

# PASSING IT ON: Lay Practitioners Share Dharma Wisdom

A publication of  
**Insight Meditation Center**

108 Birch Street, Redwood City, California 94062  
(650) 599-3456 - [www.insightmeditationcenter.org](http://www.insightmeditationcenter.org)

Copyright © 2015 Insight Meditation Center

All rights reserved.

ISBN-13: 978-1503228764

ISBN 10: 1503228762

1. Meditation—Buddhism. 2. Vipassana—Meditation 3. Mindfulness—Meditation. 4. Insight—  
Meditation. 5. Wisdom. 6. Dharma. 7. Title. 294.3

## **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 experienced lay practitioners. These lay leaders have matured and strengthened their practice through everyday kinds of experiences: having families, making a living, managing organizations, pursuing professional careers, and volunteering. They may be invited to take the Dharma seat from time to time, not because of their credentials, but because of the wisdom they can share.

The Insight Meditation Center in Redwood City, California, 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 giving talks and classes, providing chaplaincy services, conducting weddings and memorials, serving on the board, attending interfaith meetings, and offering mindfulness teachings for local businesses, schools, and jails. In a variety of ways, they have developed their gifts and talents and shared them with their communities.

To bring together the practice insights and Dharma teachings of seasoned lay practitioners, we launched this project in 2009. We are pleased to offer the 2015 edition of *Passing It On: Lay Practitioners Share Dharma Wisdom*, a celebration of creative works about Dharma practice in lay life by IMC sangha members and friends.

“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*



## GRATITUDE

### We express our gratitude to:

- Gil Fronsdal for his steady and inspiring leadership.
- Jim Bronson for creating this space where lay practitioners can share dharma wisdom.
- Our contributors, who communicate artfully and generously about their practice.
- Angie Reed Garner for her cover art, “No River Like Craving.”
- Linda Brockett for her typography, layout, and cover design.
- Dave Barnett, Jim Bronson, Nancy Flowers, Koren Jones, Judy Long, and Gerard Sarnat for their advice and editorial expertise.
- Hilary Borison for her kind help and support.
- Phil Goodwin for his web expertise.
- The Board of Insight Meditation Center for their support.
- Lay practitioners everywhere applying the teachings of 2,500 years in their lives!

*Passing It On, 2009* – Edited by Jim Bronson

*Passing It On, 2010* – Edited by Jim Bronson

*Passing It On, 2011* – Edited by Dave Barnett

*Passing It On, 2012* – Edited by Judy Long

*Passing It On, 2014* – Edited by Nancy Flowers and Judy Long

*Passing It On, 2015* – Edited by Linda Brockett, Nancy Flowers, and Koren Jones

## CONTRIBUTORS

Bridgit Agsar .....	4-5
Wendy Alger .....	6
Kim Allen .....	14
John Beeman .....	6
Robert Bohanan .....	12-13
Linda Brockett .....	Cover, 49, 53
Jim Bronson .....	7-11, 17-20
Carla Brooke .....	15-16
Stephen Browning .....	22-28
Judy Cannon .....	30
Tony Ching .....	31
Rebecca Dixon .....	28-30
Linda Filling .....	38
Angie Reed Garner .....	Cover, 53
Shelley Gault .....	32-37
Pablo Gonzalez .....	English 1-3, Spanish 39-41
Shelly Gordon .....	3, 75
Sue Harrison .....	43-44
Koren Jones .....	21, 42, 68
Susanne Petermann .....	48
Bianca Powell .....	44-47
Judith Ross .....	65

Robert Rossel .....	54-55
Gerard Sarnat .....	48
Patricia Sempowich.....	56, 58-59
Nirali Shah .....	46-47, 50-51
Nancy Shea .....	60-61
Cecilia Steger.....	62-64
Lynn Sunday .....	66-68
Harriet Taber .....	38,72-73
Judy Taylor.....	74-75
Leslie Tremaine .....	76-79
Edna Wallace .....	52, 69-71
Ted Weinstein .....	16, 23, 33, 57, 59, 78
About the Contributors .....	80-87





## **I Didn't Want to Cry, I Swear**

by Pablo Gonzalez

It had been a four-day retreat. Four days immersed in silence. Four days to study the particularities of the mind and the habits of the body. Five years of meditation practice gave me the confidence to face the challenge ahead. "I am ready for this and more." The phrase echoed in my mind the day before the retreat. The upcoming retreat offered an invaluable opportunity to demonstrate my advances in this discipline. A unique opportunity to move forward on the path to illumination, I thought.

The first day of the retreat was only half a day of practice; however, at the end of the day I felt exhausted without understanding the reason why. It was hard to accept that the retreat was resulting to be more mentally intense than I had anticipated and more physically demanding than I was willing to admit.

The second day was even more intense than I had imagined.

We practiced sitting meditation, walking meditation, meditation while we ate our meals, meditation when we performed our assigned chores, and meditation during resting time.

During the last session of the day, our teacher sensed that the majority of us were experiencing physical and mental difficulties and invited the group to practice meditation lying down. Amid groans and sighs we laid our tired bodies on the floor. Using the zafu as a pillow I rested my feet on a nearby chair giving my sore back a much-needed rest. My body took this gesture as a precious gift and for one instant the throbbing pain disappeared.

At the end of the meditation session, the pain on my neck, back, and legs was unbearable. I felt physically exhausted and mentally drained; all I wanted to do was to go to my room and go to sleep.

In the comfort of my room I reflected on the demands of this ancient practice. Meditation doesn't provide an answer that can satisfy a hungry mind. Meditation practice can be hard to understand because there is no path to follow. Each person builds his or her own path with each conscious breath, with each step that is taken, with each challenge that is faced. This path is created with each joyous moment and with each painful experience. The ancient practice of meditation offers the gift of an encounter with oneself.

Sleep came faster than normal, rescuing me from the incessant mental activity that added more weight to the load.

The third day was better. By then I had been able to find some balance between the intensity of a mind that wanted to be strong to face the challenge at hand and the nature of a body that had turned out to be fragile, tender, vulnerable. Unknowingly, I was entering new territory.

It was about ten in the evening when I got to my room. The smell of fresh forest filtered through the window screen. A beam of silver light projected a dark silhouette on the floor. I didn't want to turn on the light; I wanted to be in the peace that I felt in that moment.

The shower felt glorious and the comfort of the bed was a joyous reward for the hard effort made during the day. I got under the covers and took a few deep breaths. I closed my eyes to awaken the other senses. I could hear outside the thrashing of crickets and the rustling of birds settling for the night. I remained awake for a while, as the sounds of the night rose and disappeared into the vast space of a lulling silence.

The fourth day arrived with much anticipation. It was time to go home. A mixture of joy and longing played in my mind. It was true that the retreat had been grueling and demanding, but it was also true that, in some subtle way, four days of silence had awakened a different sense of awareness in mind and body.

Alicia greeted me with a smile. We sat on the sofa in the living room. I listened to her more attentively than usual. The sound of her voice was different; it had a clearer, fresher, sweeter tone. I felt the flow of her words caressing my face as the fresh ocean breeze. I couldn't quite understand the change I was seeing in her, nor was it necessary. Maybe it was me who had changed. She kept talking and I listened without interrupting. Then came silence. She understood the situation and said that she was going to water the roses in the garden. Silence had found a space in our home. After a while I went looking for Alicia in the garden, I told her that I would return in a while. I wanted to visit my father.

I spent about an hour in my father's house before returning.

I was about two blocks away from my house when I felt the sensation for the first time. It was something different, something I had never felt before. Surprised by what was happening I looked around, trying to figure out what was going on. I had traveled this same road thousands of times without paying much attention to what

was around. Today it was as if I was traveling the same road for the first time. I felt the warmth in my pupils and the humidity in my eyes. Tears rolled down my face, dropping slowly on my lap. An expansion of joy and well-being shone from within. I felt a profound sense of gratitude for everything: for Alicia, for my father, for my brothers, for my sisters and for the person who was driving next to me lost in thought. I thanked life for my daughter who had died and for my son who was alive. I felt gratitude for my cats and for the pain in my back. There was nothing and no one that could escape the deep state of gratitude I felt at that moment.

Alicia opened the door and I found comfort in her arms. “I need a hug,” was all I could say before the stream of tears flowed freely. She held me tenderly in her arms as she whispered in my ear: “I didn’t want to let you go by yourself.” Women have developed a level of intuition that men have learned to silence.

I cried like I had not cried in a long time. It was the crying that my culture had taught me to suppress and pride had forced me to ignore. On this day, culture and pride melted before the power of gratitude. I cried for a long time in Alicia’s arms. She remained silent, caressing my back with the tenderness of a mother caressing a grieving child. She knew my tears were not tears of pain or sadness, but the tears emanating from a deep state of joy. I felt the warmth of her tears on my shoulder. I finished crying when there were no more tears to shed. I felt light, clean, alive.

I did not want to cry, I swear, but there is not much the conditioned mind can do when faced by the infinite power of a grateful heart.



**Zentangle** by Shelly Gordon

## **Be Quiet, Sit Upright**

by Bridgit Agsar

A flower bloomed today  
without a divine intervention  
no, god was not needed

just the sun and the rain  
and the soil  
and a turn of the great wheel

the matter and circumstance  
the seed and the all  
are tumbled together, simple as this

heed the instruction: be quiet, sit upright,  
scent speaks in whispers  
sweet molecules speed quick through the air

full glory ignites beauty and love  
time's now, hold out your hand  
receive the gift being given

without your deserving or meddling  
as always, the deed's getting done  
not by will, just by way

flowers and hearts are made for this  
the subtle transmission  
refreshing our ancestor's code all anew, once again.

## **Thin Air**

by Bridgit Agsar

With every reason to be angry,  
sitting here within the embers,  
I've vowed not to move, not to speak  
until the smoldering fire  
once again becomes thin air.

## **Will and Expertise**

by Bridgit Agsar

Don't bother to hold on  
everything has an invisible thorn  
just a warning

of course, you can do as you like  
and grab with all your might  
thinking it's too good to let go

but thinking won't help you  
nor will your will  
or your expertise

remember the rose  
with all its beauty  
pouring out its scented allure

calling you, my sweet one  
yes you with the fine-tuned nose,  
is red not your favorite color?

come, come, surrender  
all of your wholeness to me  
your every particulate matter

the prick of your finger  
a little crimson on your shirt  
not so embarrassing if no one knows

your lustiness, your greedy ways  
so easily taken  
you, with your will and your expertise

## **Sometimes It's Quiet in the Woods**

by John Beeman

Sometimes it's quiet in the woods,  
Except when a chickadee trills her hopeful song,  
A chipmunk skitters along a fallen log,  
Or when the dragonfly dips  
Its lacy wings into water.  
A brown trout intrigued, darts up with a splash.

Sometimes the forest is still,  
Except when a watchful dog rumbles a warning.  
Now the wind stirs and breathes life through pine branches,  
A sharp crack of wood and a deer sprints away.  
Thunderheads rise, and rise again,  
A distant bass, like off-stage timpani.

Sometimes it's quiet in the woods,  
Except when I stand up  
And I begin to move my own two feet.



**Golden Gate Park Chair**

by **Wendy Alger**

## **The Dancer**

by Jim Bronson

To dance so well, like  
the tree's shadow on water,  
appeals to the light.

## **A Farewell**

by Jim Bronson

Sweet traveler moving fast in the heat,  
May nothing restrain your long leaps,  
The bounding that knows few bounds,  
The reaching skyward for rain, for light.

I honor your brave, adventurous ways.  
Go far, go far. May thirst lead you true.  
May you drink in a shimmering valley,  
Lie still as the darkness falls off your eyes.

My love flies after you as you go, so far.  
A willing prisoner of desire, I love these flames.  
Your silhouette wavers, grows small and gray,  
Your animal scent already fading from my skin.

I could not let you go except for the promise:  
Clear water from the deep source you seek.  
In lavish spaciousness, when do we celebrate?  
How much rain falls from the solitary cloud?

## **Valentine's Day Lament**

by Jim Bronson

May the heart stay open  
and truth be spoken  
though the way be tough  
and the self feel broken.

## **Finding a Home When the Old One Breaks**

by Jim Bronson

As I started walking the three miles from a remote bus stop in the North Minnesota woods, I thought about the slogan on the job contract in my pocket. Above the date, May 15, 1964, in big bold letters was: “To Serve, To Strive, and Not to Yield.” Though the contract specified that I would be a framing carpenter, my employer, the fledgling Voyageur Outward Bound School, clearly was up to more than just construction. Who were these serving, striving, unyielding people? Would I find a place for me helping them build a new school in the Boundary Waters wilderness?

I was just noticing the weight of my tool-laden backpack when a cheery voice called from a passing pickup truck. “You look like you’re part of my new framing crew. Even if you’re not, hop in.” The driver was huge and bearded, a rough character it seemed. He was quite different from the college folks I had spent the last several years with as a nearly-flunked-out student. I hoped I could succeed in the framing job now that my college time seemed nearly at an end.

“I’m John Sanstead, Hammer Honcho. You’ll be bunking in the new A-frame on the second floor, above the kitchen. My wife, Rena, starts cooking at five o’clock, and the smell of her sticky buns will get you up right promptly. We’ll be siding the new canoe house starting at seven. You won’t have to run five miles and then jump in the lake like the instructors. Those poor buggers.”

Sure enough, after a partly wakeful night hearing wild sounds coming from animals in the woods, I catch the smell of Rena’s cinnamon buns. My memory of that smell is primal, from early childhood. It is freezing as I get dressed, using every piece of clothing I brought. I hear Rena singing a song in a foreign language with lots of “oof’s” and “umms.” She greets me with a hug, a plate with two steaming cinnamon buns, and a cup. “Hot chocolate’s in that big kettle. Get yourself warmed up before you start pounding nails. My Johnny’s a tough taskmaster. You’ll need some get-up-and-go today.”

My first morning went well. I got twelve feet of framing up and sided while the other two framing grunts were mostly gazing at blue prints and grabbing coffee breaks. John put me in the lead for the afternoon while he went to town for supplies. I helped the grunts lay out their two-by-fours and showed them how to position studs between top and bottom plates using a sixteen-inch scrap piece of wood as a guide instead of wrangling their tape measures to set each stud. By the time John got back, the canoe house was sided, and we were working on the



interior. “Damnation,” he said. “We’ll do the trusses tomorrow and be roofing by the weekend, before the thunderstorm comes.”

Two weeks of framing flew by, and the school’s new buildings looked like they would be ready in time for the first student class. I spent my off time swimming and paddling a canoe with some of the instructors-in-training, always taking the stern as none of them could do the J-stroke, and they would have to switch sides every few dips of the paddle. John and Rena were friendly, and I felt I was making a place there. Meanwhile, at my family home in Denver, my mom and step-dad were locked in a bitterly contested divorce, but that seemed miles away and years ago, just a bad dream I could easily forget.

I had seen the school director and his son, the chief instructor, at a distance as they trained the instructors. They seemed bright and energetic; good examples of people who lived by the values of “To Serve, To Strive, and Not to Yield.” The instructor training was changing from physical conditioning to classes on teaching map and compass skills, planning an expedition route and meals, applying first aid in the back country, and handling difficult students (half of the first class were coming from the Juvenile Authority in New York City).

I was just settling down for a framing crew lunch break with my back against a stack of two-by-twelves when the director approached me. “I’m Bob Pay. You have done well with John. Would you like a chance to be promoted to instructor? One of the senior guys has a sick child and has had to go home suddenly. Can you paddle a canoe?”

I tried to hold back my surging excitement. “Yep. My step-dad was a doctor for a Boy Scout canoe trip out of Moose Lake, and he negotiated a deal where I got to go along. We did the Knife Lake chain along the border and ran the rapids on the river at Canadian Customs.”

Bob nodded and said, “Well, if John can spare you, we’ll give you a few tests along with a couple of other candidates; swimming, paddling, back woods skills, endurance. If you’re the best, you’ll get the new assignment.”

Early next morning I was up and jogging with the instructors, vapor clouds of breath pulsing in front of our red faces, frozen dew lining the trail. I had just gotten warmed up when it was time to strip and dip by jumping off the dock into the lake. If anything within a mile was still asleep, they were awakened by desperate shouts as we felt the water and swam heads up for the ladder. The sticky bun at breakfast put me back in a good place where I could face a whole day of testing and scrutiny.

I knew I could handle the paddling and swimming and breezed through the morning with my solid J-stroke and my well-practiced over-arm sidestroke learned in Red Cross Life Saving class. The backwoods skills were tough, but John Sanstead was the judge, and I think I got a pass just because he liked me.

The final event of the day, role-playing crisis situations, looked ominous. Several senior instructors were acting as tough kids from the projects who didn't want to be led by some college kid. My scenario involved a kid who had to leave the group for a "secret" smoke ten times a day, delaying them and putting them at risk of not reaching their campsite before dark. "What would YOU do with this bozo?" said the chief instructor.

My brain did a fast search and found nothing in my past experience that could help. Then, I remembered a Jack London story about a rookie miner on the Klondike Trail whose slow pace kept everyone stuck and angry. In the story, they threw him in the snow when they finally got to the cabin. After spending a night out, the slacker apologized and never lagged again.

"I think this kid's cigarette fetish is his way of comforting himself," I began. "I'm guessing that only group pressure can get him to drop it. I doubt if anything I say as an instructor would reach him. So, the first night out, we'd have a group chat around the campfire. I'd say to no one in particular, 'What's it like when you are carrying a pack or a canoe and have to wait for someone?' 'What do you think could help that person move quicker?' 'If we get to camp after dark because of someone's delay, and we have to skip dinner, what might you want to say or do?'"

I saw a positive nod from the chief instructor. After a pause, the instructor speaking in the smoker's role hit me with, "I need to smoke! I been smoking since I was ten. I can't go an hour without it. Give me a break!"

I said, "Let's see. You are taking it easy behind a tree and the twelve of us are carrying our loads down the portage trail. That doesn't seem fair. We're taking care of our part and we're stopped until you take care of yours. When you finally arrive what do you think would happen?"

"I'd give everybody a fag, ha ha."

"And, what do you think they would do to you?"

"I'm guessing I might be getting wet."

"You ever tried to smoke a wet cigarette?"

"Hmm, I'd better be learning how to chew tobacco, like the cowboys."

"Can you chew while you are walking and carrying your load?"

“I’ll try. I don’t like getting dunked.”

Whether my group process approach would actually work didn’t matter. It had an air of possibility about it, and the judge gave me a pass. While the results were tallied, I exchanged short remarks with the real instructors. “No time to smoke or even chew out on the trail.”

“Who makes enough money to buy those things anyway?”

“Kids steal them. Like nails. They keep them in Juvie.”

Bob read the results from the day of testing. I was the last to be mentioned. Giving a hint of his orthodox upbringing, Bob finished with, “Someone once said, ‘And the last shall be first;’ at last, please welcome Jim as our newly appointed instructor. He’ll have his hands full for a while, so let’s pull together and help him be up to our high Outward Bound standards.”

Being an instructor, I found, was a lot harder than framing. My first course was a super-busy blur, but I had the good fortune to be paired with Ralph Clough, an English instructor whose career included working at Outward Bound Schools in England and Hong Kong, as well as being director of the school in Loitokitok, Kenya. He and I got along famously, and I developed quite a taste for tea as he always took a break about four in the afternoon and had a brew with his little billy pot. At first I thought about telling him that habitual interruptions delayed the group, but once I tried daily teatime, I got hooked. My favorite brew is Assam with a spoon full of Carnation milk powder, though I might yield on that if need be.

To this day, having a break for tea and conversation is one of my favorite activities. At the conclusion of a meditation retreat last weekend the kettles boiled, teapots steeped aromatic brews, and each person held a warm cup in a reverent posture that reminded me of bowing. Through rising steam, meditators spoke from a quiet, calm presence that one rarely finds in gatherings in this world except after times of mindfulness practice. The post-retreat atmosphere was warm and collegial, reflecting for me an inner sense of being at home; the feeling I was looking for many years ago through employment with Outward Bound. I didn’t realize it at the time, but, in actual fact, I was inward bound and I was home.

## **CONVERSATIONS**

by Robert Bohanan

### **Monkey Mind and Beginner Mind**

#### **Talk About Emptiness**

Monkey Mind woke hungry. Beginner Mind woke hungry too. “If I don’t eat soon, I’ll die, I surely will!” Monkey Mind cried.

Beginner Mind smiled and patted Monkey Mind gently on the shoulder. “You’ll be ok. We’ll find you some food,” Beginner Mind said quietly and smiled.

“Is this what emptiness means?” Monkey Mind asked, for this was a conversation they often had.

“No,” Beginner Mind answered. “Different kind of empty,” he added.

“I don’t get it. I don’t, these riddles of yours,” Monkey Mind said with great dismay.

“You’re getting closer, you are,” Beginner Mind encouraged. “How do you feel now?” Beginner Mind asked again.

“Still hungry. And you know, I think it’s becoming worse,” Monkey Mind said aloud with his voice rising to a fever pitch. “How about you?” Monkey Mind asked.

“Still hungry too,” Beginner Mind answered. Then he added, “But I’m ok for now and so are you.”

Monkey Mind hated it when Beginner Mind said that. “How do you know? How can you be sure?” Monkey Mind asked with furrowed brow and wrinkled forehead.

“Because I’ve been hungry before. Because I’ve been full before,” Beginner Mind said and smiled.

### **Monkey Mind Woke In a Bad Mood**

#### **And Beginner Mind Smiled**

Monkey Mind woke, woke in a bad mood and with a sour taste in his mouth. Beginner Mind woke too, a bit later than Monkey as was their usual habit. Monkey Mind wanted to talk of the week ahead, that yet to come, for he was worried, he was.

Beginner Mind listened and listened some more. He listened and he smiled. Though Monkey Mind was bothersome, troublesome he was so many, many times, Beginner Mind smiled at Monkey Mind again.

## **Monkey Mind Talks And Beginner Mind Listens**

Monkey Mind woke thinking, thinking about what was said. Beginner Mind listened and listened with care as the story unfolded. Monkey was hurt and yes; he was angry with the turn of the events of the day. Monkey Mind held tightly to yesterday and the words, words said and not.

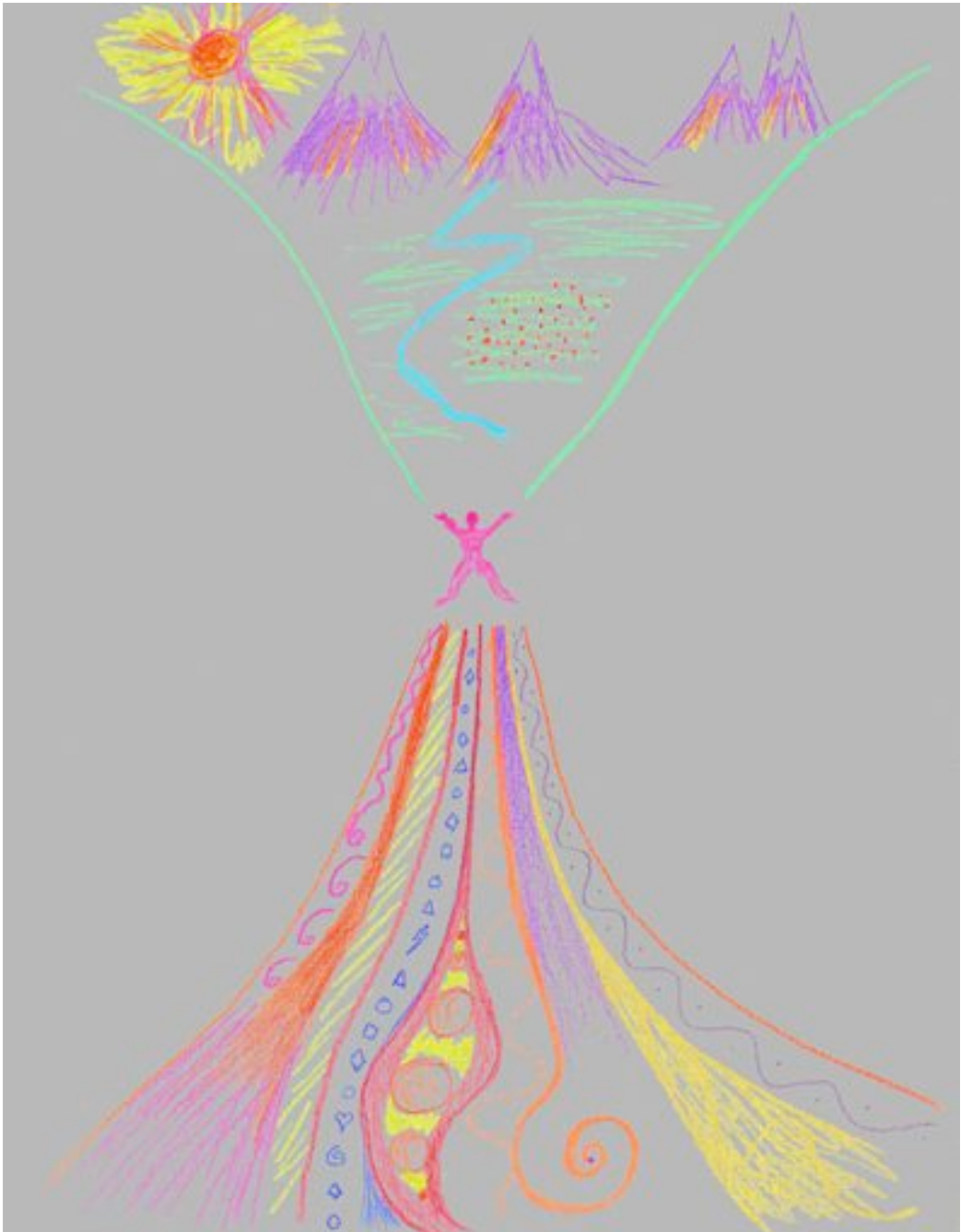
Beginner Mind listened, just listened and smiled while Monkey Mind cried. Beginner Mind had learned a lesson yesterday and today—Truth is rarely spoken aloud. Truth is deeper he thought. Words cannot speak truth for the heart has no mouth. For that Beginner Mind was ever so grateful, yes he surely was. And so he listened to the pauses. For somewhere in the precious pauses, that fleeting yet vast space of all and no-thing, was a truth that only Monkey Mind knew.

## **Monkey Mind Wakes To Grey Skies**

Grey clouds in a morning sky, even the rising sun sleeps in. It looks like rain and probably storms. Beginner Mind sits quietly and waits, waits with love and kindness for Monkey Mind to take a breath. Monkey Mind worries about this, but mostly about that and the other. It's just what Monkey Mind does. Monkey Mind isn't bad and means no harm. Monkey Mind was born with worry to survive. That's why it's so wonderful that Beginner Mind is a friend.

## **Monkey Mind, Beginner Mind And a Bag O'Rocks**

Monkey Mind and Beginner Mind went for their usual morning walk. Both were unusually tired for the hour. Monkey Mind complained, "My back hurts." Beginner Mind quietly and curiously agreed. They looked and they tried to find the source. "There it is!" they said in unexpected unison. A bag of rocks it was, right there on their backs, tucked away out of sight unless they really looked. One pulled out a rock, heavy and jagged with a label—Spring 1964, Tennessee, Fear. More from Tennessee, most with Fear. There were some from Illinois with various dates and many others from several states and years. Most were from Wisconsin, and many of these Regret. Monkey Mind fretted and rubbed our hands. Beginner Mind raised a brow. They each began to talk at once. Monkey Mind scowled and growled. Beginner smiled and laughed. This was our usual way. Beginner Mind suggested that these rocks that they had carried for so very, very long were no longer useful, nor needed. Monkey Mind wasn't sure and still frowned. Beginner Mind suggested that they drop one, just one, then another, another and more until the bag was empty. Even Monkey Mind agreed that this was better, much preferred. Then he stopped and whimpered, for up ahead more rocks. Beginner Mind smiled, laughed, gave Monkey Mind a hug and on they went.



**Doorway**

**by Kim Allen**

## **Miramar**

### **To See the Sea**

by Carla Brooke

Welcomed by glassy waves that echo stillness,  
We float inside a rubber boat on April morning whispers.  
The ocean disguised as a hidden lake stretches time  
While all my thoughts give way to the chant of a foghorn.  
Two of us melt into a water ballet of kelp by our side.  
No need to hold onto oars that dissolve with each stroke.

I can see now that life grows under the surface of things.  
Soon it all blurs from bird life to plant, then mammal  
A guessing game I play with the sun's reflection.  
Out there something calls and we row without fear.  
Silky fins move water in a spray of ancient rhythm.

While quiet disbelief takes hold, we drift closer.  
Our human eyes fill with tears only to magnify  
two seals who fan water as if welcoming us home,  
Their breath now a visible mirror reflecting  
the fullness that has brought us here.

## **Autumn Finds**

by Carla Brooke

A sunflower I rescued from a trash can along the road  
thanked me with a proud, upright pose, showing off her  
full blossoming crown as I set her in a blue glass vase.  
Center stage here in my living room, she shined for weeks  
The mirror behind her reflecting the ocean-kissed sky.

This day I sulk beneath the beauty of ripe autumn fruit  
just as the sunflower bows her head in surrender.  
I offer a handful of maple leaves I swept up today,  
while letting thoughts of aging crunch along.

The compost container is now filled  
with all that continues to fall away,  
I am here on this morning after the full moon  
danced along the ocean waves  
without stopping for a moment to wonder  
how long it would shine.

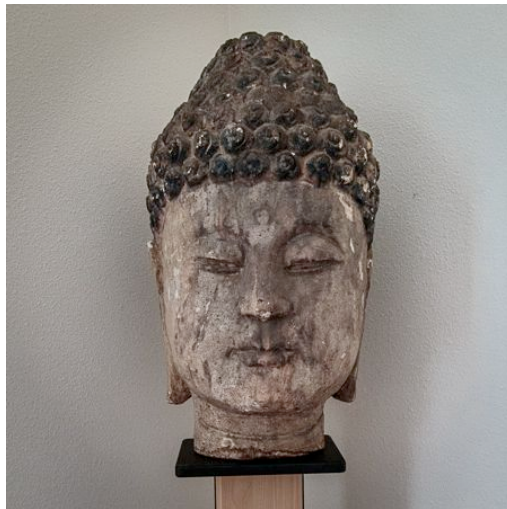
## **Dinosaur Greeting** by Carla Brooke

The traffic was slow enough to take in the sights  
of nurseries and coastal artsy displays.  
Here along the highway in Half Moon Bay  
I pass by Spanish Town's eclectic garden art  
where a statue of Buddha sits along the driveway.

At first I didn't see his peaceful, smiling face,  
sitting on a platform beside a fountain.  
There was too much in the way, demanding that we stop  
and look at the collection of rusting dinosaur sculptures.  
Hungry mouths showing off their enormous teeth.

In this dream-like moment I recognized  
prehistoric thoughts and emotions  
that continue to ask for attention  
while I'm rushing to get where I think I need to be.

On this sea-breezy day, Buddha  
quietly asks that I stop and take a closer look.  
Just one moment of laugh out loud recognition  
between my own rusting thoughts  
as I step on the gas pedal  
along the scenic highway, back home.



**Photo** by Ted Weinstein



## The Snow Man

by Jim Bronson

“It’s another suicide. A boy, seventeen, honor student, ran cross-country, teachers knew him as a kid who always has a different way of seeing things. Philosophical, several girlfriends. Low-income family, on his way to the military. Argued with his aunt this morning. Called several friends with ‘farewells,’ left voice messages on their cell phones. Knew that he could have text-messed them in class, but chose to leave voice messages they would get later. Stopped his car beside the freeway. Died by a bullet. They think the gun was his dad’s.”

I put down the phone and notice that it is hard to breathe. Dinner awaits in our kitchen, but I make several stops before getting there; the bathroom to rub some lotion on my tight face and the dog in the hall to rub his scruffy head. Meanwhile, downtown, my office mate, Sally, puts a check beside her to-do item, “Jim – handle Center High School suicide crisis call.”

The next morning I arrive at the school’s administrative office at 7:30 AM. Security guys are greeting adult visitors and directing them to the Vice Principal’s office for a briefing and to meet with the Superintendent. I introduce myself to a security guy as “Jim Bronson, Community Outreach for Kara, the grief counseling agency.” He directs me to an empty office with “School Psychologist” on the door.

While I wait I notice a big shrink-wrapped package of tissue boxes, a mounted three-foot wide roll of butcher paper, packets of marker pens and five-gallon jugs of water. The first person in the door introduces herself as Tina Romero, the school psychologist. As we shake hands, I feel large metal rings and later notice that she has one for each finger and two for the pointer finger. “I want you to talk to the family members,” she says. “Jose had a brother and two cousins here and an older sister who graduated last year. They all came from Mexico about the same time six years ago and have been together in school since. One of Jose’s friends remembered last year when he started talking about joining the Marines he said, ‘Why shouldn’t I be dying over there too?’”

The next person in the door says, “Hi, ‘I,’ you look fabulous.” Tina ignores the comment and hands us forms with check boxes to indicate risk factors for students we have spoken to. “Just help them know that they are feeling normal feelings after such a tragedy. Don’t let them get away with being quiet and gloomy.” Quickly the room fills with eight additional counselors from nearby schools and several who raise their hands when Tina asks, “Who are the Christian folks?”

She goes on, “I was here until 9:30 last night with kids who just wanted to be together and remember Jose. They heard on student chat rooms after school that Jose was missing and then identified. Somehow they got candles and a big photo of him and just stood silently in front of my office while the police, family members,

and press shuttled in and out. There were two guys there I want you to help me with especially. Bret, a tall kid who got one of the 'farewell' voice messages. Jose told him he was passing along his guitar and wanted Bret to write him a song or two. The other kid, Alex, didn't want to play Jose's voice message when the police asked for it, so they impounded his cell phone. He just cried without talking."

We walked to the gym while an announcement was broadcast in the rooms and halls. "This is a sad day at Center High School. One of our students, Jose Rodriguez, took his life yesterday. We will have a day of mourning today where you will follow your class schedule as usual. Teachers may offer time in class to talk about what you are experiencing. Alternatively, you may want to come to the auditorium, where we will have counselors available to talk with students one-on-one or in groups. There will also be materials there for you to write and draw, along with plenty of water and tissues. To close our announcements today, Mary Solano, a friend of Jose's, would like to read part of a poem called 'The Snow Man' by Wallace Stevens."

One must have a mind of winter  
To regard the frost and the boughs  
Of the pine-trees crusted with snow;

And have been cold a long time  
To behold the junipers shagged with ice,  
The spruces rough in the distant glitter

Of the January sun; and not to think  
Of any misery in the sound of the wind,  
In the sound of a few leaves,

Which is the sound of the land  
Full of the same wind  
That is blowing in the same bare place

For the listener, who listens in the snow.

At the end of the poem we got to the auditorium and spread around, waiting. As the students began to arrive, a knot formed near the door. Some were hugging, some just huddled in bunches, some sobbed. A counselor had to repeatedly ask them to move in. It seemed like several hundred were seated before the doorway was clear and the doors flapped shut. Tina started with, "Good for you all. We are pleased to have you come together so we all can help each other at this time of unthinkable suffering. At any time you may go back to class or go home, but please, if you go home, check in with the attendance office before you leave. We care about each one of you and don't want anyone to disappear or feel unconnected."

After some logistics, Tina asked me to give the group, now about two hundred students, a perspective on suicide. I walked up on the stage, seeming to take forever

as I maneuvered among large pieces of butcher paper. I wondered what to say to touch so much grief, so many wounds. “My name is Jim Bronson and I work with an agency that provides support for people who have had a tragedy or loss. We have learned a few things that I would like to offer to you in case they may help you today.

“First, losing someone to suicide is very hard. It is natural for us to wonder and worry about what we could have done to prevent it. ‘Why didn’t I say something wise? What if I would have been there, returned that phone call?’ We may even know that it won’t help to feel guilty, but still feel a huge amount of guilt. Just notice guilt if you feel it. Don’t resist it or keep it away. Just assure yourself that you did all that you could and that the forces pushing Jose were huge. Even professionals who are trained to spot suicides among depressed people are unable to reliably predict which will choose suicide and which will cope with their depression in other ways.

“Second, at a time of loss it is normal to remember and re-experience previous losses. When someone dies, all of our losses come forward to be re-noticed and re-handled. Don’t be surprised if you feel the need to be with past pains and suffering today, even ones you may have thought were finished. Each time of grieving gives us a chance to see what we still carry with us that still needs to be grieved.

“Third, today and possibly for some more days, we need to take special care of ourselves. This is a good time to do some things to help yourself. Spend some time just doing what has that ‘Mmm good’ feeling for you. For some that may be having some alone time, possibly to write poetry or journal. For some that may be gathering with friends. We all need to grieve in our own way. No matter what, please be very gentle with yourself and others. Our hearts are tender now. They will grow strong again and, in some ways, we may have even more strength than we had before. Right now, this is a time for gentle nurturing.

“There are some things about suicide that you should know. People who choose to kill themselves are making a decision that seems rational at the time. Their suffering is so overwhelming in the moment that they may forget about people whom they love and who love them, and they may forget that they have positive options available to them, no matter what bad news they are facing. Something masks their ability to see their life just as it is. We call that something depression.

“Depression is a complex condition that is treatable in a number of ways. Almost all people who die by suicide have untreated depression. Also, they often feel isolated. There may be many things happening positively in their lives that would keep them connected, but they can’t see them through their depression. So, let us be vigilant with ourselves and with our friends and colleagues. Notice depression before it gets overwhelming and have it treated professionally. It is not a black mark for us to seek treatment. Treatment may assist our innate abilities to see things clearly and make healthy choices when things get tough. And, stay connected.

“My favorite philosopher is Fred Rogers, the man with the gentle neighborhood. He said, ‘Whatever is mentionable becomes manageable.’ Make sure today that you help yourself and your friends keep this experience mentionable. It is a good time to ask ‘How are you doing?’ and give yourself and others the safety to be real and talk about what’s happening.

“Being safe and real with each other at hard times is like the poem the student shared in the announcements...

One must have an open mind (a mind of winter)  
and hear the misery in the winter wind  
That blows for all lands, all losses  
That we all will inevitably encounter in life.

“It is like to be fully alive and present for life, we must be like a listener who listens in the snow, hears the wind, and realizes the same wind blows for us all, Jose, his family, his friends and teachers, everyone who knew him. Let’s all acknowledge our misery today and know that we are not alone in it. Be gentle with each other and gentle with ourselves.”

I left the stage and walked outside feeling the enormity of Jose’s loss, and all of the other losses that have come forward in the students’ thoughts. I also felt the strong wish to explain them, understand them. How tender to just be able to hear together the misery in the winter wind and to warm each other while we wait for the feeling of strength to return.

When I got back to my office I looked up the poem. The last lines are reminders for me of why I do the work of supporting griever through loss and tragedy.

For the listener, who listens in the snow,  
And, nothing himself, beholds  
Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.

*Note: The names and certain details of this story have been changed to maintain confidentiality*



by Koren Jones

Defilements

## **Really and Truly (a song for a spider)**

by Stephen Browning

Halfway up you can turn and look back  
to where the land  
hollows itself out  
into a valley,

turn and look back  
with your eight eyes,  
your new-found land  
raveling down  
from a sort of alpine scarp,  
vestiges of dawn  
furring the ridges,  
the terra nova  
of a spidery mind state,

a co-created world  
and the lay of the land this song.  
So when I found you  
dark against the shawl of slubbed wool,  
indifferent cloth  
slung over a chairback,

climbing the woolen runnels  
on leopard-colored legs,  
a faint depth of oval shade  
in brittle moonlight,

I thought of Petrarch, the first Italian  
ever to climb a mountain  
just for the doing, it is said,  
despite a herdsman's warning  
that no good could come of it,  
"nothing but repentance,  
torn clothes and broken bones"

to see, having made the climb,  
the world spread out  
in a manner never seen before,  
not the world the world  
recognizes as the world.

A week later I found you again  
in the radiance of a web  
between the camellia and the porch rail,  
and formed a sort of bond  
watching for days  
your unproductive stillness;  
but then sometime between  
breakfast and a second cup of tea  
a squadron of bees  
exploded into your net.

You must have moved fast because  
you had them wrapped and dangling,  
four struggling slowly  
while you crouched over a fifth.



**Photo**                      **by Ted Weinstein**

I myself about that time,  
asking their improbable forgiveness,  
killed three wasps  
nested in my sliding door.

In the faint light of four a.m.  
(you outside under a curled camellia leaf,  
swollen with the juices of five bees),

this sudden waking:

affection  
attention  
interest  
compassion

with these it is possible  
to know the world as it is

and to be happy  
moment by moment  
while porch-rail shadows pace  
their lengthening paths,  
happy in this body,  
this mind held ever longer  
in its own radiant netting,  
this heart.

Really and truly it is as if  
time has spun a web for me,  
the world has made me a nest;

it is something  
those who have known it won't forget,  
like the splendor of the view  
up on the mountain.



## Bliss

by Stephen Browning

We are known by a few hundred others,  
possibly well known by thirty or forty,  
intimately and reciprocally by five or six.

What chance of anonymity? It is already  
too late. But the three-lobed leaves  
of the maple, in their profusion

hidden from scrutiny, bud, spread, fall,  
and dissolve unnoticed on the forest floor;  
and faint stars unattached to constellations

at rest in the non-distinction of sheer number,  
these escape accomplishment's burden of proof.  
And I think of barefoot monks in their meditation

working toward the skill of no remainder,  
in whose closing eyes the stars wink out  
and are lost as they themselves are lost

for a time from the world, and I am certain  
there cannot be, in the spotlight of reckoning,  
such blissfully unremarked coming and going.

## **Nama-Rupa (Name & Form)**

by Stephen Browning

Koan: A goose is confined in a narrow-necked bottle.  
Short of breaking it, how do you free her?

Form and name,  
body and mind,  
image and imagination.

*Metaphors*: a transfer, a moving across.  
A sparkplug gapped that a spark may bridge it.  
Thereby is caused an explosion.

A mental vehemence, concussion  
of form that may open  
to a locus of new names,

a redress of mind,  
a change of heart,  
a breaking of language. Pop!

The goose is out of the bottle.

Language may have developed  
to describe, but it actually wants  
to hover in inchoate implication.  
Nothing can be said completely  
without recourse to that shadow.



**Namo Tassa Bhagavato**      **by Stephen Browning**

## **Not Lost**

by Stephen Browning

When the heart opens and fortress head  
throws wide its gates, you I we they,  
not fortress but palace, and everyone's *yes*  
the singularity in which nothing is lost,

there is something in you then,  
reborn into this larger life  
you know by its colors, pigments  
compounded of precious stones,

its sounds and speech a peal of bells.  
Not lost. As if held by a great rope  
stretching taut from your body down  
into earth's center, its woven strands

thick as your wrists, holding you firm,  
heavy with presence as marble  
in moonlight. And the rattle of night leaves  
that the wind is blowing around you

is saying, here is the continual shift  
of presence, while you, held taut to  
the world's core, feel how in this grounding  
all the plurals have ceased to exist.

## **Feeling the Fragility**

by Rebecca Dixon

Feeling the fragility  
of all things dear and fleeting,  
my heart opens  
like a wound, salved with love  
and bound  
by every breath I take  
to the sweet, unguarded mystery  
of life

## Serenity

by Rebecca Dixon

I was a twister of emotion  
cutting through my life  
a swath of destruction.

It seemed to be life itself, this  
intensity, as if the trouble to speak  
could only be justified  
by a tremendous noise.

Everything I encountered  
yielded to my fervor  
until the day I came  
to the edge of life  
and saw  
the emptiness embracing  
all experience.

It quieted me  
like a divine voice  
that stills the waters.

In the face of just this moment,  
all vehemence seemed  
a child's pretense,  
and every  
thing, in its simplicity  
stood silent, sacred  
in the miracle of being  
exactly what it is.

## **Mummy Tape**

by Rebecca Dixon

Coming out of grief  
is a little like coming out  
of anesthesia: there's  
the clearing of the mind  
with some relief, but also  
a lingering regret for having lost  
that haven from ordinary hurts.

We feel caught between old wounds  
and new growths of skin, not yet  
ready to walk on, still willing to fall back  
into that matrix of emotion  
which has until just now  
held and defined us, like a  
long coil of mummy tape,  
newly unraveled at our feet.

## **If I Could Only...**

by Judy Cannon

If I could only let go of complaining, I would  
have a lot of time on my hands. I could watch the  
clouds form and disappear and sometimes turn  
brilliant colors. I wouldn't mix myself up with  
other people so much. I'd hear someone's  
complaint and feel a little compassion for her  
suffering. If I could only let go of complaining,  
I'd smile a lot. People might wonder what I'm up  
to. Maybe they'd feel safe with me. Maybe they'd  
feel safe within themselves. Maybe they'd take an  
easy breath and smile, too. With a little luck this  
could turn into an epidemic. We could catch  
happiness from each other. Now that would be  
nice.



**Just Unfolding**

**by Tony Ching**

## **Three Birds** by Shelley Gault

Once I found a young hawk—a redtail—  
lying in tall grass, bright sunshine,  
just killed, still warm. Heart  
pounding, I lifted the limp body,  
imagined briefly somehow  
keeping it  
(as if it could be kept).  
Instead I made a bier,  
with lichen and moss and  
cool damp stones, and stroked  
the beautiful streaky breast, and  
laid it down, and bowed deep thanks,  
and covered it. Over the days  
and weeks I would return  
to visit, to see the changes.  
Small insects at first,  
then the smell, then larvae of flies.  
Many small creatures took life from  
the hawk's death, as it had taken  
life before. After a year,  
I too took a gift, a few feathers  
that still had shape and color,  
to remind me. And later still,  
a thighbone, white and clean,  
all that was still solid in the  
tangle of lichen and moss.

Another time a cedar waxwing  
lay, head akimbo, in  
the dust beside the road,  
and again I picked it up,  
this time carrying it home  
to my garden, marveling at the  
beautiful ochre-brown back,  
the tiny beads of red  
on each wing, yellow-dipped  
tail feathers, golden belly,  
black masked face.  
All that complexity of color and



form went gently into the ground  
under the aging apple tree, one  
shovel blade deep, a mound of rich  
earth to cover it; and soon some unknown  
creatures would be finding life  
in that death too.

Yesterday a third—this time  
a fat quail, its breast the  
colors of an autumn forest,  
its back the softest grey. Again  
it went into the earth, just by  
the waxwing, near the two dear  
cats, next to where the apple tree  
stood so long.

I always thought I'd be  
cremated. Not so sure now,  
though. To slip into the soil  
and let the closing door of death  
open to life for others—to offer  
a last gift, completing the circle—  
there's something  
no trust in that:  
nothing wasted,  
nothing lost.



**Photo by Ted Weinstein**

## **No Wind, Bahia de los Angeles**

by Shelley Gault

Early morning,  
deep sighing breaths  
ride the silence.  
Out on the  
silvered surface  
I see them rise,  
breathing in, breathing out,  
black dorsal fins arcing  
in slow rhythm,  
as light climbs  
faithfully  
over the steep shoulder  
of the Guardian Angel.

Noon,  
and the biggest sound  
in this white place  
is the splash  
of pelicans  
dropping  
    like  
        stones.

Evening cool comes  
crawling down like honey  
engulfing hot slopes,  
and buries for the night  
the distant noise of the  
sun almost before I am  
aware of it.

## Poems from a Long Retreat

by Shelley Gault

1. The wind and the crows  
are playing this morning  
above the oaks in the creek drainage  
way up the hill,  
and who can say truly  
which is which?

2. Perfect waning quarter moon  
floats just so, vertical to the horizon,  
thin cloud moving very fast across her face.  
Name one thing that is not  
complete, one thing that falls  
short of this.

3. Walking down the hill I pause  
to watch the moon break  
free of the horizon  
again, and again,  
and yet again.

4. Vast grey ocean within  
unperturbed  
absorbing all  
unreflective  
completely still.  
There is light above  
but the sea is not moved,  
is in no manner moved.

5. Trees outside my window.  
No breeze stirs a single leaf,  
sunlight smooth and continuous,  
unbroken by leaf's tremble  
or moving shadows—  
inside here, much the same.

6. The tall white vase of an egret's body  
barely seen against the  
misty dawn hillside—  
elegant angel of death  
passing over small creatures in  
their damp burrows beneath  
her delicate black feet.  
One foot rises slowly,  
its toes coming together  
like a blossom that closes  
in the evening, then  
descending again  
the dark petals open,  
barely moving the air  
beneath them.  
Lift/move/lower  
in one silent flow,  
hypnotic to watch—

The egret cannot live  
except by others' deaths.  
None of us can, not one.  
Each death opens a door  
that swings both ways—  
opening to coming,  
opening to going.

7. And who are you now?  
Bright white farm buildings in the  
mouth of a narrow green valley,  
three crows flying low, calling,  
two bluebirds alighting on a chair,  
this warm sunshine, cool breeze,  
the pen in the hand, the question.

8. The idea "not-okay"  
does not enter  
the bluebird's mind.

9. Rolling and turning, dry leaves  
spiraling in an autumn-like gust, bright

spring blossoms on these wiry branches,  
frog songs proclaiming  
“again, again”  
for the first time  
again, again.  
Already seed heads form  
on the green grasses, already  
the gold of summer ripeness is  
creeping in, and all these  
springs and falls and summers tumble over  
each other, beginning for one  
ending for another, spiral  
within spiral, winter within  
spring, rolling on, rolling on  
implacable, inexorable,  
excluding nothing,  
nothing.

## **Just like that**

by Shelley Gault

Following a big pickup round  
all the bends, behind the  
wide grey tailgate, the massive  
tires—mile after mile, it seems more like  
a dream of driving—  
and then the shadow of a bird,  
maybe a crow—probably  
a crow—races across the  
asphalt, across the cracks  
and the ragged white line,  
disappears in the desert  
off to the right,  
and suddenly the day  
is blue,  
and bright.

## **Zazen**

by Harriet Taber

Restlessness akimbo

Camera obscura

Pinhole

Sky lit

Sit



You can't live a perfect day  
without doing something  
for someone who will never  
be able to repay you.

*John Wooden*

*Linda Filling*  
11-74

**You Can't Live**

**by Linda Filling**

## **No Quería Llorar, Lo Juro** by Pablo Gonzalez

Había sido un retiro de meditación de cuatro días. Cuatro días inmerso en el silencio. Cuatro días para estudiar las particularidades de la mente y los hábitos del cuerpo.

La confianza para asumir el reto me la daban los casi cinco años que llevaba practicando la meditación. “Estoy preparado para esto y más.” La frase hacía eco en mi mente el día anterior al retiro. Sin duda el retiro presentaba una oportunidad invaluable para demostrar mis logros en esta disciplina. Una oportunidad única para seguir avanzando en el camino hacia la iluminación. Así lo pensaba yo.

El primer día fue solo medio día de práctica, sin embargo, termine exhausto sin entender la razón del porqué. Me costaba aceptar que el retiro estaba resultando ser mentalmente más intenso de lo que había anticipado, y físicamente más demandante de lo que quería admitir.

El segundo día fue aún más intenso de lo que pudiera haber imaginado. Practicamos la meditación en posición sentada, caminando, durante la comida, en el periodo de trabajo y en los momentos de descanso.

Durante la última sesión del día, la maestra entendió que la mayoría sufríamos los estragos físicos y mentales del retiro y ofreció una invitación para que aquellos que así lo desearan, hicieran la meditación acostados. La mayoría se tiró al piso entre gemidos de dolor y suspiros de alivio. Use mi cojín como almohada y con cuidado, para no lastimar mi espalda, me acerque a una silla. Con dificultad levanté los pies y los deje descansar sobre el asiento. Mi cuerpo tomó este gesto como un regalo y por un momento el dolor dejó de atormentar a la mente.

Al final de la sesión el dolor en el cuello, la espalda y los pies se había vuelto intolerable. El cansancio me ahogaba, lo único que deseaba era irme a mi cuarto a dormir.

En la comodidad de mi cama repasaba las exigencias de esta práctica milenaria, una práctica que niega dar las respuestas para callar las inquietudes de una mente ruidosa.

La práctica de la meditación no es fácil y a veces suele ser difícil de entender porque no existe un camino a seguir. Cada quien lo va formando con cada respiro consciente que toma, con cada paso que da, con cada reto que enfrenta, con cada alegría y cada dolor que siente. Esta es la práctica que ofrece el regalo divino de un reencuentro consigo mismo.

El sueño llegó más pronto que de costumbre rescatándome del ruido mental que agregaba más peso a la carga.

El tercer día fue mejor. Para entonces había logrado encontrar el equilibrio entre la intensidad de una mente que buscaba ser fuerte para enfrentar el compromiso asumido, y la relajación de un cuerpo que resulto ser frágil, tierno y vulnerable. Sin darme cuenta estaba entrando en territorio nuevo.

Eran cerca de la diez de la noche cuando entré a mi cuarto. El olor a bosque se colaba por el mosquitero de la ventana entreabierta. Un rayo de luz plateada penetraba desde el exterior proyectando una silueta sobre el piso. No quise encender la luz para no disturbar la paz que sentía en aquel momento. El baño me supo a gloria y la comodidad de la cama fue un premio al esfuerzo realizado durante el día. Tome un respiro profundo y cerré los ojos para despertar los otros sentidos. Afuera se escuchaba el trillar de los grillos y los ruidos de algunas aves que revoloteaban entre las ramas buscando el lugar adecuado para pasar la noche. Por instantes los ruidos en el exterior surgían y desaparecía en el vasto espacio de un silencio arrullador.

El cuarto día llego con mucha anticipación. Era tiempo de regresar a casa. Una mezcla de alegría y añoranza confundían a la mente. Era cierto que el retiro había sido demasiado exigente, pero también era cierto que, de alguna forma, reconocía la riqueza que habían traído a mi mente y a mi cuerpo cuatro días de silencio.

Alicia me recibió con una sonrisa. Nos sentamos en el sofá de la sala y la escuché con más atención que de costumbre. El sonido de su voz era diferente; tenía un tono más claro, más fresco, más dulce. El flujo de sus palabras acariciaba mi rostro como la brisa fresca del mar. No lograba entender el cambio que percibía en ella, tampoco era necesario. Quizá era yo quien había cambiando. Ella siguió hablando y yo escuchaba sin atreverme a interrumpir. Después vino el silencio. Ella comprendió la situación y dijo que iba al jardín a regar las rosas. El silencio había



encontrado un espacio en nuestro hogar. Después de un rato salí al jardín y le dije a Alicia que regresaría en un rato, quería visitar a mi padre.

Estuve cerca de una hora en casa de mi padre antes de regresar.

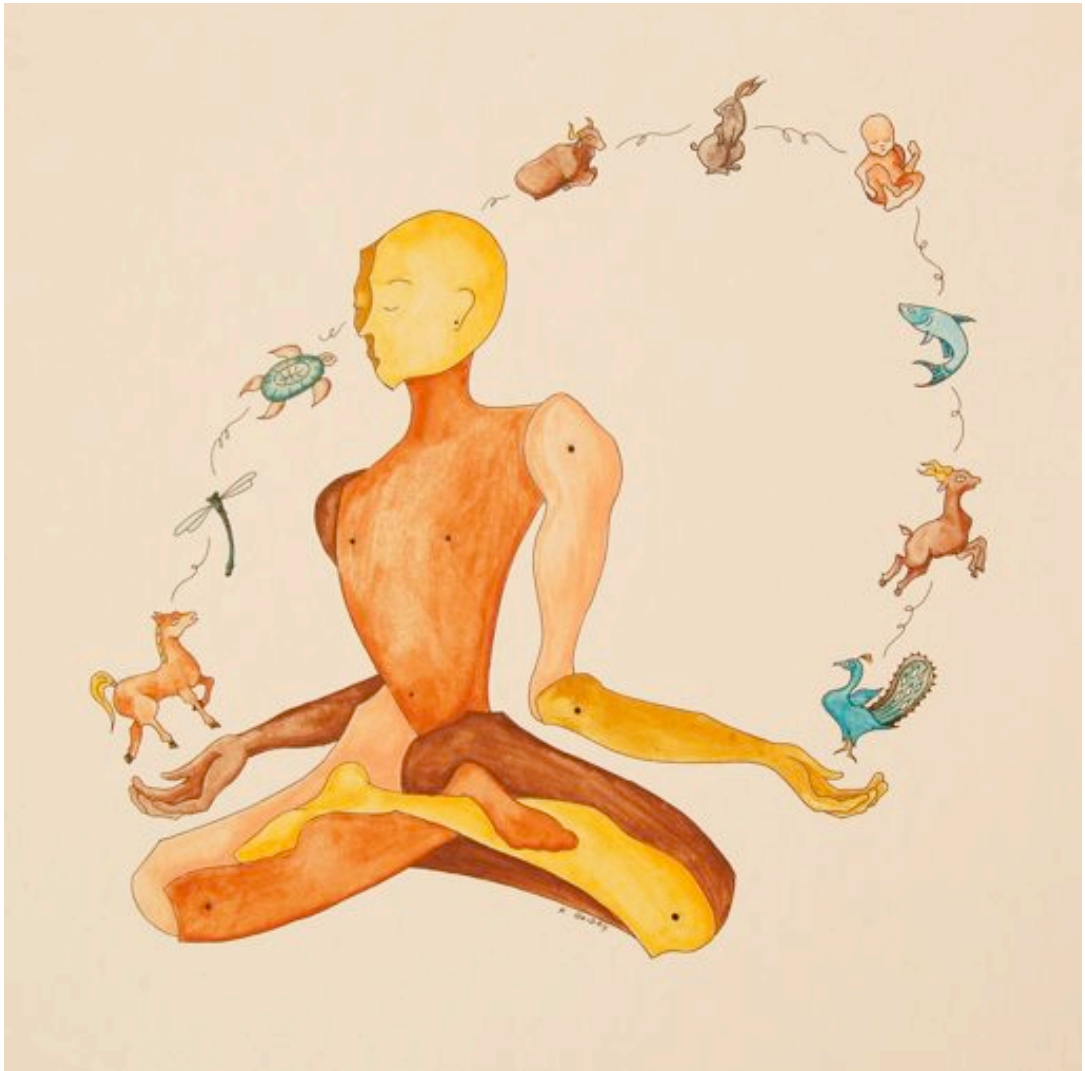
Faltaban dos cuadras para llegar a mi casa cuando sentí la sensación por primera vez, era algo diferente, algo que nunca antes había sentido. Sorprendido por lo que estaba pasando miré a mi alrededor sin descuidar el camino. Este camino lo había recorrido miles de veces sin poner atención a lo que veía. Hoy recorría el mismo camino por primera vez. Sentí calor en las pupilas y humedad en los ojos. Sin poder evitarlo las lágrimas se deslizaron por mis mejillas acariciando mi rostro. Tal era la expansión en mi interior que creí que mi cuerpo rebasaría los confines del carro en cualquier momento. Sentía una profunda gratitud por todo; por Alicia, por mi padre, por mis hermanos y por la persona que manejaba a mi lado perdida en sus pensamientos. Agradecí a la vida por mi hija que había fallecido y por mi hijo que estaba vivo, por mis gatos y por el dolor en mi espalda. No había nada ni nadie que pudiera quedar fuera de mi corazón en aquel momento.

Alicia abrió la puerta y no me pude contener más. “Necesito un abrazo,” fue lo único que pude decir antes de que el llanto me traicionara. Ella me abrazó al tiempo que decía: “no quería dejarte ir solo.” Las mujeres tienen ese sentido que los hombres hemos aprendido a callar.

Lloré como no lo había hecho en mucho tiempo. Era el llanto que mi cultura me había enseñado a ignorar y el orgullo me obligaba a reprimir. Ambos se derrumbaban ante el poder de la gratitud. No se por cuanto tiempo lloré en los brazos de Alicia. Ella permaneció en silencio. Acariciaba mi espalda con la ternura de una madre que acaricia a un hijo dolido. Sabía que mi llanto no era el llanto que surge de la tristeza, sino el llanto que emana de un estado profundo de alegría. Sentí el calor de sus lágrimas humedecer mi hombro.

Terminé de llorar cuando no había más lagrimas por derramar. Me sentí ligero, limpio, vivo.

No quería llorar, lo juro, pero la fuerza de una mente acondicionada poco puede hacer ante el poder infinito de un corazón agradecido.



**Meditation**      **by Koren Jones**

## **This Moment While Walking Considering**

by Sue Harrison

This moment while walking considering  
this space between the sounds,  
this light, this dark.

These equal and opposite measures:  
pleasure and pain,  
loss and gain. Like the tiny  
terrified field mouse,  
captured by a hawk, carried  
dangling from the raptor's talons  
to a nearby fencepost—its tiny terror  
compared to the majesty  
of that very bird, calling and calling,  
announcing its catch,  
pinning its prey to the post, and  
eating and eating to live  
another day.

This is the way it is  
in this moment, walking,  
considering the hawk and mouse, or  
whether the grasses  
growing from the crevices  
in the blacktop path  
came after the cracks were open  
or did they somehow push up and up  
and, with a final burst of strength,  
tear the blacktop open  
making the jagged streaks  
that remind you of calligraphy.

**For Alma from Sue's Garden Journal**  
**(on finding a gift from Alma to Sue for her 50th birthday)**  
by Sue Harrison

How fitting that I should have reached into my writing  
satchel on this day and laid my hand on this book,  
a journal, a gift from a friend on a meaningful  
birthday some ten years ago, its pages blank  
but surely breathing

the sense of loving kindness with which they were given.  
Pages to record the tending of my garden, the work  
of planting tiny seeds—nasturtium, compassion,  
contentment, joy—pages where I'll come  
to know the present

moment, with its passing truths and fictions, and where  
I'll come to find the wisdom, all that's ever needed,  
to coax the tender leaves of lavender and coastal  
manzanita from their graceful  
hardwood stems.

**Tibetan Sand Painting**  
**(four years into a diagnosis of dementia)**  
by Bianca Powell

Mandala swept away,  
sand adrift in time.  
Symmetry scattered into chaos;  
design smears into confusion,  
life's defining order reduced to dust.

Abandoned plans and unfulfilled promises  
litter the ground underfoot,  
while dreams blow in the wind overhead,  
like forgotten prayer flags,  
threadbare and torn.

## **Winter-Bound**

by Bianca Powell

This morning  
my altar remains dark and cold,  
no candle offers light,  
no incense smoke rises to heaven  
carrying prayers in its perfume.

I feel bereft and barren,  
blighted and broken.  
Somewhere within (I'm told),  
the blaze of Spirit burns bright.  
Love and Joy still hold forth.  
Infinite Life unfolds!

But this morning,  
Faith is a fallow field,  
a stunted bud-shriveled fruit  
winter-bound bone.

## **Again**

by Bianca Powell

Sooner or later, I always return,  
return to stir the fire,  
to fan dying embers into feeble fingers of light,  
waving weakly in the wind,  
wafting the smolder of smoke and ash  
into the air, until  
new kindling is finally caught,  
the leap to living flame made  
again.

## **Morning Metta**

by Bianca Powell

It's a happy motor I hear  
in the darkness of pre-dawn mornings,  
humming its way along the back road,  
resonant drone deepening  
with the acceleration going into a curve,  
easing as the driver steers clear,  
coasts to the next.  
From the sound, it's an older car,  
one from an age of faithful service  
and simple necessity.  
Though I don't know the driver,  
or the make and model he drives,  
when the familiar sound of their passing  
reaches me in the warmth of blanketed waking,  
my heart swells, fondness overflows—  
May you be safe.  
    May you be happy.  
        May you have ease and well-being.

## **Untitled**

by Nirali Shah

You want to hold something,  
But nothing stays.

All experiences come and go,  
You look up at the sky,  
Clouds changing form,  
Dissolving slowly  
Into rain.

## Evening Mala

by Bianca Powell

Each day, daunting.  
Every night, utter exhaustion.  
Awaiting sleep, I recall the many gifts—

Fragrance of freshness in the predawn air.  
First light of day dappling the wall with radiance.  
Sparrow's song gracefully lilting from a distant field.

My husband's humor splitting the air with laughter.  
Warmth of a friend's words melting frozen tears.  
A stranger taking time to offer a helping hand.

Each glimpse of beauty a bright bead,  
each act of kindness a connecting link;  
the *mala* I return to again and again,  
touching each luminous encounter  
in the fullness of Gratitude,  
—the felt embrace of Love.

## There is Silence

by Nirali Shah

There is Silence  
In between the clouds, between the rivers, between the rays of light,  
Between the words you speak, in between every step you take.  
There is this tender Silence in between each breath I breathe.  
The more I accept, the more it expands.

## **Thank-You**

by Susanne Petermann

For offering to help paint my house.  
You should know in advance:  
I may be one of the few do-it-yourselfers  
who uses a two-inch brush  
on a three-bedroom house.

Through no fault of your own you weren't there  
at the first communion with the old cedar siding  
when I approached a wall with my scraper  
and sandpaper and picked at it like a kind dentist,

put my face right up to the flakes of old paint  
the better to see them. I'm the one  
who needs to dip a sponge into a pail of clear water

to wash the pollution off, to touch each board  
with a hand that speaks on behalf of my body

of which the house is an extension  
that gestates within its walls

a life I like to think has meaning.

## **Time Motion Analysis**

by Gerard Sarnat

I come from a long line of corporate efficiency experts,  
Emotionless men and women who got shortlisted for  
Nobel Prizes in Latin Toolboxes or Medicine and Physiology  
but never won—they say because of office politics.

Sitting a fraction of Sunday morning's meditation, the ratio  
of folks on floor cushions over those in chairs has shrunk.  
If this snapshot holds true, the sangha's grown old, not renewing  
—*post hoc ergo propter hoc*, we're all totally screwed.





Icon by Linda Brockett

## **There is Another World**

by Nirali Shah

There is another world  
Different from this world  
That breathes inside and outside this world.  
I say it because its vastness entered my body once  
And throbbed for a moment, gently, in the vein  
That runs through my chest.  
It has collided with my everyday existence—  
Like the light of the moon touches the ocean floor;  
Like the warmth of the sun swims into the roots of a tree;  
Like the silence of outer space  
Ensconces the tender heart of a child in the womb;  
And dissolves everything in an unbearable connectedness.  
Oneness.

There is another kind of living,  
Different from this everyday living  
It is floating inside and outside of all the filaments  
That weaves the fabric of our collective experience.  
In a world over-consumed with reason and becoming  
It awaits patiently for us to take a pause.  
I say it because when I paused it guided me.  
It took me to a river  
In the dark of the night  
Where I have quietly washed the cloth of my  
Soul in the silvery stream of its ever-flowing  
Consciousness. And I feel cleaner  
Today.

## The Galaxies that Glow Inside Us

by Nirali Shah

Do you remember when we first met?

Let me remind you. It all started a few million years ago. As Neil deGrasse Tyson describes, the very molecules that glow in our bodies are traceable to the centers of high mass stars, supernovas—the suns that exploded their chemically rich guts into the galaxies. It is a profound truth that makes me think about the calcium in our bones, the iron circulating in our blood, and the light glimmering in our eyes in a profoundly new way.

Tyson says, “We are connected to each other biologically, to the earth chemically and to the rest of the universe atomically. That makes me smile and I actually feel quite large at the end of that. It’s not that we are better than the universe; we are part of the universe. We are in the universe and the universe is in us.”<sup>1</sup>

This universe has far more galaxies than the number of people that reside on earth. And yet while floating on this little dust mote that we call earth, we sometimes forget the exquisite vastness that we are born of. In a world driven by competition and division, we forget sometimes that we cannot be better than each other when we are, in fact, a part of each other.

My small prayer is that may we all become a reminder of the vastness and beauty that we hold inside us. That we help each other recognize the limitless power within each one of us to be true, to radiate joy, and to heal.

One day you might find out that the billions of galaxies are not that far away but they shimmer in every atom of your own body. And maybe after that long dark night of fear and loneliness in your soul, you might be surprised to find out that you have survived. You might wake up to the compassionate warm light of the sun rising in the horizon of your own heart—softly illuminating the shaky, unreliable crevices of existence.

---

<sup>1</sup>Neil deGrasse Tyson, Astrophysicist. From the final minutes of the episode “Beyond the Big Bang” of The History Channel’s documentary series *The Universe*.

## **I, On My Bench, In Awe**

by Edna Wallace

I love the brown-blue-gray water rising and roaring, then breaking into cloudy, frothy, spurting bathwater by the rough hewn gray-brown rock outcrop.

And I, on my bench, watching.

I love the feel of colored pencils filling in designs on my paper, just because, not for any recognition or achievement except perhaps for the feat of calming my mind.

And I, on my bench, coloring.

I love the anticipation of warm, rich, delicious coffee filling my stomach and a full breakfast awaiting me once I arise.

And I, on my bench, anticipating.

I love the warming sun on my face and through my hair, stroking me kindly.

And I, on my bench, basking.

I love the feeling of gratefulness, the bliss of contemplating all that I have, all that is beautiful in my world, my riches in love, family, friends, work, fun, and surroundings.

And I, on my bench, practicing.

I love the gnarled rope in front of me, curving through low posts, roping off these four weathered benches, set high above the ocean, allowing the viewer to take it all in.

And I, on my bench, in awe.

T H E R E I S N O  
**FIRE LIKE PASSION**  
T H E R E I S N O  
**GRIP LIKE ILL WILL**  
T H E R E I S N O  
**NET LIKE IGNORANCE**  
T H E R E I S N O  
**RIVER LIKE CRAVING**

**VERSE 251: Dhammapada**



**No River Like Craving**

**by Angie Reed Garner**

## Entering the Garden Beyond Paradise

by Robert D. Rossel

I had an experience one morning on my walk beside the Sequoias in Portola Valley, CA, the retirement community where I live. There is a trail called Hamm's Gulch, which winds by a beautiful stream that is still flowing despite the recent drought we have experienced. I was able to sit down on a rock by the stream, enjoying the most amazing huge bay laurel nurtured by the stream. This particular tree has about six trunks that branch off from a huge root structure that is fed by the stream.

As I sat down by the stream with the brook gurgling before me in stereo, I had this amazing gift from the universe. It said to me, so to speak, "You are the eyes and ears of the 'gods.'" So sit and listen to what it/they say!" And what came? I had a palpable sense of the presence of Phyllis, my now-deceased wife contacting me and blessing my new relationship with Annie, the new love of my life. I had a palpable experience of Phyllis with me, enjoying the feast of nature that was laid out before her/us! I was overwhelmed with grief and gratitude, appreciating the experience of being with, sharing, and drinking in this particular experience with Phyllis. The experience was singularly and utterly REAL for me, a gift from her and the "gods" that gave me a rare and precious experience of "presence." Hard to describe but very real to me!

I found this poem by Jalaluddin Rumi that captures the experience more clearly than I could ever describe. Here it is:

### A Garden Beyond Paradise

Everything you see has its roots  
in the unseen world.  
The forms may change,  
yet the essence remains the same.  
Every wondrous sight will vanish,  
every sweet word will fade  
But do not be disheartened,  
The Source they come from is eternal—  
growing, branching out,  
giving new life and new joy.  
Why do you weep?—  
That Source is within you

and this whole world  
is springing up from it.  
The Source is full,  
its waters are ever-flowing;  
Do not grieve,  
drink your fill!  
Don't think it will ever run dry—<sup>2</sup>  
This is the endless Ocean!  
From the moment you came into this world,  
a ladder was placed in front of you  
that you might transcend it.  
From earth, you became plant,  
from plant you became animal.  
Afterwards you became a human being,  
endowed with knowledge, intellect and faith.  
Behold the body, born of dust—  
how perfect it has become!  
Why should you fear its end?  
When were you ever made less by dying?  
When you pass beyond this human form,  
no doubt you will become an angel  
and soar through the heavens!  
But don't stop there.  
Even heavenly bodies grow old.  
Pass again from the heavenly realm  
and plunge into the ocean of Consciousness.  
Let the drop of water that is you  
become a hundred mighty seas.  
But do not think that the drop alone  
becomes the Ocean—  
the Ocean, too, becomes the drop!

---

<sup>2</sup> From *Garden Beyond Paradise: The Mystical Poetry of Rumi*, Ed. Jonathan Star  
Bantham Books, NY, 1992.

## Yucatan Retreat

by Patricia Sempowich

I hang in a hammock on a Caribbean beach  
reading an Irish poet's memoir, a stunning story  
of how her poet's life affects her life as an Irish woman.

Civilizations away in this Mayan country  
of flour-fine sand, I rediscover the calm  
of deserted beaches raked clean for shoeless sun lovers  
to claim natural rhythms.

Retreatants come here to purify lives too full,  
to feel free and safe in a simple *talapa* that  
contains only the essentials, still more than the  
early ones knew who owned this land.

Transformed from ancient days  
this beach colony allows me to dip into myself...  
separated from distractions of my other life,  
to renew and restore my potential.

Here I build a Mayan temple in the sand,  
don a snorkel mask to view exotic fish,  
enjoy *pina* and *papaya* in a thatched-roof  
dining hall with intimate strangers.





**Photo**

**by Ted Weinstein**

## Cave Yogi

by Patricia Sempowich

I imagined cave yogis lived  
in great holes in the harsh Himalayas,  
food delivered to them every few days.  
I saw lean, wiry men swathed in saffron robes,  
under huge crude woolen shawls  
whirling white beards  
long white hair  
collected under tight fitting caps.

I discovered a cave yogi in the Drepung Monastery  
at the foot of Mt. Gambo Utse living in a tiny stone  
house fronted by a garden of opulent magenta zinnias  
where a pair of cats one grey, one black combine  
like ying and yang. Pepa, our guide, speaks to her;  
she leaves her meditation to meet us.  
She wears:  
a dusty-rose wrapped skirt,  
a saffron shirt,  
a collection of prayer beads,  
and an alms pouch  
encircles her neck.  
A smile joyous and prudent  
reveals her sixteen-year life of meditation.

## Tea Time

by Patricia Sempowich

I invite Jane Hirshfield to tea on the last day of April  
to celebrate National Poetry Month. We sit at the  
tea table in my garden, where warm breezes blow  
and the quiet presence of pansies and peonies abides.  
A Zen simplicity where intimacy emerges.

We talk about her poetry that points to a way of life,  
a way of meeting life, an openness to anything that  
might arrive. She quotes from one of her recent poems:  
“Think assailable thoughts or be lonely.”

Hirshfield applies this to Emily Dickinson,  
who accepted the solitude of undistinguished  
strangeness and knew her words might matter,  
greatly, eventually, to others.

I ask what her work offers the world.  
She replies, a door, or many doors at once.  
Doors that lead simultaneously inward and  
outward, the privacy in which self can take stock.



Photo by Ted Weinstein

## The Story of Ego

by Nancy Shea

Here is an interesting proposition,  
profound really:  
experience a deeply painful emotion without  
attaching a story.

Just let the emotion  
rip through your body  
ripple down your spine  
grip your stomach  
stab your brain  
crawl under your skin  
tingle your hands and feet  
twist your intestines  
strangle your lungs to the point of panic.

Sit with this ass-kicking experience of the now.  
Hold it. Trust it to wake you up.  
You will, I promise, be graced with an  
opening, even a tiny crack will do.  
Through it pours a flood of body and mind  
compassion, coming when beckoned, always  
coming because it has never left, always  
coming because it is the core of your true nature.

Why do you doubt?  
Do you fear the body's pain or the final release?  
Are you more attached to your story or  
to your liberation? Understand, it is only the hope of  
rescue that holds you,  
seduces you to believe your twisted  
delusion of momentary egoist comfort.

Or try this:

Congratulate yourself when you construct a  
meaningful story.

Applaud that you have found the necessary and  
sufficient ingredient to  
insure a coherent ego structure.  
Revel in your accomplishment.

Then let it go.

Dive into a post-ego experience of the now.

Distinct from the  
undifferentiated experience  
enjoyed by our fellow  
sentient beings, their innocence we call “nature.”

Our quest has taken us beyond

“their” primitive, naive knowing.

We are higher order, even precious human beings.

We have evolved consciousness in our quest for  
complete understanding.

Yet our failure descends upon us.

Our experiment in  
omniscience collapses upon itself in  
escalating suffering.

Herein is our liberation.

Our conscious awareness is our doorway to the  
post-ego experience of now.

Awareness without story.

Awareness without construct.

Awareness without meaning.

Awareness without true or false.

Awareness fully aware of the consequences of ego attachment.

Revel in open-hearted, pure awareness of now.

(Ojo Caliente, Sept 25, 2012)

## **And So It Is**

by Cecilia Steger

I meditate to find stillness and peace. Although, many times, I find instead the three stooges. Not Moe, Larry, and Curly, but instead, resistance, misperception, and resentment. I basically suffer through until I am ready to listen. Sometimes, I abandon ship before I feel settled or complete. This is real life after all.

When I have fallen out of meditative or mindful practice, I have failed to reach that space between the breathing or I have completely forgotten what the intention was—I choose to try again. Persistence is the antidote to my resistance.

When I abandon gratitude and compassion, I sink back into ego. My selfish and mean ego tells me awful, hateful things about myself. Then in the midst of a meditation, I remember a sense of abundance, a feeling of mercy washes over me, and misperception steps aside.

When I join and sign up for the suffering, chaos, and drama, I lose all grips on reality. I am choked by fear. Then I return to my breath, I empty my hands, and my soul releases expectations, freeing me of resentment.

I allow the obstacles to fall away because I know my enemies now: stubbornness, judgment, and anger. Previously stuck to the bottom of my ego like a barnacle bound to a ship's hull, I am liberated by my practice once more. Every nuance of meditating feels like a lifetime of sublime existence. Every moment I am fully conscious, I am timeless, and every act of love seems to stem from this spacious awareness.

The true me, the authentic self I recognize, is revealed via my listening to the higher self in quiet contemplation.

The joy of simple understanding and the knowing I receive from meditating on a daily basis, whether walking, sitting, or contemplating a star or flame, is a gift I give to myself.

The freedom and release I bathe in, after repeating a mantra over and over, letting my thoughts pass by via clouds, balloons, or bubbles or even following my involuntary breath, is pure satisfaction.

The quantum leap from feeling like a zero to believing I am a precious gem is due in part to my practice. I am loved and cocooned in my own aura. I can change my perception and attitude during the day, because I come back to a realization I found previously in the expanse of my consciousness during a prior meditative session, perhaps even earlier that week.

My best, authentic self strives to be born. My raw and human failings are turned to lessons as I connect the dots to where I am now, which is exactly where I am supposed to be.

And I accrue all this alchemy, from just a few minutes of my time each day, one day at a time. Yet I endeavor to carry this consciousness with me all through the day, every day. I learn discipline. I learn detachment. I learn to nurture and I learn to observe. I learn to balance and I learn to accept. Solitary moments help me interact with others, while joining, observing, and relating with others and my surroundings allow me to be with self. My goals, decisions, and passions become one. I get to lead a centered, devoted, and fulfilling existence when I am in the meditation zone. Do I remember that when I am on the brink of an emotional breakdown? That is exactly when I need to scurry back to the mat.

And then I ask myself, “How dare you leave?” Yes, how dare I leave the awareness and meaning of my very life?

I am beckoned to return to mindfulness or suffer and perish via my own projected experiences I believe I am having.

There have been times in my life when the depression or anxiety was so alive and active, I felt suffocated in my own skin, time, and space. Moving, good nutrition, and distraction did not alleviate or cure me. What helped me was closing my eyes and NOT running away from being still, breathing in and out with purpose, refreshing my cells and tissues with new oxygen. It was the getting back to basics in silence that snapped me out of it, repeatedly—not the assortment and medley of therapies I undertook.

It was slow, arduous, and not always improving steps. It was coming back to self, finding the divine and higher self, the person I wanted to be, the person that had what I wanted, needed, and craved yet had rejected—that ended up helping me. To reconnect with aching body places and feel emotional discomfort gave me hope I would get to the other side of pain. I knew the

worry, the anger, and the stress was just a symptom of a core belief about myself I had to change. Meditation brought me that solution.

As I grew stronger, I acquired a love for the quiet and rest. No longer were my thoughts random and relentless. I was calmed and subdued by the regimen. It brought me relief from catastrophic and negative thinking. It taught me it was all right to be in the moment no matter how frightening or unbearable it seemed.

Mostly it brought me back from the living dead. It opened the door to a spiritual self I had no intention of inviting. It liberated my soul. No one was more surprised than myself. Once I was awake, little irritations about myself became known to me. I was amazed to find myself responsible for every consequence of my own actions. I started to manifest a mature look at myself. I no longer could hide. Instead of discarding the new ideas about myself, I delved deeper into the many layers.

Meditation was key to the greater acceptance of my humanness by joining my mind, body, and spirit to this truth: Here I am on Earth. Now what? Haven't I been contemplating this all of my life? Don't we all? Was the very question also the answer?

If I am a mere drop in the ocean, I adhere to other drops so we can become a great body of water, together. This is where I understood service to others, I gained self-respect, I became self-love and started to address my unending desires, incessant grasping, and pathetic indifference that caused me no end of self-afflicted torture and delivered no respite from my circular, chaotic thoughts.

There is vitality to meditation that makes it a paradox. Who knew that sitting quietly, going within your layers of reflecting mirrors or doing something monotonous while being mindful and just *paying attention*, could bring such rewarding energy, such compassion, and such clarity?

In the realm of my wide and wonderful imagination, I found the soul's infinite echo.

And so it is.





**Apple a Day**

**© 2014**

**by Judith Ross**

## **My Evening Alone at the Kabuki Baths**

by Lynn Sunday

A visit to the Kabuki Baths in San Francisco's Japantown is one of my favorite ways to unwind. I go with my friends Pat, Diane, or Sally (occasionally all three) for a soothing soak, sauna, salt rub, and whispered conversation—with a long chatty visit over a meal afterwards. We go on women-only Wednesdays, Fridays, or Sundays, usually in the evening. To me, it's the perfect ladies night out.

One Wednesday last May, Pat and I agreed to meet at the Kabuki at six PM. I arrived early and parked near the entrance, just as Pat called to cancel, her son was sick.

I was disappointed. I'd arrived anticipating relaxation and social interaction. Suddenly I faced an evening alone. I considered doing something else instead, dinner maybe, or a film. But a solitary meal or movie didn't appeal to me. I called another friend who was unavailable, and in the end decided since I was already there, I might as well go in.

\*\*\*

I opened the wood-framed doors to the Kabuki Springs & Spa and stepped inside. It felt odd checking in alone—walking the softly lit, carpeted hallway with its display of fragrant bath and hair care products, turning right at the statue of Buddha, then left—and entering the locker room, alone. There I undressed, secured my possessions, slipped on acupressure sandals, wrapped myself in a fluffy white towel, and entered the main bathing room heading for the showers—in silence. In fact, the only words I spoke to anyone during my three hours at the Spa were “thank you,” when I received my locker key and later, “thank you,” when an attendant brought fresh tea.

I began by showering in a Western style stall, helping myself to cucumber bath gel, and rosemary shampoo and conditioner from dispensers on the wall. When I stepped, towel-wrapped, from the shower, I stood a minute looking around.

It was early evening. The bathing room, an oasis of rest and relaxation was half empty at dinner hour. Nearby, women sat on traditional wooden bathing stools, lazily soaping themselves and rinsing with flexible handheld hoses. Across the room to my left was the dry sauna, with the steam room straight ahead. A handful of women soaked in the spacious tiled hot tub to my right, conversing in whispers.

Others rested, eyes closed, on teakwood benches. There was a fifty-five degree cold plunge in the center of the room.

A long table near the steam sauna held pitchers of lemon and cucumber water and stacks of paper cups. A large bowl of sea salt was provided for scrubbing and polishing the skin. A smaller bowl contained cucumber slices to sooth puffy eyelids. Chilled facecloths were offered to help prevent overheating in the torrid heat of the steam room. The small, metal gong on the table was there to be sounded if whispered conversations grew too loud.

Lulled by the sound of water—bubbling, dribbling, splashing, flowing—I began to relax and enjoy myself. Since I was alone, there was no need for whispered consultations—shall we do the dry sauna first, or the hot tub? And would I like tea or lemon water? Was it time for the salt scrub yet? This time it was my decision entirely.

\*\*\*

Without the distraction of being social, time slowed down for me. In the dry sauna I lay slick with sweat on a slatted wooden bench, feeling my breathing slow and deepen as stress and tension drained away. When I left the sauna, the air in the main room felt cool against my skin. I submerged myself to my shoulders in the one-hundred-four-degree hot tub, half floating, letting the heat permeate. Later I sipped jasmine tea and then rested on a bench with cucumber slices on my eyes.

I worked my way to the steam room. The steam was as thick as coastal fog, and the one hundred-twenty-degree heat so intense I could hardly breathe. Almost immediately, sweat poured down my face and stung my eyes. I stuck it out for several minutes—long enough to scrub my skin with salt before rushing from the room to the cold plunge where I submerged myself to my chin. Then I alternated between steam and cold until my blood rushed to the surface and every inch of my skin tingled.

When I finished bathing, I stood squarely on my feet, arms stretched high over my head, raising my rib cage, straightening my spine. Lowering my arms to my sides I breathed slowly and deeply. My shoulders were relaxed. I felt calm.

Dressing to leave I felt so clean, I was almost sterilized—my skin infant smooth, every pore clean and tight. I sighed with pure satisfaction. My entire body felt vibrant and alive.

\*\*\*

It was nine PM when I turned in my key at the front desk and left the Kabuki Baths. When I stepped outside the wind had died down and the mild evening air felt deliciously cool against my skin. Bathed in moonlight I was so relaxed I was practically floating as I walked up the street to my car.

Funny, I thought, driving home. I worried my evening would be ruined because I had no one to share it with. But going alone made it a whole new experience. In the end I loved my time alone with myself and taking the time to just be.

*Used by permission of and previously published, November, 2011, by The Noe Valley Voice*



**Tree of Life**

**by Koren Jones**

## **But a Baby**

by Edna Wallace

I am but a baby,  
stepping out,  
trying her first steps;  
not knowing, not striving  
but encountering.  
I am but a baby  
with a grown-up neurotic mind,  
wily and undisciplined in its imaginings.  
Still, I can still it. Who knew?  
I can quiet its prattling  
for a few minutes, later longer.  
I am that baby when first  
she awakes and plays with the orange rattle;  
when she coos and smiles  
and giggles a little.  
Before the crying begins...  
but I can still it.  
I can know the crying, and feel it.  
I can bring my focus back to the breath,  
choosing to re-focus.  
I am every baby and every grownup.

This is not so unique.  
This is not so terrible.  
I can see and lose and take another breath.  
I can feel and name and take another breath.  
I am but a baby,  
awake and ready.  
From this state,  
I can say "hello"  
to the other babies and grownups,  
then return to my breath.  
I can still my mind  
again...

## Being “Good at Life”

by Edna Wallace

“What does it mean to be good at life?” my friend Bea mused the other day over lunch. “We know what it is to be good at sports or good at math, but what about life?” Good question. I told her, truthfully, that I think *she’s* good at life. At seventy-three years old, Bea still takes classes, sees friends, swims daily, leads happiness and marriage enhancement groups, travels to New York City to soak up its cultural offerings, and reads voraciously (to name just a few of her involvements).

But I think being good at life requires more than that. I used to think that that’s what it took: a structured life with meaningful activities, healthy living habits, exercise, mind stimulation, and close relationships (friends and family); basically being active, involved, and engaged in life. But I think it needs more. Yes, I know that’s asking a lot. But the essential additional element is outlook—and the mental vigilance around that.

The juncture between positive psychology (incorporating pleasant and meaningful activities in your days) and what mindfulness tells us about abandoning thought (and being in the moment) is key. There’s the rub. It’s in the appreciation, the awareness, the savoring of your experience that separates those who are “good at life” and those whom life seems to defeat. “There’s always something,” my relatives say, and what they mean by *something* is something bad, something stressful, some hardship to deal with. There is also always something good. Some piece of beauty or act of kindness or small success we tend to bypass (in our urgency to attend to the bad).

Yes, of course, there are things that go awry ... every day! The package that arrives late, poor cholesterol, high blood pressure, traffic, a close friend who’s dying, too many emails, the mean thing someone said to you that week, work stressors. But the problem usually isn’t in the problem solving; that’s the easier part. It’s in the immediate spiking of thought around the problem, it’s in the rumination, it’s in the meaning we attribute to it. And, boy, do we attribute meaning. Even if our thoughts start out positively or value-bound, they often go south fast. Or the thoughts start south and descend more southerly. Or there isn’t a southern or northern direction about them; there are just lots and lots of them. Our thoughts confuse us and overwhelm us and ... raise our anxiety further. My new motto is that “All my thoughts eventually cause angst.”

Being good at life means that you cultivate good *chi* for yourself: pointed activities, friends, close relationships, regular stimulation, fun, keeping up with chores, healthy physical living habits. Our doctors and *People* magazine tell us that. Our parents and friends counsel us the same way. But more insidious and in some ways more fundamental is the mental vigilance piece: the need to practice good mental hygiene.

That hygiene is the discipline of keeping thought contained and curtailed, helpful, somewhat optimistic, and, at a minimum, neutral: practicing awareness rather than rumination. Far better than succumbing to (or believing) the clamoring of monkeys going on in our mind is the exercise of lassoing thought towards appreciation or awareness and then dropping it. Thinking has its place, problem solving has its place, appreciation has its place. Keep it there and don't let it veer off the railroad tracks. You can even question: is this line of thinking helpful to me? If not, don't torture yourself. Don't let the turkeys (living inside you) get you down. It's also extremely dangerous: the two people I personally know who killed themselves did so out of the meaning they gave to their lives: "I'm a failure, I've messed up everything, I'm no good, I can't cope." We are in peril if we believe that ... probably Robin Williams believed that line of thinking.

Bea and I call them gremlins. Most of us have those gremlins—not everyone, I grant you, but they are the lucky ones, the ones born or bred with the potential to be "good at life." The rest of us walk about with unwanted gremlins inside. And it's those gremlins (of doubt and negative comparisons and presumption of danger and fear) that do us in, that assault one's prowess at life. It's our job to catch the gremlins at work and put the kibosh on them.

A more helpful—and fundamentally truer—outlook would be to appreciate that we are all in this life together, that indeed we can get counsel from each other (often far kinder than the counsel we give ourselves), and that love starts with self-love and expands outwards. The Beatles had it right: "All we need is love." Add that to the simple motto: "It's okay... I'm going to be okay" and you probably will be. Sprinkle in the actions that please you and, voila, you'll be good at life!

## **Bright Faith, Verified Faith – Ehipassiko**

by Harriet Taber

Day-  
Break  
blind  
bat  
sleep  
fast

Mid-  
Day  
one  
eye  
open  
wide

Blue  
Sargasso  
Sea  
wide

Clear  
gyre  
where  
ghosts  
suffer

Caught

En-  
snared  
in  
sea-  
weed

Horse  
Latitudes  
way-  
laid



Brave  
bat  
kind  
heart  
stead-  
fast

In  
up-  
side  
down  
repose

Curious  
humorous  
dis-  
passionate  
bat

Stay

In  
single-  
pointed  
intention

Until

Night  
comes  
illuminated  
by  
bat's  
grace

## Hearing Voices

by Judy Taylor

Walking the trail,  
I hunt for peace.  
Spearing it,  
I taste its nourishment.

Walking farther, I hear voices.  
Whining, bragging, shouting,  
they sandpaper my nerves.  
Footsteps stomp out serenity.  
Seeking refuge, I speed away.

The din recedes,  
slipping beneath  
the shuddering leaves  
and trickling water.  
Again, I revel in Nature's Valium.

But wait.  
What's that jabbering I hear?

A familiar voice,  
incessantly yammering at me,  
telling me things I already know,  
regaling me with stories  
heard many times before,  
rewinding the day's events,  
running stale commentary on all I see,  
liking this, hating that,  
Repeating itself ad nauseam,  
Never pausing to breathe.

So instead I breathe.  
In and out,  
in and out,  
again and again.

A current of peace  
Wells up to the surface,  
drowning out the voice,  
Leaving only the rhythmic tide  
of my breath.



**Zentangle**

**by Shelly Gordon**

## **Retreat Poems**

by Leslie Tremaine

### **Day 1**

first morning breakfast  
a silent setting for sound

spoons scraping against bowls  
chairs sliding on wooden floors  
tea mugs set back on the table  
the crunch of apples being eaten  
birds greeting an April early light

background sounds  
brought into focus  
without the whirl of words

### **Day 2**

first day doubts and restlessness  
begin to thin out like the morning fog  
burning off a bit as attention briefly brightens  
then reappearing  
stretching from breath to breath  
like the single spider strand visible in the slanting morning light  
linking window to bay branch  
shimmering as the leaves rustle in the lifting winds

### **Day 3**

no words come forth  
silence deepens  
images and sounds floating  
without names

## Day 4

ask me what sense is strongest  
in taking in the world  
seeing I'd say  
mind immersed in images  
    seeing meaning  
yet today sounds seem everywhere  
    footsteps falling  
    doves conversing with a chorus of frogs  
    water running and knives clattering in the kitchen  
and most of all the silent sounds of a flood of words  
within my thoughts  
a stream of stories  
pouring forth as sound tracks to my day

## Being Time

by Leslie Tremain

Our morning begins with music  
chanting our way past the chatter of arriving  
the melody rides a river of time  
a flow of grace  
vibrating through every part of my body  
    re-membering  
a time beyond words and clocks  
time before time

later when clock time came back  
and all the talk scattered seeds of distraction  
it was the birds outside  
singing in time with a perfect pitch  
who brought me back  
to being  
beyond words again  
    a soft space  
where the only response possible  
is reverence

## **The Music of Roots**

by Leslie Tremaine

Bells sound into the silence  
a buried music is lifted briefly  
into the air  
then sinks deep again  
to live down in the darkness  
among the roots  
hidden source of harvests

listening now to silence  
singing  
as fog drifts through trees  
hearing now the sounds  
of blue beyond the fog

for once nothing  
is needed  
plans forgotten  
no rehearsals needed  
just listening  
to life



**Photo** by Ted Weinstein

## Collecting Clouds

by Leslie Tremaine

I've watched clouds all day  
not as weather  
simply as shapes  
containers for light and color  
spread across the canvas of sky

first frame

morning drive down the mountain  
a cover of thin gray fog over the ocean  
and above vast columns of billowing cumulus clouds  
darkly dramatic colors rim the rounding forms  
lit from within  
by early slants of sun

second frame

midday coming out of a café  
beneath a collection of smaller clouds  
simpler shapes  
more self-contained  
stronger light  
yet less drama  
more open spaces of blue

third frame

evening approaching  
pausing on the balcony at home  
caught by setting sunlight  
spreading warm shades of colors  
pink  
gold  
lavender  
on long strands of clouds  
spread above the horizon

nothing solid  
nothing to hold  
changing every moment  
a collection of a few frames  
from infinity

## ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

**Bridgit Agsar** has been practicing mindfulness meditation and studying the teachings of the Buddha as taught in the Theravada tradition for almost eight years now. In search of Dharma friends and a desire to connect practitioners on the Path, Bridgit has founded several sitting groups in the Sarasota/Venice, Florida area. About her work she says, “Poetry is a way of expressing insights gained through silent meditation practice. Even though poetry is made up of words, it is not a word’s meaning that is primary, but the easy way words, expressed through poetry, can lead us back into the silence itself.”

**Wendy Alger** majored in Photography at the Academy of Art University in San Francisco and worked in the field of graphic arts most of her career life. Of her practice she says, “I am gradually losing my eyesight due to retinitis pigmentosa, and mindfulness practice is giving me kindness and compassion for myself.”

**Kim Allen** lives as a resident volunteer at Insight Retreat Center in Santa Cruz. She also teaches at various sanghas around the Bay Area and serves as President of the Buddhist Insight Network. “My practice and life are informed by the silence that pervades both stillness and activity. I explore ways to convey that the inner and outer worlds are in constant dialogue. Sometimes my art feels representative of my mind in meditation.”

**John Beeman** is a composer living in Half Moon Bay, CA, who frequently collaborates with his wife, Carla Brooke, who writes the words for his songs and operas. The poem “Sometimes It’s Quiet in the Woods” was written in 2014 as the text for a choral work: “I was hiking to beautiful Emerald Lake in the Caribou Wilderness when the words just came to me.” The musical version, performed by Matthew Curtis, can be heard at [johnbeemancomposer.com](http://johnbeemancomposer.com).

**Robert Bohanan** has written and posted more than one thousand poems over the course of seven years. He began the practice a few months into sobriety when spiritual practice and mindfulness became very real, very concrete for him. He writes about his practice, “Today, I pass it on to others around me, especially those in my recovery community who are lost and confused. The poems, which I lovingly call Spare Verses, are written in the morning usually after meditation. Over time, I noticed they are a way for me to observe rather than judge and to be aware of the connections of my outer ecology and my inner ecology.”



**Linda Brockett** is a lifelong artist but relatively new to mindfulness meditation. Mindfulness both blends with and positively influences Linda's creative expression. She strives to produce art that explains persistent visual memories. In Mevlida's case, Linda met her in a Hungarian refugee camp in 1996. Mevlida had no family, was mentally challenged and all alone in the world; effectively discarded from her community. So, Mevlida climbed into the camp's dumpsters and dug out thrown away knitted garments. (Refugees don't throw away anything useful.) These she unraveled into balls, which she kept in a banana box under her bed. The ugly, discarded yarn was Mevlida's secure thought for her future; she had something of value now. Works such as *Blessed Mevlida of Bosnia* are intended to spark viewers to positive action for all beings everywhere.

**Jim Bronson** began working with the inner life and spiritual traditions as a student of Krishnamurti through a meditation course in 1968. After years of reflective meditation and Krishnamurti's pathless approach, Jim's concentration on Vipassana teachings and meditation began in 1990. A bereavement support volunteer since 2000, Jim also serves on the IMC Chaplaincy Council. He is a graduate of the Spirit Rock Community Dharma Leaders program and gives dharma talks, instruction, and retreats in the Bay Area and Southern Oregon. Jim finds that coming to the present with a spacious acceptance is a good approach for all of insight meditation and for lightheartedly moving through life's vicissitudes. Savoring vibrant writing and recognizing prose and poetry as important dharma for his own awakening, Jim is the founding editor of *Passing It On*.

**Carla Brooke** has been part of the IMC community for twelve years. She says of her work, "While teaching mindfulness to children over the years, I have come to realize that we are born to be mindful. There is an umbilical connection to this peaceful place inside, after all. Mindfulness is our birthright. It has been said that artists and writers need to write. While creating art or writing, I am able to find my way to that innocent place of open awareness while letting my senses lead the way. My hope is that through writing and art I can share the never ending thread of common humanity."

**Stephen Browning** began meditating with a small group of Buddhists in Palo Alto before Gil came down from the San Francisco Zen Center to become our teacher. Stephen's practice has supplied the subject matter for some of his poems and the underlying mindset for many more. The true wellspring of his poetry is the deep mystery of the nature of the world. He sometimes considers himself a Buddhistic phenomenologist and sometimes a phenomenological Buddhist. He is eighty-three years old.

**Judy Cannon** began Insight Meditation practice in Bethesda, Maryland, in 2001 and two years later came to IMC, where she is grateful for her happy sense of belonging. Of her work she writes: “I wrote this piece while on retreat at Spirit Rock. It happened because (1) the leader gave us the assignment to write ‘If I could only let go of ... , I could ... ’; (2) we had only five minutes to write so there was no time to think; and (3) Eighty other retreatants were earnestly writing at the same time. In my practice I find that a slightly indirect approach works well for me—an imaginary dialogue with a wisdom figure, for example. When I read what I wrote, I recognize it as something I already knew but didn’t know I knew. It’s clear.”

**Tony Ching** came to IMC last year for the Introduction to Vipassana class through Gil Fronsdal’s collection, *Issue at Hand*. After help from Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction for pains and ailments, he began to explore mindfulness beyond personal health. About the relationship of his art to his practice he says, “In origami, we strive to capture the essence or spirit of the form or original nature. So too, it seems as we cultivate our practice, we take shape of our lives. Like life, *Kami*, the Japanese word for paper, starts fresh, full of potential. Many forms can arise from this simple sheet. Sometimes we need good clear instructions so that we can capture the essence of our form. The dharma is a good clear set of instructions for the art of living. But we can’t create a Buddha just by reading about it. We have to act; we have to practice. What do you want to take shape from your fresh clean sheet of paper?”

**Rebecca Dixon** has practiced and taught Vipassana in the Bay Area for many years. She teaches regularly at three sanghas in the East Bay and occasionally at IMC and other places, as listed on [RebeccaDixon.org](http://RebeccaDixon.org). Writing, practice, and teaching are inter-connected for Rebecca. She sees practice not as a part of life, but the way to live. In her writing she seeks to express her experience of the truth of things as they are.

**Linda Filling** has been studying calligraphy for four years under the direction of Marian Gault, a highly respected calligrapher, watercolorist, and colored pencil artist in Los Gatos, CA. Linda tries her best to emulate both Marian and her late father, Walter J. Filling, who was both a Master Penman and engraver. Linda finds nothing more meditative than calligraphy, which requires deep focus, concentration, and simultaneous relaxation.

**Angie Reed Garner** is a second-generation self-taught narrative painter. A serial expat since 1999, she has lived in Germany, Pakistan, and the United Arab

Emirates. Garner has been exhibiting actively since 1996 with twelve solo shows in the USA, Europe, and the Middle East. Since 2012, she also serves as director for garner narrative, a contemporary art gallery located in Louisville, KY. Garner paints saturated, symbolic narratives. Her favored theme is the fragility of that which makes social life possible: identity and belonging.

**Shelley Gault** lives in Santa Barbara, where she helps lead the Open Door Sangha. She also teaches fourth grade kids about plants at a beautiful estate garden there. Of her work she says, “The natural world has always been a teacher for me, the place where my heart is most open and undefended, where I can see the dharma most easily. Poems come from insights that often arise in nature or from moments of either clarity or confusion in relationship with others, with the world. Writing poems is often a way of teaching myself the dharma. I can’t separate practice from any other part of life, certainly not from writing. It’s all of a piece.”

**Pablo Gonzalez** is a student in the dharma *en Español* class taught by Andrea Castillo at Insight Meditation Center (IMC) in Redwood City, California. Pablo has been practicing meditation for over five years.

This essay was written as the result of Pablo’s experience in a four-day retreat offered by IMC. The retreat was the first Spanish-language Insight retreat offered in the West Coast, and the second in the United States, which was offered at IMS in 2002. This was also the author’s first residential retreat. Pablo offers us an intimate account of his experience, which he originally wrote in Spanish. We are publishing it both in English and Spanish.

**Shelly Gordon** discovered Zentangle, the art of drawing simple ink patterns that connect to form an interesting mosaic, about six months ago. Each individual pattern gives rise to a new one inside an amorphous shape, allowing plenty of room for imprecision. About her work she says, “Zentangle is especially rewarding for people like me who have struggled to draw recognizable images. Most importantly the act of “Zengtangling” is a meditative process. To draw each pattern and stitch it together requires a deceleration of the mind, slowed down enough to notice my thoughts as they connect to form a story: ‘this time it won’t turn out’ or ‘I should be doing something else with my time.’ Then I let go and enjoy the process.”

**Sue Harrison** has lived in La Honda, CA, for nearly thirty years. She finds mindfulness practice and the teachings of the Buddha a wonderful guide to living and experiencing life each and every day. She says of her work, “There is a

very poetic and wonderful vocabulary around mindfulness and Buddhism along with a wonderful tradition of using stories and poems to illustrate the Buddhist concepts. I think learning this new 'language' has given me a whole new way to express poetically some of the more sublime thoughts that I often feel very strongly but have a hard time articulating with words."

**Koren Jones** joined the IMC community in 2014 when she moved to the Bay Area from the East Coast. Her Buddhist practice centers around mindfulness in daily life and creating artwork. She often begins a piece with no outcome in mind, using chance techniques such as doodling or collage. Mindfully reacting to these preceding marks or shapes, she builds an image that becomes a play of chance, subconscious expression, and abstraction.

**Susanne Petermann** is a poet and translator living in Southern Oregon. She makes her living as a professional organizer. Both at work and at rest she believes in the power of careful observation, whether or not what she sees and feels gets turned into poetry.

**Bianca Powell** found the Dharma twenty-five years ago. Her root lineage is Theravada, but she has gone on to draw deeply from Mahayana and Vajrayana teachings and methods. She says of her work, "Writing poetry is an extension of my practice in that the aesthetic distance required to turn life events into 'art' supports dissolving the habit of hardening into identification with experience. At this particular time caregiving my husband most deeply informs my practice. Life itself is the practice!"

**Judith Ross** paints watercolor botanicals. She has been practicing meditation and painting for fifteen years, and her painting seems closely related to the meditation experience. About her art she says, "I paint always from the live plant, and this process invites deep seeing and concentration. The real plants express the dharma. I endeavor to paint them as they really are and to show their life cycle and relationships in the natural world. I am inspired by the Japanese aesthetic of wabi-sabi, which expresses impermanence, imperfection, and simplicity."

**Robert Rossel**, Ph.D., is a life coach and grief counselor living and practicing in Portola Valley, CA. He is a Buddhist and a long-time practitioner of self-relations psychotherapy and Ericksonian hypnotherapy. With an abiding interest in music, art, yoga, nature, and mind-body practices, Rob has sought for many years to find ways to apply meditation and mindfulness in his spiritual practice

and his life. Rob is a husband, father, and grandfather. He plays violin and viola. He is one of the original creators and the core editorial team of *Into the Bardo*, an online blogazine that is devoted to creating a common ground (sacred space) through the arts as spiritual practice.

**Gerard Sarnat** is the author of three collections: *HOMELESS CHRONICLES from Abraham to Burning Man* (2010), *Disputes* (2012), and *17s* (2014). He is now working on *Patriarchs*, in which his poem “Time Motion Analysis” appears. Harvard and Stanford educated, Gerry has set up and staffed clinics for the disenfranchised, as well as being a CEO of healthcare organizations and a Stanford Medical School professor. For *Huffington Post* reviews, Stanford and other reading dates, publications and more, visit GerardSarnat.com. Gerry has been an IMC Board member. He meditates with a daughter and sometimes grandsons in the room above their L.A. garage where Gerry and his wife, Lela, currently live.

**Patricia Sempowich** is a retired educator who lives in Ashland, Oregon, where she writes poetry, volunteers at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, sees many plays, and hikes in the Siskiyou and Cascade Mountains. She has been writing poetry since high school days and is currently working on a chapbook that describes her experiences over the last twenty years. About her practice she says, “My spiritual practice is often the inner reflection that shapes my poetry. Through my hours of meditating over a quarter of a century, I have become familiar with my interior landscape. Poetry, I believe, grows out of concentration, reflection, experience, and relationship; and while the act of writing is not simple, it often deals with simple experiences that profoundly affect the reader. The need to focus and let go in both meditation and writing liberates and awakens me.”

**Nirali Shah** teaches meditation in different parts of the world with an emphasis on mind-body awareness and Vipassana. She has spent more than four years serving in one of the largest slum communities of Asia and also enabled a platform for hundreds of volunteers to work on social change projects: [www.niralis.com](http://www.niralis.com). She says of her work: “I have realized over the years that the practice of meditation and writing are unified in the act of ‘allowing.’ Allowing that which has to arise in the ephemeral forest of your consciousness. To create a safe space on the page where you can bring all parts of yourself—no matter how whole or broken they may seem. To have the confidence that just like your practice, your art too will meet you if you show up with earnestness and devotion.”

**Nancy Shea** lives in Ashland, Oregon. With a Ph.D. in Eco-philosophy, she has been a teacher, leader, and non-profit administrator for thirty years. Her meditation practice, which began ten years ago in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, is now a stable, daily practice. A three-month meditation retreat at Upaya opened her up to the possibility that through her poetry she could deepen the experience of her practice and share it with others.

**Cecilia Steger** is grateful to be able to express herself through writing although she has no formal training. About her practice she says, “Spirituality has been an adventure, and my meditative practices have enhanced every aspect of the journey. I am an avid reader and an eager and enthusiastic student, and from being a Master Gardener and Yoga Instructor to raising three children, meditation has brought quality to my life in the subtlest of ways. I believe exercising awareness has kept my mind open to new perspectives, fresh ideas, and mindful choices. Painful realizations or circumstances transform into revelations which become fodder for my writing.”

**Lynn Sunday** lives in Half Moon Bay with her husband and rescue dog. Her stories have appeared in *Passing It On 2010 and 2011*, *Tiny Lights: A Journal of Personal Narrative*, *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, and *Times They Were A-Changing: Women Remember the 60s and 70s*. *My Evening Alone at the Kabuki Baths* is one of a series of reflective pieces about being in the moment, accepting what is, and maintaining equanimity.

**Harriet Taber** is new (a little over a year) to Buddhism and Vipassana meditation. Her husband lives in Redwood City, CA, a few blocks from IMC, and whenever she visits from Brooklyn, she attends talks and sittings at the center. About her poem she writes: “Meditation practice seems to have inspired this poem, the first poem I have written in over a decade.” She is currently tutoring high school math, working on a history of Generative Linguistics, and looking for employment on the Peninsula.

**Judy Taylor** has been practicing various forms of meditation for over twenty years with exclusive focus on Vipassana since 2005. She finds that her meditation practice gives her the focus, patience, and contemplative ability to go deeper with her writing and visual art. Buddhist concerns such as impermanence and mindfulness often influence her writing and photography.

**Leslie Tremaine** is a long time meditator who has been part of the IMC, IRC, and Insight Santa Cruz practice communities. Recently retired from a more than

thirty-five-year career in public mental health and substance abuse administration, Leslie now uses her time to teach mindfulness in a range of community settings, including Insight Santa Cruz, prisons, schools, and retirement facilities. She sees her writing as a form of spiritual practice—a way to express the richness of present-moment awareness in a spirit of gratitude. After decades of writing mostly memos and reports, she says, “This new chapter of creative expression feels both vulnerable and exciting!”

**Edna Wallace** is a psychotherapist at El Camino Hospital in Mountain View, CA, working at an intensive-outpatient program that treats older adults suffering from severe depression or anxiety. She also has a private practice in Los Altos, CA. About her art and practice she says, “I find that that writing helps me clarify and cement my practice. I try not to be perfectionistic about my writing; it comes from my heart. And writing is, of course, another opportunity to instill the lovely, accepting, helpful tools of mindfulness and compassion so integral in the practice I want in my life. Writing helps me along in this journey.”

**Ted Weinstein** is a literary agent and a photographer who lives in San Francisco. As an agent he represents a wide range of non-fiction works, and his photography ranges from portraits to events to landscapes to candid street shooting. About his practice he says, “Usually on meditation retreats the teachers urge students not to read, write, or otherwise distract from their meditation, but occasionally I steal away with a camera and try to capture the scene and mood of that retreat center. The thinking and decisions that go into taking a photo are different from contemplative concentration, but it’s nice to exercise a different kind of mindfulness for a few minutes, too.”