

# Wind In The Forest

Venerable Sujiva



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# WIND IN THE FOREST

by

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# CONTENTS

FOREWORD .....	15
PREFACE .....	16
ANCIENT TONGUE .....	17
LIVING IN THE PRESENT .....	19
HOME AGAIN .....	21
LADY BEWARE! .....	24
WHAT'S IN A TREE? .....	25
A DYING DISCIPLE .....	31
THE DREAM OF THE FOREST .....	34
IT WAS MURDER .....	37
A DIFFERENT PILGRIMAGE .....	40
COLD PARADISE .....	46
NATURE'S CURTAINS .....	48
KENYIR LAKE .....	49

OTHER THAN THAT .....	50
LANGSIR FALLS .....	51
WINDS AND WAVES OF JARA .....	52
LEMON DREAMS .....	54
ROSE-APPLE DREAMS .....	56
GREAT DREAMS, LONG DREAMS, CRYSTAL DREAMS .....	57
THE DREAM OF WEST LAKE .....	60
THE POET OF HUANG SHAN .....	63
1. WE COME TO YELLOW MOUNTAIN .....	63
2. THE STEPS UP HUANG SHAN .....	65
3. THE POET OF HUANG SHAN .....	68
A POET'S SEND-OFF .....	71
THE SONG OF THE GORGES .....	73
CONGQING .....	80
DEATH ON WHEELS .....	85

ELECTIONS .....	88
IT'S JUST LIKE THE GOOD OLD DAYS .....	90
THE STATION OF LIFE .....	93
LAST LAP .....	96
AFTER A STORMY NIGHT .....	96
SOLITUDE .....	98
GOOD-BYE KINABALU .....	99
THE TEMPLE OF FORGOTTEN FLOWERS .....	99
YOUTH AND OLD AGE .....	102
1. FORGOTTEN FLOWERS .....	103
2. YOUTH AND OLD AGE .....	108
THE WAITING GAME .....	109
A WALK IN THE HILLS .....	111
ROMANCING WITH DAHLIAS .....	113
THE BUTTERFLY IS NOT A DREAM .....	115

BEST OF GIFTS .....	117
ONE FOR THE BUSINESSMAN .....	119
MEDITATION .....	121
DEATH WILL COME FOR SURE .....	122
MORNING SPECTACLE .....	123
IT'S A DOG-EAT-DOG WORLD .....	124
BOUGAINVILLAEAS .....	125
ROOTS .....	126
INSIGNIFICANT .....	129
CONCENTRATION .....	131
A SURPRISE CALL FOR MR BUSY BUSINESSMAN ....	132
FASTING .....	136
TRIBUTE TO MR SKEELETOR .....	137
ETERNAL WISH .....	140
FALLEN FLOWERS .....	142

BARN OWLS .....	143
FIG TREE .....	144
LOVE BIRD .....	147
THE BALM OF LOVE .....	148
GRANDFATHER FIG .....	149
A RECOVERY .....	152
RAIN DRAMA .....	153
NOBLE OF THE FOREST .....	155
THE HOUSE THAT SORROW BUILT .....	157
HONOURABLE TREES .....	164
IN THE NAME OF FREEDOM .....	165
DEATH AT OUR DOORSTEP .....	167
SPRING AND WINTER .....	171
DEATH IN THE HOUSE .....	172
CREMATION .....	173

RETURN TO THE SEA .....	175
RETURN TO THE EARTH .....	177
FOOD DEVA .....	179
TAIPING'S HANGING TREE .....	181
THE WIND IN THE FOREST .....	182
WHEN YOU LEFT .....	186
NEW YEAR CROWD .....	188
MR KIK-KOK WYATT EARP .....	189

## AUSTRALIA POEMS

KOOKABURRA .....	192
THE CURRAWONG BIRD .....	192
AUSTRALIAN YOGIS .....	194
APPLES .....	195
LYRE BIRD TRAIL .....	195
SYDNEY HARBOUR .....	196

SURFING .....	198
HANG GLIDING .....	200
Moon .....	202
DEATH IN AUSTRALIA .....	202
HEALESVILLE SANCTUARY .....	203
KING AMONG TREES .....	206
BLACKWOODS	
DANDELIONS .....	208
KOOKABURRAS .....	208
THE THREE STOOGES .....	210
 NOTES ON AUSTRALIAN POEMS .....	212
BLUE MOUNTAINS .....	212
BYRON BAY AND LISMORE .....	219
MELBOURNE .....	223
BLACKWOODS .....	224

D-DAY .....	225
IMPATIENT YOUNG MAN .....	232
CRY BABY .....	233
MATANG'S CLEAR WATER STREAM .....	234
BOAT RIDE .....	237
THE DEVELOPMENT OF METTA .....	239
BEWARE, AUSTRALIA! .....	240
THOUGHTS ON PEACE .....	241
THOUGHTS ON FREEDOM .....	243
DAFFODILS .....	245
PEACH BLOSSOMS .....	245
BYERS BACK-TRACK SONG .....	247
CONVENT GALLERY .....	248
THE BIG TREES .....	249
TREE OF LIFE .....	250

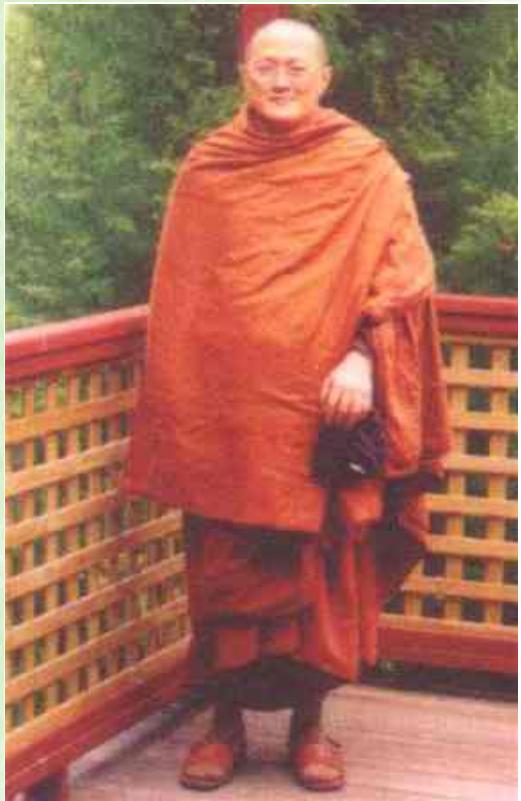
SAILING AT WAIHEKE ISLAND .....	252
SNOW ENCHANTMENT .....	254
WATERS OF WAKATIPU .....	256
WATERS OF MILFORD .....	256
THE WIZARD .....	258
THE AMARANT, MELBOURNE .....	260
TASMANIA	
1. REMINDERS .....	267
2. LAST PARADISE .....	269
SEEDLINGS .....	272
WINDS OF KAMMA .....	275
BROKEN .....	280
TIME ON THE MOVE .....	282
ALL IN THE SPLIT OF A SECOND .....	283
THE DAY AFTER .....	286

Earlier collections of poems by the same author –

*Voices from the Heart*

*Walking Iris*

*The Door*



The Buddha once exhorted his disciples to “*go to the foot of a tree and meditate lest you shall regret later on*”. This advice shows us that the Buddha’s Dhamma and Discipline cannot be separated from Nature.

Nature teaches us lessons about the impersonal nature of existence – about birth, life and death.

It is therefore timely that Venerable Sujiva, a very well-loved and respected Theravadin monk in Malaysia, now offers us an opportunity to learn from his insights into Nature, among other things, in his latest book *Wind in the Forest*. The present book is a unique collection of poems, write-ups, illustrations and photos.

In Venerable Sujiva’s sincere and heart-felt writings, readers will find many touching incidents related by him in his many years of teaching. They will also come to understand him, his compassion and loving-kindness, as well as the Dhamma, by simply flowing with his pen.

The Venerable’s earlier compilations of poetry include *Voices from the Heart*, *Walking Iris* and *The Door*.

WIND



IN THE  
FOREST

*poems by sujiva*

## FOREWORD

A DECADE has passed since a group of aspiring members pioneered the inception of the Buddhist Wisdom Centre (BWC) with the noble objective of propagating the practice of Vipassana Meditation. Their goals have been progressively realised and over the years the society has generated interest in Vipassana Meditation through its practice and publications.

On behalf of the BWC, I wish to express our heartfelt gratitude to our spiritual advisor, Rev. Sujiva, who has been instrumental in guiding and motivating us in this noble practice. It is therefore apt that the BWC publish this book by our spiritual advisor, entitled *The Wind in the Forest*, to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the society.

I take this opportunity to thank the founding members, past and present committee members and the meditation guides for their untiring efforts in carrying the activities of the society. At the same time, a great Sadhu! to all members and well-wishers for supporting the society from the spiritual and financial aspects.

May the BWC grow in wisdom and strength.

Lee Lee Kim  
Chairman, 1998

## PREFACE

Unlike my other poetry collections, *The Wind in the Forest*, is not just poetry. Also included are cartoons and short stories. The other difference is an emphasis on our natural environment. I do hope our Malaysian Buddhists can be more aware and concerned about our greens. It had and will play an important role in spirituality. However, the book did not come about for that purpose. I happened to find myself moving in that direction for, as in the past, the forest and the monk go hand in hand.

As for the wind, it's the Dhamma. When the yogi contemplates on the body and mind as mere processes, they can be perceived just like 'winds' — sometimes turbulent, at other times cool and blissful, but nevertheless ungraspable and void. The poem whose title the book bears is actually about such a situation. The yogi or monk meditates where he strives to lose himself in Nature. Does not that tattered brown robe camouflage him among the brown tree trunks?

SUJIVA, 1998

## ANCIENT TONGUE

All persons  
Familiar or otherwise  
Are now winds.  
Their faces appearing intermittently  
Between gaps of voidness  
As thin fragile films  
On invisible air.  
How can such unreal manifestations be permanent?  
They change, these insubstantial happenings,  
So I call them winds.

Flowers!  
Only you seem to remain fairly loyal  
To my past perceptions,  
However deceptive.  
It can be expected  
Since you are the closest  
Of all natural expressions  
To ultimate Natures  
Of that, I have accepted

The immaculate jasmine that lasts but for a day,  
The leaves of the Kopsia aged red,  
Butterflies and moths,  
Dragonflies levitate,  
These are thoughts,  
But whose thoughts?

The language of Man  
Too has vanished with the winds,  
I've lost all words my teacher drilled me.  
May I borrow your tongue to communicate,

O plants of the world,  
Your lips to speak?  
And safe-keep my memories between your layers of  
leaves?  
O Mother Earth, O Father Sky!  
Only with your words can I talk to you,  
And I can do so only when I'm no different from  
A showy hibiscus,  
Or the moon, the mirror of the sun,  
Or the sun, the discus of life.

7 NOVEMBER 1994



I have, for some time, been talking to plants. Not in the way some people talk to themselves. It's more of a communication, but not like what the mediums do during seances. When you develop keen awareness while working with and among plants, you can sense their unique characteristics, not just their external morphology but qualities which seem to tell you about the nature of life, the ways of the world and so forth. It enlivens and inspires my spiritual life as well as contributing to good health. Everyone should learn the ancient language Nature speaks. This reminds me of a short poem I wrote long ago:

*Nature speaks in symbols and signs  
Catch them while they fly  
Let her tell you what's in her heart  
– The Truth that never dies!*

## LIVING IN THE PRESENT

Living in the present  
Is doing yet not doing  
Existing yet not existing

Living in the present  
Is slipping in-between the conscious  
And the unconscious  
Dissolving into brilliance of Truth  
That's ever invisible

Living in the present  
Is really all one needs to know  
That is to know how to know  
Know what is to be known  
The Unconditioned!  
The world, the world,  
Whirls round in concentric ripples  
The mind first  
The body follows after,  
Aren't they interdependent?

On one end you may find  
The particles paradise  
Expanding  
Her territories geometrically,  
In the inside edge however,  
Terror awaits  
In suspension,  
Threatens!

The past is gone  
The future not yet come

To be in the present that's unreal  
Is to be trapped  
In imaginations.

But living in the present  
With clear awareness  
Breaks all three time periods asunder  
So what are we left with?  
Nothing, No body, No mind, no where.

Yet I stand before you  
No, what you're looking at is not real!

Living in the present  
Is existing yet not existing.

21 NOVEMBER 1994  
*Santisukharama, Kota Tinggi, Johor*



The secret of the Teachings is: how to live in the present where reality is. The old have but memories of things long gone. The young live on bright hopes yet to be fulfilled. Even the present is fleeting, too fast to catch. What people perceive when they say "now" is already the immediate past. Therefore when we say we live in the present, we are using the word "present" as a convenient tool of communication. What we really mean to say is to be with reality. If we can do that perfectly, we can be considered enlightened. The Dhammapada verse 348 illustrates this point clearly:

*Let go of the past  
Let go of the future  
Let go of the present  
Crossing to the farther shore of existence,  
with mind released from everything,  
Do not again undergo birth and decay.*

## HOME AGAIN

Too long, too long,  
Have I wandered  
Along compassion's circuitous routes  
Into the land of ogres,  
Demons bedecked with jewelled garlands,  
Dwelling in crystal caverns  
With airs wafted with the hint of roses.  
They all sing praises to the Lord's blessed path  
And bow their heads low in veneration.

All illusions!!  
In time they'll devour themselves  
And in turn they'll devour you.  
But a storm arose  
Thunderbolts raced across the sky  
Crackling as she screamed her fire  
And as the rain poured  
I remembered what I should not have forgotten,

In the midst of a storm  
I recalled home  
The forest  
With darkness smothering the pupils  
Dampness sticking to the marrow  
Deafening silence resonating deeply

Into the consciousness,  
And it's wild, O so wild!  
In remembrance my heart harkens again  
How indeed, the cicadas call and call  
Pathetically  
Even as the evenings sighs its last  
Betwixt the tall trees  
Standing straight, stationary and still  
Then tossed their heads  
And waved their leaves with joy  
At a passing wind.

Suddenly  
I was once again  
A little mousedeer  
With tiny feet,  
Timid and gentle,  
Soft and hidden,  
Fearful of humans with little wit,  
Cruel in means,  
Running free through the lush undergrowth,  
Fleeing fast between the shifting shadows,  
Following the lead of the stream side trails  
Infested with leeches, littered full with leaves,  
Deep in the jungle  
Home of the king of the beasts.

3 DECEMBER 1994  
*Camp Matang, Sarawak*



Do you know that the mousedeer is actually not a deer? It's more closely related to the

camel. It is a loveable, small creature, less than a foot high. Often featured in the Malay folklore, it plays the role of a hero which outwits predators such as the tiger and crocodile. Historically, it was responsible for the naming of the state of Malacca, when the state's founder saw it warding off a tiger while he was resting under a Malacca tree. Having just been chased out from his homeland, the incident must have served as an inspiration to him as did the spider to Shakespeare's King Edward.

Personally, I have come across the mousedeer a few times when I lived near the forest. They really looked gentle and vulnerable and so, an object of affection. Unfortunately, they are often hunted as food. A friend tells me that one of the ways to trap them is to capitalise on their unique love of dancing. It seems that if you tap a pair of sticks in a certain rhythm when the animal happens to be around, it cannot help dancing. All you have to do is to make it dance until it is dead tired. He seems genuine in his claim because he reports an incident in which he was personally involved. There was this mousedeer dancing uncontrollably to the taps of sticks. My friend was supposed to shoot it down with his rifle. He could see the creature dancing with tears in its eyes. It obviously knows about this dance of Death! My friend didn't have the heart to do it. The musician was furious. We now know that even such a wise hero of the jungle has its weakness.

## LADY BEWARE!

Lady beware!  
Of the man whose feelings overpower him.  
Feelings beget sufferings  
Intense emotions promise deep sorrows.  
And feelings are blind  
Indiscriminate  
There can never be enough  
To satisfy his cravings.

Lady beware!  
Of the man who gently holds your hands  
Young in years, fresh in love.  
Inexperience  
Will claim its toll  
Of countless broken hearts.  
You're in his list,  
Of that you can be certain.

Fly away while you may  
When the skies are still for free  
Before he casts the net over you  
And on himself.  
The chains that bind lovers to eternity  
Also binds your limbs and consciousness  
To the endless cycle of Deaths.  
To break clean  
You've got to bleed  
The sea dry.

Beware lady,  
Of his charms and smile.  
Run away lady,  
To live a divine life.

5 DECEMBER 1994  
*Camp Matang, Kuching, Sarawak*



Young love, puppy love and first love, probably all in one will most likely be a failure. The inexperienced usually look for something and usually it is based on lust. But for those involved, it is the most wonderful thing that can possibly happen.

Usually I would sympathise with the young man for not being able to become a monk. In this case I sympathise with the female. That's because the male is the more emotional one and therefore less reasonable. He's also quite immature and is also more likely to be attracted to another. But who knows, it may just work out. It's also not my business.

## WHAT'S IN A TREE?

For the weary traveller  
Hospitable shade  
For their thirsty throats

Juicy fruits  
For her coral neck  
Garlands sweet  
For the homeless one  
A humble abode.

But what is it in a tree  
That makes a monk happy  
with joy expanding in all directions  
Unimpeded?

For one whose life  
Is intertwined with Nature,  
Unsullied,  
Whose heart is bent on striving,  
That solitary seat  
Is his domain.  
There grows too  
Preciously  
All of his life's meanings.  
Happy is he who finds a friend  
Who gives selflessly  
Supports his life sublime  
Uncomplaining, unintrusive,  
Such a friend is indeed  
Hard to find.  
Such a friend is the tree.

When you feel lonely  
Do not look for companionship  
With man blinded by self-interest,  
Neither seek from him comfort  
Who is bent on worldly gains.  
Retreat instead

To Nature's stalwart elders  
To speak and spill  
Your heart's emotions, wishes.  
They'll understand and console  
Far better than anyone else!

Or walk between their tall stately trunks,  
Pillars of Nature's own shrines.  
Seek not in what man-confused has instituted,  
These alone suffice to ease  
Aching hearts,  
Breathe spirit to weakened bodies,  
And supply answers to all queries  
If you would but learn to listen!  
Rustle, leaves sing,  
When the rain falls  
O how sweetly they smile.  
Then listen, listen  
Can you hear them tell  
Mountains of tales  
Of how all things rise and fall,  
Of how rivers flow to the sea  
In diverse ways.

I would like to make friends  
With all the trees in the world.  
Invite them to live right next to me  
If only there's enough place to accommodate them!  
Then I can get to know them all  
Intimately,  
Listen to their every story  
Attentively,  
And gain understanding.

What is it in one tree  
That makes my heart leap with joy  
More than another?  
My mother's favourite is the pomegranate.  
But the Great Man's Religious Fig  
Excels all else.  
Once I chose the Casuarina  
An airy fairy who dances by the sea.  
But I found her shade too meagre  
And thus I looked elsewhere for another.

Then I saw  
The stately Alstonia  
Its coat neatly pressed in tiers.  
In the race of trees  
This is a tall handsome gentleman  
Hardy but elegant,  
A perfect attendant.  
But I'm disinclined to select him  
To shade that solitary seat in my heart  
I prefer one more at home  
In the deepest of the wilds.

Why not me? invites  
The tree of sadness,  
Nycthanthes arbor-tristis  
That's her Botanical name,  
Whose fragrant white blossoms  
With vermillion hearts open  
In the depths of the night,  
The silver sheen of its petals  
reflecting moonbeams.  
A moonlight serenade  
Subtle ecstasy!

This precious princess  
Never wears her clothes for more than a day.  
Indians plant her at their temples,  
And offer her flowers to their gods  
The following daybreak.  
It's a fine tree to be with  
But then she's too dainty  
To have beside me always.

The Iron wood  
If you fain upon it  
Is durable against all odds.  
When flowering,  
Its blossoms large, white and fragrant  
Echoes virtues' excellence.  
It has been a tree chosen by Buddhas!  
Now are you good enough for it?

Somehow I feel drawn to  
The admirable Borneo Camphor  
Dimensions at par with the hosts of giants  
Towering over lesser inhabitants  
Its wood is highly valued  
Its blossoms I have yet to witness  
Beholding it calms down my mind  
Into an ocean without waves  
Deep and clear,  
Inexplicable peace.  
What is it in this tree  
That makes me feel this way?

Grow O mighty tree  
For my sake  
Your life is like my life

Your wish, my wish to fulfil  
For we share the same heart  
The heart of Nature  
Where the deepest green  
Merges with the unknown black  
Where there is also found  
The access to freedom!

9 DECEMBER 1994  
*Camp Matang, Kuching, Sarawak*



Trees. If you imagine a landscape without trees, you will end up with a desert or the sea. How miserable!

Trees have played an important part in Buddhism. The Buddha was born, lived, preached and died under trees. Each Buddha has his own Enlightenment (*Bodhi*) tree and that will be the one beneath which he sought shelter and eventually gained enlightenment. Our present Buddha Gotama was enlightened under the species of *Ficus Religiosa*. He himself chose it to represent him when he was not around. Since then Buddhists have shown a special reverence for that tree or its offspring. Strangely enough, people who meditate under it find that they get good results. Faith works wonders.

In the past year, planting trees has become one of my passions. They are true friends of Man. They give us food, shelter, medicine and much joy and beauty in life. I have also encouraged

my friends to adopt a tree, spread cremated ashes under a tree and to plant thousands of trees. And I tell you, it is indeed a joy to see them grow tall, above our heads.

How tall is a tall tree?

Just in case you have wrong ideas, trees are considered short if they fall below 30ft, medium if they are between 30ft and 100ft, and tall if they exceed 100ft. The Borneo Camphor tree can reach a height of 200ft. That's about four times the height of a normal rubber tree. I planted quite a fair number of them in the hermitage. The tallest tree we have at present is the Batai (*Albizia falcata*). It is also the fastest growing tree at the hermitage but extremely brittle. It must be over 50ft by now. We planted it from a seed. The tree does not always last and usually become a victim of lightning. I hope ours lasts, because it's the only one we have. At present, we have over 190 species of trees at the hermitage and many more if you include the unidentified ones.

## A DYING DISCIPLE

With a shrivelled up body  
And swollen legs  
A man not too old in years  
Lies waiting uncomfortably  
For his imminent death.  
He seeks for refuge from the Buddha.

I tell him to recite his wish out loud  
Like I do, like this:  
“Buddham Saranam Gacchami”  
After each “saranam”,  
He gulps a big HICK-CUP  
Which sends his head jerking  
And mind reeling.  
It’s not an ecstasy I assure you,  
It’s more like a strange kammic manifestation.

“Now take these 5 precepts”, I explained,  
Starting with the restraint from  
Intentional taking of life  
To the restraint from intoxicants,  
And with each restraint he vowed to keep  
He gulped a big HICK-CUP.  
Which turns his head around  
And sends his mind spinning.  
That too I assure you  
Is not ecstasy.  
It’s more like a strange kammic manifestation.

“Do not cling to anything in this world”  
I then further advised,  
“Recite in your heart again and again,  
I have faith in the Buddha.  
One who has faith  
His mind will be at peace.  
Such a one need not fear anything  
Even if his body withers to ashes.”  
He nods as if with understanding  
And no big HICK-CUPS interferes.  
Before I left I held his hand to console,  
As an appreciation for some simple guidance

In refuge taking,  
He offers a red packet.  
This may well be his last act of charity  
In the dispensation of our Lord  
In his life.

12 DECEMBER 1994  
*Kuching, Sarawak*



What do you do when you meet someone who is about to die? Some psychiatrists and psychologists are specialised in this field. They know what to say and do. I have read an interesting book called "Final Gifts" by Maggie Callanan and Patricia Kelley which gives you a good idea of what to do.

As monks, we have often been involved in such situations although that is not really our work. But what is it in life that we are all not involved in? There are many things which I can think of that we should not be involved in! First of all, ALL the EVIL and WICKED things. I'll leave you to think about the rest. As for death and dying, it is something very much concerned with spiritual life, even though it may not be yours.

So, there was this man who was suffering from kidney failure and it looked like his days were numbered. An old lady friend of his believed it was so, because she said, "I have worked in hospitals before and I know. With people who are about to die, their ear lobes shrink. His had shrunk, but I did not tell his children..."

Somebody then checked this out for me and confirmed that it was true.

Anyway, I didn't deny his last request and so I went. The rest you have already read. It may have done him a world of good. Generally, what we have to do is to remove fear, keep him calm and keep his mind in a pure state. Concentration will give the mind strength and hope, but people don't think of such things until only the last minute when it's too late. But then, it is also better late than never.

## THE DREAM OF THE FOREST

In December,  
When the mists roam thickly  
And the rains shower generously  
over Serapi, Matang's peak,  
The mighty dipterocarps that grace  
The Kubah reserve  
Pours out all its splendour  
As millions of winged marvels  
Rich in diverse colours –  
Reds and yellows,  
Pinks and maroons,  
And the freshest pale green,  
Borne bountifully on their convex crowns.  
You would think it a wonder  
How such temporal events  
Can be so beautiful and grand,  
And how one who is also temporal,  
Taking a temporal residence,

A fleeting glance of it  
Can make an impression so deep  
That evokes in him  
Another million dreams  
And countless tales of struggle  
So that he may one day  
Truly and befittingly adorn  
As an incomparable gem  
The forest of such majesty.

When the forest lives its dream  
And the monk dreams his life  
Or when the forest dreams its life  
And the monk lives his dream,  
They are essentially the same.  
The difference is only whose and which  
Dreams are first fulfilled.  
Then Nature is flowering with all its glory  
For the happiness of all that lives.  
And unless such dreams are fulfilled  
Or at least still kept alive  
Can there still be hope for mankind  
And the world.

I dream of a forest  
Deep and thick  
With trees so tall  
That its tops escape  
The reach of eager eyes;  
And buttresses so high  
That form walls equalling  
Those of an emperor's fortified castle,  
Where between them sits  
A monk

Tranquil and wise,  
Who has done what there is to be done,  
Who has rightly lived the holy life,  
And who shall no more be reborn.  
It is such a sage  
That should be sitting  
On your sacred peak!

15 DECEMBER 1994  
*Camp Matang, Kuching, Sarawak*



Our Malaysian equatorial forests are the oldest type among all others because there was no such thing like the ice periods here. A typical feature of this type of forest is the presence of Dipterocarps of which this region is their place of origin. It has the highest number of genera and species (Borneo – 13 genera & 276 species, Peninsular – 14 genera & 68 species). The family's distinctive characteristic is its fruit that looks like a shuttlecock.

When I was holding a retreat at camp Matang which is at the edge of the Kubah forest reserve, I noticed that the Dipterocarps that formed much of the canopy were bursting into flower. The different colours covered their entire crowns. The sight was breathtaking! It reminded me of a verse in the Ratana Sutta:

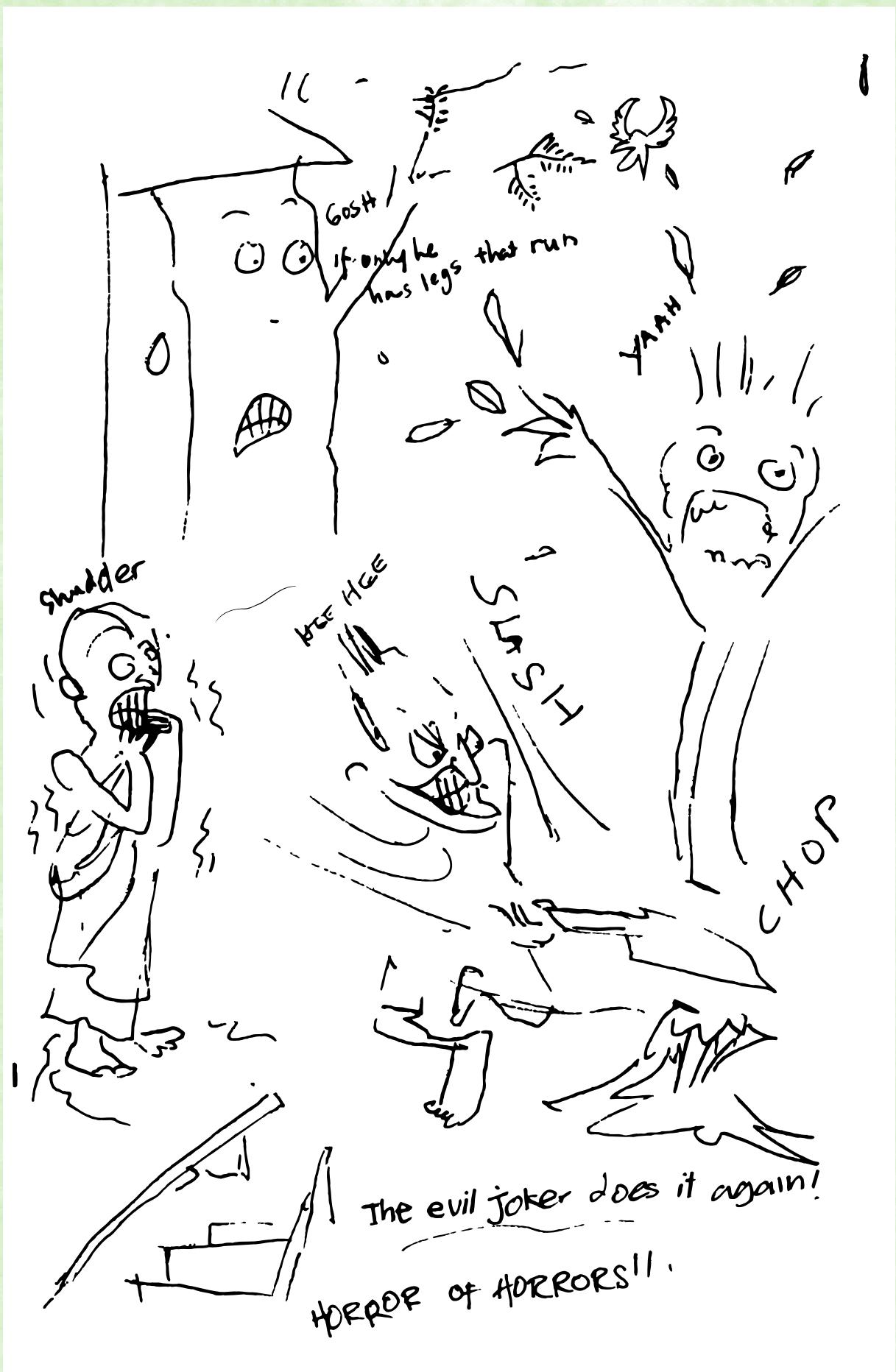
*Just as a fully blossomed woodland tree  
In the early heat of the warm summer months  
Such are the excellent teachings he taught  
Leading to Nibbana, the supreme goal*

*In the Buddha is this precious jewel  
So by this truth may there be well being.*

Incidentally, one Dipterocarp played an important role in Buddhism. This is the Shorea Robusta, known commonly as the Sal. The Bodhisatta had his last birth under it. The Buddha's mahaparinibbana was also under Sal trees. Unfortunately, this species of Shorea is not found locally. I wonder what part our local types of Dipterocarps played during the Buddha's time. Surely, many species similar to those we have here must have been found in the forest hermitages in Thailand and Burma.

## IT WAS MURDER

You may consider him an accident child  
Someone after consuming voraciously  
His mother's sweet, fragrant flesh,  
Dropped his seed in the ditch nearby  
Where women daily washed away their dirt.  
But he grew up all the same  
In our backyard  
And O how he grew!  
Fast and prolific  
Profusely and quick  
Soon he was a tall handsome lad  
Healthy and optimistic  
Ambitious and anxious  
To sire his own off-springs.



But alas! Misfortune befell this day  
For along came the Evil Joker  
With pouting lips  
Sadistic smirk at the tips,  
Pointed his wiry finger  
At the innocent chap and said,  
“This dangerous thing -  
Is too close to the building,  
We've got to chop it down  
Before it's too late.”  
And to think, O how terrible!  
That I actually agreed to his suggestion,  
Although it had a sprinkle of truth  
In the whole situation.  
So what took it many painful months and years  
To grow  
It just took us minutes  
To pull it down.  
Now I wonder if it will ever be possible  
That I will forgive myself  
For being partly responsible  
For the MURDER  
Of an innocent Jackfruit tree  
As for the Evil Joker,  
He still thinks it was a wonderful idea  
Even pleased that he has done a good deed!  
And maybe it was too...

JANUARY 1995

*Santisukharama, Kota Tinggi, Johor.*



If you are one who loves trees, you will agree with me that it was murder – shameless and intolerable murder – although not everyone will

agree with that. But, there are priorities and trees are not all indispensable. Do you know that there is a precept which specifies that bhikkhus cannot damage or have someone damage plant life? There was a bhikkhu who unintentionally did it, and was later reborn in a woeful state. The morale is, if one did so, do not be filled with remorse over it. One way is to plant more trees to replace the one you removed. And make sure it grows healthily! It takes so long to grow one, but it just takes minutes to fell it.

## A DIFFERENT PILGRIMAGE

A pilgrimage to the past rightly begins  
With a visit to my invalid mother  
Who no longer speaks, faculties failing fast  
Is a pilgrimage to change  
Another awakening from illusion.

A pilgrimage to Nature quietly begins  
With a visit to the birds in their sanctuary,  
So distant, quite alien,  
To what most people are familiar with,  
Is a pilgrimage to life forgotten,  
Another renewal of zest for contemplation.

Of herons and egrets,  
Of plovers and kites,  
Their fast flights, their majestic glides,  
Your silent movements,  
Your distant spirit,

Remind me of a time  
When Man had not forgotten you.  
And when you called out harsh cries  
Voices cracking the silence  
'Cept the winds that howl  
It churns up feelings  
As removed as are your abodes,  
Feelings too subtle to decipher distinctly  
Any words,  
But I know,  
That buried there lies my hopes,  
Be there too, vain imaginations.

Monkeys sitting on forks of trunks,  
Macaques grappled onto tightly  
By their babies,  
Their long tails hanging down  
Like furry grey ropes,  
Looking indifferently at us,  
I too look at you  
But with interest,  
Don't you recognise your distant cousin?  
I have come back  
Not a homecoming  
But as a visitor  
And as a pilgrim,  
To re-discover the lurkings deep within Man,  
I can already hear it  
In the rumblings of your distended abdomens,  
And in the rustlings of the wild fig leaves  
When the wind blows.

I lie down to rest  
The simple comforts of a chalet bring me back

To unrecorded moments thirty over years ago.  
Again in my innocence,  
Pleasant feelings of false security  
Sweeten the milk of childhood experience,  
My mother is well and smiling in her early forties,  
Before father's death brought in an era  
Disfigured by grief and struggle.  
Again features and characters of long forgotten people  
return,  
These feelings replay with sour exudations!

I awake to see a lighthouse before me  
A beacon of hope for sailors and ships,  
In a sea of their own making, born of their innate  
yearnings,  
Just then the still wilderness which has caught time  
In its thick meshed tangle of mangrove stilts  
Throws me into tides of rise and fall,  
Are these oscillations the regular thrusts of the heron's  
wings  
That my heart rides into the forests and rivers  
Created by the consciousness?  
My beacon, my light, that mindfulness  
Will tell me where to go,  
It has travelled before along such terrain,  
It will be my guide.

We rode along in a rickety boat  
In the dark, dark night.  
The waters, our faces and everything  
Were black but flowing.  
The kelip-kelip fireflies we came to see  
The only brightness dizzily sparkling  
Flashed their backsides in unison.

Then the rain came pouring  
Wetting down all their celebrations.  
Only a distant light from the jetty shone,  
The reflections of the rain and the ripples on the river  
Replaced the psychedelic displays  
Of those eerie insects  
With a cold, dark and distant  
Romantic calmness.

The beacon is now stronger than ever,  
In the rain, its rays swing with great power  
Determined and defiant, nothing can halt its noble duty  
Such is the light of a leader, the grit of a victor!

9 JANUARY 1995

*Kuala Selangor, Selangor*



There are many types of pilgrimage. The most important one would be to visit the most inspiring and spiritual places, or if you like the metaphysical word, objects. In this case, it is best done in an intensive meditation practice.

I have just begun, on this date, something I have always wanted to do for sometime but kept postponing because of too much work. I decided to go around looking at places and Nature in Malaysia, to help me think about life and whether or not there was anything I'd like to change. After getting involved in a routine of work over the years, work has become a momentum that you don't think about!

You can call this a pilgrimage to Nature, or to the Past because I will be visiting some places where I used to live when I was still a kid.

More rightly therefore, it is a time to search within myself what I want to do for the next few years. Nature will help me do it, not a lot of people with wise ideas...

Every place, well, almost every place, has a symbol or landmark. In Kuala Selangor, there is the lighthouse. I remember I visited it back in my school days. After that we went there again during my varsity days. This time I looked at it differently. Although I am not an ardent follower of the Chinese "I Ching" which places considerable stress on signs, I have begun to be aware of such things. Rather than predict the future conditions, I read its significance.

Is this what my life is about? To be a lighthouse? It's really no fun standing out there in the cold rain. Sure, it's a noble job but there can be no end to this. Or is it that I have to be sure of my own Lighthouse? Who doesn't need to? That Lighthouse is the Dhamma itself, and the Light is the light of Wisdom, which is developed from the light of mindfulness.

This brings to mind a Dhammapada verse:

*The bhikkhu who dwells in the Dhamma, delights in the Dhamma,*

*meditates in the Dhamma, remembers well the Dhamma, does not fall away from the Sublime Dhamma.*

– DhpD (364)

Here we stayed at the Nature's Park, which is a bird sanctuary. I had actually lost quite a bit of interest in bird-watching, so this was a refresher course. These birds really looked alien and distant from the problems of the human race. From the simpler lives that they live, they may actually be happier, in certain ways, than a lot of stress-ridden humans! If only humans made much better use of their potentials.

As for the fire flies, called kelip-kelip in Malay, these are silly. All those blips go on and off in unison, so what? It's great if you have not seen fireflies before, and there are many who haven't. I can also see some couples making full use of the dark situation. As for me, I liked it only when it started raining and saw the distant light from the jetty. It gave me an idea of how a fisherman might feel when he returns late at night and sees the light in his hut still burning.

Again I recall a poem I once wrote:

*A light in the darkness  
Is a gift we must always remember  
Its flame burns to comfort lost feelings  
A light in the darkness*

*Can be seen from afar  
Burn on light for the comfort of many  
If you have no light in your heart  
Find one, light one  
If you have a light already burning  
Let it burn with greater glory  
By sharing with others.*

Isn't the symbol bright and clear? When I wrote this in the '80s, I was in the forest in Kedah, watching a dim kerosene lamp. The lighthouse is a much stronger symbol. It is more like the light of one with Great Compassion.

## COLD PARADISE

Red blossoms fly in sprays  
Shooting straight into the eyes,  
Flower shafts of Mara's arrows  
Do not stick here  
These eyes have blurred when the road wound round  
a hundred circles of green collage.  
It left me dazed on an immaculate white sheet  
Thickened with mists and drizzle coalesced.  
All that's left of a hill resort is now cold darkness  
Flooding in innumerable layers of sleep sweet sleep.  
Forgotten then is all good and evil,  
Good rest indeed for the body  
But procrastination for the mind.  
I did not come here to enjoy or waste time  
I came here to be prepared for a sudden change in life  
Forewarned by intuition  
What change I can only guess.

The last time I was here  
My friend Tan was dying.  
Now he is dead,  
My mother may be the next candidate.

The cold darkness speaks in a thin voice  
Wrapping me up  
Whispering into the trembling heart:

Your pilgrimage to the past  
An echo that returns once but never again  
Is the essence of your last journey.

In the day the spirit unravels freely  
Over the verdant green hills,  
Nothing captures it  
Not the little birds, not the flowers fair.  
The unnamed tree that I passed by to the waterfalls  
Still grace my steps as it did 5 years ago  
With pure white blossoms fallen.  
The fruit and flower stalls that prey  
On enthusiastic tourists now and again  
Looks at us hard and coldly.  
But in the temple up the hill  
That had once harboured us for many nights  
Still greets us warmly with a smiling monk.  
The Bodhisattas are still benign.

11 JAN 1995  
*Cameron Highlands, Pahang*



Cameron Highlands can be considered as one of the more beautiful places in Malaysia. With development, more of Nature is now being lost.

Still, the weather and the flowers continue to attract tourists. For us, the temperature was a bit too cold for comfort. Warmth was the answer, and it came with blankets and fire by the hearth. When the world is cold, what can you do to warm it up? Loving-kindness and compassion can do the job. The other thing is the energy fired up by a noble aim, such as, the striving for the ultimate goal of liberation.

Why has man become so cold? I asked myself. A heightened perception of non-self does dampen loving-kindness somewhat. The sharpened perception of human defilements and their suffering also seem to decrease it and instead, one opts for compassion. But it is a distant, detached kind of compassion. You don't find much solace from people any more. So you go to the trees, the rivers and the sky. It's happier by oneself than with confused crankies.

## NATURE'S CURTAINS

As we descend  
Nature with her expert fingers  
Let tumbling downhill  
Her wonder curtains  
Those panels after panels of feathered ferns  
Boughs upon boughs of pale yellow forest blooms,  
Flushes over flushes of Perah's\* pink leaves

---

\* *Elateriospermum tapos*

Flying vermillion butterfly-like petals flutter on high  
Clusters upon clusters of fragrant inflorescences  
Cascade and dive  
Layers of unfolding misty hills  
Come tumbling down over us  
As the winding road weaves itself between and beneath  
All these splendour.  
What is it that we did to deserve this fantastic farewell  
You'd really wonder.

12 JANUARY 1995

*Gerik, Perak*



If you are the driver, you will have no chance to  
see all these.

Somehow, it's a better experience going down-  
hill than uphill. It's faster and you get a clearer  
picture when you look at things from the top,  
and I tell you, it's fantastic.

## KENYIR LAKE

My heart ached  
When I saw a corpse  
Of a fallen giant float  
Listlessly on the lake.  
Cruel were the teeth of iron saws  
That sank into your massive trunks.  
O how I shudder when I think of the others  
Dwelling on lower slopes were drowned,  
Some of their ghostly white fingers still sticking out  
From their watery graves.

## OTHER THAN THAT

Kenyir Lake is my kind of place  
Where Nature still plays host  
And man is still guest.

At the jetty  
Two tall Dillenias stand  
Soldierly at guard,  
The others nearby wave to welcome  
With their supple leaves  
At guests.  
Along the path  
The Mahangs with their gigantic leaves shade,  
Mallotus and Leeas attend at the door,  
Tall stem figs wait for calls.  
Kenyir Lake is my kind of place  
Next time do come with us  
For rest and meditation  
Not anything else please.  
Here are all that we have missed –  
More water to drink, even more to bathe,  
Many hundreds feet deep.  
Unending hills of virgin forest,  
Space and more space that stretch to the sky.  
Everything you need is here  
Except Nibbana.

Kenyir Lake in a way  
Is like a Noble One's mind,  
Hills of forest,  
Solitude and silence,  
Deep within you may find a sage in meditation.  
Waters vast and wide,

Cool and calm,  
Here are depths for his great thoughts to swim in.  
And the space O so free,  
That they reach the open heaven -  
Nibbana,  
signless,  
When all clouds have by winds scattered.

Kenyir Lake is like a Noble One's mind,  
This sacred domain, his peaceful abode.  
The boat is the path we take,  
Our will, the boatman's steady hand,  
And the passenger that rides,  
The heart of faith.

## LANGSIR FALLS

Those grass green waters  
Fresher than the freshest I have seen.  
O how they rush and pour  
Down steep rock faces.  
O how they splash, fall and tumble  
Over steps green with moss.  
And the joy, O the pure joy  
Of swirling mists and sprays of water,  
And the cool freshness of wakefulness  
O how with joy it dances in my heart  
So alike the pure joys of a Noble One  
Lost in ecstasy.



People have told me about how nice this place is, and having been here, I agree. It's the place

for you if you want to be with Nature and have all the space and water you want. They have even labelled the trees.

We came at the right time when the guests were few and so, there were much quietness and solitude.

I have had one ecstatic moment here – that was when I was standing right in front of the Langsir waterfalls. The light around the place seemed so brilliant, the air extremely fresh and the waters were blue green. This was supplemented by the fresh green leaves all around the area. Its freshness, quietude and sprays of moisture brought about an extremely fresh kind of wakefulness that I seemed to be aware of all around me with great clarity and joy.

## WINDS AND WAVES OF JARA

Here we dwell like Rajahs  
Too luxurious even for an indulgent monk  
For the Sage, 'twill be fitting –  
That solitude by the sea,  
Those winds that roam free.

Come walk with me O winds, by the sea  
At the tail end of the monsoons, still fluttering  
Along Jara's golden stretch  
Come walk along but don't tell  
Me where the restless heart squandered.

Come hum with me O winds, we'll chant  
As we walk along Jara's superb sands  
Washed clean by waves that had travelled far  
Whisper to me a mariner's dreams.

Come dance with the palms O winds, o'er our heads  
'Tis time for us to celebrate  
A victory  
Of mind over man  
And Man over his heart  
A beginning of some lasting peace.

O winds, see how the waves roar and rise  
Loftier than a sturdy man's height  
Crash and break in stages fast  
Swirl, recede, then bury my feet.  
For a moment I'm lost  
Swallowed by the waves  
Mind scattered with the mist.  
See what the encompassing sea has brought back  
It brought back my heart all washed and cleaned!

16 JANUARY 1995  
*Jara Beach, Dungun, Terengganu.*



This is actually Terengganu's send-off, just as good as the others. Unlike the beach at Kuala Terengganu which was littered with rubbish, this one was spotlessly clean. There was also a blissful moment here when I stood with my feet under the water and buried them in the sand. The waves at this time of the year were still fierce and they rose high up, towering over me and then broke as if in stages. As they break in

front of me, one loses oneself in the environment. By the time the waves receded, the whole mind seemed absorbed in the environment. I must have stood there watching the waves for many minutes. If the waves had been stronger I might have been swept away.

## LEMON DREAMS

I dream of lemons,  
Bright yellow fruits,  
Pregnant and hanging  
Full in generous clusters  
On tall, luxuriant bushes

I dream of picking  
Basketfuls of them,  
Preparing bowls  
Of sour but refreshing  
Lemonades for thirsty yogis  
On a hot blazing hour.

Then one day I came across  
A lemon of enormous proportions,  
Freshly picked and ripened,  
Just waiting to be adopted.  
So without hesitations I bought it,  
Squeezed its juice,  
Collected the seeds,  
Waited and watched out for the germination  
Of my lemon dreams.

But woe! the gecko found them too delicious,  
Swallowed up every seed while I was away,

Devoured my lemon dreams entirely,  
Left me with only tattered seed coverings.

But the seeds in the mind are still alive,  
Waiting, bidding its time  
For favourable conditions to come by  
Waiting for opportunity to sprout again.

But why sour lemons, why do you haunt me?  
Why not fragrant rose-apples,  
Why not sweet mangosteens?  
Why not fat pomeloes  
Or juicy tangerines?  
Why sour lemons, why do you haunt me?

3 FEBRUARY 1995

*Santisukharama, Kota Tinggi, Johor*



It all began when I was waiting in the car for a friend who stepped out just to buy some fruits. Lemons, I thought, are a rarity these days. Those round, bright yellow fruits somehow seemed very pleasing. But then you can't get any here. I finally came across it when I was in the Cameron Highlands. Despite the size, it had only a few seeds, which I planted in two special containers. I was only away for a day when some creature, an oversized gecko I suspect, devoured them. The conditions were not yet quite right. We do need a fair amount of conditions to make a dream come true. Think awhile what your dreams are. I thought that was the end of my lemon dreams until I noticed the seeds were still alive in my mind waiting to come up again. Such seeds don't die easily!

## ROSE-APPLE DREAMS

He dreamed of rose-apples,  
Trees crowded upon a hill,  
Prolific, matured,  
bearing fruits, sweet,  
Ripe and fragrant,  
Drooping heavily,  
Kissing the fertile earth thankfully.  
And He in the midst of his green heaven,  
Buried knee deep,  
Intoxicated by  
Bountiful harvests reaped.  
Lorry loads of it,  
Abundant and excessive,  
To give and to sell:  
Rose-apples!  
That's what his dreams are made of.

So every seed he now collected,  
He buried it deep  
Into the soil with another bucketful  
Of juicy hopes.  
Every seed, he thought,  
Will sprout twenty seedlings,  
And each in turn will be a tree  
Bearing fruits by the hundreds.  
But it will take sometime,  
And so he heaved and sighed,  
For rose-apples grow rather slowly.  
Even with regular manuring  
With expensive Japanese fertilisers  
And watering when the sky is dry,  
Still, the dream will take years to blossom.

Meanwhile he'll still dream on  
Long dreams that stretch over many suns and moons,  
Dreams to be nurtured by hard-work and patience:  
Dreams of rose-apples!

3 FEBRUARY 1995

*Kota Tinggi, Johor*



While dreams need many conditions to be fulfilled, they also take time. Rose-apple trees too take time to mature, and I think, at least five years. But they produce delightfully fragrant fruits, belonging to the Myrtle family. They are not too sweet and when compared to other tropical fruits, are clean (unlike the messy Durians and Chempedak).

India, also called Jambudipa, is actually named after it – The Land of Rose-Apples. The Bodhisatta was meditating under it while his father was engaged in the ploughing festival. Some past Buddha had also been enlightened under it.

This poem was written when someone said that it can be planted as an agricultural crop in the hermitage, but also added that the saplings have rather slow growth.

## GREAT DREAMS, LONG DREAMS, CRYSTAL DREAMS

I dream of a world  
Where all men are brothers

Forgotten are all grievances  
Abandoned, all grudges.  
Where there's no room for pettiness  
Only the essential matters:  
The caring of your fellow men  
The destruction of fetters.  
I dream of a time  
When all wars are forsaken  
All atomic bombs defused  
No terrorists threaten  
Where the environment is well preserved  
And knowledge well applied  
For the welfare of everyone  
When peace seems to last forever!

But dreams for others  
Will never seem fulfilled  
For the infinite number of creatures,  
Their dreams – be they simple ones  
Or great expectations,  
Will likewise be infinite.

But still I dream  
For the sake of others,  
Great dreams, long dreams,  
While I dare dream such dreams.

I dream of a life  
Pure and restrained  
Calm and composed  
Wise and liberated  
From all defilements

Spokes of suffering cut in twain  
I dream of a life of mindfulness established  
With no "I-am" thorns left  
Stuck deep in the chest  
And no more becoming left  
Right after Death.  
Even now I still dream  
This clear crystal dream  
Dream for me too please,  
And I'll make it realised  
To shine for myself,  
You and others.

3 FEBRUARY 1995  
*Kota Tinggi, Johor*



I wrote this as a conclusion to the above two poems on dreams. Man must have dreams if life is to have meaning and direction. They must also be good dreams. The greater they are, the longer it may take to realise. There must also be people who dare to dream such long dreams if the world is to be a better place. The final dream will be the dream to end all dreams, and that is the dream of absolute freedom from illusions.

Meanwhile:

*We do our little bit  
To make the world a happier place to live:  
Plant a tree,  
Make a friend,*

*Note the moment  
And Attend  
A retreat to be most mindful,  
So that you may dream long dreams,  
For these are instalments, steps that lead  
You to the world's final end.*

## THE DREAM OF WEST LAKE

At Hangzhou

Barren trees with twisted trunks greet us,  
The West Lake too, darkened by the night  
Is not different from any other shore,  
But in the light I beheld

Where lovers' dreams come true.

Even in this season

With her head shorn of her willowy braids,  
Her limbs stripped naked of her peach blossoms pink,  
There's still much magic  
In this three dimensional silk screen lake  
woven by the finest fibres of sensual creations  
– a net if you're unaware,  
a net that keeps you entrapped in mundane sufferings.

3 MARCH 1995

*Hangzhou, China*

A little boat rows by silently  
Across the flat face of a speechless lake,  
No water ripples, only peace flowing,  
The morning mist had spread all over  
A dreamy atmosphere for admiring visitors.

I do not see the slim maiden spinning her flowered  
umbrella  
Sitting on the boat, smiling;  
I do not hear lute strings strummed  
Under the willow tree by her lover entranced;  
Neither do I have time to listen to  
The poet sings his song to welcome spring;  
Come my heart, this world you see here  
Finer than the finest silk screen  
Is but a dream.

The boat moors at the banks;  
Peddlers crowd in to sell beads and other wares;  
The distant pavilion is still sleeping  
Even though dawn had come calling;  
The farther shore of trees is whistling happily to itself  
Indifferent to our intrusion.

But  
I do not see lovers walking hand in hand,  
I do not hear birds chirping or bees buzzing,  
I do not have time to pen my poem then,  
But I will, when I return home  
With West Lake in my chest.

Come dear heart, did you remember what I said?  
That silk screen dream has vanished forever.  
Is it then, any different from the other illusions?  
Spring has come, but not the flowers.

16 MARCH 1995  
*Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia*



The change of plans to stay in Hangzhou was  
an extra bonus. I had not been there before.

Besides, there is the famed West Lake that I've heard so much about. I've seen it in photographs but it does not make enough sense for all that praise.

We were allowed only half an hour to visit the Lake in the morning before we headed for our destination, Huang Shan. I think we spent much less time than that. Being there is different. You find yourself in very fine surroundings. You don't feel the quietness and coolness by looking at pictures. Then there is that three dimensional spatial effect. The quiet movement of the boats and most of all, there seems to be a subtle hint of romance intermingled with a carefree attitude in the air. The lines that make up the picture are very fine and the colours subtle. Even though we came at a time when the trees were still stark naked, it was still beautiful.

The only snag is that this type of beauty is purely sensual. The pleasures I can assume will be connected with craving although it may be of the finer variety. Harmless though it may be, it is the beginning and the final stages of the stronger passions which cause Man his immense suffering.

And I say beginning, because it often starts that way, seemingly harmless and extremely pleasant. It is soft, fine, attractive and finally intoxicating. Once addicted, it becomes that passionate obsession. Have you fallen in love before? Don't you think that what I say is true?

I also say final stages because before the passion ends through your practice of detachment, it subsides into a fine state. It then becomes undetectable and you feel good. Complacency hides it altogether and it will not be long before it grows again. That is why I say it is a fine and beautifully woven net, like a silk screen.

This is a good lesson for those who intend to reach beyond the realm of the senses, towards the fine material sphere (Rupavacara) of the Jhanas, and what more the unconditioned Nibbana. We cannot afford to underestimate the power of the finer aspects of these sensual pleasures, although we have to deal with the grosser forms with appreciable success first. One point to bear in mind is to really know and appreciate the joys, happiness and harmlessness of the peaceful pure mind.

## THE POET OF HUANG SHAN

### **1. We Come To Yellow Mountain**

We come to yellow mountain,  
We come not like spring  
Which comes bringing flowers to fullness

We come to yellow mountain,  
We come not like the rain  
Which comes bringing showers of green life  
While we're still here.

We come to yellow mountain,  
We come not like an emperor to rule  
Or like the pauper to beg,  
We come as something far more obnoxious,  
We come as tourists with searching eye balls,  
With fidgety fingers ever ready to snap photographs.  
We come rambling along your roads lined with crooked  
trees,  
By fields of yellow mustard blooming free,  
And little hamlets with white-washed walls cosily  
stacked between terraced hill-slopes crowded with  
bamboos and tea.

There's much similarity here with the scenes of Nepal,  
And it might as well be anywhere else,  
I'm not deceived.

For I know that in every house is filled  
With aeons of sorrow, oceans of grief,  
In payment for that one day of joy  
Brought in by the wild cries of spring.

4 MARCH 1995  
*Huang Shan, Anhui, China.*



The journey from Hangzhou to the base of Huang Shan or Yellow Mountain took us many hours. By the time we reached there the sun was already setting. All the way it reminded me of the scenes I saw in Nepal – the steep hills, the running rivers, hamlets stacked away in the valleys, terraced fields, narrow bridges and so on. But we are in China and the customs

and language differ. There is an obvious absence of temples although a few old pagodas stand out here or there.

Huang Shan is also a city and district, but as for the mountain, it is made up of many peaks. They hover about 6,000 feet above sea level and from what I had heard before, the scenery is fantastic. The above poem came up after we left the Huang Shan city and started climbing up the meandering road and until this time, I am still not yet impressed.

## **2. The Steps up Huang Shan**

Granite slabs  
Evenly piled up  
Through the centuries  
Leading beyond the sea of clouds  
Up to the peaks  
In honour of the Poet of Huang Shan.

They ascend steeply  
Ringing its slope like a jewelled necklace.  
I see old men bent low,  
Shoulders weighed down by the loads they carry.  
How I admire their strength and spirit.  
Is that the spirit of the Mountain?

Now man has strung cables across your sacred shoulders  
An eyesore! But how I love it,  
Shame on me! who is still young but unfit,  
But I tell you unabashed,

O how I love it,  
For it gives me the chance to get to know and meet  
The Poet Of Huang Shan.  
In the early spring  
The steps are still coated with ice,  
Extremely slippery, melting in the sun,  
People came peddling grass slippers  
To ease the trek.  
I tried them on, it didn't work  
They slipped off my feet.  
Many slipped and sat hard on their bottoms,  
The old surrendered their lives  
To unfamiliar sedan-chair carriers.  
But, ahh, do you see as I do  
The snow so white and pure  
All around us,  
Between the blackened trees with feathery twigs  
All over the peaks  
And on the steps  
Sparkling!

5 MARCH 1995  
*Huang Shan, China*



Our local guide here is a lady with a fair complexion, who in her forties, looks as if she's in her late twenties. But I tell you, by the way she rattles away with facts about the mountain, you know she's trying to do her job. The only thing (again?) is that she'll make a model Red Guard candidate. All you have to do is to substitute what she's saying with the words of Mao Zedong! Another thing I noticed is that they

also try to entertain the guests by singing. It's impressive that they try to do it, so long as it's not too jarring.

The temperatures here were the lowest that I have ever experienced. It snowed up here a few days ago. When we reached the place, the temperature was -4 to 2 degrees Celsius. From the base of our hotel, it took us 20 minutes to reach the cable car station and another 8 minutes to the peaks.

Looking below at the deep valleys, I could see the steps curling uphill steeply like a necklace. The climbers were like specks of tiny flowers gradually moving upwards. The whole scene was quite breathtaking, like a Chinese painting come alive; like entering into the heaven of the Taoist immortals.

It's indeed strange, because with the practice, the mind is no longer intoxicated with these scenes although the curiosity is still there. I must remember the proverb – Curiosity kills the Cat.

This is also the first time I walked on ice, melting ice. We saw people selling grass slippers. It seems it helps in the walking. It didn't help me very much, in fact, the Reeboks do better without them. Quite a few people came round to support me, including some locals for a fee. I think they make things worse. Mr. Kuan was very insistent on supporting me. From the

looks of it, he was trying to look for some support himself. When I turned him away, he went to Jee Kong. Finally, it proved true when he was alone – he slipped and sat hard on his fat bottoms! Quite a few people met with the same fate, including the local guide. However, one thing is certain, I never did see so much snow before, all around us sparkling. It's also strange how quickly one takes it for granted.

The guide tells us that there are four things unique to Huang Shan – the curious pines, the grotesque rocks, the sea of clouds and the hot springs. I have tried to personify them into the Huang Shan hermit. There must have been many hermits living here in the past and there is a remnant of a temple now converted into something else. Of the three places of poets, this is the more spiritual one because of its clean natural surroundings.

Now, Huang Shan is a park and it's worth visiting. Two nights and two days are insufficient. It's too vast a place to get a real feel of it in such a short time.

### **3. The Poet of Huang Shan**

The Hermit of Huang Shan  
If there be one  
Will have to be crooked and bent  
As the aged pines,  
His head shaven, aloof

As the jagged peaks and grotesque rocks,  
His beard, soft, white and flowing  
As the rolling sea of clouds,  
But his heart, warm and comforting  
As the hot springs bubbling at his feet.  
Until this evening  
I neither saw nor dreamed  
Of such a hermit  
Or a fairy maiden either  
But the beauty of the landscape  
They must have treasured,  
I now relish,  
And the silence of solitude  
Which they must loved so deeply  
I too caught a glimpse  
Between the twisted pines piercing through the rocks  
Among the slender pines flying with the clouds  
Mingled among masses of pines assembled to soften the peaks  
Mixed with the pure white snow sprinkled all over them  
Sparkling!

Huang Shan is a Paradise on Earth  
Anyone who comes here is at once THE POET,  
But some poets are dumb,  
They'll sing no songs;  
Others are crippled,  
They'll pen no poems;  
But their hearts,  
Allow me at least to tell you this much –

Is as clear and as fresh as the air that we breathe  
Is as peaceful and as quiet as the silence of the peaks  
And ahh, it's so pure and white, the joy of it

Like the snow all around us,  
Sparkling!

5 MARCH 1995

*Huang Shan, Anhui, China*



What is it that makes a poet?

This is one thing I'm trying to find out. Certainly, not the command of a language. Many exponents of a language are not poets. By the time I came here, I had come to the conclusion that heightened sensitivity together with the outpouring of emotions aroused is one factor, and then there is the desire to express one's feelings. Of these two factors, the former is the heart of the poet. Maybe that's why love poems are often the more well-written ones. The command of the language is the tool for expression. Still without this, there won't be any written down.

In the Dhamma, the depth of the teaching and its universal application make the verses distinctive.

This is truly so when one considers that the concentration and penetration of a cultivated mind is indeed a sharp and sensitive instrument. The feelings that come with it are also not lacking. The paeans of joy (Udāna) and verses of the Elders (Thera/Theri Gatha) are examples of these. They are, in this sense, the best and purest poets at heart.

Before I visited China, I had an idea of what my poem of Huang Shan would be like. It was something like this –

*Odd shapes and colours do not make a heaven  
But that is what makes Huang Shan –  
Its peaks, its pines, its flowers and clouds  
Let us not forget that one more ecstatic  
MIND.*

How things can be other than our expectations! The flowers have not yet bloomed and the sea of clouds comes only after a thunderstorm, which is unique to summer. However, the present season offers us very clear views and more solitude due to a low number of visitors.

## A POET'S SEND OFF

The sun sets gold over the Yangzi  
Our boat will leave this evening  
The river is China  
With its long and turbulent history,  
I leave you my friend,  
After a brief acquaintance.

The wharf has witnessed many partings,  
The river is deep,  
Do you, my friend, understand feelings?

And the creatures that swim and lurk  
Beneath its waters,  
Do you, my friend, wish to trace our origins?

Study then the mind,  
That is the ocean  
Where all rivers meet  
Mixing the ripples of thoughts  
With the tides of time.  
Observe deeply its subtle workings,  
It is the same in everyone.  
Peace comes with such understanding.

As I watch the city lights of Sha Shi retreat,  
As the foam thrusts us forward towards the gorges,  
I think of all those I have met and left  
And I have come to accept one fact,  
That truly,  
A short acquaintance with a sweet parting  
Is far better than  
A long episode with a bitter conclusion.  
Man will come and man will go  
But what will he carry with him  
In his heart when he departs?

The sun has set  
The night covers the Yangzi with inky darkness  
I see not your homeland now,  
Only the chilly winds blow.  
But I know you are there  
And I will remember you  
Even if we do not ever meet again.  
I have the memory of an elephant  
That stretches farther than you can imagine.

Meanwhile farewell my friend,  
Tomorrow I will arrive at the gorges,  
The gateways to your inner worlds  
Protected by indomitable ranges.

7 MARCH 1995

*On the Yangzi, off Sha Shi, Hubei, China.*



This original poem was written for a certain Mr. Ruan, a local guide at Wuhan. When he took us to the Yellow Crane Tower, he recited and tried to translate some poems conceived there by some ancient Chinese Masters. Li Bai, according to him, wrote eight poems on a single visit. Because he had an interest in this field, I promised to write him one. Before I went on board at Sha Shi, (we were originally to board at Wuhan but the water level was too low) he asked it of me again. I roughly wrote this there and polished it up when I returned.

## THE SONG OF THE GORGES

Between steep cliffs  
Passed by chilly winds  
I journey along your cruel waters  
Not knowing how it ends  
Never to know its head.  
Here the Great Earth divides  
Here the misty river meets the sky  
Here I cruise through your Evil Gates  
Here too I'll hear your battle cry.

The gorges are countless variations  
Poetic expressions  
An interplay of 3 distinct elements  
In the history of Man's struggle.

The fickle, temperamental sky, indifferent to feelings,  
The harsh, hard land, bleak and never giving in,  
The ferocious river, cruel, dangerous and untameable,  
Crashing head on  
Onto the man of steel  
Heart numb to pain  
Innards fired with determination  
To survive or win.

His mark often devastating  
At times awe inspiring  
Is pathetic and meagre here  
Merely a few little houses  
Clinging precariously to the steep slopes  
Linked by pathways like single line scratches  
With narrow bridges spanning chasms.

I see them stubbornly hammering the boulders  
I see them braving the waters on tiny vessels  
I see them inching narrow paths  
Carrying heavy loads  
This land is cruel and hard  
Every plot that can be tilled has been planted  
Still it's desolate for miles,  
Bare rocky landscape  
With the indomitable river cutting through it.  
In this misty weather  
The gorges are mere perpendicular lines drawn over  
blue tones

With the indomitable river crashing into it.  
How can such a place be also a land of beauty?

The gorges are charged with emotions  
There are echoes of the dead and drowned calling  
incessantly,  
The groans of their sufferings threaten to swallow the ship,  
The cries of your murderers bite into our livers,  
Many have died in vain in your waters,  
Many others surrendered their fate to obscurity.

And yet you cry:

March on, Strive on,  
Fight to the very end,  
Never will there be such a victory!  
Better to die than to live in disgrace of defeat,  
Follow me, break open the gates of hell!  
You have a right to be free, the will to be happy,  
Sail on, Push on,  
Never will there be a more glorious victory!

The Song of the gorges is a battle cry  
Thrown into eternity from idealism, ambition and  
adventure,  
Thundering as the river with drums to the sky  
Or screaming in cold, bleak desperation of winter ice.  
Are you trying to tell me there's beauty in adventure  
Even if it be a battle that'll cost a thousand lives?  
Even if it be a war that'll shed floods of tears  
As the waters that inundate the lands  
And fill this raging long river?  
I know only of a struggle that's worth all those troubles,  
The struggle within to extricate all thorns of the heart  
Let it be then that I'll think of you in that respect

Though your culture here, as I understand it  
Is as bare of such struggle as the meagre dwellings man  
has made  
Along your precipitous cliffs.

9 MARCH 1995

*On the Yangzi off Feng Du, Sichuan, China*



In the days before the advent of aeroplanes or even motor vehicles, the river route to the inaccessible interior was often resorted to, although dangerous. Then, I can imagine, the gorges were a pass of great emotions. It is here that we see the gateways that link different worlds. The journey obviously took time and risks, and so it was not always attempted. When one passes through, one leaves a whole world behind and meets an uncertain new world. The awesome scenario, sandwiched on both sides by towering, cold and hard cliffs, accentuated the feelings further. Here, history tells us, is also the scene of many battles. Relics from the "Three Kingdoms Period" remind us of this. Even in this century where China is ravaged by wars, the Yangzi gorges had played a significant role. And yet in the silence, when one looks at all there is around one, it's all quite majestic. Looking from my cabin, each scene that passes by is a work of art framed by the glass window.

One thing, however, is inescapable – the land is harsh and bleak. At present, the weather condition is still pretty cold.

We made stops at certain places each day. One amusing event happened at Feng Du. The city lies outside the three gorges nearer to Congqing. Ancient stories passed down tell us that ghostly haunts are common here. I have also read somewhere that it was a centre for necromancy (but is it still such a centre, after the cultural revolution?). When we arrived, we met with many cripples (not met elsewhere) lining the walk from the wharf. Our guide greeted us with,

“Welcome to Ghost City.”

When asked about the ghosts in the area, she replied in the affirmative, and added that at night, you see a lot of people who are actually ghosts.

“In front of people’s houses there is a pot of water for people to put money in. If it is ghost’s money, it will float. Otherwise it will sink.”

I wonder at that point if she’s trying to entertain us or insulting our intelligence. Well, she’s certainly not laughing.

Then we were brought by bus to what I call a large scale, third-class Disneyland Haunted House. I take my hat off to them because they have really spent some money and effort to make it good, but it’s just... sloppy. Incidentally, it’s not a display of statues of ghosts. Rather, it portrays various scenes of the differ-

ent levels of hell. Maybe they should rename it Hell City instead.

Just before we left the place I came across a group of elderly men spending their time leisurely near our bus. One of them told us that we had come to the wrong place. The REAL Ghost City is up on the other hill.

“See those cable car lines? It takes you there. They have taken you to the wrong place, a newly built facade!”

After shaking his head and looking at our astonished faces, he continued,

“You take the steps up here, that’s the way to the Real Ghost City of the Tang Dynasty. People who died all ended up there.”

That made me even more astonished. And as if to rub it in deeper, he asked,

“Do you believe in it? Do you believe in it?”

Just then a plump woman started pulling my robes from behind. She started asking,

“What religion do you believe in? Are you a monk?”

Then, to prove the point, I took off my woollen cap to show my shaven head, triumphantly saying:

“See, I’m a monk.”

The old man was not at all convinced, and so he said almost immediately:

“Real monks burn holes in their heads.”

At this point, Mr. Kuan who had been listening with interest, could take it no longer. He just shouted back with his usual “high volume.”

“Burnt holes in the head don’t make a monk. It’s the heart that counts!”

Once back in the bus, our friends started complaining to the guide, claiming that they had been taken for a ride.

“You should have taken us to the Real Ghost City!”

The reply was that we had all been complaining of being exhausted after the difficult climb up the White King’s City yesterday, and so it was decided for us that we would be spared any more ordeals. The cable car by the way, leads only up to a third of the climb. As I suspected, it is a temple with castings of scenes of Hell. Well, if it’s REALLY a Ghost City, I don’t think anyone of us would want to step in there.

This clearly shows one thing – that the Chinese will capitalise on anything, including ghosts and hell. If you don’t believe me, then I ask you: “why are they selling Hell Bank Notes at the shops?”

Just before we left, I asked our (ghost) guide again,

“Are there really ghosts in this place?”

She gave us one really disgusted look and replied: “No!”

## CONGQING

This is one drab and dirty city  
The trees are black  
The streets – the dustiest.  
Dark tunnels lead you round and round  
To nowhere else  
Except around and within  
The Dustbin of Yangzi.  
You say you love this land of yours  
But I say otherwise with no disrespect,  
That if I were ever given the choice  
I'll never step back in here again.

This is one overcrowded city  
Its population far exceeding  
All we have in all of ours.  
You say your ladies are the fairest in the land  
I see only a sea of ugly faces.  
Only the laughs of children glow warmth and cherry  
Before any flowers burst forth in season.

You tell us you are so proud  
Of your People's auditorium  
A replica made of Beijing's temple of heaven.

But I think a city of your size deserves something better  
Than an outdated structure  
Resembling a cinema hall of the fifties  
With hard seats and walls with its paint peeling and  
faded.

Then you took us to where fossils are kept  
Of dinosaurs unearthed, now displayed  
In a museum I dare say is the coldest place on earth  
Most of us who ventured in, came out sick.  
But I admit the pandas were just great  
And the racoons the cutest things I've seen.  
But sad to say, they were the only specimens we saw  
Quite caged up when they should be free,  
Outnumbered by crude man-made animal figurines.

O Congqing! There's no poetry here,  
Tomorrow I'll leave you with no love lost.  
Send me off safe and sound back home  
To Guangzhou first, on your disreputable airline,  
That's the only request of you I plead.

10 MARCH 1995  
*Congqing, Sichuan, China*



The poem, I am ashamed to say, is quite unfair. There must be many nice things here. But the first impression of the pollution is strong and hard to forget. The guide did give us a very well-planned tour of the city. She speaks fairly good English and conducted things efficiently. The city seems to have everything from a zoo, to museums to an airport. Here we were again brought to a hospital.

As anticipated, we were led to be convinced of the medicines' miraculous cure for suffering.

Unlike the fiasco at Guangzhou, the spokeswoman, a lady doctor-professor displayed superior skill in salesmanship.

She spoke in a clear voice with eyes wide open, and soon, confidence saturated the whole atmosphere:

“This is Doctor... (so sorry, I forgot his name) he is an exponent in Qi Gong.”

Taking hold of two wires and a test pen in her hand, she proved it to us, “Look, these are two live wires with 200 volts each. The doctor will demonstrate his powers.”

No sooner had she completed the introduction than the good doctor who went into a horse-riding stance, started grunting and puffing like a first-class Gong Fu master. Well, I thought, this is a treat – the first time I've seen a doctor in his uniform performing his martial arts skill at a hospital!

When he held on to the live wires, one in each hand, she tested him with a test pen to prove that his body was electrified. (I should have tested the type of shoes he was wearing).

“So, if there is anyone who wants a massage that will cure him of manifold ills, the doctor will see to that. The price is 100 Renminbi.”

I like her, she goes straight to the point.

I'm sure she could see that we were impressed, but she didn't stop there. Next, she turned to a quiet young lady, also in a doctor's uniform and said,

"This is also another Qi Gong expert. Do not underestimate her powers. She specialises in face massage that will definitely make you look younger. Now, we will demonstrate. Will a volunteer step out?"

After much persuasion, Bee Hua's mother became the guinea pig.

And do you know what happened next? After the massage, everyone started praising her for her new found youth. With all that teasing, her face was beaming with smiles. It's hard to tell if it was the Qi Gong or not, but definitely, she and everyone else were happy about it.

Another thing, however, is also definite – she didn't look any younger.

Again, the professor stresses her point,

"If there is anyone who wishes to have her service..."

Before you know it, many of us had been swept off our feet by her salesmanship. Mr. Kuan, who although refusing any involvement earlier, was the first to step out. Then there was Lee

Lee Kim and Jee Kong, the latter being only too pleased because he was sick on the boat.

As she turned to more and more Qi Gong medical experts, of which the hospital here seemed to have an inexhaustible supply, fear must have shown in our faces, because it looked like she wouldn't rest until all of us were subjected to the mercy of her people.

The guide must have felt it and quickly interrupted,

“You don't have to if you don't want to.”

That professor became quite surprised and annoyed by the treachery of her Congqing comrade, and so started protesting in an incoherent manner. After that, I used my usual trick of looking for the toilet.

This is the common Chinese attribute again – overdoing things. Our super saleswoman was overselling her goods. One must know one's limits or else the whole scene starts to stink. Moderation is still the best policy.

And is it worth that 100 Renminbi?

Mr. Kuan does not think so. The moment he got on the bus, he started protesting.

“I tell you this, it is all nonsense. They just massage and rub you all over like a stupid fool.

I feel the same after that. And you," he said, looking angrily at our own guide from Malaysia, "why do you bring us to such places?"

Mr. Goh shot back, "Somebody requested!"

Lee Lee Kim and Jee Kong seemed quite pleased about it when they returned. Especially Jee Kong who said he felt better. But one unexpected thing happened. They could not sleep the following night no matter how tired they were. The massage must have done something to their nervous systems. It was therefore a relief to arrive at the best place around – the Holiday Inn Hotel. But then, that's not Congqing. That's some place imported from far away.

## DEATH ON WHEELS

Motorcyclists,  
Death on wheels racing on highways,  
Swerving between cars,  
Frightening drivers and pedestrians.  
They have left their patience waiting at home.  
They have forgotten that their loved ones still value their lives  
They have forgotten the value themselves.

Motorcyclists,  
Daredevils on wheels,  
Reckless youths speeding on the roads,

They have never noticed their parents  
Or considered the feelings of their brothers and sisters  
Or their wives and children.  
You will never be able to discern clearly their faces  
At most you can only know how their brains look like  
Having splattered out from a fractured skull  
Frothing in a mess with sticky blood.  
Death is faceless until he draws near  
And he will one day wear one with your nose and ears.  
These motorcyclists are indeed Death's messengers.  
When you see them, you have no choice but to be mindful!

14 MARCH 1995

*Kuala Lumpur*



Traffic jams in Kuala Lumpur are getting much worse than before. Stress levels ought to have risen proportionately. The rise in the number of yogis cannot be expected to follow suit as time becomes scarcer. There is, however, something that is keeping up with the times – The Divine Messengers, namely Birth, Sickness, Old Age and Death.

We may think of Death coming dressed as the Grim Reaper, or in the case of the Chinese, as the pair of Mr. Black and Mr. White, with the oft-quoted “Once you've seen me, your fortune has arrived.”

Death reminders, if you are observant enough, are always around. In the midst of a traffic crawl, I noticed that they also come dressed as



Along the P.J. & K.L. ROAD



I GOT THE MESSAGE!

daredevil motorcyclists swerving precariously between the cars. Death seems so alien to them and yet, it is actually in themselves. Maybe you can find some more examples of modern Divine Messengers.

## ELECTIONS

Even the trees have been dragged  
Into the fray of political affiliations  
Forced to voice the views of others  
With words pasted onto their silent trunks  
For candidates they know nothing of  
Whether or not they will help their brothers in Nature  
To survive and flourish  
Or send them into extinction  
To be together with the lot of dinosaurs.

In going to vote as a monk, I feel guilty;  
Although as a citizen, it is solemn responsibility.  
Sheepishly I put a finger into the affairs of man today,  
Then ran back wondering how another in robes  
Could run for a seat in the parliament.  
After that I'm exhausted as well as disgusted,  
Retreated into a far away oil palm estate,  
In a quiet free state I looked back at how the world  
And the rest of day pass by peacefully!

Elections decide the fate of a country,  
Choices for directions are summed up in a day.  
Other decisions each of us make for ourselves and others,  
Determine destinations that we reach even after death.

Do we decide wisely considering all the consequences?  
And when choices conflict, do we then make more  
enemies?

Life is in perpetual election  
Of mental forces found within us,  
I vote for the Party for Nature,  
The Party for Peace and Compassion,  
I choose that all men should recognise each other  
As brothers.  
I vote for the eradication of all corruption.

25 APRIL 1995

*Kota Tinggi, Johor*



I had not voted for many years. At times, this was because I was abroad in Myanmar or Thailand, while at other times, I was busy in another state. There was once, I recall, I was teaching in East Malaysia when the elections were taking place. Then, when I was looking for a toilet halfway during a journey, I came across an election booth. Quickly, they came towards me to call me to the polling booth. I don't think they were disappointed when they found out that I had different intentions. I, on the other hand, was amused. Don't they think that a monk would not be included in the electoral roll in a remoter part of Sabah?

This time around, I made it a point to vote. I felt a bit odd because a monk should be removed from such worldly affairs. But I also felt it is a responsibility I had neglected as a citizen.

## IT'S JUST LIKE THE GOOD OLD DAYS

It's just like the good old days  
When I came to your home  
To be with your kin,  
Big brother, kind mother  
And all the rest are here  
But where are you,  
Have you gone somewhere?

It's just like the good old days,  
Yes, with the old Sedili River  
Still flowing,  
And Jason Bay,  
With her casuarinas  
Still singing windy songs.  
But where are you,  
Are you still sleeping  
In your room, back there?

Your brothers still talk of you  
As if you're still alive,  
Visiting them on and off,  
In their dreams.  
Why, O why,  
Do memories cling on so tightly  
In the hearts of  
Your loved ones?

Now your father's dead  
Is he now with you  
In a happy world,  
Roaming free?

Coming to this solemn occasion  
Of his departure from his life  
Is like coming to your home  
To be with you  
Just like the good old times!  
When it's time to leave them,  
Leaving here,  
Is like leaving you  
Back to the past.  
But where is it,  
There's no place to put my feet,  
Yet it's ever so clear  
It's all in my mind.  
There I can see you waving gently  
With a heavy heart,  
Wearing your big brotherly smile  
On your cheeky face.  
Why, O why  
Do memories hold on so tightly  
In the heart just when I thought  
I had forgotten you?

Since you died  
I have made many new friends,  
Gone on trips  
All over the world,  
Still it's not the same  
With all these new people,  
New places,  
As when you were around.

I guess there's little change  
With all your people,  
Except that their children

Have grown up.  
As for me,  
I've become more like the wind,  
Blowing in from the sea  
In a carefree mood.  
But in my memories  
You are still the same  
Why, O why,  
Do memories remain?

4 MAY 1995  
*Kota Tinggi, Johor.*



Memories are strange things. They spring up from the mind, many things long gone. Such was the case when I was called out to conduct a night service for the father of a deceased friend who died some years ago. Since my friend's death, I have rarely met his relatives, whom I used to meet when I went to his house in Sedili while he was alive. When I met them again, his brothers were still as friendly and they spoke of their deceased brother as if he was really around. They dreamt of him visiting their then-ailing father. All the environment and feelings made his presence so strongly felt that even I thought he was around in spirit.

But memories are just memories; mere impressions from the past imprinted in the mental processes, and empty like all conditioned phenomena. And yet, they seemed to hang on stubbornly; my friend, just like that image of you waving me good-bye when I left your home

with you still stricken by cancer. Do I remember it because of fond attachment? I don't think so. There are other factors involved. The depth of the impression depended on the strength of the impact (of contact); the feelings that arise also depended on it and the train of thoughts that followed. I had known this friend for a period of 10 years, and we did many fine things together. I suppose that left quite a bit of leftover impressions in the memory. So when they emerged, I had to NOTE MINDFULLY.

## THE STATION OF LIFE

The station of life is here  
Where man leaves this world  
Discarding his broken cart  
Here too where he enters  
Out of his mother's womb  
In another shape.  
I too first met the world here  
And after that I came again  
Many times  
To stations of life such as this  
Where meeting is pleasure,  
Parting usually pain.

I came again today  
To see someone who will never see me  
Someone who didn't see a lorry speeding towards her  
Neither did the lorry man see that little girl.  
Her brain has been dead two weeks since

Her breath now hung onto  
A life support system  
Soon to be switched off.

I came to send her off  
To another station of life  
But I don't know where.

That little girl may very well be my youngest sister  
Her father's face is also very familiar.  
I did not feel a knife sink deep into my heart  
I only heard an innocent voice pleading  
Papa, please do not let me die like this.

Her parents whose hearts has been singeing  
With the fire of pain, stood beside,  
Their eyes overflowing with tears,  
Swollen red.

Who had to be told to bid farewell,  
Who has to learn to accept Death.

Let go, that mental bondage brings pain,  
To the seen and unseen, all the same,  
Tell her not to cling onto rotting flesh,  
Tell her to let go of that life –  
Which is but a dream.

What words I say may it bring her relief,  
After all, life must go on, all the same.

Here is not a battle-ravaged kingdom  
With bombs strewn all over by careless hands,  
Here too is not where disease runs rampant  
In a famine-stricken land.

Here is a country where food is plenty  
Fed him till he sat up fat and lazy,

Here too is a place where pleasures have ruined full many,  
Softened their steel fists, weakened their iron wills.

Here's a place where faces of grief are hidden,  
So unlike elsewhere, frequent encounters.  
Yet here in its stations of life are abundantly displayed  
Come here to witness for yourself –  
The destiny of man –  
In his first cry,  
In her final gasp,  
In the laughter of life,  
In the silence of Death.

4 JUNE 1995  
*Kuching, Sarawak*



Here – I am speaking about a hospital. Some say it's a house of suffering (*Rumah Sakit* – in Malay) but others prefer to call it a place of healing. In a way, it is also like a station where people come into (i.e. born) and leave (i.e. die) this world.

By the time I wrote this down the little girl is probably dead. Such a brief span of life, of less than a decade and she is gone. Why did she come in the first place? For many people who do not know the Dhamma, it is difficult to accept. Even those who know but attachment runs deep, it is just as bad. Coming to the hospital to see all these can be very educational and motivating. For those who work here they can, on the other hand, become quite indiffer-

ent. As one nurse said, "It's one of those things..." True, when you see too much of these, you can't afford to become emotional. You'll only end up depressed, and not too helpful to the patients. But still I hear, nurses do break down crying at times.

## LAST LAP

Blood like drops on silty water  
Are fallen petals from tree beside pond,  
These blossoms would adorn well  
An awakening from paradisical dream  
Paid for a hefty sum,  
But instead descended, dropped down  
Coinciding with a last lap  
Of striving, A spiritual ending  
Should be quiet, but not quite,  
It should be dignified,  
And with detachment, will be rightly so.  
The water lilies shall sing to that,  
Lotus leaves in rapture clap,  
The cold winds blow in shivering cheers,  
And the mountain grinned and threw a few burps  
At the back.

18 SEPTEMBER 1995  
*Zen Garden, Kundasang, Sabah.*

## AFTER A STORMY NIGHT

Last night the thunderstorm split apart the sky,  
Cracked open its pot belly,

And rained threateningly into the valley;  
Before dawn, the mind too exploded,  
Crashed into a thousand pieces  
And the heart cried tears  
That flooded the entire samsara.  
Come sunrise, the tree took away the fire into its  
blossoms\*,  
And shone with the redness of my love for Nature;  
All the lotus pads, even the littlest one,  
Caught those pure crystalline tears,  
Transformed, cupped them as silvery pearls  
Reflecting sparkles of diamonds  
In the warmth of the morning.  
Then in flew a blue kingfisher,  
Perched on a near horizontal pine branch,  
Looked at me through the window  
With an intensely suspicious eye,  
Gaped open its beak,  
Flung its perplexed pea-sized brain into the sky,  
Then hurried to retrieve it back again.  
Has not the irony of the world been around since time  
immemorial?  
That beauty after terror,  
That fretting over nothing?

20 SEPTEMBER 1995  
*Zen Garden, Kundasang, Sabah*



The first few days here were a happy period of  
smooth practice in a pleasant environment.

---

\* The tree is *Erythrina Sumbrabuns*.

## SOLITUDE

Solitude is

When you do not need anyone around  
And even if you are sick,  
You are still happy.

Solitude is

To be wrapped in silence  
By a mind unattached,  
Sinking deep into a foundation of stability.

Solitude is

A clear understanding that  
All of us, everything  
Are just mental creations, conditioned.

Solitude is

To have abandoned the “I am” conceit,  
And is free.

22 SEPTEMBER 1995  
*Zen Garden, Kundasang, Sabah.*



One night, I did not feel too well because of purging and a slight fever. Although I felt cold and weak even after being wrapped up in blankets, I still felt happy. Then a thought arose regarding its possible reason, and I realised it must be solitude. These incidents are not new and they appear frequently in the suttas.

## GOOD-BYE KINABALU

Good-bye Kinabalu,  
For now and maybe forever,  
The sky beams with smiles  
From one horizon to another,  
The sea too roars with laughter  
Louder than all your storms,  
For my mission is done,  
And the old land beckons.

Good-bye Kinabalu,  
The Iron wings are waiting,  
Though the heart has already flown  
Back that other evening,  
You have been very kind,  
I will write sweet memoirs,  
Like beads of a rosary,  
The last count – a hundred and eight,  
My mission is done,  
My cup (of joy) overflows.

12 OCTOBER 1995  
*Kundasang, Sabah.*



This is a happy poem of a moment when one  
feels one has fulfilled one's mission.

## THE TEMPLE OF FORGOTTEN FLOWERS

The laterite path that winds around  
The shrine of wondrous sounds



Leads me to her many past springs and autumns,  
Bushes of gardenias, ixoras  
And other forgotten blossoms sigh,  
Aren't they like old women?  
They still throb with energies  
Of spinsters long gone,  
Left-over vegetables of another generation,  
rotted and rotten,  
The few relics that remain  
shuffle and drag their decaying frames about,  
No longer resemble  
Human beings.  
And when they sit motionless,  
Resigned to the hopelessness  
Of another never tomorrow  
Become old-fashioned furniture that tells you  
Without a single utterance,  
All their feelings;  
And O, their eyes are but vacant stares  
Of one whose heart had left  
To be reunited with their deceased inmates.  
What's their point of living?

All their hopes resound again  
With all its ardour,  
In the mornings and evenings  
When the drum beats thunder  
And the gong vibrates in prayer,  
And I wonder,  
Of the joys it had given them,  
Of whatever teachings they had received  
To relieve them of their sufferings  
Of carrying decaying burdens.

Forgotten flowers  
Have long gone beyond,  
Once overcrowded  
Within these quarters.  
Only few remain  
Of what had been 10 times more,  
Now wait to join those gone before.  
It is an evening of an era,  
Soon only their ancestral tablets shall stand  
For what they are,  
What they believe,  
All their joys and sorrows.  
What a pity!  
There was no one to record the countless ways  
They must have tried to kill whatever time  
That was left of them.

19 OCTOBER 1995  
*Miao Yin Si, Semabok, Malacca.*

## YOUTH AND OLD AGE

Beautiful youth,  
Horrible old age,  
Two worlds apart,  
Linked by the mysterious thread  
Of perception.  
A boy's short-sightedness  
Cannot foresee,  
In his body,  
An impending dread,  
The old hag  
Sadly discovers it  
Far too late,

One is caught by craving,  
The other trapped in regret,  
Who could have created such a cursed thing  
Other than universal delusion?  
Having seen decrepit old age  
Youth's smooth face should no longer entice,  
That mask, you know, will wrinkle  
No sooner than when that smile begins to fade.  
That buoyant fairy skip soon too will sink  
Down, bent in disgrace.  
Youth's hopes fly with the winds,  
Hitch a ride on his strong shoulders  
While you may,  
There's no place for procrastination  
In this fast vanishing frame,  
Your race is against time.

23 OCTOBER 1995

*Miao Yin Si, Semabok, Malacca.*



## 1. Forgotten Flowers

We were just talking about a tree called “Midnight Horror” on the way to Malacca from Kuala Lumpur, where I was scheduled to hold a week’s retreat. On arrival there, I met “Evening Horror”. She is a 77-year-old lady, who shuffles her feet as she walked towards us. Right across her forehead was a large L-shaped scar, kept in place with at least 20 stitches. Both her cheeks were blue-black and together with the sagging, wrinkled skin, she simply looked horrible.



It was just a few nights ago when she met with an accident. In the middle of the night, she had got up to go to the toilet in a really groggy state of mind. As a result, she rammed right into the window panes, becoming wide awake only to find blood all over her face. With the help of a monk there, she was duly sent to the hospital.

A clear case of what can happen to you when you lack mindfulness.

The venue of that accident is a Chinese temple in Malacca by the name of Miao Yin Si, literally meaning monastery of wondrous sounds. It has been known to house spinsters who have devoted all their lives to vegetarianism and reciting the name of OMITOFO, or Amitabha Buddha, in the hope of rebirth in the Mahayanist's Pure Land. The shrine proper, an elongated octagon, was completed in 1967. But another photograph dates the movement back to 1958. I was told that there used to be between 40 and 50 inmates at one time but now there are only four left, including a younger caretaker. There would have been five inmates, but for one who died five weeks ago. When I arrived, another was away and so there were only three.

Actually, about 10 years ago, I came here to hold a four-day meditation retreat. Little has changed since then. This time I was staying for a longer period and so had more time to observe these old maids.

All I can say after a week of study is that they are quite pathetic. It's not that they do not have enough to eat. Besides, they also have a roof over their heads. It's the meaninglessness of their existence that is glaring.

The only one with spirit in her is our "Evening Horror". One day while talking to her, I discovered that she actually knew my grandparents. Of grandma, she described her correctly as the lady with white hair who got along very well with the nurses and sisters. "Evening Horror" was herself a seamstress there at that time.

"...And that old man, he gets upset whenever his wife gives birth to a girl instead of a boy! We all laughed at him for that," she added. A small world indeed.

As for the others, I cannot say much. There's one inmate who often moves up and down the veranda, and besides having the support of a walking stick, she also hangs on to a mop. She is the one who does not eat in the kitchen like the others. One day I happened to see her opening her room's door, and oh my goodness! I saw what was better not seen. ...oh, what a clutter of tin cans and other things we call rubbish!

Then there is the one with waxy eyes and a distant, vacant look. She moves about slowly and greets us once in a while. Of her, the caretaker warned, "Do not underestimate her, she can be violent."

It's only when the drum thunders for the evening prayers that the strength of what was to be their faith comes back to life. But the old ladies are too old to engage in the daily chanting. It's "Evening Horror" who usually hits the drum. "That I can do; all I have to do is to chant OMITOFO when I bang the drum," she said. That night I saw her sitting down – gasping and panting – after a session.

Well, theirs is a world where the light is fast dimming. There was an air of sadness about it as I saw one of them tending to the ancestral tablets of those gone before them. Maybe they are resigned to the fact that life has nothing more to offer, and that they think they may be better off joining their deceased inmates. This is despite whatever grievances they may have harboured before. One day, while venturing into a room, there arose a strong stench of decaying flesh. Maybe some of them are still around. Just maybe.

Wouldn't it be much better if they were to learn Insight Meditation or any form of meditation seriously so that even their last breath may be nobly observed? I did try to tell "Evening Horror" a bit about it and even showed her some simple techniques in walking meditation, and she seemed respectful. But I think what I did was simply insufficient to hit the message home.

## 2. Youth and Old Age

During the meditation retreat, especially the nightly talks, I noticed a number of young people. Their youthful faces and behaviour seemed completely out of place here. They were like flower buds cast onto rotten trash. And yet, to think that the old ladies in this temple were once like that, is something worth reflecting.

Now reflecting on myself, time seems to really fly as age advances. A year is already nearing the end and I have hardly noticed what has happened. So many things that I have wanted to do, I seem to keep postponing them. Soon, I'll have to shuffle and drag my feet along, just like them and look so horrible that you might well call me "Venerable Horror."

But at least I think that my faith in the practice will remain as thunderous as those drum beats until I die. As for the young people, I certainly hope that they will make full use of their youthful strength while they can.

All the while, when I was observing these old folks, one verse kept coming back to mind. There was an occasion when the Venerable Ananda saw the Buddha seated, warming his back in the sun. Thereupon, he commented on the ageing state of the Buddha's body, "...It's a wonder that the Exalted One's skin is no longer clear and translucent and how all his limbs are slack and wrinkled, his body bent forward and

a change is to be seen in his sense faculties of eye, ear, nose, tongue and body!"

The Buddha replied, "So it is Ananda. Old age is by nature inherent in youth, sickness in health and death in life..." Finally the Buddha uttered two verses on old age:

*"Shame on you, contemptible old age!  
Age that makes colour fade,  
The pleasing image of man  
By age is trampled down.  
Although one should live a hundred years,  
All end up in Death,  
Nothing can avoid it,  
It tramples over everything."*

It would indeed be appropriate that these verses be put up in the old folks' homes to arouse the sense of urgency in young people who visit them.

## THE WAITING GAME

A flower once  
Not any more,  
Rather,  
A dried up specimen  
Hanging onto a rotting stalk.  
That was how she was  
The last time I came  
Now it has fallen  
To be dust on the floor.

Sleep on forgotten flower  
Your waxy eyes are now closed forever  
Open only to a dream that's finer  
Than the far off stars twinkling with your wishes.

A forgotten flower has passed away,  
Only a relative looked on  
In her last spasms of life,  
leaving behind 3 more inmates  
Waiting to go –  
A crumpling evening horror of a rose over-aged,  
An ashened white drooping mop of a chrysanthemum,  
A wrinkled daisy thin as a thread,  
All are waiting, waiting,  
Playing the waiting game  
As to who will go next.

Can you be a little more mindful while you wait?  
If you can, maybe it'll be  
Something really worth waiting for.  
Wait mindfully, forgotten flowers,  
it won't be long anymore.

10 MAY 1996  
*Miao Yin Si, Semabok, Malacca*

1

I have put this here since it is a sequel to the poem on “The Temple of Forgotten Flowers.” After seven months, another forgotten flower has fallen dead. Evening Horror has, however, recovered from her crash against the window, and another fall. Despite her age, you can still see her grit when she drags her feet as she

walks along the main road bustling with heavy traffic. The feet are, I repeat, a pathetic sight. Even though Evening Horror asked me to explain the meditation technique to her again when I was there on a visit, I don't think her mind can record much of these things. This time I also managed to take pictures of her. Nevertheless, the photograph I took did not turn out, but a candid one of her on the chair did.

2

By the time of printing, Evening Horror had, for some time, passed away.

## A WALK IN THE HILLS

I like the florets that benumb the lips,  
I like the Sonerillas that creep and peep,  
I like the fog, so too the mist,  
I like the road, where these feet lead  
To a familiar corner where I shall meet  
Myself – a ghost that competes for peace  
In a mellowed mood,  
With a softer tone,  
And there we'll talk  
Of how silly things were  
And will be.

28 OCTOBER 1995  
*Fraser's Hill, Pahang.*



When one takes a walk in the hills, the mind also goes on a trip. What is then exercise for the body, becomes relaxation to the mind. The greenery soothes and the fresh air invigorates. A sense of well-being ensues. Then, if there be an absence of suitable company, either to discuss important issues, or to share enlivening experiences, you still have yourself to do it. In silence and calmness, you may be surprised how many issues previously considered inextricably entangled can be so easily resolved.

It was on such a walk, though not alone, that I discussed with some friends what poem one can come up with in such a situation. The above poem was what came to mind. I do not think I had resolved anything at that time, simply because there wasn't anything I could think of.

As for: "florets that benumb the lips", I was referring to a herb that grows wild by the road-sides. Mr. Kwan picked one up to let me taste.

A bite at the flower and the lips and tongue went numb. According to him, it can be eaten to serve as an anaesthetic for abdominal pains. It is obviously a member of the sunflower family (Compositae) and I think the plant is *Spilanthes acmella*, more commonly called "toothache plant".

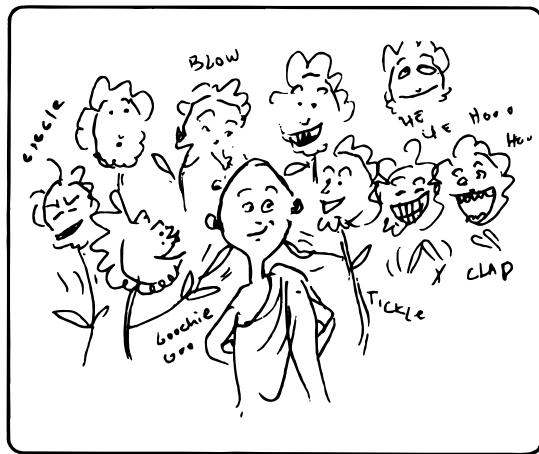
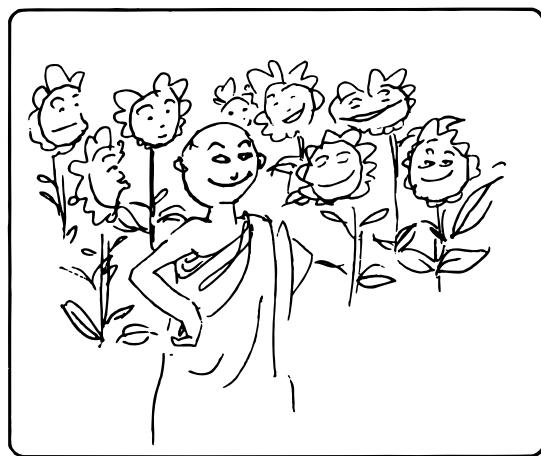
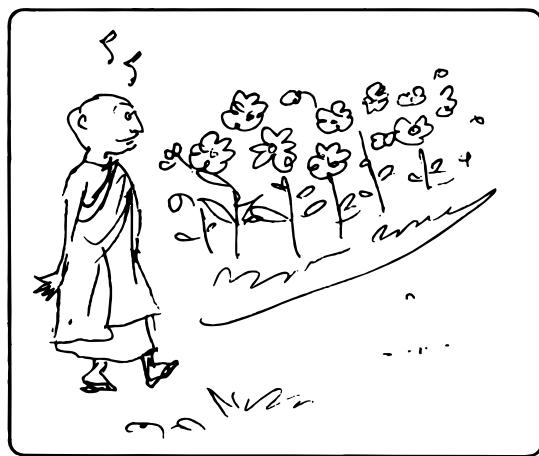
## ROMANCING WITH DAHLIAS

Crimson dahlias, yellow dahlias,  
Maroon dahlias, pure white dahlias,  
Giant dahlias, Dwarf varieties,  
Young dahlias, ageing dahlias,  
Healthy dahlias, sickly dahlias,  
Aggressive sweeties, shy little babies,  
Squinty dahlias, pimply dahlias,  
Loud-mouthed dahlias, dumb dumb flowers,  
Wrinkled dahlias, stupid dahlias,  
Chronic dahlias, diseased blossoms,  
Out of shape dahlias, sloppy dahlias,  
Yucky dahlias, rotted till they stink,  
Evil dahlias, wretched dahlias,  
Schizophrenic dahlias, confirmed sadists,  
Evil dahlias, most cursed of the cursed,

CUT THEM UP, CHOP THEM UP,  
STOMP ON THEM, SMASH THEM TO BITS!  
CRUSH THEM TILL THEY ARE MUSHY  
LEAVE THEM TO ROT AND STINK,  
MIX THEM WITH PUS, URINE AND FAECES  
AND ANYTHING YOU CAN HORRIBLY THINK OF!

After that throw them in an unseen corner  
And run away.  
That's the best fun you can ever get from  
dahlias!

28 OCTOBER 1995  
*Fraser's Hill, Pahang.*





On seeing the pretty dahlias grown in the compound of the bungalow where we stayed, I was inspired to write about their impermanence. And, O no, not that usual types of contemplation! So, I ventured into something else. The result, as you see, will not fit into any religious sort of ritual. On the other hand, it may do well in a comic strip.

## THE BUTTERFLY IS NOT A DREAM

That crimson flare  
Which warms at first sight,  
Now sears the heart with pain.  
Foolish man! Feel not sad,  
Count yourself fortunate.  
Better it is, to lose a finger  
Than to sacrifice one's whole life  
For a sip of honey.

Smouldering grey clouds,  
Hovering darkness, thick and suffocating,  
These repercussions of vanity  
weigh down your eyelids.  
The worst of the storm has passed,  
Picking up the wreckage,  
You discover what your folly cost you.

After rendezvous, parting follows,  
And from craving arises woe,  
When pleasures fade, suffering enters the stage  
With a loud bang and scream.

These Truths – not that you are unaware,  
But since you forgot,  
You see them again, now right before you,  
Your deep love burns with a fire  
That only a storm can extinguish.  
Cry if you can't help it  
But by all means, do not end the world.

Alas! What mistakes man can commit, he repeats.  
I can forgive him a thousand times and more,  
And each time present a gift of a lotus petal  
Accompanied with a drop of compassion dripped down  
From the bitter nimb tree leaf.  
But what really matters is that you can forgive  
While others may still hate,  
Forgive the sky and the earth  
Forgive the ocean and all Mankind.  
If you can do that,  
Turn around to find,  
See that pretty butterfly fluttering  
From jasmines to roses,  
How busy she is,  
With the affairs of the world.  
Why must you feel so sorrowful  
When the beauty of Nature is yours, all yours!

No, that butterfly is not a dream,  
That woman is, and the man too  
And that conflagration of love  
That you bathed in with sheer delight  
is the substance from which nightmares are made!

21 NOVEMBER 1995  
Santisukharama, Kota Tinggi, Johor



I befriended a nice chap who has a keen interest in the Dhamma and meditation. However, he had obviously fallen in love with someone who did not regard him the same way as he did her. When he heard that she was getting married, he must have been quite broken-hearted, although he said it was good that the issue was at long last resolved, and now he can have some of the peace of mind he used to have. That was when I decided to write this poem and handed it to him. To my surprise, he actually memorised it to help him overcome the depression. So if you happen to meet someone with a broken heart, copy this poem and hand it to him (or her) to memorise.

## BEST OF GIFTS

A gift of spectacles  
Is a gift of sight,  
Is a gift of clarity,  
In a world of manifold wonders,  
The Teachings included,  
And therefore the Noble Path as well,  
To tread to Freedom,  
The end of all woe!  
That is the greatest of all gifts,  
And it comes with the volition,  
So give wisely,  
With the thought of Liberation.

The gift of a tooth,  
Be it a filling or a denture,  
Is a gift of food,  
Is a gift of vigour,  
That he may strive,  
For that single taste of Freedom,  
In the Sea of Truth,  
In the Teachings of the Master.  
That is the greatest of all gifts,  
And it comes with the volition,  
So give wisely,  
With the thought of liberation.

2 JULY 1995  
*Kuching, Sarawak.*



The body does not seem to be working well these few days. The spectacles don't fit any more, the filling dropped out and the thumb developed an acute sprain. My friend, the upasaka-in-attendance, very patiently attended to all of these despite his busy schedule. Feeling grateful for all his kindness, I decided to write this bit.

Every deed done by body, speech or mind has its Kammic force and therefore its retribution. It depends, firstly, on the nature of the volition of the doer. In all these acts, he did it out of loving-kindness and compassion, and so the actions can be only wholesome. As recipients of his generosity, we practised as best as we could so that he may reap the best results. As had

been previously mentioned, his action was the seed and we provide the soil.

## ONE FOR THE BUSINESSMAN

Do you know what it takes to be a businessman?

Let me tell you some –

A businessman has to be iron within

( he's got to be tough to survive  
in this dog-eat-dog world ),

Without, he wears soft wool

With the fragrance of musk

( to get his gullible customers enticed ),

His ways are deceptive

( to escape the internal revenue's net ),

But his aim is sure and simple

– Net Profit with the dollar sign.

Ask him what he needs all that money for,

Is it to survive? For power?

Or pleasurable sense?

And unless he is committed

To religion, truth and compassion,

It's obviously none other than greed.

Ah! Then I've got him in my hand,

As a snake got caught by the neck.

Then that businessman is an economic beast,

A stinking materialist!

Never trust that businessman,

His words are worth their weight in filth.

But man, if you have what it takes to be one,

O boy, you're sure to grow rich quick;

But man, if you don't yet try to be,  
Poor thing, you're heading for the ditch;  
But man, I know quite sure I can love him true,  
Don't get me wrong, I'm not one of them;  
For if I can replace that dollar god,  
With the sublime teachings of our Lord,  
I know full well he'll zero in on the goal,  
Even if he has to dump his pride,  
Throw aside a lovely bride;  
Yes, he'll be one of those whose chances are  
That he'll get his prize.

5 JULY 1995  
*Kuching, Sarawak*



One day while listening to a businessman talk about the difficult makings of another up-and-coming businessman, I pondered on some qualities that make up this group of people.

They are pragmatic, realistic, energetic and they know what they want. The trouble is: they are also very materialistic and with that comes craving and pride. But given spiritual influence, they tend to do well in meditation.

What about other groups? Intellectuals and professionals seem to be next in the line. Their intellectual capacity makes them stand out, but it can also slow them down. They have to be intellectually satisfied first. They also tend to philosophise, analyse and think a great deal; and these will make it difficult for them to con-

centrate and observe with bare attention. If they do manage to overcome all these, they should also be able to do well.

Then there are the housewives. This is a big and varied group and there will be some who will excel. Their faith faculty can be prominent; so too patience. Time is also on their side if they are not too attached to their families. Given a pinch of wisdom, they too should fare all right.

## MEDITATION

Listen to sweet silence  
Seal it into the mind  
Keep the heart at ease  
Fill joy to the brim.  
Follow the rise and fall  
Observe the dancing waves  
With one-pointedness  
The mind will possess wings  
Rapid fluttering of the wind  
And then a rush of an eternity  
Fly on fair bird, to everlasting peace.

6 JULY 1995  
*Pasir Panjang, Johor*



A poem which I thought out after having considered how one condition, beginning with silence, leads to another, until good results of the practice can come about.

## DEATH WILL COME FOR SURE

When will it be?  
When will Death take me, when?  
Please tell me when.  
To-day, just to-day, I was told,  
He took away a friend,  
At the prime of age,  
With a wife, two kids,  
Plus one on the way,  
I'm much older and alone,  
Yet I'm still hanging around.

How will it be?  
How will Death claim me, how?  
Please tell me how.  
Death drove a truck, then knocked him down,  
And he has gone ever since.  
Will mine be the same  
Or will it be as I prefer  
With a stinging, silent kiss  
With his cold, dry lips?

Where will it be?  
Where will Death meet me, where?  
Please tell me where.  
His life ended on the road  
In the city where he worked  
Amidst polluted air.  
Do I have a choice?  
And if I do,  
I'd rather have a serene place  
There'll be a shrine, there'll be holy men  
And the winds whistling through the forest then.

Death gives no sign as to how, when, and where  
It'll arrive.

But Death will come for sure  
So be ready and bid your time.

7 JULY 1995  
*Pasir Panjang, Johor*



News came to me that someone I knew had just met with an accident. He was a devout Buddhist who frequented the Brickfields Vihara. He must have been in his thirties when this unfortunate incident took place. I had not met him for quite some time because I am seldom in Kuala Lumpur. Nevertheless, the news of his death still prompted some feelings about the uncertainty of life and the certainty of death.

## MORNING SPECTACLE

With legs running at top speed,  
And yet he remains on the same spot,  
With arms swinging round in circles,  
And yet he has not lifted himself up.  
You would think it's an oversized chicken  
Learning to fly,  
Or it may seem like Superman  
In his panic-stricken time,  
But it isn't,  
It's just Mr. Quah working out  
His ridiculous morning exercise.

8 JULY 1995  
*Panjang Pasir, Johor*





By chance, I saw Mr. Quah working at his exercise one morning. He looked quite ridiculous and funny. It must have been something he thought out besides the usual forms.

## IT'S A DOG-EAT-DOG WORLD

Stinko and Bibop are pals.  
Bibop is yellow, Stinko is black,  
Both are males and both have tails.  
Stinko is bigger, lazier and stinks.  
Bibop is smaller, timid and whines.  
When it's food time, it's all for grabs.  
Stinko gobbles up his share  
As well as Bibop's portion  
What else can you expect?  
When you have a dog for a friend!

9 JULY 1995  
*Pasir Panjang, Johor.*



Where I was staying, the manager reared a dog. Its given name is "Tompok" which means "Patch," to describe the patchy and mangy state of the dog when it first arrived. I called it Bibop because it sounded cute. The other dog, Stinko, often comes over from the oil-palm mill for food. Bibop obviously welcomes this fellow. When it's time for food, the greed is obvious. Strangely enough, Bibop does not harbour

hatred towards Stinko. Even in dogs, we see the differences in character. In human beings, however, things can be more concealed. Sometimes I think that human beings can be worse than animals. Dogs can't destroy the world, but human beings can! So which one have you to be careful of?

## BOUGAINVILLAEAS

Large masses of pink  
Thick sprays of purple,  
White and red,  
All glow with satisfying richness  
From crooked plants growing in  
Restrictive soil containers.  
Nature has a way of opening your heart,  
It makes one think  
How much more meaning and joy  
Can be begotten from a man  
If only he'd cultivate love  
In all the colours and shades  
Of bougainvillaeas.

18 JULY 1995  
*Kuching, Sarawak*



When I was doing the Metta meditation, the bougainvillaeas around the house were in full bloom. Their rich colours seemed able to enliven those who looked at them. Metta is also

able to inject life into people who may be otherwise depressed or rendered indifferent towards others because of stress.

## ROOTS

Impatience is the indicator of anger,  
The overflow of wrath – an explosion of temper,  
Grudges deeply buried are its concealed roots  
Spreading wild fire,  
Anger is the foulest of the foul,  
He who delights in harming others,  
Destroys himself.  
Avoid such dangers,  
Even as a foot avoids the head of a viper,  
The distance of a league is still far from safe,  
In the possibilities of human endeavour.

Acquisitiveness is the store house  
Full of “me” and “mine”,  
Indulgence in food is passion’s sure sign,  
Obsession in foul habits is a plunge  
Down a bottomless pit,  
Who on earth can prevent an avalanche of shit?  
Avoid such dangers,  
The roots of attachment spread quickly,  
The creeper of craving extend and entangle rapidly,  
There is nothing like the guarding of the senses,  
Plus a regular dose of contemplation on impurities.

Delusion though hard to detect,  
Lack of interest and aim  
Indicates that unwieldy state,

Such a one is disinclined to communicate,  
Locked in a prison of his own limited perceptions,  
How can there be an expansion of knowledge?  
Delusion is hard to see,  
Tricked by Mara's camouflage  
The masses march downwards to their doom,  
Motivated by ever increasing anger and greed,  
Avoid them, do what hermits do,  
Seek seclusion, meditate.

Loving-kindness brings blessings to all,  
Compassion is he, when you suffer seek,  
Sympathy is the supportive hand of a true friend,  
The equanimous is most reliable,  
The highest of the breed.  
Such people are a joy and comfort to live with,  
A soothing balm, a trusted relative.

Simplicity has no tricks  
What greed has to hide,  
Moderation is a positive effort  
To restrain greed's might,  
Contentment with the barest necessity  
Is the spiritual man's bounty,  
A detached man is not demanding,  
He is easy to live with.

One street-wise can manipulate  
Share market prices as well as another's pocket,  
A man spiritually bent  
Is wise to the extent  
That he knows life is not just money,  
One has also to be prepared for death.  
But even if he does strive,

And claims an insight or more,  
Yet he who cannot restrain his senses  
Is still not wise enough to teach,  
Seek one wiser,  
But such a one is hard to find,  
He'll know well enough  
To stay far away  
From the despicable lot of you!

Immorality is an indicator of danger,  
Know his mind by asking one question after another,  
Seek refuge in those with the Dhamma,  
Best yourself alone,  
And of course Nibbana, forever.

With these six roots,  
Mind states deepen and expand –  
Anger, the foulest of the foul,  
Attachment, poison's sugary taste,  
Delusion, the darkest foe,  
From these three keep away.

Kindness, your friend at heart,  
Detachment, your freedom right,  
Wisdom, the brightest lamp that shines,  
Forever keep these three beside.

20 JULY 1995  
*Santisukharama, Kota Tinggi, Johor*



A contemplation on the six roots.

## INSIGNIFICANT

As insignificant as the shit of a blue-bottle fly  
Are your anxieties,  
Blown out of proportions by egoistic attachments.  
Thus you suffer unnecessarily like a fool.  
If you can but see the sufferings  
Other people in this world undergo,  
Dying in pain and despair, unjustly victimised by others,  
Then all your problems are, insignificant indeed.

If everyone were busy purifying their minds  
Instead of minding other people's business,  
Like pussy cats digging for fishes  
In a neighbours' pond,  
Then there would be peace on Earth.  
After all, what really matters is that  
You survive enough to be mindful  
Of things as they really are,  
Or at least just enough to keep peace at that moment.  
Then all else, even Death,  
Will become as insignificant  
As the tears of an Aedes mosquito!

But why is this not so often found in life?  
It's because the Ego needs to be satisfied,  
sustained and reassured,  
Which it can never truly be!  
So if I were to have any regrets when I die,  
It will not be because I had made mistakes,  
Rather, it will be that I have not tried hard enough.  
And if I were to be angry with the world,  
Which I should never let myself be,

It will not be because of the foolish things they did,  
Rather it will be that they had not tried hard enough.  
But then things of the world are very much beyond  
An individual to control,  
When you cannot even control your own mind,  
What talk is there of controlling the mind of others?

Peace in the world must begin with peace within oneself  
Before it can spread out effectively to others,  
So, Man of the world,  
Do be mindful  
And after that strive diligently  
Till the world ends.  
And that, be assured  
Is not insignificant,  
For by then, even bed-bugs' saliva  
Or sand-flies' Karaoke fever,  
Will not be of any bother to you.

28 JULY 1995  
*Kuching, Sarawak*



Why do you think I chose such similes like the blue-bottle fly shit, and the Aedes mosquito's tears? These are tiny things which bother people quite a bit. You may even say it's significant because they can cause epidemics if we are not careful. That is precisely why I chose them, because they are insignificant when you are oblivious to these dangers. They become significant when you are conscious of them. They

become insignificant again when you have become much more aware of other more important things like striving to be free from the Samsaric cycle. Things can be great or small when compared with another object, but when looking at the REAL NATURE of things, striving beats all else.

## CONCENTRATION

Inner chattering can surpass all external noise,  
So let the sounds of silence be louder.  
The wavering of an anxious heart  
Can shake even the heavens,  
Therefore, set the mind steadfast  
On the foundations of Mindfulness.  
Without a strong still base of concentration,  
How then can insight arise?

A comfortable body,  
An established aim,  
A peaceful heart,  
And previous mindful striving;  
Follow closely,  
Concentrate into the object,  
Forgetting all else,  
That pure concentration you seek  
Will quickly sink in level upon level,  
As waters tumbling into a pool.

28 JULY 1995  
*Kuching, Sarawak*



There's one thing that I noticed after some time in meditation, that is, it's not difficult to go into concentration. If you really fix your mind to the object, turning all else away, then you will go into it within a minute. It's whether or not the mind wants to. So what are the conditions that make the mind willing to do so? After some thought, these were the basic things, including a comfortable body...

After having done much striving, the peaceful heart comes next and that can be easily achieved if you are DETACHED.

## A SURPRISE CALL FOR MR BUSY BUSINESSMAN

[**B** – *Mr. Busy Businessman*, **C** – *Anonymous caller*]

Telephone: Ring, ring....

**B**: Hello, who's there?

**C**: Is that you, Mr. Busy Businessman?

**B**: Yes, may I know who's there on the line?

**C**: WELL, HELLO MR. BUSY BUSINESSMAN!

I've got one or two things to tell you.  
You who have no time for anything else  
Except: Accumulating phone bills,  
Rushing for meetings, seminars  
With big shots,  
Borrowing from the bank,  
Then paying only when you can,

Speculating on shares,  
Watching prices go up and down,  
Deciding when to buy and sell,

O Mr. Busy Businessman,  
There's no end to your running around  
Trying to make ends meet,  
Earning more than you need,  
Suffering in hell for a number of cents.

**B:** May I know who's the IDIOT on the line?

**C:** I can be anybody, you just name it,  
I am your mother, your father, your wife,  
I am your child, your brother,  
I am your conscience, your remorse  
Over things done and undone,  
I am your lost hopes for goodness and blessings,  
I am your greed, your anger and most of all your  
delusion,  
I am the reminder of terrors waiting for you,  
I am that sickness, old age and of course, Death,  
I am those things once gone, never will return,  
Your time is up Mr. Busy Businessman!  
I'm your Kammic creditor and tax collector, your  
Nemesis!  
You're now spiritually bankrupt, Mr. Busy Businessman.  
When you were young you did not strive,  
When you should have given, you hoard instead,  
When you should be in the temple,  
You went to the bars for a drink,  
You've wasted away your precious human life.  
O Mr. Busy Businessman!  
So now how can all those money help you?



Look, what have all those anxieties done to you?  
A little late is too late,  
What's done cannot be erased.  
The black hearse is waiting,  
The chains are on your neck,  
LOOK BEHIND YOU NOW,  
Do you see all those demons waiting to torture you?  
Can you see all those wolves and vultures  
Waiting to devour your flesh?

(Mr. Busy Businessman looks behind him and sees something too horrible to describe)

**B:** What the hell are these... GULP... GASP...

(Mr. Busy Businessman gets a heart attack and dies)

**C:** HEE HEE HEE HOO HOO HAA HAA HAA...  
YOU MAY BE NEXT!

8 AUGUST 1995

*Kuching, Sarawak / Kota Tinggi, Johor*



While travelling from Kuching to Johor Bahru and then back, the curse (or blessing?) of the cellular phones kept ringing all the way. Most of these involved business calls for busy businessmen. As a result, my imagination went wild and I decided to put it down on paper.

## FASTING

When food goes on leave,  
Hunger comes in to take charge  
Together with its whole gang of cronies  
Such as weakness, dizziness, furry tongue,  
And excuses not to meditate.

But fasting has its advantages,  
Good health, they claim  
When the toxins are expelled,  
A lighter body too,  
An edge over the battle of the bulge.  
It's true as it feels,  
But mentally I can only conclude,  
A better appreciation of food  
Or rather, the energy it gives us,  
And the generosity of its donors,  
For all their effort in earning it,  
Searching for, then preparing it,  
And finally giving it away.

Food comes and goes,  
Strength too, according to circumstances,  
Health then, is an illusion,  
Especially when sickness comes for a visit.  
Noting moment to moment with mindfulness  
Freed from expectations is but small relief  
In the middle of the night,  
Patience then is that which holds the fort  
Till dawn breaks in  
With a little pack of fruit juice.

18 AUGUST 1995  
*Santisukharama, Kota Tinggi, Johor*



This is the first time in my life that I have actually fasted. Although I could not eat anything at various times when I was sick, this time it's voluntary. The intention to do it had been in my mind for sometime but was not put into practice. With the encouragement of a friend, I finally succeeded.

The effects were as described above - furry tongue, dizziness, weakness and hunger, of course! However, these lessened after a few days. As for toxins being flushed out, I don't really know. But I did feel a surge of energy and good health after that. The only thing is, there will not be enough energy to really exert to gain much concentration if you are not yet adept at it. As for the other normal activities, it should not pose any problems.

What surprised me was the energy level that a little cup of fruit juice could provide. You can be comfortably striving for one whole morning. It only proves that we are gorging ourselves with too much food every day.

## TRIBUTE TO MR SKEELATOR

He has served us faithfully for many years,  
Standing in attention by day and night,  
To remind us of death and loathsomeness,  
Yet few really noticed his significance.

But those who knew him, loved him dearly,  
Posed in photographs with him before they left,  
Some even embraced what they considered  
A mirror of themselves.

After some years, Nature came to claim,  
Even Mr. Skeeler is not exempted from imper-  
manence,  
His bones broke off by bits,  
His hand dropped off, so did part of the ribs.  
Then some students took compassion on him,  
Fixed him back close to his original form.  
Still those bones' date is due,  
Beyond repair, they kept decaying.  
O how sadly he looked at me today,  
Through a pair of spectacles  
In tears he stared,  
His jaws gaping open, as if sneering said,

“My days are numbered, venerable sir!  
Soon to join my donor who died of cancer.  
These old bones that you see here,  
Soon will return to the earth forever.  
Look at them now, as clearly as you can,  
Look as if you've never looked before,  
Savour this vision, look long,  
Soon you'll look at me no more!  
This death ever beside you,  
Yet taken for granted,  
This horrible skeleton that people attach to,  
Yet should deplore,  
Look at me, a grim reminder,  
Strive hard, venerable sir,  
Your duty calls.”  
So I stared hard and looked long,



To fix a picture of a most compassionate skeleton  
deep into my brains.  
How slim he is, I do declare,  
Those bones that limply hang  
Now blackened and bare.  
And those empty sockets,  
O how they glare,  
Into infinity  
Into the heart of reality!

28 AUGUST 1995

*Santisukharama, Kota Tinggi, Johor*



Mr. Skeeler is a skeleton (not a real one) presented many years ago by Mr. Cheong Boo Sit of Penang who has since died of liver cancer. Now, even that skeleton is breaking apart. One evening, I noticed how glaring his eye sockets were, as if staring at me with a sad look. So I decided to write this poem.

## ETERNAL WISH

When I was younger  
I thought I could change the world  
Make mountains of mole hills  
Turn satans into saints.  
Now that I am older  
I have come to realise  
The Nature of these Bloody people  
Were not made in a day  
Or in a year, or in a lifetime  
Rather, it was aeons of conditioning.

Even Buddhas merely show the way  
People themselves must strive  
But then, even with the greatest effort  
It may not come to much  
And so I have decided that  
I'd better change myself.

2 SEPTEMBER 1996

*Pasir Panjang, Johor*



By chance, I read a magazine featuring the Sinhalese prime minister Chandrika Kumaratunga saying, "I thought I could change the world..." This sparked off a poetic streak and thoughts about changing people.

No, it's not true that all people cannot be changed for the better through meditation. From experience, a great many have undergone much psychological improvement, although for many others, it may take a bit of time. Anger, the grossest of defilements, should be the first to go, followed by greed and then delusion. But to be rid of them completely, it will need much more time for most people. Patience is then the name of the game. It depends on the progress of meditation, which then depends on two factors – the potential already built up in one's past lives and the degree of defilements present. The first is a matter of human resource, the other is a matter of human failings. After that, it is the right method, the effort made and the time to practise. What about faith? That comes under human resource. Generally, with observation, it

is not difficult to judge the extent of each factor. For a start, Buddhists do not spend enough time in meditation nowadays. If this condition is satisfied, then the rest can be considered.

## FALLEN FLOWERS

Fallen flowers beneath my feet speak,  
This yellow carpet's the result of merits,  
See the tree that gave the golden rain,  
Sprung from roots beneath a squalid drain.

Will it be thus the day I leave?  
With heart lighter than magpie bird's wing,  
Remind me thus to not-cling and strive  
Renounce all transient joys  
Abandon all grief.

4 SEPTEMBER 1995

*Paloh Estate, Paloh, Johor*



I was delighted to be invited to spend part of my retreat at the estate manager's bungalow. His abode was spacious and well-kept. And its compound had plenty of greens. In front of the gate was a tall Yellow Flame Tree in full bloom. The fallen flowers formed a yellow carpet beneath it. As I walked on it, the above verses just flowed out and so I jotted them down.

## BARN OWLS

Last year it was cats,  
The other year it was rats,  
Now it's barn owls  
Causing a racket.

Cats mew and tumble  
Playing on the roof,  
Rats squeak and rumble  
Running above,  
But owls screech and scramble  
On top of the ceiling,  
And that startles you a bit.

Of all the three,  
I like the barn owl best  
A noble predator  
With a pretty white face.  
As a bird of the night  
It symbolises movement in dark hours  
Seldom seen but nevertheless deadly.  
Aren't our defilements similar,  
Concealed by delusion, cause endless troubles.  
Then in sweeps the barn owl  
To finish off the culprits.

6 SEPTEMBER 1995

*Paloh, Johor*



Owls are a type of bird that haunts the night.  
For some reason, they are sometimes associated with wisdom and at other times (under-

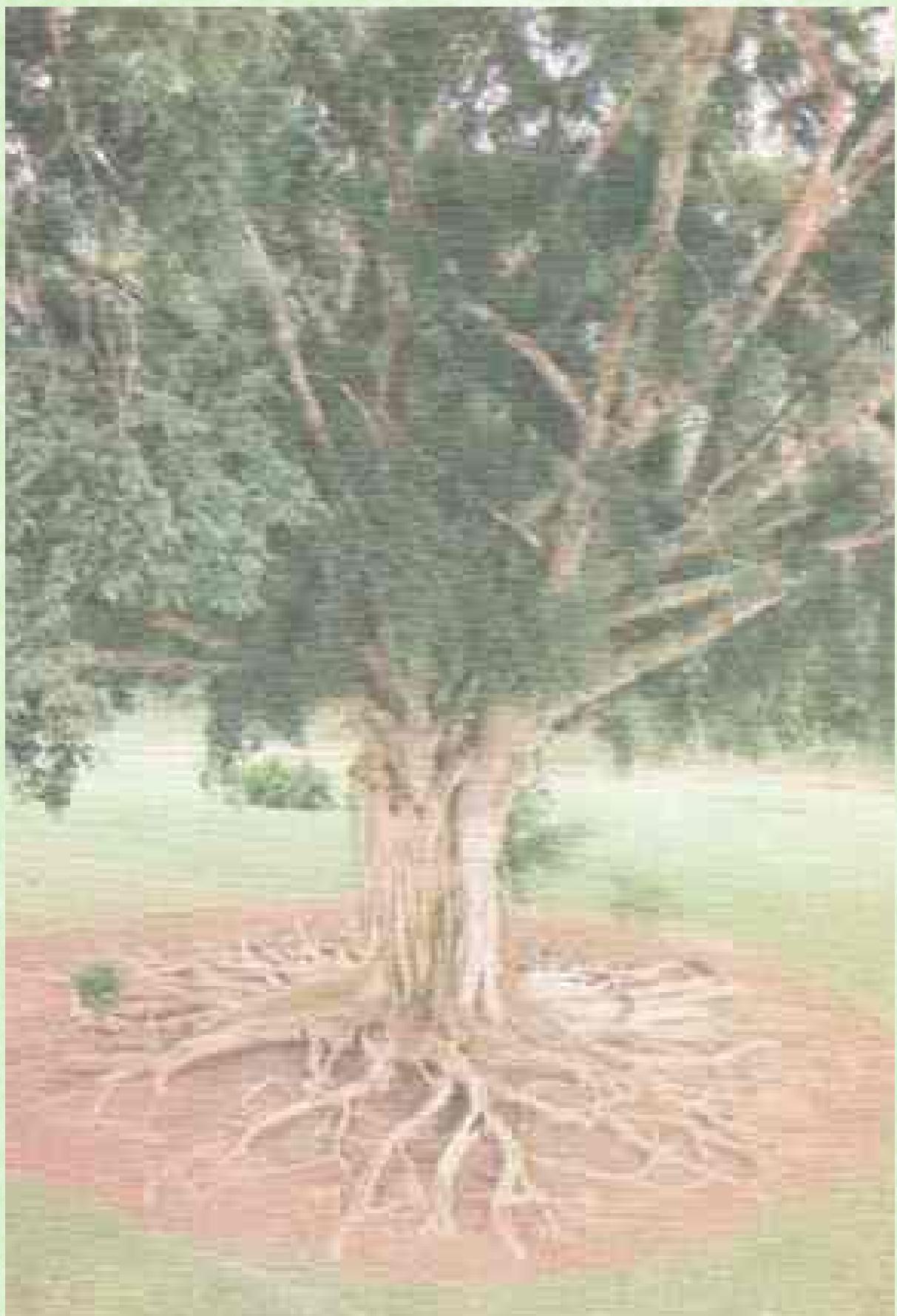
standably), associated with ghosts. In oil palm estates, they are welcomed as they act as a biological control for the rat population. Sometimes the estate workers would build little huts for them to breed in. It is therefore not strange that the manager's house, situated on the top of a hill, attracted a number of these.

Being birds of the dark, it is not easy to see them. But they sometimes perch on a branch of the fig tree outside my window.

I was told that they make strange noises too difficult to describe. After hearing them, I would classify them as screeches. They also hoot, although the manager swears that the Barn Owls don't. So maybe it was another type of owl. However, I'm sure Barn Owls are not the only species found here. There's a larger type that heaves and groans like an asthmatic patient. Just by the sound of it, one may think it's a ghost breathing down your neck. From afar, I can see that it is quite large, with many dark stripes. When I tried to look closer at it, it also moved a bit as if trying to get a better view of me. Given his night vision, I think it can see me better. It could have been a Barred Eagle Owl... What's in a name after all?

## FIG TREE

Permit me to say  
That a tree is like a man,  
Yet a handsome tree is better than a handsome man,



But the Great Man surpasses a forest giant.  
As for a useful tree, it is like the loyal servant,  
To be imprisoned for his fruiting labour  
Or axed down (if you so wish) for his timber.  
The fig tree outside my room has all three attributes,  
It is lovely, it is huge, it gives plenty of shelter.

Silent tree with pleasant shade,  
Daily you greet me through the window,  
Roots into a multi-veined disc is spread,  
At the centre, the Earth Deity's coveted seat.

You are one of the most handsome fig trees I've seen,  
With a clean torso, each muscle elegantly sculptured,  
And arms so long and strong,  
That you'd think it upholds all heaven.

A host to ten thousand birds, providing food and shelter,  
To me, a most friendly neighbour,  
Leaves finely crafted wind-chimes flow down  
Like sprays of green water,  
When the wind blows, listen to the rush of whispers.

And when the figs ripen,  
Countless wild pigeons flock here,  
Visited by rarely observed members of the avian family,  
This place becomes a haven for birdies.  
This season that I come,  
No such wonder is here to distract me,  
But –  
The chatter of boisterous mynahs  
The melodious flutes of the golden orioles,  
The sweet whistle of the black magpie,  
The soundless rushing-bys of the tree swifts,

Do justice to welcome a guest who came afar.  
We all share a common dream –  
That the world be safe  
That it will remain green.

Some are wont to say  
That a tree is like a man,  
Its roots his god-given grace,  
Its trunk the soul within,  
Its branches his many faceted roles,  
The leaves, his miraculous manifestations.

But I prefer to compare  
Its roots, to unseen, past conditioning,  
Its trunk, this present mind base,  
The branches, thoughts many pathways,  
And the leaves spread and fly,  
Life's possibilities.

8 SEPTEMBER 1995  
*Paloh, Johor*

## LOVE BIRD

Love is like a bird  
That flies at the speed of thought  
Bringing light, joy  
And all goodness of life  
To the one it loves.

Love is like a bird  
That sings a song of hope  
Hearing its call, the heart lifts up,  
Like the moon freed from clouds.

One with love shall shine,  
One in hate is buried alive,  
Be like the big bird whose wings stretch  
Right across the universe  
Spreading love.

11 SEPTEMBER 1995

*Paloh, Johor*

## THE BALM OF LOVE

Love is like an ointment  
For a mind sick and weary,  
It warms up cold and clammy states of depression,  
Soothes and cools down the fires of hatred.  
The exercise of spreading love  
To oneself and others  
Is a perfect massage  
To repair and tone up  
Every strand of emotional muscle.  
Little wonder they sleep well,  
Dream sweet dreams,  
Then wake up fresh after each session.

Love is like an ointment  
You should always carry in your pocket,  
Use it on yourself, your friends  
And everyone else whom you come across  
They will never be able to thank you enough,  
For it really work wonders,  
This miraculous ointment of loving-kindness.

14 SEPTEMBER 1995



This time, I was doing the Metta meditation. The two poems here show how the state of mind influences thinking and the association with things around oneself. In the first case, I associated the numerous birds that call and fly with the thought of Metta. With that, I radiated Metta to the birds as well. I also noticed that they sometimes perched on the branch just outside the window and peeped in curiously.

In the second case, I was rubbing some ointment on a sprained shoulder. Again, I compared Metta to an ointment that soothes a “sprained” mind. It was then also appropriate to send Metta to those who gave me the ointment.

## GRANDFATHER FIG

A great grand fig  
Its massive arms sweep and soar  
Into unlimited space  
Length-wise are giant beams that stretch  
Pass moments – elements of eternity.  
And those roots, a wrangle of coils  
Extract essence from forgotten ancestors,  
This might as well be  
The last of the great grand figs  
That once lorded over the land.  
I am glad to have met  
This great grandfather  
And I thank it for giving me strength.

See my branches how they fly,  
Behold the trunk that holds them high,  
The roots embraced by mother earth,  
These are the reasons for the bliss I feel.

The secret of growth is space,  
The heart of survival, strength,  
The bliss of existence  
Is the freedom these two give,  
And mother experience,  
The nourishment of life.

15 SEPTEMBER 1995  
*Paloh Estate, Paloh, Johor*



Figs belong to a family known for its peculiar fruits which are commonly called in Chinese the “flowerless fruit.” This characteristic has also been described in the Snake Sutta of the Sutta Nipata:

“He does not see any substantiality in forms of becoming, as one does not find flowers on a fig tree. That monk gives up the cycle of existence as the snake sheds its old, decayed skin.”

Botanists will, however, say that figs do have flowers. They are neatly hidden in the structure which will become the fruit. They come under the plant family of Moraceae, which has a wide range of growth forms and habitats.

One form is that of the strangling fig. This usually grows as a fair to large-sized tree which

has many roots that grow from its trunk and branches. Its unique habit is that it may start its life cycle on the branches of some tall forest tree, then wrap its masses of roots over the host-tree, finally strangling it to death. The host trunk would then become its trunk and later rot away, leaving a mass of roots with a hollow central column.

The Bodhi tree, under which the Buddha was enlightened, and the Banyan tree, under which the Bodhisatta took his meal, belonged to this type. It has also played an important part in the religious culture of India. Even in our country, it is taken to be the abode of spirits, and so it is not unusual to find someone worshipping at its foot.

The two trees described in the poems also come under this category. The first one is obviously a *Ficus Benjamina*. It must be around 30-40 feet high. The second one, I think (if I have not identified it wrongly) is a *Ficus Caulocarpa*. This one must be around 80ft – as high as it is wide. Hence, the comparison of this tree's characteristic with a physical attribute of the Buddha – the Blessed One's height was also equal to the width between his two outstretched arms.

We were told that when the trees are in their fruiting season, many wild birds will flock here to feast on its fruits. Fearlessly, they will roost on all the trees and bushes in the manager's bungalow compound. Greed blinds one to dangers!

## A RECOVERY

Over the hill  
Saturated greys deepen with rain  
Whoosh, in rushes the wind  
With immediate freshness  
And an explicitly clear picture  
Life becomes green once more  
That life – a pleasant illusion.

The chanting rain  
Sacred to the forests  
Therefore sacred also to us,  
Then cold nights follow  
With frequent nightly calls to the toilet  
Which is just as natural and sacred  
As it is necessary.  
If only you can see the forest in deep thought  
In the darkness, if only you could.

Next morning  
Delicate tree patterns wake up  
Partly screened by moisture laden smoke-mist  
Wet ecstasy of tropical rain forests  
They rise carrying new breath and songs  
To our green lungs,  
Our hill of hopes of healthy life.  
From there the spirit flies up  
As a black swiftlet playing with the rain.

Sounds of water play  
Music if to make you happy  
The rain is now rushing down the slopes  
Brings me a sudden wonder

With boulders and a clear stream  
Waters light and flexible  
Yet powerful  
These streams are veins of the forest  
Let me wash my feet,  
Wash my hands, my face,  
Let me wash my heart  
With your life-blood,  
It is also my life-blood.

5 DECEMBER 1995  
*Camp Matang, Kuching, Sarawak*



I was quite exhausted after a heavy period of  
teaching at Kota Tinggi.

## RAIN DRAMA

This morning  
The rain did not just play tam tams  
She fell apart and poured out all her cold tears  
O how she cried and wailed  
Blew her snot all over us  
Till mats flew and mud splattered the floors  
Till the yogis shivered as they hid in their rooms.

But the forest  
O how beautiful she looks  
The trees are not indifferent  
They seem to be jostling with joy  
Singing with the rain

It seems that the more she cried  
The more they rejoiced  
It seems that Nature has a wonderful way  
Of being cynical and sarcastic  
It seems she knows how to sympathise with broken  
hearts  
O vast sky,  
No matter how much you cry,  
You cannot wash away Man's tears.  
O great Earth,  
No matter how much you sing,  
You cannot deafen Man's lamentations.  
When the heart aches and breaks,  
No one except lovers can mend it;  
But when the heart dies,  
Even they are helpless.

As the day dragged on,  
Still the sky bawled and sobbed,  
Till the trees around us shook till dead tired,  
Till those far out on the slopes,  
Stood motionless, dazed in trance.  
Is it that when the heart dies,  
The body too follows after?  
If so, My funeral arrives sooner than expected.  
Burn it and feed the trees here with the ashes  
Till they grow fat and tall!  
But O look! How exquisite a picture the mind paints,  
The rain has formed a silver veil,  
Its fine threads woven in shining seams  
Over the deep green silhouette  
Of the trees along the ridge,  
The long house seeped in purple mood complements,  
The open field in front spreading out generous space,

And all of us waving, swaying, vibrating  
With the wind coursing in all directions.  
Is it that when the heart dies  
The mind functions better and brighter?  
It seems so.

6 DECEMBER 1995



Why did I feel this way? There seems to be  
much discomfort. Yet the mind was clear. I dis-  
covered I was still exhausted.

## NOBLE OF THE FOREST

I'm at a loss for words,  
I know only an awe,  
Grasping at his toes,  
I behold his massive brown trunk  
Stretch, towering above the rest,  
Bursting into showers of little leaves  
This noble of the tropical rain forest  
Is as ancient as it is refined  
Tall and strong,  
Unshaken by the strongest winds,  
Aloof yet graceful,  
A work of art no man can simulate.  
No doubt, is a magnificent product bred up from  
From an elaborate and age-old system  
Nature had designed  
It could not have evolved elsewhere  
It could not have survived in a different environment.

Hey you, high up there  
Can you see me right down here  
Tell me your vision, a vision of a giant  
Tell me, Noble tree of the forest

“Hills and more beauteous hills beyond,  
Clouds and clear blue skies above,  
The world vast and wide, expands as life grows,  
The vision of a giant knows no bounds.”

“Life to be great  
Barriers must be broken,  
Development warrants time,  
Patience unlimited,  
Then sacrifice and more sacrifice,  
Endless sacrifices must be done,  
Climb up the ladder of perfections.”

9 DECEMBER 1995



A tall tree loomed in the vicinity of the camp. Although it may not be among the tallest trees in the world, it is still a fairly tall one; in fact, the tallest one nearest to us. We estimated it to be easily over a hundred feet. Its girth is also considerable, easily exceeding 10 feet. While other trees still swayed with the strong winds, this one remained unshaken. Unmistakably, it is a dipterocarp. With my limited knowledge of botany, I am unable to determine which type. Nevertheless, it is not difficult to appreciate the majesty of such a creation of Nature.

Somehow, at that moment I associated its existence to be the result of specific environmental conditions. Among other reasons (I presume), it explains the limited distribution of many of its members to this part of the world. Similarly, I also think of the many necessary conditions needed for the growth of a spiritual giant. Outside these conditions, such an existence would not be possible. And what are the conditions? The 37 factors of enlightenment.

## THE HOUSE THAT SORROW BUILT

This is the house that sorrow built,  
This is the family that lives in the house that sorrow built,  
This is the old woman who lies on the bed in a room  
In the house that sorrow built,  
Can you hear her groans as she gasps for air?

GASP, GASP, GASP,

Will there ever be enough that goes into her lungs?  
She hasn't been eating and has been moaning all night.  
Her family panics and sends for the doctor to save her life.

This doctor, this is the doctor  
That came to the house that sorrow built,  
A doctor that came from afar,  
A heart full of compassion, a saving star.  
He checks her pulse

And says she's suffering from oxygen hunger,  
sends her son,  
"Go to the hospital and get her an oxygen breather."  
Meanwhile he confidently administers jabs  
After checking blood pressure.  
As for her, what can she do  
But keep on gasping for air?  
How long can she live?  
The question crossed my mind.  
And if she does pass this crisis,  
How much more such agony has she to face?  
And if she does go, will it be another house of pain,  
One disguised by new flesh and fresh blood,  
Or will it instead be fur and feathers,  
Worse if it's just bare bones of a ghost  
Born in darkness.

The phone rings, her son at the hospital calls,  
He says that they won't sell him his mother's life at any  
cost,  
They ask endless questions and delays the time.  
He argues that his mother's dying but they couldn't care  
less.

At home they prepare liquid food mixed with medica-  
tions,  
Fixed a tube through her nose to enter her stomach,  
The doctor pumps in the mixture with the help of a  
syringe,  
Too weak to struggle, she just keeps on gasping.  
Her chest heaving up and down,  
Waves in the sea of sorrow,  
The pain in her mind,  
I can almost hear it screaming,

“O why must death be so painful  
O why can’t death come sooner?”

Then a cool wind blew  
Fresh air rocks the window panels  
And What?  
In my mind’s eye, I saw celestial chariots.  
Men with tall hats, in long gowns with pleasant  
demeanour,  
Draped black in mourning,  
But the chariot is bronze gold and shining

So soon? Am I imagining things?  
The doctor checks her blood pressure  
And says she’s recovering.  
But still I ask my friend,  
“Is she a good woman?”  
He replied,  
“A kind mother who cared well for her family.”  
So they perked her up to let the food down,  
She stopped gasping and seemed quite well,  
But in a minute after I turned away  
There was wailing  
What?  
The doctor’s giving her cardiac pulmonary resuscitation.  
It looks like her heart had stopped beating  
Her lungs stopped breathing.

WAIL, WAIL, WAIL,

This is the house that sorrow built,  
These are the lamentations resounding  
From the house that sorrow built,  
This is the family that lives in the house the woman died.

They are kneeling before her body wailing their hearts out.

In I went to conduct her last rites, only to find  
No, she's not gone yet,  
A tear drips from the side of her right eye  
Her mouth opened to speak but no words can be heard  
The doctor sits bowed,  
Resigned to the helplessness of the state.

Good doctor, you are not GOD!  
You tried your very best, Death surely comes to us all.

Soon she passes over, who can tell the precise moment?  
Ah, I see the chariots and its attendants  
Blowing their trumpets.  
See the old lady, her head turned longingly for a last look  
At the family she is now leaving to be in the house in tears,  
But who can hear the trumpets or her sad farewells?  
As for me, I ask, is this my imagination?

Still I tell her in my mind,  
Go good granny, as you must,  
You can return later with blessings from the gods  
Go now to a better world or else Hell guards may arrive  
To drag you down to suffer in Nether worlds.

Do you hear them wailing  
“Mother O Mother!”  
Wailing for their mother who had left them  
In the house that sorrow built.  
We too are leaving – a curious monk, the good doctor  
And the good doctor's driver,  
Leaving them wailing in the house that sorrow built.

Is this how life will end – in agony?  
Is this the suffering we all must face?  
Will there be golden chariots  
Or Hell guardians with chains in their hands?

For me, O let it be,  
Be that Nibbana unsurpassed  
The Unborn, the Deathless  
The End of All Grief  
And no more houses that craving builds.

12 DECEMBER 1995  
*Kuching, Sarawak*



“Is this where sorrow is?” I asked my friend as we approached a single storey wooden house, located in the wilderness just seven miles off the Matang road from Kuching. As usual, they have not spared any of the original vegetation and what is left now are some miserable fruit trees planted far apart, hemmed in by “lalang” grasses. In afternoons such as these, the blazing sun beats down harshly to make life more than miserable, and if you are sick, you can expect the worst.

Near the door we could hear the moans and groans of an old lady in pain,

“Aiyah... Aiyooh...”

“Is this what sorrow is?” I asked my friend again.

My friend, Animmitta, has in the past month or so, been helping to ferry a certain Dr. Lim (who

doesn't, for some reason, believe in driving himself) to see patients, usually cases written off and sent home to wait for their inevitable exit from this existence. Dr. Lim graduated from Taiwan and has a teaching hospital there.

Seeing the unstable situation in that country, he had decided to return to his homeland – Kuching, Sarawak. Here, he was appalled by the poor state of medical services and as a result, set upon himself to improve it. He has ideas of roping in teams of doctors from Taiwan and setting up a private hospital in Kuching itself. So far, the progress has been favourable. Let's hope he succeeds.

It so happened that on this day, I was around when they were called on to attend to a case of an old lady in her eighties.

The hospital quotes her as suffering from: TB (?), Malignancy – none.

With her lungs filled with liquid, they sent her home saying there's nothing more they could do for her; go home and...

Since then, the doctor had taken upon himself to attend to what he called a hopeful case. After giving her the drips, medications and so forth, she had recovered to the point where she could sit up, talk and be quite happy. That was three days ago and now, they are calling for help.

As for what happened next, the poem more or less narrates it.

As I watched her gasping, memories of my critical time back in Lahad Datu flooded back. There, I was gasping like she did. Even as I decided to let go and die, it wouldn't. Instead, excruciating pains pounded onto the brains. At those moments, a second was like a million years. But then, even if those around understood, what could they do? Well, being around definitely helps... even if you can't do anything to relieve the physical pain; you can relieve mental agony.

Dr. Lim, I noticed, was in his element. These things, he says, he has done a thousand times. You can see him moving around doing his part plus the nurses' part (if they were there) confidently.

At moments such as these, the doctor is the captain of the ship. Such is the worthiness of knowledge and experience. Without him, you can imagine the confusion.

It was surprising how quickly the change of events took place. One moment she seemed well, the next moment things took a plunge. This was the first time I saw someone giving another the CPR (cardio pulmonary resuscitation). This was also the first time I sat there fanning someone at the moment of her death. Although the heart and lungs stopped functioning when the doctor gave up, I could see that she was still there. Only after sometime did the body seem lifeless. It's not as easy to know the exact moment as I had previously thought possible.

It was just as well I came, to make things better for the old lady. So I told the children not to wail and cry as it may disturb her peace of mind and thus, cause an unfavourable rebirth. They do not seem to understand although they tried to comply. After some chanting, I tried to tell them to share merits. That was when the youngest son rushed back empty-handed from the hospital and started wailing at the top of his voice. After awhile, I stopped when I thought it was as much as I could do.

O yes, Sorrow has not yet left the house. Life goes on.

As for the visions, they are mental images that flashed in and out. Being sceptical about such things, I usually ignore them. But this time it was interesting and came about in a way beyond my expectations. So, I recorded them in the poetry to add interest. Interesting, isn't it?

## HONOURABLE TREES

Men are honoured  
Should they plant trees  
For they bestow blessings  
Of green life on Earth  
But when our teacher came  
And planted trees  
It's they who are honoured instead.

Tall trees they are  
From the family of beans  
The Kekatong and the Kempas  
Welcome in  
Into the family of virtuous men.

19 DECEMBER 1995  
*Santisukharama, Kota Tinggi, Johor*

## IN THE NAME OF FREEDOM

With a sky filled with rain,  
Many are caught within and without.  
For the adventurous, the daring,  
The determined and those  
Who like caged birds,  
knows the impending dread,  
Shall not wait to seek  
What may be called a genuine escape.

In the name of Freedom,  
This one pretty birdie is set free  
For Mr. Wind,  
And this one's for me.  
More for all the Yogis in Malaysia,  
And more for Yogis in the whole wide world.

Six birds it is for peace in the world,  
Six more for lovers with hearts entwined,  
That they too may disentangle craving's net  
And at last be freed!

Fly little birds fly,  
Fly with our hearts into the void.

Fly, for thy freedom's bought  
By a generous heart  
And one who knows what freedom is.

28 DECEMBER 1995

*Santisukharama, Kota Tinggi, Johor*



Today happens to be my birthday. While others celebrate a birthday in other ways, Buddhists celebrate it by performing meritorious deeds.

I remember being told once that one ought to recollect that birth as a human being is a result of meritorious action (wholesome kamma) and is rare. Rarer still is for a human to meet with the Teachings of the Buddha. That is why Buddhists perform acts of charity, morality and meditation. Today, after some hoo-hah, I slipped out for a drive with a friend whom I called Mr. Wind in the poem. On the way back, I decided to set free some birds. At the pet shop, Mr. Wind generously offered to buy them, saying, money is not the problem. After all, isn't freedom priceless?

We bought three pairs of chestnut munias, three pairs of scaly breasted munias, three pairs of peaceful doves and a most colourful pair whose name I do not know. The last pair was set free in the name of freedom for Mr. Wind and myself. The peaceful doves, three for our yogis and three for yogis of the world. The scaly breasted munias for the peace of the

world, and the last and plainest, for lovers. That's because they don't deserve the best birds. They wouldn't have got themselves into trouble if they took up meditation with enough seriousness.

## DEATH AT OUR DOORSTEP

It seemed like she was going to live forever,  
But she did not.  
Last night she died,  
After a brief illness concerning her heart.  
Before this,  
It seemed like nothing could trouble her,  
That old lady  
Who must be far into her seventies,  
With hair all white,  
Eyes now fiery, now vacant,  
Skin rough, seasoned,  
Tough as a wire,  
And a face which seemed numbed  
Into an unintelligent look,  
From many years of hard living.

Maybe it was that childish simplicity  
Of village folk,  
Or maybe it was acceptance of an inconsiderate society  
During those days gone by,  
When she was sold and sold again,  
That had made her such an earthly  
Gnome-like creature.  
Now I wish I had been more compassionate,

Less indifferent,  
Despite those crude ways,  
Despite her cynical, screaming laughter  
whenever she came around.  
After all, she was somebody's mother,  
After all, we always waved to each other  
Whenever we passed by the doorway  
Of our goodly neighbour.

Now her children sends her off  
With clash of cymbals,  
With blare of trumpets,  
With melodies shouted out loud  
By Taoist priests,  
And paid for with a hefty sum  
With their meagre earnings.

Even in life she did not  
Have an honour such as this,  
All that fuss and extravagance,  
They made it as if  
She had finally returned back to  
“Ancient China.”

or WHERE EVER THAT MAY BE.

Death at our doorstep,  
Came silently and took her away,  
Only after she had left,  
Did they blow their pipes.  
Uninvited, she came,  
Uninvited, she went,  
Seeing her gone,  
Makes me feel kind of sad  
For one who lived

A precious human life  
Without really learning  
The precious Teachings  
And its practice  
Even though she had lived  
Next to an Insight Meditation Centre  
For over 10 long years.

3 JANUARY 1996

*Santisukharama, Kota Tinggi, Johor*



Everyone who comes to the hermitage will first have to pass through two old wooden shanties. Sometimes newcomers arrive in disappointment, wondering if either one of these could be the hermitage they have heard about. The first one is inhabited by a family with the surname "Tham," who own their land which was originally, and is to some extent still covered by rubber trees from which they earn their income. The one most familiar to us is Ah Kow. "Kow," I learnt means "9", unlike some people calling their children "Kow", meaning "dog" in Chinese, with the belief that it can divert evil spirits from taking away their son in youth.

The "Tham" family members are what you can call very earthy people. They live off the land and are also often covered by earth. Even their children would run bare-footed very naturally and freely over rocks and stones. From what I learnt, the family had two mothers. The one who lived and died here was the younger one, but by all means, no longer young. She must have been in her late seventies.

When I first came here, they were my immediate neighbours. The old lady would, once in a while, drop in during those early days, when I stayed in a building which was a little larger than a hut. I had not always welcomed her company for two reasons. Firstly, they could not understand that I would rather have more silence to meditate than to speak of worldly matters. So, when I was nicer to them, she and her son would come more often and sit longer. Secondly, she would always bring along with her a large company of mosquitoes. But as a good neighbour, I did try to entertain her sometimes and believe me, I did try to tell them about meditation or something like that.

Even if we had not been extremely close, at least our relationship was congenial. We should at least be grateful that they allowed us free passage through their land all these years. A nice thing was that every time we passed by their doorway, they would wave and smile, a fine greeting before and after the hermitage.

Just this morning while passing by their house again, we were told that she had died in the middle of the night. It seems that she had not been well for the past two months. Now that she is gone and the sound of death-ceremonies echoed into my room, I thought I felt a bit sad. Had she had more faith, she would have gained much. But these people aren't the intellectual type. Only Ah Kow seems to be more receptive and he participates in our activities once in a while.

## SPRING AND WINTER

That's when the flowers bloom,  
That's when the magic bells ring,  
To the song of the cool winds  
In dry January.

That's when the rain-soaked land  
Breathes with "Leagues of fragrances",  
That's when the pesky mozzies leave us  
Alone to our meditations.

At this time of the year,  
It is the best time of the year,  
At our hermitage of peace,  
It is now both spring and winter

5 JANUARY 1996

*Santisukharama, Kota Tinggi, Johor*



After a long spell of rainy weather for two months (and oh, how it does rain in Kota Tinggi!), the cool dry season that follows is a welcome. The flowers come into bloom as never before in other times of the year and the mosquitoes are minimal. The temperature falls to a chilly level at night and the small number of yogis made the hermitage truly deserving of its name – Peaceful and Blissful.

Unfortunately, this is also the time when I can afford to visit other places, and so will be absent from here most of the time.

Incidentally "League of fragrance" refers to a flowering bush or small tree called "Mock orange" or

“Murraya paniculata” in scientific terms. The Chinese here call it “7 miles fragrance,” but elsewhere I have read of it being called “9 miles fragrance.” That mile must be a Chinese mile – the “Li” – which is how long? The League is about 8 miles and so, it lies in-between. At this time of the year, it is in full bloom. So it has been issuing a strong, intoxicating fragrance all around us for days.

## DEATH IN THE HOUSE

If you know that life has an ending in time,  
Then that's the time she has been anticipating.

To-day my mother died,  
I could only recognise her when she could speak,  
When she became withdrawn and an invalid,  
Was it her, where is she?

Seeing her pallid corpse lying on the bed  
Fingers cramped, legs bent  
Through Parkinson's disease,  
It's as if she's fast asleep  
Is that her, Is she dead?

Ever since I left home  
I saw little of her,  
Not that I did not think,  
And now if I do,  
Is it a dream of a dream?  
What has become of her,  
What rebirth did she take,  
Will someone please tell me?

Mother's life is past,  
Other relatives I see  
Aged, hair white,  
I see in their faces, a knowledge  
And maybe sadness too,  
A helplessness to the scythe of time,  
That their exit is also near,  
Where will they end up in,  
Who can tell me?

7 JANUARY 1996  
*Wisdom Centre, Petaling Jaya*

## CREMATION

Burn fire burn,  
With flames to the sky,  
Burn away what was once  
That dear mother of mine,  
Burn her coffin painted gold,  
Burn her body to ashes and bone.  
For all your crimson tongues of flames,  
You cannot touch the mind –  
That tangled ball of kammic forces  
Gathered in those years in the world of Man,  
Have flown to a birth beyond the random thoughts  
Of even her closest kin.  
With the mind gone,  
the body turns corpse,  
Consumed by fire,  
The corpse is earth,  
And the Earth remains ever changing.

9 JANUARY 1996  
*Buddhist Wisdom Centre, Petaling Jaya*



## RETURN TO THE SEA

The fire had reduced everything to a collection  
of bones in assorted shapes  
Washed in colours of cherry pink,  
Rose quartz  
Deep aquamarine  
Citrine  
Laundry white marble  
Among grey ash and black charcoal.

We take you on your final journey  
From the grave crematorium to a jetty bustling with life,  
Onto a lone tugboat to where the river meets the sea.  
The sky was gently drizzling,  
No hot sun beating hard on our heads,  
There we scatter you in handfuls,  
We see you vanish into the lime green depths  
As you wished.  
No waves leapt as your feet would  
In the way you used to dance,  
No sways rocked the boat as your hips would  
As when you would rumba in jest.  
Only gentle heaves of relief breathe and cast  
A sense of freedom across  
The vast waters, open space.

Mother! You are now free to satiate your wander lust,  
Journey in all 8 directions to tour the 8 great continents.

When the earth returns to the great waters,  
Only the great waters remain,  
Heaving monstrous sighs,

Raising waves or relief,  
To a broken horizon.

10 JANUARY 1996

*Buddhist Wisdom Centre, Petaling Jaya*



I would think that she seemed to have chosen the right time to die. I had just arrived the night before in Kuala Lumpur to hold a retreat and so was available to contact the right people to conduct the final rites according to Buddhist rituals, which was simple, neat, practical as well as meaningful. As to this ceremony, I must thank the Sri Lankan monks, especially Ven. Sarnankara of Sentul temple, and Ven. Vijita of Brickfields temple who came for chanting. Ven. Mahinda also gave an inspiring Dhamma talk to my family although I was not there at that time. I must also thank Mrs. Tan Teik Beng who so efficiently contacted the relevant people. Finally also to all the Buddhist friends who found the time to be supportive at this solemn occasion.

She died just before 3.00pm on Sunday, 7th January. She had been rendered invalid for the last two years by Parkinson's and Alzheimer's diseases. The doctor said she probably died of old age. My sister-in-law who had been attending to her said she had difficulty in eating and was not well in the last few hours. Other than that, there were no obvious signs. During these last years she was quite withdrawn, and in that sense I could not reach her when I visited her, although she was around. Seeing her pale

corpse on the bed, made me think that the body is just a reflection of a greater existence of the mind that works behind it. Really, if you think about it, when one's communication with another has been cut off, then one is as if dead to the other. Even if you happen to see him, it's just a shadow or a ghost.

I can remember vividly the little square window of the furnace. The flames leapt up licking hungrily at the gold-painted coffin. A dramatic ending to a body of someone who had lived 79 years on earth. An end to a tale of tales which I have been part of. Just think of the thoughts, emotions, and all the play in her world that stretched from Singapore, Southern China and finally, Malaysia. Surely this song of the final flames is a deserving conclusion. The bones we collected the following day were of an unusually pretty rich pink colour. Some of them were coral blue while others tinged orange. As I threw them in handfuls into the sea as she requested, I cannot help but feel a surge of freedom, a feeling that she is now free to roam the universe as she wished, and that she is now happy.

## RETURN TO THE EARTH

There will not be any impressive granite tablet  
For your ashes  
With your name and origins carved and inscribed  
in golden calligraphy  
Neither will it be buried among hills of gravestones  
stretching through centuries

As did our ancestors  
As did father's corpse  
In a Chinese Association's cemetery

Rather,  
We will lay them down  
Under a young pine tree resplendent in the sun  
With needles that shooting any rain  
Growing in a patch of sand  
In holy vipassana ground

We will lay them down  
Mixed well with the fertile earthy grains  
To feed the Holy Bodhi tree  
Growing on the slope  
And be one with it  
Ashes to the Earth  
Earth to the tree  
Tree to the air  
Let Mother be free

Her body is no more  
The mind, where has it strayed?  
Memories linger on  
Till they be buried  
By our own Deaths.

4 FEBRUARY 1996  
*Santisukharama, Kota Tinggi*



A last note, when I buried my mother's ashes under two trees at Santisukharama. One was a pine tree and the other, the Bodhi.

## FOOD DEVA

Displaying vivid colours and luscious shapes,  
Odours that water the mouth,  
Textures that titillate both teeth and tongue,  
They all crowd in demanding attention.

You must try each and every dish,  
My food advisor commands,  
These have been cooked full with faith and care,  
Especially this one that I did.  
Don't you dare to disappoint us!

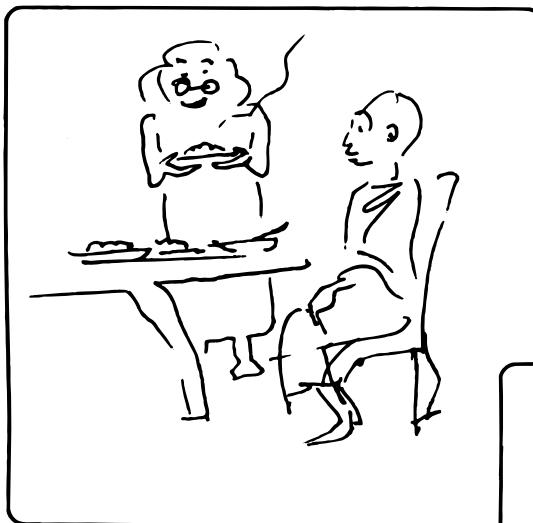
Taking meals here is like riding through a storm,  
The world comes down raining  
Chickens and ducks,  
Mushroomed soup and slaughtered salad dish,  
Macrobiotic specialists' specialities  
And sauna-bathed fish,  
Snow-cream galore and Michelangelo-sculptured fruits  
Catch-you nuts plus cushion-cakes,  
Makes you think that you've just arrived  
At a delightful Porky Pig's paradise,  
All that's needed to blow up an already bloated belly,  
Just the thing to turn your mindfulness topsy-turvy.  
But be thankful you're not starving while others are,  
Be sure not to be greedy while you're a FOOD-DEVA!

12 JANUARY 1996

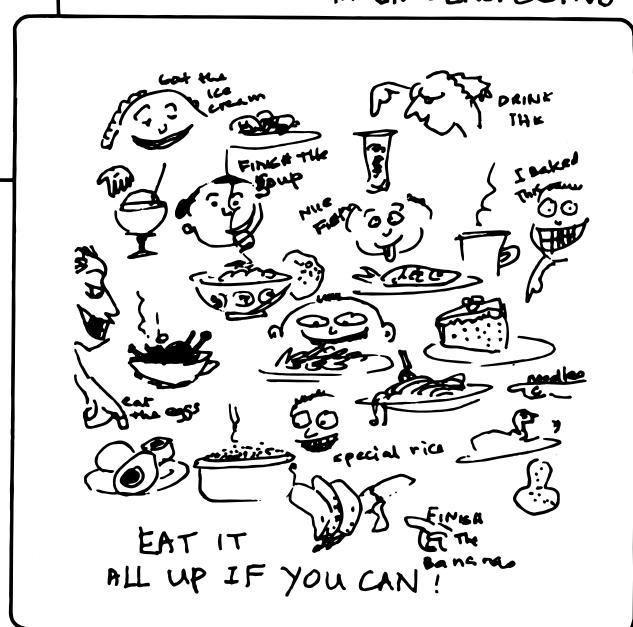
*Buddhist Wisdom Centre, Petaling Jaya*



There is no doubt that there is much Dana  
(alms-giving) spirit in Kuala Lumpur. Even in



ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE



OUTER PERSPECTIVE

Wisdom Centre, which is a relatively small place, the food brought in is plentiful. Every breakfast and lunch is a feast. Going through it is like going through a storm.

## TAIPING'S HANGING TREE

A shrunken old man  
Took me round the lake,  
Showed me trees  
As haggard as his head,  
Searched for Saga seeds  
'neath a dainty shade,  
Found a teeny weeny bead.

Across a busy bend,  
Proudly reminded us,  
How the celebrated "Rains"  
Arch and stretch,  
Cheekily pointed out  
To a Tamarind tree,  
Where many a broken heart  
Hanged themselves there

Its branches bent low,  
Thickly set, velvety pods,  
Holding them in my hands,  
My palms and fingers turned sour,  
Smelling its strong odour,  
Lungs crushed astringent airs,  
So I threw them away –  
Those sour seeds of a sour tree,

I suppose I do not need a world  
More sour than what have we.

19 JANUARY 1996  
*Taiping, Perak*



There's nothing more sacrilegious to a tree than to hang yourself on one of its branches. This is just what happened to this Tamarind tree in the Taiping Lake Gardens, and I wonder why they all chose this particular one. Some trees are known to house evil spirits. Some of these beings can become violent and murderous if you try to chop down their abode (the tree). Even tractor engines are mysteriously turned off when they approach it.

The hangings on this tree occurred before and after the war, but not in recent times. I dared my attendant Gek Ann to go near it. He proceeded to swing nonchalantly on one of its branches.

## THE WIND IN THE FOREST

That I may forget myself  
And the world  
That I may destroy craving  
Abandon hate  
That I may see the end of  
Birth and Death  
I think of the Wind  
In the forest



That forest dweller who shuns the world  
And society  
Wears a tattered brown robe of a past  
Solemn tradition  
He yearns for the freedom from  
Conditioned existence  
He is the Wind in the forest

Leaves rustle, leaves fall  
On the roof top  
Robes flap, feet ruffle  
As he walks  
Mind notes intently on  
Arising and Dissolution of  
Mind and material states  
Like falling rain drops  
Thus the wind moves  
Stealthily, daily,  
In the forest

After the peak of day  
After a brief rest,  
Leaves stand still expecting  
Birds silently sit to watch  
As he concentrates  
Retreats to a world beyond sensuality  
Where respiration becomes imperceptible  
Each pulse seems like eternal cessation  
But the beat of life continues  
The Inner Wind still stirs though reduced  
Watch the waves in the sea of feelings  
Follow the winds of thought as they roam  
In the arena of creation  
Winds within the wind  
In the forest

Calls of crickets at the doorstep  
He ignores  
Tok-tok night-jars knock at the ear base  
The mind merely acknowledges  
Lonely nights creep in  
Darkness darker than ink squeeze between  
Still he meditates, still he pushes on  
Longer than late

Wait great man, wait a wait  
As long as indefinite  
Call and call like cicadas to no avail,  
And yet still he calls  
For the gate-less gate  
The mind knows no limits  
says he, so rise high  
That faith to strive  
Forbearing patience likewise  
As trees that grow to touch the sky

Then one day, just maybe one day  
Hope upon hope, (What loss is there?)  
That silence pounds away ten thousand drums  
The mind a sword, cuts through eternal suns  
A flashing lightning runs across infinite space  
Black from no beginning to no end  
The forest breaks asunder, rolling apart  
Entire heavens crumble down falling on his head  
Yet the wind keeps still, void of mind and heart,  
Remains untouched.

6 FEBRUARY 1996  
*Santisukharama, Kota Tinggi, Johor*



For many of us, there is an ideal who lives like an ascetic in the forest. If he has not yet attained to the highest state of Arahattaship, then he is striving very hard for it. At least I do not have any illusions of the difficulties of such a forest life, and I hope none of you do either. It can be unpleasant, especially in the tropics where the humidity is high and blood-thirsty insects are abundant. But burdened by a lot of worldly responsibilities or missionary undertakings, one cannot help but think of the nobler task of striving. At this point, my mind went to a friend who lives somewhere in the forest or a place like a forest. He is living out his daily routine and is also striving. So, I paint a pretty picture of him as best as I can – being one of the few you can find around this country. I also wish that I will soon spend more time in that manner... like "The Wind in the Forest".

## WHEN YOU LEFT

When you left,  
You left me with a stack of large numbered notes  
Concealed in paper packets red with fervent well wishes,  
Notes whose real value I know little of, except suspect  
Its joys and sorrows,  
Blessings and responsibilities.  
If you had known of my disillusionment with material  
comforts,  
Would you still have given lavishly?  
I would not have minded if you didn't.

Do you then not think that having such an attitude  
Is the best way to honour your generosity?  
Detachment, after all, is superior to gratefulness.

When you left,  
You left me with a reality severe with detachment,  
Something I had known a long time,  
Embedded like a jewelled pin stuck deep in the chest,  
Shining over all worldly paraphernalia.  
If you had known of my disillusionment with people and  
feelings,  
Would you still consider me a friend,  
Or even a human being?  
I will understand if you didn't,  
But be reminded that we have avowed ourselves  
To practise to the end of the world,  
A practice that places detachment above compassion.

Who would have thought?  
Who would have thought  
That the severity itself is strength,  
And that strength, freedom,  
And that freedom, peace,  
And that peace, so very empty?  
All rooted in detachment,  
So alike bitterness.  
When you left,  
All these were very clear,  
That I shall love it ever more,  
That I shall cleave the heart apart,  
With a strength I know little of,  
But suspect  
Its limitless dimensions.

14 FEBRUARY 1996  
Santisukharama, Kota Tinggi, Johor



A couple of friends left the hermitage after their retreat. As usual, in their appreciation, they offered money for requisites, and it was of a considerable sum. I could not help noticing the feelings that arose, and interesting it was!

## NEW YEAR CROWD

Packed like sardines on the floor at night,  
Walking like flies all over the halls by day,  
Sit like ticks sticking near walls to meditate,  
Yogis from all over come here in search of peace.

New year's festive season should be in different mood,  
Instead we have solemn faces, peaceful faces,  
And faces cringing in pain,  
Hearts that are tired, hearts that are anxious,  
Hearts that long for the unconditioned state.  
Come my friend, join in the noble chase.

Celebrations have become meaningless when you see suffering,  
So they all cram in here breathing down each others' necks.  
Mosquitoes instead will feast, so will the flies,  
Ants too take ample shares and the rest are for the birds.

Sure, it's better than gambling poker,  
Or drowning in booze, or running all over.  
But with all this crowding, the teacher too gets tired,

I'd say we need a bigger place, and many more teachers.  
Come anyway, the more the merrier!

23 FEBRUARY 1996

*Santisukharama, Kota Tinggi, Johor*



Once in a span of many years, the Chinese New Year and the Islamic Hari Raya coincide. This is because both follow the lunar calendar. When this happens, people get a long stretch of holiday. So, we were expecting an increase in the number of yogis this season. The number went up to 76, a record for the season. Many just popped in for a few days without informing us, but we didn't have the heart to turn them away. As a result, the conditions weren't too conducive. Anyhow, it's a good sign that the Dhamma is becoming more important than traditional culture. After all, it's a better way to spend the holidays.

## MR KIK-KOK WYATT EARP

Now he drives a Mercedes Benz  
Now he drives a Pajero  
He must be a filthy rich businessman  
He who's short and slim and bent.  
But Oh what suffering he has!  
For over a decade he's been kik-koking  
When he walks, he kik-koks followed by an "urp"  
When he talks, he kik-koks and then an "urp"

When he sits, he kik-koks, urps  
When he eats, he kik-koks, urps  
When he sleeps, he kik-koks, urps  
When he prays, he KICK-KOKS, URPS, OOPS, ERKS!  
When he tries to meditate, he  
KIKETY-KIK-KIK-KOK-KOK-KOK  
KIK-KOK KIK-KOK KIKETY-KIK-KOKETY-KOK-KIK-KOK  
URP-URP-OOP-ERK-HOOH-HOOT-HONK-HONK!  
After that it will be  
Sigh, sigh, SIGH!!!  
Will it be like this till I die?  
Others around however will wonder  
Is it a frog, an owl but what animal?  
That burps so loudly,  
Hoots and honks both morning and night?  
Oh No! It's not all that  
It's Toadie Wyatt Urp.  
What???  
Toady-boy Wyatt Earp!!!  
That's who!

2 March 1996  
*Santisukharama, Kota Tinggi, Johor*



A man turned up one day with a chronic throat problem. He said it arises when a pressure from his abdomen produces discomfort and thus forces him to cough and hiccup. He also believes that all this started when someone charmed him by making him eat something. He had been cured once but when it relapsed, no one could do anything. Life, he said, is really suffering since then.

I really could not promise him a cure, but meditation I assured him, will definitely help. So, I accepted him not without concern, because it seems he has sleepless nights and at times, thinks of killing someone. At first, he was quite a distraction. His hiccups and burps were really loud. Many thought a strange animal had come close to the yogis. But slowly, you can see him becoming calmer. At least, the mental suffering was reduced. Later, he even became a novice monk for a while, and this reduced the problem further. He is obviously happier after that. But as in all cases, meditation has to be maintained. When he returns to work and forgets about meditation, I fear a relapse may occur. But I was right – meditation did help...

# AUSTRALIA POEMS

## KOOKABURRA

Kookaburra sits on a wickety gum twig  
Screaming demonically  
HOO HOO HAR HAR, HOO HOO HAR HAR HAR!  
Old-men gum trees with beardie leaves,  
Ribbon-peeled bark that sag and shake.  
This is a land of gum trees,  
Over 600 species, you say.  
To me they all look quite the same.  
If you have a sniffle or a cold,  
Pluck a leaf, crush it,  
Then stick it into your nose,  
Free aromatherapy is available  
All along their roads.  
So chop down the pines,  
Pull out scottish brooms,  
Save the space for Natives,  
It's the conservationist's line.  
So it's good-bye to pretty English gardens,  
That golden red flair of autumn oaks,  
Soon too will go,  
It's raggy, shaggy time.

## THE CURRAWONG BIRD

Kurak Krong Kreek!  
Hong Hong Whew Wheeee...  
That madcap Currawong Bird's at it again  
Singing his crazy song, driving me nuts



Hah! You aren't different from your  
Ugly cousin, the black scavenger, the dirty crow  
Even though you may wear patches of white  
You scrounge on rubbish heaps,  
Eat up worms and other yucky stuff  
Curse you, you crazy bird!

## AUSTRALIAN YOGIS

Australian yogis,  
Quieter than us.  
When it comes to meditation,  
There's not much difference.  
Struggle, struggle, note, note,  
A little progress made is better than  
Getting worse.

Old MacDonald pops up in the mornings and evenings  
Cracks corny jokes, Beams out sunny smiles,  
The little Malaysian Ducklet tries to play along,  
Quacks a silly Penang joke but no one laughs.

Two Burmese ladies appeared one day,  
With abundant food for the monk and the rest,  
The fatty one is articulate,  
The quiet doctor asks for my business card.

Jim in his fifties,  
A bubbling spring of youth,  
Took us on a long 5-hr trip,  
Just to see the nursery where he works,  
And I wonder which is more interesting,  
That drive, the nursery or him.

## APPLES

Red apples, green apples,  
Heavy, large and round.  
'tis the first time I ever saw  
Such delicious dreams hanging down,  
Pulling low wrinkled branches  
and someone else's dripping tongue.

Red apples, green apples,  
Heavy, large and round,  
Sweet with imaginations,  
Sour with fantasies,  
Tasty baits hanging down  
From trees to stir up  
Greed and naughty thoughts  
In someone sitting around.



Written at various dates in March, Blue  
Mountains.

## LYRE BIRD TRAIL

Way below the arid struggling gum tree cliffs,  
Step after stones between shafts and trunks,  
Follow the water snaking with the rocks and grass,  
Here you'll hear the Lyre Bird's song.

Walkety me walketoo walk me a happy walk  
Me the Lyre Bird walk along me Lyre Bird walk  
Strollety me strolletoo stroll me a quiet stroll

Me no worry bird couldn't careless what comes along  
Skippety me skippettoo skip me a skip alone  
Me the King here, even men respect me here  
This is my undisputed land, you know?  
Hoppety me hoppetoo hop me a merry hop  
What a lovely day this day surely is a Lyre Bird's day  
now,  
Struttety me struttetoo strut me a jolly strut O yea!  
I've gobbled up me catch and am now going home to  
rest...

Oh, oh... This Duck Loon's coming too close with his  
idiot camera. Bloody Bastard! He's ruined my nice day's  
walk!

Flee flee flee  
Never trust a man with a bird's name in his  
And this chap's got two  
so flee flee flee!

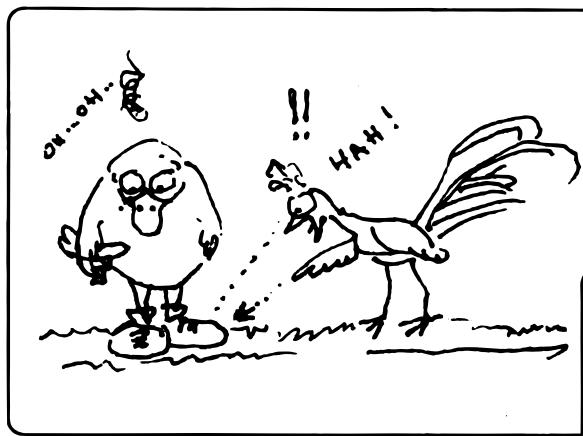
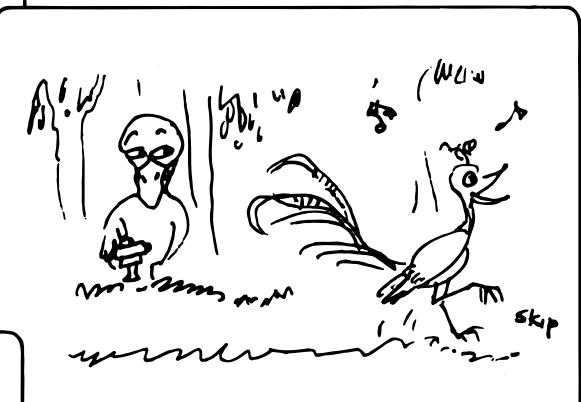
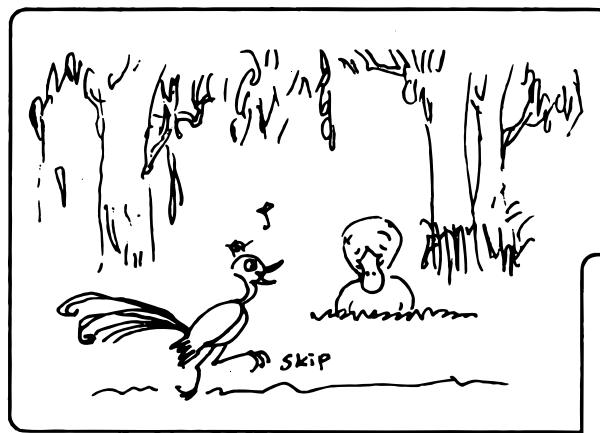
25 MARCH 1996

*Blue Mountains, New South Wales, Australia*

## SYDNEY HARBOUR

Blue sky above,  
Blue waters surround,  
Free winds, free ships,  
An iron bridge, an opera house.

Clear mind above,  
Clear feelings abound,  
Thoughts flying fast, a sailing gull,  
And a heart filled with song.



Is this my new harbour in life?  
If so, the sun shines,  
My heart's happy and love flies to touch  
All as the waves touch all shores.

Rise good Kamma, rise,  
What fear have I of thee?  
Friends are plenty here and food is fine,  
Even the Great Pan who blows his magic flute smiles!  
My ship of mindfulness have come to Australia,  
Great country of the South.

26 MARCH 1996

*Sydney, New South Wales, Australia*

## SURFING

Surfers at Byron Bay,  
Ants jumping off tricky rockheads  
Waiting for the next wave to sweep  
Them up to the top of the World.

Then with a thunderous crash,  
And a graceful sweep to the side,  
Among the splashing waves, see him ride,  
Ride on the crest of his wish  
Go man, go,  
You're the King of the Surf!

It's all a matter of concentration and balance,  
Harmony of body, mind and the surge of the waters,  
It's all a matter of excitement and achievement,  
Forgetting the worrisome world outside,  
Total involvement in the here and now.



Surfers of Samsara in Nibbana Coast,  
Meditating under trees or in hermit's cells,  
They too are waiting for the next surge  
Of concentrated awareness,  
To lift them up to higher consciousness.

Then with a thunderous crash of determination,  
And a graceful sweep of mindfulness noted to precision,  
Lose yourself to the flow of Nature,  
Go man, go  
To the unconditioned.

30 MARCH 1996

*Byron Bay, New South Wales, Australia*

## HANG GLIDING

Align the body straight,  
Perpendicularly across those flimsy wings,  
Jump over the cliff hundreds of feet steep,  
Trust the fancies of the Easterly winds,  
Your life's in your twiggy hands!

Soar bearded batman,  
Rise high slim ladybird,  
Relish that feeling of Man aloft the world,  
Up there in the sky will you ever think  
That way down below  
Those rich blues of the sea  
Those deep greens of the trees  
Those black-browns of the rocks  
Is the colour of your Death?

30 MARCH 1996

*Byron Bay, New South Wales, Australia*



## MOON

White moon over Lismore,  
While you sleep I stand awake  
In front of the window watching  
How the night sweeps you under  
Dream-time's carpet;  
As I bathe in her silvery streams,  
My heart has flown to the pitch dark heavens.  
Love has crossed another ocean,  
Finds a home in a different continent.

30 MARCH 1996

*Lismore, New South Wales, Australia.*

## DEATH IN AUSTRALIA

So,  
Australians also die,  
Feel sad, be grief stricken,  
Break down and cry.  
Done perhaps discreetly behind closed doors,  
Before compassionate psychotherapists,  
At decorated funeral parlours  
With their death expertise.  
Nevertheless,  
They still die,  
Break down and cry!  
Something you'd never thought would happen here,  
But the fact is they do,  
When they themselves would not believe it too!  
What a marvellous facade they have made,  
A corpse with a painted face,  
Embalmed in formalin,  
Thoroughly sanitised.

But Oh! Death still hangs heavily in the air,  
Oppressiveness sticks to all who dare  
Venture into their stations of exit from life  
Where the bell tolls for all!

31 MARCH 1996

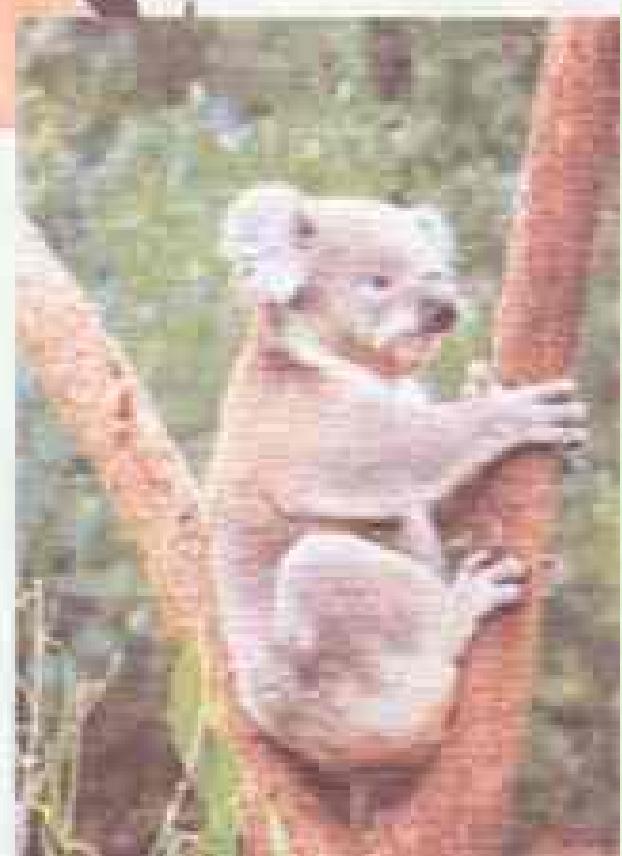
*Lismore, New South Wales, Australia*

## HEALESVILLE SANCTUARY

1. Pickety peckety cheeky little parakeet,  
Picks and pecks at the tips of my spectacles.  
O No! Now it's looking at my ear holes.
2. Boppety bumpety little clock-work mice,  
Miniature Charlie Chaplins  
Hop and jump and crash.
3. Slimy, slippery sleek venomous snakes,  
Kiss them passionately and you're sure to die.
4. Ibis with ugly black wrinkled skin-heads,  
A commoner, a scavenger,  
They're all over the place.  
When they come near,  
Watch out for those  
Long prodding chop-stick beaks,  
If one picks a piece of food out of you,  
Woe! The whole pack attacks.
5. Teddy Koala Bears,  
Moving slow and steady,  
Looking cute and cuddly,  
But they're probably too heavy  
For you to carry.

6. The Wombat is round and fat,  
Too small for a pig,  
Too big for a rat.
7. Kangaroos hopping,  
Loose triangles jumping,  
On one of its tips.
8. Echidnas,  
A little wave  
From the sea of thorns  
That have strayed  
Too far off  
Till it got lost  
In Australia.
9. Duck-billed Platypuses,  
A bit of a fish,  
A bit of a bird,  
But essentially a mammal.  
Does the taste of it  
Also have a bit of each?  
Perish that thought!
10. Dingo Bongo  
Doggo of outbacko  
Kept inside you don't look so wildo  
But I'll rather not try to  
Venture near you  
For I'm not yet ready to die-o.

2 APRIL 1996  
*Melbourne, Victoria, Australia*



## KING AMONG TREES

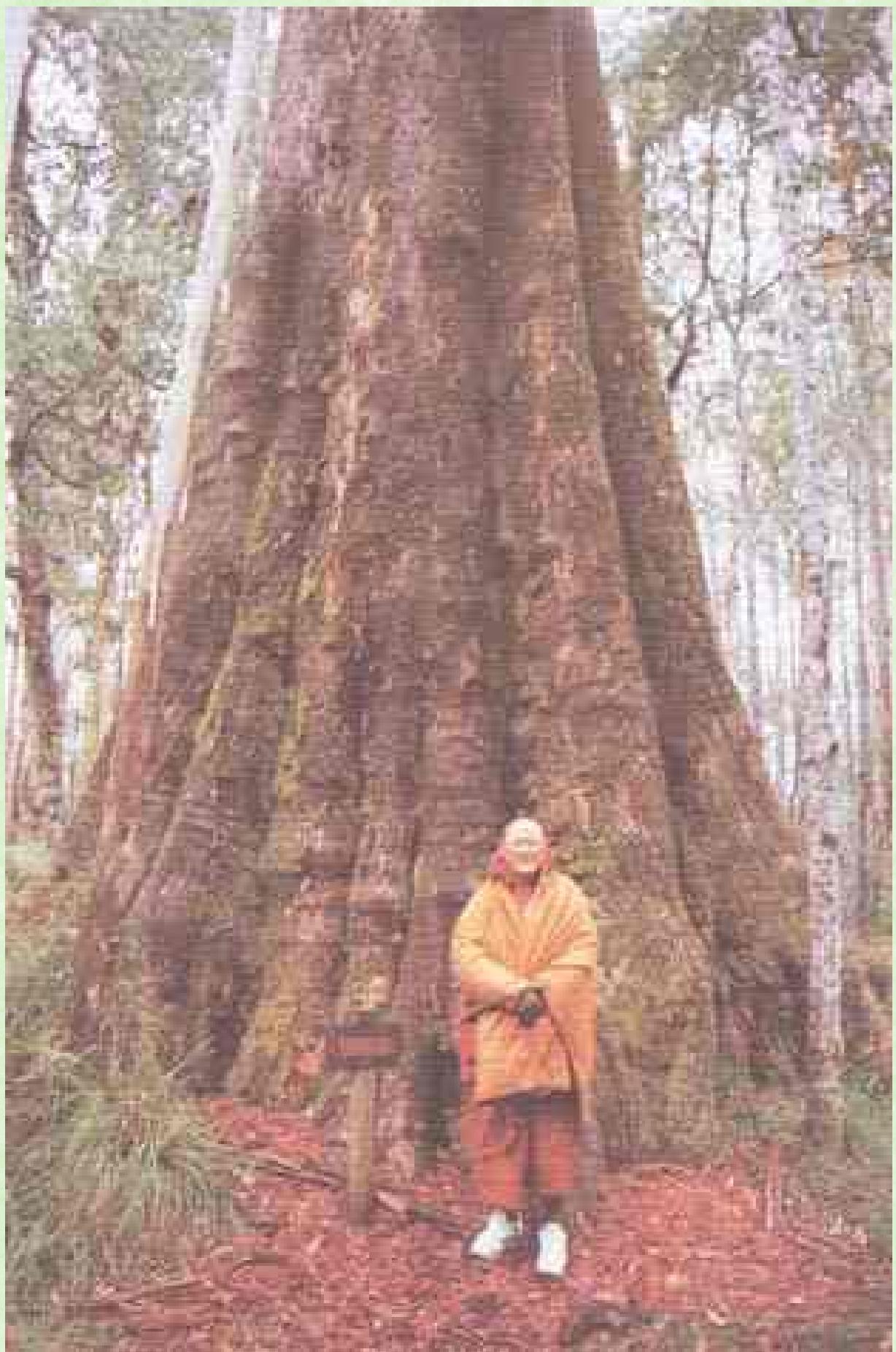
Where the big trees are,  
Moss and ferns carpet the earth,  
Mists and fog roam the hills,  
And Man is lost in myth.

Worship the king of trees,  
The Mountain Ash,  
The Tallest in the Land.  
Worship the very spot  
Where he stands,  
Worship him and you worship Man.

Reverence to its birth from a little seed,  
Reverence to its growth, surviving hundreds of years,  
Reverence to its Death to remember well  
Your duty to conserve the Earth.

I am a tree worshipper,  
I am a Nature worshipper,  
I want to be a big tree.  
I want you to be a big tree,  
Love life,  
And Live fully  
With Wisdom.

2 APRIL 1996  
*Melbourne, Victoria, Australia.*



# BLACKWOODS

## DANDELIONS

Fallen sunbeams that vanished yesterday  
With the setting sun,  
Are reborn as little yellow outbursts  
Of Dandelions.  
The field sings its praise  
To the light and the air,  
And for the love of the Earth.

## KOOKABURRAS

Kookaburras of the Blackwoods,  
Are as wild as they are tame,  
Lovable fluffy white balls  
With intensely fierce stares  
And cruel sharp beaks,  
Snuggled comfortably on the branch  
They watch me watch them watch me  
Comfortably sitting on a chair.  
Give a piece of meat,  
And we're friends.

3 APRIL 1996  
*Blackwoods, Victoria, Australia*



## THE THREE STOOGES

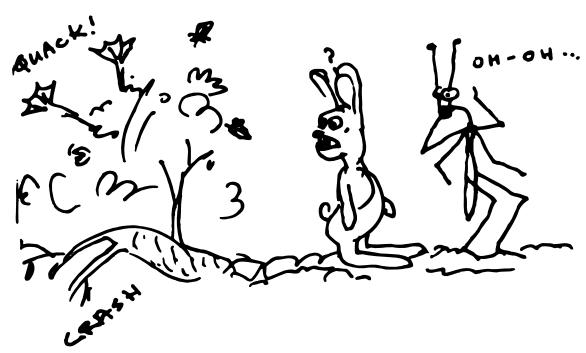
As we bush walked along a trek  
From the garden of St Erth  
Before passing by the Wombat's bottom,  
The black berry briars that bit me in Blue Mountains  
Bit again at the Blackwoods,  
There the duck flipped when his flippers flew  
Instead of his wings,  
When he slipped over slippery stones  
Along the sloping trail,  
His wings got twisted and some muscles were busted  
Together with the sound of a CRACK!  
His face then turned yellower than his flat yellow beak  
And when asked if he was okay,  
He squeaked instead of quacked.  
Poor duckie, he didn't know what hit him.  
Stood up dazed and wondered if he was dead.  
A pair of Kookaburras flying past us  
Laughed and laughed out loud

Oh, there are 3 stooges here, three!

The Tall Gum trees above shook and sighed, amused,  
Confirmed,  
Yes, there are 3 stooges here, three!

Wendy the stick insect, leader of the troupe,  
SugarFat Rabbit the inquisitive goon,  
And of course, Duffy Duck Loon's  
The one who fell down like one shot in the wing,  
It's Duffy Duck Loon, who else?

4 APRIL 1996  
*Blackwoods, Victoria, Australia*



Laugh kookaburra  
Laugh ...  
Laugh ...

## NOTES ON AUSTRALIAN POEMS

### Blue Mountains

Before I went to Australia, I must confess that I did not really know anything about it. What I knew was what little I remembered about the things I had learned in school. Even when the proposed trip to Blue Mountains was planned, I did not do any research into it. After all, I thought, it will be a one-off affair. My main reason for going there was: I wanted to know what it is like to teach westerners. The least I could do was to try my best to earn my keep. Other than that, all else is superfluous. I was in for a pleasant surprise. What struck me most about the trip was how little I knew about Australia, and from what I found out, I liked it.

The obvious question that follows will be, why?

Firstly, space. Australia is a big country or more correctly, a continent. The population is relatively small and so we can find a lot of land and space. This is evident in its cities. For instance, the actual city centre of Sydney is not that big as compared to some Asian cities like Bangkok or New Delhi. Yes, it is modern, clean and beautiful, but not that big. What is big are the sprawling suburbs. Here everyone, well, almost everyone can afford a house with a compound if he makes some effort.

The result is miles and miles of suburban quarters. Once one goes outside these areas, the world around you opens up and you are

sure to find solitude or quietude, and if you know how to control your mind, also peace.

When I arrived at Sydney airport, Donald and others were there to receive us. He then took us, as planned, to lunch at Vincent & Annie Loh's residence. I met this couple back in Kota Tinggi and Kuala Lumpur many years ago. Since then, I only knew that they had migrated to Australia. What a pleasant surprise it was to see old friends again. But this was only the beginning. In the course of time, I discovered many other old friends who had migrated here.

Blue Mountains Insight Meditation Centre certainly did not look at all impressive in the lousy print-out published in a newsletter which Donald had sent me earlier. This was another pleasant surprise. It is actually a very quiet, cosy and beautiful place. The only thing is that it may be a bit small for a large crowd of yogis. About 20 would still be fine, but more than that would be crowded.

The weather during the first two days was rainy and cold. I had the heater on for many hours of the day. But when the sun finally came out, I had begun to marvel at the beauty of the place. If this is what English gardens are about, then they are pretty things.

The garden of the centre was sufficient to entertain me for some time. First of all, there's a huge cypress tree, the largest I have seen so

far. Then there are the hazelnuts, walnuts, apples, and so forth. Being interested in botany since my varsity days, you can imagine the thrill. I had read or seen pictures of these, but now they are an experience. Then there are the natives. To see more of these, one does not have to go far. A short 5-minute walk will take you to a catchment area where there stretches, for many square kilometres, the Australian bush.

In fact, a large part of the Blue Mountains is a national park. For the weeks that followed, it provided me with feast after feast of botanical pleasure.

During my stay, I got acquainted with Ian of Katoomba. They told me that in matters of plants (with their botanical names included), he was the one I would have to speak to. I was not disappointed. Besides trees, he also has great affinity with wildlife. It seems that whenever he goes for a bush trek, he is sure to come across wildlife. On one occasion, sure enough, we encountered a Lyre Bird.

Ian told me that a large percentage of the plants in Australia came from three families – Myrtaceae, Proteaceae and Mimosaceae. What intrigued me most were the Eucalypts. It seemed to me that they made up most of the trees that covered the Blue Mountains. I was also informed that there are somewhere between 600-700 species in the Mountains. I

bought a book on them and it tells you quite a bit with lots of pretty photographs. In the field, however, they all looked quite the same. Well, the bark can be white and peeled, stringy, rough, etc, but did that make up over 600 types? Of course, the flower and fruit structure of these Eucalyptus can also be unique, but you get to see them only when they are in bloom. I guess knowledge of their distribution is crucial to identification.

I have learnt to love Eucalypts, although not right from the start. To begin with, I thought them rather eerie-looking. Ribbons of bark would peel and hang untidily all over the place. The exposed trunks are often white and ghostly-looking. The leaves dangle down, often quite scanty. But just wait till you see a large specimen towering over a hundred or more feet high and you will also be impressed. Then you will find that you have begun to recognise some of them although they may at first look very much alike. Finally I have come to think of the Eucalypts as the basic plant element of Australia itself. The best of all species is, of course, *Eucalyptus Regnans*, the king of them. We saw them during the trip with Wendy. They even labelled the tallest one in the state of Victoria – 275ft, if not for a storm that knocked off part of the canopy, it would have been 305ft. Being among them one can feel so much peace and calm. Nature is calming, healing and this is what many of us must learn.

There's one thing about the people here – they are very concerned about Nature conservation. Here they are trying to get rid of what was introduced and replace them with the natives. So you get some people who are obsessed with chopping down pines which tend to prevent the natives from establishing themselves. Once I saw an old lady frantically pulling out the Spanish broom, a lovely plant with yellow blooms that have invaded the country and pushed the natives out. On looking around, I saw the whole place infested with these. I also wonder how much of it she can get rid of.

Most people I have met also know how to appreciate wildlife, and speak proudly of what is unique to their country – kangaroos, koala bears and so forth. In the wild, I have come across the koala bear in Lismore and the Lyre Bird in the Blue Mountains. The Kookaburra can be found inhabiting places where people feed them, and I have seen them in Sydney itself. At Blackwoods, we can actually feed them off our hands. When men do not harm animals, they will actually come in close contact with men. In Malaysia, they usually keep their distance. Once I tried to build a bird-feeder, and all that came were ants. I have also been asked about animals in Malaysia, I answered: "Oh yes, we have tigers, elephants, wild boars, cobras, pythons, etc." Secretly, I thought to myself that we do not consider it fortunate to have seen some of these in the wild, for we may not survive to narrate it. So

when a westerner comes around and says he wishes to visit our jungles, we think he is crazy. In Australia, they will take you there even if you don't ask. Bush walking is not just a pastime here, it has become a culture.

I have not been to all parts of Australia, but the Blue Mountains is a great place to do bush walking. The area is big and there are many trails. We were taken to a few, such as to the Mini Ha Ha Falls, the Canyon walk, and a short distance of the Wentworth Falls trail. The landscape and vegetation are all quite similar; there are panoramic lookouts into the grand canyons of the southern hemisphere, dramatic waterfalls, rugged cliffs, tall trees, unique vegetation and so forth. Most of all, the walk was invigorating after being cooped up indoors during the cold days.

The invitation I received from Australia required me to hold a 10-day retreat besides some public talks, including one at the Buddhist Library concerning death and the dying process.

The retreat allowed me to have an idea of how these westerners take to meditation and whether or not I am able to communicate with them. As the participants were "sieved" to some extent, all of them were very reasonable and diligent yogis. But there are some characteristics that are different from our Malaysian yogis, not that they were unexpected. The first is that

they are individualistic. They keep to themselves their own private lives and are not in the habit of washing dirty linen in public as some of our people tend to do. But I am surprised that quite a number of them have anger kept within themselves. They are not without distress. It seemed to me that it is unacceptable to show anger, even the slightest bit and so, to a great extent it seemed suppressed. This had led me to teach Metta (loving-kindness) meditation and it not only worked, it was also very well received.

Again, concerning the individualistic character of the people here, I found myself giving the talks as a form of guided meditation. In this way I felt I was talking to them, and they seemed to like it. There is also a need to give thorough theoretical information whenever necessary. Most of these people are highly literate and so intellectual satisfaction was needed to arouse faith. I gave a few talks to this effect, such as "concept and reality", "concentration and insight", and I wondered if they understood what I had meant to say. Obviously they did and they progressed in their meditation. So it seemed to me that the content of the talk and their command of English played important parts in the retreat, more than these factors did in Malaysia. Back home here, many are not very literate, and often emotional counselling during interviews is required before the actual practice comes into play.

So as I see it, I like teaching in Australia, only because the number of yogis is much less. But this is fine, as it allows more time for more thorough interviews, prepare talks, exercise and do my own meditation.

## **Byron Bay and Lismore**

The mere mention of Byron Bay brought excitement to Australians I met. When I asked, why, a lady just replied, "Well, because it is Byron." Another said it was because it is warm. Byron Bay is obviously loved because of the sea. Surfing is a favourite sport there, and hang gliding is also popular. All in all, it's a place to have sports, fun and relaxation. We were invited there to give some talks and hold a one-day retreat.

The area, it seems, was and still is the centre of Hippyism. It was these people that sought after philosophies and ways of life that the West has now grown accustomed to. As a result, it was also they who took up Buddhism. When we arrived, we stayed at Lismore, a short distance from the resort-bay, at the home of Malcolm Huxley. When we arrived, Nissy, another active Buddhist member in the area, picked us up at the airport with a limousine, used for funeral purposes! She, we soon got to know, is a funeral director in Lismore.

A number of interesting things also happened to us here, just to quote a few...

1. When I was about to give a talk at the Byron Bay community centre, I nearly laughed aloud. Before me sat what looked to me like a circus performance group in fancy dress. They were in all sorts of outfits and hairstyles. I had to contain myself a lot! A couple of these types of people actually came to attend the one-day retreat. They were very nice and reasonable people. Never judge a person by the looks!
2. Another incident was more surprising than hilarious. At the beach one morning, a man came up, shook my hand and said, "I believe in what you are doing." He also added that he had seen me on television and in Time magazine. Just as I was wondering what that was about, I came to find out that he thought I was the Dalai Lama! I do not look like him and I certainly do not have his compassion and so I was thoroughly confused. I only added that we come from the same Buddhist family, so as not to disappoint him. It seemed that Tibetan Buddhism has made a great impact in the West. Very often I have been asked, "Are you from Nepal? Tibet?" When I said that I was from Malaysia, they seemed unable to relate.

There is however one more interesting episode that happened in the Blue Mountains. On a visit to the Jenolan Caves, the guide there commented on the purity of the underground river and that it was their source of drinking water. When I asked if there was any danger posed to health, especially with the high content of cal-

cium from the limestone, she merely replied with a big “NO.” “There are people who have been drinking it for years and nothing wrong has happened to them. In fact, it may do you some good, such as, make your hair grow,” she said. At this point, she actually reached out to stroke my head. I ducked in time!

3. After seeing people surfing and hang-gliding for the first time in my life, it occurred to me that Australians will have their own similes and examples to draw from to explain points in the Dhamma. Usually, I will use struggling, sailing and flying to illustrate the three levels of concentration. The first is the struggle for concentration. When one can effortlessly keep the mind to the object, the flow of the concentrated mind will then be like sailing. When one really goes higher, the mind uplifts itself (or really sinks in), then it is like flying. In Australia, the examples will instead have to be bush walking, surfing and hang-gliding. In New Zealand it will be trekking, sailing and bungee jumping!

4. One day, and I think it was the final day in Lismore, we had a very rare opportunity, taking into account the Australian conditions, to visit the morgue. When we were there, one of Malcolm’s patients (or late patient) whom he had counselled, met with an accident and died. His body was in the morgue and Nissy asked if we would like to come along to see it. To show us around the place was the manager, Mr. David, who said he liked his job. He sure sounded like

he did. And not only that, he spoke well and was experienced. He showed us all the works.

“This is the bag we bring them in from the hospital...

This is the compound we use to embalm the body...

This is the iron suction rod we use to suck up dirty fluids and gas from the abdomen...

This is the liquid we use to disinfect the body... here, try it” at that point I shrunk away, although others took it into their hands.

“This is the eye support, the mouth support for the corpse to prevent the sinking of the eyes... Here take a look,” and he placed them in my hands.

Wow! He'll make a good salesman for the paraphernalia needed to embalm and make up a corpse. He also aims to make good the business.

When we looked at the corpses, they were just empty shells. One old lady who had just passed away, looked like she was asleep.

Deprived of the Chinese stuffs of paper money and paper clothes, cymbals, large coffins, wailing, etc, they don't look eerie. In the clean and air-conditioned room there was nothing frightening. But still there was heaviness in the air.

When I asked Nissy, who has been working with the dead and dying for a long time, if the people of the deceased feel sad, she answered: “Very.”

So, Australians also die, feel sad and cry! That’s how I got to write the poem, “Death in Australia.”

## **Melbourne**

Our visit to Melbourne was included later when we found out that Wendy was returning to Australia and was enthusiastic in inviting us over. I managed to squeeze out 5 days and they were wonderful 5 days. We stayed at her parents’ house and during that period, we visited the Healesville Sanctuary for Australian wildlife, as well as the “Big Trees.”

The sanctuary is actually a kind of a zoo with an open concept like the one in Singapore. Seeing these animals made me think of the meaning of existence. These animals, I assume, don’t think about such things. They just eat, sleep, play and reproduce. Being caged up doesn’t make things happier, although it may increase the chances of survival for their species in the future.

The “Big Trees” belonged to the Eucalyptus Regnans species. One such tree was once the tallest in the world, well over 100m high. It was

chopped down and now the highest is a Redwood in California. While trying to locate the Big Trees, we got lost for a while. The map wasn't quite complete. Then there was the fog. When we finally walked among them, I felt like I was walking in an ancient place. Although the trees were really tall, their trunks were not as massive as the Sequoias of California. But then, aren't they just as fantastic? I always feel I should spend more time living among them, just the same way as we just pop in on the holy spots during a pilgrimage.

## **Blackwoods**

Wendy took us to her brother's cabin for a weekend hideout in Blackwoods, some hours drive from Melbourne. Blackwoods, which was once a mining town, is now a small community with a handful of shops. Mostly, they are cottages. The cabin is at the edge of a forest park and has a stream running nearby. A few Kookaburras that live here come to be fed when there are people around. During our stay, we looked around the place, which included the lovely Garden of St Erth with a short trek nearby, the trek on which the "Duck" tripped and injured his wing, the cemetery with its short history, some nurseries, and that's about all. After spending two nights in this place, I decided to spend sometime meditating here as suggested. The only snag was – it can be quite cold, but I didn't mind it at all!

## D-DAY

Pain the man but the tooth's unshaken,  
The gum complains, spewing yellowish explosions,  
Daily antiseptic washes and vitamin C tablets,  
A thousand grams each, didn't help,  
Just one look, and the dentist shakes his head.  
X-rays pass a sentence beyond redemption,  
It's as good as an ornament  
For a cemetery stone slab.

A long thin needle pierces where I cannot see,  
Pliers with strong paired arms and an iron grip  
Does not seem intimidate me,  
Yet it is a killer that amputates part of the mouth,  
Pulls out roots long embalmed in flesh and blood.

Heave ho, pull and a bag full of gastric juice,  
Crunch, twist, shake, and it's heave ho, pull again,  
Between his flexing muscles and gums long attached,  
An amusing tug-of-war struggle  
Which once would have been hell,  
But the anticipation still looks on, fixed.

Finally, O finally, the dentist triumphs,  
The culprit's won over,  
With a pearl of sweat on his forehead  
And a torrent over my brows,  
Raining as a river.

No loss! You'll get another dead stone fixed,  
One that gives you no trouble,  
Replacing a goner that can torture  
An elephant to death.

The cooling water relieves with a blood bath,  
But the interesting story has not yet ended,  
With a hiss, the drill rears up is spinning pointed horn,  
Eyes turn up with blank stares into an artificial sun,  
The mind with an oh, oh...  
Grasps at a meditation object – a reflection of the moon,  
The heart squeals Hee Hee, tickled to hysterics,  
And then a donkey-ish Hee-Haw coupled with  
an intestinal squeeze.  
“This,” the dentist says with a grin,  
“Is what the FBI does to extract  
Information from prisoners.”

22 APRIL 1996

*Santisukharama, Kota Tinggi, Johor*



D-day, to me, means Dentist’s Day. It is not unlike Mother’s or Father’s Day when you shower them with kisses and presents, except that you offer your mouth, wide-opened with teeth exposed, for the dentist to fix.

Dentistry, it seemed to me, has advanced with giant steps. Not so, my dentist disagreed. According to him, the idea remains very much the same. What has improved with time was the technology. As he spoke, he used an instrument that flicks free a bridge that has been fitted too tightly.

“Wow!” I exclaimed, “You seem to have an instrument for everything.”



He giggled as he related how one dentist actually pulled out the tooth while trying to remove a bridge which was fitted too tightly. It seemed the inexperienced dentist used the pliers.

Another patient, he said, was apprehensive that he might dislodge his gums. He had to reassure his patient that he knew what he was doing. That similar thought, I recollect, did pass through my mind.

As far as I can remember, a visit to the dentist did not frighten me, at least not as much as most whom I know. My first dentist, as I recall, was our pig-tailed amah. To extract my decaying milk tooth, she tied the tooth to one end of a string while with the other end, she fixed it to a door knob. Slam! Out comes the tooth, and strangely enough, there was very little pain.

One of my first visits to the dentist was at school. It was a nurse who took care of matters. I went up to her and requested that she sewed up my tooth.

“We don’t sew up teeth,” she corrected me.

“Then mend it.” I retorted.

“Mend it?” She laughed again.

I can’t remember what followed, but the next thing I recalled was, there I was, in the chair. She took out the pliers, gripped the molar and pulled. As she pulled and pulled, I was literally

pulled out of the chair, dragged to a sink until my back leaned against it. With one of her legs, she fixed me in that convenient position which at the same time, served as a leverage. Then, she extracted the tooth.

*Little Soonie Horner  
Was dragged to a corner  
By his school nurse with a pair of pliers  
And as she stretched out her legs on him  
She pulled with her strong arms, his tooth  
Then said, what a good boy he was!*

As I grew up I went to a lady dentist to fix any tooth decay that I had. She must have been just a registered dental practitioner because when I finally went to a qualified one, she said my teeth was not properly disinfected during the filling. On further thinking, I had to agree, because at times it was her daughter that did the job, and she must have been in her early teens. What made me keep going back there must have been the cheaper rate! Having to dish out money seemed to be more frightening than the pain. I can also recall that utter embarrassment when I did not have enough money with me. I had to apologise to the dentist and promised to return with the balance.

At the varsity, we had a dentist. Only one to handle all the students. As a result, you have to wait for months for an appointment. Your tooth would have totally rotted by then. So I would make an appointment whether or not I

needed it. At least it will then be a check up. And after that I will immediately make another appointment.

This particular dentist was an Indian lady. Fat was the description of her. Motherly was another adjective to describe her. While fixing my teeth, she would place my head between her breasts and fiddle with things in my mouth. At first I was embarrassed, but after a while, I felt comfortable. She must have been overworked, because, at one time she started rattling away...

“You should complain to your student union about the lack of dentists provided for the students...”

I totally sympathised with her, but I felt guilty because I was the sort of person who was very unconcerned about student unions, and all I wanted was to get my degree.

Being a monk did not exempt me from tooth decay or the dentist, but it had helped me handle the situation better. Be mindful, don't panic, and also don't note the pain if you don't have to. If you have to, make sure you're REALLY DETACHED. Usually I would fix my mind onto a visualised circle of light, the light kasina, which is not unlike the full moon.

One such occasion was in Myanmar. There they have good doctors but not the technology.

I suppose the same goes for the dentists as well. However, I also suppose that not all of them are that skilled.

At the Mahasi Centre, I was suffering from a terrible tooth ache.

The dentist on service at that time could not detect any defect and so attributed it to the gums. She did some scaling of the plaque, but the pain persisted. Then I wondered if it might be my wisdom tooth growing. On my next visit – this time it was a doctor – he said that it could not possibly be so.

“Wisdom teeth” he said, “grow only on the lower gums, not the upper.”

After a while I proved the doctor wrong. My other friend fared worse. He told the dentist or doctor that he had “holes” in his tooth and by rights, it should be attended to. But then there were no such facilities there, and so the doctor dismissed him with a few PANADOLS.

As the pain persisted, I noted and noted but it still became unbearable. I finally resorted to pain killers, that unassuming PANADOL again. It worked for sometime but finally, it too, was no longer effective. With sufficient encouragement from the teacher, it came to a point as if the tooth exploded into many, little hard bits, and after that, it troubled me no more. The wisdom tooth, it seemed, had stopped growing.

Since then, I have been to quite a few dentists. One even requested me to tell him about meditation while attending to my teeth. He would first asked a question and then before I could utter more than a word, he would quickly fit something into my mouth. I think it is a lousy way of making one forget the ordeal.

Another dentist I met recently in Kuching has the most modern clinic I have ever been to. It looked like a 21st century clinic, the space age type; together with an all-glass wall with a good view of a city corner. He even went on to educate me about the toxicity of mercury fillings, how to brush one's teeth and even the history of dentistry.

Before I finally came to Dr. Tan, I used to go to a doctor in Petaling Jaya. But that was too far away, and I am seldom there now. Dr. Tan has so far won my trust and that is whom the poem is about. He said, "every tooth is precious, and should be saved." Obviously, the one extracted was beyond redemption.

## IMPATIENT YOUNG MAN

I have never seen such an impatient young man before  
Even when I was young and impatient  
I was never this impatient,  
How can one demand results  
Even before one has started to meditate?  
How can one expect miracles  
Even before working a little bit?

But there he is, demanding and expecting  
Progress and enlightenment to drop out from nothing,  
Fun without working,  
Results without waiting.

Is he a spoilt brat whose parents always gives him what  
he wants?

Or Is he one with little wit  
who never ever thinks why things work out the way it  
does?

Alas! Impatience leads to ruin,  
so too foolhardiness, craving, anger,  
And the rest of the defilements.  
a weak mind needs strengthening, whose doesn't?  
The one especially needs it although he may not realise it.  
So meanwhile I can smile as I advise him  
Before he makes a serious mistake and then downfall.

26 MAY 1996

*Santisukharama, Kota Tinggi, Johor*

## CRY BABY

Cry baby ba-boo, cry  
Not because you didn't try,  
But just because you think you're not  
Progressing as fast as you should.

Cry baby ba-boo, cry,  
Please don't ask why me, why?  
Most others aren't much better off  
Yet they don't complain,  
Day after day  
Sleepiness sticks stubbornly on,  
Restlessness never seem giving in.

Self pity is not the answer or the cure,  
Patience, lady, is the key to the door,  
For the mind is not easily controlled,  
The plant of tranquillity grows slowly,  
Insight's rare blossom flowers only  
In the richest soil and fairest weather  
The fruit of freedom, sweet beyond compare,  
Is meant for those who have toiled laboriously  
One season after another,  
Year after year.

28 MAY 1996

*Santisukharama, Kota Tinggi, Johor*



The two poems above are about two young people trying to meditate. Patience seemed to be the quality lacking in them. What is it that will make them see it? Knowing the need for patience will be a great help to ourselves.

## MATANG'S CLEAR WATER STREAM

1.

Waters to be clear must flow  
Gently, swiftly with the times  
Light caught by ripples play moving lines,  
Bless the rocks beneath with blissful shine.

The heart to be pure likewise must flow  
Gently, swiftly unattached,  
Joy caught by movements play sweet tunes  
Deeply into the tranquil mind.

Chilly to the heated sole,  
These waters cool a burning frame,  
a soothing rest, resuscitating life,  
As Nature flows gently, swiftly  
To uncertain end.

Finally time slows down to catch  
A falling leaf,  
The heart pauses a while to breathe,  
The body to heal.  
Watch how tirelessly the water boatman rows  
With its filamentous long legs  
Upstream, yet budge not another inch.  
See how the fig tree scatters millions of seeds,  
Yet not a single offspring succeed.  
That's how Nature carry on her sacred task  
To conserve life on this fragile Earth.

Clear waters of Matang,  
You remind us how to carry on with our spiritual path,  
To strive without expectation of results,  
The purity is in the purpose,  
The clarity is in the mind,  
The joy of life – living moment to moment,  
The fulfilment – the realisation of non-self.

Clear waters of Matang!  
On washing my face,  
I hear the Bulbul's bubbling song,  
Forgotten are Man's follies,  
This moment is alone.

17 JUNE 1996  
*Sri Matang, Kuching, Sarawak*

2.

A pleasant dip  
Of simple joy,  
A cool spot  
In a person's life,  
The water's as fresh  
As decades before,  
Age vanishes,  
I'm a boy once more.

In innocence I prayed,  
Sincerely implored,  
Tho' never did I do such a thing  
Till this very day,  
To the fresh clean waters  
Of life and joy,  
For peace and health,  
for one and all.

Ah, Clear waters of Matang,  
Sitting chest deep bathing in your currents,  
I've become one with the invisible,  
Forgotten are Man's follies,  
Only your waters flow.

20 JUNE 1996

*Sri Matang, Kuching, Sarawak*

3.

Debris, flotsam, sand, silt,  
And muck of the mind,  
Multicoloured, multicultural,  
Innumerable butterfly conversations,  
The inner river – an variegated pageantry

Noisily marching thoughts,  
Can be painful, can be blissful,  
Can also be interesting.  
Old folks sigh sentimentally  
Because of these,  
Or be benumbed blocks  
Clogged up with rotting memories.  
The mindful will be matured into wise old sages,  
The heedless degenerate into shrivelled cabbages.

Fortunately, there is still clarity in Matang's waters,  
rushing over rocks, spraying rainbow sparkles.  
Flow on clear waters into the sea,  
Forget Man's follies,  
They are not worth a single penny.

22 JUNE 1996  
*Sri Matang, Kuching, Sarawak*



The retreats in Kuching are as sleepy as the place itself, despite the fact that everyone is busy meditating. But it's fine with me after the busy schedule in Kota Tinggi. I have more time to relax and write little poems like these.

## BOAT RIDE

The jade green gift of a sea,  
The blue peace sent from the sky,  
Softly beats the pulse from within the heart,  
Roars of the vessel deafening beside.

Farther up  
The jade green turns into  
Green tea milk,  
The blue sky deepens into  
Grey rain haze,  
The vessel's cries are left behind,  
The horizon glitters sparkling lights.

Sing the song of freedom,  
The world outside is wide,  
The spirit of the sea is blissful in me,  
Its million ripples, each a story.

The sea now glum brown  
Blackening grey,  
A long dark cloud sighs  
Leading the way.  
Lone boats anchor still,  
An artistic touch,  
Upon the horizon,  
A distinctly dark stretch.

Blessings fall at journey's end,  
Showering drops,  
A lone gull rises to greet us  
Into Rejang's wide mouth,  
Wind beating on my face,  
Sun glowing over the head,  
Robes flapping all over the place.

Sing a song of ecstasy  
To a clear blue sky,  
It's frilly white clouds  
Are close enough to touch,

Do not be attached,  
Let go of the self,  
All's but lessons in life.

3 JULY 1996  
*Sarikei, Sarawak*



I embarked on a trip to Sarikei in Central Sarawak on an invitation. We took a boat ride from Kuching into the Rejang river. Although the ride was good, Sarikei turned out to be a sleepy hollow, with the jetty as the only exciting thing around.

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF METTA

I see the love for the whole wide world  
in a single pentamerous Malacca flower,  
And the heart of a loved one  
At its raised centre  
Surrounded by five pure white stamens,  
Shedding rich fragrance of pandans to the wind,  
Catching anyone who comes across it  
With mild surprise.

I see love grow like a young rain tree  
Its lanky juvenile branches  
(Borne on a sturdy trunk)  
Reaching out in all directions,  
Upwards and around  
Throwing out fresh green growth at its tips

Promising pink beauties, abundant shade and home  
For countless beings.

I see love extend to fill a universe  
Undiscriminating, boundless,  
Saturated the sky to rain,  
And in an outburst and a thunderstorm  
The forces came and swept away.

20 JULY 1996  
Kuching, Sarawak



As you may have guessed, the inspiration for these two poems came up while I was practising the loving-kindness meditation. The flower incidentally was identified by someone as *Cananga Scortechnii*.

## BEWARE, AUSTRALIA!

Although the duck had got lost quacking  
In the Island of Penang,  
The Robber Wabbit will be back!  
This time with  
Groovy Garfield grown puffy fat,  
And Squirrelee with his squidgy-squangy head.  
They'll disguise themselves  
As harmless looking human beings  
To get through the immigration,  
And then run wild....  
Beware, Australia!  
Robber Wabbit with his itchy tooth

Gonna mess up EVERYTHING,  
From kangaroo tail tips to wombat's bottoms.  
Squirrelee to assuage his constricted cranium  
Gonna eat up all the eucalyptus leaves  
And let the koalas go hungry.  
And Garfield will walk down  
Every street in their cities  
And drive everyone crazy.  
What's More,  
Tortoise Sue will join in soon,  
Followed closely by the Ghost of a Lily,  
And the Geeeek!  
And there's nothing,  
NOTHING  
Wendy can do to save her country.

Ha! Ha! Ha!  
Watch out Wendy,  
WE ARE COMING!!

16 AUGUST 1996  
*Santisukharama, Kota Tinggi, Johor*



As we were all ready to go to Australia, I made a final fax to Wendy in the form of a humorous poem.

## THOUGHTS ON PEACE

Forgive all those who have wronged you,  
Have compassion for the weak and fallen,  
Be humble, accept your failings,

Learn from the wise,  
Then strive for peace in the world.

Let there be peace for now,  
Peace tomorrow,  
Peace hereafter,  
Peace forever.  
Nibbana is the highest peace of all  
Let Man strive for peace in the world.

They say that  
Man must dream dreams to be alive;  
But we say  
Man must be awake  
To be free.  
Yet still we dream,  
Dreams upon dreams,  
This world, ourselves are all dreams.

As to this,  
For me it'll certainly not be  
Dreams of emperor and empire,  
Certainly not passionate loves  
That set the world on fire,  
Certainly not for Mankind  
To be a great compassionate saviour,  
For me it's just this peace, – PEACE FOREVER!

Let there be peace this very moment,  
Peace too, the next in line,  
Peace with the rise,  
Peace with the fall,  
Peace for you and me,  
Peace for one and all.

Nibbana is the highest peace,  
Strive then to abandon all cankers.  
Strive to be awake,  
Strive to be free,  
Without striving,  
All these will not come to be.

18 AUGUST 1996

*Santisukharama, Kota Tinggi, Johor*



When the going is tough in Vipassana, I often resort to Samatha to help me out. This is because the mental sufferings encountered can be very exhausting, and if one is not careful, one may end up somewhat depressed. At that point, concentration falls. I use the contemplation of peace (Upasamanussati) to bring in the purpose, peace and therefore concentration. After that, the meditation will go on for some-time.

## THOUGHTS ON FREEDOM

If you asked me what freedom is,  
I'd say, set free a bird  
And see it fly.

If you asked me what is the way,  
The means by which freedom's gained,  
I'd say point blank,  
Straight from the texts

That Detachment,  
That best of states  
Is the key.

Man is entangled within and without  
By work, by house,  
By wife and child,  
By friends and foe  
Most of all by himself,  
Cages within cages,  
Delusion's the darkest cage,  
Craving's the chains,  
Hatred's the fire that tortures.  
Kammic retribution wraps up the rest,  
What chances then is there for escape?  
Even for those who strive,  
On one hand as they try to untie a knot,  
On the other, they bind up another ten!

Follow that bird out into the wilderness  
Worship that freedom of a heart disentangled  
The worthy prize of renunciation is yours  
If you are willing to let go  
To an uncertain future.

23 AUGUST 1996  
*Santisukharama, Kota Tinggi, Johor*



This is the point when I really felt and decided that I had to prepare to leave Santisukharama if I wanted real progress in meditation, which required longer retreats of 6 month stretches or years. This had in fact been in my mind for

many years now. You may say that the thought had just matured as a result of my meditation. A decision I once found difficult to do, now it's done as easy as a breath.

## DAFFODILS

Daffodils,  
Aren't they lovely?  
Yellow stars on golden bells.  
Dancing, spread over the field.  
Their song of spring  
Is ringing in the air,  
Spread your wings  
Fly over the hill.

Daffodils,  
Aren't they lovely,  
Maidens dressed in green  
Yellow bonnets shaking.  
Children of the earth,  
With mirth they're all proclaiming  
Awakening surely is a pleasant thing

17 SEPTEMBER 1996  
*Borogove, Blackwoods – Victoria, Australia*

## PEACH BLOSSOMS

Each peach blossom  
A white breath of spring  
Takes thousands to make the season's song

The beauty Nature provides  
Is praiseworthy to one and all  
Where the eyes speak for the heart  
This is it – joy.

Each mindful noting  
Is also a white blossom  
Takes thousands to make the holy path  
Truth realised by wisdom  
Is praiseworthy to one and all  
Where the mind is mute and feelings stop  
This is it – peace.

18 SEPTEMBER 1996

*Borogove, Blackwoods – Victoria, Australia*



This was the first time in my life that I saw the spring flowers in Australia. Many of them I had only heard of from story books or seen in pictures. There are daffodils and apple blossoms, tulips, blue bells and poppies, just to mention a few. Many of them I had not seen before, such as the one mentioned in the above poem, which could be an almond tree. This was when the gardens reveal their true colours.

Spring is when the “dirty” weather of winter gives in to the warm sunshine of spring. The lousy mood disappears and life is renewed. Maybe this has some significance for me. I’ll be starting a new cycle of things, whatever that may be.

## BYERS BACK TRACK SONG

Which would you like to be?  
The fresh green hills  
Or the clear blue sky,  
The fairy flowers  
Or the winds sweeping by,  
Cockatoo's screams  
Or Wombat's droppings,  
Which would you like to be  
In a wilderness as wonderful as this?

Which would you like to be?  
The rugged rocks  
Or the precarious river crossing,  
The crooked Eucalyptus trunks  
Or the sounds of water falling,  
The serene silence hanging in the air  
Or the invisible space that holds all these,  
Which would you like to be  
In a wilderness where time stands still?

Let me be,  
O let me be,  
The hills and sky  
Vanishing with the night,  
The fairy flowers  
Enchantingly pretty,  
Dispersed by winds sweeping by,  
Cockatoo's screams  
and Wombat's droppings,  
Quickly decaying into the past,  
But do not let me be  
The rugged rocks that lasts.

Let me be,  
O let me be,  
The sounds of water  
Vanishing into eternity,  
The crooked tree trunks  
All dried waiting to be burnt,  
The unheard silence  
And the unseen space, a void,  
When I'm gone forever.

22 SEPTEMBER 1996  
*Blackwoods, Melbourne, Australia*

## CONVENT GALLERY

The Window that overlooks pretty Daylesford town  
Frames a lovelier picture  
Than all the paintings in the gallery  
Encloses also the thoughts of nuns that lived  
In this convent many years before.  
The narrow stairs still climb a struggle against sin  
The chapel still a reserve of pious peace  
Their little cells simplicity shine  
In the infirmary humble acceptance and care of woman-kind.

25 SEPTEMBER 1996  
*Melbourne, Australia*



The gallery was once a convent. I cannot say much about the paintings as I am not a connoisseur of art, but I do appreciate the building as a convent where nuns once dwelt. They have

preserved some parts of it so that it is also a kind of museum. The cleanliness and orderliness of the place with its large but simple decor is striking. These concepts can be adopted by our Buddhist places.

## THE BIG TREES

Walking among giants  
Is so unlike mixing  
With little people  
With big egos,  
Listening to their silence  
Is so unlike attending  
To little people  
With big mouths,  
Walking among giants  
Does give peace of mind  
Uncommon among the masses.

The forest is a lesson in solitude,  
Its towers of strength –  
A timeless peace  
A stillness that seems to stand forever,  
As you feel their trunks  
They become part of you.

Even when they've fallen  
After several centuries of wear and tear,  
Coated with green moss,  
Caressed by running streams,  
They lie as if in sleep,  
Unaware,

devoid of dreams  
They are still great.

Sitting at the foot of a giant Mountain Ash,  
Beholding twin columns reaching high, high,  
Sitting at its foot, I seem to have arrived  
Even if it be for a little while,  
Home,  
Like the wind back to the forest.

26 SEPTEMBER 1996  
*Melbourne, Australia*



It has been a year since I saw these big trees. I didn't have enough of them the last time, and so we went back again for more. I also wanted Wung, also a tree enthusiast, to see it. It seems to me there's something sacred and vulnerable about them. I also suspect that we may not have these things with us on Earth for very long. Ancient things shall pass as all impermanent things do. These trees are not different, so cherish them while you may.

## TREE OF LIFE

I planted a tree of life  
High up in the Blue Mountains,  
A Blueberry Ash  
From the most tender part of my heart  
Into your soil of many seasons.



I planted it deep  
On a sunny day in October,  
Watered down chilly waters  
That it may grow –  
That tree of life,  
Your happiness,  
My satisfaction.

20 OCTOBER 1996  
*Blue Mountains, Sydney, Australia*



On the day we left, I planted a tree at the corner of the meditation hall. It is a Blueberry Ash (*Eleocarpus reticulatus*) reputedly a slow-growing native tree. This was done with much pleasure and enthusiasm from myself and the people around. There is much joy in planting trees. There is even more joy as you watch them grow. When it comes to planting an Australian native in an Australian meditation centre, it is even better. You feel you're becoming part of the new place.

## SAILING AT WAIHEKE ISLAND

The sun, the sea  
And the wind on the sail,  
Unearthly blue waters  
Glassy, green gleams,  
Peace and *The Prelude* glides  
Dreamily on,  
Reflections silently break.

The sun sets low  
Gurgling silver with gold,  
Phenomenal Man watches  
Time rippling beside him,  
Images and illusions  
Arising and vanishing,  
Happily we're lost  
In your world of waves.

24 OCTOBER 1996

*Waiheke Island, New Zealand*



The Island of Waiheke is a little off Auckland city. We needed to take a ferry to cross over. There we took up an invitation from Mark Parishian to sail on his boat *The Prelude*. This incident taught me an interesting lesson, and that is, how one can go into concentration while on the move. When I asked him what joy he gets from sailing, he answered, "peacefulness". After experiencing it once, I knew he was correct. Unlike the motor boats where a din usually accompanies, this type is silent except for the gurgling of the waters, the beating of the wind on the flapping sails, and the dreamy glide of the boat as lights play reflections on your eyes. If you can keep a silent awareness, then the concentration sets in easily. Having caught the concentrated state of mind in movement, I think one can bring it to any moving situation. It is letting a concentrated awareness flow and roll along as if in sleep while the situation around you moves.

## SNOW ENCHANTMENT

There has always been  
And will always be  
Enchantment whenever I see  
The magical snow capped peaks  
Appearing as a vision  
after a night's grey clouds,  
As dazzling lights,  
Something out of this world.

Snow mountains far, far away,  
I see you as if in a dream,  
I know I am dreaming  
But I also know that one day  
I will wake up to find it real.

Then suddenly we're rising above the rainforest,  
Following pathways from where glaciers came.  
Then suddenly, we're there,  
We're in the snowfields  
After a new fall,  
Starlets twinkling over landscapes,  
Exhilarating purity!  
There the feelings, they sleep,  
Under soft sheets of satin and silk,  
And the mind, it expands,  
With luminescent clarity.  
White is indeed the purest of colours  
Snow the coolest substance I can find  
The mind enchanted in this snow paradise  
Can only think of the magic  
That is right here with us.

I've awoken from the dream  
To find it real,  
I'm finding myself  
In a far away place,  
Overpowered By the magnificence  
Of untainted Remoteness  
I feel like  
Snow mountains.

1 NOVEMBER 1996  
*Franz Josef, New Zealand*



When you're on a helicopter, you can get pretty close to the snow mountains. We were also allowed a short landing. This we did on that fine day on the 1st of November.

They say that the place is lovely after a snow-fall. Being up here at the top end of the Fox Glacier, it is undoubtedly true. It's like the fairyland you heard about in the folk tales while you were young. You can almost expect the fairy godmother and the wicked witch to appear any time. What strikes me is the cleanliness, the remoteness and the stark beauty of the vast snow mountains. It's almost like the vast mind that has been purified and shining in all its naturalness. White, is indeed a pure and healing colour. I chose the colour of my meditation rightly!

## WATERS OF WAKATIPU

Waters of Wakatipu  
Bluish transparency  
Fluid glass  
Liquid light  
Willows and pines  
Sigh beside  
People and houses crowd in  
So too as ducks and gulls  
And we cash in  
Onto Nature's purity  
Our life source,  
Life line.

A pure environment begets a healthy body  
So too pure actions, a happy mind.  
is a happy place  
Shall we make it happier still?

4 NOVEMBER 1996  
*Queenstown, New Zealand*

## WATERS OF MILFORD

Ancient forests tell us why  
Waters of Milford  
Smile the colour of life  
Born of lofty snow clad peaks  
Its eventual result  
The unlimited Tasman Sea.  
Man cruises along the fiord  
Marvelling the present change  
Yes, this is the way the sage would live



In the sea of truth  
Detached, clinging freed.

5 NOVEMBER 1996  
*Milford Sound, New Zealand*



You can say that you have everything here which make fantastic scenery – snow mountains, pristine lakes, beautiful hills, lovely flowers, fresh air, wild birds and so on. What strikes me most, however, is the clean waters. At Te Anau, I took a photograph of an edge of the Te Anau Lake; on print, you cannot see the difference, that is, the part which is covered by water and the part which is not. Water is the source of life, and pure waters do mean healthier living. In the spiritual sense we always relate back to the mind. Pure water will mean pure thoughts and pure feelings. They make up a happier life. In this sense, Queenstown is basically sensual where people are here for a good time. Some meditation and Dhamma knowledge should do well to balance it.

## THE WIZARD

The Wizard is one  
Who can say what he likes  
And yet get away with it,  
The Wizard is one  
Who can say crazy things  
And yet still make sense,  
The Wizard is one

Who can make the simple man laugh  
And fundamentalists cry,  
The Wizard is one  
Who thinks like a genius  
Yet dresses up like a clown.

I met the Wizard at the Cathedral Square  
In Christchurch city, New Zealand,  
The tall bearded man makes fun of the world  
To many a churchman's dismay.  
For his talk on the upside-down world draws crowds  
While the preacher man beside speaks to empty space.  
The Wizard is a funny man  
The Wizard is a clever man  
He is also a happy one.

8 NOVEMBER 1996  
*Christchurch, New Zealand*



There is this fellow who teaches at the university and dresses himself up as a wizard to give orations at the Cathedral Square in the centre of Christchurch about anything under the sun – from “Saving the Males” to “The Upside-Down World.” He does that for five days a week after the Band has played at noon time. On that day when we were there, I could see an old man right beside him reading the bible aloud to empty space while he draws crowds. I wondered if he might be someone employed by the tourist department, but obviously this character wants to speak his mind and has, for many years, become an institution by himself. I also heard that he drives a car which he had made

the back look like the front. So if he backs up his car, you'll think a car is heading right for you, and if you see him drive towards you, you'd think a car is backing right into you.

When I asked him if the Church harasses him, he answered, "No, they are as confused as I am." I think he's nice, but kind of crazy.

## THE AMARANT, MELBOURNE

### 1. The Golden Tree

It could have been the Crimson Rosella  
Or the sun's hand on the ridge,  
But it was the Golden Tree  
That graced the Amarant.  
Beautiful brown bark  
Peeling into lighter hue,  
Three grand trunks  
Shoot from the base –  
A symbol of sacred growth  
In a special place.

But it was the intense greens  
That granted seclusion,  
And the silence that nursed  
The heart to sleep,  
The mind that created all her dreams  
And all else that lives.  
There is a golden tree in each of us  
Growing amidst our wildest dreams.

8 MARCH 1997  
*Amarant, Melbourne*

## 2. Vision Corner

Moss carpeted, fern lined,  
Zig-zag uphill track,  
Then a window opens out  
To Victorian vistas,  
And magic, magic, magic.

Sea of cloud climb behind,  
White and greys blanket the eyes,  
Then across your path, hops out  
One Lyre bird, another Lyre bird,  
And magic, magic, magic.

8 MARCH 1997

*Amarant, Melbourne, Australia*



1 & 2. Wendy arranged a retreat for a small group in Melbourne. We spent nine days peacefully meditating at a retreat centre called "The Amarant", located in the hills to the east of the city. The place is quiet, surrounded by regenerated bush. There are two main walking trails in the property, one zig zags uphill to a look-out which they call "vision corner", another goes down the hill to where there grows a tree which the owners took pride in, and which they call "The golden tree". It is definitely a Eucalyptus and of a fair size. It has beautiful brown bark that peels out to expose a lighter orangish-grey trunk. Three trunks rise from a short base. It seems to stand out from the rest of the bush and is quite pretty. Other than that, I do not see anything more special about it, but the owners think of it as something spiritual. Maybe many who came here have gained inspiration from

looking at it. Then, going to the tree another day, I can only add one more thing – that one can sit very comfortably between the trunks and let one's mind run freely into one's dreams.

### **3. Tree Of Wisdom**

No, not those native gums  
Peeling grey and brown,  
No, not the iron or stringy barks,  
But those tall wattles and maples  
That haven't grown much.

He planted those trees  
When he was a boy  
When the land was still quite barren,  
When he planted them, did he know  
That they will mean anything  
To him now?  
Looking back at a life of innocence,  
Who can help but be nostalgic,  
After so much has passed to age a man  
or as humus for the growth of wisdom.  
The past is gone,  
It's not difficult to understand  
Why he chooses a life of contemplation,  
Even it be in an alien culture of a far-flung land  
Bereft of material conveniences.  
The tree of wisdom excels all trees!  
Great hope for one whose roots are deeply set,  
Go my friend, follow your heart's yearnings  
For that life of purity and meaning.

9 MARCH 1997  
*Amarant, Melbourne, Australia*



Greg came to visit us at the weekend. Greg is someone I met when I first went to Burma about 17 years ago. Since then, he had become a monk, returned to lay life and now intends to return to that contemplative life again. He tells me that he lived here during his youth, and the bed he slept on is the one at the level just above my bed. During his teens he helped the caretaker here to plant the trees in the property. As he walks around trying to locate those trees and commenting on their growth, I was more interested in watching his nostalgia. Greg has much similarity with me. He loves trees and he loves to plant those big ones. He also took up a course in botany. When I told him that I also like to plant big trees and have already done quite a bit in Kota Tinggi, it made me wonder if the same thing would happen to me when I have left the place and return after many years. What is this feeling of nostalgia? Recalling the past brings up feelings. All those years that have gone by made us what we are now. We have grown older but are we any wiser? The Dhamma has helped each of us to grow in our own way from our own unique roots. Then those feelings come with an almost exquisite joy. Later, alone in the room, I commented that he was still very much a monk inside. He turned around and said that when he disrobed, he thought he had lost everything, but obviously he hasn't. The roots have gone deep and he looks forward to returning to Burma after a month or so. We feel sad if a monk returns to lay life, and it is also true that it is

happy for one to see another returning to monkhood. I later told him that I also look forward to returning to a life of contemplation after all these years of teaching.

#### **4. Mind Trails and Mindscapes**

Somehow, somehow,  
The silence here overwhelms you  
With its hums and songs.  
Somehow, it sends you drifting  
Into the depths of the unknown.  
But, these worlds, real or otherwise,  
I know, are mind trails and mindscapes.

Why does Gabriel come beside my bed  
With a smirk on his lips?  
Why does Lord Shiva appear in my dreams,  
Trident in hand, rock torso, stoned face?  
But loving-kindness smothered them with  
A thousand kisses and sent them back to sleep,  
While mindfulness traced the subtle contours  
Along their deceptive pathways.

Watching formations is so alike  
Walking along the stony sloping trails  
Littered with gum leaves and barks,  
Covered by creeping berries  
And wattle seed sprouts.  
Tread a little too quickly  
Onto an unassuming twig,  
There you'll go rolling uncontrollably  
Down the Vipassana slip-way.

15 MARCH 1997  
*Amarant, Melbourne, Australia.*

## **5. To Remain in the Essence of Non-distraction**

That quiet strength to last  
Comes from the experience that understands  
That to achieve great things takes time,  
That time is but a concept  
And what matters is the action  
That is peaceful and pure,  
That within the mind, all things worthwhile can be  
begotten  
Stability and softness  
Seclusion and solitude  
Silence and strength,  
That the deep timeless state of rest  
unaffected by a distracted world  
Is to be always kept inside the heart,  
And one may also nurture that curiosity  
To see more clearly what comes next  
And what wisdom can grow from it.

15 MARCH 1997

*Amarant, Melbourne, Australia.*



4 & 5. One thing which is definite is that I really had a good time here, which I consider as about the best one can get from Australia. There is quietude, cleanliness, space, friendly people, comfort and also the time to do quite a fair bit of meditation. It will go down on record as one of the happier moments of my life. The only thing which may be not so right is the chilly temperatures in the early hours of the day...which may freeze up one's meditation. To

solve that problem there are heaters, but for churning up the body system one needs to go on good long walks. Generally, the mindfulness peaks at the second sitting after lunch. At other times the concentration faculty tends to dominate. But then it is very pleasant! It gives me deeper understanding into this faculty and how to develop it. It also makes me realise how unrestful goal-orientated minds can be.

# TASMANIA

## 1. REMINDERS

A night vanishes,  
Quiet times pass unnoticed,  
Awakening comes reluctantly  
To a pleasant surprise.

Awake to see sleeping beauty  
Head pillowled in clouds,  
Awake to weave trails  
Between charred stringy barks,  
Awake to walk alongside  
“Old Folks” – Huon Pines,  
Awake to find the biggest of the Big  
Trees, right before us.

Awake to behold Hobart city  
From a window of swirling clouds,  
And each time I’m amazed and reminded  
Of the reality of the present moment  
That I’m in Tasmania.

TASMANIA?

What am I doing here?  
Isn’t it amazing what you can find in life?  
Isn’t it amazing where you find life in?  
Have you wondered why things happen as they do?  
Reminders of the present moment  
Can come with pleasant things.

19 MARCH 1997  
*Mt. River, Tasmania, Australia.*



They say that Tasmania is really beautiful and I have wondered why. On this trip to Australia, I took up Alan's invitation to visit him and to find out if it's true, although I did not expect to do so with a small entourage.

He must have been trying very hard to complete his new house so that he may at least be able to accommodate us. When we reached his place it was still in quite a mess. When auntie Tay came out of the car, she asked, "Do you mean we are getting down here?" We, more or less, spent the rest of the day cleaning it up to make it more habitable. After that it was just filling up the place with laughter. The most important thing for a guest to feel at ease is to know that one is welcome and not imposing. As to this, I can say Alan's heart is much bigger than most people's houses.

Tasmania is like New Zealand with an Australian setting. There are fields with sheep and cattle, perhaps a little bit less, and the arboreal content still consists of a great extent of gums. Population wise, it is relatively sparse other than around Hobart and, life is slow. An ideal place to settle down to personal spiritual life. One evening, seated outside his house, facing the grove of stringy barks, I told him it's amazing that I'm now in Tasmania, a place I never imagined I'd come. And as for the few days I had been here, I often forgot that I'm in a far out corner of the world. Only when something

strikes me, such as the fantastic look-out to Hobart from Mt. Wellington, watching with awe, an enormous Swamp Gum, or seeing the shape of the hill which looks very much like "The Sleeping Beauty", that I am jerked up to the knowledge that I'm in Tasmania. Then I stand wondering about the causes and implications of the present conditions. The present moment can bring up many wonderful things, and being mindful and alert, makes it many times better! If we must dream, let it be a beautiful dream.

## 2. LAST PARADISE

Beach sands open out a screen of blue  
Sea and sky, and a young man surfing out a brilliant  
smile,  
Blowing cold winds, hard cliffs and a dead penguin  
arrive  
To meet us at Clifton beach,  
Is this where you're withdrawing to,  
To waste away and die?  
I have to admit  
This place is as good a place as any  
For a last paradise,  
And if I have to choose mine,  
I don't mind ending up in this one.

Faerie waters, fine lines falling  
Perpendicular to hard horizontal rock blocks  
At Spectacular Russell Falls,  
Rushing stream gurgles beneath

Fern leaf tapestry, As moss rocks sleep,  
Giant Swamp Gums stand silently  
As we walk and watch in awe  
In this ancient land where you're withdrawing to,  
To waste away and die?  
I don't think my time is that close  
Or will be here,  
But really, I just can't tell.

Blue sky interspersed with clouds  
Playing grey, shining white;  
Dense deep green gums, rolling hills,  
A road that winds round, sinks  
Down into river smoking morning mist,  
Lights, swans sail together like magic,  
In this place that you're withdrawing to,  
To waste away and die?  
They all tell you, don't do it,  
You cannot die yet, there's still much to do.  
I try not to say the same, but what can I say,  
But say what you already know – to meditate.

Down town Hobart Salamanka market square  
Rings out dizzy music,  
People who sell throw out their wares,  
Curios, clothes, plants, fruits and cakes,  
The wharf nearby sells fish,  
A large Catamaran sits beside.  
Kitty Hawk protectively anchors in sight.  
All you need to live is here  
So too all you need to die.  
This indeed is a happy and self-sufficient place,  
See what a nice harbour you have here  
To watch those gulls fly!

You took me round Dobson Lake shining blue green,  
Eyeless Pandani stumps stretches out to stare at us,  
Up the mountain trek cold winds wring Snowgums  
Struggling to survive.

Beyond rolls out the Tarn Shelf,  
Below Seal's Lake suns herself,  
Around the corner, do you know what lurks?  
Maybe it's Death.

I can understand why, if it's here  
That you've chosen to withdraw to,  
Waste away and die,  
For from here I can see the trees  
Over on the hills on the other side,  
And I can feel what it's like  
To be spreading my wings in flight.

25 MARCH 1997

*Maydena, Tasmania, Australia*



Here in Tasmania we met John, who acted as our host for many days. He took us on treks up Mt. Field National Park besides other places. I had heard of him from others and only now did I find out that he is one of the more senior yogis in the tradition. He also helped to teach although is now quite withdrawn. Lately he has been diagnosed to have a degenerative motor-neuron disease for which western medicine has yet to find a cure. It looks bad and he may have just a few more years to live, although we hope that it is not true. But it is a wonder how he had taken to the situation with great equanimity which speaks much of one's practice. This made me reflect on how I can maintain such

equilibrium when my time comes and how this beautiful place can grace one's last moments. It is not always that one can choose one's conditions at death and if we can, it might as well be in Tasmania.

## SEEDLINGS

Viable seeds, products of fertile combinations  
Of giants over a hundred feet tall,  
Pinhead-sized grains fall to the rich dust grow  
Into seedlings, fragile and small,  
Easy victims to many a natural and man-interfered  
selection.

Grow my little babies,  
Grow even if I will not see your flowering miracle,  
Grow even if I will not see your next generation  
Of many thousands as magnificent as yourselves,  
Grow and you will bring green blessings  
To a hungry world.

Seeds, tiny they may be  
Holds within them  
All the data and secrets of evolution,  
Holds also within them  
Our future of a happy planet,  
Would you destroy that hope  
Or help fulfil its promise?

Everytime you sow a seed into the earth  
You also set a seed into your mind  
Just as a seed sprouts its tender head to the sun

So will the seeds in your mind sprout the beginnings of life.  
Sow good seeds, not those of poison vines,  
Nurture the seeds of good deeds, Seeds of mindfulness,  
To bring happiness in life.

19 APRIL 1997

*Santisukharama, Kota Tinggi, Johor*



Many years ago, as children, we used to recite nursery rhymes. For a time, I thought them as a tool to learn the English language. With age, I discover the subtlety of the wisdom hidden in it. For example, there is the nursery rhyme on Humpty Dumpty, a jolly egg of a fellow who, due to carelessness, fell off the wall and could not be put back together again even with the help of all the king's men – a lesson in mindfulness! There is also the one on the horse shoe nail, the loss of which finally accounted for the loss of a war. Then there is another on the little acorn, which little by little grew into a huge oak tree. Here we have the lesson of patience – for even great things have to start small... and fragile. That is just what the miracle of a seed is about. Within that little thing, is stored all the data of its future growth, and with it, all the potential it carries.

Science now recognises it as the blueprint found in the genes. Subsequent fertilisations bring about different combinations, while mutations add variations within the species. External factors then select the fittest to survive.

As I began to see some seedlings that I planted germinate, I lifted up their tender heads into the air, thinking of how these fragile little things will be when they grow into huge trees or shrubs with pretty flowers. Some, such as the basil, will be suitable for healthy consumption.

But from experience, the mortality rate is high. The high humidity here fuels rapid fungal growth and hungry insects are also too happy to make them part of their menu. Only a small percentage make it to maturity. There are so many conditions to fulfil before a dream becomes a reality.

Then my thoughts go to the kammic seeds we plant in life. Countless times we commit acts that are unwholesome. Can we do more wholesome deeds than those notorious deeds? In the many years that I have spent here, I reflected that I have indeed planted many seeds into people whom I have met. Fortunately, they are meditation seeds. Not many make much of it, valuable though they may be, but some have grown up somewhat. There is some satisfaction when I see the results – mindfulness “walking” in many parts of the country. It is also satisfying to know that the seeds are also likewise found in my own mind.

If one looks deeply into the nature of a deed, one can perceive the different results that are possible. Similarly, when we meet with a single event, it is also possible to trace the various

causes that have brought it about. A substantial degree of it is Kammic. These Plants connected with mindfulness came from the seeds of mindfulness, and the seeds of meditation will also grow into trees of wisdom. What better seeds can there be?

## WINDS OF KAMMA

Lady soft as willow  
Blown by winds of Kamma,  
Drifted through the window  
Into my room  
And asked me,  
Why she came  
And what guidance I can give.

And I tell her –

Mindfulness, dear lady, is the way you're searching for,  
Mindfulness, dear lady, is what you need most,  
Mindfulness, dear lady, is what you've been developing,  
Mindfulness into the real nature of things.

Many years ago  
The same winds blew me off  
Away from my dear home  
And the world of paper chase,  
Blew away my hair,  
Blew away my clothes,  
Now it's blowing me away  
From this place.

But I don't mind at all,  
For these winds blow in  
What I've been searching for,  
These winds blow in  
What I needed most,  
These winds blow in  
What I'm developing,  
These winds blow in  
Mindfulness,  
Mindfulness into the real nature of things.

Severing ties of the heart is painful,  
Strangely, the same too,  
That bondage of duty,  
These are chains in the valley of senses,  
The Ego will forever refuse to give in.  
So let go, and go we must,  
No matter what others may say or feel,  
Listen to that brilliant jewel of the heart  
It speaks very clearly in the softest of voices,  
The duty to the spirit is foremost.

24 APRIL 1997

*Santisukharama, Kota Tinggi, Johor*



Just the other day, my sister wanted to bring a friend here to see me. She said her friend needed some help.

“For what?” I asked, and further added, “I hope you realise I’m not a psychiatrist.”

“Not that, it’s on spiritual matters,” she answered.

“Well, in that case....” At that point, my mind wandered into spiritual matters or rather, *spirit* matters. I wanted to tell her I’m also not an exorcist, but I held back. I did not want to be too presumptuous.

Well, she turned out to be an extremely sane and fairly young, articulate lady, and from what I later learned, is also highly educated. Many traumatic and spiritual experiences happened only lately, about a year or two ago. It included the loss of a child and a near death experience. What is surprising is that she began to have experiences that are quite similar to *vipassana* experiences I had before I became a monk and finally renounced. She obviously understood the nature of the energy that pulsates in her body as part of and similar to that in the universal existence. The rate of detachment seems to be picking up at a rate beyond her expectations. She wanted some guidance.

Well, I did what I could, explaining the necessity of mindfulness and the training of it. In my case, it cleared up all the matters soon after I took up the practice, and it should do much better on her.

During that time I was already a Buddhist. The meditation I did was *Ch'an*. All those pulsating energies of mind and matter frequently ran through and I would lose the thought of an “I” completely. Despite all these clear experiences, I was still fumbling with the conventional logic

to find a foothold in the conscious, intellectual mind. Only when I dwelt upon the Vipassana tradition, that that structure of the system fell into place. Mindfulness clarifies!

Just before she left she passed me some poems she wrote lately, poems that she wanted to share with me, and they were beautiful poems. Here, I shall put in two.

*I lay in the deepest of sleep  
With the waves of a thousand oceans over me  
Ebbing and flowing through the night  
I lay in the deepest of sleep*

*I lay in the deepest of sleep  
When even the wind remained still  
And the stars broodily sent out their light  
I lay in the deepest of sleep*

*I lay in the deepest of sleep  
When the moon was high  
And the sun blazed and glowed so bright  
I lay in the deepest of sleep*

*I lay in the deepest of sleep  
When the mountains grew to their tremendous height  
And the earth trembled with all her might  
As the universe filled with wondrous delight  
I lay in the deepest of sleep.*

*I have a journey  
Such a long, long journey*

*And there is no time to sleep  
I have a journey  
Such a long, long journey  
And there is no time to weep  
All those mistakes that I did make  
Those incorrect decisions that I did take  
These are things that I must forget  
For I have a journey  
Such a long, long journey  
And there is no time to look behind  
For I have a journey  
Such a long, long journey  
And clear and pure must be my mind.*

*I travel the same journey  
Repeatedly  
For I have forgotten why I am here  
I tread the same path  
From here to eternity  
For I have forgotten why I am here  
I take these same steps  
Time and again  
Walking down the road of forever  
For I have forgotten why I am here  
My destination I know  
Is where the soul rests  
For I have been there and returned again  
Looking for you and looking for me  
I walk through the saddened clouds  
Passing the dying of time  
My goal is far,  
My destination is near  
For I have forgotten why I am here.*

## BROKEN

My boy, what did they do  
To make you cry like this?  
You shouldn't have let them  
Break your will.  
The pot that's broken,  
E'en it be pieced again,  
Shall never be the same.

My boy, it's true that  
The world at large is cruel  
But it's still a human world,  
And there are those who are kind.

This boy keeps a pain  
Beyond description,  
And yet he bears  
Trying to ignore  
The burden,  
Occasionally letting out a scream  
Of agony,  
There is fear, there is anger,  
There is despair,  
If you do not empty it,  
Drugs will numb you  
Into a zombie.

That pain, my boy,  
Should be thrown away,  
Thrown away to mingle  
With the dust and dead.  
Forgive and forget,  
Let the past be the past.

Human life, after all,  
Is to be happily lived.  
When tense, relax,  
When well, merits accumulate.

9 MAY 1997

*Santisukharama, Kota Tinggi, Johor*



We do meet, once in a while, people who are mentally unstable. The Dhamma speaks of different causes of mental instability, some of which include demonic possession, Kamma, physical illness such as fever, wrong views and of course, an excess of defilements such as craving, anger and delusion. The result is then, that indescribable suffering, which I think is the worst form of suffering on Earth, a sort of a living hell. But the one I am talking about isn't so bad, in the sense that he has not gone completely raving mad. He is one that once too often tips off into something abnormal (aren't we sometimes like that in a lesser degree?) and that is when you see the terror of a broken man. Usually some tablets that knock him off to sleep will do the job for the time being, and that is what we did, give him a few magic tablets. But that's not the answer – the causes lay deep in his mind. That strange behaviour resurges up again given the conditions. He knows it, but what can he do? Maybe he will get well with time, but that's not what we can do for him here. This is a meditation centre, not a mental hospital. But it's sad, because

they come across the Dhamma which they know is good, but are unable to embark on the most wonderful part called insight meditation.

## TIME ON THE MOVE

Time flips through numbers  
On the calendar sheets  
Time crawls between the lines  
That makes up your face  
Time rushes under the soles  
Of scurrying feet  
Time climbs onto tops  
Of growing trees  
But time stood still  
on the road as we rode along  
Froze all angles of the sun  
For me to choose  
The direction in the last laps  
Of my brief life on Earth  
To choose to fly alone  
Or to die with the herds

My dream tells me emphatically  
That I should not delay the course  
Detour to sight-see a world  
That has always been the same  
So I cry for you,  
With tears of a crocodile  
I smile for myself  
A decent smile,  
A monkey of a smile.

I have a choice, one choice,  
A beautiful choice

18 MAY 1997  
*Batu Pahat, Johor*



This poem came up when I was on the road  
from Kota Tinggi to Batu Pahat to give talks.

## ALL IN A SPLIT OF A SECOND

It all happened in just a split of a second,  
That screech of rubber on rocks,  
That clash and thump of metals.  
Then flew an Indian man as his bike rolled along,  
A tumble and a scramble and I saw him licked his  
wounds.

But somewhere behind the car,  
Another motorcycle laid in silence.  
Its rider, (how? It was just too fast)  
was thrown to the ground  
In the rear of the car.  
His body too lay silently,  
Just like his motorcycle,  
On the metal road,  
Face to one side,  
Eyes staring blankly.  
Even as the driver slowly walked to him,  
Tapped him gently on his shoulder,  
He lay there silently,  
Body soft and limp,  
Face to one side,

Eyes staring blankly.  
Is he dead?  
Is this how time seals up  
The man, his breath?  
All in a split of a second?

25 MAY 1997

*Santisukharama, Kota Tinggi, Johor*



The incident occurred shortly after my visit to the dentist, my yearly reminder of sufferings that come with the body, which fortunately did not come with too much. After paying a short visit to a friend, just at the junction, when Alan was waiting for his turn to cross the road, right in front of us, there was a bang and a screech. It was obvious that an accident had occurred. But it was just too fast, all in a split of a second. The next thing I saw was the Indian man thrown off his bike, made a brief scramble and seemed to escape relatively unhurt. But then, when I saw the driver, whose car's rear was bumped, walk out, I also saw another bike trapped at the rear. When he tapped the shoulder of the other man lying on the metal road, there was no response. The victim's face was emotionless, eyes blank, body soft and limp.

This was not the first time I saw something like this. There was a case which I saw many years ago in Penang. The motorcyclist, who must have been travelling at a considerable speed, was hit by a turning car. He was carrying a lady who, in turn, was cradling a baby. Shortly

after the screech and bang, the man with the crash helmet somersaulted in front of me. The helmet came off and his head was bloody. The lady flew and rolled at a tremendous speed further away towards the side. I can remember her face, eyes tightly closed as if determined to shut herself from what was happening. From her hands, the baby was flung off till it rolled right across the hard road, quicker than a football. All three of them made no sound.

However, the worst that I heard of was a car that ran over a pregnant woman. The foetus came out as a result. The man who saw it decided to become a monk.

I suppose this type of thing occurs everyday all across the world. People die, but does anyone really think about it? In this instant, it made me think with some compassion about the victim. It also made me think of how it can all happen so very fast, all in a split of a second and how helpless most of us are then.

Contrary to expectations, there are those that know exactly what happened during these brief but critical periods. A young friend of mine who once met with an accident reported his experience to me. He said that from the moment he was thrown from his bike, it was like slow motion. He could feel and notice everything happening step by step. Even when he landed on the ground, he could hear the cracks of his bone in slow sequence. There was no pain and

fear then; they come later. The same was reported to me by my aunt who slipped in the bathroom. Fortunately, her head was saved when it landed onto the waste paper basket instead of the hard floor. But she suffered a leg fracture. All came in slow motion. Is it adrenalin doing its work, or is it previous practice in meditation? Usually in life threatening situations such as these, the alertness called up can be tremendous. Man had done feats usually unaccomplishable. If you have been meditating, it would be stronger. There have been reports by yogis that the mindful noting that can arise by itself at that time can become even stronger than during retreats.

## THE DAY AFTER

After I have left  
Be happy for me  
For I have followed my heart  
Flown away with the winds  
For my Nature is such  
Empty and fleeting  
Be happy that I have left  
To be on Nature's path

After I have left  
And if you wish to find me  
Go to the forest  
Dark and deep  
For there is where I want to be  
And where I was meant to be

Deep in the forest  
Where trees grow tall

Then, there at that very spot  
Where you stand  
If you wish to hear me  
Look up and listen  
To the rustlings of the leaves  
As the wind passes by  
In whispers or in cries  
What winds have to say  
Is also what I have in mind  
What has the world got to do with me?

15 JUNE 1997  
*Place Unknown*



I do not know if I will spend much time deep in the forest, but I will certainly try. At least it will be places like that – secluded and simple. Meditation has always been on my mind, and it is what I live for, and there is no choice but to find such resorts.

I am glad that after all these years in Kota Tinggi, I did not harbour any strong attachments to the hermitage or anybody. So also I did not leave in anger and sorrow. Even the trees that I planted and took much interest in were more of a sideline. Something to relax the mind in the midst of my teaching activities. I hope they will grow beyond my lifespan to great heights.

Rather, I leave happily, having known I have done more than my part. Now, there lies before me what I want to do, and that is, to go into deeper private research in this field which I know will be most rewarding. Maybe after many years I will be able to share my findings of the more profound aspects of the Dhamma with my friends, if they are still around. This does make a good conclusion to this book with an appropriate title.

Will there be a sequel to this? Go ask the winds.

