

Mirror Flower Water Moon

2025

鏡花水月



DHARMA REALM
BUDDHIST UNIVERSITY

How much have you forgotten? You must have forgotten something. Your breakfast a week ago, your breakfast a week from now, the rhythm of thoughts hammering away after every shallow breath. A smile that gave you comfort, that comfort itself. Where has it gone to?

How long have you lived? Every year we blow candles for our birthday: with one more of them on the cake, we take one more step from our childhood. The body we carry today is never the same as years ago. Have we ever paused to catch these transformations that time imprinted on our flesh? The child we once were—where have they been?

When was the last time you thought about that child? That little person. Clawing at the carpet, grasping at fabrics and floor tiles. I was once a child, we both were. They were new to this world, letting it fill out. There's some idea of them in pictures and worn out stories your mom told who knows how many times. But can you find them today? Do you know where to look?

How are they?

Turning the pages of *Mirror Flower Water Moon*, can you hear a hello from your inner child in the voices of our writers and poets? The little version of you has never left, they're napping and waiting for you to wake them up to draw maps for your next adventure. Can you put your feet behind your head?

How long will you live? The leaves fall and trees wither. The rain on the mountain finds its way to the salt of the sea and becomes it. In every tantrum or confusion of a child and an elder how can you not find yourself? Your past, your future. There is no life outside of time and it will not stop despite my well formed arguments and screams. What will you do, now that you have this?

Your magazine team

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Perfect Mistake!

Saipriya Vallabi

There is elegance in slipping,
There is grace in growing, beneath the groves...
Lies, in making mistakes, fear vies...
How can you ever know, if never you heard. No...
Beauty lies in melting down with the mistakes we make...
A mind set to honor the truth we've found...
To the found, we realize: fall, then rise, but never again fall and rise...
It's perfectly alright to have a million mistakes...
Until you have the courage to master the art of being a child,
Until, learn to walk again...
It's perfect to make mistakes.





Where My Dreams Dwell

陽明

Red, yellow, orange, falling slow,
Softly drifting wherever they go.
The breeze was cool, the air, so sweet,
A quiet moment felt complete.

As a child, I'd lie on the ground,
On crunchy leaves all scattered around.
I still remember that time so well,
Under the tree where my dreams would dwell.

Some Inner Child Writing

Victoria Pang

I remember my mom told me a story. She said, Victoria, do you know Rong? I didn't. I was three. I didn't even know how to spell my own name.

She said: Rong had seven brothers. One day, his father came out with a tray full of fresh pears and gave it first to the youngest of the brothers to pick from. This little boy selected the biggest, fattest, juiciest one. Then the second youngest son, Rong, picked one. He picked the smallest, most rotten one. Rong's father asked, You had the choice to pick any pear, and you picked the smallest and worst one. Why? Rong said, Because I want my brothers to have the best of them.

According to my mom, I had given her an abashed smile then. She had told me this story because of my hoarding habit: I never let my mom eat my favorite foods, ever (even the ones she cooked!), saying (in a Shandong accent), "Don't eat this, mama!" And according to her, ever since she told me that story, I never hoarded anything ever again. She's reminded me of this story for over ten years now, because I guess it's funny, and also quite meaningful.



At age four, my mother snuck me into a Chinese after-school that only took kids above the age of five, telling me to pretend that I was in fact five. Proudly, I smiled widely at anyone who passed by and announced to them, in all the glory of the gaping gap that was my missing front tooth, that I was five! I allegedly sent my mom into a small panic mode at each proclamation.

Songs in Cantonese about a bunny with a cute fluffy tail and memories of the two boys sitting next to me vandalizing our Chinese textbooks resurface upon writing this. Throughout elementary school, if it wasn't a Chinese after-school I attended, then it was my mom's at-home lessons on Revolutionary China, Confucian morals, and Tang Dynasty poetry that I distinctly recall taking place at my childhood kitchen table.



After age four, my baby brother was born. Then my second brother, and finally my sister. By age seven, I had three pudgy siblings to change the diapers of, babysit, and use as props in my preschool for teddy bears. And I loved every second of it, being a big sister. Every morning was made of chasing Andrew around to get him into some pants—finally! After thirty minutes of giggling and wrestling. And every evening was drawing shapes and letters for Marianne to trace, after my piano or karate class, in the workbooks I designed with every mind-blowing fact I was learning as a third grader.



I remember another story. I remember almost falling asleep because my mom's voice was so soothing when she told it. I remember the little drawing in the picture book of the tattoo on his back, his mother's hand poised above it with a needle dripping blood.

This story's name is 精忠报国 *Jing zhong bao guo*, "To Dedicate One's Life in Repayment of the Country."

Yuefei of the Northern Song Dynasty (960–1279) was tattooed these four Chinese characters on his back by his mother, who reminded him that no matter what temptations came along the way, his life was made to loyally and dutifully serve the country.

At thirty-nine, Yuefei died at the hands of a minister who framed him for surrendering his army in one of Yuefei's major campaigns against the Jin troops. Ten years of war feats defending the country, only to die by an unjust accusation.

Stories like that filled me with some sense of awe. I could hardly explain it. To this day, I just know in my heart: do things not for fame, not for recognition, not for gain.

I was eight when I burst out crying in the gymnasium on Canadian Remembrance Day. Terry Kelly's music video of "A Pittance of Time" had been played on the big screen to remind us to pay respects to the soldiers who gave us our land and peace. I didn't even know what "pittance" meant, but I did "thank the boys and the girls who went over."

"Aw, it's okay to cry, Victoria!"

My third grade teacher—one of my favorite teachers of all time—Ms. Adams hugged me outside the gymnasium as I heaved my shoulders under her giant hand.

In my fourth grade report card, she had written that I could "change the community, change the country, and change the world." I didn't even know until my mom happily read those words to me on the way home.

Two Poems and an Excerpt

《登飞来峰》

宋·王安石 (1021–1086)

飞来山上千寻塔，闻说鸡鸣见日升。
不畏浮云遮望眼，只缘身在最高层。

Climbing the Mountain of the Thousand-Tiered Pagoda
By Wang An Shi (1021–1086) of the Song Dynasty (960–1279)

On the mountain of the thousand-tiered pagoda—
Hear the rooster sing and watch the sun rise.
I fear not the floating clouds that may block my eyes,
for I am rooted already at the highest of heights.

July 25, 2021

Sometimes pursuing my dream—the greater dream for the benefit of others—seems so tough and challenging, but reading this poem and absorbing the imagery of being rooted to one's vision, already at the highest peak in the world, so that any distractions and challenges need not become a bother, is, needless to say, thoroughly empowering and liberating. I think we might all need some motivation once in a while, to not forget what we were placed on this earth for—what is the purpose you live for?

《游子吟》

唐·孟郊

慈母手中线，游子身上衣。
临行密密缝，意恐迟迟归。
谁言寸草心，报答三春晖。

Song of the Traveler

By Mengjiao (751–814) of the Tang Dynasty (618–907)

In kind mother's hand are needle and thread
On traveling son, clothes made by hand
Before he leaves, she sews and sews
while fearing for his late, late return.
How can the heart, a blade of grass,
Ever repay the warmth of spring?

December 24, 2023

In my mom's arm, I hear the song I learned to play in the Chinese orchestra recently—世上只有妈妈好—“In this World, only Mom is the Greatest.” One of its lines goes: “Dive into mother's loving arms, greater bliss cannot be enjoyed.” In my mother's arms, my gratitude extends beyond eons into future times unknown, to all mothers of my lifetimes. Because of my mother's love, I know what love is in the world.

“今风尘碌碌，一事无成…当此，则自欲将已往所赖天恩祖德，锦衣纨袴之时，饫甘饜肥之日，背父兄教育之恩，负师友规训之德，以至今日一技无成，半生潦倒之罪，编述一集，以告天下人…”

—《红楼梦》第一章

“Today, dust and business float about in the world, yet I have accomplished nothing...Now, I thus wish to tell the world of the merits of the heavens and

the virtue of my ancestors on which I relied; about the days when silk lined my clothes and hearty meals filled my plate, when I received the kindness of my fathers and brothers' teachings, and was bestowed the guidance of my teachers and friends, for I have, until this day, accomplished not a single feat, and only committed the sin of laying to waste half my life…”

—*Dream of Red Chambers*, Chapter 1

July 31, 2024

As my twenty-third birthday approaches, I ask myself what I've done for the world, and what the world has done for me. It turns out, I am just eternally grateful for the angels who came into my life time and again. On this birthday, I can only remember their help, love, and kindness.

Is it simply enough to remember? Is it simply enough to reminisce? Is it simply enough to “be grateful for”?



妈妈 Mama,

You are my mother. You carried me for over nine months, and birthed me by C-section. At night, when I cried, you chanted the Great Compassion Mantra until I quieted down. You taught me my first Chinese words, written and spoken, and read 岳飞精忠报国 “Yuefei Dedicates His Life to Repay His Country” for my bedtime story. You bought me CD's teaching me Chinese proverbs, like *the fish's eye is mixed with a pearl* 鱼目混珠, *one covers one's ear to steal the bell* 掩耳盗铃, *drawing feet on a snake* 画蛇添足, and bought me simplified English and Chinese versions of classics like *Jane Eyre* and *Great Expectations*. You told me your favorite line from the *Diamond Sutra* is “一切有为法如梦幻泡影,” “All dharmas exist like dreams, illusions, bubbles, and shadows,” and that your idol is 地藏王菩萨 Earth Store Bodhisattva. You wanted me to know the roots of my ancestors and walk the paths of the sages. You told me, “一念善可以改变一个人的命运,” “One kind thought can change your life,” and you proved it. You said you can die for Buddhism ten thousand times and over. You gave me three little siblings, each cuter, handsomer, smarter, taller, stronger than the next. You made me who I am today. You are my everything. Without you, and without our family, I am nothing. Even if in this life I cannot accomplish what you want me to, I will in the next life, and the one after that, and the one after that.

Sincerely,
Victoria 贺童

法名：亲近
Dharma Name: Qin Jin

3.11.2025



I want to be a child again

Lavanya Adhikari

I want to be a child again,
Not that I am not one anymore,
It's just not how it used to be.

No more are the chirping of birds exciting,
No more does the wind make me run,
No more do the flirting butterflies make me want to fly.

I wish I never knew red and green,
To be able to do things out of the blue,
And not be ashamed to do it wrong,
Because I never knew what's right and wrong.
I wish I were innocent again,
So I hadn't a clue that life is short.

I want to be a child again,
To live that moment once again,
To run even faster behind those butterflies,
To try and catch those falling leaves.
Oh! Those times, I wish I knew,
That I can never be a child again.

Is There a Purpose

Dave Strong

I'm in my sixties —
not my fifties or forties —
and most certainly not my thirties or twenties —
over five decades away from childhood.

Life is like driving a car —
the windshield is vast as to focus on the future —
the rearview mirror is small, the past is behind me
occasionally I look back;

barefoot, clothing too small, hungry
being poor, living in poverty
surviving from one day till the next

Can't return to that place
no need, no desire to return

Hopes, dreams, desires —
some attained, some not.

From the inner child to the old man

One word sums up a lifetime
Grateful



定慧相資歌

Song of the Mutual Support of Samadhi and Wisdom

Composed by 永明延壽大師 Master Yongming Yanshou (904–975 AD).

Translated by Rita Yee and Roxanne Xin

in Classical Chinese V, Fall 2024

Reviewed by Instructor Huali Yuan



1. 祖教宗中有二門，十度萬行稱為尊。初名止觀助新學，後成定慧菩提根。The patriarch school has two doors, regarded as honorable among the Ten Paramitas and myriad practices. Initially, these are called Śamatha (Stilling) and Vipassana (Insight) which support beginners. Over time, they develop into Samadhi and wisdom, which are the roots of Bodhi.
2. 唯一法，似雙分，法性寂然體真止，寂而常照妙觀存。Only one Dharma, resembling two aspects. The nature of Dharma is still, which is the Śamatha of Experiencing True Reality¹. It's tranquil, yet constantly illuminating, which is the wondrous Vipassana.

1. 《釋禪波羅蜜次第法門》：三者、體真止。所謂心所念一切諸法。悉知從因緣生。無有自性。則心不取。若心不取。則妄念心息。故名為止。The Sequential Practice of the Perfection of Chan: The Third: The Stillness of Experiencing the Truth. This refers to the realization that all phenomena perceived by the mind arise from conditions and do not have inherent essence. Thus, the mind does not cling to them. When the mind does not cling, false thoughts cease. This is why it is called stillness.

3. 定為父，慧為母，能孕千聖之門戶，增長根力養聖胎，念念出生成佛祖。Stillness as the father, wisdom as the mother, they are means to conceive a thousand sages. Enhancing the strength of the roots, nurturing the sacred fetus, thought after thought, they give birth to Buddhas.
4. 定為將，慧為相，能弼心王成無上，永作群生證道門，即是古佛菩提樣。Samadhi as the general, wisdom as the minister, supporting the mind-king in realizing the unsurpassed, forever serving as the gate to realize the Dao for all beings, they are the Bodhi of ancient Buddhas.
5. 定如月，光燦外道邪星滅，能挑智炬轉分明，滋潤道芽除愛結；Samadhi is like the moon—its light shines upon the deviant paths, extinguishing their deceptive stars. It pricks the torch of wisdom, making it glow brighter. It moistens the sprouts of the Way, and eliminates the knots of craving.
6. 慧如日，照破無明之暗室，能令邪見愚夫禪，盡成般若波羅蜜。Wisdom is like the sun, illuminating and dispelling the darkness of a room of ignorance. It allows a foolish person who has distorted views to change their contemplation into prajna paramita.
7. 少時默，剎那靜，漸漸增修成正定，諸聖較量功不多，終見靈臺之妙性。A brief moment of silence, an instant of stillness, gradually builds up to true samadhi. Compared to this, the sages' effort differs little; In time, the wonderful nature of the spiritual platform² will be revealed.
8. 瞥聞法，纔歷耳，能熏識藏覺種起，一念回光正智開，須臾成佛法如是。Hearing the Dharma briefly, once passing by your ears, can perfume the seeds of awakening in the store-consciousness to arise. In a single thought, when the light is turned inward, true wisdom emerges. The Dharma of becoming a Buddha in an instant is like this.
9. 禪定力，不思議，變凡為聖剎那時，無邊生死根由斷，積劫塵勞巢穴墮。The power of Samadhi is inconceivable. It transforms an ordinary being into a sage in an instant, cutting through the endless cycles of birth and death, and taking down the den of eons of wearisome dust.
10. 湛心水，淨意珠，光吞萬像燦千途，抉開己眼無瑕翳，三界元無一法拘。Still the waves of the mind, purify the pearl of thoughts. The light encompasses all forms and illuminates countless paths. Your own eyes open, free of blemish and disease. Originally in the Triple Realm, not a single dharma can confine you.
11. 覺觀賊，應時剋；攀緣病，倏然淨；蕩念垢兮洗惑塵，顯法身兮堅慧命。The thieves of discriminating awareness are swiftly eliminated. The illness of climbing on conditions is instantly cured. The defilements of thought are cleansed, and the dust of delusions is washed away. The Dharma body is revealed, and the wisdom life is fortified.
12. 如斷山，若停海，天翻地覆終無改，瑩似琉璃含寶月，倏然無寄而無待。Like cutting through a mountain or halting the sea, profound changes occur, yet the mind remains unwavering, and it radiates like a lapis lazuli cradling the precious moon. Instantly, all reliance and duality vanish.

2. The spiritual platform is another name of the mind.

13. 般若慧，莫能量，自然隨處現心光，萬行門中為導首，一切時中稱法王。Prajna wisdom is immeasurable, and the light of the mind naturally shines everywhere. Among ten thousand doors of practice, it is the foremost leader, at all times, revered as the Dharma king.
14. 竭苦海，碎邪山，妄雲卷盡片時間，貧女室中金頓現，壯士額上珠潛還。Dry up the sea of suffering, shatter the mountain of evil, and in an instant, the clouds of delusion roll away. In the room of the poor girl, gold suddenly appears; the pearl on the warrior's forehead quietly returns.
15. 斬癡網，截欲流，大雄威猛更無儔，能令鐵床銅柱冷，頓使魔怨業果休。Cut off the web of ignorance, stop the flow of desires. Awe-inspiring and mighty, unmatched in power, it can cool down iron beds and bronze pillars³, and instantly bring demonic resentments to halt and karmic retributions to end.
16. 和諍訟，成孝義，普現群生諸佛智，邊邪惡盡慧朝宗，螻蟻鯤鵬齊受記。Resolve disputes and arguments, fulfill filial respect and righteousness, revealing the wisdom of all Buddhas in beings everywhere. The deviant and the cunning all return to the proper source. The cricket, the ant, the giant fish and bird equally receive their predictions.
17. 偏修定，純陰爛物剝正命，若將正慧照禪那，自然萬法明如鏡。If you only cultivate samadhi, the pure Yin energy will deteriorate things and hollow out your life force. However, if you use true wisdom to illuminate your Dhyana meditation, all dharmas will naturally become clear, like in a mirror.
18. 偏修慧，純陽枯物成迂滯，須憑妙定助觀門，如月分明除霧翳。If you only practice wisdom, the pure Yang energy will dry up things and stagnize them. The wondrous power of Samadhi must be applied to support the door of contemplation, like the moon's radiant light dispersing the mist.
19. 勸等學，莫偏修，從來一體無二頭，似禽兩翼飛空界，如車二輪乘白牛，即向凡途登覺岸，便於業海泛慈舟。Embrace balanced learning and avoid partial practice. From the beginning, only one substance and not two heads, like the two wings of a bird soaring in space, like the two wheels of a cart steered by a white ox. Once ascending to the shore of awakening from the ordinary path, immediately sail the boat of compassion on the karmic ocean.
20. 或事定，制之一處無不竟；或理定，唯當直下觀心性。Cultivate Samadhi through specifics, focusing the mind in one place and nothing will be incomplete; cultivate Samadhi through principles, directly contemplating the nature of the mind.
21. 或事觀，明諸法相生籌算；或理觀，頓了無一無那畔。Contemplating specific things, thereby understanding appearances of dharmas and developing discernment. Contemplating principles, immediately understanding there is neither one side nor the other.
22. 定即慧，非一非二非心計；慧即定，不同不別絕觀聽。Samadhi is wisdom. They are neither one nor two, free of discrimination. Wisdom is samadhi. They are neither the same nor different, free from seeing and hearing.
23. 或雙運，即寂而照通真訓；或俱泯，非定非慧超常準。When Samadhi and wisdom are both functioning, the mind is still and illuminating, directly connecting to the true teachings. When both vanish, neither traces of Samadhi and wisdom remain, the mind surpasses conventional understanding.
24. 一塵入定眾塵起，般若門中成法爾。童子身中三昧時，老人身分談真軌。Enter Samadhi in one dust, and emerge out of Samadhi from all dust. This is the nature of the Dharma in the Prajna door. Appear in the body of a child when entering Samadhi, and appear in the body of an elder when discussing the true reality.
25. 能觀一境萬境同，近塵遠刹無不通。真如路上論生死，無明海裏演圓宗。Contemplate one state as equal as ten thousand states, then the dust nearby and the land far away are all connected. Discuss birth and death on the path of True Suchness, and proclaim the teachings of the Perfect School in the sea of ignorance.
26. 眼根能作鼻佛事，色塵入定香塵起。心境常同見自差，誰言不信波元水。The eye faculty is able to function as the nose to do the Buddha's work. Enter Samadhi in the dust of form, and emerge out of Samadhi in the dust of smell. The mind and its perceived object are the same, distinctions make them different. Who says they do not believe that the waves are fundamentally water?
27. 非寂非照絕言思，而寂而照功無比；權實雙行闡正途，體用更資含妙旨。Neither stillness nor illumination, the mind is free of words and thoughts; When still and illuminating, its function is incomparable. When the provisional and the real are practiced together, then the proper path is revealed. Substance and function mutually support each other, containing a wondrous principle.
28. 勸諸子，勿虛棄，光陰如箭如流水，散亂全因缺定門，愚盲祇為虧真智。All disciples, do not abandon your time in vain. Time passes by like an arrow and also like flowing water. Scatteredness is all due to the absence of Samadhi. Foolishness and blindness are only due to lacking true wisdom.
29. 真實言，須入耳，千經萬論同標記，定慧全功不暫忘，一念頓歸真覺地。True words must reach the ears. A thousand sutras, ten thousand sastras all have the same pointers. If, even briefly, you never forget to apply full effort on Samadhi and wisdom, then in one thought, you'll immediately return to the ground of true awareness.
30. 定須習，慧須聞，勿使靈臺一點昏。合抱之樹生毫末，積漸之功成寶尊。Samadhi requires practice, wisdom requires study; do not allow your spiritual platform to become even slightly dimmed. The towering tree grows from a tiny sprout; the accumulation of gradual efforts leads to the precious and honored Buddhahood.
31. 獼猴學定生天界，女子纔思入道門。自利利他因果備，若除定慧莫能論。The monkey learns Samadhi and ascends to the heavens; the girl with one reflection, enters the Dao. In benefiting self and others, cause and effect are perfectly complete. If without Samadhi and wisdom, there is nothing more to discuss.

3. The iron bed and bronze pillar are facilities in the hells where beings undergo their retributions.



姐姐和弟弟

Roxanne Xin

有一個星期六，基基在翻譯楞嚴經。他的姐姐拉拉在廚房裡學做油餅。拉拉把調和均勻的麵粉放在一處候一小時，就去看看基基怎麼樣了。拉拉看到基基很苦的樣子。

拉拉問：「基基，你怎麼了？」

基基回答：「翻譯太苦了。又有很多規矩，又很多很難的字。翻譯完了結果也不知道別人會不會喜歡。好渺茫啊。」

拉拉說：「太難了，不如去休息一下吧。等等可以吃油餅。」

聽到油餅讓基基很快樂。他用溫水洗一下臉，就出去找朋友玩了。回來了以後，基基和拉拉一起吃油餅，喝豆漿和看星星。明天，基基會繼續加油翻譯楞嚴經的。

Brother and Sister

On a Saturday, Kiki was translating the *Shurangama Sutra*. His older sister Lala was in the kitchen learning how to make oil cakes. Lala set the well mixed dough aside for an hour, and went to see how Kiki was doing. Lala saw Kiki's suffering expression.

Lala asked: "Kiki, what happened?"

Kiki answered: "Translation is too painful. There are a lot of rules and a lot of difficult words. You don't even know if people will like your translation once it's done. It's very hopeless."

Lala said: "If it's too difficult, why don't you go take a break? We can have some oil cakes later."

Hearing about oil cakes made Kiki very happy. He used warm water to wash his face, then went out to play with his friends. Once he came back, Kiki and Lala ate oil cakes, drank soy milk and star gazed together. Tomorrow, Kiki will keep working hard and translating the *Shurangama Sutra*.

Avatamsaka Encounter, Part One

Blake Plante

Blake went on a journey to find a teacher
He felt that he needed to go on a journey to find the treasure within him
He traveled until he came across somebody somewhere
That person seemed like a pretty good spiritual teacher, named Heisenberg
So he presented himself
Soon he was told, in such a situation, he should prostrate himself
And circumambulate
And so eventually down and round he went
As the teacher began to see him
And he began to see the teacher
So they eventually met
And Blake spoke to the teacher,
And the teacher spoke to Blake
But what did they say?
Not known, not remembered, no matter
The taints were slowly whittled down
Time and time again arose for things to arise
And time and time again things passed like sludge
Like ground-walnuts like butter like juice like water
Until like air sometimes, and sometimes like sludge
And until time became less of an issue,
As well as place and person and etc.
So finally a dialogue could happen
And happen it did,
Here's what it was:

1 – Heisenberg

“Oh spiritual teacher Heisenberg, I am one who has resolved to resolve upon an-uttara samyaksambodhi. I think that I'm on the path toward it, though my habit energy confuses me sometimes and I'm not sure my intention is entirely purified toward that direction, but I would like it to be, though I'm scared to say that, which may indicate I don't really want that, etc. Please teach me what you know.”

“O son of the buddha, your wordiness perplexes yourself. You are confused because of yourself, because what you have to say has to do with what you want.”

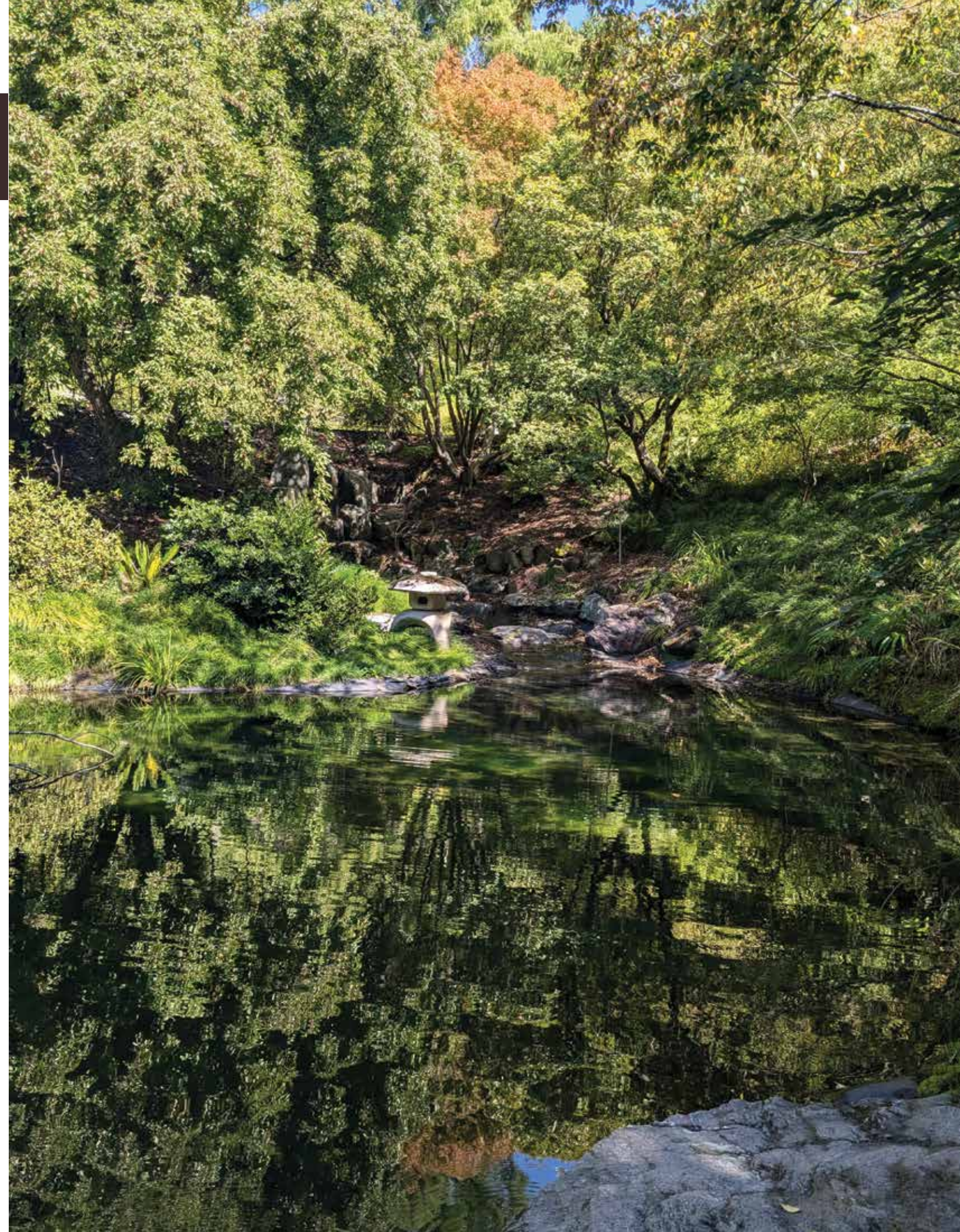
“Oh. Okay, that's helpful.”

“I can only deconstruct,” said Heisenberg. “As for teachers who can deconstruct deconstruction...”

(continued on page 22)

UC Berkeley Botanical Gardens at the Japanese pond

Photography: Meghan Sweet



Who can exemplify the qualities of wonderful enlightenment;
Who can make you feel better
Who can direct you in what I can only suggest
Who are further down the path than me,

How could I speak of their attainments? You should continue along this path,
where you'll find a teacher named Tetralemma."

Then Blake, thankful and looking up at the spiritual teacher with what gratitude he could muster, cried inwardly and left.

2 – Tetralemma

Soon he encountered this second teacher, and here is what they said:

"O spiritual teacher, I am one who has resolved to resolve upon anuttara samyaksambodhi. But I am only just on my way, and I'm not sure exactly where I'm going yet or how much I'm willing, you know. I'm not sure what it is I'm waiting for nor what I'm doing or not doing right or wrong. Though right or wrong I understand isn't the point, I mean it's all valid. I know I just need to do the work, just the matter of *in what way* is coalescing and I'm strung up and tied not because of what's unfolding but because of what I am, how I am, you see."

"Oh student, you could be more kind to yourself. You have many voices going on in your head, and they're not integrated yet. Because of that, you don't trust them. But listen: one will take you somewhere. It need not be definitive. You don't need to worry about not sounding definitive. Here, go ahead, follow one: where does it take you?"

"I am a walrus and I eat pizza pie. The like can light the matches dry when a world stops in worldwide whops. Whoops, oops, coolio dude-o, I'm a screenwriter here's my montage. Hoopdeedoo and loop on repeat, and watch where I wait when I want an inch of meat."

"Dear student, I do not understand what you're saying. But nevertheless there will be those who can. The six marks prove that whatever you have just said is valid. You see, the one that is true includes all, including what you have said. And all that you have said is of the *all* that is one. Both the specifics of what you have said and the principle of what is true are in alignment. And yet each of your words, and particularly each of the voices that come out from time to time are distinct. They all assemble for you to exist as you are. And at the same time, none of this applies."

"Oh teacher, thank you for this framework. Can you tell me what liberation gateway this is?"

"This is the liberation gateway of Believing in the Validity of All That Arises."

"Great, thanks. Can you tell me how this applies again?"

"One is all and all is one." The spiritual teacher snapped her fingers, but student Blake didn't see anything. "One is all and all is one," she said again. "Are you tired of hearing this?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Then perhaps you should go meet the venerable Vow Dude, who will instruct you on the path to realizing it."



Tick-Tock at Twilight (Berkeley Bell Tower)

Photography: Selene Luong

Conversation with the Master

Jack

I was walking on the ochre fields
Not knowing if it was dawn or it was dusk
When I saw him in the distance
Bending gently over his cane.

I went up to him
Drawn as a duck to a pond
On a blazing scorching day.

“How are you?” he asked, smiling
With eyes that sparkled
With the wisdom of a child.

I paused as the sky’s orb
Silently spun above.

I considered my past: it was a house
With suddenly transparent walls.

How many messy rooms there were,
How many mounds of crap
I’d brought in and grabbed tight.

“Why,” I said, “did I have to come into this world?”

He smiled, gentle as the breeze.

“Why,” I said again, “is everything a spiderweb to my fly?”

He continued to smile.

I looked at my hands, and then at his face

Lined like the earth
Is lined with rivers sweet and deep.

“Why,” I said once more, “has it been so much pain?”

He was still smiling but a tear
Was slowly glazing his cheek.
We started walking in silence and the sun
Was warm like a brother’s hug.

“It’s all been difficult,” I said once more,
“And pointless.
All I’ve done is walk in a circle
And hit my head against the same walls.”

He remained quiet but his silence
Was deep and warm like a summer’s night
— I could have swum in it.

It was the silence — not him, that spoke.

It said the only thing the silence is ever saying.

And we continued to walk for some time,
Me, the silence and him,
Until everything was a haze.

And then? What happened?

Who knows?

I’m just sitting on my desk
Typing out words.

[Tight]

Bach Nguyen

What's the point of chasing worldly material height?
"Spending a million cash" to live in a spacious site,
Tie our child to this spacious house, why things still feel tight?
Just a shift in the perspective of mind,
Without distinction, us and objects, all combin'd.
If there are no separations nor boundaries, how can we feel tight?
The cloud of thoughts comes and passes by,
Without obstructions, the moon shines bright.
Spacious and tight, no differences are implied.
Chasing materials, (things will) always tight,
The only spacious place, the mind.



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Moving to me
Yet so still
The scent of your prayer
Still fresh to fill
Do I dare to ask such childish questions?
Another bow to drop,
To cut up tension.

And I've been cracking up
like a dried lemon peel
No feast for the eyes,
No hellos to feel.

This was a shrine meant for antique times,
But it's gathering around as if pristine
This was a shrine meant for antique times
Even my vessels ain't clean.
Only because it is what I know

Just like Baltimore and honeyed silence
Like my rock collection
Like my home of violence...
it's only what I know.
This was a shrine meant for antique times,
But it's gathering around as if pristine
This was a shrine meant for antique times
Even my vessels ain't clean.



The Beauty of Destruction, July 2024. Artwork: Selene Luong (Air-dry clay, trash, plants, acrylic)
Using the colorful waste of childhood snacks, I created a piece illustrating the environmental impacts of the fashion industry, emphasizing the overuse of plastic.



Avatamsaka Encounter, Part Two

Blake Plante

3 – Vow Dude

Then, calling to mind thankfulness for his prior teachers,

Contemplating how they are helpful people,

Contemplating how they are like philosophers whose speech is like medicine, who dispel doubts and instill integrity, ethical action, and good feeling,

Contemplating how they are like DJs rewiring the mind at a dharmic frequency,

Contemplating how they are the coolest people he's met,

And calling to mind the qualities of good spiritual guides,

That they're soothing to be in the presence of,
That they've attained some awesome degree of purity and peace of mind,

That they exist,
That he can find them,
And that he's on a path to meet more of them,

Blake continued on until he found Vow Dude, whom he bowed to and circumambulated with palms pressed together. Blake then said,

"Oh venerable Vow Dude, I am one who has resolved to resolve upon anuttara samyaksambodhi."

Vow Dude responded, "When it comes to vows, resolving to resolve is just the same as uncovering a resolve that's already there. What you wish for is more information, to guide yourself during this time in which you have not yet excavated your resolve from beneath its obstructions. Oh son of the Buddha, I will teach you ten awesome vows, which I have practiced for a very long time."

At this, Vow Dude emitted a blackboard from his brow, stretched out an exceptionally long arm, and gracefully wrote,

- I. The vow to worship and respect all buddhas
- II. The vow to make praises to the Tathagatas
- III. The vow to practice profoundly the giving of offerings
- IV. The vow to repent and reform all karmic hindrances
- V. The vow to joyously support all merit and virtue
- VI. The vow to request the turning of the Dharma-wheel
- VII. The vow to request that the Buddhas remain in the world
- VIII. The vow to always follow the Buddha's teaching
- IX. The vow to constantly accord with living beings
- X. The vow to transfer all merit and virtue universally

At this, Blake reverently held his palms together and said, "Venerable Vow Dude, man, the wording here is sort of unfamiliar and I'm not sure I can relate to them all. Can you please explain them to me?"

"Sure man. First, you should know something in general that's pretty cool and applies to any framework. I just gave you some specifics, and within them are principles. The specifics pervade the principle, and the principle pervades the specifics. Specifics are created on the basis of principle, the specifics are able to

Samantabhadra

Artwork: Adam Smith

manifest the principle, and the principle overpowers the specifics. So, whatever it looks like and whether you relate to the specific or not, there's definitely some principle behind it that you can create other specifics for."

"Oh cool that sounds helpful, thanks noble Vow Dude. Can you, then, tell me what is meant by the vow to 'worship and respect all Buddhas?'"

"Yo, worshiping might be hard to do if you're not used to it, but it starts with respect. Respect is, at a really basic level, having admiration for something – not a false respect because you're supposed to, but really feeling admiration for something. And for what things? Buddhas. What are Buddhas? Buddhas represent enlightenment, represent everybody's natural ability to awaken themselves to wisdom, to peace, joy, stability of mind, and to being beyond suffering and duality. Respecting all Buddhas means having reverence for that capacity within each of us, and respecting those who have cultivated it. Worship means you give yourself to an ideal and its attributes. It means that you respect it so much that you undergo becoming it."

"Hey venerable Vow Dude, if that's what worship means then sign me up. I wanna worship and respect all buddhas."

"Neat bro."

"So then, what is meant by making praises to the Tathagatas?"

"Praise is great because it's an expression of good things. It can be good to say good things and not bad things. You read the *Lotus Sutra*? The *Lotus* is an exercise in that: *we will say good things about the Lotus, about the buddha, about people: you will be a buddha, and you will be a buddha*. That's why there are a lot of long tongues there, because they encompass everywhere, because they're praising the whole world with their tongues.

"You met Tetralemma? She says *It's a buddha*. No, *it's not a buddha*. *It's both a buddha and not a buddha*. *It's neither a buddha nor not a buddha*. She means that your experience is valid: basically you can say anything about it and that'd be

okay. You could disagree, and that would be right, because the tetralemma says so. So I can't disagree with you; I can only praise you. That's the beauty of praise: to see that the other person isn't wrong, they're just in a different orientation within the tetralemma.

"You can praise by expressing praise, and also by manifesting the enlightened qualities of the Tathagatas in your own actions and intentions. When, with any action of body, speech, or mind, you let go and say, *this is good*, it feels good. There can be resistance; it can be hard to say something good. It's hard to force praise. It comes out of seeing something in others or yourself—from seeing something good, and recognizing that it's good. Then, whatever you do in positivity, it affects others and multiplies, each speech emitting a boundless ocean of voices and each voice emitting a boundless ocean of expressions and etc."

"What about the giving of offerings?"

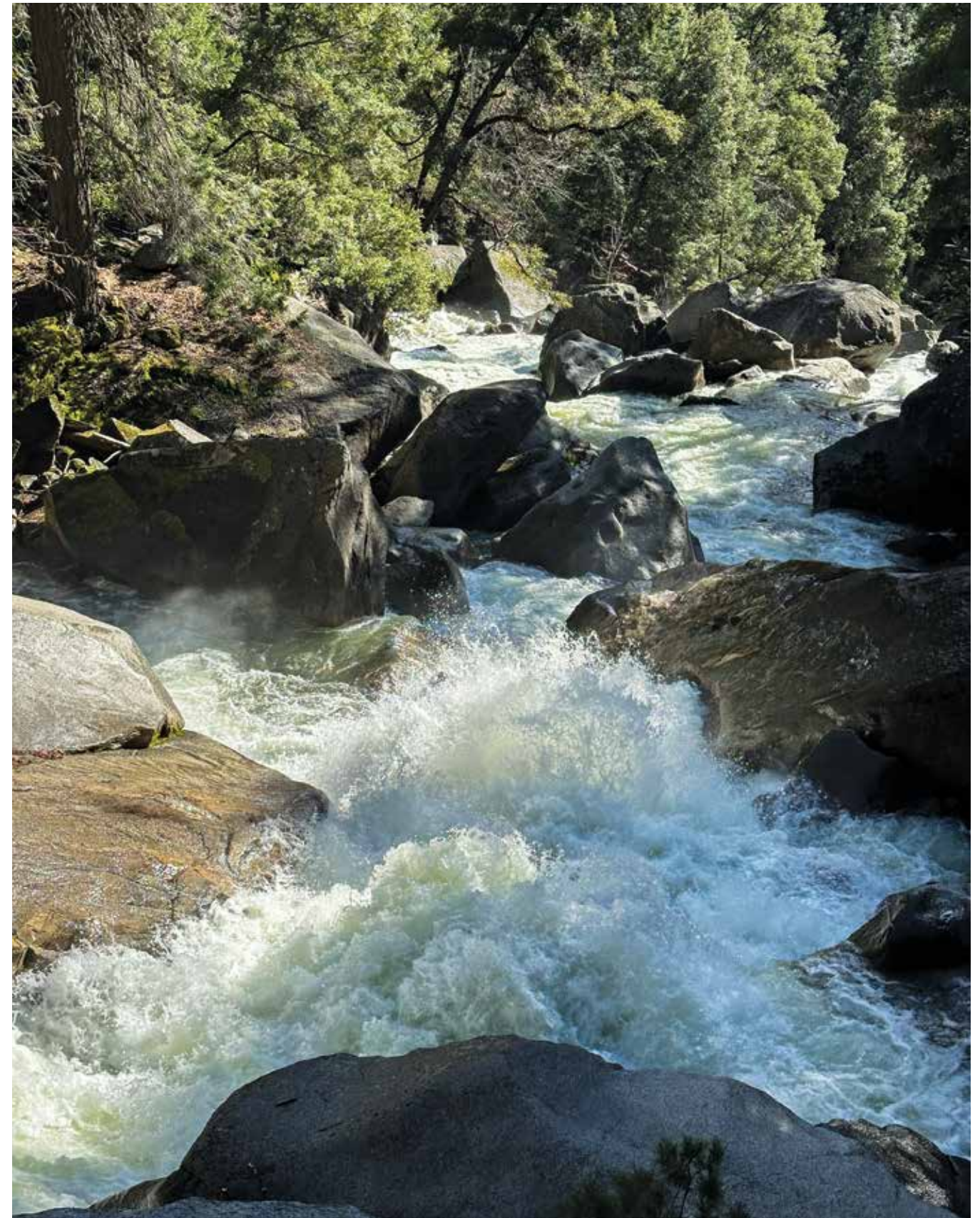
"Yeah so basically imagine a wealthy person enjoying their food alone. A deva looks and says, 'dude, you're doing it wrong. The best way to enjoy this is if you share it; sharing is actually really fun.' What's better than having a really good meal is having a really good meal and sharing it with others. It's just more fun this way.

"In general, giving just feels good. The vow to 'practice profoundly the giving of offerings' expresses the importance of generosity and making offerings to support the well-being of all beings. 'Profoundly' means to do it with verve, to do it extensively, to do it for the purpose of all people's welfare."

"Hey that's cool, I think I can try that. Noble Vow Dude, I notice that the words you're saying to me are also specifics, though they do help me to understand."

"That's right my man, all the things I can say to you in words are specifics, and if my word jazz's helping you to understand, then that means you're getting the principle behind it."

"Awesome, ok. Noble Vow Dude, what is meant by 'the vow to repent and reform all karmic hindrances?'"



Merced River below Vernal Falls, Yosemite
Photography: Stan Shoptaugh

“Super important. It’s about acknowledging and taking responsibility for one’s own actions (repenting), and striving to avoid harmful behavior in the future (reforming). ‘Karmic obstructions’ are things that are in the way, like negative habit patterns that keep coming up or actions you regret that you keep feeling bad about. Repenting is often seen as ‘I’m bad, I did something bad,’ but it’s more like ‘I get in the way of myself. I get in the way of my true nature.’ So when you repent you’re trying to get out of your own way.

“Bowing, for instance. You’re kind of surrendering, humbling yourself, letting go of your fixed views of yourself, letting go of your defenses, in some ways even letting go of praising. Bowing has nothing to do with you. If you say ‘oh I’m good!’ then I mean, *ok*, now you’re getting in your way. ‘Ok I’m bad.’ Ok now you’re getting in the way again. ‘I’m bad!’ Ok you’ve got a lot of self there.

“Reforming is saying, I have done these things, I will cease to do all these things. Sometimes we get the guilt of *oh I did this, I did this, I did this*. But once you’ve done a thing and learned from it by repenting and reforming, you don’t do it again. It might still have karmic retributions, but nevertheless, you don’t have to create obstructions for yourself.”

“What about joyfully supporting all merit and virtue?”

“Joyfully supporting all’ means when a student in math class gives the incorrect answer every time *except* one time, *whoa, they did it*. It’s acknowledging and taking joy in someone’s merit, however great or small. It’s also seeing that they’ve always been capable of virtuous conduct, and nurturing its arisal.”

“Hey Vow Dude, this is going on pretty long.”

“That’s right.”

“And these descriptions aren’t definitive.”

“No, but they’re true. Besides, I’m just saying lots of words because that’s what you’ve been wanting.”

“I think I’m getting to my limit for now, Noble Vow Dude.”

“Yeah I’ll just give you a quick synopsis of the others. ‘Requesting the turning of the Dharma-Wheel’ is asking for teachings that unburden the spirit and benefit all beings. ‘Requesting the Buddhas to remain’ is asking the buddhas to continue their teaching activities. This includes teachings available from the Buddha-nature that exists within all of us. It is a request for us to continue to cultivate these qualities, and not to neglect them. ‘To always follow the Buddha’s teaching’ is about studying and practicing the teachings of the buddhas, because buddha teachings expand far and wide to all phenomena and to the nature of all phenomena and are ultimately about the liberation, interconnectedness, and interdependence of all phenomena. ‘To constantly accord with living beings’ is about caring for others and skillfully meeting them where they’re at. ‘To transfer all merit and virtue universally’ is to dedicate and give to others anything good that comes from doing good stuff.”

“Thanks Vow Dude. I realize these are all very expansive vows. Like if I asked for more clarification of any of them we’d get caught up in this for a while.”

“Narly truth man. I’m only saying as much as you need to or are ready to hear now. To get the deeper truth etched in your oxygen, you’ve got to go beyond me. I’m just the dude who gives vows. Your journey to realizing these vows is a long one, but it’s a for sure one, man, and that’s real cool if you ask me.”

Blake bowed in deep respect.

“Hey, man,” Vow Dude said, “Vows and their principles and specifics are all I know. As for those teachers who...

Can attain their goals promptly without creating unnecessary obstruction,

Can get their assignments in on time,

“There’s one more teacher you should go see on this stretch of the journey. Go see Alice.”

“Alice?”

“Yeah man, she’s in your cohort. All you need to do is go to the wonderland buddha place.”



4. – Alice

Blake traveled until he approached a gate. Near the gate was a house where three teachers presided, one of whom really liked croissants and potato chips, another chocolate, and the third presumably only healthy food. Peacocks chirped loudly. There, he met with his cohort to disagree on whether or not to plant a tree, where he encountered the spiritual teacher Alice who gave him the following advice.

“Yeah I set a deadline for myself to get everything done by early May. I’m not sure how this can help you with your bodhi resolve though.”

At this, Blake experienced a moderately profound awakening. “So a resolve is just like that?”

“Like what?”

“Like you resolve to do it and then you do it.”

“Well you need to be flexible sometimes. Like, I got it done because I wanted to and because it was a realistic resolve. So you just need to continue connecting with your resolve and setting up the conditions for it, then you’ll be able to make it easypeasy.”

At this, Blake experienced an even more moderately profound awakening. “Ah. One day my resolve will be clear,” he said. “One day, and for now I’ll just keep connecting with it and setting up the conditions for it.” He then bowed, helped plant a plum tree, and continued on his journey, significantly more resolved upon the resolve to anuttara samyaksambodhi.



Observing

Adrian Samuelsberg

Samsara scorches
The tender skin of the heart
Like innocent children
Playing with razors

Mahasthamaprapta,
Ecstatically dancing and singing
People practice giving, eating vegan
And reciting the scriptures

At times I am captured in love of death
At times I am eternally dwelling

The mind is only observing

Lessons from the Earth

returning to nature through repentance

Abigail Setera

First step.

I take refuge with the Buddha.

Second step.

I take refuge with the Dharma.

Third step.

I take refuge with the Sangha.

Bow.

*“All the bad deeds I have done in the past,
based on beginningless greed, anger, and delusion,
created by body, speech, and thought,
I now repent and vow to reform them all.”*

Rise.

Namo Guan Yin Bodhisattva.

In the fall of 2021, DRBU hosted a Contemplative Exercise Immersion (CEI) on the practice of bowing at the Wonderful Words Hall. It was my second year in the MA Program and it was one of the most transformative experiences I had here. At that time, I was taking care of the elderly Dharma Masters at the Tower of Blessings. For their health and safety, I took my classes online, while the rest of DRBU returned to in-person classes.

Fortunately, the faculty were kind enough to accommodate me for the upcoming CEI so that I could participate in person. After a year, I finally met my cohort! Due to Covid precautions, I had to be apart from the group. They set a bowing and meditation cushion outside the door. It kind of felt like I was sent outside the classroom, but it definitely had its perks. I had a direct view of the instructor when they were teaching and it was very spacious.

Bowing and meditating in nature has a different feel compared to doing it indoors. Outside the entrance of Wonderful Words Hall, there were two trees that bowed and meditated alongside me. It was a little lonely, so I'm grateful for those two trees giving me company during the CEI. In a short period, we became good Dharma friends!

The transformative part of my experience was connecting with nature in a way I never imagined. In the morning, while everyone gathered to do three steps one bow in Buddha Hall courtyard, I went to the field next to the mountain gate with a few Dharma Masters who were also not part of the DRBU bubble, but were partaking in the CEI. The mornings were cold and dewy, the sound of gravel crunching at our feet while we looked down the path that snaked through the field. Then we started bowing. It was painful at first. As I lowered myself on the gravel path, the sharp rocks dug against my hands, threatening to break the skin. My knees cried out from the uneven surface, and my forehead gently touched the edges and points.

I have never bowed more slowly in my life.

In the Buddha Hall, I would bow quickly on the cushions that soften the impact without a second thought. But during the CEI, the sensations from the contact with the ground forced me to be fully present in my body. And so with nothing else on my mind, I focused on the practice.

Before we began, the instructors told us that with each step we take homage to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha to return to our inherent nature. When we bow, recite Samantabhadra's verse of repentance to plant



seeds. Then standing up, recite Namó Guanyin Bodhisattva to reconnect and engage with the world with compassion. I did my best to be sincere and mindful when I recited the verse, “All the bad deeds I have done in the past, based on beginningless greed, anger, and delusion, created by body, speech, and mind, I now repent and vow to reform them all.” I kept tripping over the words in the beginning, while trying to bow at the same time. This forced me to slow down even more and contemplate on the words. It would’ve been easier in Chinese¹, but it wouldn’t be as meaningful to me since my Chinese was not that good.

Repentance gives us a chance to acknowledge the harm we have caused to ourselves and others. With this in mind, we also acknowledge that we are capable of change, and begin to cultivate a new way of interacting with the world that brings benefit rather than suffering. Dr. Verhoeven told us that we do not have to recall a specific moment of wrongdoing or bring up feelings of shame. Just focus on the verse. If things come up, observe them and let them pass on their own. This took some pressure off of having to produce a memory. It would be unnatural to do so. You can’t force a plant to grow, it moves at its own pace. Prostrating puts you in a vulnerable position, and that vulnerability allows us to be open and honest with ourselves. Sometimes, without us realizing, shame and ignorance can bury things deep within us that we forget the many ways that we have hurt ourselves or others. But when your head touches the ground, the ground is all you see. The rest of the world falls away, and you have nothing to face but yourself.

Dr. Verhoeven stressed on the word “returning,” or going back to our original nature. Since it might be a lot for students

1. 往昔所造諸惡業，皆由無始貪瞋癡，從身語意之所生，一切我今皆懺悔。 I added “vow to reform” in the last line of the English because I couldn’t remember the exact wording at that time.

who were not so familiar with the practice, he offered a shorter alternative to the repentance verse: “Thank you; I’m sorry; I’m coming home.” Going home and returning within makes it feel like you are withdrawing from the world, but everything about this practice is about engaging with it. By saying these words in your heart, you say them to the world around you. The inner and outer intertwine and are not separate. As you cradle your past and present self in your hands, the world too, as harsh as it may seem, cradles you on its own. Through gratitude, we open up our hearts to create space for vulnerability and honesty with ourselves, and to sincerely apologize for causing harm.

The last phrase offered as an alternative to the full verse, “I’m coming home,” summarizes the essence of the prayer and offers a promise. Home is where we feel safe, secure, cared for, and loved. It is warm, bright, and tranquil. No matter where you are or how long you’ve been gone, home will always be there awaiting your return. It can take a long time to feel safe with ourselves because there are a lot of things that we do or have done that are difficult to admit, even to ourselves. With each bow, we can be more honest, and with each step we can slowly return home.

During the bowing practice on the gravel path, its repetitive nature made it meditative. It sets a rhythm that settles the mind. One step, two steps, three steps. Down. Up. With every step, taking refuge with the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, and reciting the repentance verse as I bow. My hands and knees came out a little red after the fact, but that’s nothing compared to the veteran cultivators who made it up mountains and highways for years. Down on the ground, nose almost touching the ground, the rocks were all I saw. With my arms blocking the side of my head, I felt like a turtle going back into its shell. There were little bugs scurrying around, I wasn’t sure if I was privy to their world. People liken their unimportance to the vast expanse of the universe, but

watching the bugs, it’s clear I wasn’t important to them either. That was the first day.

On the second day, I bowed again, repeating the verse. Halfway down the path, when I rose from the ground, a thought came to me saying that the earth heard me and will remember my vow. While I was doing my best to single-mindedly recite the verse, I was not expecting to be held accountable for something I was told to say. It was terrifying, not just because the earth was observing me, but also because I didn’t truly believe in what I was saying. The last line of the verse, “I now repent and vow to reform them all,” is a nice aspiration, but realistically? It feels impossible. I remember Doug saying something along the lines of us not wanting to become Buddhas, and everyone thought he was being silly, but he’s absolutely right. I’m not ready to be a Buddha right now. I’m not ready to give up all of my habits and comforts. I still wanna have fun! But now I made this vow committing to be a Buddha with the earth as my witness. Vows are to be made solemnly, not casually. The only solace I had was getting the sense that the earth is impartial and therefore won’t judge me for however long it will take me to accomplish this vow. If anything, the earth was keeping a record of my oath, and knowing the earth, it has a long memory. The CEI might only be a few days, but what happens in them may last lifetimes.

Knowing the earth was watching me, I set out to continue doing three steps one bow on

the third day. As I bowed, there was one point where I felt as if I had become part of the field, an extension of the ground. I could still walk and move around, but the point of contact between my feet and the ground felt stronger, as if I’d grown roots and the earth was supporting me and carrying my feet. At that moment, I felt a deep gratitude. It eased the pressure I felt from the day before, and enveloped me with a sense of reassurance that made me want to stay in my fetal child’s pose and fuse into the ground forever. With regards to the vow, even though I’m the only one who can change my ways, that doesn’t mean that I have to do it alone. The earth is alive. It is patient, impartial, and equanimous. It listens and helps those who seek it, including myself. The trees, mountains, and rivers are all quietly listening too. All of nature supports us in their own way.

By being in touch with nature on the outside, it makes it easier to return to our nature within, as ultimately they are not different from each other. The world around us moves so fast, in a way that takes us out of our bodies. Returning to the earth through three steps, one bow gives us a chance to slow down for introspection. Samantabhadra’s vow helps us recognize our true mind by polishing our mistakes and habits. When we open our hearts to compassion, we want to bring benefit and lessen suffering for all living beings. Once we return to our minds, the world opens up and we can truly engage with it.

年少的我妳好嗎？

To young Yidan, How Are You?

Yidan Wang

年少的我妳好嗎？

好久了沒有問候妳 也沒有好好關心妳

記得妳第一次認真的在大海邊哭

抱著吉他唱著對人生的憧憬和遺憾

昨天讓我在多年後再次看見了妳

擁抱著妳

聆聽妳的委屈和妳的傷痛

我大哭 向年少的妳道了歉

忙著長大 忙著前進

忙著不落後

忙著證明自己

忙著收到別人的欣賞

忙著變成理想中更好的自己

忙著加速度奔跑向未來

現在的我 背著重重的殼 帶著面具

却忘記了

停一停 回頭看看

已經走了很遠

Acknowledge that

慶祝自己的每一個小小的進步和成功

做自己吧！

不需要演繹 只需要Be 做真實的自己

也許不夠完美 那又有什麼關係？

不需要和別人比較

羨慕別人的優點

其實自己有很多閃光點

Do I really want to be someone else?

生活無論怎麼對待妳

請對ta微笑吧！

To young Yidan, How Are You?

It's been so long since I last greeted you

since I last cared for you

I remember the first time you cried earnestly by the sea

holding your guitar

singing about your dreams and regrets in life

Yesterday I saw you again after so many years

I embraced and hugged you

I listened to your grief and pain

I cried loudly—

apologized to you

my younger self

I was too busy growing up

too busy moving forward

too busy keeping up

too busy proving myself

too busy seeking approval from others

too busy becoming the “better” version of myself

too busy sprinting towards the future

Now I carry a heavy shell on my back

wearing a mask

forgetting—

To pause

To turn around

and see how far I've come

Acknowledge that

Celebrate every little progress and success

Be myself!

No need to perform

Just be

Being authentic and real

maybe not perfect—

but does that really matter?

No need to compare myself to others

to envy other's strengths

I have so many shining qualities too

Do I really want to be someone else?

No matter how life treats you,

Just smile at it



San Francisco Bay from a Speck of Beach off the Eastshore Freeway

This photo is my experimenting with an idea from the Avatamsaka: that within the ordinary one finds/sees the wondrous; that wonders exist here and now right within what we call the ordinary, everyday world—if we only stop to look. People pay no attention to it; drive by every day on their way to who knows where, and even walk right past it without a second glance.

Photography: Marty Verhoeven

Bodhisattva

Richard Josephson

Nagarjuna, the author of many of the Buddhist “Wisdom Teachings,” was not a *mere* logician. He was a bodhisattva first and foremost, who employed logic for the instrumental purpose of prying error from our thinking. We are stuck in familiar thought patterns that play the same movie over and over again on different stages with different actors and in our confusion we are entertained and amused by our daily lives. The director is of course desire, and desire plots our every course and keeps us true to the script. We sense a better part to play that does not confine us to the script, but fear keeps us from stepping off the stage we are on and into the unknown.

Bodhisattvas such as Dignaga, Dharmakirti, and Nagarjuna are pioneers who broke the mold of confining themselves to habitual thought patterns, the breaking of which enabled them to discover another reality that embraced the common world we all know without being tethered to it. While not rejecting the truth of our everyday world, they recognized another truth, the truth of an awareness free of duality. Having made this discovery, the bodhisattva aspires to awaken others to the richness of non-dual awareness. One of the principle methods of breaking the fetters of dualistic thinking was to employ paradox, contradictory statements that beg for meaning. Statements such as the “Self” is not “Real” or “Unreal,” the “Buddha is neither eternal nor impermanent,” “things are neither the same nor different from their causes,” “in no place at any time is anything found to exist, not exist, both exist and not exist, or neither exist nor not-exist,” and similar statements.

We all glimpse a greater potential within ourselves during moments of clarity but are unable to stabilize that vision. Part of the reason is that we apply our ordinary mind to accomplish what is beyond its reach. The seemingly impossible paradoxes presented to us by reliable teachers are aimed to break the habit of misusing our mind as if there were something to “figure out.” When we finally stop, we surrender. When we finally throw in the towel our mind suddenly becomes capable of receiving.

Our world is one of choices we make concerning the wishes we desire to achieve and the likely path to success or failure. The pros and cons of pathways are always before our mind and keep us busy making decisions which we hope will lead to the best outcome. We fail to doubt the paradigm we live in or notice its limitations. We are conditioned to frame our thinking and actions in reference to the societal influences around us. Contentment follows when things go well, and displeasure when things go south. Either way, however, our thirst for truth is not quenched.

Vasana is a Sanskrit word that is often used in Buddhist texts meaning “latencies.” These are the propensities to act and think in a particular way because in the past we have. These latencies are not confined to a single lifetime but build over many lifetimes. It is difficult to change the direction we are going because the momentum to stay on track is strong. As long as we think the way we are accustomed to thinking, changing course is almost impossible. We may envision a better way, but breaking free of the old way is hopelessly elusive. We need to think outside the box, but how?

Within the sciences and mathematics many have made great discoveries by thinking outside the box, however the domain of conventional inquiry is nevertheless in the box. The bodhisattva functions in a domain that is free of selfish ambitions and is solely motivated by compassion for those struggling to free themselves from the ignorance obstructing self-knowledge. From the vantage point of self-realization, the bodhisattva sees the limitation of human striving and gives rise to mercy. He regards our lack of self-awareness as suffering and aspires to introduce us to an alternate view that can function side-by-side with our familiar one. A new perspective is gained of our commonplace world that does not come at the expense of renouncing it.

It is not surprising in light of the above that bodhisattvas have appeared over the centuries in many guises: householders, monastics, rulers, mendicants, farmers, yogis, merchants, students, etc. The term, “Good Knowing Advisers” is a common phrase in spiritual texts used to refer to awakened ones. It is not always obvious who they are and the attainment they have achieved. Even ordinary appearing people may be bodhisattvas. Regarding others as bodhisattvas is a worthy endeavor that will attract many friends and eventually if we dedicate ourselves to the effort, a Good Knowing Advisor.



Passenger

Bach Nguyen

Roses bloom then wither,
Its beauty shines then decays slither.
A little plant, soon, grow taller,
Yet, at some point, will then wither.
Turn around and look inner,
Emotions, bloom — wither, plant-similar,
Thoughts, plume — molder, rose-equalizer.
Thoughts, emotions, both rise and cease, why they keep bother?
Giving from to the senses, that's the causer
Catch that thought of affliction, see it as bypasser
Acknowledge its existence, don't try to interpret this passenger
Welcome them, let them be, they won't be tormenter
They rise and cease, our child won't be trigger'd
That's how, in the conditioned world, we are liberators.

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KEY:

DRBU - Dharma Realm Buddhist
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IGDVS - Instilling Goodness Developing
Virtue School

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CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

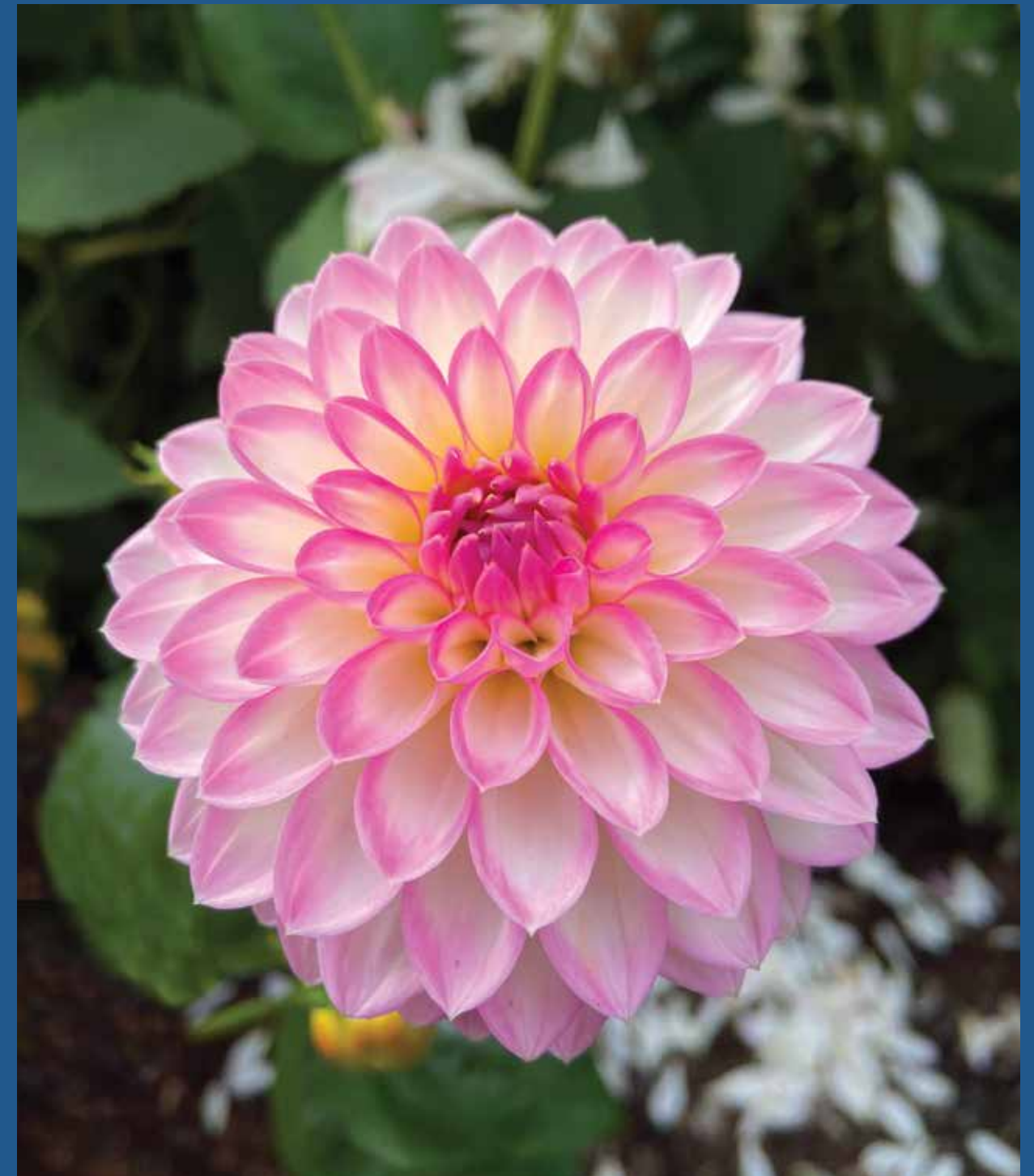
Good and Wise Friends, we want to hear from you!
This magazine is what you make of it.

We cherish your work and want to see it in print.
The theme of our upcoming 2026 issue is Anticipation.
Let it inspire you, but don't be beholden to it!

Please send us your:

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

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Photography: Stephen Shoptaugh



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cosmic vibrations



great compassion mantra



medicine master buddha's
mantra for anointing
the crown



prajñā pāramitā mantra



pure land rebirth mantra



repaying parent's
kindness mantra



six syllable great bright
mantra



śūraṅgama mantra



śūraṅgama heart mantra