

THE MONEYYA CHRONICLES



The Moneyya Chronicles

Selected Poems and Musings of Bhikkhu Moneyya

With Original Artwork from Bali

In Memory of my Mother
The Artist

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Note to the Reader

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Illustrations accompanying the poems are from local and expatriate artists living in Bali.

New Edition, December 2017

On the Cover: painting by I Ketut Murtana.

Preface

Part of the joy of writing poetry is in sharing it with others, which I have done with my friends and family over the years, and now, for the first time, in this small book of verse, a select number of these poems have been compiled to share with a wider audience. With the exception of the first poem, this book spans the years of my life as a Buddhist practitioner, initially in the Zen tradition, later in the Theravada tradition, and finally as a Theravada Buddhist monk (*bhikkhu* in Pāli). This does not mean, however, that every one of these poems has a Buddhist theme or subject. Some of them do, but many do not, except in the sense that my orientation as a Buddhist practitioner serves as a backdrop for their presentation.

A number of the earlier poems merge this Buddhist orientation with those of other spiritual traditions. “Tears of Blood,” for example, has an unmistakably Christian theme, while “Hansika” and “Return” were written during my residence at a yoga ashram. Another turning point takes place during my second visit to the Philippines in 2015. This is reflected in several of the final poems in the book. In order to avoid confusion about these different periods in my life, I have arranged the poems in chronological order and included specific locations, where possible. This should make for greater continuity in the reading and also make it possible to trace the various threads of development running through the poetry.

The poems are followed by a postscript, consisting of a series of aphorisms and musings that were separated out from the main body of the poetry, due to their difference in style and character. To make the document more accessible to the general public, Buddhist terms have been footnoted and defined. A short biography has also been included at the end of the book, which will hopefully provide some insight into the origin of the author’s works and make for a more fruitful reading experience.

Bhikkhu Moneyya
Forest Island, Bali Usada
Peneng, Bali
March 2017

Medusa

Medusa stands in grey twilight
That those may hide who wish to see the day and not the coming night,
Keeping watch upon her fearful flock,
Turning words to stone, lest they wander.
The muse of madness and a million corpses,
Lashing through their timeless dance like aberrations of the mind,
She screams commands
And strikes the blind puppets,
Crushing them beneath her feet as they run to do her deeds.
And we speak of human creeds,
While she pours the serpent's venom in our ears,
Makes bravery the tyrant's fool,
Spreads chaos in the name of truth,
And shatters us.
Then let us make a sacrificial altar in her name,
Call her beauty
And worship her with closed eyes.

Gypsy caves
Granada, Spain
1967

Father

In memory of my father

You are my father, I am your son;
We are one in blessed purity.
Our radiant love can eclipse the sun
And stay the season's fated course.
Within your timeless memory, I become a child again –
Cradled in your loving arms, all thoughts of sorrow flee.
You are my earth, father,
And I am the rain, soaking your pores with my tears.
Death cannot separate us, father –
Even the dust beneath my feet contains your seed,
And flowers bloom from your ravaged breast.
I will always be with you, father.
Your breath fills my spirit with boundless aspiration,
And I encompass the stars,
Where you burn brightly in eternal solitude.

Rochester, NY
February 1987

Tears of Blood

“Horse and wagon part. Bloody tears flow.” – I Ching

Tears of blood stain the cheeks of my Madonna,
Who did no wrong and yet was forced to see
Her only son crucified upon the cross of man’s ignorance.
Who can know the burden that she carried on her way to Calvary?
Who can know the depths of her travail?
Imagine, if you can, that final tragic scene:

The hill, the guards, the crown of thorns, the prisoner
struggling to his fated destination, the jeering crowd, the
spikes, the cross, the growing gloom, the silhouette with
arms outstretched, the words of absolution.

Can you hear the groaning of the firmaments as earth prepares to
give him up?

Can you taste the bitterness upon the lips of those who have
betrayed him?

Can you see the heavenly descent of cherubim and seraphim
coming to receive him?

Can you feel those tears of blood that fell upon the multitudes and
washed away their sins?

Rochester, NY
April 1989

The Rope of Lust

The rope of lust is like a line
Attached to thoughts which seem divine.
It strangles Logic's Golden Rule
And makes of man a beast most cruel.

I long to hold love's crimson rose
But grasp the thorn with which it grows.
A fevered passion burns my heart
For I'm struck down by Cupid's dart.

How many lives this game I've played
As many deaths can ne'er be stayed.
The very thing I crave the most
Is what turned the king into a ghost.

So now I'll bid the world adieu –
This passion play that turns the screw
Which crucifies the best of men
And brings them back to play again.

From Wisdom's chalice I will drink
With faith in Causal Chain's each link.¹
I'll fight delusion's rising tide
Whose siren song is passion's bride

And set my course by freedom's star
Knowing well the path leads far
Into the night where tempests reign
But inch by inch I'll make my gain.

¹ A reference to the Buddhist teaching of Dependent Origination.

And if a moment's thoughtless glance
Inclines my flesh toward sweet romance
I'll summon forth with clear recall
The ditch awaiting mankind's fall.

This thought alone will set me free
From bondage to eternity
And when the inner battle's won
I'll hear the gods proclaim, "Well done! Well done!"

On the road, USA
1989

Hansīka²

To Hansīka on her 60th

Hansīka is truth, knowledge, bliss divine –
 It's all in a name, it's all in a rhyme.
 How did she forget the root of her noun?
 She likes to play games, she thinks she's a clown.
 I once saw Hansīka playing "Maori" with sticks;
 She tossed one to me, it's one of her tricks.
 I didn't respond quite quickly enough,
 But that's part of the rules, there's no time to bluff.
 No doubt, Hansīka's a sudra, she's not upper crust.
 She works for a living, a nine-to-five bust.
 But Hansīka's got something that goes beyond art:
 She gives all she's got, cause Hansīka's got heart.
 Now Hansīka's got sixty years under her belt;
 She's seen how dreams vanish, how visions can melt.
 And Hansīka's not looking for fortune or fame,
 But at your request, she's still good for a game.

Satchidananda Ashram
 Virginia, 1990

² **Hansīka:** a Sanskrit name derived from the word "hamsa" (swan), the vehicle of Brahma; metaphorically, universal soul or supreme being, possessing the power of separating Soma from water (i.e., supreme discrimination); destroyer of ignorance; associated with royalty; beautiful or graceful like a swan.

Return

To Swami Satchidananda

He comes and goes as he pleases,
Crossing the great ocean and the perilous heights.
This is the sign of return:
After sickness comes health, after darkness comes light.
Should one applaud the day?
Should one lament the night?
The entire universe is his home.

Satchidananda Ashram
Virginia, 1990

Bojjhanga Sutta

Discourse on the Seven Factors of Enlightenment
(translated from the Mahāparitta Pāli)

To the Venerable U Revata, for his help with the translation

The factors of enlightenment consist of seven dhammas,³
Which have the power to vanquish Māra's⁴ army
And eradicate all the suffering of those beings who are
transmigrating in samsāra.⁵

Having practiced and realized these seven dhammas,
Those beings liberated themselves from the three realms⁶
And attained the birthless, ageless, deathless state,
Where sickness, fear and danger reign no more.

Endowed with innumerable benefits and virtues,
The recitation of the Bojjhanga Sutta is medicinal for both body
and mind. Let us now recite this sutta:

The Seven Factors of Enlightenment are Mindfulness, Investigation
of the Dhamma⁷, Energy, Rapture, Tranquility, Concentration and
Equanimity.
All seven factors were well expounded by the All-Seeing Sage.⁸

When developed and frequently practiced,
These factors lead to the direct realization of the Four Noble

³ **Dhamma**: in this context, thing or principle.

⁴ **Māra**: the Evil One, comparable to Satan or Lucifer in Christianity.

⁵ **Samsāra**: the ongoing process of being born, ageing and dying, which occurs repeatedly over countless lifetimes.

⁶ **Three realms**: the three main divisions of the thirty-one realms of existence, i.e., the sensual realm(s), the fine-material realm(s), and the immaterial realm(s).

⁷ **Dhamma** (with a capital “D”): the teaching or doctrine of the Buddha, universal law, ultimate truth, the Four Noble Truths.

⁸ **All-Seeing Sage**: a reference to the Buddha.

Truths,⁹ to path knowledge¹⁰ and to the attainment of Nibbāna.¹¹
By this declaration of truth, may you be always well.

At one time, the Venerable Mahā Moggallāna and the Venerable Mahā Kassapa¹² were sick, suffering and in pain.
The Blessed One,¹³ seeing their condition,
Proceeded to expound the Seven Factors of Enlightenment to them.
The two elders were delighted and rejoiced in his words;
At that very moment, each was liberated from his illness.
By this declaration of truth, may you be always well.

Once, even the King of Dhamma¹⁴ was afflicted with an illness.
Then the Elder Cunda was asked to recite that same discourse, with
due reverence.
Having delighted in that recitation,
The Blessed One recovered from his illness.
By this declaration of truth, may you be always well.

Just as the defilements, eradicated by path knowledge,
Can rise again no more, in like manner
These ailments were overcome by those three great sages.
By this declaration of truth, may you be always well.

Pa-Auk Forest Monastery
Mawlamyine, Myanmar
February 2003

⁹ **Four Noble Truths:** the central teaching of the Buddha.

¹⁰ **Path knowledge:** the first of two insight knowledges that function as the core of the enlightenment experience.

¹¹ **Nibbāna:** the cessation of suffering and the goal of all Theravada Buddhists.

¹² **Venerables Mahā Moggallāna and Mahā Kassapa:** two famous disciples of the Buddha.

¹³ **The Blessed One:** the Buddha.

¹⁴ **King of Dhamma:** another reference to the Buddha.

Methuselah

One step at a time,
 Old Methuselah walked in concord with the ancient law.
 He had no access to the internet,
 No need for firewalls or anti-virus protection,
 Knew nothing of gigabytes, memory sticks or virtual reality.
 As he approached old age and bones grew brittle, he slowed his pace
 But did not surrender his faith;
 What he lost in strength, he gained in grace.
 If only we could be like him, content with little,
 Moving one step at a time with conviction.

Whom can we honour if not the aged?
 Whom can we trust if not the wise?
 How many lives are lost moving down the fast lane,
 Going God knows where?
 How many battles fought because of too much ambition?

How can we buy what we cannot sell?
 How can we sell what we cannot buy?
 Who can stop the clock,
 Undo the blunders of the past,
 Or bend the future from its fated course?

Truly, we are fixed in stone.
 But lo, the stone dissolves.
 Soon it will be nothing but sand.

Pa-Auk Forest Monastery
 Mawlamyine, Myanmar
 October 2006

U Subhūti

He draws his sword
And cuts through empty space.
He takes up the great burden
But it is not heavy.
He speaks
But is not heard.
He enters the market place
And dwells in seclusion.
He leaves home and family
But has nowhere to go.
He renounces the low life
And lives on offerings and leftovers.
He meets his debt
But does not know how to pay it.
He looks up into the heavens
And is blinded by the sun.
His face shines
Yet he sees no one.

Pa-Auk Forest Monastery
Mawlamyine, Myanmar
2006

Rules

He follows the rules,¹⁵
 But the rules do not follow him.
 He conforms to the order,
 But his mind rebels.
 The jewel he seeks, he cannot find,
 Neither in the folds of his robe
 Nor the lip of his bowl.¹⁶
 What good to seek for non-essentials
 When the essential is waiting to embrace us.
 Go to her and surrender yourself –
 Let go the mind that seeks the way.
 Dissolve into the present moment
 And the timeless bliss of her sweet embrace.
 Listen closely and she will tell you what to do:
 Let go! Let go! Cease to grasp! Let go!

Pa-Auk Forest Monastery
 Mawlamyine, Myanmar
 June 2007

¹⁵ **Rules:** the rules of discipline for a Buddhist monk.

¹⁶ **Robe and bowl:** basic requisites of a Buddhist monk.

Bhikkhu¹⁷ Beware!

Beware! Beware! Bhikkhu beware!
 For what we say will come to fare –
 A tune that burns each note upon the khandhas¹⁸ mortal frame,
 A song we sing of suffering, for anyone we call a name;
 For what we say is duly sung,
 As courts of law judge cases one by one;
 Then let each note from kamma's¹⁹ fateful song
 Be rightly sung and not be wrong,
 For careless words that stain a bhikkhu's face
 Lack wisdom, virtue, mindfulness and grace.

Pa-Auk Forest Monastery
 Mawlamyine, Myanmar
 September 2007

¹⁷ **Bhikkhu**: a Buddhist monk.

¹⁸ **Khandhas**: in this context, the five constituent groups of existence that comprise a being's body and mind, i.e. materiality (the physical body), feeling, perception, mental formations (volition) and consciousness.

¹⁹ **Kamma** (karma in Sanskrit): the law of moral causation.

Song of Sharing

(adapted from a popular Sri Lankan song)

With red and white roses
And lilies offered to the shrine,
The devotees with faith unwavering,
Cling not to “me and mine.”

As birds upon the wing
Move freely through the sky,
So ants seek refuge in their anthills
And squirrels their tree-homes ply.

Such is nature’s law: Rains fall,
Flowing ownerless across the land
And sing a song of sharing
For peace sublime and grand.

Sri Lanka Buddhist Monastery
Brisbane, Australia
April 2008



Artwork by I Wayan Tunas

Chinese New Year's Poem

To live in peace, we must forgive,
As we would be forgiven.
By forgiving, we release the heart
And receive the gift we've given.

Two wrongs indeed don't make a right,
But one right can right two wrongs;
This is heaven's golden mean
And the sweetest of all songs.

It soothes the raging beast within
And brings an end to war;
It overcomes all enmity
And leads to freedom's shore.

So easily the debt is dropped
The moment we forgive
And set ourselves a higher norm –
To live and to let live.

Then peace will reign throughout the land,
And harmony's bright ray
Will shine within our hearts again
On Chinese New Year's Day.

Chinese New Year's Day
Bodhi-Heart Sanctuary
Penang, Malaysia
February 14, 2010

A Vesak²⁰ Thought for the Coming Year

It is not the robe that makes the monk,
 But the monk who makes the robe.
 His needle and thread are one-pointedness and strong determination.
 His robe material is this human birth,
 Its stitching is the Eightfold Path,²¹
 And the dye is Dhamma-Vinaya.²²
 His girding-belt is insight-knowledge,
 His sitting cloth is faith,
 His razor is renunciation,
 His water strainer, insects' grace.
 His umbrella is dispassion,
 His alms bowl, sense-restraint,²³
 And the finished robe, Nibbāna
 Is the ending of all taints.
 Such a robe indeed, adorns the monk who wears it well,
 And he in turn becomes a field of merit
 For all the world, where men and devas²⁴ dwell.

Bodhi-Heart Sanctuary
 Penang, Malaysia
 May 2010

²⁰ **Vesak**: a festival traditionally held on the full-moon day of May, when Buddhists around the world celebrate the birth, enlightenment and passing away of the Buddha.

²¹ **Eightfold Path** (i.e., the Noble Eightfold Path): the path that leads to the realization of Nibbāna.

²² **Dhamma-Vinaya**: the combined teaching and disciplinary code of the Buddha, which provides the training and moral structure of the (Theravada) monk's life.

²³ **Girding-belt, sitting cloth, razor, water strainer, umbrella, and alms bowl**: along with his robe (and needle and thread), the basic requisites of the bhikkhu.

²⁴ **Devas**: heavenly beings; angels.

Angulimāla and the Buddha



Artwork by Ketut Murtana

Angulimāla Verses

(translated from the Theragāthā 866-91, with the exception of the second and third stanzas, which have been adapted to avoid repetition)

To Sayalay Daw Sobhana Dhammarakkhita

Who once did live in negligence
And then is negligent no more,
Shines like the moon freed from a cloud,
Which brightens earth's broad shore.

Who overcomes the evil deeds he did,
By doing wholesome deeds instead,
Shines like a beacon in the night,
By which mankind is safely led.

The youthful bhikkhu who devotes himself
With great effort to the Buddha's way,
Shines like the rising sun at dawn,
Which drives the darkness of the night away.

Let my enemies hear this discourse on the Dhamma²⁵ then,
Let them be devoted to the Buddha's way,
And let them wait on those good folk,
Who lead others to the Dhamma day by day.

And let my enemies give ear from time to time,
To hear the words of those who teach them to forbear,
Of those who speak in praise of kindness,
And having heard, may they in turn be kind and fair.

For surely they would not wish to harm me then,
Nor would they think to take another's life;

²⁵ **Dhamma** (with a capital "D"): the teaching or doctrine of the Buddha, universal law, ultimate truth, the Four Noble Truths.

So to those who would protect all beings, both weak and strong,
May they attain the peace that overcomes all strife.

Conduit makers guide the water's flow;
Fletchers straighten out the arrow's shaft;
Carpenters straighten timber's warps and bends,
But a straightened mind is wisdom's greatest craft.

There are some who tame with beatings,
Some with goads and some with whips they bring,
But I was tamed by one who leaves
No mark of rod nor weapon's sting.

“Harmless” is the name I bore,
Though I was dangerous in the past;
But the name I bore is true today –
I hurt no living being at last.

And though I once lived as a bandit fierce,
Bearing “Angulimāla”²⁶ as my name,
One whom the great flood swept along,
I took refuge in the Buddha and was thereby freed from blame.

And though I once was bloody-handed,
Named for all the fingers I had cut,
See the refuge I have found –
The bond of being has now been cut.

And though I once did many deeds
That could have led to rebirth in a woeful state,
Their kammic fruit has reached me now,
And so I eat debt-free, untouched by greed or hate.

²⁶ **Angulimāla**: literally “garland of fingers,” which Angulimāla wore around his neck, to remind himself of the number of people he had killed. It is said that when Angulimāla met the Buddha, he had already collected 999 fingers (one from each of his victims) and was seeking to complete his collection with a thousandth finger.

They indeed are fools and have no sense,
 Who give themselves to negligence,
 But those of wisdom guard their virtue well
 And know that virtue is their best defense.

And thus I say, “Do not give way to negligence,
 Nor in sensual pleasures be remiss,
 But meditate with diligence,
 So as to reach the highest bliss.”

So welcome to that choice of mine
 And let it stand above the rest;
 Of all the dhammas known to man,
 I have come upon the very best.

So welcome to that choice of mine
 And let it stand, it was not ill wrought;
 I have attained the triple knowledge²⁷
 And done everything the Buddha taught.

I stayed in forests, at the roots of trees,
 And dwelt in mountain caves alone,
 But in those days, no matter where I went,
 I had not arrived at my true home.

Now I rest and rise in happiness,
 And happily I spend my time,
 For now I’m free from Māra’s snare;
 Ah, to me the Buddha was so merciful and kind!

A Brahmin²⁸ noble by descent,
 On both sides high and purely born,

²⁷ **Triple knowledge** (or threefold knowledge): (1) remembrance of former lives, (2) the ability to see beings passing away and being reborn according to their kamma, and (3) the extinction of all mental defilements.

²⁸ **Brahmin**: a member of the upper caste in India, traditionally assigned to the priesthood.

Today I am the master's son,
An heir in Dhamma of the perfect norm.

Free from craving, without grasping,
With guarded senses, well restrained,
Spewn forth the root of future suffering,
The end of taints have I attained.

In sooth, the master has been served by me full well,
And all the Buddha's bidding has been done.
The heavy load I bore so long is finally dropped,
And the ending of samsāra finally won.

Centre de Meditation Vipassana Sakyamuni
Saint-Agnon, France
July 2010

Truth

He aligns his mind with truth
 And removes the crookedness from his character.
 Purified of pretense and duplicity,
 He goes his way, independent of the many.
 Unswayed by others' points of view,
 He does not lose the balance of his mind.
 Just as the compass needle,
 Aligned with earth's magnetic field,
 Wavers neither to the east nor west,
 So he whose mind is in accord with Dhamma
 Wavers neither to the past nor future,
 Nor does he cling to notions such as good or bad, or right or wrong.
 Thus he bides his time, mindful and equanimous,
 With faith firmly grounded in the Middle Way,²⁹
 And asks for nothing more.

Na Uyana Aranya
 Pansiyagama, Sri Lanka
 November 2011

²⁹ **Middle Way**: a synonym for the Noble Eightfold Path; the path that avoids extremes and therefore leads directly to Nibbāna.

At Pātimokkha³⁰

With roving eye and simulated smile,
 He tosses his eyeglass case into the air.
 Who could fail to see the case's rise and fall,
 Born of the shamelessness of such a dare?
 Caught by its tail, the two-faced viper will no doubt bite,
 And bitten, we will badly fare.

Oh Mahā Kassapa,³¹ leader of the Sangha,
 We have been bitten and are in need of your care.
 Oh Mahā Kassapa, guardian of the Dhamma,
 Perfect in virtue and supremely austere
 – You who could not be bought at any price –
 Where have you gone, oh where?

Na Uyana Aranya
 Pansiyagama, Sri Lanka
 November 2011

³⁰ **Pātimokkha**: in this context, the formal recitation of the bhikkhu's disciplinary code, which traditionally occurs in Theravada Buddhist monasteries, on the full-moon and new-moon days of the month.

³¹ **Mahā Kassapa**: one of the great disciples of the Buddha, known for his strict discipline and asceticism.

Unfinished Dhammapada

(translated from the Dhammapada)

1. The Twin Verses

1. Mind is the forerunner of all conditioned states,³² mind is their leader, mind-made are they. If one speaks or acts with an impure mind, suffering follows him, even as the wheel follows the hoof of the draught-ox.
2. Mind is the forerunner of all conditioned states, mind is their leader, mind-made are they. If one speaks or acts with a pure mind, happiness follows him as surely as his ever-present shadow.
3. “He abused me, he struck me, he defeated me, he robbed me” – in those who harbor such thoughts, hatred is not appeased.
4. “He abused me, he struck me, he defeated me, he robbed me” – in those who do not harbor such thoughts, hatred is appeased.
5. Hatred is never overcome by hatred in this world. Only by non-hatred is hatred overcome – this is an eternal law.
6. Those who live by hatred have forgotten that we all must one day die. Those who know this truth settle their quarrels.
7. Who lives contemplating the attractive and the lovely, with senses unrestrained, immoderate in food, indolent and dissipated, him verily does Māra overcome, even as the wind blows down a weakened tree.

³² **Conditioned states:** in this context, the physical and mental states of living beings, which can be either pleasant or unpleasant, depending on the wholesomeness or unwholesomeness of their previous actions.

8. Who lives contemplating the repulsive and the ugly, with senses restrained, moderate in food, firm in faith and energy, him can Māra never overcome, even as the wind cannot blow down a rocky peak.
9. Who wears the bhikkhu's yellow robe, yet bears the stain of passion, devoid of self-control and truthfulness – such a one is not worthy of the yellow robe.
10. Having purged himself of passion's stain and kept the moral precepts well, endowed with self-control and truthfulness – such a one indeed is worthy of the yellow robe.
11. Taking the unessential as essential and the essential as unessential, they enter the field of wrong thought and never arrive at the essential.
12. Knowing the essential as essential and the unessential as unessential, they enter the field of right thought and thereby arrive at the essential.
13. Just as the rain penetrates an ill-thatched roof, even so does lust penetrate the untrained mind.
14. Just as the rain cannot penetrate a well-thatched roof, even so is lust unable to penetrate a well-trained mind.
15. Here he grieves, hereafter he grieves, in this world and the next, the evil-doer grieves. He grieves and is afflicted, recollecting the impurity of his own past deeds.
16. Here he rejoices, hereafter he rejoices, in this world and the next, the well-doer rejoices. He rejoices and is uplifted, recollecting the purity of his own past deeds.

17. Here he's tormented, hereafter he's tormented, in this world and the next, the evil-doer is tormented. The thought, "Evil have I done" torments him, and he's tormented even more when he's born in states of woe.
18. Here he delights, hereafter he delights, in this world and the next, the well-doer delights. The thought, "Good have I done" delights him, and he delights even more when he's born in states of bliss.
19. However much he recites the sacred texts, but acts not accordingly, that heedless man is like a cowherd who counts the kine of others – he has no share in the blessings of the holy life.³³
20. Though little he recites the sacred texts, but acts according to the teaching, forsaking lust, hatred and delusion, and clinging naught to this world or any other – such a one, with knowledge true and mind well-freed, shares indeed the blessings of the holy life.

2. Heedfulness

21. Heedfulness is the path to the Deathless,³⁴ heedlessness is the path to death. The heedful do not die, the heedless are as if already dead.
22. Having clearly understood this truth, the wise rejoice in heedfulness and find their pleasure in the resort of the noble ones.
23. Ever meditative and steadfast in effort, these wise ones experience Nibbāna, the supreme security from bondage.

³³ **Holy life:** the life a monk or layperson who observes celibacy.

³⁴ **The Deathless:** a synonym for Nibbāna.

24. Who lives in Dhamma, with actions pure, energetic and mindful, heedful and restrained, his fame ever grows.

4. Flowers

49. Just as a bee gathers nectar and flies away without harming the flower or disturbing its color or scent, so should the sage go on his alms round through the village.

18. Impurities

239. Even as the smith refines silver, so, little by little, gradually, moment by moment does the wise man fine away his defilements.

Colombo, Sri Lanka
December 2011

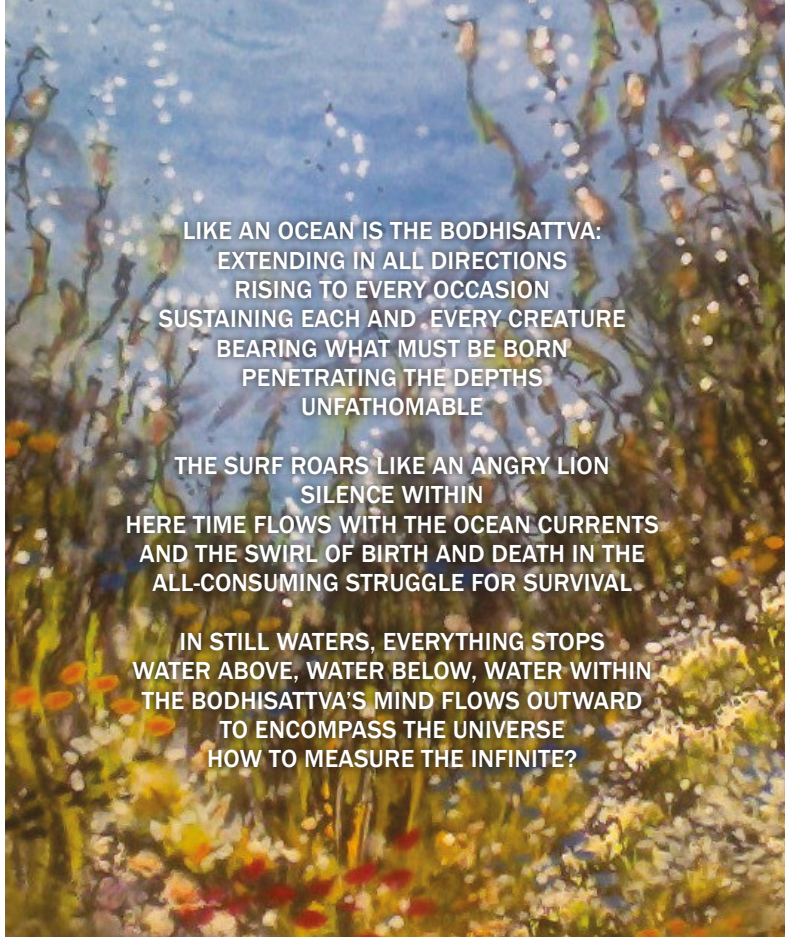
China

If the Chinese could see where they were headed,
They would go back to Confucianism.
If they could see the consequence of where they were headed,
They would go back to Taoism.
If they could see the cause of where they were headed,
They would go back to Buddhism.

Green Valley Forest Refuge
Sebastopol, California
July 2012

Sagara³⁵

To the Venerable Ariyadhamma Mahathera



LIKE AN OCEAN IS THE BODHISATTVA:
 EXTENDING IN ALL DIRECTIONS
 RISING TO EVERY OCCASION
 SUSTAINING EACH AND EVERY CREATURE
 BEARING WHAT MUST BE BORN
 PENETRATING THE DEPTHS
 UNFATHOMABLE

THE SURF ROARS LIKE AN ANGRY LION
 SILENCE WITHIN
 HERE TIME FLOWS WITH THE OCEAN CURRENTS
 AND THE SWIRL OF BIRTH AND DEATH IN THE
 ALL-CONSUMING STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL

IN STILL WATERS, EVERYTHING STOPS
 WATER ABOVE, WATER BELOW, WATER WITHIN
 THE BODHISATTVA'S MIND FLOWS OUTWARD
 TO ENCOMPASS THE UNIVERSE
 HOW TO MEASURE THE INFINITE?

Artwork by ginty

Green Valley Forest Refuge
 Sebastopol, California
 August 2012

³⁵ **Sagara**: Sinhala for ocean.

* **Bodhisattva**: one who has resolved to become a fully enlightened Buddha.



Artwork by Ketut Martana

Beeing Time

To Ron and Joanne

I think that I shall never see
A poem as lovely as a bee
That spreads its shining wings in flight
And brings to all such great delight.

In valleys greened with redwood trees,
The wondrous bee dost shake its knees,
To pollinate the world to date
And open Eden's garden gate.

In meadows filled with wild flowers,
The buzzing bee dost pass its hours,
To warm the hearts of passers by
With a sun-filled bee-time lullaby.

From flower to flower the bee dost light,
As happy as a woodland sprite.
It leaves each blossom as it found,
As it makes its way on alms-bee-round.

From lilac to the honeysuckle,
The busy bee in flight dost hustle.
From lavender to Queen Anne's lace,
It never seems to lose its pace.

On summer days that languid lie,
Our busy bee is never shy,
To seek the undiscovered bloom
Or gnarled branch draped with perfume.

Within the heart of love's sweet rose,
Our gentle bee a harvest sows,

So that the rose may bloom again
In rocky cleft and forest glen.

It's not a GMO-type ploy
That brings the world such scented joy,
But nature's gift to all who thrive
Upon the fruits of the beehive.

So let us thank the humble bee,
Who gives its life in service free,
And in our hearts the words enshrine
A big "BEE HERE NOW" for all bee-kind.

Green Valley Forest Refuge
Sebastopol, California
September 2012

What Would Beauty Be?

What would beauty be without desire?
The rose without its scent,
The plan with nothing to aspire,
The heart unbound that yearns for none,
The love unconsummate,
The doing left undone.
True perfection it would be,
A beauty unconstrained and free,
Resplendent and beyond compare,
For beauty would be everywhere.

Pa-Auk Forest Monastery
Mawlamyine, Myanmar
December 2012

Woman's Liberation Revisited

Their father was an old-fashioned man,
While their mother was a modern woman.
Their father sacrificed himself for the family,
While their mother sacrificed the family for herself.
Who's to say if one was right and the other wrong?
Listen to the children crying in their beds at night
In the homes of broken families
And decide for yourself.

Pa-Auk Forest Monastery
Mawlamyine, Myanmar
December 2012

Final Words

A Reflection on Death

For all our presumption,
We are but pawns in the service of King Death,
Players on an empty stage,
Conspirators of the dead, imprisoned by our fears and dreams.
Oh youth, how can you be so blind?
How can you not see the terminus of life's highway, where all
must exit?
How can you not see the graves of your parents and grandparents,
and the hand of death reaching up to pull you in?
How can you not see death's vacant stare in the eyes of your
beloved or the seed of death entering her womb at the time of
conception?
How can you not see death's claim upon the child you call your
own, and upon the children of that child, and the children of its
children?
How can you not see the inescapable conclusion to life's journey
and the providence of its one immutable truth: whoever is born
must die?
How can you not see the flower of life fading and the seed of
death sprouting within?

Pa-Auk Forest Monastery
Mawlamyine, Myanmar
February 2013



Artwork by Dr. Yudhy Winata

Poems to my Sisters in the Holy Life

I. Snow

To Snow

Beneath the heavy blanket of snow,
 The germ of life, slumbering in fertile soil.
 Warmth of springtime sun transforms the snow to drips of thaw
 That trickle down into the soil and prod the seed to life,
 Making it become what it was not.
 At first, the infant seedling sprouts in darkness,
 Anchoring itself in what is firm and stable.
 Later, a slender shaft of pale green emerges from the earth,
 Lifting its tender bud up toward the sun.
 Balanced, as it were, on one leg in some primordial asana,
 It reaches up into the heavens and unfolds
 Into a self-created world of form and color,
 Revealing in that instant the glory of its inner perfection.
 To what higher state could any flower aspire?
 To what higher law could any flower conform?
 A fragrance heretofore unknown pervades the universe,
 Rainbows festoon the sky,
 And a thousand bees dance upon its timeless petals.

Pa-Auk Tawya Buddhist University
 Pyin Oo Lwin, Myanmar
 May 2013

II. Prescription

To Sister Gunagavesi

Of causes and conditions, the Great Physician³⁶ taught twenty-four,³⁷
Beginning with root condition, and followed by object condition
and the rest.

Not knowing these twenty-four, worldlings confuse cause and effect,
Mistaking the cause of their disease for its symptoms,
And the symptoms for their cause;
Thus they poison themselves with the wrong medicine.

Knowing both cause and effect, and how they differ,
The Great Physician prescribed the proper course of medicine for
our disease.

With the proper course of medicine, the cause disappears.
When the cause disappears, the symptoms disappear.
When both cause and symptoms disappear, the disease disappears.
When the disease disappears, the patient disappears,
For how could there be a patient without a disease?

Pa-Auk Tawya Buddhist University
Pyin Oo Lwin, Myanmar
May 2013

³⁶ **Great Physician:** an appellation for the Buddha.

³⁷ There are 24 conditions described in the Patthāna, the last book of the Abhidhamma. These conditions explain the occurrence of all conceivable mental and physical phenomena.

III. The Greatest of Gifts

To Sister Paññā Cārī

The greatest of gifts, the joy sublime
Is in giving a gift with a satisfied mind.
The fruit of this gift has the taste of release,
When bondage to clinging and stinginess cease;
So open your heart to whomever you give,
And content you will be and long will you live.

Pa-Auk Tawya Buddhist University
Pyin Oo Lwin, Myanmar
May 2013

Lord of the Ring

No practitioner of martial arts can match the striking power of death;
 None has death's speed;
 None can withstand death's blow.
 In the ring, all who face death are vanquished,
 Consumed by death's relentless fury.
 In the ring, death reigns supreme,
 Crushing his opponents, one after the other, in endless succession.
 When your time comes to face death in the ring, how will you respond?
 Listen to this short verse:

None have ever beaten death at his own game,
 None ever will despite their claim;
 So ask yourself what you will gain
 Within the ring when you are slain,
 For death from life gives scant relief,
 But acts instead more like a thief,
 And death cares not how you might die,
 Nor counts the tears of those who cry.
 In summary, the ills of life death cannot mend,
 But only brings life's painful end,
 And thus, to challenge death within the ring
 Is certainly a most foolish thing.

Oh brother, don't be a fool; get out of the ring!

Pa-Auk Tawya Buddhist University
 Pyin Oo Lwin, Myanmar
 September 2013

Lady

To Aung San Suu Kyi

A treasure among treasures is she who served as faithful wife,
Who built within her house a home secure and free from strife,
But treasured more is she for her unwavering devotion to the
Golden Land,
Outshining even the gilded stupas with her simple elegance and
open hand.
She, whose dedication to the common good is tribute to her
father's name,
Whose humanity and strength of character are unalloyed by
politics or worldly gain.
Oh youth of Myanmar, the jewel within your midst you seek afar
And thereby miss the glorious light of Burma's eastern star,
For true heroism is born within the heart and cannot be bought
or planned.
For proof or this, you need seek no further than the lady of your land.

Pa-Auk Tawya Buddhist University
Pyin Oo Lwin, Myanmar
September 2013

Rhinoceros Tear Sutta³⁸

Shed your tears, oh great horned one. Plunge into the sea of loneliness and desolation.

Have you lost your lover, one who made the snow spirits dance and the wildflowers sing, blooming on the ice shelf of eternity?

Shed your tears and cry for lost horizons and vistas as purple as the dark night of the savannah.

Shed your tears, oh great horned one, for such tears will be your consolation and release – tears that cut like knives and wash into a boundless sea, frozen in the liquid marrow of creation.

Release your deluge, oh great horned one, from the solitary sky,
Upon the parched savannah of this weary round.
Flood the earth with tears that long for liberation,
Pregnant with the final goal of craving's end.

Weep, oh great horned one, as you wander forth across the land,
Weep for what is not yet won.³⁹

Southwest Sangha
San Lorenzo, New Mexico
January 2014

³⁸ **Sutta:** in this context, an ancient verse or quotation; (traditional) knowledge, belief or lore.

³⁹ This poem contains a number of references to the Rhinoceros Horn Sutta of the Sutta Nipata I.3, where the Buddha advises us to forsake the intimacy of friendship (unless we can find a companion equal or superior to ourselves in wisdom and morality) and to “wander alone like a rhinoceros.”

Love's Labor's Loss

What holds you back within this convoluted dream,
Love's labor's loss to taste the god's ambrosial cream,
When all of heaven's joys lie veiled from mortal sight,
Yet beckon love's sweet bloom enfold the emptiness that cloaks
the night?

Canst thou not see the hidden place within love's beating heart,
Where love and lover meld and disappear into a single part?
Then leave all thoughts of nature, God and heaven's joys behind,
And seek that place within the heart where love and truth combine,
To taste the kiss of unborn lips that worship at that shrine,
And drink the draught of timeless bliss in non-creation's wine.

Southwest Sangha
San Lorenzo, New Mexico
February 2014

On Whitman's Dream (Balinese Barong Dance)



Artwork by Wayan Gabrig

On Whitman's Dream

To Michael and Maria

The stream of verse flows freely from the poet's heart,
 Not quite unlike eternity's
 Long dawn of endless consonants,
 To which the flow of vowels a structured measure dost impart –
 Such works that swallow space like fissures in the mind
 And rend time's veil in sceptered phrase
 To conjugate forgotten visions of the blind –
 Denizens of the maze, the self-repeating puzzle,
 Perpetrators of the crime,
 Dressed in coat and tie,
 In straight-jackets which they struggle,
 Strung upon the abacus of asynchronic time,
 Buying time so that it can unravel –
 Here within the labyrinth,
 The muse that seeks but cannot find
 The silent means to end the round
 And split the atom of the mind,
 Like Alexander's two-edged sword
 That cut the Gordian Knot
 Or tribulation's fateful law that turned to salt the wife of Lot.
 Oh, stop therefore this useless rhyme,
 As useless as the chirping crickets
 Or croaking frogs that fill the night
 With cacophony and render sound
 Into arboreal flight.
 At dawn the peacock cries.
 Two orbs burn brightly in a golden sphere
 And burn in splendor as they disappear,
 And a thousand-armed Kwanyin⁴⁰

⁴⁰ **Kwanyin:** (Chinese Mahayana) the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, somewhat informally translated as the God or Goddess of Mercy.

Dissolves into a million gods
That merge and separate in rhythmic grace
And dance their timeless dance of empty space;
And as they drift together and apart,
A foreign language contradicts their ancient art,
Which leaves all thought in dreams of disarray
And beckons like an echo,
Calling with a passionate voice
To eat forbidden fruit on judgment day.
Words fail the poet –
They always have and always will.

Wood Valley Temple
Big Island, Hawaii
April 2014



Artwork by Erwin Bastomi

Jimi

To Colin

“Purple Haze, Jesus saves,” sang Jimi,
 But how could he have known that time would change the lyrics to
 his song,
 And irony would mock the meaning of his former words
 As if by twist of fate to prove him wrong,
 That he himself would soon become the sacrificial lamb,
 The truth by which he lived engulfed in treachery and sham.

No, Jimi was not the first in line to be led down the primrose path,
 Nor will he be the last,
 As long as there are hypocrites and worshipers of the golden calf;
 And although the holy covenant foretells a promised land,
 The tragedy of Jimi’s life begs questions that still stand:

Do we have to die in order to be saved?
 Is that the meaning of the cross?
 Must we follow Jimi to the grave,
 To be martyred for another’s loss?
 And where and how did the problem begin –
 Isn’t that what some people call the “original sin?”

Those who know don’t speak.
 Those who speak don’t know.⁴¹
 Was the Buddha only deceiving us then?
 Was his Dhamma nothing but a passing show?
 It all depends on one’s perspective:
 Don’t try to speak unless you’re really dead,
 And if you want to kill the Buddha,⁴²
 Then kill Jimi instead.

Green Valley Forest Refuge
 Sebastopol, California
 September 2014

⁴¹ **“He who knows does not speak. He who speaks does not know:”** a verse from the Tao Te Ching by Lao Tzu, a sage and poet of ancient China.

⁴² The phrase “kill the Buddha” comes from a famous koan attributed to the Chinese Zen Master Lin Chi: “If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him.”



Artwork by ginty

Tree Ode

To James “MacD”, Defender of Trees

A tree, a tree, pray tell, oh tree, how shall I honor thee – with loaf of bread or flask of wine, in book of verse or song – to which of these most favored means does the honored task belong?

Quoth the tree: “Eat my fruit, take shelter in my shade – if you wish to honor me, that’s how the honor’s paid.”

And for the sake of industry, may I also turn thee into pulp and paper?

Quoth the tree: “Nevermore.”

But oh, fair tree, as Adam was to Eden, so am I to thee, for God created man to have dominion over trees. And if thou serveth not when thou couldst render service unto me, oh then, pray tell, what good is it to be a tree?

Quoth the tree: “Cut me down and you will see.”

But having cut, have I not sinned?

Quoth the tree: “Become a tree, the answer lies within.”

And if I do become a tree, oh then I fear what will become of me?

The tree laughed and shook its leafy boughs,
 The wind whispered secrets in my ears,
 And soon a sense of woodland peace allayed my unfound fears,
 The heartwood of my mind grew still and calm,
 Within my breast I felt the pulse-beat of an ancient earthen psalm,
 And in that sacred moment, for one second in eternity,
 I became a tree.

But still, one final question lingers, and I wonder what the truth might be,

For the tree is silent now and seems it does not want to answer me:

Was I the tree,

Or was it that the tree was me?

Green Valley Forest Refuge
 Sebastopol, California
 September 2014

Anicca⁴³

C'est la vie, sabbe sankhāra anicca,⁴⁴ que sera sera –
 “This is what but what it is,” the teacher said to me.
 C'est la vie, sabbe sankhāra anicca, I see but do not see –
 Such is life, impermanent, whate'er will be, will be.
 C'est la vie, sabbe sankhāra anicca, que sera sera –
 Whate'er begins will surely end, how could I not foresee?
 C'est la vie, sabbe sankhāra anicca, the teacher made his plea –
 “Stop talking and stop thinking, and the truth shall set you free.”
 C'est la vie, sabbe sankhāra anicca, que sera sera –
 And now we've reached the end, my friend, of this our little spree –
 Of c'est la vie, sabbe sankhāra anicca, of que sera and me.

International Vipassana Meditation Centre
 Colombo, Sri Lanka
 November 2014

⁴³ Anicca (Pāli): impermanence; the Buddhist doctrine of impermanence.

⁴⁴ Sabbe sankhāra anicca (Pāli): All conditioned things are impermanent.

The Tao of Shit

“The more you stir it, the more it stinks.” – Brazilian proverb

The more that you stir it, the more it will stink –
 The higher it’s piled, the deeper it sinks –
 The more you proclaim it, the less that you know –
 The greater the load, the more pompous the show –

When you throw it, it splatters –
 When you crush it, like jam it spreads out –
 When you fart, there’s always a danger that some might come out –

Go home, and it’s with you as you walk through the door –
 If you don’t have enough, you can always make more –
 Give it to someone you love, and they’ll soon send it back –
 Released in your undies, it leaves a brown track –

When you travel abroad, it can go duty free –
 When it plops in the toilet, it floats in your pee –
 If it runs down your leg, you’ll hope no one’s around –
 To see the brown pool as it forms on the ground –

Now most doctors won’t tell you what every turd knows –
 The more that you eat, the bigger it grows –
 If it plugs up your butt, it can ruin your day –
 And when nature comes calling, it’s best not to delay –

In the end, all turds are a product of cause and effect –
 You have to eat the right foods to gain their respect –
 So don’t blame it on God if your bowels should protest –
 For to him, what we call shit is in fact one holy mess.

The First Hundred Days

“If a person does what is good, he should do it again and again...”
– Dhammapada, verse 118

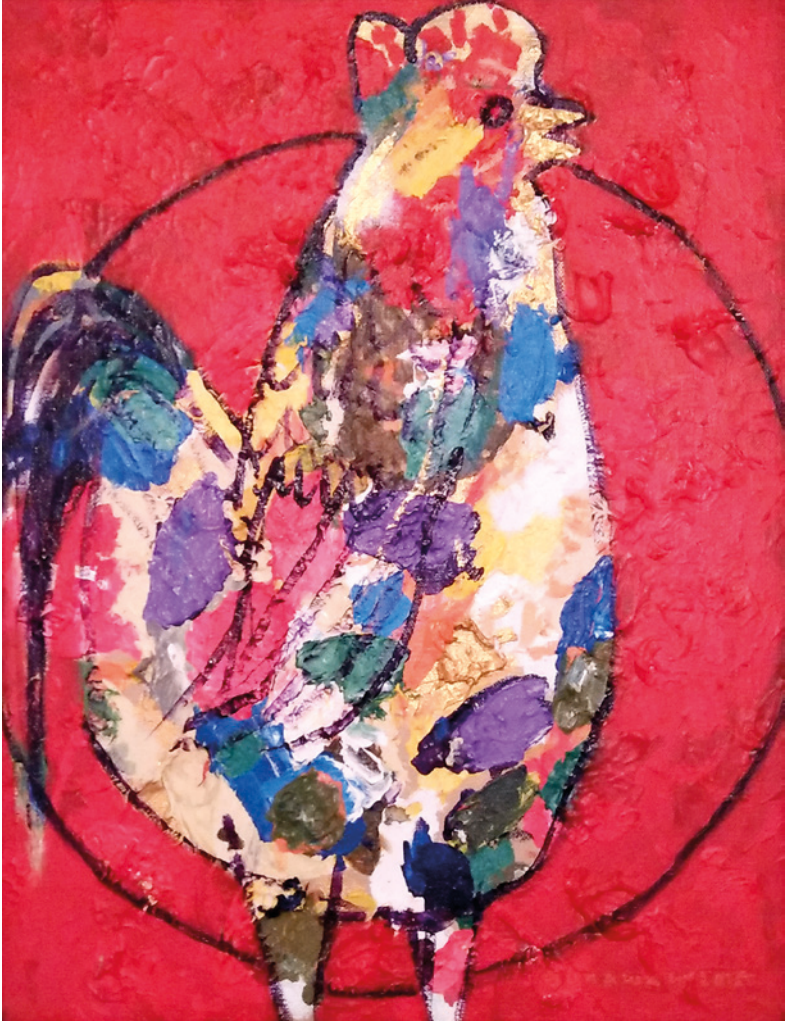
To Maithripala Sirisena

After the first hundred days,
A second hundred days,
And then another.

Is it
The life cycle of a worm or flea,
The duration of an alien flower,
A lunar month on Jupiter,
A half second in a Deva’s hour,
Or ten months in the womb of your mother?

Is it
The stigmata of man’s inherent flaw,
Divine non-intervention,
The repetition of a faulty law,
A foolish predilection,
Or is it merely nature’s way to greet perfection?
If you had to choose, which way would it be?

Devi Mahamaya Temple
Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka
March 2015



Artwork by I Made Gunawan

The Chickens of Global Warming

The chickens of global warming have finally come home to roost,
 And folks in the US are getting well goosed.
 With the heat-waves and draught, and the cost of our vegies,
 You'd think Mother Nature was giving us wedgies.

No doubt the Kentucky Fried Devil will soon join the fun,
 When the broilers line up in the fierce morning sun,
 Pre-cooked in the streets at the Devil's command,
 As our earth is turned into a big frying pan.

While the Congress and lobbies are out making merry,
 Fact is our future looks pretty damn scary.
 Come the end of the day, with these birds of a feather
 Still pecking at pork, we'll all sizzle together.

And now, the land that God graced hangs by one little thread,
 The amber waves withered, the fruited plains bled,
 The wasteland dustbowls growing daily by day,
 With the sun at its height, blazing and ready to slay.

But there's still one ray of hope – let's make a swift ban
 On petroleum products and raping the land.
 Let the meadows go fallow and set the cows free,
 Let the chickens go back to roost in the trees.

Let's get off the grid and collect our rainwater,
 To leave something left for our sons and our daughters.
 Let's stop all our species from kicking the buckets
 And hang the damn politicians by their chicken McNuggets.

International Vipassana Meditation Center
 Colombo, Sri Lanka
 April 2015

Manny

To Manny Pacquiao

With fists ablaze, like Thor's hammer,
 And Jesus as his sure defense,
 Like Samson with the Philistines,
 He proves God's eminence.

Like David when he faced Goliath,
 Undaunted in the battle's heat,
 Endowed with faith, he moves a mountain,
 Much more his hands and feet.

Whatever the odds, they can be changed
 By one who's tried and true,
 Who sets a goal and keeps on going,
 Who gets in the ring and sees the battle through.

Such is he, who fights the good fight,
 And gives all credit to the Master,
 Who doesn't seek ill-gotten gain,
 And thus avoids his soul's disaster.

Much like the Good Samaritan,
 Both rich and poor, he'll gladly greet,
 Or shoot a basket with a friend,
 Or share his food with others on the street,

And when God's grace is finally put to song,
 With a feisty Filipino beat,
 His fellow countrymen will sing along:
 "Manny, Manny, all glory unto thee!"
 And heaven's gate will open at his feet.

International Vipassana Meditation Center
 Colombo, Sri Lanka
 April 2015

Of Touch and Gravity

There are higher pleasures in this world than taste or touch or pull
of gravity,

For on the wings of angels, you can soar beyond the sea,

And outer space is but another name for heaven's inner majesty,

And light, oh light, more glorious than the moonlit night, your
gown and jewelry.

Vajirarama Forest Solitude
Bowalawatta, Kandy, Sri Lanka
April 2015



Artwork by I Ketut Murtana

Mosquito Love

To the Venerable Pa-Auk Sayadaw

Sweet fragrance of dawn –
 Clemency of life's morningtide –
 Perfumed rivulets of dew flowing into an ocean of grass.
 A single note and the silence is broken.
 The changing of the guard:
 Exit the winged marauders of the night,
 Hiding themselves in the receding shadows –
 Those who sought me out under cover of darkness
 To greedily exchange their body fluids with me
 That they might bring forth more of their own kind.
 Mosquito love is such a one-sided affair –
 Their gain is my loss, their pleasure, my pain.
 But that is only one point of view.

Enter the harbingers of the new day –
 Swooping down upon the blood-sated denizens
 Of last night's repast,
 As if in retribution
 For every bite that left its itch and stigma on my mortal frame,
 As if in retribution
 For every mosquito I had ever slain,
 For who knows what I might have been to these mosquitos in the past,
 Or what they might have been to me.
 And who knows if I will stay the same as what I am,
 Or if and when and how I might yet change –
 The slayer slain, the proud brought down,
 The merciless who vainly pleads for mercy?
 And who might then one day in some far-distant time
 Point to me and say, "Ah, I was once like him, and he was once
 like me"?

Suddenly, my mind is shaken from its reverie,
 As swifts and swallows burst into song,
 Diving and soaring like French curves from heaven,
 And pulling me back into the present moment.
 With each aerial maneuver, my strength enters their veins,
 And we are joined together by a common heritage,
 As brothers and sisters of the earth and sky,
 And solar sons and daughters,
 Our unity sanctified by my blood,
 In the light of the morning sun.

And in that light I clearly see
 A new mathematics of the mind and heart,
 Which brings all opposites together,
 Balances polarities,
 And makes whole what was once divided.
 Some call it love, for love unites and judges not,
 And brings together dark and light,
 Male and female, left and right.
 And love forgives and turns its cheek,
 And bitten though a thousand times bares not its teeth,
 But freely gives an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth,
 And one's blood for the blood of another.
 And in that light I further see
 Love conquers all, because it has no enemies,
 That even should I lose my limbs or life itself,
 Love grants me wings that I might rise above hate's tangled mire
 And journey on to happy isles beyond this mortal shore.
 Thus my joy grows ever more complete,
 And on wings of joy, my heart takes flight,
 Returning in full measure what was taken.

Polgasoweeta Aranya, Sri Lanka – Sanur, Bali
 May-June 2015



Artwork by ginty

If you want to be a Christian

*In memory of Clementa C. Pinckney and the others who died
in the June 17th shooting at the Emanuel African Methodist
Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina*

I

If you want to be a Christian,
Then be black.
Show me
That you can rise up from slavery,
That I am your long lost brother,
That we are of one family,
That truth will not stab me in the back.
Pull me out of the morass
And heal the wounds that you have inflicted on me –
Become the Good Samaritan that you are not.

If you want to be a Christian,
Then don't act superior.
Don't think you're better than somebody else,
Just because of the color of that person's skin,
For skin is only as good as the person within,
And I am far brighter than the holes in your soul,
While you are the blight that spreads from heart to heart,
Dividing brother from brother
And father from son.

If you want to be a Christian,
It all begins in the heart,
For as you think, so you become
A child of God or a servant of Satan.
You have the choice
Between darkness and light,
Between love's ray of hope and the beam in your eye –

From the twisted perception
 To the growing occlusion,
 From the rage and the blame
 To the imminent blindness
 Of a fool's cataract.
 You think it's white,
 But your lens is dark with poison.

And yet, you call yourself a Christian,
 But I know what you see -
 It is the color of hypocrisy,
 The grain of pretense and deception,
 That will bring you to the deepest hell
 And consign you to the flames
 Of your own self-begotten hatred.
 But I have forgiven the error of your ways;
 Therefore, my strength is greater than your loss,
 And with it, I will inherit the earth,
 Shining like black diamonds in heaven.

II

No matter how hard you try,
 You can never take away what was originally mine,
 But this kind of logic you will never understand –
 It is as if you had fallen into a deep pit
 And forgotten there is a world outside,
 Beyond the barrenness
 Of this narrow hole in the sand.

One with wisdom would be seeking to escape,
 Leading the others with him
 To the freedom of a better life.
 Instead,
 You spend your days and nights conspiring against me,
 Endeavoring to keep me with you

As your prisoner in this pit,
 As if my life had no significance,
 Other than to serve
 Your every whim and need,
 And that I should be as you would have me be –
 A creature of your dictates,
 Servile and unquestioning,
 Subordinate to you
 In every measure.

But now,
 Because God's Law would grant me
 Equal stature in his sight
 And set me free from your dominion,
 You are plagued by jealousy, and I –
 I have become the object of your spite,
 The scapegoat of your status quo,
 A pawn within your twisted game –
 White above black,
 Dark above light,
 Treachery above shame.

Such is the nature of your jaundiced prayer,
 That for the sake of loathing,
 You would turn the world into a pit
 And cast me in,
 To keep me under your control,
 Downtrodden and distressed,
 I, the slave, and you, the master.

But who are you to choose my fate
 And do to me such things
 As would tarnish e'en the Golden Rule?
 Then let me ask you on this fateful day
 To take a moment and reflect
 On the way you treat your Christian brothers,

And if you know,
Or think you know,
How you will answer for yourself
When the Day of Judgment comes,
Or if you've given thought
To who will testify for you on that same day,
As you sing your psalm of wrath,
Or forgive you – the unforgiving – of your sins,
You who would raise Cain from the dead
And crucify Abel,
Tarring and feathering the Lamb of God,
Pretending to be the Christian that you are not?

Temple of God of Espiritista Cristiana
Urdaneta City, Philippines
July 2015



Artwork by I Ketut Murtana

The Right Mishmash

To Esther

LET THE READER BEWARE: THIS POEM CONTAINS STRONG LANGUAGE,
INCLUDING PROFANITY, WHICH SOME MAY FIND OFFENSIVE

I feel it in my veins
 the blood of Elijah
 the wine
 in the cup at the empty seat⁴⁵
 Jesus on the cross
 the passion
 the passionless
 God the Father
 barefoot on my mother's breast
 green manna sprouting up from between my toes
 how many lifetimes did it take to get to where I am?
 how many more do I have to go?
 seems I've gotten too old for this game
 even my semen is curdling and drying out
 putting holes in my desire like Swiss Gruyère⁴⁶
 how then did I end up a Buddhist monk
 living at a Filipino church in Urdaneta⁴⁷
 eating durian and blended salads
 a Zionist supporter of the Palestinian cause
 and an advocate of equal rights
 for the Filipino water buffalo?
 guess I've always been a bit of a dreamer
 rooting for the underdog-undercow-undercat
 monks for monkeys – that's me
 high on the rock at Nimalava⁴⁸

⁴⁵ A reference to the Jewish custom of setting aside a cup of wine for the Prophet Elijah at the Passover Seder.

⁴⁶ **Swiss Gruyère**: a popular brand of hard cheese from Bern, Switzerland.

⁴⁷ **Urdaneta**: a city in the province of Pangasinan, Philippines.

⁴⁸ **Nimalava**: a monastery in southern Sri Lanka.

meditating with the gibbons at sunrise
 eating the sun as if it were ice cream⁴⁹
 in the eye of the hurricane
 I'm the low pressure center
 reaping the whirlwind
 a right mishmash I am
 walking the talk of the oxymoron clan
 stopping status quos dead in their tracks
 but I keep forgetting
 at this age my memory's not quite what it used to be
 maybe I took too much acid back in the 60's
 but whoa, let's not get into that trip again
 anyway, it's kinda like everything got tossed in the blender together
 now the blender's churning away
 and there's not much time left
 to pull the arrow out⁵⁰
 before samsāra⁵¹ sends me off on another mission
 so at this pivotal point in my life
 when everything seems to depend on everything else
 I'd like to ask only one thing:
 Lord, give me refuge⁵²
 tell me: are Nibbāna⁵³ and God the Father one?
 but don't open your mouth
 don't expose yourself

⁴⁹ A reference to the ancient yogic practice of sungazing.

⁵⁰ **Pull the arrow out:** a reference to the *Cula-Malunkiyovada Sutta*, where the Buddha discusses the importance of removing a poisoned arrow from the body in a timely fashion.

⁵¹ **Samsāra** (*Pāli*): literally “perpetual wandering;” the ongoing process of being born, ageing and dying, which occurs repeatedly over countless lifetimes.

⁵² A reference to the Buddhist Threefold Refuge, the formula for professing one's faith in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha (traditionally repeated three times by the reciter); in this poem, however, the term “Lord” acts as a double entendre, since it could refer either to the Buddha or the Judeo-Christian Lord of the Bible.

⁵³ **Nibbāna** (*Pāli*): literally “blowing out” (as of a candle) or “extinction;” the cessation of suffering. Descriptions include: “extinction of greed, hatred and delusion,” “final deliverance” and “the supreme foundation of truth.”

with your insipid quotes and stock answers
 and your rotten toothy smile
 rotten from chewing too much betel
 hide your light
 as it shines forth
 radiate, but without the splendor
 disappear like the Buddha did from Baka⁵⁴
 but you might reply
 hell with you, I'm an atheist
 and my response to that is
 how can you not believe in God once you've tasted durian?
 (however, some people mistake God for the devil
 and then they think durian is evil
 but actually it comes straight from God)
 still, if you want to go ahead and ask God for an answer –
 to get the last word on Nibbāna
 straight from the horse's mouth –
 what do you think he'll say:
 hey, don't get personal with me?
 oops, there I go again, stepping on the tail of the tiger⁵⁵
 pretty soon there'll be nothing left of me
 but one big bite
 as I'm chewed from here to eternity
 but isn't that what happened to Adam?
 what did we inherit from him other than the bite in the apple?
 blame it on Eve, if you will, for tempting Adam
 but God should have known better when he first made Eve
 who came from Adam's rib, but smelled so much better than he did
 (except when she was menstruating)
 that she was gonna have all the right attributes
 (both software and hardware) in all the right places
 and that Adam would be programmed not to resist

⁵⁴ **Baka**: this is a referene to Baka the Brahma (the supreme deity in one of the Brahma Realms), in the *Brahma-nimantanika Sutta*, who challenged the Buddha to a disappearing contest and, of course, lost.

⁵⁵ A reference to the I Ching, hexagram 10.

so you can't blame Eve for that
besides, she was tempted by Satan
who slithered up to her in the form of a serpent
personally, I think the whole thing was a set-up
but I'm getting a little off track here
the bottom line is
that the Adams lost their booking at the honeymoon suite in the Garden
and had to go east, looking for work
in order to pay the rent on their new apartment
and buy a smartphone for everyone in the family
(not to mention the other basic necessities of life
like health insurance and funeral costs)
which are things they never had to deal with in the Garden
where everything was free – sin-free, cost-free and care-free
kinda makes you wonder, doesn't it
if money didn't have something to do with the original sin
which lay ensconced in the flesh of the apple
or if the knowledge of good and evil wasn't the start
of putting a price-tag on everything
and then incorporating and opening a franchise?
whichever way you look at it, the children ended up paying the price
and it's as true today as it was in Adam's time
the children still craving the indescribable flavor
of that old forbidden apple
unwilling to come to terms with the loss
anyway, kids have always been like that
they always want what they can't have
being forbidden only makes it more attractive
and when they grow up, it's no different
except that they replace some of the toys with real people
and the real apples with artificial ones
but they still end up miserable
craving and pining away for the proverbial and unattainable
something for nothing
kinda like winning the lottery
which almost everyone would like to do
until it actually happens

and all your relatives start moving in
and on top of that you gotta pay 50% in taxes
or winning the most beautiful girl in the world
and then when you kiss her
she turns into a frog
don't they know things never turn out the way we'd like?
if you don't believe me, just ask someone who's died
don't they know there's no free ride to Nibbāna
you gotta take up the cross
you gotta give what you got
and you get what you give back?
don't they know what goes around comes around, la-de-dah
ring around the rosey with your karma?
take it from one who's learned the hard way
but some people never learn
they just keep on singing the same old stupid song
like the guy on the train in Australia
who seemed to have about a three-word vocabulary
I wanted to ask him how he could talk like that
to the woman sitting next to him on the train
but she would have probably told me to fuck off
hmmm, looks like I'm off on a tangent again
anyway, as I was saying
she would have probably told me to fuck off
darn, still on the same thread!
where was I
before I lost my place in the poem
and strayed from the natural order of things?
give me a moment
to get my act together
and sort out the strands
of my fractured mind
hey man, nobody's perfect
what'd ya expect, Shakespeare or somethin?
Buddha or Christ on the cross?
wait a minute, got an idea: I'll do a word search
nah, that ain't gonna work

how about backtracking?
 okay, let's see: fuck off, the woman sitting next to him on the
 train, three-word vocabulary, train in Australia, same old
 stupid song, but some people never learn... ya, that's it
 okay, got it
 anyway, as I was saying
 some people never learn
 they just keep on singing the same old stupid song
 paving the road to hell with their bad intentions
 too proud to admit they might be wrong
 after all, what could be worse
 than to be a fool and proud of it?
 better to humble oneself
 and make amends for the coming disaster
 than to go on erring until it's too late
 waiting for closure
 while the door slams in your face
 and mine, too, if I'm not careful
 fact is, we're all in the same boat together
 so who am I to be preaching to you?
 I better save myself first
 before I try to start saving others
 well, that's a truism if there ever was one
 and here's another – fuck off, fuck off
 darn, the f-word again!
 thought I'd gotten rid of that
 hey, wait a minute
 I thought monks weren't supposed to talk dirty?
 well, ya, that's kinda true
 whataya mean "kinda true"?
 what kinda bullshit is this?
 well, you know, when I first started this poem
 I was feelin' pretty good about it
 kinda like Adam must have felt in the Garden
 you know, before he munched down on the forbidden apple
 I mean, back then, he was as innocent as a lamb

so you see, what I'm tryin' to tell you, fact is
 I had no idea this was gonna happen
 I mean, like the words just kinda popped up
 when I opened my mouth
 besides, this is only a poem
 you know, like Ginsberg, I mean the poet
 remember him?
 ya, whataya tryin' to say?
 well, you know, Ginsberg, you know, the poet
 well, he was an innovator
 and sometimes, you know, when he wrote
 I mean, let me see, uh, damn, forgot what I was gonna say
 oh ya, that's it – from the stream of consciousness
 you know, he used, uh, whataya call it
 I mean, uh, wait a minute, ya, that's it – poetic license
 in order to, uh, you know, uh, whataya call it, to uh...
 you want me to punch you in the mouth?
 just shut the fuck up
 I don't wanna hear your fuckin' excuses
 hey man, jeez, I mean, like I said
 I had no idea this was gonna happen
 I mean, come on, man, gi'me a break
 you know, I mean, everybody makes a mistake
 I mean, jeez, I mean, I didn't really mean it
 ya, sure ya didn't mean it
 then tell me
 who's writin' this fuckin' poem
 Ginsberg's ghost?
 wait, I can explain, just calm down
 calm down, my eye!
 I'm gonna leave this fuckin' poem
 you can go find yourself another reader
 wait, are you sure you want to do that?
 ya, as far as I'm concerned
 you can take your poetry and shove it
 all you poets are nothing but a bunch of faggots, anyways

I'm not gonna pander to your bullshit anymore
 what a crock of shit this is, what a crock of fuckin' bullshit...



oh well, you can't please everybody
 now I gotta find my place in the poem again
 and another reader to boot
 wow, that guy was really angry
 hope he doesn't take it out on his wife
 okay, let's backtrack a bit and see if I can't catch my old thread:
 well, that's a truism if there ever was one...
 ya, that's it
 but right about now I'm gettin' a bit tired
 and fed-up with this poem
 so let's take a break
 we can come back to it later
 no way, Jose; you want a break, first finish the poem
 jeez, what a dictator!
 as if the last guy wasn't enough of a pain
 now I gotta deal with my own ego game...
 well, that's a truism if there ever was one
 and here's another – no Walt Whitman am I
 I'm just too aware of all my mistakes
 like the prodigal son
 who put all his eggs into too many baskets
 and fell from grace again and again
 who would have thought
 after forty years, I'd still be wandering
 with not much to show for my time on the road
 but a face full of wrinkles, parched by the sun
 or in the end
 that death should be the final victor
 when all we hold most dear in life
 is swiftly swept away
 oh, vanity of vanities
 and shame on me
 for all the good I'd left undone
 so here I sit, my medicine half-swallowed

a covenant unkept
 the promised land all but forgotten
 and I, not knowing whom to trust
 which path to take
 or what the roll of dice will bring
 in karma's wake
 am not what I have been, or am, or will become
 for I am what I am not
 and in that state, doubt rears its ugly head
 and morphs into a thousand demons in the night
 hell's merchants mocking me
 and laughing at my plight
 plaguing me
 as the cat would plague the mouse it caught
 shouting gross obscenities
 and cursing me for fun
 and yet... and yet...
 despite the demons' din and sway
 their hell-bent ways
 and frenzied fray upon my senses
 throughout the night, I hear another –
 a voice that rings above the rest
 “oh no it doesn't,” so they say
 “our voice is perfect as it is, and that is why there is none better”
 “oh yes it does,” I do protest
 “one voice rings clear above the rest”
 a voice as clear as living waters
 flowing freely through the mountain rent
 cascading down like thunder from the heavens
 resounding with a mighty resonance
 is it man or god
 or the product of an apparition?
 or is it naught
 but the voice of one who cries
 for the sake of man's redemption
 who cries indeed for all living beings
 caught in the cycle of birth and death

that they might waken from the night
 to the dawning of a newborn day
 and then that voice cries out again
 calling out for peace on earth, goodwill to men
 and bearing witness to the light:

“make straight the path
 the middle way⁵⁶
 that leads directly to Nibbāna”

and then I pray
 for the second time:
 Lord, give me refuge
 be an island unto me
 for truth is an island
 and truth is one
 and truth is three
 the holy trinity times two:
 Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha⁵⁷
 Father, Son
 and the Holy Spirit
 perched in my heart
 in the cage of my breast
 cooing ever so gently
 yes, the caged bird sings⁵⁸
 but the bird is free
 I just couldn't see it

⁵⁶ **Middle way**: the path between the two extremes of self-indulgence and self-mortification; an appellation for the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path, which “leads to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbāna.”

⁵⁷ **Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha** (the Three Jewels of Buddhism): the Buddha, or awakened one, is the person in this epoch who (re)discovered the Dhamma. The Dhamma (Dharma in Sanskrit) is the teaching of the Buddha, the understanding of which leads to Nibbāna. The Sangha is the community of Buddhist practitioners who have realized or are striving to realize the Dhamma.

⁵⁸ A reference to Maya Angelou's famous poem, “Caged Bird,” and secondarily to the New Testament, where the Holy Spirit is often symbolized as a white dove.

for the dust in my eyes⁵⁹
 and the passion
 now is the time to wake from the dream
 and come to terms with my past
 for the third time, I ask only one thing:
 Lord, give me refuge
 give me the refuge of a pacified heart
 and I promise
 to take what you give
 and give my best back...



oh, and by the way, Lord
 one more thing:
 an offer like this doesn't come every day
 and just for the record
 I think we'd make a great team
 cause I'd be for you
 and you'd be for me
 and that's a right mishmash if there ever was one
 (oh, and I almost forgot –
 no need to worry about the apple, Lord
 I'll take care of that).

Temple of God of Espiritista Cristiana
 Urdaneta City, Philippines
 October 2015

⁵⁹ **Dust in my (their) eyes:** a phrase occurring in several Buddhist suttas, which refers to the mental defilements that obstruct mankind from seeing things as they really are.

Double Standard

Who are they to invade our land and commit unspeakable acts of
terror,
Killing women and children alike?
Who are they to plant the seeds of foreign values on our native soil
And decide for us
If we should live or die?
In whose name do they perpetrate such crimes,
And by what heinous belief are they possessed
That they should be so callous
To our basic rights,
When so many lives hang in the balance?
Who can ignore
The blood on their hands
And the stain in their hearts,
Which can never be washed away
With rationalizations and excuses?
Who can justify
The heritage of grief
Bequeathed to the innocent
Who mourn for the loss of their loved ones?
Who can remove the fear and the pain,
Etched in our memories
For generations to come?
Who are they
And to what alien God do they owe allegiance –
A God so fierce and wrathful
That he would turn against us like an angry serpent,
Striking our mortal flesh
With a swift and mighty retribution,
Penetrating the thick-skinned exterior
Of our double standard,
And poisoning us with our own venom?



Artwork by ginty

Cat Skinner's Blues

Y'all know
There's more than one way to skin a cat.
It ain't no big deal to take a knife
And cut the skin off
And then stretch it on a rack.
But can ya show me a man
Who can re-skin a cat –
Who can take that same skin
And then put it back?
Well now,
There's a man worthy of praise,
And I'll drink to that,
For the dead he can raise,
And I bet you'll have one grateful cat.

Forest Island, Bali Usada
Peneng, Bali
May 2016

Entering the Coconut

We make our overtures in the four directions
 And divide the coconut into four:
 Husband, wife, son and daughter (one piece each);
 The water we share.
 This is the ritual.

But I can remember a time,
 Before the leaves ever fell from parental trees,
 When the world was still an unfinished painting,
 Awash in colors that had no names,
 And everything was fresh and pure,
 Innocent in its unexplored potential.
 Even the air itself seemed to sparkle in the sun.

At that time, there was no coming or going,
 No male or female,
 No right or wrong way to divide
 What was originally undivided –
 Only mother and father,
 And the sweet, jellied flesh of the baby coconut,
 Scooped out with a spoon.

Back then, the world was my coconut –
 I could close my eyes and enter its flesh in an instant,
 Lose myself in its mysterious waters
 And sail across to uncharted shores.

Since then, I have aged
 And trudged forth into manhood,
 Sacrificing the unknown for the known,
 But if I could, I would give it all up in an instant,

To return to that lost innocence
And the ephemeral flesh of those childhood coconuts
That offered so much and asked for so little in return –
A complete meal for one who had not yet learned to divide,
At home or in school.

Forest Island, Bali Usada
Peneng, Bali
February 2017



Artwork by I Ketut Martana

Humility

To Puspa

On the tree of life grow myriad fruits,
Each one more delicious than the last,
But the root of that tree is humility,
With a flavor quite different from the rest,
For the more that one eats of it, the sweeter it gets.

The scriptures say of the proud and mighty:
“Pride cometh before a fall,”
But even should the humble fall,
As all surely will when conditions ripen,
Humility will lift them up and bathe their wounds,
And set them back on course again.

As surely as the seasons change,
What comes will come, but does not stay,
And yet humility stays its course,
For it follows nature’s way:
Like water, it accommodates to changing conditions;
Like wind, it moves unseen;
And like the earth, beneath our feet,
Humility does not complain.

In truth, humility is many things to many people:
To the arrogant, it is a bitter medicine;
To the hungry, sustenance;
A friend to the friendless;
A home to the homeless;
To the angry, a soothing balm.
Each gains what he needs most,
And so to him or her, humility is a blessing.

There are four great virtues in this world – faith, hope, love and charity,

But greater than all these is humility,
For love may be blind, but humility sees;
For faith may be one-sided, but humility is even;
For hope may be broken, but humility bends;
For charity gives, but humility also receives.

Be humble –

You may not become famous, but you will be happy.
You may not become wealthy,
But you will learn to appreciate what you have.
You may not reach all your goals or get everything you want in life,
But in their place, you will find contentment.

Be humble,
And the gods will bow down before you,
Heaven will honor you,
And in this world of endless conflict,
Where vanity and egotism rule the day,
You will be like a king among paupers,
With humility as your crown.

Forest Island, Bali Usada
Peneng, Bali
December 2017

Postscript

A Collection of Aphorisms and Musings

The following series of aphorisms and musings were culled from the previous poems and arranged in chronological order in the eight sub-sections below (along with a few minor alterations for the sake of continuity). The time frame of their composition overlaps the author's stays in Sri Lanka, the US, Myanmar, the Philippines and Bali. Due to the fundamental difference in style and character between poetry and aphorism, it might be best to read these two different art forms on separate occasions. Despite this contrast, however, the reader may notice some concordance of subject matter between the poems and aphorisms originating from similar periods.

I. Sri Lanka

- Silence should come from the heart. A forced silence is no better than no silence at all.
- The greatest of all teachings is a good example.
- The true measure of man's greatness is that it cannot be measured.
- As long as we continue to impose our views on others, the world will be enveloped in conflict. Not until we finally relinquish this tyranny of the mind, will mankind be able to live in true peace.
- How to choose between an inconvenient truth and a convenient untruth? Is this not the dilemma that life is constantly presenting us?
- If we keep on sweeping the dirt under the rug, a day will come when there will be more dirt than there is rug to cover it. Thus, sooner or later, the dirt is bound to reappear.

- He who would willingly sacrifice the one for the many, would also no doubt willingly sacrifice the many for the one.
- The Middle Way is the path that avoids extremes, but it does not oppose extremes, since opposition in itself is an extreme.

May 2011 – July 2012

II. USA

- Better to be a lone wolf than to live in the company of jackals.
- If only Ronald Mc Donald could see the suffering in a hamburger, it would wipe the smile off his face and he would be forced to stop playing the clown.
- Frugality shares what you don't need with others; stinginess hoards it for yourself.
- Money is the root of all money, evil is the root of all evil; mix the two, and you end up with a multi-national corporation.
- Why is there a great way and a small way? It has nothing to do with background or tradition, but rests solely on a person's character: a great person follows the great way, a small person follows the small way.

July – October 2012

III. Myanmar (Mawlamyine)

- One who has unshakeable faith does not need to reinvent the wheel.⁶⁰ If he can stop the wheel from turning, that is enough.

⁶⁰ **Wheel:** in this verse, the term “wheel” can refer to either a regular wheel, the Wheel of Dhamma (*Dhammacakka*), or the wheel of existence.

- If you want to follow another's example, observe him closely, until you can hear the hidden meaning behind his words and see the future results of his actions.
- Some dogs act more like humans, and some humans act more like dogs. Therefore, we should not take our humanity for granted.
- What you see is only the tip of the iceberg; what you get could sink the Titanic.
- People never see what they get; they only see what they want to get.
- Old age creeps up on us like a titmouse, but pounces on us like a lion.
- Beauty is as beauty was.
- "Vanity of vanities" – some things never change.
- Favoritism and oppression go hand in hand – what you give to one you take from another. Don't think you're Robin Hood.
- Happy is he who does not seek happiness.
- All's fair in love and war, but only Dhamma is intrinsically fair. Dwell not, therefore, in love and war, but harken unto Dhamma and be at peace.
- What is the ideal state? Ah yes, that's it!

November 2012 – March 2013

IV. Myanmar (Pyin Oo Lwin)

- A bird in the bush is worth two in the hand.
- If the mountain does not come to Moneyya, Moneyya does not go to the mountain.

- Better to marry than to burn, but better yet to put out the fire.
- If marriage is a sacrament, then adultery must be a sacrilege, since it violates the basic trust inherent in the marriage vows. Without this fundamental restraint in the marital relationship, the holy bond of matrimony cannot long survive. A new generation of children will test the efficacy of this principle.
- Look before you speak.
- Fool me once – shame on you; fool me twice – shame on me; fool me thrice – c'est la vie.
- The shortest distance between two points is a straight thought.
- Regarding the question of free will, will is neither completely free nor completely conditioned. If it were completely free, training would be unnecessary; if it were completely conditioned, training would be impossible.
- Shakespearisms:
 - “To be or not to be?” – that is the wrong question.
 - “Et tu, Māra!”
 - “A Porsche, a Porsche, my kingdom for a Porsche!”
 - “A bowl, a bowl, my kingdom for an alms bowl!”
 - “Out, damn turd!” – sin of the modern-day refined-flour diet.
- Once upon a time, an apple a day kept the doctor away.
- Better to be sorry than safe.
- The best we can do in this life is to learn from our mistakes. The worst we can do is to blame others.
- To err is human, to forgive, divine, to blame, profane.
- My God, my God, why have I forsaken thee?
- JFK was my boyhood hero. On the day he was assassinated, my world began to crumble, and has continued to crumble ever since. Now I understand that this is the natural order of things. It was happening all along, whether I saw it or not.

- Armageddon is here and now. It is the cataclysmic battle between the forces of good and evil in your own mind. Therefore I say, “The end is near. Take nothing for granted except your own demise. Repent before it is too late!”
- Peaceful coexistence with our fellow humans depends upon our peaceful coexistence with the rest of creation. If we cannot learn to live in peace with our brothers and sisters in the animal kingdom, how can we expect to live in peace with our brothers and sisters in the human realm? The transformative power of this natural law could turn the world into a heavenly place; its violation, however, could turn it into a hell.
- Living in the forest, I used to battle the ants for dominion of my kuti.⁶¹ Now I share my food with them. Here comes Uncle Jerry, crawling up my leg, there’s Ant Ann on the wall, there’s Cousin Spike in the cupboard. “Come and get it, guys!” Oh, woe to those who do not have the good fortune to be born an ant!
- Flexible mind, inflexible body; flexible body, inflexible mind. Body and mind are not one.
- All’s well that bends well.
- Who knows when to stop should also know when to go.
- He who laughs last is laughing for the wrong reason.
- Two is company, three’s a crowd, and the world has been at odds ever since.
- Two is company, three’s a crowd, and four is a Sangha.⁶² With morality, harmony prevails regardless of the number. Without morality, even one is too many.

⁶¹ **Kuti:** a bhikkhu’s forest hut.

⁶² **Sangha:** the community of Buddhist monks, which requires a minimum of four in order to recite the Pātimokkha (see footnote 26 for explanation of Pātimokkha).

- To believe in kamma is to believe in heaven and hell. Such a belief protects us from all manner of misfortune and sets us firmly on the path of virtue. But the world is full of unbelievers, and that is why we should not expect too much from the world.
- The best of all words is the unspoken, because it does not arouse contention. The best of all worlds is the unmanifested, because it does not arouse existence.
- If cause and effect are one, the universe could neither expand nor contract, birds could not fly, there would be no birth and death, no path and fruit; all would be seen as illusion. But how to remove illusion? *To see it is to remove it.* But how to see it as it really is? Something still needs to be done. *Then stop doing.* But how to stop doing? Is not stopping also a form of doing? *To stop without stopping, to do without doing, effortless goes the Way.* But without effort, how could there be accomplishment? *What need is there for accomplishment when there is nothing to accomplish.* Oh brother, do not speak for accomplished ones unless you are one.
- Until science recognizes the interdependent relationship between mind and matter, it will never be able to fully explain the universe. Mind is the key that opens the door to other dimensions and functions as the woof of continuity in the fabric of life. Without this key, scientists are basing their work on the wrong premise; to use the imagery of a horse and cart, they are putting the cart before the horse. With this approach, they can gain some limited insight into the construction and nature of the cart, but for them, the horse will remain a mystery.
- According to the Buddhist teachings, a concentrated mind can produce brilliant and powerful light. In the suttas,⁶³ it is stated that the light of the Buddha could penetrate 10,000 world systems; however, although he had vast and profound

⁶³ **Sutta:** a discourse on the Dhamma, given by the Buddha or one of his close disciples.

knowledge and vision of the world around him, the Buddha's primary interest, as the compassionate teacher and good friend to the many, was not in the macrocosm, but the microcosm, not in the external, but the internal. As he states in the *Dutiyarohitassa Sutta*, Book Four of the *Anguttara Nikaya*: "And yet, friend [Rohitassa], it is just within this fathom-long body that the world is [to be found], the arising of the world, the cessation of the world and the path leading to the cessation of the world – this is what I make known."

- Society, like any other institution, is only as good as the sum of its members. A perfect society, in order to function as such, would have to have perfect members; however, human perfection is an ideal that few can agree on and fewer still have attained. Furthermore, as history has shown, it is not a standard that can be imposed from the outside, by such measures as manipulating the gene pool, enforced sterilization, the extermination of so-called inferiors, or any other artificial means. Thus, although the concept of a perfect society may seem tenable on paper, it can never become a reality – society is, by its very nature, imperfect because man himself is imperfect. Society is merely the mirror of man. With this understanding, we cease to blame society for its imperfections and turn within to root out our own imperfections, and that, in itself, is the greatest contribution we can make to society.
- The basis for addiction is delusion. You may break an addiction, but delusion does not necessarily cease, but if you destroy delusion, addiction will automatically cease.
- Sensuality is the crack in the honeypot. What we take for sweetness is actually the loss of honey.
- Nowadays, an ounce of medicine requires a pound of cure. This is certainly good news for the pharmaceutical industry.
- An aphorism a day keeps the psychiatrist away.
- Judge not that ye shall not be judging, for that in itself is its own reward.

- You can spare the rod if you don't spoil the child.
- When the stock market crashes, our trust in God also crashes. What kind of God do we worship that our faith should rise and fall with the stock market?
- See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil, think no evil – easy enough to close the sense doors, but how to purify the monkey mind?
- If ignorance is bliss, then may we all become fools and experience the bliss of benightedness.
- Once burned, twice forgotten.
- A broken promise is like a piece of rotting fruit. No matter how pleasant the fruit's appearance was when the promise was first made, a time comes when the fruit begins to rot. Gradually, it loses both its benefit and appeal, until it is no longer of any value, except perhaps for the worms, and at that point is best discarded; however, even a worm cannot survive on broken promises.
- Even if the entire world is against you, you should still side with the truth... but perhaps better not to tell anybody about it.
- The real Camelot is not of this world. None can bring Arthur back from the dead, none can raise the edifice of ages past from its ashes, but he who conquers himself and establishes the kingdom of truth within is himself brought back from the dead, himself raised up and resurrected. He is the true king, and his law the true law – transcendent, immutable, and uncorrupted. Thus, his kingdom is not of this world.
- May the Dhamma bless you and keep you, and may it make your face to shine upon it forever and ever. Amen

April – November 2013

V. Philippines, Bali and the US

- If the Holy Spirit told me to go out and kill a dozen people, the Holy Spirit would not be the Holy Spirit.
- Out of mind, out of sight.
- Out of sight, out of mind, but not quite out of karma.
- Be careful what you preach, because sooner or later you are bound to practice it.
- Sensuality is the opiate of the masses. Only a few are able to resist its siren lure and escape misfortune. All the rest are swept downstream and swallowed up in the maelstrom.
- The ultimate conspiracy is ageing and death. Birth is its cause, but who is to blame for birth? Only when we stop theorizing and blaming others, will the true culprit reveal himself.
- Question authority, but question first your own authority.
- The devil made me do it, but I made the devil do it.
- God helps those who help themselves, but God also helps those who help others.
- We call those who worship nature, who honor and supplicate the forces of nature, pagans and animists, but those who destroy nature, who dishonor and desecrate the forces of nature, what do they worship, and what should they be called?
- Buddhists are such pagans; they'll worship anything, even a stone or a piece of shit. That's why I haven't eaten animals in 45 years – cause I worship their shit.
- Even before the first step is taken, the thousand-mile journey has already begun. But not until the last step, does it end.
- A foolish inconsistency is the hobgoblin of great, but sometimes small, minds.
- At first, I wanted to be a leader. Later, I wanted to be a follower. Now, I don't want to be either a leader or a follower.

- Better than freedom of choice is freedom from choice.
- In unity there is strength, but beyond unity is peace.
- People have been asking themselves the wrong question for so long they have forgotten what the right question is.
- No doubt, the internet is going to save the world, but the world it saves will be a virtual one.
- In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man can easily become the sacrificial lamb.
- There are two great dangers in this world: the first danger is to believe that one is always in the right; the second danger is to believe that someone else is always in the right. In between these two beliefs is a middle way – a path that does not veer toward either extreme; neither does it deny the basic rights of anyone or anything. To follow such a path requires freedom from bias and a willingness to examine all points of view. It asks nothing of the world, but rather is a revolution of the mind and heart, and an opening to all possibilities.

November 2013 – November 2014

VI. Sri Lanka

- Buddhist nationalism is a movement consisting of two mutually exclusive points of view. Those who belong to this movement call themselves Buddhists, but in striving to develop a national identity, they are unwilling to extend thoughts of loving-kindness to their fellow Muslim, Christian and Hindu countrymen. Thus, their very actions betray the teaching of him to whom they pledge their allegiance. Initially, they join together under a single banner, but ultimately end up quarrelling with one another. Battling with ghosts and demons of their own creation, they fall ever more deeply into wrong view and gradually lose sight of the true Dhamma. It is as if such persons had exchanged a valuable jewel for a trinket.

- Attachment is the glue of existence. It is what binds the sperm to the egg, mind to matter, the pauper to his hovel, the king to his throne. Kill the king, destroy his kingdom, and what need will there be for a throne?
- Better than a hundred prostrations is a promise kept.
- Better to have ants in your pants than black widows and venomous cobras.
- Better to have loved and lost than to have to pay alimony.
- Love is a many-splintered thing.
- The body ages, but the passions never grow old.
- If only there were a magic pill to end our dependence on magic pills.
- Ye are the sodium chloride of the earth, but if the sodium should lose its chloride, wherewith shall it be salted?
- When yin and yang disentangle themselves from one another, then only the Tao remains. But the Tao has no need of itself – therefore it does not interfere. Not interfering, it leaves all things free to come and go according to their nature. But the Tao does not go anywhere.
- Once upon a time, blood was thicker than water, but nowadays, oil is thicker than blood, and before long, water will be thicker than oil.
- In our quest for petroleum, we have created a new Holy Grail, and a crusade and inquisition to go with it.
- In the beginning was the word, but what was there before the word?
- The question is the answer, but it also obstructs the answer.

VII. Bali and Philippines

- Reproduction is the beginning of death, desire is the beginning of reproduction, and desire is the beginning of desire.
- If you don't start it, you won't have to stop it.
- The most powerful magic in the world is the magic of truth, for truth exposes the deception of all other magic.

June – October 2015

VIII. Bali

- Hatred can never put an end to hatred in this world,⁶⁴ and that is why the world will never be free from hatred.
- The quickest way to a man's heart is to control his stomach.
- Those who generalize are generally wrong.
- Ultimately there is only one disease and one medicine, but since that disease takes many forms, so does the medicine.

2016

- If you can, help others. If you cannot do that, at least do not harm them.⁶⁵ If you cannot do that, at least don't harm yourself.
- The old iron kettle may be black as pitch, but to the true believer, it will always be a gilded teapot.
- In the world of the spinmeister, he who spins last, spins best.
- Life is an infinite series of domino effects. Who can say, when one domino falls, if it is the result of our present efforts or the consequence of our past actions? Only when we fathom this truth, will we understand the limits of our free will.

⁶⁴ A reference to Dhammapada Verse 5.

⁶⁵ The first two sentences in this musing are a quote from the Dalai Lama.

Hey girl, can you remember the last time we rubbed wings? You were running around Old MacDonald's farm like a chicken with its head cut off, squawking bloody murder that the sky was falling – that was some conspiracy theory, huh?

Yeh, I remember, cause right about then is when you started clucking away with your "help me bake my bread" twaddle. You must think I got feathers for brains and don't know that chickens don't bake bread – only people do. After that I flew the coop; thought there might be more opportunities for a chick like me in Manhattan.



Artwork by ginty

- Chicken Musings

Dedicated to the chickens of Forest Island

1st Chicken: There is an innate order to the universe – unfortunately it's a pecking order.

2nd Chicken: No problem, as long as I'm at the beginning of the line.

1st Chicken: Who said there's a beginning?

1st Chicken: Which came first, the chicken or the egg?

2nd Chicken: The chicken.

1st Chicken: How do you know?

2nd Chicken: Stop squawking and you'll find out.

1st Chicken: The early bird gets the worm.

2nd Chicken: What does the worm get?

1st Chicken: Why don't you ask it?

2nd Chicken: Too late.

1st Chicken: How many chickens does it take to change a light bulb?

2nd Chicken: I don't think any of them could do it anymore.

1st Chicken: Why not?

2nd Chicken: Selective breeding – they've made us so damn big we couldn't get off our fat asses even if the sky were falling. Besides, once you've had your beak clipped, how you gonna screw in a light bulb?

1st Chicken: God, this is a lousy life being a chicken! First you spend your days cooped up in some stinking cage, then you get your head lopped off and your feathers plucked. After that, it's chicken soup for the soul.

2nd Chicken: Well, you deserve it.

1st Chicken: Why?

2nd Chicken: Cause you were a chicken plucker in your last life.

- 1st Chicken: You ever seen two cocks fight?
- 2nd Chicken: Not over me, I'm too damn busy laying eggs from all the artificial lighting.
- 1st Chicken: Well, you know, people pay good money to see two cocks slashing each other with razors.
- 2nd Chicken: Really? I thought only people did that.
- 1st Chicken: Wise up, girl, this is the 21st century.
-
- 1st Chicken: Do you believe in God?
- 2nd Chicken: Kind of, but I think he's probably too busy dealing with people's problems to worry about us poor chickens.
- 1st Chicken: Hey, why don't we write our own bible – then we could create our own chicken God, plus a chicken Moses and a chicken Jesus? Maybe people would leave us alone if they thought somebody died for our sins.
- 2nd Chicken: You really think people are gonna fall for that story? Keep dreaming, girl.
- 1st Chicken: Well, it's just a thought – you know, an all-compassionate God that has mercy on us poor dumb creatures. I mean, if they can have a women's liberation, why can't we have a chicken liberation? After all, we do more laying than they do; don't you think we should get some credit for it?
- 2nd Chicken: Hey, girl, don't you know that we chickens don't count – only people have souls. In the cosmic order of things, we're only as good as the eggs we lay, and, after that, our wings and livers. Better keep laying, girl, otherwise it's McNuggets for you.
- 1st Chicken: Oh yeah, I forgot. What a dumb cluck I am.
- 2nd Chicken: Hey, wait a minute, maybe if we got enlightened, at least we wouldn't have to reborn as chickens.
- 1st Chicken: Now who's the dumb one? Don't you know that chickens are too dumb to become enlightened?
- 2nd Chicken: No shit?
- 1st Chicken: Yeh.
- 2nd Chicken: Wow, chicken karma really sucks!

1st Chicken: Life's a bitch, huh.

2nd Chicken: Well, at least a bitch gets two square meals a day and some pampering.

1st Chicken: Plus, with a bitch, at least you're safe up a tree. Nah, life's gotta be worse than a bitch.

2nd Chicken: True enough, sister.

1st Chicken: God, if only we were birds of paradise.

2nd Chicken: Yeh, or an endangered species...

- Nature's wheels turn quickly, so quickly that we think they turn slowly.
- The smarter the phone, the dumber the owner.
- Kill your smartphone.
- A wise person investigates all points of view; a fool seeks advice from those who agree with him.
- Pride cometh before a fall; it cometh after a fall; it cometh during a fall; it cometh like one's own shadow, casting darkness where there was light.
- Most people think they come into this world with a clean slate. They fail to see the invisible writing that starts to appear on that slate, even during the first month of life, affecting their abilities, strengths and weaknesses, likes and dislikes, modes of expression, tendencies, and even length of life itself. In some cases, that writing is deeply etched into the slate and can manifest as a prodigy or disabled child, or perhaps so deeply etched, that the slate is broken at birth. But what is the nature of the slate itself? This is the pivotal question that each of us must ultimately answer.
- I do not support conspiracy theories; neither do I conspire against them. Whatever truths they contain, I accept; whatever falsehoods, I reject. If I do not know the verity of a particular statement, I freely admit my ignorance. Only in this way am I able to maintain my neutrality.

- Cling to a molehill, and it becomes a mountain.
- A brave person without discretion is brazen, without kindness, a knave, without scruples, depraved, without wisdom, a slave.
- God may not be dead, but in the minds of most Americans, he might as well be. If he would only pay off their credit card bills, insurance premiums, and yearly taxes, you can be sure they'd be praying to him every day.
- Eight Guidelines for a Successful Marriage (a husband's guide):
 1. Never argue with your wife – if you want your pet to be a pussycat, don't pluck the whiskers of the tiger.
 2. Kiss her, even if it hurts.
 3. Thou shalt not lie, except when it comes to telling your wife how beautiful she is – God gives you a marital dispensation for this one.
 4. If you want to cheat on your wife, get her permission first.
 5. Buy her 70% dark chocolate (percentages may vary).
 6. If you like to gamble, put 90% of your earnings in her bank account.
 7. Never text and drive at the same time.
 8. If you decide to become a monk, break it to her gently, with a box of chocolates and the promise of your undying love (and equally enduring financial support).
- Love is like fire – if kept under control, it can cook for us, keep us warm and maintain our species. If it gets out of control, however, it can ravage society, burn us in the most shameful manner and destroy the lives of those who get too close to it.
- Nowadays, what most people call “love” is actually about 25% real love and 75% attachment. However, as meager and corrupted as such love may be, 25% love is better than no love at all. Of course, if you can raise the percentage level up to 50%, that is even better, and then your love becomes a true friendship, with equal sharing and deep affection for one

another; and if you can raise it up to 100%, that is the ideal – a love that is free from any attachment, completely pure and unconditioned, that asks nothing in return, is unbounded by time or space, and whose greatest joy is in giving to others. And why do I say that love without attachment is the ideal? Because attachment brings suffering.

- How can we choose between a lesser good and a greater good or a lesser evil and a greater evil if we cannot first establish what is good and what is evil? This is not as easy as most people think, since both good and evil so often lie hidden at the core of things, concealed by their outer form. Thus, if we cannot penetrate to the core of any given issue and weed out the irrelevant from the relevant, inevitably our choices will lead us in the wrong direction.
- The US will never win the war against terrorism until we (the citizens) are able to fathom its cause; only then will we have the means to eradicate terrorism at its roots. And what is the cause of terrorism? It is the greed, anger and delusion in our own hearts and minds. This is the hidden enemy and the true axis of evil in the world today, just as it has always been. If we can expose this hidden enemy, root it out and fully destroy it, by that act alone, we will do more for the cessation of terrorism than all the weapons in the world combined.
- To act for one's own welfare, without interfering with the welfare of others – this is called living in harmony.
- Birds of a feather squabble together.
- Fine feathers don't make for an omelet.
- The early bird gets the early worm, the early hunter gets the early bird, early karma gets the early hunter, and he goes to the Early Bird Hell⁶⁶

⁶⁶ According to the Buddhist Doctrine of Right Livelihood, being a hunter (as a profession) would fall into the category of wrong livelihood, with its corresponding negative karmic consequences.

- If you rest on your laurels, your laurels will end up resting on you.
- Beauty is in the eye of your plastic surgeon.
- A rose is not a rose without a name.
- Some people pay to play, but everybody pays for having played.
- The proof is in the pudding, but the pudding got lost in the mail.
- It is not the flag that is false, but the one who waves it.
- It is the mark and distinction of our current generation to forgive others for lying, but to hold them accountable for telling the truth.
- Black lies matter; white lies also matter, but not as much.
- Let him who is without sin live in a glass house, for such a one has ceased to cast stones.
- Never rejoice in the misfortune of another, or the ghost of misfortune will come to haunt you.
- Those who sow division amongst others will themselves be conquered.
- This is the beginning of the end, and when the end ends, there will be a new beginning, and when that beginning ends, there will be a new beginning of the end.
- Lord, grant me the strength to attain what cannot be changed, the serenity to accept what will always change, and the wisdom to know the one in the other: how they are different, yet one and the same.

2017

- The problem is not so much that we can't see the forest through the trees, but rather that we don't even really see the trees, for every tree is in itself a forest, and in that forest there are no trees.

- When one door opens, another door closes, and in that opening and closing lie a truth and a freedom that only the wise can comprehend.
- Before you walk through the door and enter the house, you should know to whom the house belongs.
- People are always passing the buck – they never want to take responsibility for their actions. What they don't understand is that each one of us is responsible for his or her own destiny, and no one else; but because they believe otherwise, they act otherwise, and thus the threads of destiny become entangled, until the whole world becomes a tangled web. If they could only unravel those threads, one by one, they would see that all their entanglements are nothing but an illusion, but this they cannot do, for to do so, they would have to take responsibility for having created them in the first place.
- You can cheat some of the people all of the time and all of the people some of the time, but you can't cheat karma.
- The dog that bites the hand that feeds it is the dog that has yet to learn its lesson as a dog.
- There is nothing to fear but foolishness itself.
- Lift your mind, and your face will also lift – no stitches, no painkillers, no recovery time – satisfaction guaranteed.
- Healing the heart with the scalpel of the mind is the best form of surgery.
- “Whom does God love?” is the wrong question. “What does God love?” is what you should ask yourself, and the answer is, “God loves a pure heart.” It doesn't matter if you are Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu, Jewish or none of the above, if your heart is pure, that is what God loves.
- We are not born into sin in the sense that we sinned when we were born, but rather in the sense that we sinned even before we were born. And what is that sin? It is the very seed of desire that

brings us into this world, divides us from the timeless reality of undifferentiated truth and casts us into the dungeon of a separate existence.

- The truth is that we are all sick, not just passingly sick, but sick unto death.
- To date, no political party has developed a clear vision of how to deal with the fundamental social, cultural and existential issues that human beings have to face in this world. It doesn't matter if you are a Republican, Democrat, independent, socialist, communist, anarchist, or a green/red/black/etc. party member; if you think your party is going to solve the world's problems, you are sadly mistaken. And why is that? Because politics is based on a materialistic view of the world and essentially ignores the moral-spiritual laws that govern the universe; therefore, at best, one could say that politics espouses a partial truth, but actually, it's worse than that – in politics, the priorities are all upside down. Of course, there may be exceptions to this rule, as there have been in the past, but most truly great political leaders either get killed off or compromised along the way, and in this day and age, they are bound to be few and far between. Therefore, whatever you do, don't put your hope in the political process, for you are bound to end up disappointed.
- The greatest knowledge a man can gain is the knowledge of his limits, for when he knows his limits, he knows both his capacity and that which has yet to be attained. With that knowledge, he does not misjudge his relationship with the world around him or make false claims about what he can and cannot do. Knowing both his strengths and weaknesses, he knows where to apply the greatest effort in order to effectively realize whatever he sets out to accomplish.
- Zen Master Dogen wrote: "Give up the desire for fame and profit," but how difficult that is to do, for one may give up sex, sense pleasures, and even money, but the concern for one's reputation and the desire for renown and self-aggrandizement

run deep within the heart, feeding the subtle kilesas⁶⁷ that drive us from lifetime to lifetime. Therefore, is it not better to confront the problem directly – to take the bull by its horns, rather than to grab its tail and risk getting kicked or gored? At least, when you grab the horns, you know you’re in danger.

- Never make the consultation of oracles, demons, the dead, prognosticators, political or financial pundits, or the position of the zodiac a substitute for good common sense. Don’t sell yourself short – always take the high moral ground, regardless of the soothsayer’s advice or the alignment of the planets. Don’t be influenced by that which itself can be influenced. Go straight to your goal, like an arrow shot by a mighty bowman.
- Compromise is a virtue when it comes to people, an art when it comes to the business deal, a blemish when it comes to beauty, a crime when it comes to the law, a lie when it comes to the truth, and damnation when it comes to the Devil.
- The flesh is willing, but the spirit is weak.
- The saying goes: “Truth is one, paths are many,” which means that many paths lead to a single truth, but actually there is only one path – the path of truth – for how else could a path lead to truth if it were not of the truth?
- Death is mankind’s most primal fear. We refer to this fear as an instinct, but what is instinct other than a habit or tendency so deeply embedded in the mind that we call it “natural”? Then let me ask you, “Who is more natural: one overcome by fear, who cowers at his own shadow, or the peerless victor, the hero, who has overcome all fear, risen above the pettiness and sensuality of this world, and sees things as they really are?” To put it another way, “What is more natural: ignorance or wisdom, falsehood or truth?” If we say that ignorance and falsehood are more natural, then we are going by majority rule and the lowest common denominator. On the other hand, if we say that wisdom and truth

⁶⁷ **Kilesas** (Pāli): mental defilements.

are more natural, we are looking at mankind's highest potential – the goal of what it means to be human – and even though the man or woman who has realized this goal is only one in ten million or one in a hundred million, he or she is one completely at ease, living in harmony with nature, without pretense, ambivalence, fear or internal conflict, and such a one we call “natural.”

- When you are climbing a mountain and reach a plateau, you can look out in many directions and see rivers, valleys, villages, rice paddies and fields in the outlying areas below. Therefore, there is a danger you may think you have reached the pinnacle, and discontinue your climb; but if you investigate the surrounding terrain, you will realize that your vision is obstructed by the mountain itself, for you cannot see what's on its other side, nor can you see the pinnacle hidden in clouds above. When you reach the pinnacle, however, you will know it, because you can see clearly in all directions, both the plateaus and valleys below, and you will understand that there are many plateaus, but there is only one pinnacle.
- In this day and age, when the forces of darkness are in ascendancy, if we want to take refuge in the light, we must make a sanctuary of our own hearts and minds, and seek the light there. If we look outside ourselves, we will see many lights, but, in truth, these lights are little more than shadows that veil the caster of shadows – Mara, the Evil One – who rules this world, and always has. Once we turn within, however, and see the light shining there, that same light will shine everywhere, for light dispels darkness, but darkness cannot dispel light.
- In a sense, writing poetry is like trying to turn a pointing finger into the moon. Although this may actually happen on some level, let me ask you, “When you are pointing at the moon, can you see the moon in the finger or the finger in the moon?” If not, then why are you wasting your time? Go to the moon and send me a poem from there.

Addendum

Final Poems & Musings 2018-2019

Bhikkhu Moneyya

Ode to My Smartphone

Smartphone, smartphone, on my stick,
Whose selfie is the fairest one of all?
Whose texts and tweets are full of wit?
Who is the queen of the virtual ball?

Smartphone, smartphone, in my pocket,
Hallowed be the names of Samsung and iPhone,
Of Sprint and Verizon and AT&T,
For 5G will come and thy will will be done,
On earth as it is in Facebook.
Give us this day our daily tweet,
And forget not our passwords,
As thou savest the passwords of others.
And lead us not into malware or temptation by spam,
But deliver us from all hackers,
For thine is the platform, the app and the power,
Forever and ever (well, maybe not).
Amen.

Sanur, Bali
July 2018

Kathina in Sri Lanka

To the bhikkhus of Polgasoweeta

With robes the color of jackfruit and mahogany, draped upon our aging bodies, we stand single file, silent and motionless, awaiting the inevitable. With the crack of wood-on-wood thunder, our line comes to life, like some giant naga, roused from its slumber, and snakes its way along the path to the Dhamma Hall. Today is Kathina (the annual offering of robes to the monks), and many families have come to join in the celebration. For them, it is a time for making merit and reconnecting to their Buddhist roots; for the children, however, it is a time of discovery – of giving and receiving, when the old is replaced by the new.

As usual, more girls have come than boys – girls with dark skin and nubile bodies, coaxed by their parents up to the seated monks in the Dhamma Hall. One of them, with the help of her mother, cautiously approaches the chair I am seated in, and reaches out to me with her first Kathina robe, as I extend my arms to accept her offering. Her coal-black eyes shine like burning embers – the wick of an all-consuming glory, flickering in the consciousness of the moment, casting shadows of a distant time, when devas descended from the heavens to pay homage to the Ariya Sangha, with the Blessed One at its head.

Year after year, they come and make their offerings, as the supple lines of breast and hip grow more pronounced, evoking the roundness of ripe pomegranates, bursting with their red seeds. The flames grow brighter, curves become shooting stars, the branches bend ever so slightly, heavy with the burgeoning fruit of the season's bounty.

Yet all too soon, the season ends, for buried deep within the flesh of every fruit, lie the seeds of future change, of increase followed by decrease, as gravity takes its toll on the physical frame: the breasts sag, the belly distends, the hips widen. Gone is the lilt and bounce, the spark that lit uncounted fires, long forgotten, yet burning still in the memory banks of time; so too, our old robes wear out, but each year new ones are sewn and offered to the Sangha.

This year, I returned to Sri Lanka just in time for Kathina. Withered and hunched, with faltered step, an old lady approaches the row of seated monks in the Dhamma Hall, unable to lift the heavy burden of her offering alone. With the help of her son, she extends her arms toward me, as I reach out to accept the freshly sewn robe. Suddenly, I see the same young girl that I saw so many years ago on this very same day – the same purity, the same innocence, the same wonderment and devotion. But her eyes no longer shine like burning embers, and everything about her seems to have turned a shade of grey.

Soon there will be many tears, but not from her eyes. The ashes will be collected and placed in urns or scattered on the ocean waves. Later that same day, a young girl, with the help of her mother, approaches the row of seated monks to make her first Kathina offering. Her coal-black eyes shine like burning embers, but her features are shrouded in a mist, which seems to hang in the air, veiling the entire Dhamma Hall. Beyond that veil, a thousand eyes stare back at me, all of them asking the same question.

I think back to the time of the great ascetic monk, Maha Kassapa, who kept the same robe for more than eighty years –

a true benchmark if there ever was one. It was the last robe to ever cover the nakedness of his 120-year-old body, but what would you do if you'd been offered a robe by the Buddha? Anyway, I am not Maha Kassapa, and this old robe – faded and threadbare as it is, and coming apart at the seams – has been my home and second-skin for more than seventeen (or is it seventy?) years, and is in sad need of a replacement.

Polgasoweeta Aranya
Polgasoweeta, Sri Lanka
December, 2018

Unfinished Symphony

I saw her there,
Stranded on the reef,
With the water rising.

I wanted to tell her there was nothing to fear,
But I knew she would not live
To see the coming day.

My mouth was frozen,
My thoughts dispersed, my tongue made lame,
I knew not what to say.

The tide was coming in,
A pearl of dew slid down her cheek,
And dropped into oblivion.

I saw the wave as it crashed the reef,
Her frail form was swept away,
Engulfed in the mighty spray.

I must do something, I said to myself,
It seemed too cruel and cowardly
Just to stand there while this happened.

Across the void, my hand reached out,
The emptiness shining –
The unspoken word.

I could taste the salt water
As it entered her mouth
And made its way to her lungs.

I could feel the currents
As they swirled round her body,
Pulling her down to a treacherous end.

I could sense the hopes and the fears
Of an unfinished journey,
The moment of transit,
And then, and then...

Polgasowita Aranya
Polgasowita, Sri Lanka
January 2019

Final Musings 2018-2019

- Seek and ye shall find; but if thou seekest anew, hast thou lost what thou hast found?
- If you had to choose between political correctness and moral correctness, which would it be? And why do I ask? Because sooner or later, you will.
- How can we know the difference between the relative and the absolute? The difference is relative.
- When it comes to war, going in is always easier than getting out.
- The best sex is sex without birth and death. Unfortunately, that is a contradiction in terms.
- Ask not what the Dhamma can do for you; ask rather what you can do for the Dhamma.
- Read my lips, but don't believe everything you read.

Polgasoweeta Aranya
Polgasoweeta, Sri Lanka
Nov-Dec, 2018



Bhikkhu Moneyya was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1946 and spent his early youth in Cleveland, Ohio. He attended Stanford University for one year and then transferred to University of Otago in Dunedin, New Zealand. Several months later, he dropped out and spent the next two-and-a-half years traveling through Europe and the Middle East, before returning to the US and joining the Rochester Zen Center in 1968. His involvement with the Rochester Zen Center lasted eleven years and included a two-year stint as a Zen monk.

In 1989, he sold his house and business, and retired to an ashram in central Virginia, where he met his future wife. In 2002, he traveled to Pa-Auk Forest Monastery in Myanmar, taking ordination there as a Theravada Buddhist monk and later putting together an introductory manual on the practice of Theravada Buddhism, which has seen repeated publications.

Due to a gradually worsening health condition, he left Myanmar in 2007 to seek medical assistance in Australia, spending time at several monasteries there. Over the next seven years, he traveled respectively to Sri Lanka, Malaysia, France, the US, back to Myanmar, and then on to the Philippines and Bali, where he currently resides.

“Through the mediums of poetry, prose and painting, Bhikkhu Moneyya brings his spiritual and terrestrial journey to life, as he shares his insights and experiences with the reader. His wit and unabashed sincerity become a magic carpet upon which the reader rides, soaring above the pettiness of daily life, with a monk’s-eye view of the world below.”

– David Chadwick, author of *Crooked Cucumber: the Life and Zen Teaching of Shunryu Suzuki*