



Passing It On:
Lay Practitioners Share Dharma Wisdom
2012

a publication of
Insight Meditation Center

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Passing It On

Lay Practitioners Share Dharma Wisdom

Passing It On: Background

The growth of Western Buddhist practice has come largely through the initiative of teachers who often carry credentials based on having been a monastic and received "dharma transmission" from venerable sages. In recent years, many sanghas have developed an additional leadership resource based on long-term experienced lay practitioners whose practices have matured and strengthened through everyday kinds of experiences, for example; having families, making a living, managing organizations, pursuing professional careers, in a variety of ways developing their gifts and talents and sharing them with their communities. These practitioners may be invited to take the dharma seat from time to time, not because of their credentials, but because of the wisdom they have to pass on.

The Insight Meditation Center in Redwood City, CA, has many such mature Lay Practitioners. Some participate and volunteer regularly at the center while others, though attending irregularly, are closely connected to our practice. Some of the lay practitioners have started small sitting groups of their own. Others have actively provided services to the IMC community, including; talks, classes, chaplaincy services,

conducting weddings, memorials, serving on the board, attend interfaith meetings, offering mindfulness teachings for local businesses, school, and jails, and other settings.

To bring together the practice insights and dharma teachings of seasoned lay practitioners, we launched this project in 2009 and are continuing it in 2012 to publish art and writings about the many facets of Dharma practice in the many dimensions of lay life.

"As he was sitting there, Venerable Ananda said to the Blessed One, 'This is half of the holy life, lord: admirable friendship, admirable companionship, admirable camaraderie.'

'Don't say that, Ananda. Don't say that. Admirable friendship, admirable companionship, admirable camaraderie is actually the whole of the holy life.'"

- Samyutta Nikaya 45.2



In Gratitude

- to Gil Fronsdal for his steady and inspiring leadership
 - to Jim Bronson for creating this space where lay practitioners can share dharma wisdom
 - to Dave Barnett, Jim Bronson, Judy Long, and Gerry Sarnat for their advice and editorial expertise
 - to Rob Hammond for his able assistance in production
 - to Linda Filling for making her father's illuminations available
 - to Carla Brooke and Buddhanet.net for appropriate line art
 - to the Board of Insight Meditation Center for their support
 - to lay practitioners everywhere applying the teachings of 2500 years in their lives and to all of our contributors who communicate artfully about their practice.
-
- Passing It On 2010 – edited by Jim Bronson
 - Passing It On 2011 – edited by Dave Barnett
 - Passing It On 2012 – edited by Judy Long



Our Publication

Passing It On is an independent, ad-free collection of writing and art by lay practitioners connected with the Insight Meditation Center in Redwood City, California. The collection celebrates the every-day lives of dharma practitioners, but not in a way that ignores its complexity. The personal essays, short stories, poetry, and art explore the challenges we face and the moments when we rise to meet those challenges.

Passing It On publishes the work of emerging and established artists who are striving to be thoughtful and awake. The collection invites readers to consider an array of ideas and then to join the conversation by submitting work for future editions. The collection is offered freely in the 2500 year-old tradition of *dana*, "generosity", and intends to show that helpful teaching can be found in the ordinary lives of lay practitioners.

Passing It On is a publication of the Insight Meditation Center which is a tax-exempt, 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Publication of *Passing It On* is supported primarily by contributor and reader donations through the Insight Meditation Center. Cash donations to IMC are tax-deductible.

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PHYLLIS KLEIN

Phyllis Klein has been attending IMC for many years. In addition to the dharma she believes in the healing power of poetry, writing, and creativity.

MORNING AND THE MIND

*Daylight, full of small dancing particles
and the one great turning.*

Rumi

Incline the mind towards wisdom
the way the head tilts back
for a kiss,
the way a plane lifts off
the runway. As the sun
begins its floating up,
sun and sky meet
in the grand *rélevé* of day.

Cups clink on saucers,
toaster cradles bread, eggs sputter
from their pans into your kitchen,
with its yellow corners
supporting the walls,
the way your mind wants to embrace you
in a pas de deux.

BUDDHISM MAKES A MEAL

Doors open, hearts open, neon arrows
light up dreams of vegetables salsa-dancing.

She sautés awareness and
transcendence with onion and garlic, adds the jolt
of compassion that flew from her center
as she experienced, for a moment,
human pain deep beyond her own.
She stirs in the Tibetan wheel of life
along with circles of carrots and crescents of celery.

Insight wants to feed her in the numinous center
of her table. Grief no longer starves her,
and loss, no longer craving,
leads her to joy.



KAZUKUO KUMORI

Kazuko Kumori, who came here from Japan in 1992, started practicing Vipassana in 2004 and began writing poetry in 2010. Kazuko enjoys meditation, yoga, tai chi, walking the dog, and belly laughter. She lives with her husband and dog in Southern California.

EMPTY WISH

light as air
soft as whisper
an empty wish
born from the heart
may it land on the palm of those who shall receive
like a feather landing from a high flying bird
may it turn into all they wish
may it be
may it be



FRAN CESARONE

Fran Cesarone, has been practicing insight meditation since 2004. She frequents open mics in the San Francisco area performing her music and sharing her poetry and family stories. She enjoys cooking and baking for the people in her life, as well as spending time in nature.

ENCOUNTERS

I met a young girl playing on the swing set in the square
She looked at me and giggled as she plunged into the air
Sliding back I pushed the chains to lift her even more
Her laughter was infectious and I felt it to the core
I said "Honey will you tell me why it is you love to swing?"
"Yes," she said "that's easy. Soaring is my favorite thing!
It feels like I am flying now don't you want to try?
There's nothing to be scared of with God up in the sky."
I met a college student in the bookstore down the street
Spoke of Friedman and of Chomsky and the bossa nova beat
His sophomoric blarney educed from me a grin
This soapbox sermon seemed a game he aimed to win
I said "Tell me if you're so inclined what you want from life."
He said "I'll be a CEO and take a young blonde wife"

With a Bentley in the driveway and a mansion in the hills
I will want for nothin', never worry 'bout no bills."

I met a business person on the platform of the train
She opened her umbrella as the sky succumbed to rain
She sighed, "I will be late, and I've so much work to do."
Her face showed signs of worry and I knew her words were true
I said "Dear if I may be so bold, what is it that you love?"
She looked a bit bewildered as the crowd began to shove
"Deadlines and deliverables are reality for me
I have no time to ponder that which I would rather be."

I met a patient waiting for the outcome of some test
His face was taut with worry his hands clenched upon his chest
I pulled my chair beside his praying "I am here with you"
But I feared he couldn't see me and was unsure what to do
I connected to his spirit asking how I best might serve
He cried, "Is your compassion really something I deserve?"
I answered not with words but with a spiritual embrace
The tension slowly washed away as teardrops from his face
I met an ornithologist within the county park
He scoped some bird and I murmured, "nightingale or lark?"
He smiled and said "'Tis neither but the bluebird that I see."
A harbinger of happiness was perched upon the tree
I asked, "If he could speak to us, what story would he bring?"
"Listen close," the birdman said, "and you'll hear everything."
I closed my eyes and heard a song I never heard before
He sang of love and harmony, a flyway by the shore
I met a street performer gifted with comedic flair
Laughter was the medicine that she most loved to share

A momentary respite for lives filled with travail
How she hoped the joyful laughter was the sound that would prevail
I proclaimed "If only laughter could forever cure our blues!"
She suggested greens and yellows, other options I might choose
I felt a bit perplexed but knew it wouldn't hurt to try
As I stepped onto my path I saw a rainbow in the sky

I met an old man walking on the sand beside the sea
I offered him a friendly wave and he smiled back at me
The years had carved so many lines upon his sunlit face
He wore them well as I could tell with such distinguished grace
I asked if he would tell me, just how does one grow old
He whispered softly in my ear and took my hand to hold
"The alpha and omega are really both the same
Young, old, start, end - illusions in this game."

I looked into the mirror not expecting what I'd see
All these precious faces were projecting back at me
Age, gender, color, creed assimilate to one
Love, fear, hope, greed - alien to none
With newborn understanding I step into the now
I inundate in perfect pause, relinquishing the how
I inhale deep as spirit floods across life's many pages
Intention clear, it's love we share, the life force of the ages



ERIC KOLVIG

Eric Kolvig, Ph.D., has been teaching in the Vipassana Buddhist tradition since 1985. He leads meditation retreats and gives public talks around the United States and abroad. Eric has a particular interest in "grassroots dharma," building spiritual community in democratic, non-authoritarian ways. Eric has also led retreats in the wilderness; he is interested in the special value of spiritual practice in the natural world. He has worked with many teachers but primarily with Joseph Goldstein and Sharon Salzberg, in the lineage of Mahasi Sayadaw of Burma, and also with Richard Clarke in the Zen lineage of Roshi Philip Kapleau.

WEDDING BLESSING

Here is my wish for you in your marriage: May you take refuge in each other as a strong sangha of two.

I wish you deep, sustaining love for each other. But as rare as authentic love is, helping someone to be or become free is even rarer. If you make such mutual help the organizing principle of your life together, then authentic love and all other goodness will flow and purify between you as a natural result.

The greatest test of your helping each other to be or become free is likely to be losing each other. As surely as this wedding joins you, death or estrangement will part you. I hope that you will never take for granted what can never be taken for granted. If you know in your hearts every day that you will lose each other, then you can cut away attachment with the fierce courage of the fox that chews off its own leg to free itself from the trap.

If you know for certain this approaching loss, perhaps every day you can thank each other for the invaluable gift of that day together. Perhaps this knowing will help you to live gratefully and urgently together in the present moment. And perhaps dwelling deeply in the present will even allow you to see that separation is only illusion, that no loss is possible, and that you are bringing each other home.



JIM RAMSAY

Jim Ramsay lives in Nyack, NY, but regularly visits his partner Anita Kline in San Francisco. Anita introduced him to Buddhist thought and meditation practice in 2002 at SF Insight, and he has been trying ever since to practice mindfulness on the cushion and in everyday life. He looks for guidance in the Buddhist ideas of nothing added, loving kindness and letting go.

The Climb

Think Fuji, Denali, Kilimanjaro – like climbing a mountain --
gradual at first, then ever steeper. Toward the top there are no trees,
only snow and rocks, and a wind that blows from the end of the world.

I watched my mother those last 20 years, eighty to ninety-nine.
I used to say was declining, but now I know it's not a
slow slide down. It's a long, hard climb up.

Watch a child get up from the floor. She's down, then she's up. Badda
boom. Badda bing. When I try to rise from the floor, it takes a plan, and I
grunt as I man-up, heaving a heavy harpoon at the great white whale of
my aging.

You climb higher, get weaker. Knees give out, and hips, backs, hearts.
Your eyes and ears fail to report danger. As your air thins, you think
you'll see farther, but the world removes itself, grows distant, dim,
confused.

Almost to the summit, it's
like Norgay and Hillary on Everest:
Very slow, short steps.
Bend into the hill.
Catch your breath.
Another step.
Can't catch
your breath.
Try to
get warm.
Rest.

By the time my mother summited, she was talking with her parents
half-a-century dead. Then she was there – at the edge of that
huge, round, mysterious opening to the world's heat and light.

She teetered,
closed her eyes,
and let go.

The Artist's Notes on Three Paintings



Anita Above Phoenix (acrylic on canvas, 2006) was inspired by a snapshot Anita Kline's friend Deb Porter took of Anita after they'd spent the morning hiking up to the top of Camelback Mountain outside of Phoenix, Arizona in 2005. I decided to create the painting, using the snapshot for guidance, as a gift to Anita, a very small gift compared to what she has given me.

Anita and I were high school sweethearts in the Chicago suburbs. We broke up (badly, my fault) in the early 1960's, and we lost complete touch for decades. She was never out of my heart. Forty-two years after I'd last seen her, through magic of the internet and email, we found

each other again in 2002, reunited and have become bi-coastal partners. She lives in San Francisco. I live in Nyack, New York, but I will move to San Francisco in less than two years, once my daughter goes to college. I knew nothing about Buddhism until Anita came back into my life. I did not paint or draw.

Anita belongs to SF Insight, has had a regular meditation practice for the last ten years or so, and when I first visited her in San Francisco after our miraculous re-discovery of each other, she brought me along to SF Insight's Sunday sit and dharma talk by Eugene Cash. I liked the mediation and I liked what Eugene said.

Once I was back in Nyack, Anita sent me things she thought I might like to read – Pema Chodron and Jack Kornfield. She encouraged me to meditate. I read those books, then others, I began to meditate. On other of my trips to San Francisco, we drove up to Spirit Rock for daylong retreats, to Mount Madonna for weekends, to Tassajara for a week's practice at the zendo, and gradually an entire spiritual life I had been blind to, started to open up to me.

It was very strange and unsettling at first, because I'd been trained as a behavioral scientist. Truth was found through carefully controlled experiments, and high-powered statistical analysis. It has taken me the last decade to understand that, although the terms and visualizations were quite different from my training, the Buddha was a very pragmatic behavioral scientist. Among the first guidelines to the path he offers is: experiment, see for yourself what works and what doesn't. It's the only way to know in your heart what's true.

Two years into Anita's and my new-found partnership, I took early retirement from a corporate job in New York City, and she asked me,

“What do you want to do now?” I had no answer. She persisted, I resisted. Finally, I said, “Well, I still don’t know about the big picture, but for one thing, I’ve always wanted to paint, but I never had the time.”

I promptly forgot that conversation, but for my birthday that year – 2004 – Anita gave me a complete set of watercolor painting equipment and supplies, and a how-to instructional book. I began to paint immediately, and have continued since then. I also began to take figure drawing classes at Hopper House in Nyack, learned the basics of anatomy, layered depth and foreshortening, and applied these lessons to *Anita Above Phoenix*. To me the painting expresses triumph, the kind of “Hah!” that breaks through the surface to deeper experience.



Green Heron at Sueño Azul (watercolor on heavy-weight Arches paper, 2004), is based on a snapshot I took of a green heron (I didn't know what kind of bird it was at the time; I came home and looked it up in a bird book) that was fishing from a log at the edge of the lake behind our room at the Sueño Azul ("Blue Dream" in Spanish) resort in Costa Rica. Anita and I spent a few weeks in Costa Rica in 2004, hiking in the cloud forests to the north, paddling the rivers near the Nicaragua border, and relaxing at Sueño Azul.

At Sueño Azul, we meditated in our room, and also while sitting under the few enormous trees that remained on the edges of the meadows and farm fields, survivors of the clear-cutting that in the past had turned Costa Rican forest and jungle into ranch and farm land.

The clear-cutting took place years before the country and its people decided, with astonishing rationality, that they could make more money by preserving their extraordinarily diverse, unique environment and making it available for tourism, rather than selling the trees for lumber and depleting the exposed soil with agriculture and ranching. That positive ecological choice resonates with a very wise statement recently shared on Facebook by Thanissara Mary Weinberg: "There is no Planet B."

This Costa Rican reverence for life, motivated by enlightened self-interest, meant that a green heron alighted on a log in the water ten feet from us, cocked its head, and waited fixedly for its dinner while I moved slowly off the porch and into the room, came back out with the camera and snapped its picture.

Half a year later, using that snapshot for guidance, I painted the picture – spending two weeks meticulously trying to capture the feeling of the water and the reflections of the bird, mossy log and reeds. And then I

painted the bird itself in about an hour – realizing that I had to let go of my compulsion for precision if I were to be true to the nature of the bird. That choice, which in retrospect was as close to doing something “zen” as I’ve ever done in this kind of painting, was the right one.

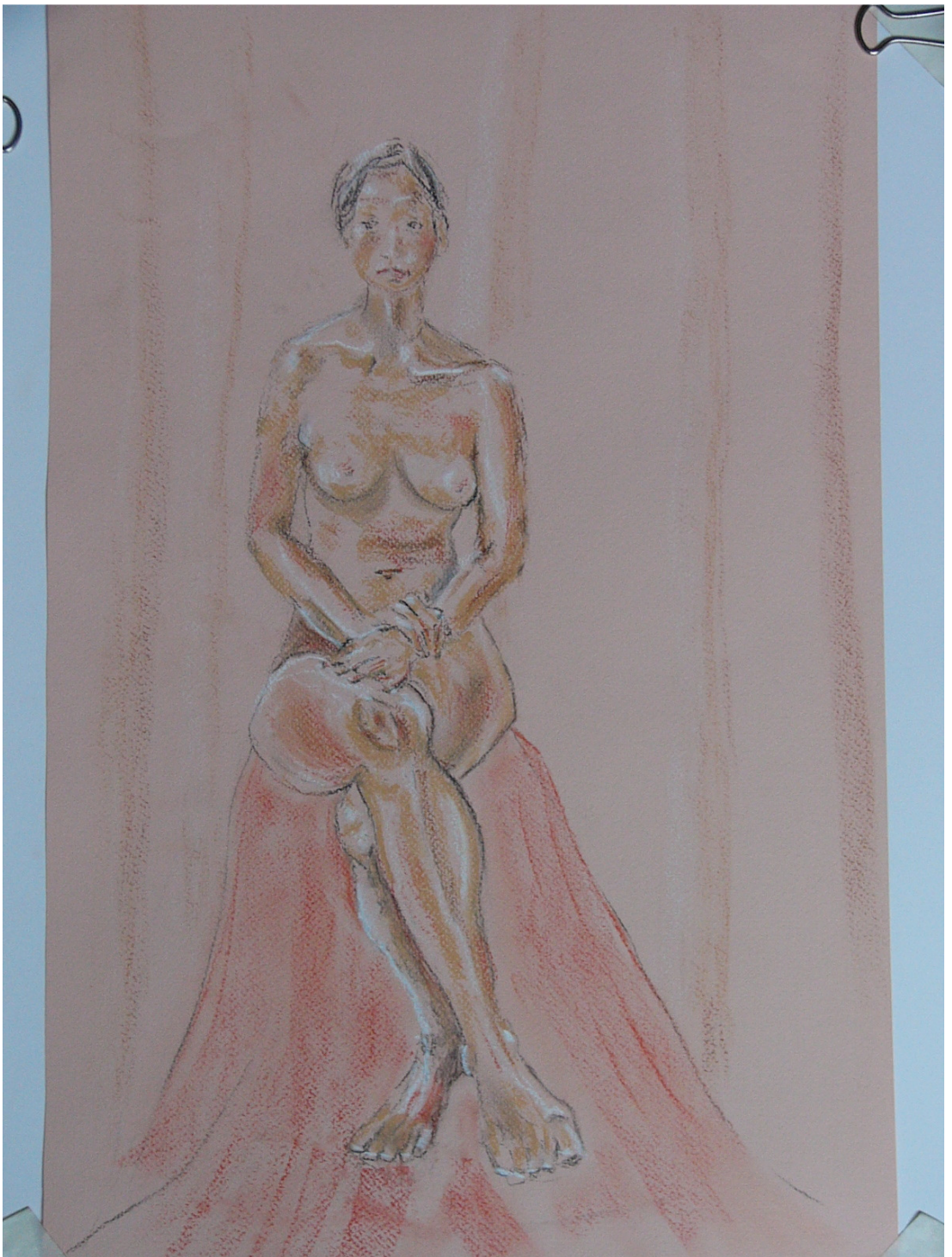


Figure at RoCA (pastel chalk on paper, 2010). I began studying figure drawing at Hopper House in Nyack, New York, right down the street from where I live, soon after Anita gave me the drawing and painting supplies. Hopper House is a non-profit art center, the birthplace and boyhood home of Edward Hopper, American master realist painter.

When my figure-drawing teacher Daniel Dugan shifted his classes from Hopper House to Rockland Center for the Arts (“RoCA”) in West Nyack, I followed along. I continue to take his classes at RoCA when I have the time. My trips to San Francisco to be with Anita, and our shared travels – Costa Rica, Mexico, Montana, Nova Scotia (a week meditating with the monks and nuns at Gampo Abbey), and other wonderful places – prevent me from taking classes as often as I’d like to.

Figure drawing is much harder for me than the work I do from photographs like *Green Heron* and *Anita Above Phoenix*. A photograph doesn’t move. Yes, it’s flat, and you risk winding up with a flat-looking painting, but it doesn’t move. A photograph has infinite patience. But no matter how professionally still a live model sits, the model moves – some less, some more – while in the pose. There’s breathing, there’s fatigue, there can be muscle cramps that the model has to stretch out.

When the class involves drawing one pose, as was the case for *Figure at RoCA*, the model will pose for two and a half to three hours, taking a five- to fifteen-minute break every 20 minutes. When the model gets back into the pose after the break, inevitably the pose is slightly different. This is just the way it is working with live models. So you’re drawing a hand, there’s a break, the model goes back into the pose and holds the hand differently. You do the best you can. You have to see the hand in your mind’s eye (that’s got to be a Buddhist concept) and get it down on the drawing surface.

While I find figure drawing harder than working from snapshots, it is also more rewarding. Drawing the human figure, I work for the most part with pastel chalks on paper. Using this medium, because it is so imprecise, I'm much more likely to make lucky accidents – to move the chalk on the paper and suddenly discover I've made a shadow in the face that suggests wistfulness, or a highlight on the shin that reads as underlying bone.

In figure drawing, I have good days and bad days and I never know which it's going to be. On the good days, the drawing flows, the time flies and at the end of the class, the drawing looks like the model and, additionally, captures a fleeting mood in face and posture – pensiveness, sadness, determination, peace. On the bad days, the drawn figure is wrong, lumpy, unintentionally distorted, sometimes to the point of appearing monstrous and cartoonish, and with a face that can wind up looking like the late Heath Ledger's smeary, grotesque "Joker" face in that Batman film.

You don't have to be an artist to look at a bad drawing and know it's bad. We're all experts on the human face and figure. We begin with intense study of our own, agonizing about it in adolescence (when did you first use two mirrors, look at yourself in profile, and sink into despair?), later perhaps joining a gym and feeling body-proud as young adults, then shaking our head (and our jowls) in middle age, finally becoming resigned to who we are as we become seniors. In addition to this visual self-inspection, we also all intently study the figures and faces of others – for reasons ranging from sexual attraction or repulsion to parental interest and concern to guesses about health and caloric intake. My point is, *anyone* can tell you with expert, ego-puncturing accuracy when your drawing of a human figure is "off."

Figure at RoCA is a drawing that I was pleased with. It was a good day. I was early to class. If you're late to class, you wind up on the edges, drawing the model in profile. I got to class early, set up my easel in the middle, and was able to see the model's full face and form. Drawing her right leg and foot coming toward me demanded a lot of foreshortening.

Also, this is one of the few of the hundreds of pastel figure drawings I've done where I've used more than one color of chalk. In this case, I used a brick red, two tones of burnt umber, black for edge shadows and white for highlighting.

The ends of the chalk pencils, even though I sharpen them with a razor blade, are not fine enough to work in precise detail. You daub and hope. Here, it worked out. The model's expression – which I would call one of patience and endurance – was entirely a lucky accident.

Now let me take back something I said earlier. I have learned from the dharma – and from my figure drawing teacher – that to call a class a “good day” or a “bad day” based on what the drawing winds up looking like is to be confused, to miss the point. The point is that every day I draw, every class I take, regardless of the quality of the finished drawing, is a good day. When I understand this – and I have to keep rediscovering it – when remember I don't need to be concerned about the product, but rather simply experience the joy of the process, that's when I do my best work.



SYDNEY REUBEN

Although Sydney has spent many years integrating Buddhist principles into her personal life and her professional work, she is new to IMC and to establishing an ongoing mindfulness practice. What she lacks in experience, she makes up for in enthusiasm. Sydney also enjoys singing in a quartet, walking, playing bridge, family and friends. She works as a freelance editor and life coach.

A CHILD'S VIEW

What Are You Not Seeing?

Children teach us to see. For instance, the first time we took my grandson Ryan to the zoo, Robin and I looked at the animals. We kept pointing and excitedly saying, "Ryan, do you know what animal that is?" or "Look at that monkey, Ryan" and "Ryan, do you see that tall giraffe?" Despite our gestures, enthusiasm, and, yes, pleading, Ryan said nothing.

As I mentioned, Robin and I were looking at the animals. Ryan, being in a stroller, about two feet off the ground, was looking at other things that he found fascinating, like people's legs, twigs and stones, and Robin and me frantically gesturing. We must have looked pretty funny to him.

That outing showed me how out of touch I was with a child's perspective, but I didn't truly appreciate the wonder of a child's view until I took Ryan to my neighborhood park.

PRINCE RYAN AND THE MAGIC CHIP

At the playground, three-year-old Ryan declined my invitation to push him on the swing and bypassed the multicolored, state-of-the-art equipment, to play instead with the wood chips that were often trampled upon and all but invisible to the adults.

First grinning and saying "Wheel!" as he threw them in the air, then tirelessly making trip after trip, using little boy handfuls to move them from the play area to the cement, Ryan finally struck gold. His eyes glinted with glee as he spied the ultimate wood chip. About the size of a small domino, it was more of a chunk than a chip. But to Ryan, it was a treasure—the Hope Diamond would have been tossed aside for it.

He toted the chip here and there, pushed it through slats in the benches, flung it this way and that, but leave it? Never! It came home with us. And was it magical? Most definitely—it opened my eyes to unseen possibilities. Ryan's had never closed.

DON'T BOTHER ME, I'M SEARCHING FOR GOD

Sitting cross-legged in her living room, June arched her back and then, one by one, relaxed all of her muscles. The sweet music and

sandalwood incense helped set the mood for her to clear her mind. Behind her closed eyes, the familiar ball of purple light whirled and pulsed to the rhythm of her deep yogic breathing, and she felt at one with the universe. Then, from a distance she heard a strident voice call, “Mimi, oh Mimi,” and Mrs. Hatch had once again shattered June’s spiritual attunement.

“That damned dog,” thought June, “and that damned nuisance of a neighbor, forever doting on a manicured ball of fluff!”

“Junie, honey, have you seen Mimi?”

“Mrs. Hatch, you know I always meditate at this hour. Please don’t bother me.”

June was determined not to allow Mrs. Hatch’s inane mothering of that little creature interrupt her search for Self. Yet, each day brought another version of the same story. June might be reading a book called *Finding Your God Within*, or some similar title, and be just about to grasp the key concept when her neighbor’s shrill voice would ring out, “Oh, Junie, come see how cute Mimi looks in her new sweater.”

“Please don’t bother me now, Mrs. Hatch,” June would implore. “I’m reading something really important.” And she would shake her head in amazement at how that lady could fill her life with such trivia.

On the evenings that her spiritual study group met at June’s home, Mrs. Hatch always found some excuse to come over and disturb them. “Junie, I need you to polish the fingers on my right hand,” or “Junie, I want you to see the new towels I bought,” or “Junie, Mimi’s not feeling well tonight. What should I do?”

June would invariably take a deep yogic breath and slowly reply, “Please don’t bother me now, Mrs. Hatch. I’ve a very important meeting

going on.” And the group would praise June for her patience with her annoying neighbor.

Incredibly, the interruptions to June’s inner peace went on for many years, during which time she learned four different forms of meditation, made two trips to India, did Sufi dancing and Buddhist chanting, and even tried playing Tibetan bowls. But inevitably her concentration was broken by Mrs. Hatch’s insistent calls.

In her retirement years, June gave up her lifelong search, traded in her meditation cushion for a recliner, and became a soap opera addict. Still, Mrs. Hatch’s nerve-shattering voice, pandering to her silly mutt (Mimi had been replaced by Claude and then Jacques), pierced her inner peace.

June eventually became a bedridden, bitter old lady who felt that her earnest attempts at finding God had gone completely unrewarded. Her eyesight too weak to watch television, she lay in bed, eyes closed, breathing so shallowly her body barely moved.

One day the dancing purple light returned, then turned to brilliant white, and an outstretched arm emerged. She knew in an instant her maker had come for her. “God,” she croaked, “why has it been so hard? Why did you not give me any help?”

“Oh, my dear Junie,” rasped the frighteningly familiar voice, “I tried. I certainly tried.”

THE ROAD TO TRUTH

It isn't always comfortable:
sometimes it's messy,
It forces me to grow or get off:
It challenges me,
it humbles me,
it crumbles the not-me.

It strips me bare:
innocent as a newborn,
open as a blossom,
simple as the naked truth.



BRIDGIT AGSAR

Bridgit Agsar is co-founder of the SaraSangha Insight Meditation Group in Sarasota, Florida, where she gets to learn, practice and share with friends on the Path.

INVISIBLE

Invisible now
wrapped in a cloak of belonging
I am free

BEHIND THE WINDOW

If I were outside I could feel the wind
but right now I'm just looking while the tea water waits to boil
The big leaves sway and lightly kiss the ones nearby
and the small ones glisten and sparkle as the sun does its dance

Only the eyes see the wind behind the window
nothing heard nor tactile or tasty
and the scent of the flowers is only imagined



KARI PRAGER

Kari Prager (1947-2010) grew up in Vermont, then moved to California where he and his wife Gail raised their family. He said that he found serenity through motorcycling, target shooting, and mountain climbing, because doing them really well required him to clear his mind.

THE LOVE OF OTHER MEN

The men sit silent,
upright in a circle,
in mindful meditation.
Nothing is demanded.

The swelling of the chest,
time's steady in and out,
it keeps us in the present.
There is a comfort here.
These are my friends.

The silence is a prelude for
the talk to follow, meandering

like braided channels of a stream,
to share the currents of our lives.

For twenty years we've met
and seen the gentle graying,
the counting down.
We feel the bond
beyond the presence
of the darkness,
of the sudden spasm,
of the avalanche of cells gone mad.
We know that time has already
commenced its tireless stalk,
but we are comforted.

Which of us will be the chosen one,
the first to walk out on the ice?
But not alone. Our spirits
have companionship.
With hand on knee,
or shoulder clasped,
we hold each other tightly
in a love that is a blaze
of flame against our twilights.



ROBERT CUSICK

Robert Cusick is a long time student of Gil Fronsdal and a former Buddhist monk whose practice is focused on recognizing and cultivating compassion through the application of mindfulness.

JUST LIKE THE BUDDHA

Just like the Buddha we live in a magnificent world that evokes awe and wonder, a world filled with beauty and joy and, simultaneously, with darkness and peril. This is the way of the world, the way things are. It tests our human spirit.

Just like the Buddha we can learn to pay attention to life's powerful and conflicting forces.

Just like the Buddha we can learn not to add to or be swept away by fear, confusion or hatred, keeping in mind that the human experience isn't easy or predictable.

Just like the Buddha we can cultivate access to wisdom and compassion and transform our beliefs in separateness and limitation.

Just like the Buddha we can cultivate the aspiration that no living being, anywhere, ever again be excluded from the wishes for safety and happiness that we hold in our hearts for our loved ones and ourselves.

Just like the Buddha, in our own blessed and beautiful ways, we can learn to let go and meet each arising moment of experience with an open heart and a calm mind.

We can be happy and free too. Even me. Even you.

Just like the Buddha!



DEBRA ROSENFELD

Debra Rosenfeld has been practicing meditation since she gratefully discovered Insight Meditation Center in 2011. She enjoys people, poetry, the ocean, and learning.

HAIKU

Acceptance

Of the way things are.

Happiness.

In silence

Lies sanctuary.

Being here.

I have a refuge

From the loss, grief, pain, and change.

I go there often.

I plant seeds,

Which bear fruit later.

My karma.

Compassion

Is the solution

To all plight.



JIM BRONSON

Jim began practicing in 1968 as a student of Krishnamurti and in 1990, began practicing vipassana. From 1999-2011, he offered outreach and education at Kara for those experiencing tragedy and loss. Jim and his wife, Jan, live on a small farm outside of Ashland Oregon. Jim co-teaches vipassana meditation and applied Buddhism through Southern Oregon University and has also organized self-taught retreats in natural settings. You may listen to Jim's talks on Audio Dharma at <http://www.audiodharma.org/teacher/26/>.

MORNING MADNESS

At the start of every day
I wonder what will come
Will I dominate the play
Or stumble like a bum

No matter what my plans are,
My pre-determined schemes,
Something stops my progress
And thwarts my sought-for dreams

Instead of pushing harder
And sweating what won't happen
I'm just now learning to
Accept the usual gap in

The world as I would have it
And the one that comes to pass,
Resist the urge to grab it
And simply accept, at last



JUDY TAYLOR

Judy Taylor has been practicing various forms of meditation for over 20 years with exclusive focus on vipassana since 2005. She spends her time writing, reading, dabbling in photography and film, and attempting to live as mindfully as possible.

Staying Afloat on a Turbulent Sea

"I'm worried about Dad," Allan said in an unusually strained voice. I clenched the phone a little tighter, unconsciously mirroring the sudden constriction in my heart. "Why," I ventured, "because he's so tired all the time? I just think he needs to stop doing things like pouring Mocha Mix all over his cereal. All that sugar and fat would make anyone sleepy and sluggish, not to mention what it's doing to his cholesterol levels."

"Yeah..., but that's not what I'm so worried about." My brother paused, sighed and then continued in a more plaintive voice, "Dad just doesn't seem like himself. He doesn't seem to care about anything anymore. They're getting that retirement place in Panorama, and he's letting Julia make all the design decisions. That's not like him."

I had noticed this recent change in Dad's attitude too, and it troubled me. One of my dad's and his wife's favorite hobbies was to remodel and redecorate their home. So for Dad to be so disinterested in refurbishing this latest purchase was very uncharacteristic of him.

Dad's general apathy at the time stood in stark contrast to the ardently engaged person we always knew. He was an avid runner, mountain climber, entrepreneur, antique gun and clock collector, and real estate investor--winning numerous medals and ribbons for his running prowess and earning a pile of money for his exceptional business acumen. And in his globe-trekking days, he had excitedly sampled life in countries from Europe to the Third World.

"Well, maybe it's just that he's getting older and can't engage in his favorite activities anymore," I offered, clinging to my desire for nothing to be seriously wrong with Dad. "You know he hasn't been able to do much in recent years because of his lack of energy and the pain in his foot. So what's he left with? Going out to eat at fancy restaurants and reading? I know he enjoys those things, but maybe he's bored and depressed because he can't do much of anything else."

"Well, I don't know," Allan responded glumly. "I just think he's got something terminal, but he's not telling us."

Something terminal?! I could almost hear the ripping sound in the tent of denial I was living under. But no, I wanted to stay firmly entrenched in my safe tent, despite the big hole it now sported. Plus, I didn't think Dad would hide something that major from us and told my brother so. We hashed it out a bit more and then ended the call with our morbid thoughts and raw emotions still hanging in the air.

After such a dynamic life, it was unsettling for me to watch Dad steadily decline in his physical abilities. And then with his inner exuberance ebbing, I was becoming even more perturbed. This was not how I wanted to see him in his early 80's. In my mind, he was supposed to be robust for at least another decade or two.

This was not my first brush with having to face my dad's mortality. Forty years prior, after a nearly fatal heart attack, I was forced to

confront the fact that he would not be around forever. I remember seeing how ashen he looked and how somber the tenor of conversation was when we visited him in the hospital. Yet despite these disturbing signs, I did not fear his imminent death. Perhaps I was just too young to grasp the true gravity of the situation. I was positive that Dad would survive. And he did more than simply survive--he thrived.

Dad began an earnest program of health-enhancing activities after his cardiac arrest. That's when he started running, competing in sprints and marathons, and mountain climbing. Additional wellness measures he undertook were reducing his alcohol consumption, limiting his cholesterol intake, and quitting smoking. I never worried about his longevity in those days because I saw that he relished life and took the necessary steps to ensure many more hardy years on the planet. We'd always joke with Dad that he'd live to be at least 100.

But later, when he was jet-setting everywhere with his wife, I began having bursts of concern about his mortality again. When I'd hear the news of a plane crash, I would freeze momentarily and ask myself, "Where's Dad now?" Then I'd heave a great sigh of relief when I realized that he was not on that unfortunate plane in that far-flung place. I was content in the thought that I would hear his warm, enthusiastic voice once more regaling me with his recent adventures in yet another fascinating part of the world.

And as Dad entered his 70's, he was still very active despite shifting his exercise routine from running to vigorous walking. But sometime later that decade, he stopped the walking due to the persistent pain in his foot. This inability to walk much and his constant tiredness also put an abrupt end to his traveling exploits. After discovering that he was too exhausted to even drive from his home on the Puget Sound into neighboring Idaho, he turned the car around and sadly packed away his

ceaseless wanderlust.

Hearing of this aborted adventure brought back fears of my dad's mortality. These concerns haunted me, lurking in the back of my mind like bogeymen. And each time these scary monsters jumped out at me, I would beat them back with a blast of stubborn optimism. Dad was supposed to live 'til 100, I'd tell myself! I just *had* to believe this.

But after that unsettling phone conversation with my brother, I realized that I just couldn't keep ignoring reality. And as a practicing Buddhist, I knew I had effective tools to mentally prepare me for the inevitable. The Buddha's teachings around mindfulness, impermanence, and equanimity were just the kind of mental medicine I needed to regain my inner equilibrium and cope with the looming reality of my dad's declining health.

So, I began by reminding myself that he *was* in his 80's and that he wasn't going to be around forever. I contemplated this as a truth that I better get used to. Dad's reduced mobility, fatigue issues, and ebbing enthusiasm for life were solid facts. Painful as it was to reflect on these somber realities, I endeavored not to shrink away from the task. Considering impermanence like this for a while seemed to provide me with enough equanimity to allay some of my fear.

Being mindful of my thoughts around Dad, I also watched how often my mind grasped for a pair of rose-colored glasses. As tempting as it was to believe that my dad would live forever, I used the truth of his changed demeanor to lessen my inclination to cling to these hopeful thoughts. Then I would intentionally contemplate what it would be like for me when he died. This was terribly agonizing, but I knew I needed to consider how my life would be without his physical presence.

Additionally, I would focus on becoming more mindfully present during my visits with Dad. So for instance, he would say, "Now drive

carefully, sweetheart," as part of our usual goodbye ritual. Instead of letting this typical comment slip by unappreciated, I'd soak in the warmth of his paternal care. This practice made such routine moments grow more meaningful in my consciousness. I began to savor these small experiences rather than just allow our remaining time together to become a blur of unlived moments. Being more mindfully present with Dad also increased my awareness of the inherently fleeting nature of life.

So when Dad began to have seriously troubling symptoms like extreme fatigue, difficulty breathing, coughing spells, and intense pain in May of the next year, I was better prepared for the subsequent diagnosis of late stage lung cancer. I spent that summer alternating between standing on plateaus of relative equanimity and falling into valleys of deep despair. But I could always pull myself out of these terrifying ravines by taking out my bag of Buddhist tools and working with my thoughts in the present moment.

And on the day of summer's annual passing, my father made his own transition. To my great astonishment, I adjusted to his death with a lot less emotional turmoil than I ever anticipated. The thought of losing my father had always frightened me. So I was greatly relieved that this much dreaded event was not as traumatic as I had imagined it would be. I firmly believe my Buddhist practices gave me the equanimity necessary to stay afloat on such a turbulent sea.

Occupying the Present Moment

The first thing I heard as I exited my car in downtown Oakland was the sound of helicopters chopping the air above me. This hard-edged pulsing became my aural backdrop as I hurried toward Frank

Ogawa/Oscar Grant Plaza to join the General Strike of the Occupy Oakland movement. Striding closer to Broadway, I was greeted by knots of chanting, placard-carrying protestors spilling towards me. Rounding the corner, I witnessed the massed throngs of people, numbering into the 1000s, as they maintained peaceful possession of the streets and sidewalks surrounding the encamped plaza. Citizens reflecting the 99% in all its ethnic, occupational, gender, and age diversified splendor chanted, marched, and danced. Others chatted loudly, competing for ear space with a booming, rousing orator and the rhythms of a street band. Adding to this sensory load was a cloak of burning cannabis, cigarette smoke, and barbequing food. It was truly a festival and a celebration as much as it was a demonstration and a protest.

The clash of sights, sounds, and smells stoked my sense of feverish anticipation. Wild emotions rose and lodged in my throat. It was exhilarating to be present and part of such a widespread movement advocating for nonviolent change. I felt impelled to join this gathering in Oakland, on this momentous, historic day, by my deep pain at the vast inequities in our society. Since we are all interconnected, I cannot simply be content with my own comfortable situation while so many others are struggling to subsist in an economic and political reality that has ceased to work for the majority. Joining the General Strike on this day was a way for me to stand in solidarity with the folks who are demanding systemic transformation.

Yet, like my involvement with the monumental demonstrations in San Francisco before we attacked Iraq in 2003, I felt it was important to serve as an antidote to the forces of greed, hatred, and delusion. Therefore, I do not come to these gatherings in anger and divisiveness, but in joy,

oneness, and peace. In alignment with what the Buddha taught, I believe we can work at eliminating the three poisons on a societal level by cultivating and exhibiting such positive attitudes and states of being as metta, equanimity, unity, and tolerance. I was thrilled to be part of a movement working to shift the world in a more positive direction.

My intense excitement was infused with a nervousness that kicks in when I am exposed to an over-stimulating environment. My nervous system is like a sponge, absorbing the prevailing tenor and mood of whatever environment I find myself in. My barometric body registered the optimistic, high spirits of the crowd, as well as the chaotic collision of sensory input. This mixture was jangling to my nerves. I felt my body subtly tighten in defense and resistance against the overly-amped surroundings. Usually when I sense such reactions within, my impulse is to flee or shrink back from the environment that has evoked them. Yet, since I strongly desired to participate in the General Strike, I just remained present with my inclination to run away.

With this mixed brew of edginess, aversion, and exhilaration percolating inside of me, I sought out the Buddhist Peace Fellowship meditation circle. After a brief visual survey of the corner, I quickly spotted the line of Tibetan flags delineating the BPF site. I smiled as I saw the small, silent group sitting calmly and motionlessly on the pavement. Somehow, I sensed a warm welcome, even as all eyes were closed. I quietly and gingerly staked out a position at the perimeter. Placing and arranging my makeshift cushion of towels beneath me, I got as comfortable as one can sitting on the hard concrete. I observed my meditating compatriots for a few moments and basked in the glow of their apparent serenity.

Closing my eyes, I began by noticing my body. It felt a bit contracted in my less-than-ideal sitting position. I realized that I would never get as

comfortable as I'd like to on my ad-hoc towel cushion. It clearly wasn't going to be perfect. So, with that understanding, I attempted to unclench my muscles and find the least taxing pose for my body.

With my body in a semi-agreeable position, my awareness began to shift to my ramped up emotions. Whew! I sincerely wondered if I could just be present with my roiling pot of feelings and not get swept up in their intensity. But since I sincerely wanted to be fully engaged with this environment, I decided to simply make room for my powerful emotions. I gave them the inner space to rise, fall, and swirl around within me. And with that permission, they brought tears to my eyes, trembled my body, and warmed my chest. I soon realized that I was able to sit with the circus of emotions inside of me without them sweeping me away.

Once my emotions became more bearable, my attention turned to the barrage of noise streaming into my ears. The sound of pulsating helicopters, blaring speakers, thumping music, and hundreds of yammering voices rattled me. My natural urge was to steel myself against this constant wall of oppressive sound. But since I had wanted to embrace the pulse of downtown Oakland on this day, I strove to listen to each noise with as much equanimity as I could muster. Slowly, slowly, the constant din ceased to unbalance me, and I settled into being fully present for whatever sounds arose.

With my more intense sensations attenuated, I started to register subtler aspects of my environment. I detected the smells around me--wafts of cigarette smoke, cooking food, and the pungent fragrance of burning cannabis. My stomach became queasy from this mix of scents. My sensitive system reacts unfavorably to strong smells. But again, I tried to just be present with my physical discomfort to the best of my ability.

After a while, I noticed that my systematic mindfulness was beginning to pay off. I was more relaxed and at peace with my environment. The agitation-edged excitement I felt earlier morphed into a peaceful bliss. I was fully present and unfettered by my surroundings. I truly enjoyed sitting amidst this lively setting! The cascade of sounds and smells around me just flowed in and out of my senses, without my mind objecting to or clinging to any of them.

I was amazed and delighted at this relatively quick transformation. It usually takes me several days into a long meditation retreat to achieve this level of simpatico with my environment. To have arrived at this inner place of contentment so rapidly, in such an active setting, inspired me to want to meditate everywhere, not just in quiet sanctuaries. I felt that this is what occupying the present moment is all about!

Noticing an argument ensuing behind me, I inwardly shared my peace with these folks. Then I offered it to all other beings in my vicinity, and beyond. May the fruits of my practice embolden everyone everywhere to carry on in the spirit of non-violence and metta.



Ulla Mentzel

Ulla Mentzel is a performance artist and inspirational speaker. Her subject is the luminous side of death and dying. She has worked as a high tech entrepreneur, poet, spiritual book writer, teacher of various arts, hospice caregiver, and more. Born in Angola, Africa, in 1955, she later moved to Germany with her German parents. Ulla has studied both English and American literature.

CALL ME BELOVED SOUL

Call me beloved soul
again and again
kiss me awake
that I may celebrate
this splendid life
so easily ignored

Call me beloved soul
and once again
let me feel
the widespread wings
of grace and joy
carry me through my day



POETS, DHARMA ARTISTRY EVENING

POETRY FOR HEALING THE HEART

At the core of poetry is the act of catching up with ourselves. When we speak out, we make conscious what has been hidden inside us and so join the world in conversation again. Courageous speech enables us to unfreeze our lives, to move on emboldened for the next step, to be a part of flowing forces that a moment before seemed frightening to our static sense of self. Through the robust vulnerabilities of poetry we become a self more equal to the world - more present and ready for right action, with an edge of generous wildness that our social world finds hard to entrap.

--Spring, 2011



CARLA BROOKE

Carla Brooke, community artist, teacher and poet, and has been practicing vipassana meditation since 1995. She teaches mindfulness education to children, teachers and care givers. Carla has recently published a children's book, Hanai and I.

BUDDHA REFLECTION

I stand at attention, wrapped in sunshine
before freshly cleaned bay windows
autumn light joins my wide open view
pointing the way to golden finches
circling their feeder in ceremonial dance

just beyond, seedlings
reach with evergreen delight
embracing this morning like no other
Flowering orange vines begin their journey
up the fence I will soon build

but not just yet

I want only to let this life be as it is
there is nothing that needs mending
the window before me
now clean enough to see
a reflection of the Buddha smiling
round face and belly, eye to eye
this morning that I remembered
to forget what color shirt I was wearing.



ANNE EMERSON

Anne Emerson was a member of IMC's support group for people with life-threatening illnesses. She supported the dying until she herself died.

MOON'S PROMISE

In memory of Hilda

Two in the morning and the
Pacific is swelling upon the dark
beach of your home. Tumbling
in your sleep like sea glass you are
a forlorn shard of shell. Fortune has been
unkind--held breath on
the precipice of a sharp-edged wave.
Yet the moon promises you this:
more than the coil of this page in a bottle,
the chambered nautilus of my ear,
the kelp of my open arms. She parts
herself, gathers you to her like rain,
wraps you, mermaid, in glistening scales.

Most favored, you are the daughter
conceived before all others, the kind
one whispered into being. Fragile and
not, sand-haired with coral lips she is
kissing now, rolling you over and
over in the motion of Tao.

You, her sighing possession,
the pearl in the bend of her hand,
wanting for nothing ever again



Richard M. Deets

Richard Deets is an educator and consultant and is listed in Who's Who in American Education and Who's Who in America (2006) . He serves as Vice-President of the Advisory Board for The California Writers' Club-SFV and as the organizer of the San Fernando Valley Poetry Group. He is the founder of the Monroe Poetry Society at James Monroe High School.

CHRISTINA'S COURAGE

We were in Chadds Ford and talked of Wyeth art, which we
Thought timeless as Brandywine Valley landscapes, when we
Felt the mid-March chill encroach upon the evening hour,
And mused the poetic mystery of Christina's vision rising
Above the crippling curse of polio, then the wind
Battered shutters and bent daffodils and chickweed, and rain
Splashed the riverward windows. We romanticized ourselves
Children bicycling winding country roads over rolling hills
Dropping into sleepy valleys, and your flaming auburn hair
Always seemed beyond reach. Suddenly, the rain showers

Slowed to a quiet drizzle, and for a moment the only sound we
Heard was the cardinal striking the steel casement window.

I stood in the parlor doorway adjusting crutches, and turned to see
You droop in your wheelchair, staring down stainless braces
Stacked in night shadows, as if searching for the child,
Paralysis free, no longer there and I watched as a tear
Rounded your pale cheek and fell. And what of the spring day
Remained - a Norfolk Southern freight whistle
Faded northward, and the courage of Christina, which
We had discussed, appeared out of reach in the rain.



DON ALLEN

Don Allen is a retired high-tech entrepreneur executive. In the '60s he was involved with legal research with the psychedelic drugs and in later years he practiced vipassana meditation. He has been a peer-bereavement counselor for 16 years at Kara. Don's caring heart has saved and enriched many lives of the bereaved and currently unbereaved.

YOU DO BEREAVEMENT?

How can you stand it?

they say

How can you immerse yourself

in other people's loss

in their grief, their devastation

day after day, week after week?

Why not do real work

that's productive and fun

they say

You'll be weighed down, dispirited,

morose

It's so heavy,

they say

you'll become pickled in the brine
of all those tears.

We fear that you
as we knew you
will be lost to us
and to yourself,
grotesque
gone to us....

No!
You don't understand!
It's not like that
I'm
inside my soul-closet
inside my darkest corners
inside my place under the covers
where truth can be found
where event and content give way
to soul-context
where my personal/universal conduit
connects me to the
deep knowledge place
where "aha's" originate,
where what is so for me
is so.

Really, it's not like that, I say
This is the greatest gift!

This is the chance to receive
jewels and gems
of what it is truly to be human
To be touched
in our very core
in our beingness
where we can encounter
the astounding truths of
our common humanity
where life, love, hate,
guilt, passion, disappointment, and
shattered dreams collide
and find their slow path
into consciousness
into emotions
Where tears and anguish
become the lingua franca
of our soul—
calling out
for rescue
for release
for cure
for cessation.

Of all the creatures of creation,
we are called to be there
with this single tortured human being
this pinnacle product
of thirteen billion years of evolution

And I am blessed
to be their companion

their handmaiden,
their witness
in this pristine measure
of what humanity is
of how we are bonded
and wounded
and wrenched
and ground
and transformed
and bonded again
into a new version
of Self
evolved a little step up
the ladder of becoming.

How could I turn my back
on death
long past
recent
present
or prospective?

Are we not all dying
while we are living?
Are we not all able

potentially,
to grasp that which occupies
yea, permeates us all?

Why not look in each other's eyes
and see the same selves

as we
see the unique
the one-of-a-kind cloaking
of the cosmic-universal sameness,
the everything that came from no-thing
and will return to it
as will we.

Are we not brothers and sisters
even as we proclaim our difference
and sometimes, diffidence?
It makes no sense
to resist this common humanity—
this self
that cries for its loss
be it job, physical ability, relationship
lost dream, crushed myth
dog, cat, parent, brother, wife, daughter, son.
It's the same
wherever, with whomever

So that is why,
my friends
that I choose
to sit with
and listen
and sparsely share
to give occasional
tiny assists
to normalize
to encourage
to give credit

while I witness the art
of nature's healing
of the birth pain
of renewal

how fortunate
how unpredictable
that I,
the same self
as the stuttering kid
the green engineer
the entrepreneur
would end up here
doing this
being so blessed
as to witness

and share
and be so humbled
by the magnitude
and meaning
of human experience.

This is our common path,
you and I, my friends
and the sea of others,
our heritage
not to be shunned,
but to be welcomed into
our circle
welcomed in our differences
and our sameness
which stepping back
to the view of the oneness,
is the clear choice.

Bereavement teaches it
so I must proclaim it.



DAWN NEAL

Dawn Neal lives in San Francisco, where she began meditating in 2004. She practices compassionate listening when coaching, and teaches secular mindfulness and loving-kindness in medical clinics. Part of her practice includes working towards her MA in Theravada Buddhist Studies.

ENTWINED

A knot, loose and whorled
Exact circumference of my wrist

Not long, a few inches
Delicate strands part between

Tufts, small and round as beads
A strong, thin, simple form

Soon to fray from my skin
Not back to the cotton fields

But to fall, unnoticed
perhaps to grass or grove
or asphalt or chlorinated water

of the local pool

You would not find it easily,
I think – that bit of banal

Chanted sacred by Sisters
Not even white anymore

This cut bit of the cats-cradle
Circling our small group close

Friends in a house—a flat really
The sounds of streetcars
and bells and chanted languages
and tourists below

All of us wrapped
in a blessing

Strands cut
from a larger length

A spool of simple utility
offered in alchemy

Of commitment and faith
beyond the economies of reason

For the Ayyas of Aloka Vihara and Bread & Dharma

ARTIST'S DRAWING OF ELEPHANT (FACING PAGE)
INSPIRED BY
THE BLIND MEN AND THE ELEPHANT
A BUDDHIST TEACHING STORY

Some monks said to the Buddha: "There are a number of recluses, brahmans, and wanderers of various sects, living around Savatthi. And they are of various views. There are some who assert and hold the view: "The world is eternal; only this is true, any other (view) is false." There are some who assert: "The world is not eternal; only this is true, any other (view) is false." There are some who assert: "The world is finite... The world is infinite... The life-principle and the body are the same... The life-principle and the body are different..." And they lived quarrelsome, disputatious, and wrangling, wounding each other with verbal darts, saying: "Dhamma is like this, Dhamma is not like that! Dhamma is not like this, Dhamma is like that."

The Buddha replied, "The wanderers of other sects are blind, unseeing. They do not know what is beneficial, they do not know what is harmful. They do not know what is Dhamma, they do not know what is not Dhamma. Not knowing what is beneficial and what is harmful, not knowing what is Dhamma and what is not Dhamma, they are quarrelsome... saying: 'Dhamma is like this!... Dhamma is like that!'

"A former king of Savatthi once addressed a certain man: 'Come now, my good man, bring together all those persons in Savatthi who have been blind from birth.'

"'Yes, your majesty,' that man replied, and after rounding up all the blind people in Savatthi, he approached the king and said, 'All the blind people in Savatthi have been brought together, your majesty.'

"'Now, my man, show the blind people an elephant.'

"'Very well, your majesty,' the man replied to the king, and he presented an elephant to the blind people, saying, 'This, blind people, is an elephant.'

"To some of the blind people he presented the head of the elephant, saying, 'This is an elephant.' To some he presented an ear of the elephant, saying, 'This is an elephant.' To some he presented a tusk... the trunk... the body... the foot... the hindquarters... the tail... the tuft at the end of the tail, saying, 'This is an elephant.'

"Then, bhikkhus, the man, having shown the elephant to the blind people, went to the king and said, 'The blind people have been shown the elephant, your majesty. Do now what you think is suitable.' Then the king approached those blind people and said, 'Have you been shown the elephant?'

"'Yes, your majesty, we have been shown the elephant.'

"'Tell me, blind people, what is an elephant like?'

"Those blind people who had been shown the head of the elephant replied, 'An elephant, your majesty, is just like a water jar.' Those blind people who had been shown the ear of the elephant replied, 'An elephant, your majesty, is just like a winnowing basket.' Those blind people who had been shown the tusk of the elephant replied, 'An

elephant, your majesty, is just like a plowshare.' Those blind people who had been shown the trunk replied, 'An elephant, your majesty, is just like a plow pole.' Those blind people who had been shown the body replied, 'An elephant, your majesty, is just like a storeroom.' Those blind people who had been shown the foot replied, 'An elephant, your majesty, is just like a post.' Those blind people who had been shown the hindquarters replied, 'An elephant, your majesty, is just like a mortar.' Those blind people who had been shown the tail replied, 'An elephant, your majesty, is just like a pestle.' Those blind people who had been shown the tuft at the end of the tail replied, 'An elephant, your majesty, is just like a broom.'

"Saying 'An elephant is like this, an elephant is not like that! An elephant is not like this, an elephant is like that!' they fought each other with their fists."

--Udana 68 (no attribution)

**POET'S REFLECTION ON MALLIKA AND PASENADI
(FACING PAGE)**

INSPIRED BY

THE RAJA SUTTA -- UDANA V.1

I heard that once the Buddha was staying at Anathapindika's monastery in the Jeta Grove near Savatthi. At that time King Pasenadi Kosala was staying together with Queen Mallika in the upper palace. The king said to the queen, "Is there anyone more dear to you than yourself?"

"No, your majesty," she replied. "There is no one more dear to me than myself." She then asked him the same question: "Is there anyone more dear to you than yourself?"

No, Mallika. There is no one more dear to me than myself."

The King then left the palace and went to the Buddha. On arriving, he bowed and sat to one side. The king then told the Buddha of his exchange with the queen.

Understanding the importance of this, the Buddha then stated,

*If you surveyed the entire world
You would find no one dearer than yourself.*

*Since each person is most dear to him or her self,
Those who love themselves should not bring harm to anyone.*

--Adapted by Gil Fronsdal

MALLIKA AND PASENADI

'Favorite wife'

'Yes, husband?'

'Who to you is most dear?'

Warm arms, soft eyes. Heartbeat

She turns her face to his

Eyes calm, breath soft, voice clear

'There is no one, my king

I hold more dear...

(he smiles)

...than me.'

His eyes widen, heartbeat skips,
ripples the moment, unfolding rings

'Is there anyone you hold
more dear than you, husband?'

He sighs. Bo leaves tremble.

Acrobat on a pole.

'No, love,
there's not'

Later listening
the Buddha nods

Wise couple,
perhaps he thought

Saying self-love is universal
To harm another
harms self
and love



GERRY SARNAT

Gerry Sarnat MD is an advisor to Passing It On, former CEO and professor. His third collection of poetry will be titled 17s.

fortune cookie recipes

add awe to still waters
stir gently, leaven chanting
Wait, I don't know.



Policies for Passing It On Submissions:

- Material will be peer reviewed and lightly edited
- Fiction or non-fiction should be 1,000 to 3,000 words
- Poetry, photographs and art will mostly remain within a page
- The over-all focus is on exploring mindfulness practice (not just Buddhist)
- References to mindfulness and contemplative practice are encouraged.

IMC's Mission

The Insight Meditation Center (IMC) is dedicated to the study and practice of Buddhist ideals - mindfulness, ethics, compassion, loving-kindness, and liberation. At the heart of all IMC activities is the practice of Insight Meditation, sometimes called mindfulness or Vipassana meditation. Based on a 2500-year-old Buddhist teaching, this practice helps us to see more deeply and clearly into our lives. With insight, we develop ways of living more peacefully, compassionately, and wisely.

Daily practice forms the foundation of Insight Meditation practice: daily meditation practice, and the practice of mindfulness and compassion as we go about our daily lives. Buddhist tradition also

emphasizes the value of intensive meditation retreats. IMC's mission is to stay firmly rooted in the practices of meditation and retreats. From this foundation in meditation and mindfulness, we actively seek to find ways to support practitioners in integrating and applying the spiritual life in all areas of life.

IMC's Vision

Our vision for the Insight Meditation Center is to be a community-based meditation center where the practices and teachings of Insight Meditation are made available to those living urban lifestyles. IMC has six intertwining functions:

1. To provide a simple and quiet environment where the contemplative life can be developed and protected amidst the complexities of city living.
2. To offer teachings and practice opportunities that complement Insight Meditation in supporting a balanced spiritual life from a Buddhist perspective.
3. To be a place where people can come together to cultivate and express their practice in and through their family, social, and community lives.
4. To bring in a variety of visiting Buddhist teachers who offer a wide range of Buddhist practices and viewpoints to our IMC community and the interested public.
5. To establish an urban retreat center offering a variety of residential retreat programs.
6. To offer all activities, including residential retreats, free of charge.

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