The background of the cover is a dense, vibrant green forest. In the lower portion, a clearing is visible with a wooden rocking chair sitting on the grass. The chair is positioned near the base of a tree. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and natural.

CHILDREN  
of SILENCE  
and  
SLOW TIME

Ian McCrorie

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# Children of Silence and Slow Time

More Reflections of the Dhamma

Ian McCrorie



Onalaska, WA, USA

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## Foreword

John Keats was so struck by the bas-relief figures on a Grecian Urn at the British Museum that he adopted them in his famous Ode as his Children of Silence and Slow Time. My two children, Aiden and Liam, neither silent nor slow, are the very antitheses of still figures on an ancient artifact. Yet my boys and the Grecian figures typify the enduring universal nature of truth that prompted Keats to declare that all you need to know in this world is that, “Beauty is truth and truth beauty.” The innocent simplicity of my children, their innate ability to melt, wholeheartedly, into this single moment, in essence living truthfully, echoes Keats’ sentiment.

The reflections presented here are also my children, offspring of my own silence and slow time in caves, forest monasteries and countless retreats. I claim, however, no pride of ownership, borrowing and paraphrasing as I did from the likes of Pythagoras, Pascal, Nisargadutta Maharaj, Trungpa Rimpoche, Lao Tzu, to mention only a few whose writings I purposefully pilfered. So it is perhaps better to refer to these musings as my foster children, as did Keats in his Ode.

Writing poems that capture the essence of the Dhamma is akin to lassoing the wind. Though you may be very skilled with the lariat, you are doomed to failure. You are attempting to feed people by composing a menu. A wise man once said that the role of the poet is to create in a moment something to be read for eternity. Not being a wise man, I’ll be happy with a few moments of your attention. Nevertheless I do offer these Reflections for your consideration with the fervent belief that from time to time they will hit the proverbial nail on its proverbial head. Someone else said that poetry is obtuse verbiage interrupted by

poor punctuation. As an educator for almost two decades I can attest this is not the case here. The punctuation is spot on.

For the verbiage, I apologize. It wasn't always so. Years back a disgruntled parent arrived at my classroom after school. She began her tirade by berating me for the low marks her daughter had received on a recent essay. I said nothing. She threatened to go right to the top to see that I was dismissed from my position. Again, I did not say a word. She continued. "My daughter worked very hard on that paper and you totally belittled her efforts. She spent hours in her room. Of course, she may have been doing other things. She can be really unfocused at times. And quite stubborn. Maybe that failing grade you gave her will serve as a wakeup call. She really respects you. Anyway, I just wanted to say how much I appreciate all your work on behalf of my daughter. Thanks so much." I had said nothing during the whole transaction proving, to return to Keats again, that "Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard sweeter still." Succinct, clear and utterly devoid of obtuse verbiage that interchange remains my best poem.

Herein is a collection of reflections which fail to reach that standard.

To S. N. Goenka,  
my Father of Silence and Slow Time

# Poems



The purpose of life  
is to live a life  
that lies beyond needing a purpose.

One does not need a reason  
to love, to smile or to laugh.

Be unreasonable.

Life unfolds with a joy beyond compare  
when you don't try to figure it out.  
Riding a bicycle is ridiculously impossible  
except when you do it.

It is unimportant how many angels dance  
on the head of a pin.  
Of import is only that they dance.



The world is so full of any number of things  
we should all be happy as kings.  
Alas, it is not so,  
for even kings and princes despair.

The good news of the Buddha,  
that unhappiest of princes,  
is that there is no escape from this conundrum.  
Things do not get better  
nor is the grass greener on the far side of the hill.  
The promised land remains forever a distant dream  
for there ain't no gold in them thar hills.

The wealthy suffer as do the poor.  
The healthy and the sick alike are miserable.  
The employed are as unhappy as the jobless,  
the married as dissatisfied as the single.  
Wiggling out of this most noble of truths is futile.

If escape were possible, liberation would not be needed.  
If the Divine Mother could kiss and make it better  
there would have been no Buddha.  
If Prozac, Botox and mocha lattes worked  
why are you reading this book?  
And if books worked,  
what is the need for a second volume?

The lotus blooms only in stagnant swamps,  
rooted in the mud and the mire,  
its elegant blossoms floating above the putrid surface.  
It too cannot escape so it chose to transcend.

In the swamp but not of the swamp.



In the jungles of Issan we meditated long into the night.  
By the light of the next morning  
we saw we had not been alone.  
Near us, just off our walking path,  
a python lay coiled.

There for days he had lain and  
there for days we had meditated.  
Unaware of the danger lurking so close to us  
we sat untroubled and  
focused on our meditation.

Now we worried.  
Now we thought only of danger.  
Now visions of strangulation played  
across the movie screen of our mind.  
Now we meditated with one eye open.

One day the python slithered deeper into the jungle.  
Our relief was short lived  
for we had no idea to where he had ventured  
nor if and when he might return.  
Now we meditated with both eyes open.

All had been fine before when  
we shared the jungle in a quiet stalemate.  
He did python. We did monk.  
It was not the python who upset this balance  
but our own fear.

When fear disturbs the balance of the mind  
it arouses sleeping pythons  
who venture we know not where  
and whose return is frighteningly inevitable.



The aging nearly blind abbot knew it was time to choose his successor.  
He assembled his most senior monks and announced a silent pilgrimage  
to the Cave of the Sacred Emerald Buddha.

Speculation as to the whereabouts of the cave was prevalent  
as were stories of the beauty of the carved Sacred Emerald Buddha.  
But only the abbot could lead the monks there  
and then only on the eve of choosing his successor.

The trek was long and arduous but at last they came to a well-hidden cave.  
“Enter and let us meditate through the night  
before the glow of the Sacred Emerald Buddha,” instructed the abbot.

One by one the monks entered and sat down.  
But no statue glowed before them. No emeralds were to be seen.  
The cave was empty.

Though the monks wondered about the abbot’s delusion  
and his failing eyesight,  
they obeyed his instruction and meditated through the night.

At daybreak the abbot told the monks that over time  
many emeralds had fallen from the statue.  
Each should take one fallen emerald back to their hut.  
Their tradition allowed the new abbot  
to return the fallen emeralds in a week’s time.

One by one, the monks, some repressing a smile,  
went to the front of the cave, to remove a fallen emerald.  
They found only stones.  
But out of respect for their aging master,  
they dutifully retrieved these stones  
and placed them in the hem of their robes.

A week passed  
and the abbot asked for the fallen emeralds to be returned to him.  
Each monk dropped his precious “stone” into the abbot’s container  
and then proceeded on his way.  
The abbot stared at each stone, squinting in the sunlight as he did so.  
He kept count.  
He knew only one monk, Rahula, who cleaned the toilets, had yet to come.

Rahula finally approached.  
The abbot heard him searching in the hem of his robe.  
He saw Rahula remove a brilliant emerald. The abbot smiled.  
“Rahula,” said the abbot. “what do you see in this container?”

“Just what you asked for, Venerable Sir,” replied Rahula. “Emeralds!”  
“Take these emeralds back to the cave. Remember well the path you take.  
You are to be the next abbot.  
When the time comes to choose your successor,  
select he who sees emeralds where others see mere stones.”



I am not a good meditator.  
I do not try very hard to focus.  
I do not keep any goal in mind.  
I am not determined to succeed.  
I am ambivalent about my posture,  
unconcerned about what my teacher thinks of me  
and unmotivated to get anywhere.  
I do not have visions,  
have never conversed with angels  
nor levitated close to them.  
I do not care about getting better,  
about being healed or made whole.  
I speak not a word of Pāli,  
have never read the Tipiṭaka  
and can't distinguish Hinayana from Mahayana.  
I forgot my mantra years ago.  
I own no crystals  
and channel only MTV.  
I live in the suburbs.  
I drive a Volvo.  
About all I can muster is awareness.  
I guess I just don't get it.



A debilitating infection laid waste  
my first trip to India.  
I came for enlightenment but  
left with oozing sores,  
done in by the heat and dust.

Back home I juiced, flushed, vitaminated and brown riced  
in a frenzy of fearful hope,  
leaving no natural remedy unturned.  
I forsook coffee, tea, sugar, meat, fish, eggs, milk, chocolate, laughter.

My dietary asceticism only made matters worse.  
I found myself living a short distance from my body.  
But tickets had been bought and plans made  
so I departed once again for India  
exhausted, weak, and resigned to die there.

In India I had no choice but to eat all manner of fried foods.  
I drank chai whenever the mood stuck.  
I devoured Bengali sweets.  
I poured ghee on my rice.

My quest for health and de-fatted wholeness ground to a halt  
and I shelved my dietary commandments.

My anxiety dissipated. My brow unfurrowed. My fist unclenched.  
And I healed.

The oozing sores dried, the exhaustion lifted,  
the spring returned to my step  
and the summer to my face.



Suffering is not enough.

Suffering is only ennobling  
when we understand that it permeates everything,  
when we see deeply into its cause,  
when we are sure that an end to suffering is a distinct possibility,  
and when we understand what constitutes  
the path that leads to this end.

Without these four noble truths  
suffering leads only to despair,  
producing a melancholic resignation of futility and quiet desperation  
masked by a fatalistic stoicism-  
a hardening of the hearteries.

Gritting our teeth in the face of this despair  
grinds everything flat.

Don't turn away from the suffering.  
Don't neglect or deny it.  
Don't try to rid yourself of pain.  
Don't hate it.

Open yourself fully to suffering.  
Embrace it. Befriend it.  
Immerse it in loving kindness.  
Face the ten thousand joys  
and the ten thousand sorrows  
with bemused detachment.



Where is the Dhamma to be found?  
Some seek it in isolated caves in the Himalaya or  
on the plateaus of Tibet.  
Others locate it in the jungles  
of Thailand and Burma.  
And a few are drawn to the Zen Temples  
of Rynoji and Bolguksan.

It is not found here.

Some think the Dhamma is more prevalent  
on extended retreats.  
Some feel it manifests only  
when engaged socially and politically.  
Others think it resonates most purely  
through mantras and chanting.  
And a few scholars discover it  
in verses of Pāli and Sanskrit.

It is not found there.

Moving our home near it is like moving closer to the wind.  
Capturing it in a technique or a tradition is like bottling a sunrise.  
Studying it is like reading the Goldberg Variations.  
The truth is here, and the truth is now.  
This truth is already held in your own heart.  
There is no where to go and no what to do.

You are already where you need to be  
and already doing what you need to do.  
“Where is the Dhamma to be found?” is not the question  
but rather “Where is the Dhamma not to be found?”



Meditation is staying present  
to the whole catastrophe.  
It is paying attention  
to your own nervous breakdown.  
It is making snow angels  
during the winter of your discontent.  
And with this open-eyed awareness,  
a smile.  
Always a smile.  
Without the smile, the bad guys win.



Firstly everything is dissatisfactory.  
Everything.

If you think poverty is fraught with suffering,  
try wealth.

If you think being married is full of difficulties,  
try being single.

If you think unemployment is challenging,  
try being CEO.

If living in the city causes you grief,  
try living in the forest.

If living in a house unveils too many surprises,  
try living on the streets.

If your disease is challenging,  
try another, more pleasurable one.

If you think being alone is miserable,  
try moving in with your family.

The exit sign flashes red  
but the theatre is empty.



During a solitary retreat in Thailand  
sitting in the heat, drenched in sweat,  
fending off malarial mosquitoes,  
a monk opened his eyes at one point and  
found a water buffalo staring at him.  
He too was standing in the heat, drenched in sweat,  
fending off malarial mosquitoes.

The water buffalo, the dumbest of the beasts of burden,  
appeared unperturbed by the heat, the sweat and the mosquitoes.  
He lacked the discernment to want life to be otherwise  
or to desire to make it different.

This buffalo became his inspiration.  
The monk aspired to be as content  
in the Thai jungle as this beast.  
The monk did not wish to know what the buffalo knew.  
He wanted to not know what the buffalo did not know.

Aspire to be as wise as that dumb beast,  
devoid of preference,  
content with no choice,  
free from wanting what is not,  
and happy with what is.

This is don't know mind.  
This is water buffalo mind.



A novice monk was very much taken  
by the Buddha and his teachings.  
Though he already had a teacher,  
he asked the Buddha henceforth  
to be his one and only guide.

The Buddha refused his request.  
He told his would-be devotee to remain with his present teacher.

The Buddha cared not for a plethora of students.  
What gain could there be if his teachings spread  
far and wide if the reputations of other good men  
were disparaged in the process?

Be wary if your teacher panders to blind devotees.  
If your teacher points out only the shortcomings of other teachers,  
take note.  
Pause for a moment if your teacher demands to be your only teacher.

Are you free to sit at the feet of another?  
And as the Buddha did, would your teacher encourage  
you to remain there?

Follow only those you are free not to follow.



He lived in solitary retreat  
high in the Himalaya above Dharamasala.  
For years at a stretch he meditated  
never leaving his cave.

A young monk made the arduous journey  
through the mountains to his isolated enclave.  
The novice paid his respects  
and sat patiently waiting some response  
to his unasked but obvious questions.

“I can only say, as far as I have advanced,  
that the Buddha was right.”

The old monk then closed his eyes and  
returned to his practice.  
The novice left with none of the answers he sought  
but relieved of all his questions.

The Buddha gave 82,000 discourses.  
In the last 2,500 years every subsequent lecture  
can be summed up in those three words  
“He was right.”



A large forest fire destroyed everything in its path.  
For days in the long dry summer it raged on.  
In time residents were allowed to return.  
A woman was seen sitting in the ashes of her former home.  
She was weeping.  
“Why did this have to happen?”

Summer typhoon struck the shoreline with a vengeance.  
The force of the wind and rain  
destroyed everything in its path.  
A farmer was seen sitting in the remains of his house,  
surrounded by fields of flattened corn.  
He was weeping.  
“Why did this have to happen?”

Young parents carried their infant daughter to the hospital.  
A life threatening disease was diagnosed and in time the child died.  
They were weeping.  
“Why did this have to happen?”

Fire burns. Rains fall.  
And to be born is to be one step closer to death.  
The question is never why but why not.  
If it wasn't supposed to happen,  
it wouldn't have happened.  
Kamma is merciless.

Man is not disturbed by the things that happen  
but by his opinion of the things that happen.



I joined the retreat with some trepidation  
due to some discomfort in my lower back.  
Sitting still was difficult  
so my practice entailed mostly silent walking.

After the retreat, a novice told me that  
my peaceful and mindful walking  
had been a great inspiration to him.  
He thought I had radiated tranquility  
in my every step.  
A few minutes later another mendicant shared  
that when he saw me walking so slowly  
he could feel the pain and agitation  
in my every step.

Both observations were correct.  
And both observations were wrong  
for the very same reason.  
We do not see reality.  
We see our own bias.  
When we gaze into the pond, the scum we see  
is more reflection than observation.

We dance round in a ring and suppose  
but the secret sits in the middle and knows.



Not long after beginning to sit  
they begin.

Memories of the past, hopes for the future,  
the endless video loop of wrongs and retributions,  
worries, doubts and fears,  
begin their dance, obscuring any clear insight  
and holding liberation at bay.  
Your mind feels like Keith Richards' face.

Too much effort to eradicate this agitation  
further upsets our tranquility and further clouds our focus.  
The tighter we cinch our belt,  
the bigger our head.  
If we loosen the belt too much,  
our practice falls down.

Moderation in all things,  
we are rightly warned,  
but don't over do it.



The truth is not like this or like that.  
It defies description and belies metaphors.

It is more mist than rain,  
more glow than flash  
and more glade than forest.  
We don't get it; it gets us.  
We don't see it; it sees us.

I cannot look directly at the sun's total eclipse  
nor can I see it if I turn away.  
I can, however, experience it.  
I can witness it. I can be present.

If we look for it  
the truth lies far beyond the horizon.  
If we don't look for it,  
it is right in front of us.



Life is one continuous mistake.

It is not so much a melodrama  
as a comedy of errors, in which  
the Dhamma edits your personal tragedy  
to evoke laughter with each pratfall.

Longchenpa said that since everything  
is but an apparition,  
having nothing to do with good or bad,  
acceptance or rejection,  
one may well burst out in laughter.

My son fell down ninety-nine times  
before he walked.  
Falling down, no problem.  
Walking, no problem.



Gandhi wished to die  
owning simply his glasses.  
Thoreau sought solace at Walden Pond.  
Though the world may be too much with us  
possessions need not be relinquished, just possessiveness.  
The world needs not to be rejected, just worldliness.

To crave to possess nothing,  
to long for the life of the sky-clad ascetic  
reflects a fear of attachment to what you have.  
Possessions, after all, lead only to ownership;  
craving them leads to misery.

Crave no thing  
not even nothing.



Love is not extreme liking.

Love is not passionate but compassionate.  
Love is not blind but sees everyone as family.  
Love doesn't burn but cools the fires of lust.

Love is not personal but human.

Love does not patronize but empathizes.

Love emanates.

Love engulfs.

Love radiates

on rocky crag and furrowed field alike.

I can love people I don't know.

I can love people I don't like.

I can even love those I love.



The here in being here now is not a place;  
the now not a moment in time.  
Being here is being real and being awake;  
now is nurturing an authentic presence.

‘There’ may seem more romantic  
and ‘when’ and ‘if’ full of dreamy scenarios.  
‘Here’ and ‘now’ may pale in comparison with  
future speculations or past reconfigurations,  
but they are all we need for liberation.

There is just here with tea added.



Before we meditate, mountains are mountains  
and streams are streams.

After some time we begin to see that  
mountains are not really mountains  
and streams are not really streams.

And with complete liberation  
mountains again become mountains  
and streams, once again, streams.

Things are not as they appear to be  
nor are they any different.

Even after enlightenment  
the Buddha washed his bowl.



I create all my own problems.  
In fact, I am my own problem.  
If I watch very carefully I see  
that I magnify each and every event.  
My agitation, my excitement, my anger  
precipitates, preconditions, predetermines  
the ensuing eruption.

It is not my problems that need solving;  
it is the preconditioning mind states  
that need dissolving.

Solving problems is akin  
to handing the Titanic's captain a cork.  
Dissolving preconditions  
is giving him radar.



Liam came to me this morning and shouted,  
“Daddy, let’s make a four!”  
His excitement was infectious;  
child-likeness should be the eleventh parami.

Neither immaturity nor irresponsibility,  
it is a child-like wonder  
at the anarchy of life;  
the ability to laugh  
in the face of the futility and hopelessness of it all  
and bang our spoon on the soup pot of life  
for the sheer joy of making noise.  
Radical enchantment.

The Dhamma does not invite us  
to come in from the rain  
but to go out into the rain...and play.

Cultivate the child-like heart.  
Enlightenment is restricted to those under ten.



Concentration  
connotes a clenching of fists,  
a gritting of teeth  
and a pursing of lips but

Right concentration is something else again.

It is being present to the breath.

It is bare awareness of in and out.

It is the tickle of gossamer on the upper lip.

We simply attend to this breath  
with the rapt attention of a young child  
at his first puppet show.



Don't be afraid of fear.  
The Buddha saw it not as an impediment  
but as an ephemeral and enigmatic construct.  
Fear creeps into the mind  
on the padded feet of worry and doubt.  
Once you succumb to the intriguing plot lines  
and scintillating scenarios purveyed by its two cohorts,  
fear has already usurped them  
and deigned himself the new commander-in-chief.  
Fear thrives in this milieu  
like a virus in an unshielded laptop.

Smile, taking solace that you have already been through  
many terrible things in your life...  
a few of which actually happened.

What, me worry?



Call it clarity,  
call it luminosity or  
call it clear consciousness.  
Many names but all connote an  
unfettered, unencumbered, unhindered, unimpeded, untangled  
way of seeing.  
It is your face before you were born.  
Find that face.  
It is your heart before you attacked it.  
Heal that heart.

It is the trees before they became a forest.  
Clarity is cutting down that forest  
harming not a single tree.



In Upper Burma, I crossed the river  
and walked up the hillside.  
Outside the enlightenment cave of a long departed arahant,  
a lone monk stood watch  
and invited me to sit a while.

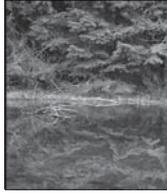
The cave was small but surprisingly comfortable.  
I sat for some hours  
experiencing a deeper clarity than ever before.

Was this due to some cosmic convergence?  
Were the spirit guides of the cave lending a hand?  
Was I resonating with the vibrations of the departed arahant?

Or was the cause closer to home,  
in my own simple mind,  
inexperienced as I was on the Dhamma trail?

Zen mind?  
Beginner's mind?

Never mind.



Some define living a natural life  
by the number of streams that run by their home.  
Returning to nature entails evergreens and owls,  
loons and rock faces,  
baked bread and open-hearth fires.

But within dwells the true nature  
we should seek,  
still inherently pure and serene,  
albeit polluted by the greenhouse gas emissions  
of modern life.

It is this inner nature we must redress.  
Once at peace with our own true nature  
we can balance our intention with our actions,  
and, devoid of social pressures, live off the grid.

A babbling brook cannot soothe a raging mind  
but a quiet mind can remain at peace through a monsoon's rage.



Be a light unto yourself  
even to questioning the revelations of the Buddha  
by holding his truths up to the mirror of your own experience,  
accepting only those tenets that are reflected back.  
The only truth that matters is the one that you discover.

Seek out guides not masters  
for you must master your own life.  
Seek out mentors not gurus  
for you need principles not rules.  
Seek out those who smile more than talk  
for you need a change of heart more than intellectual stimulation.

The Buddha was fully enlightened  
but don't trust a word he says.  
Find out for yourself.  
You may be completely ignorant  
but you are right.



The farmer's oldest son died.

"Oh, this is terrible news," said his friends.

"Let's see," said the farmer. "Let's wait and see."

His remaining profligate son returned home.

"Oh, this is wonderful news," said his friends.

"Let's see," said the farmer.

This son was very lazy and the old man had to do all the work.

"Oh, this is terrible news," said his friends.

"Let's see," said the farmer.

The old farmer worked hard and regained his strength and vitality.

"Oh, this is wonderful news," said his friends.

"Let's see," said the farmer.

With nothing to do, the son took to drinking and gambling.

"Oh, this is terrible news," said his friends.

"Let's see," said the farmer.

War broke out but the local warlord

refused to draft the farmer's drunken son.

"Oh, this is wonderful news," said his friends.

"Let's see," said the farmer.

While celebrating his freedom,  
the son fell down the stairs and broke his leg.

"Oh, this is terrible news," said his friends.

"Let's see," said the farmer.

Unable to move about, the son had to give up alcohol and gambling.

"Oh this is wonderful news," said his friends.

"Let's see," said the farmer. "Let's wait and see."

Every cloud has a silver lining and  
every silver lining will eventually tarnish.  
Wait and see. Wait and see.



An old monk found himself too frail and weak  
to continue to work in the fields.  
Because he was no longer contributing he stopped eating.  
He prepared himself to die.

His brother monks came to him.  
“Old man you are being very selfish,” they said.  
“You have stopped eating. Soon you will die.  
Winter is fast approaching.  
That means we will have to dig your grave in the cold.  
The earth will be frozen. The wind will bite.  
Have some compassion.  
Eat.”

The old monk was very wise.  
He agreed and ate.  
With the arrival of Spring  
he stopped eating and soon died.

It was warm.  
The earth was soft.  
The winds were gentle.

All things must pass.



Eventually, you must meditate continuously  
infusing every moment with clear comprehension.

And so intensive retreats are offered  
to saturate the mind with this 24/7 awareness.  
You sit in a silent cell for weeks, months and even years at a stretch  
to etch this or that technique onto the mind  
ensuring your eventual liberation.

But to depend on the twin catapults  
of isolation and duration  
to propel your awareness into the astral realms is folly  
for you will invariably fall from grace.  
Without the crutches of silence and enforced asceticism,  
you will find yourself still jostled by the vicissitudes of life.

You have become a good retreatant  
more than a good meditator.  
Sitting continuously for months in a Tibetan cave is postcard bravado  
if you cannot meditate here, now, on the Flatbush Avenue bus.

Retreat from anger, from fear, from greed,  
from hatred, from jealousy, from sloth,  
but not from life.  
The silence we need resides not in our cave but in our mind.



If moment-to-moment awareness is the key to liberation  
then clear comprehension arises when it is turned.

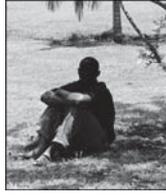
The former helps you to see,  
the latter, to understand;  
the former brings peace,  
the latter, luminosity.

When each moment finds you aware,  
your understanding of the human dynamic is extended  
so that you comprehend more and more clearly  
how change, ego and misery  
permeate all phenomena.

You comprehend more and more clearly  
how you constantly resist this law of nature  
and crave it to be otherwise.

And you comprehend more and more clearly  
how these three Sisters of Suffering  
compound, confuse and convolute  
the perfection of this moment.

A key is but a piece of metal.  
It is only with its turning  
that the key proves its true mettle.



The only truth that helps is the truth  
that you discover on your own.  
The Buddha liberated only himself;  
and you can liberate only yourself.

But the Buddha's teachings do ease our journey  
by identifying the pervasiveness of human misery.  
Meditating, ask if he is right.

He identified the root cause of this misery.  
Sit still and see if he is right.

He identified the state of freedom attained  
once this root cause has been eliminated.  
As you meditate glimpses of nibbana will prove if he is right.  
And he outlined the eight stages to reach this state of freedom.  
When you sit you follow these stages  
and witness the results.

If we prove him wrong  
he offers us a misery back guarantee.



Don't meditate.

Simply allow the state of meditation to arise.

Simply open your eyes...but keep the lids closed.

Simply see what you see...but don't look for anything.

Simply wait for it...but don't expect it.

Meditation is like waiting for the cows to come home  
knowing fully well they never left the barn in the first place.



The Noble Path is not a New Age trip.

The New Age wants to heal you.  
The New Age paints you as injured and incomplete  
in need of some crystallized angelic convergence.

The Noble Path is Old Age.  
There is no need to heal  
for you are not sick.  
You are not injured.  
You are not incomplete.  
You have not been transgressed.  
You are not a victim.

You just are.  
And you just are the way you are.

The New Age wants you to turn stones into diamonds.  
The Old Age wants you to see things as they really are.  
And when you do  
you see the stones were already diamonds  
and all diamonds merely sparkling rocks.



You can't meditate.  
I can't meditate.  
The Buddha couldn't meditate.

But meditation can occur  
provided you, me and the Buddha  
stay out of the way.

When you think you are meditating,  
start again.



You can call it vipassana if you wish,  
explain your practice as satipatthana,  
tell friends you do anapana,  
impress others by talking of shikantaza,  
or say that you simply sit.

You may refer to yourself as a Buddhist,  
a student of the Dhamma,  
a layman or a monk or a nun.

You can choose Hinayana or Mahayana or Vajrayana;  
Soto or Rinzai; Nying-ma, Ga-gyu, Sa-gya or Ge-luk.

You may sit on a bench, on the floor, or on a mat.

You may chant, recite, pray, or bow,

just as long as you see what is happening  
and you're not upset by what you see.

This is Dhamma.

Leave the rest to the spin doctors.



If you're trying to meditate  
you're not meditating.  
If you think you're meditating  
you're not meditating.  
Even if you meditate,  
you're not meditating.

But once "you" are not there,  
then  
you've got it...

if there is a you to get it,  
and if there is an it to be gotten  
and if you need to get  
what you already had to begin with.

When you finally get it,  
you realize it isn't it.



In upper Burma I waited  
to meet the revered master.  
Hours passed, dusk approached  
when finally the master emerged from his hut.  
He was almost blind and so beset with other infirmities  
he needed an attendant with him at all times.  
Yet he exhibited not a trace of remorse or bitterness.

As he touched my face,  
the better to see me,  
he exuded so much compassion  
and unconditional love  
that tears of joy filled my eyes.  
He brought this confident, ego-centric, and patronizing foreigner  
to his knees.

Blind, hobbled, emaciated and senile  
he was the most powerful man I had ever met.

Metta can indeed move mountains;  
moreover, it could even move me.



I was racked with fever  
and near delirious with worry.  
“Am I dying?” I wondered,  
exacerbating the very symptoms  
of whatever illness I suffered.

“Why me? Why now?”  
eventually turned to  
“Why not me? Why not now?”

And for this I had no answer.  
If not me, then who else should die?  
If not now, then when would be a better time?

My agitation lifted.  
So did the fever.

Beneath every illness lies resistance.



Some say they need more time to practice,  
thinking the Dhamma is akin to reading Proust.

The Dhamma does not need time.

If you can open your eyes you can practice the Dhamma.

Every waking moment is a gift for us  
to practice awareness, equanimity and kindness.

Planning to take time for the Dhamma  
is like waiting for the flood before you build a boat.



There is nowhere we need go.

There is nothing we need do.

The entire universe  
dwells within us.

We hold all the mountains we need climb  
and all the rivers we need traverse  
in the palm of our hand.

Within my mind I find the cause of every war  
and the source of every conflict.

And in my own heart lies  
all the love needed to soothe these disagreements.

Going nowhere and doing nothing  
I can accomplish everything because  
when you do nothing, nothing is left undone.  
Mountains are best climbed in full lotus.



The first thing you realize when you meditate  
is just how crazy you are.  
Your monkey mind runs the gamut from chaos to catastrophe.

Past injustices are re-visited and  
future retributions plotted.  
Love and kindness seem absent except  
in their guises of guilt and remorse.

Do not fret. You are not going crazy...  
you are already there.

You need only fret  
when horrid thoughts arise  
and you think you're fine.



Big men don't cry;  
only the truly courageous do.  
Big men hide behind the skirts of ego and bravado  
but the courageous warriors of Dhamma  
face the onslaught of outrageous fortune  
with awareness and equanimity.  
In doing so they are humbled to tears.

Only the strong and the brave can face enemies  
with neither sword nor shield.  
With truth in one hand and peace in the other  
they fend off intimidation and pressure  
by accepting their shrill cries  
as simply the shock and awe of a desperate ego.

The timid retreat. The frightened attack,  
but the brave do neither.  
The brave don't need to do,  
they are.



Problems abound.  
Social, personal, political and financial conundrums beset the mind  
fomenting a cauldron of agitation.

Trying to figure it out,  
to work it out,  
to get to the bottom of it  
perpetuates the myth that the very thinking  
that got us into the mess in the first place  
will somehow free us.

And so we turn to meditation  
to fuel the synapses of discernment,  
to oil the rusty wheels of logic  
and spark the light bulb  
that will illuminate the way out of our labyrinth of options and  
choices.

But meditation is not the way out either...  
it is the way in.  
Meditation solves nothing...  
it dissolves.

It does not reveal answers...  
it removes questions.

Opinions and judgments remain for sure  
but we no longer side with ourselves.

Meditation is an opportunity to not work on our problems.  
It allows us the time to not get anywhere  
and the space to not do anything.

When nothing seems to be working  
you are on the right track.



If it is with furrowed brow and clenched fist you sit,  
pushing yourself, fervently hoping against hope  
to end the suffering that is part and parcel of human life,  
you will fail as miserably  
as if you were pasting feathers together hoping for a duck.

You will point the finger of blame  
at your teachers, at the technique,  
at your fellow seekers, at your family,  
at the environment, and your lack of time.

But you were bound to fail.  
You were meant to fail.  
You are hard wired to fall flat on your face until  
you abandon all hope to succeed.

When you accept you cannot do it,  
and only when you succumb to the impossibility  
of conquering the Everest of the task before you,  
are you really meditating.

Only then  
with all your hopes for something better  
dashed on the rocks of futility and despair,  
does the brow unfurrow  
and the fist unclench  
and the pushing desists.

You simply sit.  
You aren't conquering Everest.  
Humbled before its majesty,

abiding in the futility of effort,  
ask not for its blessing but for forgiveness  
for your audacity to rise above base camp.  
Egos conquer. Buddhas surrender.



There resides in all an inner voice.  
A spirit guide, an angel or perhaps  
a channeled ascended master  
that speaks to your issues  
and directs your quest.  
This voice asks for your trust.

Don't listen to it.

It is wrong.  
The beguiling voice  
reflects only your desperate hope for easy solutions  
and tempts you with your own polluted confusion.  
It is the perfume of the painted harlot.

The voice you need heed  
speaks the mist of the mountains.  
It whispers the scent  
of the dessert pines.  
The silence of emptiness  
echoes the teachings of the Tathagata  
like a still forest pond  
reflects the full moon.



Smaller Vehicle or Greater Vehicle?

The Way of the Elders roots out impurity  
and replenishes the gaping hole with perfection.

Liberation is an achievement.

The Mahayana route cleans the dust  
from our inherently enlightened mirror.

Liberation is a revelation.

Will it be excavation or decontamination?

Choose your metaphor but  
be present and be at peace.

Choose a) or b)  
but be,  
eh?



Ultimately you are all alone.  
All men are truly I-lands.

Still, you are not abandoned  
nor without support.  
All the powers and forces  
for good and love and kindness  
engulf and nurture you.

Though a shipwreck may best describe your life and  
you may be hanging on to a life raft  
with nothing in sight but a horizon of tomorrows,  
the winds of Dhamma  
and the tides of Metta  
will eventually bring you to the far distant shore.

Your task is simply to stay on the raft  
and trust the forces of nature.



The monks would meditate every afternoon  
until the abbot released them for tea.  
The highly sugared strong tea,  
especially welcomed since no solid food was taken after twelve noon,  
would sustain them during the long evenings.

One day the usual break time arrived  
without the customary nod of emancipation from the abbot.  
He remained deep in concentration.  
The monks grew restless.  
The abbot stayed steadfastly focused.  
The monks' agitation grew though nary a one dared leave the hall.

Reconciled to their fate  
the monks gradually settled into their own deep concentration  
aware that more than an old abbot's forgetfulness was at play.  
They felt a surge of adrenaline  
as they were freed from their sugar and caffeine fixation.  
They realized their tea break  
was not a necessary component of the practice.  
They smiled.

They opened their eyes to find the abbot smiling as well,  
indicating his wordless discourse was complete.

He exited the hall.  
The monks bowed and retired to their huts.

Years afterwards, when the monks were asked  
about their master's greatest discourse,  
they would remain silent.

After a prolonged pause they would reply,  
"I guess you had to be there."



Sky is sky  
whether clouds are gray or white.  
Sky remains an empty, clear azure,  
the clouds, floating far below the elegant expanse,  
being more a by-product of the earth's dampness  
than the sky's luminous grandeur.  
The sky is not troubled by such fleeting, floating fluff.

Same with mind.  
It is by nature crystal and clear.  
Thoughts traverse the mind:  
some gray, some white;  
others dark and stormy.

Don't be afraid of thoughts.  
Only take care lest your awareness of them be tardy.  
After all these thoughts are not mind ...  
nor mine.



Cling to nothing.  
Why do you hold on to home,  
to health, to family and friends,  
to all that bring you hope?  
This drive to control that which can't be controlled  
unnerves and worries the mind  
producing a state of perpetual ennui.

Cling to nothing by  
letting go  
not of health but fear of disease;  
letting go  
not of family but concerns for their future;  
letting go  
not of friends but of the worry of rejection;  
letting go  
not of enjoyment but the aversion to pain.

Your barn may have burned down,  
but be happy,  
now you can see the moon.



Is it the wind or the flag that blows?  
The wind you say  
for on a calm day  
the flag lays limp.

True enough but it is also the flapping flag  
that moves the wind.  
Even the most passive of observers  
alters that which he is observing.

Observer and observed dance,  
entwined together,  
each conveying the impression  
that they alone are leading.

Pacifying our own mind  
by altering our perception,  
to see all things anew  
changes the whole world  
more than any army of the night.



Let the storms rage.  
Let the winds roar  
and the waves crash.

Still ponds fester and stagnate;  
only raging waters can smooth a stone's rough edges.



I don't love anyone.  
I don't love everyone.  
I don't love you  
and I don't love myself.  
I don't love my family.  
I don't love my friends.

I just love.



I cling; therefore I suffer.  
The more I cling, the more I suffer.

Illness is less of a problem  
than clinging to health.  
Old age is less of a problem  
than clinging to youth.

Poverty is less of a problem  
than clinging to money.

Hunger is less of a problem  
than clinging to food.

Unhappiness is less of a problem  
than clinging to happiness.

Pain is less of a problem  
than clinging to pleasure.

Life is less a problem  
when you relinquish your hold.  
You must learn to play the guitar  
without strumming the strings.



In the name of the Dhamma you  
arrange your life to maximize  
the time and space you give to meditation.

You simplify. You modify. You delete.  
Careers are terminated. Houses sold. Marriages cast aside.  
You custom design your life like your morning latte.

But setting aside time and space just for Dhamma  
is akin to scheduling blinking into your palm pilot.

The Dhamma requires not a change of clothes,  
a change of jobs, a change of weather,  
a change of address or a change of gears  
but a change of mind.

The point of it all is to take down the prison walls,  
not to make the cell more comfy.



You cannot crave what you already have;  
you can only crave what you don't have.

Therein lays the misery.

Once you have what you didn't have  
the craving, unquenchable and insatiable,  
emerges again.

This person, this dream, this goal,  
status, power, wealth  
cannot assuage this gnawing hunger.

It doesn't work.

It has never worked.

It will never work.

It cannot work.

When craving is present...

and when is it not?...

it resembles the Trojan horse,  
all haughty grandeur, inherently hollow,  
but full of the force to overpower  
your strongest resistance.

For the gypsy, it is a home;  
for the householder, freedom.

When craving is simply noted  
the gypsy finds he is already home  
and the householder, forever free.



Learned scientists now tell us the Buddha was right.  
Neurologists, physicists and psychiatrists  
prod and poke and test,  
electrify and verify and quantify,  
and conclude that meditators are happier.

Don't believe them.  
Don't believe the Buddha.  
Don't believe this book.  
Come and see for yourself.

The Buddha's message  
is not found in his words,  
nor in empirical research  
and certainly not in this poet's mercurial meanders.

His message is in his smile;  
its proof in yours.



A man in far Mysore City garnered monies  
by displaying his multi-hued parrots,  
perched for petting and viewing  
on a stick supported by two low trees.  
The parrots, though untethered,  
did not fly away.  
He needed neither cage nor heavy hand  
to extract their submission.

He had convinced the parrots  
that their every need could only be met  
if they remained quietly perched on the stick.

They didn't realize they could fly.  
Their own fear held them firmly to that stick.

Freedom was theirs  
if they just let go.



When left to its own devices  
water naturally pools in the lowest gullies.

So it is with your mind.

Left on its own  
thoughts meander hither and thither  
eventually settling in the lower realms  
wherein the darkest fears reside.

You immediately react when you uncover  
this putrid cesspool of repressed fears,  
your fear and ignorance darkening  
your vision of the swamp even more.

Meditation allows you to calmly abide  
in this quagmire of murky pestilence.

As you sit quietly  
your eyes adjust to the light.

It is not so dark.

It is not so putrid.

There is no need to fear  
what you don't want to know and  
no need to flee from  
what you don't want to face.

Shaking hands with the devil loosens his grip.



Trip the light fantastic  
on feet of mirth and laughter.  
Those guided by a child-like  
sense of joy and wonder  
have no need for the road map  
of intellectual discernment.

An everlight heart smiles  
at the curveball, low and away,  
life throws our way.

We need not fear dropping the ball  
if we never catch it in the first place.

Let it pass  
as all things must.



Go against the mind.  
If it says left, go right.  
If it says eat, fast.  
If it says sleep, work.  
If it says, “I want”, renounce  
and when it says, “I hate”, embrace.

The best time to sit  
is when you are resisting the cushion’s beckoning call.  
Always listen to that little voice in your head...  
and oppose it.



To meditate is more than noble:  
it is imperative.

To desist from activity and just be  
is profoundly energizing.

To refrain from engaging with any passing thought  
is to immerse into everything.

To sit on your cushion,  
to just sit,  
is the embodiment of perfection.

To attend to this one breath,  
just this one,  
is to be, in this moment, a Buddha.

The challenge is to attend to the next breath as well.



Everyone seeks peace  
imagining a freedom  
from the mind-jostling volcanic eruptions  
of greed and hatred.  
Peace must be a zap-free zone,  
devoid of nerve-grating negativities.

It is not so.  
Peace is not so much a state  
as a process.  
Peace does not eliminate,  
it accepts.  
Peace does not obliterate  
it welcomes.  
Peace does not empty  
it fills.

Peace opens your heart  
to make room for all the mind states  
we want so much to eradicate.  
We calmly abide with  
the disruptive forces allowing them to be as they are.  
They need not be destroyed.

Though the impurities do not lose their identity  
they do lose their density  
and, like all scum,  
they float to the surface  
where they are evaporated  
by the warm rays  
of the Dhamma Dhatu.



Everything is changing.  
Everything is always changing.  
Everything is constantly always changing.  
Everything is inherently constantly always changing.

This flux is more than the quintessence of the human condition;  
it is the human condition.

You aren't a human being  
as much as a human becoming.  
To understand this at the visceral level,  
in the heart, in the gut,  
to fully grok it,  
is to awaken to the ultimate truth.

You cannot step into the same river twice.  
You cannot step into the river even once  
for river is pure process,  
an unfolding of riverness.

All one can be certain of is uncertainty.



My son likes the toy car at the mall.  
He sits in the front seat and  
places his hands on the steering wheel.  
He works the pedals.  
He can even honk the horn.  
(And oh, how he loves to honk his horn!)  
but he isn't in control.

He is just along for the ride  
on the Kamma Express.



I am a torturer.  
I am a rapist.  
I am a jack-booted racist.

These beings live within me  
and from time to time they raise their hands,  
demanding recognition and asking to be heard.

When I fear these internal terrorists,  
when I deny their existence,  
when I repress their fury,  
they win.  
They get stronger.  
They gather momentum.

Recognize them.  
Call them by their name  
and even befriend them.  
But keep your eye on them.  
Then they lose momentum.  
They get weaker.  
They implode.

The first step to being a better person  
is to accept you are worse  
than everyone else.

If you must wag your finger  
do so at the image before you in the mirror.



The mind mirrors the body.  
If the body moves, the mind moves.  
If we still the body, we still the mind.  
If we stop our breathing for even a moment,  
the mind naturally calms.

Don't move.  
Don't breathe.  
Don't squirm, realign, fidget, slump, twist, turn, straighten, tilt, or  
fall over.  
Don't do.  
Be.



Meditation is opening up to the obvious  
and engaging the mundane.  
We engross in the banal and the common.  
It is earthworm knowledge.  
We unload the silo  
one grain at a time.

If you live the sacred and despise the ordinary,  
you are still bobbing in the ocean of delusion.  
If something magical is happening,  
some miracle is unfolding  
or some attainment has presented itself...  
start again.

Expect nothing to happen  
...and it eventually will.



Freedom may be the goal  
but it is not the means.

Freedom as a means is  
profligate indolence  
hiding under the thin veneer of liberty.

The Path to freedom begins with effort and consistency,  
undertaken with  
discipline and determination  
and augmented with renunciation and simplicity  
before we reach liberation.

Nureyev soared on callused feet.



The Buddha exemplified balance.  
He boldly set out for he knew not where  
yet he was confident he would get there.  
It appeared foolhardy to renounce his princely life  
yet he was sure answers lay in the desert of renunciation.

You too need the courage to step into the void,  
faithful that your foot will strike something solid.

Ready for anything;  
expecting nothing.



Be aware.  
Be awake.  
If you think you are aware and awake  
you are not.

If you think, you are  
And you need to keep out of this.

No you turns in Dhamma.



The polluted mind reveals no wisdom.  
It is all false leads circling back unto itself.  
Smoke and mirrors. Shadows and fog.

We cannot think our way out of our quandary  
much as we can't row a boat with a rotted hull  
no matter how Olympic our stroke.

Thinking things through  
gouges deep ruts into which we perpetually sink  
leading us ever and anon over familiar turf.

Look to the mind beyond the quandary.  
Look to the sky behind the clouds.  
Look to the coral reef beneath the waves.

Don't let the quandary eat you up;  
let it feed on itself.

Perplexity eats its progeny.



You dwell in a private garden of familiar discontent.

You wish for peace.

You wish for happiness.

You wish for joy eternal.

But these inhabit unfamiliar territory

beyond your garden's walls.

Best to stay within your incarcerating misery

and dream of better days

forever past or never to be.

You are addicted to your discontent.

It extends a kinship,

a familiarity,

a hazy, perplexing, consistent malaise

that you think is the real you.

You do not suffer.

Only the person you imagine yourself to be suffers.

Yours is a learned discontent

an engrained response,

deeply rutted in your unconscious.

You feel alive when this reactive pattern

surges through your veins

and you addict to the rush.

Your jaded myopia conceals

even the garden walls that confine you

let alone the door within that is always open

to the great clear beyond.

It's never too late to be what you might have been.



It is really so simple.  
Watch and remain balanced.  
Be present to all as it unfolds  
neither wanting it to turn this way or that  
nor angry should it not bend to your demands.  
So simple.

It is really so hard.  
Watch and remain balanced  
to all and sundry, thoughts and events,  
as they arise.  
Seek neither lottery rewards nor fear crucifixion.  
So hard.

The more we try  
the harder it is.  
The less we try  
the simpler.



This thought that invades your consciousness,  
this worry that swamps your being  
or that desire that pinches you like a vice,  
cries out for your total attention.  
“Look at me” each spoiled brat screams,  
“I need you here now!”

You have nurtured these errant thoughts and feelings  
into petulant offspring by seating them front row, center stage.  
You feed them, attend to them, stroke them, and empower them.  
You are afraid to ignore them.  
You need to deal with them.  
Now.

You handed them the keys to the castle.  
You made them the rulers.  
You succumbed to their diatribes.  
You prostrated yourself before the infantile wailing of envy and lust.

You need to regain control of your life.  
You need to desist from rolling with each and every  
bump and curve in the mindway.  
You need to do nothing.

Like the flowers in a rainstorm  
that bend and sway but remain firmly rooted  
in clear awareness.

Hear their demands.  
Hear their shrill screams  
Listen to their supplications  
but answer them not.

When these obsessive telemarketers call,  
let the machine get it.



You who now are reading this  
are a different person from the one who read the previous page.

You have changed.  
Part of you has died  
and part has been reborn.

You cannot relive the past;  
you cannot revive your old self.  
He who was, no longer is  
and he who is, will not be he who will be.  
You don't have to change;  
you already have.

No need to turn over a new leaf,  
to turn the corner  
or turn your life around.  
You have been turned... whether you like or not  
and you were flipped sunny-side up.



Do not seek the truth.  
Merely cease to cherish your own ideas and opinions.

Do not seek the truth  
but continue truthfully searching.

You haven't lost anything,  
nor is there anything you need find.

It is a goal-less goal.  
The question is not "What are you looking for?"  
but "Who is looking for what?"

You are looking for he who looks.  
The truth is not so much found  
as it is revealed.  
And it is revealed by this very act of looking.  
The act of looking is the truth.

When you look, you just simply see.  
When you attend to the unfolding of reality,  
as it is,  
you have already found  
what you thought  
you were looking for.



It is all futile.  
In the end, it is hopeless.  
Even in the beginning, the struggle is a waste.  
To realize this truth  
without descending into despair  
is Noble.

And Noble futility  
will take you from befuddlement to  
if not the cosmic,  
at least the comic.

Never despair...  
there is always hopelessness.



I struggled with a poem on compassion.  
Words and images lay splattered on the page  
like an ostrich egg under a fire truck.  
Metaphors eluded my grasp.  
Anecdotes migrated to far off isles.  
Imagination lay stagnant  
like so much still water on a moonless night.

My wife announced that she had invited friends for dinner.  
“We could have discussed this first,” I intoned,  
my jab edged with patronizing sarcasm.  
“I have some writing on compassion I must finish!”

It is futile to read these missives of Dhamma  
without nurturing their inducements to a kinder life.  
More futile yet is writing the missives in the first place  
without heeding the teachings for  
only he who acts wisely is so;  
he who merely speaks wisely is just  
another hawker in the spiritual supermarket.

The pen is mightier than the sword  
but both pen and sword pale  
in comparison with the gentle heart.



It is our attachments  
that cause us pain.  
Even our attachment to being unattached  
is fraught with misery.  
Better to be aware  
when and if and how I am attached  
than to be unaware  
when and if and how I am not attached.



Let go of your misery for sure  
but let go of your attainments even more.  
Staring in amazement at how far you have come  
is a sure sign you have much further to go.

Although gold dust is precious  
when it gets in your eyes  
it obstructs your vision.

Progress is not measured  
by how far but by how still.



Over two millennia ago  
the Buddha proposed the practice of dual tasking:  
never awareness without equanimity  
and never equanimity without awareness.

Equanimity and awareness  
are the two wheels of a bicycle.  
They are the two wings of the dove  
forever linked in tandem like  
rock and roll and  
yin and yang.

Awareness is passing go;  
equanimity is collecting \$200.



Once you get past the fear,  
the angst, the doubt  
and the confusion,

watching

becomes a fascinating experience.

When there is no time line to which to adhere,  
when there is no agenda,  
when you want to neither eradicate nor induce

watching

thoughts, emotions, dreams and worries,  
is like viewing a summer storm  
from the cozy confines of a mountain cabin.



The Abbot came by the newly erected Dhamma hall  
and inquired of his novice monks  
how the project was progressing.

“It is all finished but the details,”  
the youngest novice replied.

The aging Abbot shook his head.  
“It is all only details,” he murmured.



There is indeed no big picture,  
no panorama of perfected harmony.  
Looking to the heavens  
lands us quickly in a quagmire.

It is a collage of minutiae,  
of detailed filigree,  
a panoply of pixels  
to which you must pay attention.

It is not so much looking for the needle in the haystack  
but looking at each piece of straw therein.



## Sankhara.

These old familiar habit patterns,  
born in the recesses of the antediluvian plain,  
are destined to replay for eons upon eons,  
ensnaring every thought, every emotion  
in a miasma of interwoven cobwebs.

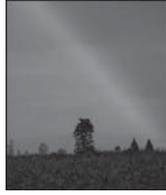
Your sankharas fit you  
like a familiar baseball mitt.  
Though you be buffeted and cajoled by them,  
though you abhor their power  
you are at the same time addicted  
to responding in predetermined patterns.

They delude you  
into thinking this is the way you are.  
You may revel in knowing yourself  
when it is only these habits you know  
while your true nature lies obscured  
beneath a blanket of blind bravado.  
You are a perpetual mistaken identity.

These consistently reinforced reactive habits  
have kidnapped your true nature  
and demanded a ransom of lifelong obeisance.



You are the heir of your kamma.  
This is your only inheritance.  
You are as you did.  
You will be as you are now doing.  
What is past is indeed prologue.  
  
The past isn't dead...  
it isn't even past.



Renounce all that impedes your journey to the light  
not out of stoicism, denial, hatred or superiority  
but simply to separate needs from wants.

It is not “I will not,”  
“I can not” or  
“I must not”

but  
“I need not.”

“I need not at this moment indulge this whim”  
releases you from the clutches of insatiable craving.

“Lagom” the Swedes say,  
“just this is enough.”

This is true freedom.  
This is true liberation.

For he who desires nothing  
everything seems a miracle.



The truth that sets you free  
does not abide in the realm of pure reason.  
It cannot be reached on flights of fanciful argument  
nor through the thrust and parry of opinionated discussion.  
The more we talk, the more we talk.

Truth is the way it is.  
And the way it is  
flashes before the mind's eye  
in a kensho of clarity  
after eons of effortless striving.

To see the truth is to understand the truth  
and to understand the truth is liberation and so  
our practice must lift  
the veils of ignorance that obscure our vision.  
Until we do so we remain engulfed in fog,  
frantically rowing about,  
in concentric circles of futility,  
hopelessly lost, endlessly searching  
unaware that this rowing about,  
this fervent striving for escape,  
leads only deeper into the morass.  
The more we row, the denser the fog.

Truth that can be discussed is not the truth.



Meditation nurtures  
how to know  
when you know  
there is no thing to know  
except knowing this.



Meditation helps  
you to find  
what you never lost.



Just sitting  
must be right sitting.  
And right sitting  
implies an investigative element  
that propels meditation beyond the realm of relaxation  
into the domain of insight.

Just sitting  
must be true sitting.  
And true sitting  
implies a courageous honesty  
to be fully present  
to the arising and passing away  
of mental conditionings.

Just sitting  
must be simply sitting.  
And simply sitting  
implies a non-intellectual introspection  
of the reality of here and now.

Just sit.  
Right, true and simple...  
so put the book down...  
keep reading  
but put the book down.



There must be more to life than speed.

When you live  
a short distance from your body  
in the state of constant modernity  
involved with the to and fro,  
perpetually preparing to really live,  
you neglect the gifts of here and now.

When scintillating scenarios of anticipated hopes  
act on the mind's stage or  
when obsessions with past injustices and disappointments  
demand retribution,  
understanding cannot arise.

Open your heart  
to the miracle of this simple moment.

Do not fret what was.  
Do not plan what may be.

Do not expect even the next moment.



Sit as if you are viewing a play.

On stage sits anxiety.

What a good actor

able to stir up all matters mundane into tempests.

Doubt enters.

Like Shakespeare's Fool he comments on the very play itself  
casting dispersion on the entire process.

As comic relief, here's joy

and what a relief she is. Pity she never stays long.

As usual, sadness follows her exit

bringing a pall over the entire play.

The usual actors come and go,

lurking sometimes in the background,

at other times charging to center stage.

When we identify so much with the actors,

relating to the conundrums and conflicts

into which they enter,

we surrender our ability to see the performances as just

so much smoke and fury,

ultimately signifying nothing.

We think the play's the thing

but it is mere illusion.

Only the viewers are real.



Lay it down.  
Lay everything down,  
persistently and consistently,  
until laying down becomes  
the new habit pattern of the mind.

It is not your burdens, however,  
that you need lift off your shoulders;  
nor is it your problems, woes or fears  
that you need relinquish.

You need lay down your obsession,  
your concern, your involvement with  
your burden, your problems,  
your woes, your fears.

Burdens are the stuff of life.  
They are your inheritance  
from your past actions.  
They are real. They keep you human.  
They are not heavy. They are your brothers.  
They are also your teachers.

It is the desire to lay your burdens down  
that adds the weight.



You must hold on while you let go.

Letting go occurs only when  
you are holding tightly to here and now.  
Sitting here, now,  
trumps  
standing there, then.

Letting go is not rethinking,  
nor relieving, reviewing, rehearsing, replaying, reliving  
but is real living  
here, now,  
with this breath.

Hold on tightly  
but don't close your fist.



There is no greater teacher than  
your worst nightmare.

Without your enemies,  
and without fear of these same enemies,  
where would you be?  
Luxuriating in divine oblivion,  
deluding yourself that you are  
but one breath from liberation.

Your enemies make you uncomfortable.  
They push your buttons.  
They expose your prejudices and preconceptions  
and uncover your most basic of tendencies.  
Be thankful.

It is not what you know  
but what you don't know about yourself  
that deepens your practice  
and this can best be revealed to you  
by those you don't want to know.

Every moment you feel uneasy  
a teacher is near and a lesson is unfolding.



According to the traditions  
of the forest monasteries of Issan  
before a monk may leave the protective guidance of his preceptor  
he must spend a night in the jungle,  
alone and unsheltered.

Python, tiger and jungle cat abound here.  
All are nocturnal hunters and all are hungry.  
Monk sous l'arbre is a rare delicacy.

The monk takes a comfortable seated position under a tree,  
vows not to move  
and meditates through the night  
emanating love and kindness  
to protect himself from all manner of beast.

If and when he returns to the monastery,  
with all extremities intact,  
he will be freed from his vows of obeisance to his preceptor  
having demonstrated that his love and kindness  
is strong enough indeed  
to fend off the destructive forces of Mara  
and to warrant independence.

Monks have sat still, immersed in loving kindness,  
as pythons slithered slowly over them.  
A few in the morning have found  
a jungle cat sleeping beside them.

Metta.  
Don't leave home without it.



Cosmic consciousness having thus far eluded me,  
I have settled for a state of comic consciousness  
wherein irony reigns supreme and  
hoisting myself on my own petard is the national sport.

I long for a cave in Issan  
yet am happily ensconced in my suburban bungalow.

I love to hike the Himalaya  
yet I drive my Volvo to the local market.  
I write of the benefits of a strong spiritual practice  
yet devour my weekly Sports Illustrated.

I march for peace  
yet teach my son to box.  
I live a life of quiet solemnity  
yet prefer the Boss at full throttle.

I yam what I yam.  
I do find my life quite funny.



Life occurs between a rock  
and a hard place.  
You are trapped between the rock  
of being born  
and the hard place of death.

You can choose to flee or to fight.  
You can fly from reality  
on drugged wings of sensual fancy  
for momentary relief  
or you can stand firm  
on your religious convictions  
that eternal deliverance is nigh.

Misery repressed with a scream of tortured excess  
or with a howl of righteous indignation.

The Buddha suggested a middle way of  
neither flight nor fight,  
neither repression nor expression,  
neither highway nor my way.

Simply sit between the rock and the hard place,  
abide there calmly and just see what unfolds.

Expect nothing to happen...  
and in time it will.



The Dhamma is not a spiritual practice.  
It is not a feel-good,  
ethereal, evanescent,  
angels-dancing-on-a-pin,  
pie-in-the-sky, warm and fuzzy  
new age, psychotherapeutic,  
Botox-for-the-mind.

It is a path for warriors.  
Only the bravest of combatants  
are willing to face the slings and arrows  
of outrageous mental defilements  
without retreating into morose anxiety  
or suing for a complacent peace.

The path is laser straight.  
It demands absolute 20/20 insight  
of the reality of here and now.  
You can't run and you can't hide.  
The path offers neither escape nor exit.  
The path is not a way out but a way in...  
and ultimately through.

Before the dawn of liberation  
you must face the dark night of your own entrapment.  
And this you do alone,  
with neither sword nor shield  
but with the unshakeable knowledge  
that it can be done,  
it will be done  
and it must be done.



The Dhamma is the ultimate reality show.  
If you crave for the truth,  
how is that different from pursuing  
fame and riches?

If you don't seek the truth,  
how different are you from  
the fauna of the forests?

You must seek without seeking.  
The truth can never be found by seeking,  
yet only seekers find it.



Surrender to the hopelessness  
of ever freeing yourself from the quicksand  
of human frailty.

It is hopeless. You are helpless.  
The direct help line to tech support  
responds only after you hang up.



To err is human.  
And to forgive may be divine  
but true pardon falls short until you accept  
that you also need forgiveness.  
You too are preconditioned  
to fall short of perfection.  
You too are a victim of human frailty,  
the universal human condition.

Only meditation can recondition  
the precondition  
of the human condition.

And it does so unconditionally.



By accepting the ubiquity of human frailty  
you nurture empathy,  
enabling you to recognize your own imperfection in others.

Seeing the universality of human frailty  
transports us from the quagmire of self  
to the heavens.

Sainthood is bestowed not on those whose heads are in the clouds  
but on those whose feet slither in the mud.

If you weren't falling on your face  
you could never see your fellow beings eye to eye.  
Wisdom is oft times nearer when you stoop  
than when you soar.



All alone,  
all together.

I-lands unto ourselves,  
unique constructs of preconditioning,  
the beneficiaries of myriad past deeds,  
and ultimately wholly responsible for our own unfolding,

we are yet all joined at the hip,  
heart-linked together by human frailty  
and the hope that spiritual salvation  
awaits the good and the strong.

Paddling our own canoe  
in others' choppy wakes.



The monk, Tenzin Gyatso by name,  
walked with a stoop.  
He had poor eyesight and constant pain  
in his right leg.  
His command of English left much to be desired.  
He had no home.  
And he had no country.

And yet he smiled.  
His eyes danced with levity and mirth.  
His happiness was infectious  
and it underscored his message of peace.  
He had only love for those who stole his homeland  
and this love brought the largest nation in the world  
to its knees.

He faced the largest army on earth  
with naught else but a tender smile  
and won the hearts and minds of the people of the world.

The soldiers may take his homeland.  
They may destroy ancient monasteries.  
They may imprison and torture countless countrymen  
and they may even take his life.  
But they cannot defeat him.  
They cannot make him fight.  
They cannot make him hate.

The strongest army is no match  
for a smiling heart.



The entire universe is ruled  
by cause and effect.

Every action  
of every being  
at every moment  
results in a consequence.  
And behind every action  
of every being  
at every moment  
lies a thought.

As a man thinketh  
so he is.

As a man thinketh  
so is the entire universe.

Think about it ....



May I be well, happy and at peace.  
May my wife be likewise well, happy and at peace.  
May my sons grow up true and strong.  
May my family be free from want.  
May my friends be loving, kind and forthright.  
May our leaders be honest, compassionate and wise.  
May those who wish us harm be happy, calm and sympathetic.  
May my door always be open to those in need of rest.  
May my home always be open to those in need of sustenance.  
May my heart always be open to those in need of love.

I forgive all those who may have hurt me  
through their physical or mental deeds.  
And I beg forgiveness from all those  
whom I may have harmed  
through my physical or mental deeds.

May all beings, male or female,  
large or small,  
two-legged or four-legged,  
multi-legged or no-legged,  
visible or invisible,  
in this plane of existence  
or another plane of existence,  
be happy, be peaceful, be liberated.



When you meditate  
you set aside time to distinguish  
what is impermanent from what is not;  
what is path from what is not;  
and what nurtures happiness from what does not.

Like a good scientist you dissect and separate  
the real from the apparent.

This is wisdom.

And like a good scientist you do so  
with a serene detachment.

This is joy.

Meditation is not ascending above reality  
but a burrowing into it.

We aren't eagles.

We are earthworms.

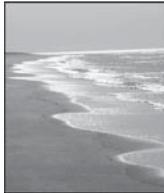


Meditation does not lead to truth.

Do not seek the truth.  
Merely cease to cherish your own ideas and opinions.

Don't look for the truth,  
because the looking is the truth.  
No need to find what was never lost.

You aren't looking for the truth.  
You are truthing.  
All path. No destination.



There is no need to seek anything anywhere anyhow.  
Enlightenment is not found by acquiring  
but by letting go.

Walking on the beach  
leaves no footprints.



What if you are realizing your dream?  
What if you are exactly where you should be?  
What if you are already the happiest person in the world?  
What if you simply don't know that you know?  
What if your dream of more is actually the nightmare from which  
you are trying to wake?

More, not to mention most, is fraught with as much misery  
as less, not to mention little.

There is no need to venture elsewhere.  
Nothing you don't already have can make you any happier.  
All you need to know is that a mountain is a mountain  
and a river, a river.

A rich man is not one who has the most  
but one who needs the least.



Thoughts are not the problem.  
They are fleet-of-foot ephemera,  
the wind in the willows of your mind.  
Whenever you engage them  
you anoint them with an oil of legitimacy  
and bestow upon them a crown of permanency  
they cannot wear.

Like painting the ebb and flow of the rolling seas,  
you try to capture what has already passed on the mind's canvas.

You stare at your artistry  
delighting in its grandeur,  
reacting to blobs of blue paint while  
the real waves have long passed on.  
And you are left bobbing in their wake.



It is indeed difficult to find  
your true self  
since your true self is  
neither true  
nor your self.

Peeling away layer upon layer of the onion  
leaves you empty-handed  
and smelling badly to boot.  
No inner onion exists.

Dismantling a watch  
yields only wheels and gears and levers.  
The watch cannot be found.

Truth and self  
are the push-me pull-you  
of your quest,  
tugging you in opposite directions  
for true self is the oxymoron of liberation.  
What is true has no self  
and what has self cannot be true.

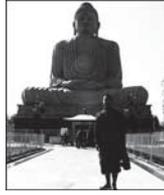


What are you looking for?  
Who is looking?  
Why are you looking?

We look because that is what we do.  
We are lookers.  
We are seekers.  
We are explorers.

What we are looking for  
is who is doing the looking  
and the who doing the looking  
is just the looking itself.

No what. No who.  
No why. No when.  
No where. No how.  
Know this.



The student gazed across the river  
and saw his Master on the other side  
seated under a cooling Banyan tree.

“Master,” asked the student, “how do I get to the other side?”

“You are on the other side,” replied the Master.

The Buddha became a Buddha when he realized  
he was on the other side the whole time.

Whose side are you on?



Arguments abound  
over the authenticity of texts.  
Each school, each sect, each tradition  
has very good reasons to believe  
it represents the one and only path.

Their arguments are infallible,  
their support irrefutable, and their conclusion solid  
because logic and reason are on their side.  
Each is right though  
they are all wrong.

The one and only path  
is simply the path that resonates with you.  
Your own discoveries will support you  
and your own insights will guide you.  
Listen to everyone but heed no one's call.

The pundits and professors  
reading, writing and arguing esoteric minutiae  
yet who practice not  
live in a virtual reality  
generated by computer graphics  
in a monastic Matrix.



I met a monk,  
home to care for his ailing mother  
after decades in the forest.  
I too had surrendered solitary asceticism  
for home and hearth  
to marry and raise my sons.

“Big changes!” he said of my life.

“Big changes!” I replied about his.

Both of us had turned our lives 360 degrees around,  
ironically finding ourselves flipped back onto the same path:  
the path of love, equanimity, joy  
and service.

Whether in the forest cave, at the hospital bed,  
at the graveside or rocking the cradle  
the practice of Dhamma remains the same.

Big change or little change or no change  
we can all spare some change for those in need.



It was the last day of a meditation retreat.  
During ten intensive days I guided the perplexed students  
and answered their myriad questions.  
I must say I did a most admirable job!

Assembled before me that last evening  
were the servers and managers of the retreat.  
I noticed the senior manager  
tuck a Thank You card under her knee.

How unnecessary. How sweet.  
Silently I reviewed my discourse on selfless service.  
I would humbly mention that we received  
no compensation, monetary or otherwise, for our work.  
I was very proud of my lack of pride.  
I would be well prepared to discourse on humility  
when the Thank You card was presented to me.  
If they loved me before the card ...

We talked of preparations for the next morning  
and we reviewed the week and what we had learned.  
I said good night and waited, oh so humbly.  
The senior manager stood, card in hand,  
and left the hall with the other servers.

The card had not been for me.

I am not sure what message it contained  
but it surely paled in comparison  
to the one I received that evening.



What truth may be herein contained  
lies not in the words  
but in the spaces betwixt.  
And it is to this emptiness,  
to this silence,  
to the quiet there  
that we must turn to find the truth.

True, the pen is mightier than the sword  
but stronger yet is the blank page,  
open, simple and unadorned,  
empty save for the focus of your attention upon its offering  
of unbridled purity.

Silence is the perennial flow of language,  
interrupted by words.  
You need to be filled with this emptiness.



I no longer meditate in jungle caves  
or sit for months in quiet solitude.  
I have two sons now  
and it is they who are my joyful focus.  
I wear the vigilant visage of the harried parent  
not the wane stare of the of the mountain hermit.  
I measure my days in soiled nappies and teething rings.  
Pali chanting no longer fills the air,  
just the jingles of the Wiggles.  
The Visuddhimagga has been shelved,  
replaced by Goodnight Gorilla.  
I seek not enlightenment but a quiet dinner.  
  
All has changed and nothing has changed.  
In leaving and returning  
I remained at home.  
This moment is still this moment.  
This breath still goes in and then out.  
I haul water. I hew wood. I change diapers.  
  
I sit in quiet solitude  
chasing my sons around the yard.



Don't meditate when you sit.

To meditate implies a technique, a method,  
a particular skill of introspective intensity,  
mastered by few,  
taught by even fewer.

In truth it is nothing much.  
It is just looking, within,  
seeing what goes on behind your eyeballs.  
It is paying attention to your inattentiveness.

Passive activity.  
Engaged inertia.  
Assertive atrophy.  
Full throttle coasting.  
Pedal to the metal parking.  
Determined lethargy.

Learn to be silent.  
Let your quiet mind  
listen and absorb.

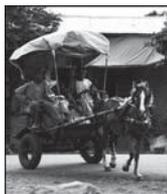
All man's miseries derive from not being able  
to sit quietly in a room  
alone.



You know before you know you know.  
When you really pay attention  
you become aware of subtle shifts of sensations  
that arise before the rational mind engages.

You know when you feel the truth at a visceral level.  
Intuition emerges, retrained and strengthened,  
ready to guide and protect.

You already know the truth.  
The Dhamma simply enables you to know you know.  
Do you know that?



A father, hand-in-hand with his three year old son,  
arrived one morning at our plastic sheeted, mud floored tea house  
on Nhat Tha Gyi Pagoda Road.

They sat on low stools, drank their tea and ate their breakfast bread stick.

The father left on an errand  
leaving his son alone at the table.

The boy drank his tea, ate his bread stick and watched the passing scene  
of bare footed monks and school children,  
rickshaw drivers and housewives.

Surrounded by friends and compatriots the young boy  
appeared unperturbed by his father's absence.

Everything was aright in his universe;  
he had tea, food and love.

But surely they need democracy.

They need the right to vote.

They need a free market economy.

They need Wal Mart.

They need to be more like us.

The father and son left the café after their breakfast.

They still were holding hands as I watched them turn the corner.

Poor wretched souls.



The double helix of DNA holds our genetic blueprint.  
Blake held the entire universe in his hand.  
And putting all his attention on one breath  
the Buddha entered the deathless realm.

It seems that the smaller things get  
the more truth they can hold.  
Sometimes, we just need to be amazed by the small things.



A man came upon a poor frog stuck in the middle of the road.  
The frog seemed immobilized by fear.  
He gently scooped up the trembling frog  
and carried him to the side of the road.  
He stroked the frog and stepped back  
to bask in the sunny glow of his charity and love  
when the snake from whom the frog was escaping  
emerged from the side brush and swallowed the frog whole.

Compassion must be married with wisdom;  
otherwise its good intentions are devoured  
by snakes in the grass.



The miracle of meditation is not the answers we get  
but the questions we relinquish.  
Just as the nightingale's trill is muffled  
under the tramping of our boots,  
so too the sweet song of insight remains unheard  
over the shrill call for answers.

You don't need to know any more;  
you only need empty yourself of doubts and curiosity.

Stars come out to dance on the water  
only after the fog dissipates.



Not everyone catches a wild turkey  
but only a person who is actually running  
can hope to do so.

Enlightenment comes only to he who  
fiercely pursues it  
without expecting any success.



Strive earnestly and fervently,  
prepared to lose every battle but the last one.  
Like miners digging out a tunnel  
one bucket of dirt at a time  
sometimes we have no sense of progress.  
Each bucket dug reveals another awaiting our attention.  
Each bucket is given our undivided attention  
without any hope or expectation  
to break through to the other side.

Eventually  
there is a breakthrough.  
How did this final bucket  
differ from the first?  
Countless buckets to  
reveal one thin sliver of light.



With awareness things are just as they are.  
Without awareness things are just as they are.

Essence is immobile;  
perception alone shifts hell  
one-sixteenth of an inch  
into heaven.



Equating the Dhamma with a technique of meditation  
is akin to throwing away the apple  
and eating the core.

If you can learn it,  
if you can get good at it,  
it isn't it.



Immortality is not living forever  
but overcoming our fear of death.

Without fear  
each day is an eternity;  
and each night  
a sleep fit for angels.



Today is not the first day of the rest of your life;  
it is the only day of your life.  
The secret is to live it to its fullest  
as if it was any other day.  
It comes but once in a lifetime.  
Nothing special  
This is what the Buddha knew.  
When you know this  
you too will be a Buddha.



Don't try to get somewhere  
because then you would not be here.  
Here is where you need stay  
because there is but a projection  
of your fear and hope.

Here is meditation...  
elsewhere, trepidation.



Wishing things to be other than they are  
is like pasting feathers together hoping for a duck.  
No amount of hope, good will  
or supplication to a higher source  
is going to make it quack.



Knocking on heaven's door merely calcifies your knuckles.  
All your prayers will be answered  
when you get off your knees.

You can choose the path of the victim  
or the path of the warrior.  
The former begs for a life stolen from them;  
the latter stands alone on the rocky cliff  
and stares down the thieves of the night,  
neither giving nor asking quarter,  
until they reveal themselves  
as only so much smoke and thunder  
unable to steal what wasn't given to them in the first place.



The reclusive life in Himalayan caves  
is exotic only to the accountant in Topeka.  
Anyone who shuts their eyes  
is a cave dweller.  
And any mendicant who concerns  
himself with the next moment  
is a Kansas bookkeeper.



What is the use of reading all this poetry?  
Your life, in all its dung-heaped majesty,  
is poetry enough  
for all the Buddhas.  
Your free verse scans better  
than another's iambic pentameter.



The Abbott was fond of encouraging his monks  
with the Buddha's admonition,  
"When eating, just eating.  
When reading, just reading."

One day a novice found the Abbott reading a newspaper  
while he ate his breakfast.  
The quizzical look on the face of the novice  
prompted the Abbott to reply,  
"When eating and reading the newspaper,  
just eating and reading the newspaper."



As I write these words  
I pour a cup of tea and wonder,  
"Who is this actor  
who writes such drivel?"



Since the best you can have  
is a mere image of yourself  
how can you then decide  
what you should or should not do?

This is like dining on sliced enigma dipped in fog  
and wondering why you remain famished.



In Asia the practice of meditation  
is stuck on form,  
full of rites and rituals.

In America we have gone beyond form.  
We have burned the Buddha images  
and stripped ourselves of robes and chanting.  
We are stuck in anti-form.

Form or no form  
just sit straight.  
Don't kill the Buddha  
before you meet him.



Searching for happiness in riches and fame  
is like digging in the ground  
looking for blue sky.

Look upward,  
above the clouds  
for there the sky is eternally blue.



When I was young  
we were so very poor.

We had sufficient food, of course,  
a warm house  
and good enough clothes  
but other than that  
we were so very poor.

Our entertainment was of the simple kind:  
Saturday night hockey games,  
Sundays and the Boy Scouts at Church  
and long walks in the park.  
We could afford naught else  
for we were so very poor.

Perhaps our parents loved us,  
coached our teams and  
supported our dreams  
all the more because  
we were so very poor.

Not for us were trips to the Mall,  
colored televisions or  
dinners out  
for these were beyond our kip.

When I was young  
we were so very poor.  
I am not so glad  
my children can't say the same thing.



All religions are true  
in the lies they tell.

This path or that,  
it doesn't matter  
for they all lead  
to the same cul-de-sac.

Any truth that can be packaged  
into a doctrine expounding  
heavenly rewards and eternal damnation  
overseen by the same God,  
cannot be true.

If you can only believe it  
and not experience it  
you've missed it.



Do not mistake the finger  
that points to the moon  
for the moon itself.

Even a Buddha  
can but show the direction;  
he can't drop the destination  
in your lap.

We tend to get caught up in the pointing ...  
Whether it is a big or little finger,  
a crooked digit or laser straight,  
a prophetic or empirical gesture.

The path is clear  
to those who can see.  
Don't get waylaid  
by the truckers' lights  
at the side of the road.



You are all addicts.

You are all addicted to your drug of choice, be it  
anger, lust, jealousy, pleasure, guilt, or worry.

Every interaction, every thought,  
every sight, smell, touch, sound or taste  
results in an all-so-familiar bio-chemical reaction,  
an adrenaline-like secretion, which intoxicates you.

Unpleasant though it be, this surge of energy  
is inevitably followed by momentary relief  
when your anger is vented, your lust satisfied,  
your jealousy requited, your pleasure realized,  
your guilt assuaged, your worry abated.

You enjoy the antecedent unpleasant energy surge  
because its ensuing release is so sweet.

You feel uneasy when you are at peace.

You fear tranquility.

Quietude is boring  
because there can be no thrill of release from contentment.

You are so addicted to peaks and valleys  
that you flee the plains below.



Live the Dhamma.  
Proselytizers shout vacuities;  
quiet minds model purity.

If this is the one and only path  
there is no need to sell maps in the marketplace.  
Walk the path and others will follow.



No need to let go.  
Letting go is letting go  
of the need to let go.

When the light is on,  
there is no need to chase away the dark.



All things must pass.

All your thoughts, your judgments, your emotions  
are passing fancies.

They are not you.

They are not even real  
fabricated as they are by your own intrinsic  
bias and trepidation.

What transforms this ethereal flux into mass,  
what perpetuates that which is so fleeting,  
what rejuvenates that which is on its way out  
is your fear that this fleeting and exiting ephemera  
may last forever.

Thoughts arise on the mind with a certain limited energy.  
Left unattended they must eventually burn themselves out.

But you intervene, you intercourse and  
interact with them  
further fueling these unwanted states.

You empower what was  
once a monologue creating a dialogue.

You are too polite to hang up.

There is no need to respond to unsolicited spam.



The first insight  
arises when you uncover the horror hidden  
in the deepest recesses of the mind.  
Your delusions about your humanity,  
your pretensions about your compassion and love  
dissolve onto the mat beneath you.  
These hellish visions  
may overpower  
revealing the real you to friends and family.

The second insight  
arises when you discover that this horror show  
is ephemeral.  
It is not you.  
It has no power.  
It passes.

The trick is to persevere  
between the two insights.  
Keep on truckin'  
though ever doubtful and anxiously concerned  
you will never reach the second insight  
before nightfall.

The highway between insights seems endless  
but inevitably it passes  
in a single breath.



Meditation is neither system,  
nor technique nor way of thinking;  
It does not reconfigure thoughts  
into a sensible, discernable order.

You will not be smarter.

You will not be better organized.

You will not be thinner.

However, neither will you be the same.

Long breath, short breath;  
deep breath, shallow breath.  
Agitated mind, calm mind;  
angry mind, peaceful mind.

The mind states are as they are.

Meditation does not orchestrate them  
into a symphony of your choice,  
but composes a simple wakeful presence  
from the cacophony of dissonance.

Soup still stains your tie  
but you recall only its bouquet.



When you first set aside  
yesterday's regrets and tomorrow's dreams  
to just abide in the now on your cushion,  
the bliss you think you should be experiencing eludes you.  
Your monkey mind jumps  
from anger to hatred and lust to boredom  
in the blink of an eye.

Congratulations!  
You have burst the delusion  
that you are pure and loving.  
No longer can you hide this misconception  
beneath the veneer of a smile and a glad hand.

You cannot heal what you flee.  
Facing this truth must precede understanding the truth.  
Most of the time what you face  
is not pretty.  
But better an enemy you know  
than a friend you don't.

And the greatest enemy is the hidden one.



During long retreats I seemed to dance  
with a different partner every day.

I have twisted with fear,  
tangoed with anger  
and jived with agitation.

Each new day brought a new dancing partner.

“Good morning Mara,” I would say to myself upon arising,  
“And with whom will I be dancing today?”  
Soon my partner would introduce herself  
and off we would go.

I insisted on leading.

My different partners would resist from time to time  
wishing to set the tone and the tempo  
but I remained steadfast and mostly enjoyed our spin on the floor.

Our practice must be a dance not a struggle.  
And our training teaches us to lead.

Shall we dance?



You can't do it  
because you and the it you think you want to do  
are the same.

The looker and what is looked for  
abide together in the act of looking.

No looker. No lookee.  
Only looking.



Whither happiness?  
Happiest is he who cares not a jot for the question,  
knowing full well that attempting an answer  
precipitates such agitation as to propel  
him from heaven to hell in a single breath.

“Whither happiness?”  
is a question  
that sends you  
looking in your jeans  
for your La Traviata tickets.

Whither happiness?  
I feel sorry for those who ask such a question;  
even sorer for those who have an answer.



When you bow raising calluses on your forehead,  
light candles sufficient to land a 747,  
or perform prostrations from Leh to Gaya  
you are only paying respect  
to the outward form of your practice.

Prostrate yourself, certainly,  
but only if you aren't counting the number.

Light candles, of course,  
but only if the electricity is out.

Bow, if you must,  
but only until you're bowing,  
even when you're not.



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