite method of practice, such as recitation, meditation, breathing exercise, yoga, kung fu, etc. to settle down your mind. This enables you to get past your superficial thoughts

and feelings and tap into your inner nature. Once you arrive at this sacred space, you realize that you actually don’t need the distraction you thought you did. In this space you can just be present, aware and at ease.

Half an hour later you come out of this place feeling energized, content, and joyful.

HABIT AS MOMENTUM

I designed this contemplative exercise to show how habits without awareness can deprive us of the happiness, contentment, and joy that we are entitled to. The situation is like driving on a winding road. The car’s momentum is like our habits. The driver is our mind, and our awareness acts like the brake and steering wheel. The journey of cultivation is a tortuous one, with many unexpected turns. If we could just keep paying attention to them and adjust accordingly, cultivation could be a very interesting and even effortless process. Unfortunately our powerful habits often get in the way while our awareness falls asleep. As a result we crash the car every once in a while. Then we learn the lesson, come back to the road and continue the drive. If we are sincerely trying, then our awareness keeps growing and our habits keep losing momentum. Thus our cultivation becomes more and more like how it could be: interesting and effortless.

Half an hour later you come out of this place feeling energized, content, and joyful.

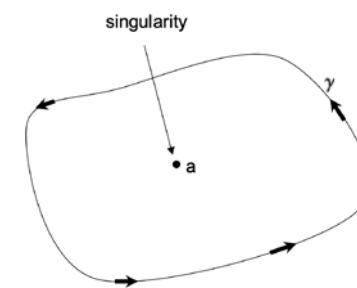
HABIT AS CREATIVE FORCE

To illustrate the creative aspect of habits, I would like to use the residue theorem from complex analysis in mathematics:

$$\int_{\gamma} f(z) dz = 2\pi i \sum_{a \in A} \text{Res}_{z=a} f(z),$$

Roughly what this says is that f is a function that behaves reasonably well throughout the

entire plane, except at a few special points called **singularities** where it takes infinite value, either positive or negative!

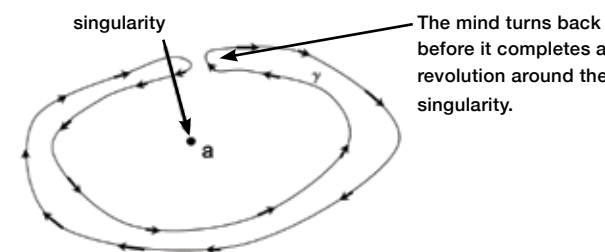


In the above example, the point a is the singularity and γ is a curve that goes around a and revolves around it. If we sum up all the values of f as we follow along the curve γ which completes one revolution around a , then some non-zero number is obtained at the end (“Residue Theorem”).

This scenario is similar to our minds in that **our minds also have a lot of singularities**: things that have special powers over us. Our strong likes and dislikes, objects of desire and objects of aversion are all examples of singularities. When we allow our mind to follow its habitual path and complete one revolution around a singularity, something is created. I believe the Buddhist term for this created entity is called “formation,” something that is formed by our action. In its broad sense, this term can refer to anything pertaining to the “I”: my physical constitution, my personality traits, my talents and shortcomings, etc.

When we keep following our old patterns around existing singularities, we keep creating more and more entities which then reinforce our old formations, making them stronger and more solid. This pattern is known as proliferation.

However, the same theorem can also tell us something different:



Again, this time the mind follows its habitual movement around some singularity (a strong like or dislike of the mind). But before it makes a complete revolution, it becomes aware and stops the movement. Then it slowly comes back in a motion that undoes the previous move until it returns to the starting point. This way a new curve is followed that never makes any complete turn around a . Thus **nothing new is created in the end!** Moreover, the old formation vanishes on its own by its very nature of being impermanent. Thus there is a sense of release, a letting go, or—as Buddhist texts call it—a fading away.

RATIONALITY REEXAMINED

In the American higher education system, especially in the natural sciences and philosophy, there is a strong emphasis on rationality. This rationality is understood in the logical sense: when one reasons one should reason well, using good logic and avoiding traps called logical fallacies.

However, I feel that there should be another type of rationality, one that everybody needs to learn but unfortunately very few have been taught to practice—not even scientists. This rationality is the ability to take care of one’s own well-being. It is the ability to become aware, evaluate, and resist one’s harmful habits.

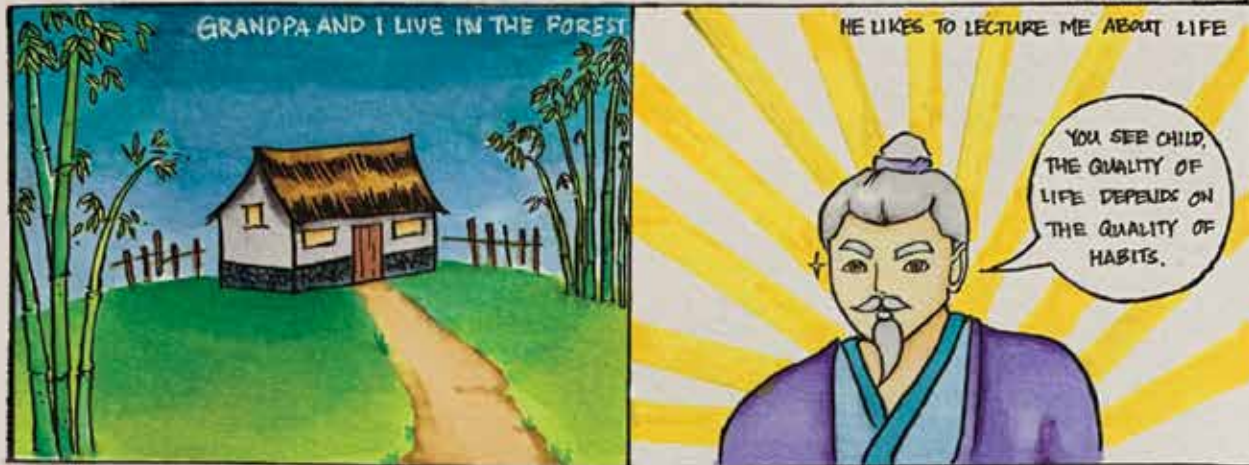
The first kind of rationality allows one to reason well, thus it enables one to become a good researcher and publish high-quality papers. But however successful one can reason and do research, one can still fall short in living a happy life. His rationality simply does not give him enough tools to deal with difficulties in life and to become a whole and complete person. In short, this kind of rationality does not teach him how to live well. This is the reason why I think the second kind of rationality is especially needed in the entire education system. The system needs to emphasize not only the intellectual development of its students, but also their growth as whole people!

WORKS CITED

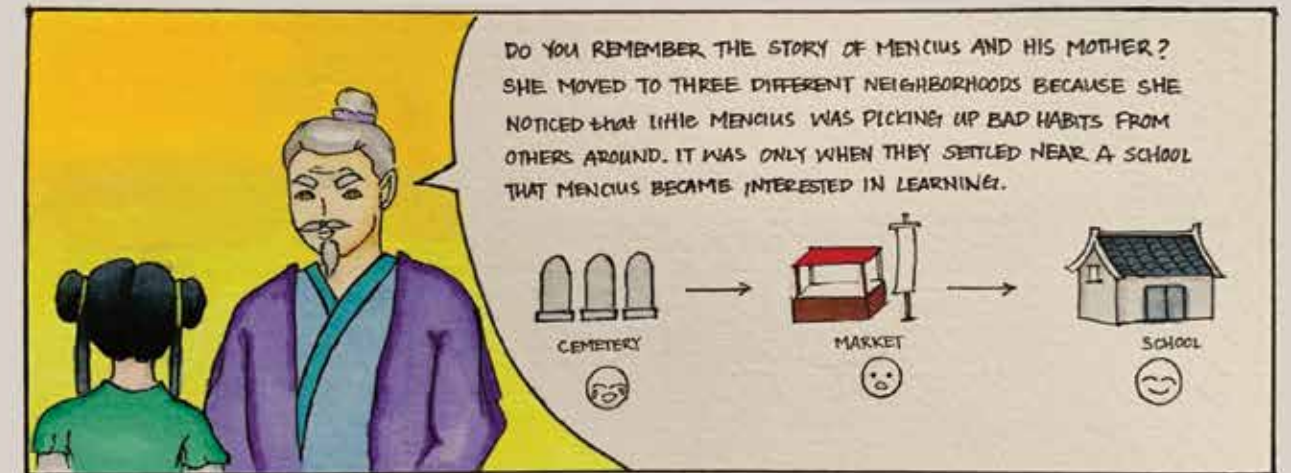
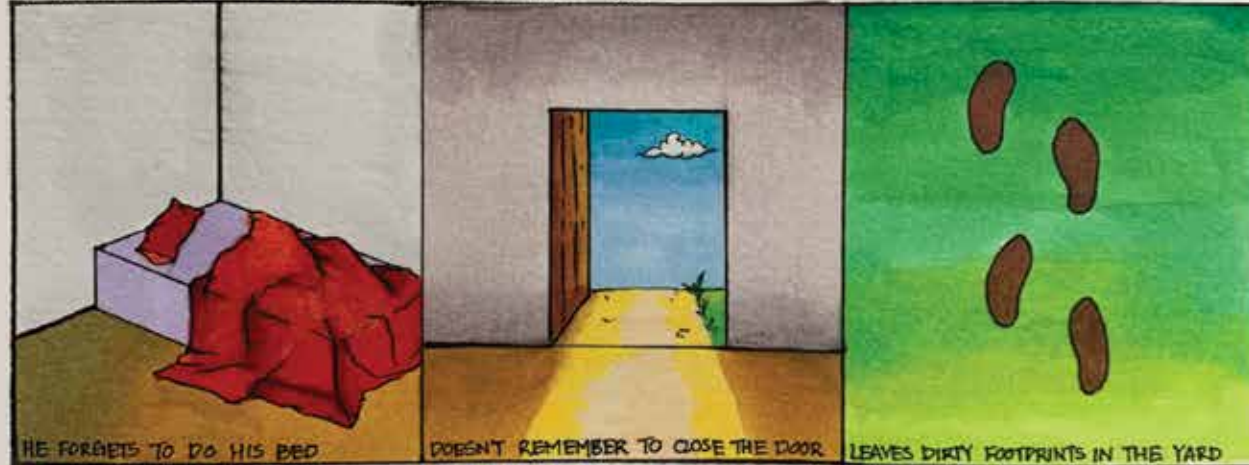
“Residue Theorem.” *WolframMathWorld*, <https://mathworld.wolfram.com/ResidueTheorem.html>

SORRY I'M TOO HABITUATED

BY GAVIN DING



OF COURSE I SEE... MY GRANDPA HAS A LOT OF HABITS TOO.





A FRIENDLY REMINDER.



*FACIAL EXPRESSIONS INSPIRED BY "SCISSOR SEVEN"

Measuring in “...Poetically Man Dwells...”

Franklyn Wu

“...Poetically Man Dwells...” continues at least one strand of Martin Heidegger’s thoughtful reflections on the nature of poetry and language in “Language”—both were originally lectures that Heidegger gave at Bühlerhöhe with the former lagging the latter by a year (Heidegger xxv). In “Language,” Heidegger advocates for a notion of language—“language is language” and “language speaks” (189)—that stands in contrast to how we typically think of language: as a medium for human expression, and as such “a presentation and representation of the real and the unreal” (190). Using Georg Trakl’s *A Winter Evening*, Heidegger teases out what he means by “language speaks”: “The [poem’s] primal calling, which bids the intimacy of world and thing to come, is the authentic bidding. This bidding is the nature of speaking. Speaking occurs in what is spoken in the poem. It is the speaking of language. Language speaks... by bidding... thing-world and world-thing to come to the between of the dif-ference” (203). For Heidegger, this dif-ference does not distinguish world from thing and vice versa, nor is it a “relation” that comes after the fact between world and thing as entities. Rather, it denotes “at most, dimension for world and thing.” Eschewing dimension’s typical sense as a spatial container where world and thing enter and leave, the dimension is dif-ference “in so far as it measures out, apports, world and thing, each to its own” (200). Though not ontologically prior to thing and world, dif-ference’s measuring and apportioning maintains an intimacy between world and thing, where they are at one, penetrate each other, all the while remaining separated (199). This active intimacy is what responds to the primal calls when language speaks.

Heidegger did not dwell on the intriguing concept of measuring or taking measure in “Language.” It receives more attention from him

in “...Poetically Man Dwells...”, albeit with an important distinction. In “Language,” dif-ference as the middle of world and thing metes out the measure of their presence, where world is the unitary four-fold of earth, sky, divinities, and mortals (199). Here, Heidegger uses dif-ference to explain that language speaks. In “...Poetically Man Dwells...”, his interest resides in the nature of man’s dwelling “on this earth,” and the meting out of dimension, measuring, or taking measure is man’s activity on the span between sky and earth, and between mortals (himself) and divinities (‘something heavenly,’ godhead, or God) (218, 220). In other words, the measuring is an inter-world (and thing) activity in “Language,” and an intra-world activity in “Poetically.” It is the latter I will focus my attention on for the rest of this essay.

In “Poetically,” Heidegger uses a late poem by Friedrich Hölderlin to shed light on poetic dwelling as the basic nature of human existence (213), and in the fragment that Heidegger cites and discusses, measuring as an activity features prominently. Heidegger states succinctly the connection between poetry, dwelling, and measuring: “The taking of measure is what is poetic in dwelling. Poetry is a measuring” (219), behooving the readers to ask: “What does he mean by ‘measuring’?” It seems customary when reading Heidegger that we eschew grasping the key term here with its customary usage; instead, we “pay heed to the basic act of measuring...[which] consists in man’s first of all taking measure which then is applied in every measuring act” (219), and only this type of measuring “gauges the very nature of man” (221).

What do we do when we measure or take measure? A parenthetical discussion comparing poetry and thinking may actually shed some light on this question. In this aside, Heidegger states that poetry and thinking are “the same,” as

opposed to “equal.” These two seemingly synonymous words differ significantly for Heidegger: “The equal or identical always moves toward the absence of difference, so that everything may be reduced to a common denominator. The same, by contrast, is the belonging together of what differs, through a gathering by way of the difference. We can only say ‘the same’ if we think difference.” I would like to argue that ordinary measuring is an equalizing act, whereas measuring “in the ground of its being,” which also is dwelling poetically for Heidegger, is an act of “meeting [the other] as one and the same” (216).

Two examples of ordinary measuring will help to reveal their equalizing tendency. The first example is a tailor measuring a piece of fabric. The tailor places the tape measure against one edge of the fabric; he then lines up the end of the fabric’s edge with markings on the tape measure; and finally, the tailor remarks, either in his mind or on paper with a pencil, the appropriate numerical label (that indicates a length) he gathers on the tape measure’s markings. This seemingly simple act of measuring, which a tailor no doubt does countless times, has two related equalizing acts hidden therein. First, the concept of length underlies the comparison between the fabric’s edge and the tape measure. Second, the unit of measurement (e.g. inch, centimeter) acts both literally and figuratively as the common denominator of both the fabric edge and the tape measure and equalizes them into length-possessing (and additionally for the tape measure, length-denoting) entities. The second example concerns time, perhaps the most measured quantity on earth.¹ The measuring of time includes recording elapsed time of events as well as the ubiquitous activity of checking the time—I look at a time-piece; note the position of hands (or the numbers displayed); and remark silently or out loud: “11:50” or “10 till 12.” Similar to the length example, the concept and conventions of time (time-of-day; time as part of calendar; units of time such as seconds, minutes, etc.) provide a standard for time that equalizes all time-measuring devices and activities. Even though passage of time is

¹ Chavez, Isabel. “SI Units – Time.” *NIST*, 23 Dec. 2020, www.nist.gov/pml/weights-and-measures/si-units-time.

more invisible than a piece of cloth, it is by far not unknown; humans infer it through the presence of day and night and seasons, movement and appearance of heavenly bodies, and fixed numerical value of atomic frequency.²

In these examples, measuring takes place as we equalize two entities along an attribute or property and use a common denominator—a unit. All measuring activities of this type are circumscribed in a known and determined system. When we ask, “What is a day?” the responses we get are not answers but unit conversions: “24 hours” or “one-365th of a non-leap year.” Once we equalize, what remains of measuring is the mechanical exercise of reading off the measuring apparatus, a type of activity that machines can be programmed to carry out. The multitude of sensors that are ubiquitous in modern life are examples of these measuring machines.

For Heidegger, this type of measuring is decidedly not poetic (222).

What does “measuring in the ground of its being” (i.e., dwelling poetically) look like? First, this fundamental measuring is an act where man measures himself against God as the “Unknown One.” This statement is counterintuitive because how can something unknown be the measure of anything, man or otherwise? Heidegger elaborates on this notion of measuring: “The measure consists in the way in which the god who remains unknown, is revealed as such by the sky. God’s appearance through the sky consists in a disclosing that lets us see what conceals itself, but lets us see it not by seeking to wrest what is concealed out of its concealedness, but only by guarding the concealed in its self-concealment” (220). Contrasting this sense of taking measure with ordinary measuring may help to illustrate this seeming contradiction of “measuring oneself against the unknown.” Ordinary measuring is characterized by measuring against the known; such activity leads to a closed and determined system and as such can be carried out by machines. To escape this predicament, man needs to practice measuring himself against the opposite of what is

² “Specially energized cesium atoms ‘tick’ with a specific frequency. We count 9,192,631,770 of those ticks and call the elapsed time interval a second.” Materese, Robin. “Second: Introduction.” *NIST*, 17 Nov. 2019, www.nist.gov/si-redefinition/second-introduction.

known: the unknown, which may also have the sense of being undetermined and indiscernible. This measure-taking brings together divinities and mortals while each “remains distinctly in the distinctness of their nature” speaks to Heidegger’s notion of “one and the same” (216).

Second, “poetry is this measure-taking” of oneself against the unknown (221). What does this poetry look like? It is clear that Heidegger saw the poem fragments from Hölderlin that “Poetically” features as exemplars. He also uses these poem fragments to describe this type of poetry where the poet calls and brings together “that which in its very self-disclosure causes the appearance of that which conceals itself, and indeed as that which conceals itself” as well as what is alien or different to it—“all the brightness of the sights of the sky and every sound of its courses and breezes into the singing word and there makes them shine and ring” (223). This is the sense of poetry in “...Poetically Man Dwells...” and it is such a dwelling that character-

izes what it means to be man. For Hölderlin (via Heidegger), dwelling poetically is not a given:

*May, if life is sheer toil, a man
Lift his eyes and say: so
I too wish to be? Yes. (218)*

Our lives can be mired in the machine-like sheer toil unless we attempt to measure ourselves against the unknown. Swap “What time?” with “What is time?” and think about Heidegger’s reflection on Trakl’s “Windows with falling snow is arrayed / Long tolls the vesper bell”: “This speaking names the snow that soundlessly strikes the window late in the waning day, while the vesper bell rings. In such a snow fall, everything lasting lasts longer. Therefore the vesper bell, which daily rings for a strictly fixed time, rolls long” (emphasis added) (196).

WORKS CITED

Heidegger, Martin. *Poetry, Language, Thought* (Harper Perennial Modern Thought). Later Printing Used, New York, Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2013.



Photograph of an Udumbara Flower: Li Jiao

Reverie

Warren Chew

You walk a familiar path between two houses and refuse to look at either of them—you've seen them before. A couple of thoughts occur to you: the neighbor to the right likes to walk her labrador around the block and chatter loudly with others. The neighbor to the left owns a log home that you wish you could own yourself some day. Nothing jars you awake as you continue walking and thinking in tandem about the lives of two individuals—neither of whom you actually care about—until you arrive at your forgotten destination.

A bench. A bench overlooking some woods that stretch to the suburbia of your city. A bench that you sit on in order to catch a glimpse of ocean beyond the buildings. What you see right now is what you sought, but your mind is elsewhere. Kicking the dirt beneath

You sink further into the bench and the depths of your body, experiencing all of your anxieties in this very moment.

your feet reveals cigarette butts littered around the floor. You remember, then, that what you're sitting on is a memorial. You discover an engraved name made

indistinguishable by layers of graffiti. Fragments of pottery and clay are strewn across some shrubbery—probably the remains of mementos for the deceased. You consider picking up the garbage, but the thought leaves as soon as it comes.

Sunlight on your skin, wind in your hair, and tightness in your chest. It's difficult to breathe despite the fresh air. You sink further into the bench and the depths of your body, experiencing all of your anxieties in this very moment. You wonder why you put one foot necessarily after the other in order to be here.

The greenery of the woods and the blueness of the ocean fade away. The sounds of the city deafen. Nothing remains but the pins and needles in your heart.



Artwork: Yang Liu

Thursdays

Thao Phi

Every Wednesday

The same conversation occurs
“Would you like to cook together tomorrow?”
“Sure.”
“Okay. You pick the recipe.”
Sometimes I give him cookbooks
Other times
He finds the recipes
Sometimes I do

The Thursday drill occurs
He picks the recipe
Usually a main and side dish
“I’ll pick you up after work at 3, okay?”
3 PM arrives quicker than I imagine it will

I wait in the parking lot
He gets in my car
We drive to the grocery store
Checklist in hand
We wander the aisles
(We pick up dessert now
sometimes, too)

He is my sous-chef
Cutting
Chopping
Dicing

Smoky black bean soup
and corn casserole
Avocado cream pasta
and honey roasted carrots
Zucchini bread
Blueberry pie
with ten white grapes
White bean soup
and glazed carrots with cider
(apple cider,
not apple cider
vinegar)
French onion soup
and cheesy toasts
Pizza
Veggie pot pie

Mac and cheese
and roasted broccoli
Unstuffed spicy tomato basil shells
(mouth-numbingly spicy)
Creamy alfredo penne
and (not-so-spicy) arugula

∞

I call her my stepmother, “stepmadre”
(and mean it dearly, too)
She’s shown me how to cook
more than a time or two
I guess now
I’m doing it, too

“When I get along with my spouse and children, I think
May all living beings
Treat enemy and friend equally
And forever turn away from greed and grasping.”
—*Avatamsaka Sutra*, Chapter 11: “Purifying Practices”

A rainbow we saw one Thursday evening while cooking together.

Photography: Thao Phi

A Tribute to My Father

Xiaojuan Shu



om namo mahāvaiṇṇyāya buddhāvataṃsakāya sūtrāya
“Om, homage to the Greatly-Expansive Buddha’s Flower Adornment Sūtra”

A month ago on my birthday, I video called my parents in China. During the call, my mother carried my father on her back to the couch closer to the screen so that I could see and hear him more clearly. When she put him down, his heavy bones landed motionless on the couch. Over the past twenty years of suffering from Parkinson’s disease, my father had gradually lost his flexibility and strength. My mother cheered up the occasion by talking about some of the “adorable” things that I did as a child. At age five, rain or shine, I walked fifteen minutes to a public bathhouse to bathe myself every day. It became my then daily ritual. Slowly, my father turned his head toward the screen, looked into me, and raised his hand to wave... A week later, he passed away.

I wondered about what kind of life my father would have enjoyed if he weren’t sick with Parkinson’s disease for two decades. He would’ve liked to travel, but he was bound to a walker and then a wheelchair for the last ten years. A few years ago, my brother took my parents to Beijing to have a specialist see my father. While in Beijing, they took a long train ride to the Great Wall. Finally, they were at the foot of the Great Wall, and my mother was so ready to climb along the wall while my brother accompanied my father, who was in his wheelchair watching. But my father began to shake violently with intense pain and they had to cut the trip short and return to the hotel.

My father would’ve liked to play *erhu*—a two-stringed Chinese musical instrument played with a bow—but he couldn’t hold it without shaking; he would’ve liked to present himself respectfully, but he couldn’t stop drooling; he would’ve enjoyed food, but he gradually lost his ability to taste, to chew, and to swallow; he would’ve loved to go to the public bathhouse often, if not every day, but that too became impossible.

Back at home in China, my brother took care of the funeral arrangements. Our relatives all

gathered. It made no sense for me to fly back due to the mandatory two-week COVID quarantine period after landing. My mother kept a three-night vigil alongside my father’s body at the funeral home. She recited Amitabha Buddha’s name without stopping and didn’t feel tired. I was told that my father looked very peaceful and even beautiful at the funeral home. I called my mother every day to see how she was doing.

“It’s hard to come back to an empty house without your *Baba*. Even the air is different. There is no longer a feeling of warmth,” Mother said. After taking care of my father for so many years, she still regretted what she hadn’t done to possibly prolong his life. Through the daily calls, I began to have clearer mental pictures of what they had

A week before his passing, my father missed his cousin who lived nearby. My mother pushed him in the wheelchair all the way to his cousin’s, but he was not home.

gone through together. One night, my mother changed the sheets and my father’s nightclothes three times. They recently fell together when my mother carried my father out of the bathroom. Sometimes, my father

held his need to get up or change in order to let my mother rest a little at night. A week before his passing, my father missed his cousin who lived nearby. My mother pushed him in the wheelchair all the way to his cousin’s, but he was not home.

I closed my eyes. How readily my emotions swarmed upon a mental image—my parents and maternal grandfather were standing outside the bus, on which I was heading to college in Nanjing. When the bus began to move, they waved goodbye. My mother followed the bus for a while, waving to me until I could no longer see her. Seeing me off at the bus station has been a “significant” recurring family event for many years. It is “significant” in the sense that the goodbye could be the last one, like the one from my grandfather, who a few months later sadly entered the hospital for the final time.

Six years ago when my mother had a medical procedure done on her stomach and my father’s mobility continued to worsen as his Parkinson’s



disease progressed, I flew back to China to visit. After a sweet two-week visit, I was leaving again. On the day of my departure, my father surprised me by offering me a ride to the bus station. My mother didn't think it was a good idea. Then he wanted to come along on my mother's electric tricycle to the bus station, but there was no room. As my mother and I were about to set off, I heard a "Hey!" from behind. My father was standing behind the kitchen window waving. I smiled and waved back, holding back my tears. My father seldom expressed his feelings, but whenever he revealed his care, it would hit me hard on my soft spot.

In later years, when he became mostly immobile, my father saw me off while lying in bed. He would hold my hands and say, "When you come home next time, *Baba* may not be here." To dam the flood of emotions whirling inside, I consciously kept that possibility in perpetual suspension.

During our last call, my father looked at me and sang the birthday song in his no longer clear voice. I sang with him. I told him how much I appreciated the monthly journals such as *Children's Literature* and *Science for Youth* that he subscribed to for my brother and me to read when we were in

elementary school. Every time a new issue arrived, my brother and I would fight to be the first one to read it. During the call, I told my father a story in the *Children's Literature* journal that made my brother and me laugh hard for a long time. It was a story about two pigs taking turns to help each other get out of a deep hole in the ground, only to find one of them still remaining in the hole after repeated efforts. My father was quite amused by the story and laughed uncontrollably. Actually, I wasn't sure if he was laughing or crying. I only saw tears rolling down his face.

For years, I have tried to clean up my past with my parents. I once apologized to my father for lashing out at him so cruelly when he biked all the way to my boarding high school and brought me some home-cooked dishes my mother made. In my depressed teen angst, I regarded my parents' love as an insult to my existence. My teenager behavior may be understandable, but one incident five years ago still pains my heart today.

I came home to visit that year and heard that my father wanted to play ping-pong, but everyone thought it was merely a fantasy due to his physical limitations. I said I would take him to play. The next day, I pushed him in a wheelchair

to the community center. With one hand holding onto the ping-pong table tightly and the other hand hitting the ball, he played with me. Soon, his physical disability seemed miraculously gone and he began to beat me in the game! I consider myself a pretty good ping-pong player, but I could barely keep up with him. An hour passed and he was still not tired, but I was. The next day, at the same time, we went again. My father amazed me even more with his physical stamina.

On the way home that day, something somehow triggered me. My old judgment of my father cast a shadow over me again. My mother's words from many years back rang again in my ears: "The most painful thing in my life is having married your father." On the third day, when my father came to my room and said, "Daughter, let's go," I said I was tired and pretended to sleep. After a while, when I came out of my room, my father was gone! My heart started pounding. My mother had just told me about the incident not long before when my father went out on his own and fell in the middle of the street, drawing a crowd and the ambulance. After frantically looking for him for a while, I rushed to the community center. There he was, peacefully watching others playing. He rolled himself there in the wheelchair! I let out my complaints and frustration through a suppressed voice. I don't remember if we played that day or not. After that day, he never mentioned playing ping-pong again. His mobility decreased and his condition worsened with frequent shaking day and night.

The pain that I may have caused for my father then gnaws at me now. In the morning bowing practice, I contemplated the phrases used in Ho'oponopono—an ancient Hawaiian practice: "I'm sorry; please forgive me; thank you; I love you." Waves of tears swelled up in my eyes.

Upon hearing the news of my father's passing, the residents at the DRBU-Sudhana Center joined me in the Buddha Hall to recite the *Great Compassion Mantra* twenty-one times. The Berkeley Buddhist Monastery held an online memorial service for him, which gave me a rare opportunity to reconnect with my friends from high school, college, and the other phases of my life on both sides of the Pacific. Two other students at Sudhana

Center and I began to read the *Earth Store Sutra* every day. The sutra illuminates the deeper meaning of filiality through the great vows of Earth Treasury King Bodhisattva. Each day, we dedicate the merit of reading the sutra to all the parents of the past, present, and future, to world peace, and to ending the pandemic.

All these unexpected acts of kindness have gently strengthened me as I live through this human experience of losing a parent. As a mixture of emotions of gratitude, sadness, forgiveness, and compassion continue to ebb and flow, I feel more connected to my father now than when he was alive. Although he was not a Buddhist, my father learned to chant the name of Guanyin Bodhisattva after hearing me chant. It's comforting to still hear him chanting in my ears, "Namo Guanshiyin Pusa." The remaining wall between us—a wall that was built with judgements and defensiveness—continues to disintegrate.

As a mixture of emotions of gratitude, sadness, forgiveness, and compassion continue to ebb and flow, I feel more connected to my father now than when he was alive.

My birthday call with my parents ended when another of my father's seizure-like episodes began. Just before he was about to lose control of his physical movement, or possibly even his consciousness, my father managed to reach into his pocket and take out a small

plastic-wrapped cake and extend it to me. My mother said while helping him, "*Baba* said *happy birthday*." That birthday wish became our final goodbye. I hold in my heart that my father's final birthday wish to me was his way of saying that he was happy that I was born and he appreciated that I was his daughter. I am grateful knowing that being a daughter is a lifelong practice, which will continue to nourish my core at the root level.

Every day during evening ceremony, I video call my mother and set my phone up with her onscreen in the corner of the Buddha Hall at Sudhana Center. She follows along with the ceremony, recites Amitabha Buddha's name, and circumambulates in the secluded balcony where she long ago set up her altar at home. Every day on that tiny balcony, she makes an incense offering to the same one-foot-tall Buddha that she has been bowing to since I could remember as a child. Whenever we happen to pass by our digital screens at the same time while circumambulating, we glance at each other and share a gentle smile.



Sati's mother always put him first until she became old and blind. What do you think Sati did then?
From *First You*, a Jataka tale, an upcoming release from Instilling Goodness Books.

Written by Dana and illustrated by Akanit Dachani

Where I Come From

Terri Nicholson

I come from: nothing is ever quite good enough
And why did my children turn out so weird?
I come from safe backyards
And entire days spent in the branches of an apple tree.
I come from fingers stained red from picking wild strawberries,
And Santa Claus doesn't come here because we're Jewish.
I come from running through sprinklers
On hot, muggy afternoons,
Feet burnt on the hot pavement,
And scraped knees that never quite healed.
Once, I wished I never had to grow up.
Now I wonder how you know when you have.

I come from jerky car rides that made my stomach queasy,
From Friday night dinners at Grandma and Grandpa's house,
And furniture covered in plastic.
I come from men who wore yarmulkes
And a prayer shawl embroidered with the Star of David.
I come from raised voices at the dinner table,
Fists that slammed down and sloshed the milk from my glass.
I come from the smell of burning Chanukah candles
And warm wax on my fingers.
I come from singing forbidden Christmas carols,
And watching films of dead bodies piled on trucks —

And you have to see this, because we can't ever forget.
I come from nightmares of dodging bullets,
Hiding, but knowing they will find us soon.
I come from you must worry to keep more bad things from happening.
Once I was trapped there,
Now I know I can wake up.

I also come from a place of men and women in saffron robes
who choose to shave their heads.
And sitting in full lotus, waiting for the sound of the yan qing bell.
I come from singing Hebrew prayers: Barach Atah Adonai
And chanting in Chinese: Namo E Mi To Fo
I come from thou shalt not bow down to graven images,
And touching my head to the floor before ten thousand Buddhas.
Once, I was part of only one dubiously privileged chosen tribe,
Now I know that the entire human race is my family.



Love, Good, God, and the One

Claire Robb

In the Bible, 1Cor. 13 is most known for its famous verse: “now abideth faith, hope, love but the greatest of these is love.” The main message proclaimed is that regardless of whatever happens, love lasts forever. Paul is trying to emphasize the imperishability of love. Some can argue that love does fail, just like hope and faith. Yet here, Paul makes a very bold statement, “love never fails.” So what was he trying to say about love when he wrote this letter to the Corinthians and how did this passage become a cornerstone of Love?

Corinth at the time was a very wealthy city because of its commerce, since it is situated on the Isthmus and is master of two harbors, of which the one leads straight to Asia, and the other to Italy. In addition to being known for their wealth, Corinthians worshiped Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love, beauty, pleasure and procreation. The worship of Aphrodite is believed to have started around the 8th century B.C. and fully developed by the time of classical Greece (510 B.C. – 323 B.C.) with the temple of Aphrodite atop the Acrocorinth, the mountain overlooking Corinth.

We get a sense of what the temple looked like through Strabo’s writing. Strabo, Greek geographer and philosopher, writes: “The temple of Aphrodite was so rich that it owned more than a thousand temple slaves, courtesans, whom both men and women had dedicated to the goddess. And therefore it was also on account of these women that the city was crowded with people and grew rich” (191).

Why would Paul need to write about love to a city that worshiped the Goddess of Love? Could he be alluding to the deeper meaning of love which could so easily be lost in a culture where the idea of love quickly turned into actions of lust?

In Chapter 13, Paul is praising love as being above all else—all performances, good deeds; even having “our bodies burn” for a righteous cause. In verse one he begins by saying, “though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels...” At the time of the anointing of the apostles, they were given the ability to speak in many different tongues. These gifts were highly esteemed and yet Paul says that without love, it is just a bunch of “noisy gongs or a clanging cymbal,” also making reference to Old Testament instruments used in rituals which were commanded by God—important, but compared to love they were nothing.

In the second part of this passage he says, “if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, if I have faith so that I can remove mountains...” These were all promises given to the disciple from Jesus, encouraging them that they could do all these things and more in His name. Yet, here Paul declares that without love these things also are nothing. All of these glorious works are dead works without love.

As much as Jesus taught his disciples to work miracles in His name, His first and foremost commandment was to “Love God with all your heart and to love your neighbor as yourself,” which is very similar to the message Paul is giving here. Most of the time, we understand love as something to give or to get, giving it name and form. Yet in this chapter, Paul is showing us that love is beyond these things.

When we “get” love it’s because we’ve created a meaning for our need and call it love. When we “give” love we also attach a meaning for what it represents to us to receive love. These meanings are different for everyone. This is why feeling loved and giving love can be confusing at times. Here Paul is bringing love into a very

different perspective, one that goes beyond what we can fully fathom as love. Love is around us and flows through us; but, we do not create love. We change the flow of love through us, but we do not control love. Love is its own power, the moment we try to grasp it, put a name to it, or try to give it form, then it no longer is. The raw power of love transcends our human understanding and although some have experienced glimpses of it, for the most part “we see through a glass darkly” (12). Could it be that Paul had a vision of this love and was trying to help others understand it? Things can bear the resemblance of love but they do not create love. According to Paul, Love always is and always has been just like God (1Cor 13).

Could it be that Paul had an experience similar to Plotinus, only many years before? Both saw something that, though they try hard to explain, can’t be fully understood. Plotinus calls it the One and Paul

calls it Love. Plotinus identified his One with the concept of “Good” and the principle of “Beauty” (I.6.9). According to Plato, there is only the Good and you are closer to it or further from it. Paul states that above all else there is Love, similar to both the Good and the One. In 1 John 4:8 we are told that “God is love,” and Jesus also says “I and my Father are one” (John 10:30), which means that Jesus is also love. So when Paul “fell to the ground” (Acts 9:4) and saw something that was so powerful it blinded him, could it be that he saw the raw power of love?

From Plotinus we hear, “the absolute transcendence of the One as unconditioned, unlimited, Principle of all things: ... eliminating all spatial ideas from our thought about Him.” The “Him” being God. He is referencing God and the One as the same things. Plotinus also compares the One and the Good as the same thing. So if God and the One are the same, and God is Love, then it stands to reason that the One and Love are one and the same.

Plotinus says, “All things are in the One and the One is not in anything, but all things

depend upon it. There is nothing that contains it but it contains all things” (V.5.9). Could this be similar to what Paul described when he spoke of Love? Plotinus goes on to say, “The One is other than all the things of which It is cause, transcending even being and beyond the reach of thought or speech” (VI.9.3). Love in its purity transcends thought or speech. Plotinus refers to God the same way he describes the One, “for He has no form, not even intelligible form: nor is He related to anything else, for He exists in and by Himself before any other thing” (VI.8.11). Again, we see how the One, God, Good, and Love all exist in and by themselves. Here Plotinus again refers to the Good and yet is relatable to Love,

“It is in their way the Good of all things, because it exists and all things depend upon It, each in its own way” (V.5.9). All things that exist and are given name and form depend on Love, but Love does not depend on anything

in order to exist. Yet here we see that it encompasses all, “It bears all things, it believes all things, it hopes all things, it endures all things” (7). Once again, we can see how God or Love can be manifested in the world yet the world cannot contain It, the same way that Plotinus states about the One, “there is nothing which contains It, but It contains all things” (V.5.9).

Going back to 1Cor 13, Paul says that everything else will pass away: Prophecies will end, tongues will cease, and knowledge will vanish, but “Love never ends” (8). Seeing that this is not easy to understand, Paul compares us to a child when it comes to trying to interpret love with the hope that we will understand, saying that one day “we will put an end to childish ways” (11) for we will have a full and clear knowledge of what all this means.

When Paul is talking about what love is and is not, “Love is patient, Love is kind. It’s not boastful or arrogant or rude, seeking its own way, or irritable or resentful,” we have to remember that in Paul’s letters to the Corinthians, he mainly writes to the Gentile and Greek members

When we “give” love we also attach a meaning for what it represents to us to receive love. These meanings are different for everyone.

of the church. As new members of Christ, they bring with them their pagan and cultural influences such as glorifying wisdom and ecstatic utterances, eating meat offered to idols, promiscuity as well as prostitution and other distorted ideas of love. Paul is saying that if we can see the effects of what Love can do and learn how to channel this power, we can become vessels of Love, leaving aside the things that hinder love in our lives.

For years, I have read and reread this chapter and it has always been a standard for how to love in a wholesome way. Doing good deeds is important but showing love through those deeds is what changes the action from being a “loud noise” to an authentic way of showing love to others. Through these texts, I have experienced a different understanding of what this chapter might be pointing at. As with most important texts, there are many layers to unfold helping us benefit from the wisdom within.

There’s a beautiful passage in the book of Song of Solomon which says: “Many waters cannot quench love, neither can rivers drown it. If one offered all the wealth of one’s house for love, it would be utterly scorned” (SoS 8:7). All that we have and all that we know can never conceive the power and wholeness of Love, and in essence God and the One being the same, which go beyond all that we can comprehend. We can’t fully grasp what this all means, so for now we only “know in part, but when that which is perfect comes, then that which is in part will be done away,” (9) and we will experience love face to face (12).

WORKS CITED

- Brettler, Marc Zvi, et al. *The new Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha: New Revised Standard Version*. Oxford University Press, 2018.
- David Padfield *The Biblical City of Corinth*. N.p. 2005. Web. May 15, 2019
- Strabo. *Geography*. Trans. Horace Leonard Jones. Books 8–9. Vol. IV. Harvard University Press, 1927.
- The Enneads*, Plotinus.



Photography: Abigail Setera

Rock Wall

Written by Alan Nicholson—Photography of a rock face by Ernest Waugh



Ernest Waugh



Franz Kline



Aaron Siskind

Ah, a great wall. The wall of time, the wall of patience, the wall of mystery. Is it a Franz Kline? Or an Aaron Siskind?

Or the rock wall at Leifa Mountain where the Exquisite Cave of 10,000 Saints dwell? and where Shifu has many stories and interesting disciples.

In the *Two Entrances and Four Acts*, attributed to Bodhidharma, the term “wall-gazing” is given as follows:

Those who turn from delusion back to reality, who meditate on walls, the absence of self and other, the oneness of mortal and sage, and who remain unmoved even by scriptures are in complete and unspoken agreement with nature.¹

Old Feng-kan embraces his tiger and sleeps,
While a frail old tree clings to the bottom of the cold precipice.²

Or the face of Mt. Sumeru...

ART CREDITS:

Waugh, Ernest. Original image: Rock Wall, 2021

Kline, Franz. *New York, N.Y.* 1953, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York. *Albright-Knox*, <https://www.albrightknox.org/artworks/k19566-new-york-ny> © 2021 The Franz Kline Estate / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Published with permission.

Aaron Siskind. *Durango 15* 1961, Gelatin silver print (printed later) 9 1/2 x 9 1/2 in. (24.13 x 24.13 cm.) Courtesy of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia. Gift of George and Joan Violin, 2019.28.2. Photo by Barbara Katus. Published with permission.

¹ Bodhidharma. *The Zen Teaching of Bodhidharma: A Bilingual Edition*. Trans. Red Pine. San Francisco: North Point Press, 1989.

² Levine, Gregory and Yukio Lippit. *Awakenings: Zen Figure Painting in Medieval Japan*. First Edition. Japan Society, 2007. Excerpted from an inscription on the *Four Sleepers* painting by Japanese artist Moukan.



by Kovilo Bhikkhu

“What Is Your Elephant?”

The Buddha’s Jackal Birth (*sigāla-jātaka*)

translated from Pali by Sean Kerr

Once, long ago, when King Brahmadata was reigning in Benares, the Buddha-to-be took birth in the womb of a jackal and dwelled on the bank of a river in the forest. One day, an old elephant died on the bank of the Ganges. The jackal, foraging for food, saw the body of that dead elephant and, thinking, *Great is my fodder, today!* went and bit it on the trunk. But it was like biting the pole of a plough. Thinking, *There’s nothing fit to be eaten here,* he bit the tusks. But that was like biting a stone pillar. He bit the ears. But it was like biting a winnowing basket. He bit it on the belly. That was like biting a grain-silo vessel. He bit the legs—it was like biting a mortar; he bit the tail—it was like biting a pestle. Not finding any relishable part anywhere, thinking in each case, *There’s nothing fit to be eaten here, either,* he bit it on the backside. That was like biting soft cake. And thinking to himself, *At last I’ve found a soft spot on this body that’s fit to be eaten!* he ate his way from there into the belly: eating the kidneys, heart, and so forth, drinking blood when he was thirsty, and lying down to sleep in the belly when he wished to sleep.

And so it occurred to him: *This elephant body is as comfortable a residence for me as any house; it’s meat in abundance when I wish to eat—what need do I have of going anywhere else?* And so without going anywhere else, he stayed there in the elephant’s belly, living on its meat.

As the time gradually passed, with the striking of the wind in the dry season and the heat of the rays of the sun, the body began to dry out and started shrinking. The entrance by which the jackal had entered closed up. It got dark in the belly. It became as dark as being in the space between worlds for the jackal. As the body dried, the meat also dried out, and the blood came to an end. Not finding an exit and becoming afraid, he ran around searching for an exit,

striking here and there. After some days of this, tossing about in the belly like a lump of dough in a pot of boiling water, a big cloud appeared and it rained. Becoming moist, the corpse soon regained its original form. The backside, now open again, a little star, as it were, appeared in the darkness. The jackal, seeing the pinprick of light, thought, *Today my life’s been saved!*, and backing up into the elephant’s head and leaping forward with all the force he could muster, he struck the hole with his head and exited through it. Due to the tightness of the passage, all his fur got stuck on the way out. Finding himself left as hairless as the trunk of a palm, running back and forth for a moment in shame, he sat and looked at his body. With a humbled heart he thought: *This suffering has been brought about by none other than myself. I did this: out of greed; to satisfy my greed—my greed gave rise to this. From now on, I won’t let greed control me and I won’t ever enter the dead body of an elephant again!* And so thinking, he spoke the verse:

nāhaṃ punaṃ na ca punaṃ, na cāpi apunappunaṃ
hatthibondiṃ pavekkhāmi, tathā hi bhayatajjito ‘ti.

Never again, not ever again, never, ever again will I enter the body of an elephant, so terrified was I! (Jātaka 148)

And saying this, running away from there, he never returned or even looked at that (or any other) elephant corpse again. From then on, his greed did not control him.

The Buddha, having told this story, said, “Monks, not giving the defilement that arises within any chance to grow, one should get it under control right then and there,” and, revealing the noble truths, connected the story to the present, saying: “I myself was the jackal, then.”



Entertainment

Lauren Bausch

JANUARY 2021

I signed up for Netflix on the day of the anticipated release of season four of *The Crown*. A frenzied tangle of conditioned arising resulted, one show at a time over winter break. Because I was also meditating three hours a day, I observed the effect on my mind. This is what I learned.

CRAVING FOR EXISTENCE.

I love stories, and it really doesn't matter whether the story is about me or someone else. The ensuing emotional experience, ever so enjoyable, is basically the same. In riding the waves of emotions while engrossed in stories—such as the trials and tribulations of Beth, the female chess champion in *The Queen's Gambit*—the mind registers change and gets off on the highs and lows. Upon reflection, the desire to register such change seems to be a subtle craving for existence, a principal cause of *duḥkha*. In meditation, it became increasingly difficult to follow only the breath because I had become used to constant stimuli. The mind often drifted to memories of past stimuli in an attempt to experience *something*.

THE PULL TOWARD PLEASURE.

The mind is especially drawn to pleasurable states. Juicy period dramas like *Bridgerton* in

particular arouse spectacular bouts of pleasure. Boredom may be considered the absence of enjoyment, so if, while the mind is paying attention to the breath, memories associated with pleasurable feelings arise, the mind prioritizes what feels good. *Experiencing the whole body, I will breathe in. Experiencing the whole body, I will breathe out. Simon and Daphne's hands touch in the gallery...* ...Realizing the mind has drifted, I return to experiencing the body while breathing in and out—until drifting again. "I am yours. I've always been yours." This continues until I realize I'm off again and bring the mind back to the body. It takes a lot of work to train the mind to see those pleasurable states for what they are: a trap. Indulging in pleasurable states conditions the mind to find enjoyment in reliance on them, rendering a free mind dependent on more such conditioned states to feel happy. For this reason, another cause of *duḥkha* is craving for sense pleasure. While it feels good, this kind of pleasure is addictive and insatiable. The more the mind gets hooked, the harder it is to rest at ease in the mind's inherent brightness and native joy.

I noticed that pleasurable states are also used by my mind to escape from painful ones. If a thought, sensation, or memory arises that is painful or scary, the mind immediately tries

to switch to something pleasurable, like to the clever and independent Enola Holmes outsmarting her brother Sherlock. This aversion is not healthy because the information from the unpleasant conditions is not received and the conditions are not seen for what they are: a conglomeration of factors both dependently arising and fleeting. Aversion sets up habits too. Not to mention that the desire to avoid pain is another cause of *duḥkha*: the craving for non-existence. By trying to escape from pain through aversion I am only tricking myself into resisting a possible solution: being interested enough in the conditioned factors to see them for what they really are.

INTERCONNECTION.

Very often that good feeling has to do with love. The mind incessantly wants to connect. Perhaps it is because originally, before the first thought of desire, the mind is inherently connected to everything. Interconnection is the natural state of the mind. Even Force-sensitive Grogu, hunted by the Galactic Empire, conceals his powers and forms an attachment to the Mandalorian, with whom he feels safe. In our confusion, we seek this connection with another person, or other people, but that is because we have forgotten who we are. Because we have forgotten, we can

experience stories about ourselves on many different levels. But the connections forged in this forgetfulness are limited to the degree that we are playing a part in a story and the results do not yield what we truly seek. The irony is that the connection that we seek all along is always there—it cannot not be present, but we forget.

FORGETFULNESS.

Many movies and TV shows appeal to us because they draw on certain themes that most of us can identify with in our state of forgetfulness. In addition to wanting to connect, we want to feel worthy. Many storylines speak to class divides: the prince falling in love with a commoner, the aristocrat inciting romance with a servant. A case in point is *Sir: Is Love Enough?*, which is adorned with pregnant empty spaces characteristic of classical Sanskrit literature. All of this screams, "Even though I am not good enough, my worthiness is possible." We have forgotten our inheritance as human beings. We have forgotten who we really are, irrespective of any acceptance or external recognition.

I noticed that pleasurable states are also used by my mind to escape from painful ones.

THE DESTRUCTIVE POWER OF GREED.

Forgetting might have to do with grasping, just like a mind rooted in greed is often associated with a pleasant mental state. In *Wonder Woman 84*, the FBI sends the museum where Diana Prince is employed a mysterious stone to identify. Reading the Latin inscription on the stone that says to make a wish, Diana secretly wishes to get her boyfriend back. Unbeknownst to her, the stone grants the wish, but also takes what is most precious to her. Steve Trevor returns (in another man's body), but she has to decide whether losing her innate superpowers is worth holding onto her desire. The story highlights the destructive power of greed—namely, when we want something, we lose what is of most value to us. This made me think that the mind operating on the pull toward pleasure or chasing after desires loses touch with the original mind, which is there all along, but only shining forth in all its glory when not covered over by grasping after conditions. For everything we get, there is something we lose. The less we seek, the more we realize we already have, that we already are.

Long story short: I deactivated Netflix after realizing how dependent my mind had become on losing myself in stories and finding pleasure in illusions. Then came a long detox. Perhaps a new friend is right: giving up watching movies enhances general mental health. It is certainly easier to observe what is happening in the present moment when the mind is not full of evocative scenes from films.

This experience provides a practical lens into some early discourses on the *skandhas* in the “Khandhasamyutta” of the *Samyuttanikāya* that Bhikkhu Bodhi taught in Pāli class many years ago. In the “Samādhisutta,” one who cultivates *samādhi* understands the origin (*samudaya*) and the passing away (*atthaṅgama*).¹ The origin means that one finds pleasure in, welcomes, and persists in clinging to the five aggregates—which is also the origin of the whole mass of suffering. Passing away means that one does not find pleasure in, welcome, or persist in clinging

1 *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Samyutta Nikāya*. Tr. Bhikkhu Bodhi (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000), 863-64.

to the five aggregates—which is likewise the cessation of the whole mass of suffering. The difference between the two is whether one clings to conditioned pleasure or not. The enjoyment (*assāda*) of the aggregates consists in the fact that pleasure arises based on them, but the danger (*ādīnava*) is that these aggregates are subject to change.² The way out is to remove desire (*chandarāga*). The Awakened One said, “one who seeks delight in form [feeling, apperception, volitional formations, and consciousness] seeks delight in suffering...One who does not seek delight in suffering, I say, is freed from suffering.”³ One is liberated through disenchantment (*nibbidā*) with the aggregates and through not grasping them.⁴

I see this delightful experience—yes, I thoroughly enjoy watching movies—as a contemporary application of the Buddha's teaching about the danger in enjoyment and the need to escape, not into another fantasy, but out of fantasy all together. The danger is that chasing after pleasure dependent on conditions is not just a source of enjoyment, but also a source of suffering (craving for sense pleasures, existence, and non-existence). As Vīryaśrīdatta says, “What wise being would consider a wound as bringing happiness because it gives a slight joy to sprinkle it with water?”⁵ *Soul* taught me that we constantly have to watch our step and treasure each miraculous moment of life, which sometimes requires seeing things from a fresh perspective. I do not resign myself to a life of misery, but neither do I wish to rely on an incessant pleasure fix. A more basic joy is present unconditionally if only I am curious enough to welcome its emergence.

2 *Ibid.*, 873-75.

3 *Ibid.*, 875-76.

4 *Ibid.* 900-1.

5 Vīryaśrīdatta, *Gathering the Meanings: The Arthaviniścaya Sūtra and its Commentary Nibandhanam*. Tr. N.H. Samtani (Berkeley: Dharma Publishing, 2004), 109.

For everything we get,
there is something we lose.
The less we seek, the more
we realize we already have,
that we already are.



Christmas Morning, 2020

James Roberts

Love waves bounce around the ocean
Like a cosmic rubber ducky.
Living Christmas trees extend fresh
Tendrils through ethereal
Mycelia. "Won't you see me!"
Shouts the deepest longing of the
Ebay.com trust and safety
Representative. And wrapped up
In our shiny plastic boxes,
Watching our children discover life
Exists on Amazon.com,
Finally allowed to breathe in,
Cold and cracked, this precious morning
When we celebrate the coming
Light, we read each other stories
Of hope
And rare vaccine side-effects
Reminding one another that living
With the virus was never,
For most of us, death.

Photography: Stan Shoptaugh

On vowing to stop using electronic entertainment

Omar Xavier Masera Astier

"They who are heedless are as if dead already."

—Dhammapada

How many hours have I given them? I shiver thinking about it. YouTube videos, Facebook feeds, Reddit discussions, memes, Netflix shows... There have been days when I get pulled in and I emerge seven, eight hours later, as from a malignant *samādhi*, unaware of how much time I just killed, how many irreplaceable minutes of life I just poured on them. Throughout many difficult, bewildering years they have lulled me away from all my discomforts, whispering their soft voices and lighting my face with their cold light, never sweet enough to be healing and never

I tried many times to escape, to reduce their pull on me but half-measures were useless.

harsh enough to be off-putting, like an always-available broker who exchanges pain for half-pain, happiness for half-happiness, life for half-life. It is in the very name of it: enter-

tainment, inter-time, an in-between times, not real time, but what comes between it. O sweet oblivion, take me away! How I would have liked sometimes not to be!

I tried many times to escape, to reduce their pull on me but half-measures were useless. Well-thought plans and clever strategies failed after two weeks, slowly being bent by small acts of indiscipline until my bad habits became their old selves. I was never one for self-control, and when you are so used to dumping all your garbage in a can it's not easy to figure out what to do with it. And garbage I have: boredom, *ennui*, uncertainty, despair, a vague sense of dread, excitement, frustration... Dump it all out! Let it be erased! (And don't look at the fine print: *that to kill a shadow is to kill he who casts it*).

The idea came from Helen Woo, that marvelous woman, who said that when she started to cultivate seriously, she made vows to Guanyin, asking her to help her keep them: to bow a certain number of times each day ("you have to do your homework!"), to stop eating meat. So I started with something really small. I thought very carefully about what I knew I could achieve and then made a small but solemn vow: to attend morning ceremony every day for the next week. Keeping the vow gave me a small measure of confidence and encouragement. Maybe I *can* do this.

So, during winter break I made more vows, modest in scope but solemn in intent, shaping my habits around things I wanted to change, always thinking very carefully before making them, asking myself, "Is this beneficial?" "Am I really willing to keep this?" knowing that once I'd made it, I would have to keep it, come what may. But once the intention was solidly set and I was certain this was something I wanted to do, keeping the vows was uncomplicated. I was doing the things I already knew I wanted to be doing and I didn't have to spend any energy convincing myself, procrastinating, feeling guilty that I hadn't done it or rationalizing why today it wasn't a good day to do it but tomorrow would be. The hard part was suddenly being stripped of distractions and being forced to *look*. Some days depression would come full-fledged, like great waves battering against a cliff. No buffers, no intermediary, no escape. I *had* to look, which I hadn't done very often before. And lo, like a dark cloud, menacing but bodiless it faded when I withdrew my attention from it and towards contemplation of the breath or the body.

And then, sweet relief, the break ended and the semester began again. O heated, plentiful Sudhana Center! However much I have always appreciated you, it will forever be too little. And out came, bursting like a dam, my entry back into screen diversions. I could roam the World Wide Web freed from my previous restrictions once again! What had I

I do not exaggerate when I say
I felt like a free man. I was
liberated! I'd gotten my life back!

missed? Not much, it turns out. The novelty died soon and it became plain that I didn't miss my old shadowy companion at all. And so I resolved on what months before would have seemed like

madness: to stop using all electronic entertainment for the rest of the semester (except for a couple of hours on weekends). I do not exaggerate when I say I felt like a free man. I was liberated! I'd gotten my life back! Suddenly I had so much time in my hands. I started reading again. One, two, three books! I was on top of my schoolwork. Admittedly, sometimes I got bored like an oyster, but even that could be put to some use (*Who is feeling ennui? What does ennui feel like?*).

Now it's been a little under three months, and I can confidently say that this is one of the best things I have done in my life. Habits may be small things but their cumulative effect shapes our lives. What's that saying? "Watch your thoughts for they become words, watch your words for they become actions, watch your actions for they become habits, watch your habits for they become character, watch your character, for it becomes your destiny?" And according to Buddhism, the force that keeps us mired in ignorance and suffering is literally habit, nothing more; *samsara* is just a mental habit. So if my life is a struggle between the part of me that wants to go along with the irreflexive stream and the part of me that knows better, then vows have been some kind of super weapon for the latter. It is ironic but by becoming more regulated I feel lighter, and by restricting myself I've become freer.





Covid Poems

Jackie Farley

Baking, painting, walking, talking
Email checking, what-the-hecking
Dancing, prancing, sitting still
So it is with time to fill

Mind is blank, heart just sank
Cooking, cooking, cooking, cooking
More to do, nothing to do
Time with Netflix 'til I'm blue

Time for...

Baking, painting, walking, talking
Email checking, what-the-hecking
Dancing, prancing, sitting still
So it is with time to kill

Conspiracy theories come thick and fast
Internet arrows—dark shadows cast
“It's all a hoax, you stupid folks”
“Wearing masks a useless task”

Time for...

Baking, hiking, cleaning, breathing
Email checking, what-the-hecking
Zooming, grooming, shaving legs

FaceTime, Skype-time, losing focus
Leave behind the hocus-pocus
Leave me alone, let me be

To meditate and have some tea...

Next Year I'm Going on Holiday

Now we've got the vouchers and the miles are piling up
At least we'll get to Europe—if not, we'll get a pup

We never had a pet before because we're always going...
Somewhere far away from here aboard a massive Boeing

But not now...

Going nowhere, going nowhere, going nowhere fast
Stinking thinking, stinking thinking, “How long will this
thing last?”

SIP's¹ like RIP, preparing for the grave
But think of all the jet fuel that staying home will save...

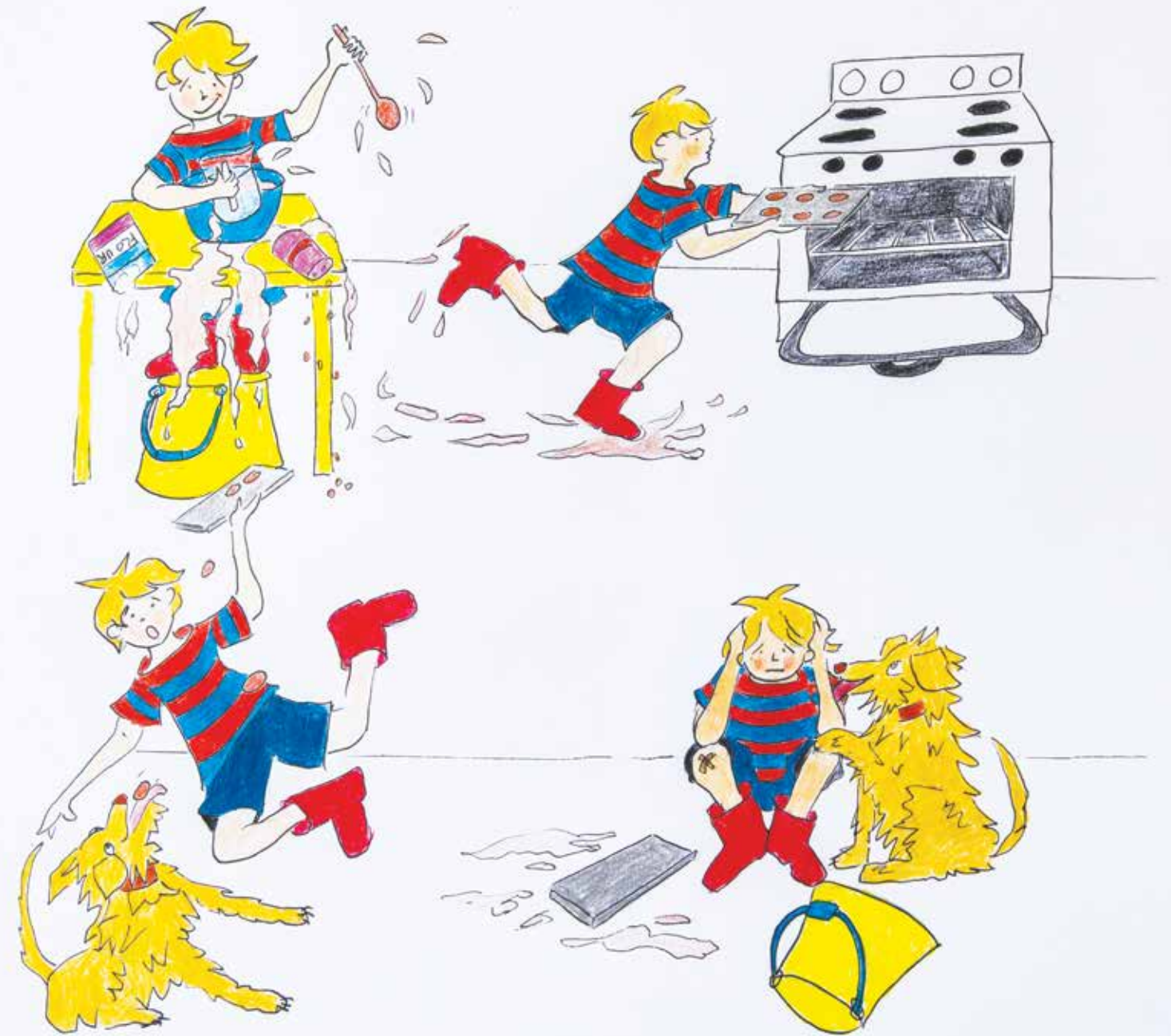
We'll think about the planet and mend our greedy ways
Reuse our cardboard boxes and save those plastic trays

Grocery bags are filling every corner of our place
Can't use them in the store now—unless we want to face
The masked checker...

¹ Shelter in Place



Here's Jody, the main character in Dana's upcoming children's book *The Unicorn and the Firetruck*.



This is a story of a little boy who wants to help his parents help evacuees from a wildfire in a neighboring town. Here he is trying his best to make cookies for them. It is harder than he thought...



Carving and Undoing the Wheel Ruts of the Mind

James Nguyen

When I was young, I used to read lots of fables. I remember reading the story of “Hercules & the Wagoner”:

A Farmer was driving his wagon along a miry country road after a heavy rain. The horses could hardly drag the load through the deep mud, and at last came to a standstill when one of the wheels sank to the hub in a rut.

The farmer climbed down from his seat and stood beside the wagon looking at it but without making the least effort to get it out of the rut. All he did was to curse his bad luck and call loudly on Hercules to come to his aid. Then, it is said, Hercules really did appear, saying:

“Put your shoulder to the wheel, man, and urge on your horses. Do you think you can move the wagon by simply looking at it and whining about it? Hercules will not help unless you make some effort to help yourself.”

And when the farmer put his shoulder to the wheel and urged on the horses, the wagon moved very readily, and soon the Farmer was riding along in great content and with a good lesson learned.

Self help is the best help.

Heaven helps those who help themselves.

—Excerpted from the Aesop’s Fables Interactive Book, Library of Congress

Rereading this parable after so many years, I find that my interpretations of it have evolved. When I was young, I mostly took stories and their messages at face value. Now, I have more of a critical lens. How do we get stuck in ruts? And how do we create them in the first place?

∞

As I’ve gotten older, I’ve found that there’s an inertia that leads into routines being grooved into thought, speech, and actions. The wide-eyed wonder of my youth has closed up over the years, catalyzed by the dulling comfort of familiarity, the bitter learnings from mistakes, and a general narrowing of the horizon of possibility.

Before the pandemic, I traveled a fair amount. I used to hop onto subways with no planned destination and wander through downtown streets with no map. Over time however, that spontaneity has increasingly been traded for schedules, timetables, and itineraries. While there’s undoubtedly a greater efficiency that comes with having a plan, there’s also been a loss of spontaneity along the way.

This change in the way I travel is just a manifestation of the underlying changes to my mind. I can look at the habits of eating the same kinds of food, liking to watch the same kinds of movies, driving the same route to the

supermarket—they're just expressions of the similar habits of thought that are hardening as well.

These routines show themselves in deep ways. It's in the same mental reactions that arise for situations, the repeated phrases being spoken in conversation, the beliefs that start to emerge in how I approach life. It's no longer as simple as not visiting one side street or another when I travel, but now not even visiting one idea or another in my own mental processes. These ruts of my mind guide me away from exploring new avenues of thought, from different possibilities of being.

This calcification goes against everything that I've learned so far during my time at DRBU.

We can wait for these unexpected, external events to change us, but how much can we drive this change ourselves?

While it's easy to say that this is perhaps just part of the process of aging, the texts we've read have all pointed to

a mind that is unfettered by such limitations. It points to a mode of thinking that remains spontaneous and dynamic to whatever situations arise, free of any clinging and attachment.

I've already dug so many ruts over the years; how might I keep them from growing ever deeper? And how might I keep new ones from being carved?

∞

I've seen dramatic life events shock some people into new patterns in life. A brush with death, a traumatic breakup, a new child, new-found faith. And I've also seen people still repeat the same mistakes again afterwards, mired in the only life they've known. We can wait for these

unexpected, external events to change us, but how much can we drive this change ourselves?

Are we always waiting for Hercules? Are we always waiting for Guanyin? Are we always waiting for just that *one thing* to change before we're ready?

∞

While I haven't figured out how to undo all the habits I've built up, I have been trying out the practice of keeping a beginner's mind. No matter how much I've learned or done something, I hope to keep open the space of possibility for something new or different. Even if past experience would have ruled it out, even if it makes me uncomfortable, even if I don't enjoy it, to still just give it a shot. Part of me worries that this "seeking of the unfamiliar" could become just another habit unto itself, but I've decided for now that it's a trade off that's worth it.

Going into DRBU's master's program, with all its focus on classical wisdom and traditional values, is perhaps a similarly radical detour I could do compared to climbing the safe career ladder of my past job working in tech, or even compared to my previous misadventures on the playa at Burning Man. In the spirit of the beginner's mind, it's certainly challenged and transformed my ossified beliefs in all sorts of unexpected ways.

I recognize that it'll always be an ongoing process to undo the ruts in my mind carved prior. But perhaps that is the best chance we have, to avoid getting stuck in the ruts, and to not need to even ask for the help of Hercules.

WORKS CITED

"Hercules & the Wagoner." Library of Congress Aesop Fables, read. gov/aesop/038.html.



Artwork: Sherry Wu

The Other Half

Amy Liu

When God said,
“Let there be light,”
He also created darkness.

When Yin and Yang
rose out of the chaos,
they remained in harmony.

One half, bright as the moon
the other half, dark as the night.

But we,
we put labels on things,
said that white
was pure, was beautiful, was good.
said that black
was defiled, was ugly, was bad.

Who said?
Who dared to make this distinction,
that there was white
and there was black,
that there was good
and there was bad,
that there was one
and there was the other —
in a world of blurry, bleary gray?
in a world that is always an I for an I,
but not always a truth for a truth?
Who says?

Harmony, self-harmony.
Not harm on you, harm on we.

Because the Yin and the Yang
can never be separated
within, or without

Because the dark side of the moon
and the brightest, fullest side we see
are the same, just 15 days apart

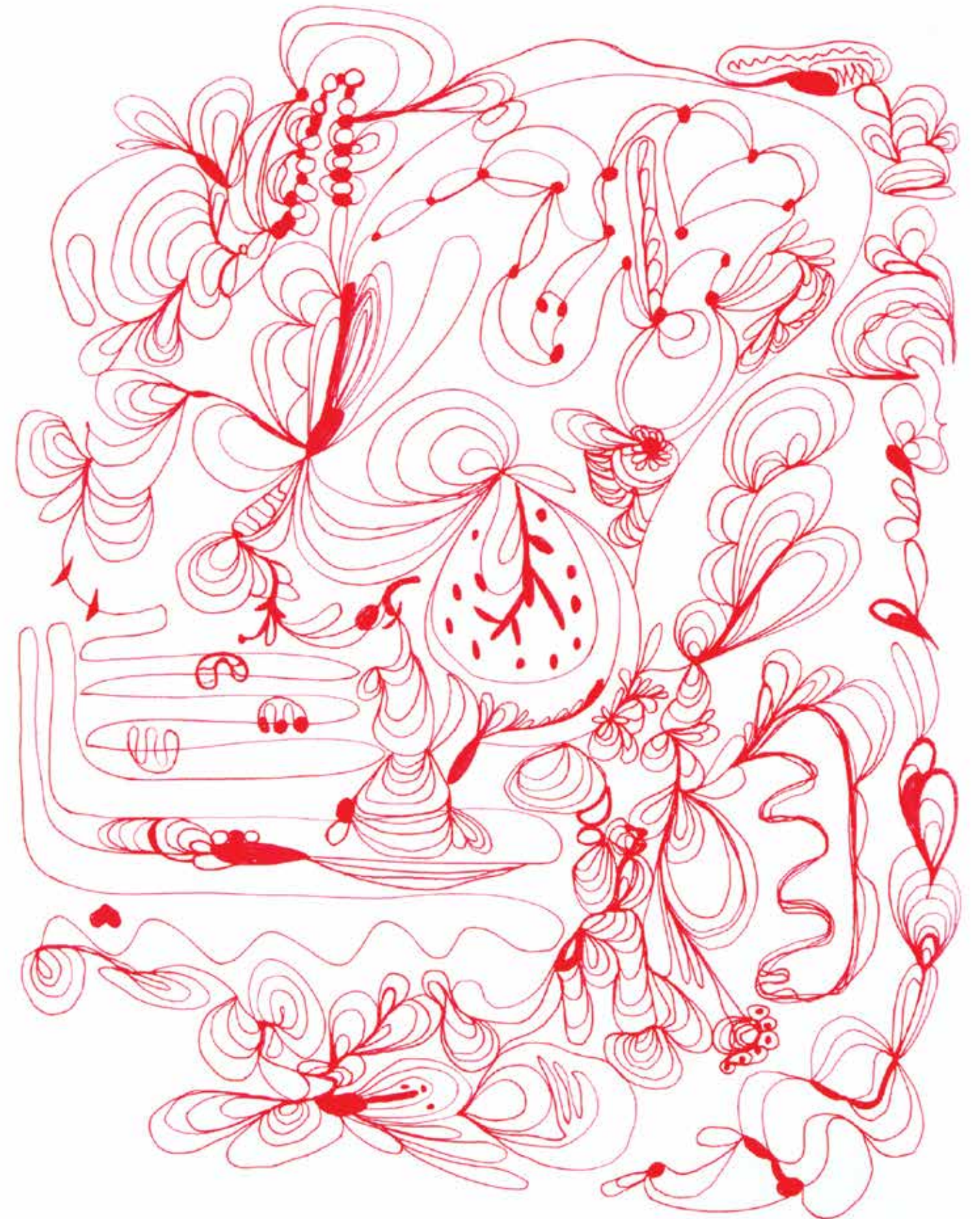
Because the color of my skin, and the color
of your skin,
and the color of their skin, are the same —
illusions of light.

One half, dark as the moon
the other half, bright as the night.

Distinctly different, but
Why not form
one circle

Not of light, and not of dark
Not of halves, and not of wholes —

Where there is no such thing as
the other half.





From My Heart

Hui Xuan Ooi

My heart has always been very upfront with me, or that's what I posit now. It's very likely that I'm forgetting the instances where I'd lost myself in my thoughts and anxieties. It's been over one week since the shooting in Atlanta, Georgia; one week since my one-year-in-lockdown passed by, and one week since I haven't been able to do anything. But this past week, the intense fear seemed to subside, the cloak of supposed normalcy began to shield my terror from view. After my week of full-time classes, homework, and meetings concluded, I had the notion that I was fine.

My stomach, however, spoke to me loudly and clearly. I had been losing my appetite at my last bite of food for every single meal for two weeks, and after droning on with a dull ache of tension, the knot in my stomach became too apparent for me to pretend it didn't exist. "It could be many things," I thought, and I reached out to one of my friends at DRBU to discuss what lingered in my mind. But there it stayed and worsened—my stomach was now joined by my tense shoulders and the shallowness of my breath. It dawned on me, "Maybe I am completely unable to bear anything and anyone outside of myself at this moment." There's no way to speed through grief, you know. The heaving in my chest began even though I tried to turn to my nightly recitation of the *Great Compassion Mantra*.

THE STORM

Memories float through my head: "Why are you not okay with feeling not okay?" "It could have been my mom." "You know, you always lose yourself when taking care of others. That's why your body is the way it is now." "*Mettā. Mettā.*" I

turn onto my side, curled up in bed, feeling tears begin to stream down my face quietly. I grab my phone and type to my best friend, "I feel really overwhelmed right now." I wasn't able to reply after she responded though, only mustering, "Give me a moment." Sadness seeps up from the cracks in my heart and darkness closes in around me. I stretch out my hand and silently scream in my mind, "Will anyone save me?" Encased in growing darkness, a close-up shot focuses on my hand as I reach for the portal above that becomes further as I sink.

My dad appears and seizes my hand, pulling me up as if to say, "Don't worry, I got you." I sob into his lap as he holds me. The final crescendo of tears hit me as I let them pour out; my nose blocks up. My dad passed away eight years ago. I know he isn't physically there with me, but I am thankful nonetheless. He often visits me as I travel the world in my dreams.

I sit up, blow my nose, and get up to collect myself in the bathroom. My tension subsides and I continue reciting, dedicating my merit at the end. I tell my friend what happened with a summary, but this is the first time I recount what I experienced in writing.



A line from *Star Wars Episode VIII: The Last Jedi* surfaces where Luke tells Rey, "It passed like a fleeting shadow." I think of this line after I weather my own mental storms. Very rarely do they get as terrible as the one I described.

I'll be honest, it has been difficult to process, let alone write down what I've been feeling about the recent news of continual acts of violence against Asian American and Pacific Islanders in the U.S. and around the world.

I myself am a Chinese Malaysian American. I wrestled all while grieving intensely with the fact that I should speak up, share my experiences, uplift and amplify the voices of my people. Yet I quickly realized that to jump into a seemingly profound gesture, I'd be completely untrue to myself, betraying my own values of integrity and sincerity, vowing my best to always speak from my heart. Because all I could do was to be in silence. I brought the news of what happened in Georgia up in a few of my classes the week it happened, but nothing more. I checked in with my family, who I found out also went on with life as "normal," but would cry behind closed doors in separate rooms of the house while watching and reading the news. I reached out to a few friends to check in on them, subconsciously wishing to also be checked in on.

But more than anything, I felt my aching pain, terror, and sadness in silence. I couldn't write anything down relating to how I felt and would avoid writing about it in my diary entirely. I wasn't oblivious to why so many of my friends and I chose to shut out, withdraw, or abide in silence. One of my final papers in my undergraduate studies spoke on how survivors of the Holocaust would often not tell of what they experienced at all. While I am not comparing trauma, experiencing what I have been going through made me understand a little more of what I'd previously written about.

Everyone experiences, processes, and grieves in their own way. I often bring up in my classes that there is nowhere to start except from where you are, and this was no different. One thing I also mention quite a lot is that there is always something we *can* do in moments where we say that we can't do anything in our current conditions. I acknowledged (though admittedly not always) that it was very clear that I needed to let myself be where I was—sitting with myself in the silence that countered the overwhelming, paranoid what-ifs—and only doing what I was able to. So, I turned to what I'd always relied on: writing from my heart.

I sat down with stationery I made myself with rolls of washi tape and blank pieces of

paper, writing letter after letter to my friends who were all silently grieving as well, trying to find their footing in an upside down time. These were my friends I met back in my time at the University of Florida in Asian American organizations. We became friends because we shared similar stories from childhood—stories of immigrant parents and multilingual households. Together we taught each other traditional Chinese dances, created our own modern choreography, and celebrated how proud we were to be Asian

American onstage with performances every semester. I found solace in remembering the times we were able to laugh, cry, sing, and dance together. I poured my heart into the nourishing, uplifting moments of the past.

I can hear what some of you may be thinking, "Aren't you clinging to your past and your identity?" I won't deny the validity of that observation, but there are instances where the strength to move forward from suffocating suffering lies directly within ourselves and our memories, no? What can I say though, everyone's different.

I wish not to mentally abide in this place of disturbing and unsettled worry. One thing's for sure, I know for myself that I can't close my eyes and push it away at all costs either. To all those experiencing grief, pain, paranoia, terror, and even anger because of what's been going on, I feel you. Take the time to really hold space for anything that arises within yourself.

Reiterating some lines from what I wrote in the Fall 2020 issue:

*May we be well.
May we be peaceful and at ease.
May we be happy.
And may we have the patience, courage, and
understanding to face what arises.*

Take care, everyone.

One thing I also mention quite a lot is that there is always something we can do in moments where we say that we can't do anything in our current conditions.



Levendivin © 2011



Lockdown Diamond Doodles

Bhikshuni Heng Chih

format for diamond poems

Noun
Adjective, Adj.
Verb, Verb, Verb
Noun, Noun, Noun, Noun
Verb, Verb, Verb
Adjective, Adj.
Noun

1.
hands
gentle, decisive
touch, give, heal
pain, sorrow, murmurs, rhythms,
throb, stabilize, sustain
balanced, open
hearts

2.
sounds
insipid, intense
shout, edify, whisper
echoes, monotones, pauses, lapses
lull, hush, solicit
sly, stoic
silence

3.
ice
rigid, frigid
bites, burns, breaks,
icicles, cubes, creeks, streams,
swirl, churn, trickle
silvery, sluicing
water



Photography: Stan Shoptaugh

Lake Mendocino drought 2021

Worriment (Why Worry?)

Quinn Anderson

I have a lot of anxiety. I am currently working out how to work through my anxiety to become a more calm and confident person. It takes a lot of careful reflection and mindfulness. Most of the time, it comes down to slowing myself down. I have to look at the ways my anxiety is manifesting, and then learn the skills for dealing with those instances. Sometimes, it's an attitude and sometimes it's an overt behavior. Sometimes it's just the physical sensations. In certain cases, it's a habitual response to my social person (the way my social identities embody and move through the social sphere), coming from a feeling of being alone. There is sometimes a fear of a loss of control over myself and my feelings. There is a feeling of a loss of control over who I am, in relationship and on my own, and in my projections and imaginings about the persona I think I might be, want to be, want not to be. It's uncertainty about my standing in the world, uncertainty about my life and embodiment. Uncertainty about who I am.

I've noticed that "I" thoughts cause a lot of anxiety. "I have to do this. I have to be such-and-such a person. I have to overcome such-and-such a feeling." The idea that I have to find an "independent" person who can conquer my problems terrifies me. What if I let myself not be that way? We all muster our way through relying somewhere, but some reliances lead us to freedom and others to imprisonment. Who and what do I rely on, and how does that liberate me? How do you work through a reliance to get to freedom? Is it possible? Do the free rely elsewhere, and what is a reliance that embodies goodness, and what is a reliance that causes anxiety? What is excess, and what is moderation? Can we really separate a reliance from an existence? Is existence reliance? Is non-reliance non-existence? Existence and non-existence are extremes, are views of self; are reliance and non-reliance also extremes, are they views of self? Is anxiety caused by bifurcation of self and other,

by separation? And is non-separation non-self or self? Tumbling around.

Anxiety urges on a seeking, maybe looking for a state of non-separating (driven by views of self). But separation is mental; it only has a basis in self-other distinguishing, and all the ways that distinguishing is wrapped up in anxiety. It can be so difficult to just sit, to say nothing, to assent or defer, to relinquish; the "I" wants so much to be acting out its worries and fears, seeking "connection" (What is connection? A set of conditioned markers in our experience?). Thus, I'm trying to work on those particular antidotes: not doing certain things, and doing other things, which align with those outcomes (stillness). The more I work on anxiety, the more urgency I feel to take advantage of the opportunities to observe it, and the less I fight back against the call to adjust. Each moment of discomfort and pain is a moment to dispel the intensity of energy behind habits. Just don't do what you're not supposed to do; do exactly what you need to get free.

Slowing down is hard to do. It takes a lot of letting go. Sometimes, I just have to say to myself, "let go, let go, let go, let go..." until I stop holding so tight to a thought or perception. Always, I have to take care to watch particular habits throughout the day: food, sleep, social situations, working, reading, sitting still. Every little movement of my life needs care towards this goal of overcoming anxiety. In particular, relationships expose my anxieties. But there's nothing really happening outside of anxiety. I notice this quality of anxiety when I listen more and learn more about my habits, notice them coming on rather than acting in obliviousness. I can watch myself making up drama from habit,

Each moment of discomfort and pain is a moment to dispel the intensity of energy behind habits.

even when everything is okay. Those moments are the good ones. The ones where I don't notice—or worse, notice but don't want to look—those moments are the ones that are hard. Thus, I can say that noticing and knowing everything is okay is the way to go, when it's available. But in order to get there, I have to be patient with discomfort and sincere about my feelings. And willing to respond differently, to slow down.

If I've accumulated anything from my studies here, it's that cultivation is more of a stopping than a doing. In the traditions we study, there are philosophies that talk about, or encourage, ways of being that slow down and dissolve habituated modes of being. In all, there are philosophies that lead us to a still, unmoving, unhabituated state. But from that place, a lot of power and energy is accumulated which can suddenly be directed, at will, toward new aspirations. Becoming less habitual and having a more tranquil mind actually provides the energy. Is it because all of our energy stratifies around habit, and once unlocked, can flow in a focused direction? How much energy is used in anxiety? Chronic anxiety leads to chronic fatigue and depression.

How do we destratify those energies? *Mettā*, loving-kindness, is an energy which destratifies. Like water, it moves into the soil and releases. Movement in the body can either reinvigorate or relax an anxious mental state; sitting meditation can do the same. *Mettā* may be the gentle presence which causes the anxiety to release. *Mettā* is support. Thus, what I do or don't do isn't the key—it's the presence of heart. Look closer.

Or, *what am I afraid of?* Am I afraid to lose? *Give!* Am I afraid to face myself? *Heal!* Am I afraid of what someone thinks? *Be true!* Am I afraid of what will happen? *Observe!*

Recently, a handful of us from Sudhana Center (the DRBU housing during the Covid lockdowns) went to a lake nearby. A rope swing reaches out over the water, from which swimmers—some quite talented at acrobatics—take turns jumping in. I'm often too afraid to do

much of anything, and it's taken me time to get to where I'm able to go to school and have a social life. For a long time, I rarely left my house. But I went, and stood on that rock slope, urged by friends to get in. It took me a while, but I realized at one point that if I just moved up and down the slope, walking back and forth on a patch of dust, with the rope in my hand, I could start to shift from the incapacitated state of helplessness to the first movements of courage. Ten to fifteen minutes of standing still with fear were quickly replaced with a couple minutes of walking up and down before I counted, "One... two... three..." and let go of the earth beneath me. I still remember that feeling: a confidence and power had formed in my body as I counted down, and I had little hesitation when I pushed off the ground.

That small movement back and forth took place on only a couple feet of ground. Two steps forward, two steps back. Two forward, two back. Just this wiggling makes me think of the mosquitoes in the pond at Sudhana Center, who wiggle gently back and forth till their cocoons rip open and, suddenly, like a flash, they're in the air, wings fluttering. Right now, I'm trying little things. Be a little quieter, sit a little bit here and there, write a sentence or two in my journal, eat a little less chocolate (occasionally), take a little more time, wait a bit longer to finish that task, think a little more before saying that thing. Slowly, this wiggling in the tight space of my habits is breaking up a little bit of fibrous tension to find some space. I can breathe more easily and stop myself more quickly. I don't get as overwhelmed when I trip, and I have a better sense for what habits my mind is creating. I'm trying to wiggle out and get my wings in the air. Maybe someday, I will look back and wonder how it was possible to live in such a small space.

we're all just trying to be loved, no matter what it is knowing that, do not fight; simply give

But from that place, a lot of power and energy is accumulated which can suddenly be directed, at will, toward new aspirations.

III. The Disciples' Reluctance to Visit Vimalakirti *abridged



Comic by Abigail Setera



Photography: Jin Xiang Shi

When Spring Comes, So Does Hope

Bhikshuni Vien Trung An

Spring, spring, and spring. This is the time of year when everything will wake up after a long nap from the winter. This is how the universe functions. How about one's body and mind? Does one get affected by it or not? Then how does the universe relate to one's body and mind?

At first, I thought that life is so simple and at ease. I don't think much about how things turn around me. All I think about when spring comes is that it is the time I can wear new clothes and save my lucky money to buy my favorite food to eat. That is my happiness and memories about spring, and this is springtime in my heart. I don't pay much attention to how my body and mind work. However, I slowly understand that my body has changed each year and my mind gets frustrated from being old. I finally looked at my mind and found that it was so tricky and deceitful. All the noble minds and those not so noble are lined up side by side. Why do I say that? For example, in the garden we plant flowers; however, weeds will appear before the flowers bloom and they go side by side. Wherever flowers grow there are weeds present with them. They belong together. The flowers represent one's noble mind and the weeds represent one's unwholesome mind. Therefore, when they both have met good conditions like water, sunlight, and fertilizer, they will grow but usually the bad grows first and fast.

The same with one's habits. There are some that are good and some that are not so good. If one doesn't pay attention and bring awareness to habits, one will easily get lost in the circle of bad habits because they are very strong and powerful. The habit that I usually get caught in is my ego which appears on the surface of my thoughts and within my mind. At first, I thought I was okay just the way I was and satisfied with my ego. I wanted everyone to follow my way and no other way. I always thought that my method is right and better than other people's. I did not want to listen to other people's opinions. Most of the time, I did not understand why people kept telling me that my ego

was so big and how I needed to learn to listen to other people and be more humble.

Now as I look back, I wonder how people could endure my behavior so well. I feel ashamed and regret what I did in the past. The things that get me to realize my ego is so big are the teachings from the sutras and the times I look back at my mind. Only when I turn my light inward to shine on my darkness do I recognize my faults.

The habit that I usually get caught in is my ego which appears on the surface of my thoughts and within my mind.

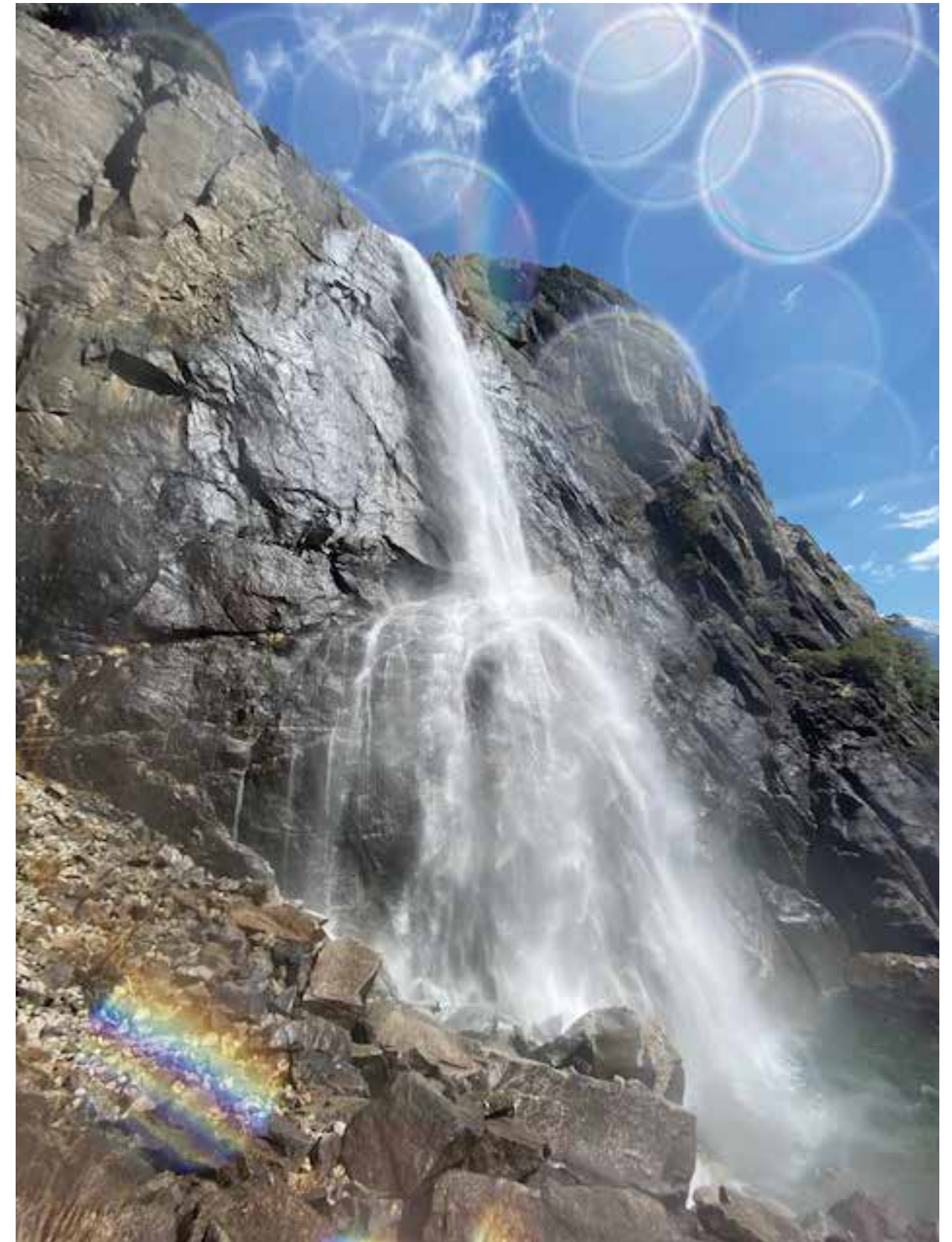
And the mantra that helps me and reminds me to learn to be humble is in the *Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, Chapter 8: "Sallekha Sutta: Effacement," which says, "This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self" (123). This verse seems so easy to say and memorize, but it is so difficult to put into practice in daily life. If one did not want to change one's habit, one will not be able to have the chance to meet such wonderful teaching. Not just in this chapter but throughout the whole book, the Buddha keeps reminding his students how to cultivate the mind in the proper way. The moment I recognize my ego is the moment I have hope in myself. I finally face myself and my own problems rather than hiding away from myself. Therefore, after a long nap in the winter, spring has come. There is time for one to look within and start a new life and to live in meaningful ways.

Habit, habit, and habit
Just (is) the circle of life
Circle of body

Circle of speech
Circle of mind.
Only one wants
To transform Oneself
Into a better person
No one can
Do it for oneself.

WORKS CITED

Ñāṇamoli, Bhikkhu and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya*. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995.



Chex Mix

I tried to play them all
like I played a chess game.
Hurt within pain,
Pain became power,
Power became fame.
But all such pipes
flow down the same drain.
Breathing in the stench
of my own deep shame.

Now
sitting at my desk
pondering what's next:

This all started
from wanting to be best,
Taming my rage
as if taming T-Rex,
Becoming a big mess—
who woulda' guessed?
Lucky for the friends
that love you no less.

Bulletproof vests to shed
for each test,
Warriors don't die
but trek without rest.
Afraid of what's passed
or afraid of what's next?
No fairytale endings,
it's just one long quest.
Revise and rewrite it
like a brand new text.

— JJream





sjon & quinn & xxxxxx

inspired by “borges and I,” jorge luis borges, 1960

sjon ljos

the other one, the one called quinn, is the one who wields the portal. when they approach the pharmacy, I watch them move between worlds—worlds printed on identification cards and orange prescription bottles; worlds translated through a speaker across the glass window of the drive thru. worlds layer with time like a stack of cards, requiring angular manipulation to perceive their awry depth worlding. I know of quinn from the pharmacist’s voice crackling confirmation of identity, and I see their name echoed on their former community college stu-

begrudgingly I remind myself that a wobbly nature is that which enables portal-wielding: for how would one straddle the infinite in a finite form?

dent identification card and on the vial for my Dawning (but not on the pill bottle for migraines, for that prescription is for xxxxxx and is still under her name). I prefer sharp efficiency, prioritizing fun, challenging my quadrabody, and men; quinn shares these preferences, but in an idealistic way that is unrealized in their reality of hesitance. I do not hesitate to shake my head at quinn and their wavering; yet it is quinn who justifies my existence. begrudgingly I remind myself that a wobbly nature is that which enables portal-wielding: for how would one straddle the infinite in a finite form? my stubbornness stumbles into faint awe as I borrow quinn’s pentaskin. momentarily I am overcome by the vast axis they intersect, stretching horizontally from their name through its matronymic inheritance as xxxxxx’s surname to the origin of her form, and vertically from the precipice of my birth to that which I no longer remember... and at their navel pivot reflect parallel limbs on which I am manifested in form, skimming toward the time after the last memory

of me is repurposed for another’s Dawning. shivering out of quinn’s skin, I can appreciate their work in this magical realm of manifesting future/form:

but this realm is not our home, not our place of belonging. the alchemical navel turns axial limbs, their galactic memory shedding helical residuum in their wake. no one lives here, not even I. I precede the portal, but the portal manifested my form. quinn manifested me through the portal and grafted me onto their form, just as quinn herself was manifested through the portal onto xxxxxx’s form. quinn, my mortal body parent; xxxxxx, its grandmother. wearing xxxxxx distorts axial limbs into event horizons, orbiting synovial nightmares, rippling nebula wails of unrealiza-tion eternally evanescing, desperation gaze slicing like star through endless grabbing whispers: *feed me, feed me, feed me*. I exit her hexaskin gasping for hope. I shall release this world to the portal-wielder.

the folk concern themselves not with form—even of word. tenderly they trace my edges from the inside before withdrawing into the portal behind my navel. like steam, air rises through the middle of me and expels autonomi-cally. hydrostatic declivity collapses my spine fetal. achingly I know: generational inertia weaves my marrow. no amount of nominal censorship erases xxxxxx residuum wicking like dancer’s sweat from my ribboning axial limbs. born of her, realized into her form, I am forever contextualized by her gravitational oblivion.

Dawning, I am: sjon, their son, her grand-son; skimming umbilical event horizon wielding hope—a quinn-skinned buoy of hope that moors me to xxxxxx. I am not always aware whose skin I don.

WHAT IS A MEMORY?

What is a memory?

Merely a chemical imprint on one's brain tissue?

A line of code in some unknowable matrix?

A snapshot taken by a soul desperate to escape the passage of time?

Are ghosts just memories whose owners have passed on?

Are memories just ghosts haunting bodies that have yet to die?

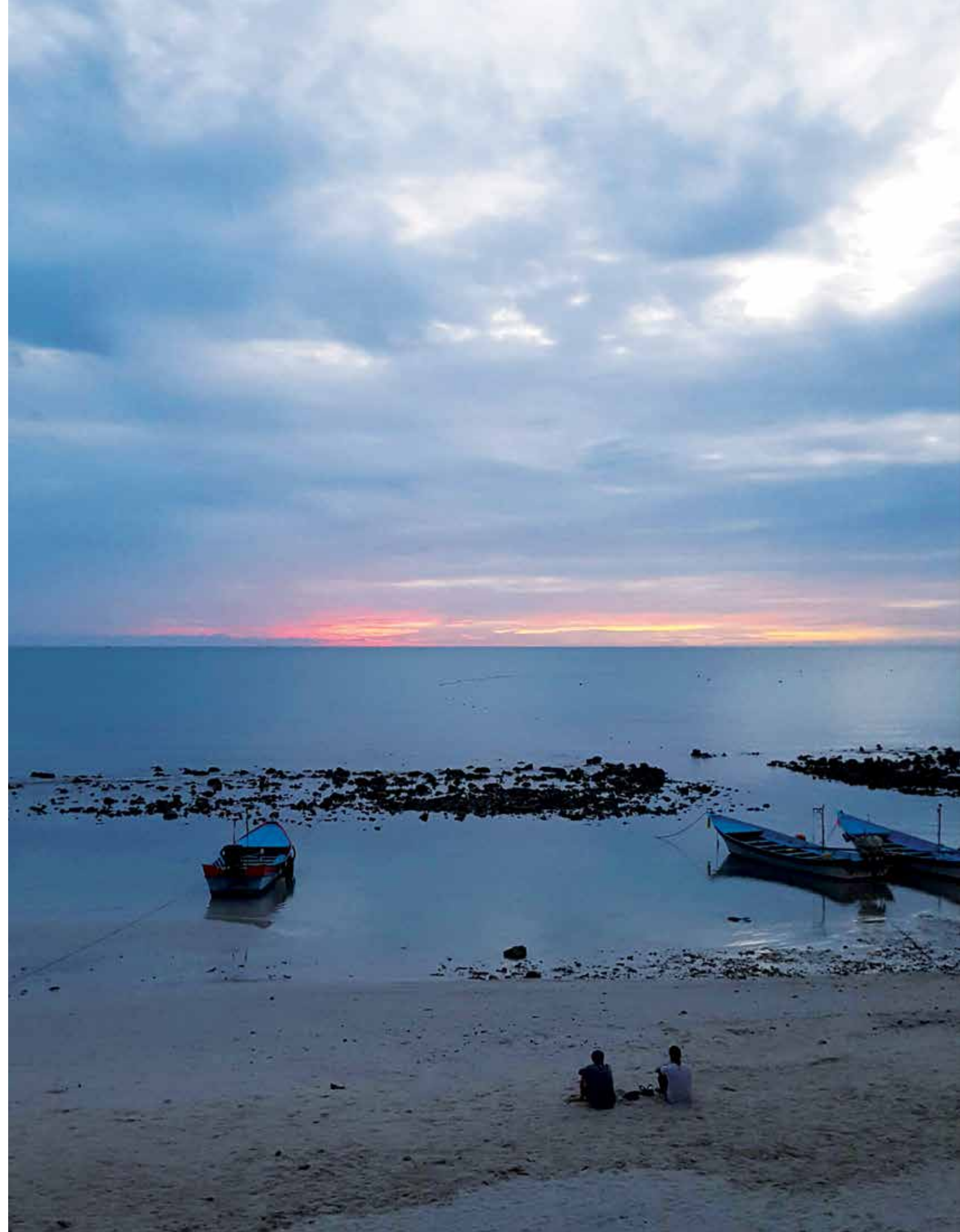
Is memory a blessing, or a curse?

The advantage or the torment of a mind advanced enough to make mistakes?

Do we remember because we want to

or because we must?

—*Phoenix Winters*





回春醫療保健操動作、要領、作用與圖解

INSTRUCTIONS AND ILLUSTRATIONS FOR PERFORMING THE
MOVEMENTS OF THE RETURNING TO SPRING EXERCISES
FOR CURING AND MAINTAINING HEALTH AND DESCRIPTIONS
OF THEIR FUNCTIONS

Translated by Bhikshuni Heng Chih et alia

This set of exercises concludes our series. Exercises 1 to 10 are found in our Summer 2018 issue, exercises 11 to 20 are in our Fall/Winter 2018 issue, exercises 21 to 30 are in the Fall 2019 issue, exercises 31 to 40 are in the Spring 2020 issue, and exercises 41 to 50 are in our Fall 2020 issue. Our previous magazine issues can be found online at: <https://www.drbu.edu/student-activities/student-magazine>

51. 拿睛明動作

左手叉腰。用右手拇指和食指肚，分別揉捏兩眼內角睛明穴(穴在眼內眥一分許)32次。

作用：疏通經絡。

防治：急慢性結膜炎、迎風流淚、遠視散光、視神經炎、視網膜炎、視神經萎縮、白內障。(肝開竅於目)。

PINCHING THE JINGMING (CLEAR EYES) POINTS

Motion: With the left hand grasping the waist, use the right thumb and index finger alternately to pinch the jingming points at the inner corners of the eyes (the points are about 1/10 of an inch beyond the inner corners of the eyes) 32 times.

Function: Clears the Principle and Connecting Channels.

Preventative cure: Helps with acute and chronic sclerotic inflammation; watering eyes when facing the wind; farsighted blurring; inflammation of the eye nerves; inflammation that causes a circular haze in the vision; shrinking of the eye nerves, cataracts (The liver's aperture is the eyes).



52. 洗鼻動作

用兩手中指肚，從鼻兩側上下推，推到鼻翼擠一下，反複進行32次。

作用：加快血液循環、增強抗病能力。

防治：感冒、鼻炎、鼻竇炎、鼻出血、嗅覺不靈。(肺開竅於鼻)

CLEANSING THE NOSE

Motion: Use the tips of the two middle fingers to rub up and down the sides of the nose. Rub to the bottom of the flare of the nostrils, rubbing up and down 32 times.

Function: Increases the rate of blood circulation; increases resistance to disease



53. 揉迎香動作

用兩手食指肚，按揉迎香穴(穴在鼻翼外緣中點旁開5分鼻唇溝中)32次。
作用：同52節。



MASSAGING THE YINGXIANG (WELCOMING FRAGRANCES) POINTS

Motion: Use the index fingers of both hands to massage the yingxiang points which lie in a hollow slightly out from the base of the flare of the nostrils 32 times.

Function: Increases the rate of blood circulation; increases resistance to disease.

54. 指耳動作

用兩手食指尖插入兩耳孔，前後轉三次，再往裡一鑽拔出16次。
作用：通經活絡。
防治：耳聾、耳鳴，增強聽覺功能。(腎開竅於耳)



PUTTING THE FINGERTIPS IN THE EARS

Motion: Put the tips of the index fingers of each hand into the ear cavities. Twist them forward and backward three times and then press them in before pulling them out. Repeat the motion 16 times.

Function: Clears and stimulates the Principle and Connecting Channels.

Preventative cure: Stopped up ears. Ringing in the ears. Increases hearing ability (The kidneys' aperture is the ears).

55. 震耳動作

用兩手掌心緊按兩耳孔，再鬆開，耳內產生咚咚音16次。
作用：同54節。



DRUMMING ON THE EARS

Motion: Use the palms of both hands to press tightly on the ear cavities and then relax and open them. A ringing sound will occur in the ears. Repeat the motion 16 times.

Function: Same as #54.

56. 搓手動作

右腳向前一步，左腿曲膝，右手放右膝，用左手掌，搓右手背，手指32次。
同法再搓左手32次。
作用：通經活絡。
防治：手背腫痛、指關節疾患、中風、昏迷、肋痛、麻木。

RUBBING THE HANDS

Motion: Step forward one step with the right leg and bend the knee of the left leg. Place the right hand on the right knee. Use the left palm to massage the back and fingers of the right hand 32 times. Using the same method, massage the left hand 32 times.

Function: Clears the Principle and Connecting Channels.

Preventative cure: Helps with swelling and pain in the backs of the hands; illnesses of the finger joints; stroke; fainting; pain in the side; numbness.



57. 大緩沖動作

兩臂自然下垂，鬆腰墜跨，曲伸膝關節，使身體上下顫動。兩臂隨體顫而顫200次。
作用：活動全身關節，疏通經絡，促進全身血液循環，對內臟有按摩作用。百練不如一走，百走不如一抖，可除風寒濕，治療各種慢性病，睡前做利於睡眠。

SHAKING ALL OVER

Motion: Let the two arms hang naturally at the sides. Relax the waist and hips. By bending and straightening the knees, cause the entire body to shake from top to bottom. Let the arms shake along with the body. Repeat the motion 200 times.

Function: Exercises the joints throughout the entire body. Clears the Principle and Connecting Channels. Improves circulation throughout the entire body. Functions as a massage for the internal organs. A hundred exercises is not as good as one brisk walk. A hundred brisk walks are not as good as one good shaking. It can dispel rheumatism; it can cure many kinds of chronic illnesses; doing this exercise before sleeping benefits sleep.



CONTRIBUTORS

Zenshin Kakudo is a DRBU BA1 student

Martin Verhoeven is a DRBU faculty member

Meghan Sweet is a DRBU faculty and staff member and graduate of the DRBU MA program

Jianqiu Wu is a DRBU MA2 student

Gavin Ding is a DRBU BA2 student

Franklyn Wu is a DRBU faculty member

Warren Chew is a DRBU BA3 student

Thao Phi is a DRBU staff member and TC student

Xiaojuan Shu is a TC student and graduate of the DRBU MA program

Terri Nicholson is a member of the DRBU Board of Trustees

Claire Robb is a DRBU BA4 student

Alan Nicholson is a member of the DRBU community

Ernest Waugh is a DRBU faculty member

Kovilo Bhikkhu is a Buddhist monk and DRBU BA1 student

Sean Kerr is a DRBU faculty member

Lauren Bausch is a DRBU faculty member

James Roberts is a DRBU faculty member

Omar Xavier Masera Astier is a DRBU MA2 student

Jackie Farley is a part-time volunteer at Instilling Goodness and Developing Virtue Schools

James Nguyen is a DRBU MA1 student

Amy Liu is a student at Developing Virtue Secondary School

Hui Xuan Ooi is a TC student and graduate of the DRBU MA program

Bhikshuni Heng Chih is a Buddhist nun and DRBU faculty member

Quinn Anderson is a DRBU BA2 student

Abigail Setera is a DRBU MA1 student

Bhikshuni Vien Trung An is a Buddhist nun and graduate of the DRBU BA program

JJream is a DRBU staff member and graduate of the DRBU MA program

Sjon Ljos is a DRBU BA1 student

Phoenix Winters is a DRBU BA2 student

Stan Shoptaugh is a DRBU staff member

Li Jiao is a DRBU MA2 student

Yang Liu is an IITBT Fellow

Dana is a graduate of the DRBU MA program

Akanit Dachani is an illustrator for Instilling Goodness Books

Huali Yuan is a DRBU faculty member

Nahelia Aguilar Castillo is a DRBU MA2 student

Levendivin is a member of the DRBU community

Jiaying Chen is a DRBU BA2 student

Cindy Wang is a TC student

Sherry Wu is a student from the Instilling Goodness Elementary School

Bhikshuni Jin Xiang is a Buddhist nun and DRBU faculty member

Bhikshu Jin He is a Buddhist monk from Berkeley Buddhist Monastery

COPYRIGHTED ARTWORK:

New York, N.Y. by Franz Kline © 2021 The Franz Kline Estate / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York was published with permission. The page containing this artwork may not be replicated.

Aaron Siskind. *Durango 15* 1961, Gelatin silver print (printed later) 9 1/2 x 9 1/2 in. (24.13 x 24.13 cm.) Courtesy of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia. Gift of George and Joan Violin, 2019.28.2. Photo by Barbara Katus. Published with permission. The page containing this artwork may not be replicated.

Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha - Mount Jiuhua and Mirage on Water by Levendivin were published with permission from the artist.

KEY:

DRBU - Dharma Realm Buddhist University

IITBT - International Institute for the Translation of Buddhist Texts

TC - IITBT Translation Certificate Program

FRONT COVER ART: Quinn Anderson

BACK COVER ART: Bhikshu Jin He



Photography: Stan Shoptaugh

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 Fall 2021 issue is CYCLE. Let it inspire you, but don't be beholden to it!

Please send us your:

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

studentmag@drbu.edu



DHARMA REALM
BUDDHIST UNIVERSITY

www.drbu.edu



dharmarealm

followers: all



literally nobody:

Chan Monk: WHO?

#knockknockjoke #ChanHumor #theresnothingtoget
#huatou24/7 #chanlife #monasticssocool