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PARABOLA
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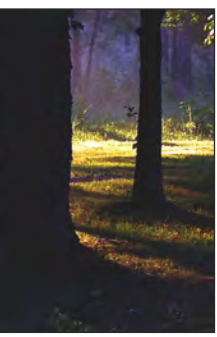
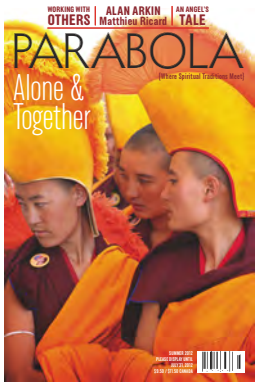
ALONE & TOGETHER

VOLUME 37 NUMBER 2 SUMMER 2012





Sacred Gathering,
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Please see pp. 44–45.

WHAT IS A PARABOLA?

A parabola is one of the most elegant forms in nature. Every path made by a thrown ball, every spout of water from a fountain, and every graceful arch of steel cables in a suspension bridge is a parabola.

The parabola represents the epitome of a quest. It is the metaphorical journey to a particular point, and then back home, along a similar path perhaps, but in a different direction, after which the traveler is essentially, irrevocably changed.

Parabolas have an unusual and useful property: as in a satellite dish, all parallel beams of energy (e.g., light or radio waves) reflect on the parabola's face and gather at one point. That point is called the focus.

In a similar way, each issue of **PARABOLA** has its own focus: one of the timeless themes of human existence.

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"THE HARDEST SPIRITUAL WORK on the planet is to try to work in everyday life," says architect Barry Svigals in this Summer 2012 issue of ***PARABOLA***. "We rarely talk about how difficult it is for a person in a family … to live a spiritual life while the kids are crying, diapers need to be changed, a job has to be done, all those things."

How is it that we manage to follow any sort of spiritual path in the midst of the mayhem that is ordinary life?

"He aspired to carry the cloister within him … he knew he could not live in a monastery," writes Brother Paul Quenon earlier in this *Alone & Together* issue. Brother Paul, who studied with Thomas Merton, is referring to the poet Rainer Maria Rilke, but his words apply to most contemporary seekers.

Most of us do not live in monasteries, but we recognize that we need others along the way, and perhaps especially because we reside in the modern-day secular world. Through others we find meaning and purpose, and in them we see useful mirrors of ourselves. Yet we also recognize a profound need for silence, for the stillness of solitude, for the cloister within, the Kingdom of God as Jesus called it.

How can we wisely balance the need for both solitude and community in our lives and in our spiritual search?

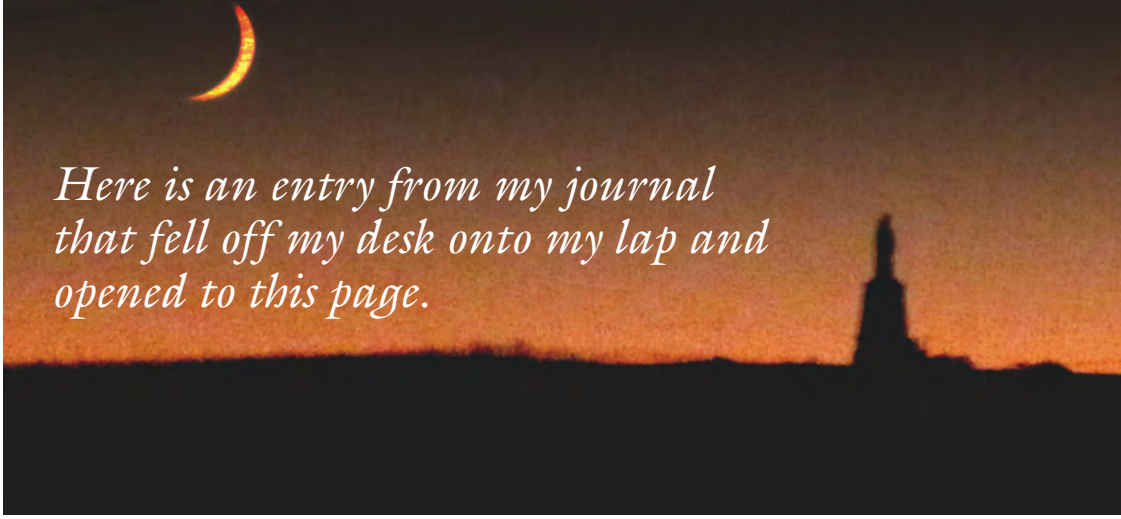
This issue of ***PARABOLA*** explores that question through interviews, articles, stories, poems, and art. Among its many highlights are an extensive interview with veteran movie star and Vedanta student Alan Arkin, and another with Buddhist monk and photographer Matthieu Ricard. There is deep wisdom from Saint Syncletica, one of the ancient Desert Mothers, and a powerful tale of vengeance and remorse from the Japanese Noh tradition. Also in this issue, we celebrate Peter Rabbit on his 110th anniversary, share the wonderful bonding of a man and a fox, and offer excerpts from two new books, one of which concerns a woman who grows angel's wings.

May you enjoy and benefit from this latest issue of ***PARABOLA***.

—JEFF ZALESKI

Prayer, Poverty, and Creativity

Brother Paul Quenon



Here is an entry from my journal that fell off my desk onto my lap and opened to this page.

MONKS DO NOT TALK much about their personal meditation, outside of discussions with their spiritual director. Contemplation is anything but a hot topic around the chopping table in the kitchen, or on the packing line in the cheese factory. This for many reasons. It is too personal, for one; and there is little to talk about for another. Contemplation is too poor, too empty and obscure. It is mostly an entrance to and abiding in the emptiness of Christ. And that largely without being aware that it is Christ's emptiness. Gradually one ceases to think of it as one's own as well. The self and its sense of well-being, or lack thereof, is incidental. This un-named emptiness attaches to no one and is not even a possession.

Here is an entry from my journal that fell off my desk onto my lap and opened to this page. It is March 2, 2002.

> I wake up at 2:40 a.m., before Vigils at 3:00 a.m., and begin saying the Jesus Prayer, and sit up in my sleeping bag and dangle my feet over the side of the porch.
>
> It seems trite to start invoking the name of Jesus—something I do habitually, but what am I doing? Now I stop before saying the name, before I even pronounce the first letter. In my mind I stop. I need prayer that is before prayer, the prayer which is not any prayer that can be said, which leaves me with no need to say any prayer. It is too pure and brief for me to dwell on. Yet it is the very truth of any religious act.
>
> It is of a depth of confidentiality and trust that makes repetition of prayer and the holy name superfluous. But what am I doing, since nothing needs to be done? The real issue is to know God's acceptance. In God my own name, the name which cannot be articulated in human words, is already spoken; spoken in silence, in this moonlit night in early spring weather, in this year 2002. As the coming year develops, what I do and what comes about is also the spelling out of that inarticulate name—be it only in some confused and garbled way.
>
> The truth of my name is already spoken in the silence, where the true name of Jesus and my own name are inarticulate in the Un-nameable—the Presence that defeats all prayer before it begins.
>
> Lord, keep me from the blasphemy of any prayer that hides and trivializes your presence. The prayer that makes itself important, that burdens and

encloses the soul, that does not and cannot really know any name—but only makes words that no one listens to except myself, and does no one good, least of all to myself.

You might ask at this point, what does this kind of personal prayer, deep as it is, have to do with community?

I would answer that it has nothing to do with creation of community because here there is no disunity to begin with. It is at the root of community. It is where community already exists. Where there is no distinction between my name and the name of Jesus, there is no distinction between my name and your name. We are one in Christ. This is the true home for every person, the home of us all. We are all persons created in the person of the Only Begotten; each one is an image and likeness of God in the Divine Person generated from all eternity. The unique love God has for me is unique in you. Christ reveals the unique, himself the only Son, the first born. All this is experienced in the depth of the heart when solitude sings a song for nobody. It is not my song, it is not your song, nor can it be possessed, and therefore it is exclusive of no one.

One of Thomas Merton's most spare and yet most suggestive poems is symbolic of this realization.

Song for Nobody

A yellow flower
(light and spirit)
sings by itself
For nobody.

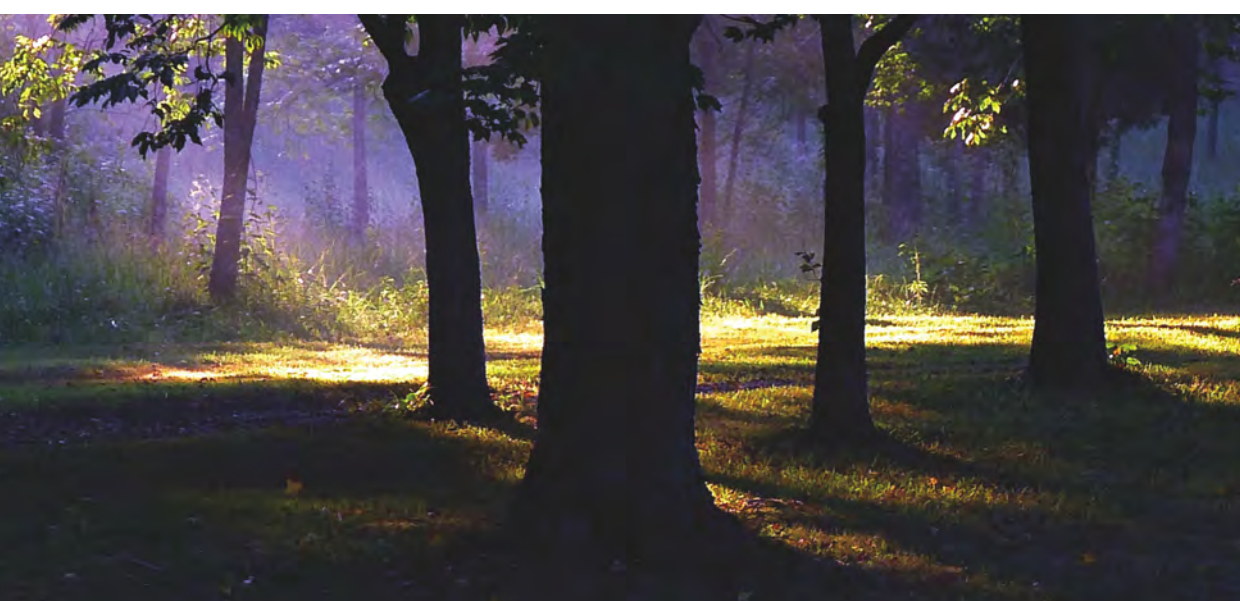
A golden spirit
(light and emptiness)
sings without a word
by itself.

Let no one touch this gentle sun
In whose dark eye
someone is awake.

(No light, no gold, no name,
no color
and no thought:
O, wide awake!)

A golden heaven
sings by itself
a song for nobody.

For such music God is not an object. For such music, the person is not a subject. The song hides itself in the dark center of silence, which is the womb of



all creativity. Who sings? Who listens? The song already contains all hearing; all joy and sorrow and rapture are already stirred to voice in such silence. In the beginning was the Song, and the Song was with God and the Song was God. All other songs are a variation on the theme—even if the song be only a small Black-eyed Susan alongside the gravel road to Merton's hermitage.

Such is the grandeur and the poverty of interior prayer. By entering into its silence and poverty I gain detachment and the freedom that makes creativity possible. True creativity does not need an excuse. It is its own motivation. It is spontaneous. It need not win public recognition, and its aim is not success.

Perhaps one of the finest examples of this pure creativity is Emily Dickinson, who shunned offers for her publication from leading writers of her time. She made her principles clear in the following words:

Publication — is the Auction

Publication — is the Auction
Of the Mind of Man —
Poverty — be justifying
For so foul a thing

Possibly — but We — would rather
From Our Garret go
White — unto the White Creator —
Than invest — Our Snow —

Thought belong to Him who
gave it —
Then — to Him Who bear
Its corporeal illustration — Sell
The Royal Air —

In the Parcel — Be the Merchant
Of the Heavenly Grace —
But reduce no Human Spirit
To Disgrace of Price —

She requested her housekeeper to burn the poems after she died. Fortunately the woman disobeyed, and we can thank God for all these gems of originality and creative detachment. For Dickinson, poetry was a form of prayer: "Thought belongs to Him who gave it". It is grounded in the sacred and shares in the sacred.

Success is not the goal of creativity. Success can be a threat to creativity and become an end in itself. As Merton said: *If you have learned only how to be a success, your life has probably been wasted.* Creativity, as life itself, is grounded in and shares in the sacred. For that reason meditation, detached and free of ego, is a healthy training for creativity. It tones up and conditions the mind and heart: will is

straightened, imagination disciplined, enthusiasm moderated. Thinking is reined in, and one gives over to the asceticism of listening, that the mind may be free, open, and flexible for the truth. St. Benedict's Rule for Monasteries opens with an appeal: *Listen*. Perhaps it is the most important word in the Rule. Listen, *obaudire*, also means obey. In listening something new can emerge, something beyond my own assumptions, control, and agenda. Rainer Rilke spoke of writing as an obedience to the moment, to what is given in the present. He would not find it strange if this were called a monastic approach to writing. He aspired to carry the cloister within him, although he knew he could not live in a monastery.

In listening, words are silenced that what is unspoken may emerge; emerge in a new formulation, one without cliché and preconceptions. Or perhaps the simplest of words may take on a new weight and dignity, one where language returns to the rudimentary, to primal wonder that you can speak at all. This is what Rainer Rilke suggested was "the hidden purpose of this cunning earth":

> Are we, perhaps, *here* just to utter:
> house, bridge,
> fountain, gate, jug, fruit tree,
> window—
>
> at most: column, tower. . . but
> to *utter* them, remember,
> to speak in a way which the named
> never dreamed
> they could *be*?[1]

Through poetic obedience you become co-creator with the world; its promptings become your poetry. Creation is taken up into a new creation, and is re-created in a form of human consciousness it does not have of its own. Any contemplative consciousness, be it of a poet or not, raises the world in a form that only the mind can give. To dwell all afternoon by a lake and be fully aware, to slow your mind to the pace of life that continually stirs, to watch the light that subtly shifts, hides, and emerges— this is to bring an awareness that only you can afford. The beauty that abides there goes undetected unless you complete it in awareness.

But the wonder of it is that the exchange is mutual. You are recreated by the lake, because as Wendell Berry expressed it: "*After many years you come with no thought of these, because they themselves are your thoughts.*" My mind will exist in a form that only the lake and its elusive, shifting features can afford me.

All beings exist in the mind of God, but even God's vast awareness needs your human awareness, however limited it be. Your awareness, the one you bring to the lake, gives the place its particular human beauty, one that can exist in your sensibility alone. And this in turn exists in the mind of God, as your awareness in the comprehensive awareness of God.

The form of the place, the song it sings to itself, whose song is it? Does it any longer really matter? Distinctions fall away, and the song the place sings in you is the song you sing in God, and

[1] Duino Elegy Ninth, tr. William H. Gass, *Reflections on the Problems of Translation*. Basic Books, 1999.

the song in God is the never exclusive of any and is the same song sung in you. This is the grandeur of personal prayer; the poverty is that it can never be possessed.

Decades ago I put something of this into words which were inspired by an Igbo name I was given by Nigerian monks when I was at the monastery of Mt. Calvary in Anambra State. I was named Chukwuma, which means: *God Knows.* As I read this poem now, it speaks of this mutual coincidence—what I would call a circumincession, to borrow a word from the theology, the circumincessions of the three equal persons in the Blessed Trinity. In this case it is of unequals. It is a threefold coincidence of consciousness in God, in myself, and in the creative expression. A coincidence that is really quite simple; the more perfect, the simpler it is. I express this in a prayer, a short one: based on my given name in Igbo: *God Knows.*

Final Vision

In your Oneness I am one
In your eye, the pupil am I
Not seen except by seeing
Unheard except by hearing

What song will be my music?
What utterance be my name?

God knowing — such may I be.
Love loving unto love.

Broadening the Arc of Devotion

A Conversation with Alan Arkin

ALAN ARKIN has been a major star of stage, screen, and television for nearly fifty years. Best known for his roles in such films as *WAIT UNTIL DARK*, *CATCH-22*, *EDWARD SCISSORHANDS*, and *LITTLE MISS SUNSHINE* (an Oscar-winning role), Arkin is also a master teacher. Along with his ongoing work as an actor/director/writer, he has taught retreats at The Omega Institute, Bennington College, and Columbia College. He is the author of *AN IMPROVISED LIFE: A MEMOIR*, and for almost half a century he has been a student of Vedanta and Kashmir Shaivism.

I found Alan and his wife, Suzanne, to be warm and engaging, and our conversations were sheer delight. This previously unpublished interview about their improvisation workshops took place over brunch at a busy diner and at the Arkin home in Santa Fe in June 2005.

—David Ulrich

David Ulrich: *Philosopher Jacob Needleman articulates the question: "We obviously cannot confront this tangled world alone. It takes no great insight to realize that we have no choice but to think together, ponder together in groups and communities. The question is: how to come together and think and hear each other in order to touch or be touched by the intelligence we need." How can groups of people "share their perceptions and attention, and through that sharing become a conduit for the appearance of a spiritual intelligence?"*

Alan, I know in your work with improvisation there seem to be many different dimensions of people coming together, making mutual discoveries, and having one's work with each other spark ones' own discoveries. How does that take place?

Alan Arkin: Something happens in the workshops that is transforming for people. It's what I had hoped for, but it's happening in a broader way than I ever envisioned. It wasn't until a couple of years ago that I realized why I don't want to teach acting and why doing the

improvisational workshops is so exciting. If I taught acting for fifty years, I'd be lucky if out of the hundreds of people I worked with, two or three people would learn how to fly, to get out of their own way. But at the end of a two-day improvisational workshop, we have, out of a group of twenty, eighteen or nineteen people that are soaring and it's miraculous.

DU: *How do they come to that ability to soar?*
AA: It's a combination of things that I am only a part of. This is not my own design, but the feedback we are getting from a lot of people says that Suzanne and I bring to the workshop a completely accepting attitude, that we don't have the need for them to be good or bad or to get anything out of it. I think people respond to the fact that we don't have a specific need except for them to have a good time.

DU: *So you're nurturing and creating an environment where people can come together, and in that coming together there is a power in the group dynamics that brings something to life.*
AA: That seems to be what's happening, The design of the workshop itself has people fly. If I have an agenda. it's wanting to see people get out of their own way and have an experience where they're going places that they didn't know existed—to what athletes call *the zone*. But that is an individual experience. The sense of the group dynamic, which I think even takes precedence over the strictly individual experience, has become kind of awesome. By the end of a weekend, we have twenty people that are bonded for years.

There is nothing that we can say, no amount of words can describe the kind of atmosphere that gets set up in the workshops. It's the atmosphere, which is a wordless matrix, that somehow is responsible for this event and I don't know how it happens. Yet as I look back on the way the workshop was set up, the entire first third of it is a series of exercises that force people to depend on each other, so that a sense of interdependence is built into everything that comes afterwards.

DU: *In what way does this take place?*
AA: My first exercise is to get twenty people in a ring. They don't know each other and they're all terrified. I tell them the rules for this exercise: I don't want to see anything interesting and I don't want to see anything creative. And immediately twenty people's shoulders go down and they breathe a sigh of relief. They say to themselves: "Well thank God I don't have to do what I came here for. I don't have to be the thing that I wanted this workshop to accomplish for me." Then what we do is

When we leave ourselves alone, when we're flowing like we're supposed to flow … we automatically go into a creative mode.

just play imaginary ball for about ten minutes, and we keep changing the nature of the ball. The ball will become a bowl, it will become a piece of rope, it will become a small suitcase, and at the end of five or six minutes everybody's laughing, having a good time, and being enormously creative. At the end of the exercise I ask: "What happened, what were the instructions for this?"

I tell them: "You failed! The instruction was not to be creative, not to be interesting." I then ask, "Why were you creative?" And every once in a while someone realizes the answer: that it's our nature to be creative, and that not being creative is the aberration. When we leave ourselves alone, when we're flowing like we're supposed to flow, without getting in our way and censoring ourselves and trying to please our parents or some teacher or some idea of who we would like ourselves to be, we automatically go into a creative mode.

In this exercise it will sometimes happen that the energy goes out of the circle, particularly when people start slowing down and trying to be clever and entertain us. That's why one of the other things I say is to keep it going, keep the object moving, no time to think—I don't want to see thinking in this exercise.

In the second exercise you start with one person performing a motion, any kind of motion, and you tell them that these eight people in the group are going to be one machine. The first person begins a motion, the second person has to add on to that, the third person has to add on to that until the eight people become one cog and one piece of machinery.

Suzanne Arkin: Initially they don't touch each other. They don't know each other very well and are a bit standoffish, so we encourage them to do it again and to touch each other this time, which starts to connect people.

AA: It gets instantly more interesting. The way I describe it is that when people are touching, something can happen. In this case the exercise is purely physical so it's a physical touch, but it doesn't have to be a physical touch—like in most of the other exercises you sense when people are connecting with each other, it is often a form of touching that doesn't have to be physical. The next exercise is getting groups of three people together and giving them some common task that they have to solve together—like putting furniture into a room in a specific way. Of course there is no there's no real furniture, it's all in their heads.

DU: *You're guiding people away from trying too hard. Is there something about the group dynamics that helps each individual become more creative and interesting?*

AA: Yes, sooner or later—it usually happens pretty soon into the experience—you'll see somebody take a big risk, and once somebody takes a big risk, I think that it starts dawning on

other people: My God they took a big risk, and nobody's denouncing them or criticizing them.

DU: *What is your own work within the group? You both seem to get into the thick of it; you are there attending to whether or not somebody is functioning from their ego and trying to pull them back to a sense of authenticity.*

AA: Yes, I feel it's the only real function I serve of any importance in the group. I tell people early on that the only thing I do not want to see on this stage is any self-congratulatory, Saturday Night Live, smart-ass stuff. And I ask, how do I know when you are doing that, and when you're not? I have an almost infallible guide that tells me when somebody's being truthful or whether they are showing off—and that's my rear end. If I find myself sitting forward in my seat, something is really happening, and it's interesting because it's out of ego-control. If it's smart-ass stuff, then I find myself sitting back on the chair and saying, ooohh he's clever, but he's not engaging in the event. It's a gauge that I have, that I feel I'm good at because I pay attention to it. And it's something everyone in the group can have access to. I tell them, just watch *yourself* and see where your attention is as you watch other scenes. And watch if your attention is pulling you back into the seat or whether it's pulling you forward into the event.

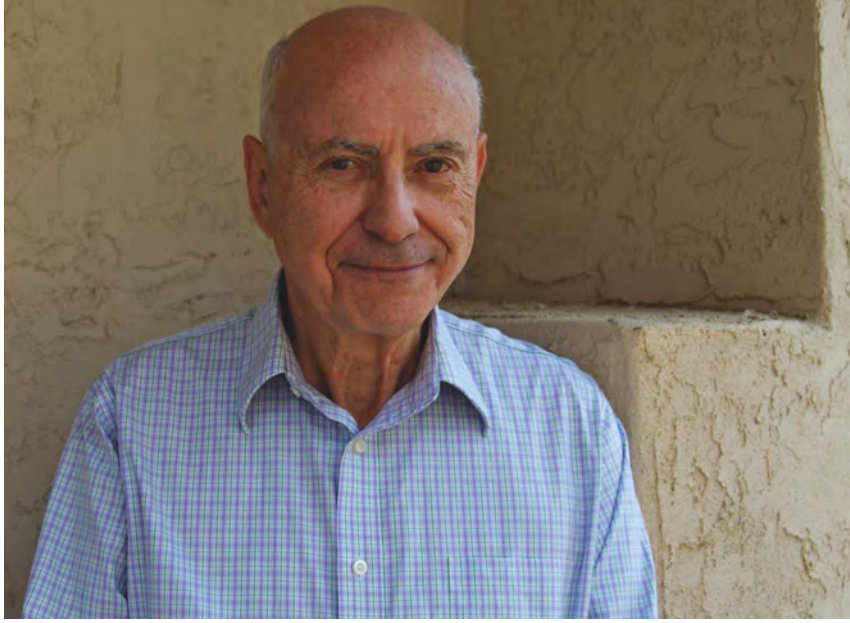
DU: *That's a very important role because you're being honest with your own responses, and by being honest you're helping each individual become more authentic within themselves.*

Inner work is infectious, is it not? If everybody is working in a way that attempts to get beyond their egos, and to both witness and challenge their implicit assumptions, something can come to life that is of a different quality. How can we get from a strictly group dynamic to accessing this larger wisdom that both lies within us and surrounds us?

SA: It's about intense devotion.

AA: Yes, I think that's the key. And it can be devotion to anything. The way that I talk about it is that one of the signs of being connected is being in the zone. That is a huge step, but I don't know how you go between the normal state of walking around and what I call the zone, where things are flowing and effortless. In my experience with people who have been in that zone, it can occur in any walk of life, but it has to be accompanied by an intense devotion to whatever mode that zone appears in.

A lot of athletes can tell you that the zone is being in a place that's timeless, a place where they can't make mistakes, where everything slows down, where they know where every teammate is, where they know that they're going to get the ball even though they haven't yet been passed it. They just know things they have no way of knowing. They're out of the way, they're a vehicle rather than imposing themselves in any way. Your ability to reach the zone in different areas of your life depends on where you have placed your devotion. Without intense devotion, I don't think it's something you can ever touch on. I had this experience with acting for many years, but I made an interesting mistake. This was the most exalted place I had ever experienced, and I really thought that acting gave me that experience, that the god of acting brought that experience to me. What I didn't realize until years later was that there is no god



of acting, there is no special acting place, that my devotion to the craft of acting gave that experience to me.

DU: *What. Oh no! There is no God of art?* [Laughter.]
AA: Well … who knows? But I do know that I brought my devotion to the craft of acting. The next step from that—and it's another huge leap—is for people to realize, wow, if I experienced this extraordinary and exalted state in this little area, maybe if I extended my devotion, if I broadened the arc of my devotion, maybe I can experience it in other walks of life, in other places of my life.

DU: "*Broadening the arc of your devotion.*" *That's a beautiful concept.*

When you broaden the scope of your devotion, does that energy extend to your workshops? Also, as the individuals in the workshop begin to broaden the devotion they bring to the task, does that help the other person they're working with? What are the steps in the workshop to bring people to that place together?
SA: Some of them are very simple techniques, like intention. We ask the participants to not go into the playing area unless they have an intention. This basically means to have some kind of need and to drive that through the entire scene, not to ever let go of that intention unless the other person says something or has a strong enough intention to organically take you in another direction—which you need to do of course in improvisation.

I think that the concentration that intention brings can begin the process towards connection. With intention, concentration, and then somehow with that deeper level of concentration, I find myself sometimes in that zone.

I think it's also by listening. By listening I mean when someone can really hear what's being said, or what's being transferred, I mean, not just in terms of words, but in terms of an energetic level as well. Actually listening to what's being said, and feeling that you're being listened to, is, for me, miraculous. How many times during the day do you really feel like someone's hearing what you're saying. It's just so rare. I think that gets you into another realm—through attention.

DU: *Could you say something about how we connect with these subtle energies through attention? The sculptor Isamu Noguchi talks about creativity as something that we access that he describes as "flowing very rapidly" through the air. Do you touch that in your improvisational workshops?*
AA: It's become very simple in the workshop. As far I'm concerned, every great performance—every great

The minute you have a feeling connection with the intention, then you have a live organism up there.

performance in the workshop, in the world, in movies and television, to me boils down to two things: intention and the emotion or feeling connected with the intention. Emotions and feelings are two different things, but I'll get to that later.

Once we get past the first exercise, I say that I don't want to see anybody get up on stage without an idea. I don't want to see anyone just spew. I want to see people go on stage only when they have an intention of some kind. Once they have the idea down of not going on stage until they have an intention, they can rarely make a mistake. You will never have a boring scene, it will never be devoid of contact or connection of some kind. That's on a very mundane level, but it will work, it will always work. Once you have that idea down, then we work on the idea of filling that intention with something personal, something that's emotionally, kinesthetically personal to you. Because if the intention stays intellectual, you'll get into the place of being a playwright on stage, and you'll be pretending to relate to somebody while you are watching this typewriter going in your head.

One of the exercises I like to give is of simple buying and selling—where the intention is built in. You come into the store, your intention is to buy something, the other person's intention is to sell something—so the intention is mutually there. But your connection to the buying is what will turn it into an event rather than just a transaction. The depth of your connection with it, your emotional or feeling connection with it, takes it from being a transaction to the possibility for it being an event.

The minute you have a feeling connection with the intention, then you have a live organism up there.

DU: *Your mutual participation in the workshop seems important. You seem to help each other, and your connection with each other seems profound, in terms of helping to encourage a flow of energy. There's a tone that comes through in your relationship. It sparks feeling, and I'm sure that the students feel it also. Do you think that the energy that you two embody as partners touches the participants of the workshops on a level they might not even be aware of?*

AA: It's not something we do consciously, but we've gotten at least fifteen or twenty letters over the past few years acknowledging that. We don't feel like it's profound, we just know we love each other and try and stay open. We have our own perspective on what a relationship can be like, and we don't have any sense of doing anything.

SA: I know this sounds so romantic, but we have a deep connection, a very deep love for one another, and I think people pick that up. And they also tell us that they feel loved in the workshop. They have said that to me often, and I feel that we do love them in this process, that we're somehow nurturing.

DU: *Is it an impersonal kind of love?*
AA: I wouldn't say it's emotionally charged. But every once in a while it gets like that when somebody does work that's incredibly deep and very revealing. It will engender some kind of a more personal light for a little while.

There's a great statement that I heard on national public radio that made an enormous impression on me when they were interviewing a Greek Orthodox monk. There was something about his voice and the way he was speaking that really captivated me. Finally there was a question to him that I thought was fascinating: "Do you find that you've changed, can you track the changes that have taken place in you in the twenty-five years that you've been a monk?" And he said: "Oh yes, I can. I feel enormously different from the person who I was when I started out. Twenty-five years ago I was a very passionate person. Now I don't see myself as a highly charged emotional person anymore, but I think of myself as a person of much finer feeling, and that I'm a much more feeling person." I said, God, what a great and fascinating distinction between a highly emotional person to a person with deeper feeling. I spent a lot of time thinking about that and I even looked into the roots of the word "passionate."

"Passionate" is related to the idea of torment and suffering, and a genuinely feeling person is somebody who has their feelings accessible to them, which you don't have when you're in a state of passion. You may have one single feeling accessible to you, but the panorama of them will not be accessible.

DU: *Gertrude Stein once characterized American writers as having passions, but not true passion. I think she was making something of the same distinction. It seems to me that this quality of feeling, or this quality of love that you feel is what can bring us to a different quality of attention and a different quality of perceiving life. Is there something about this difference in passion and feeling where we tune ourselves, if you will, to a higher vibration? What is the role of feeling in opening to the wisdom that lies within us and surrounds us?*
AA: I think it happens, I don't think it's something you decide. I think if you take care of the early stages, which is being attentive to your feeling states, then that's kind of a natural byproduct of it.
SA: I think it's also a form of grace. When we're in the workshops, it's not that I'm saying to myself, okay now I'm going to do this in order to get to that higher place. What happens is that somehow we're able to open ourselves enough to be used in some way as an instrument of grace.

In terms of what someone may believe in, whether it's a spirit or god or Buddha, perhaps when we find our way of helping or serving, we open at those moments to that force and have it flow through us to help heal or help teach or help change. I have to honestly say—and not out of any kind of humility—that it really never feels like I have anything to do with it. It feels as good for me and as healing for me as it feels for participants because of this thing that's flowing. And sometimes it does feel like maybe I'm being used, but maybe they're also being used to give it back to me.
AA: The point of entry for this experience was when I was a kid. The only way I

I want to be God's idiot, and I'm working on that.

knew anything then was through the filter of theater and film. I wanted badly to have that sense of flow and power—which I didn't have at that time. But I would watch people and would find that there were some people that had a deeper intuition about things. I found that what was almost invariably true with these people, was that they had less agenda than others. They had a fluid ability within the structure of their lives to change, to go in different directions, and that seemed to be a constant. This is the atmosphere I want to create with the workshop. I don't have any need to be a mentor. If the workshop fails, I don't care, if it goes well it's wonderful. I do care, but it is a different kind of caring. It's impersonal.

I think that the need an artist has to manipulate the world indicates some kind of aberration. What do you need to manipulate it for, it's fine the way it is. The work will do itself, the thing will do itself. There's a level of trust here.

DU: *I keep coming back to this question about trust, that we trust the creative process to proceed on its own, with our participation to be sure, but that we allow it to move in a certain direction. Does something else take over, do invisible energies contribute to that process? Do you find that there is a greater intelligence available?*
AA: My God, it's everything.
SA: Yes, and in the workshops you have to establish some form. So we start with throwing the ball in a circle, and then after a while the exercises almost disappear. Something else is happening. We're doing it, but something else does take over.
AA: Talking about invisible energy, it doesn't take a genius or great mystic to know that if you're connected deeply with somebody and you walk into the house and they're in another room and they're in a lousy mood you can feel it. I would say millions and millions of people experience that. Because when you walk into the house, you open yourself, you relax, and you have a close relationship with this person, so you allow it. But most people don't allow it in other places, they shut down, they shut down those impulses, they allow tensions to take over. But it's something that everybody's got. Whether you choose to make use of it or not is an individual thing.

And the opposite is true also. When something has an extraordinarily warm and loving atmosphere you can, you can pick up on that.

How do we broaden the arc of that devotion? One of the questions we've been getting more and more lately is terribly sad. People say at the end of the workshop: Okay, this is all very well and good, but what do we do in the real world? This question makes me laugh. The workshops are very much the real world, but if someone feels a deeper sense of freedom and safety there, it becomes their responsibility to carry this with them and insist that it become part of the rest of their life—which is a pretty big order, I know. And not a lot of people are going to be able to do it right away.

DU: *It gives people a taste of something. And then they do have to do the work in order to bring it into their lives. But it shows them it's possible doesn't it?*
AA: My teacher, and a lot of Eastern thought, says that you don't need to be taught anything. You need to remember, you need to shed skin after skin after skin until the truth, which is within you already, just starts revealing itself to you. With some help along the way, like prods—a mentor here or a mentor there.

I use the metaphor frequently in the workshop of learning how to use one's voice, how to become a singer. I studied voice for a couple of years, and my teacher drove me nuts because for a couple of years nothing he said made any sense to me. It ultimately came down to either yes or no. Then one day, after about a year and nine months, I sang from the right place and everything he said finally made sense. But up until that point he might as well been talking gibberish. The finger pointing at the moon is not the moon. You can talk and talk and talk, but until you have the experience of letting go, all you can do is believe that this guy doesn't sound like he's lying. Get out of the frontal lobe, get shoved down to the rest of your system. You have to have the experience of letting go in order for anything to really sing for you.

In the workshops, I'm happier being a wild man, I'm happier being God's fool. I have to keep myself from saying outlandish things all the time to people—or the opposite, saying them too rigidly. So I want to be God's idiot, and I'm working on that.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Away

Tracy Cochran

During the first meditation of my silent retreat at the Insight Meditation Society, I realized I didn't really want to be away. For months I had longed to be cloistered in silence in the wilds of Massachusetts in the depths of February. Yet in the candlelit meditation hall, I understand that I never really wanted to be elsewhere, just here, fully here, inside my own life. My deepest longing was not to go out but to sink down under the layers of conditioning, to touch the unconditioned. I remembered suddenly and with great force that the kingdom of heaven is within.

"In the point of rest at the center of our being, we encounter a world where all things are at rest in the same way," wrote Dag Hammarskjold in his spiritual journal *Markings*. Sitting on my cushion at IMS, I pictured Hammarskjold, Secretary-General of the United Nations and a great peacemaker, finding his way to the center of his being while war raged around him.

Once, while being mugged on a deserted side street in Hell's Kitchen in Manhattan, a power of stillness and vision descended on me like grace. I glimpsed the light of love and compassion behind the appearances of this world. Everything glowed with this light. I saw that it dwelled in me even when I was in darkness, and that it was my deepest nature. But that was a glimpse, a gift, and the price had been high.

I went on retreat to practice solitude in the company of others, to let go of the world of striving for a time, to mindfully receive what is given without judgment. This was not the solitude I felt on the street the night I saw the light, or the solitude of Hammarskjold carrying the weight of the world. This was not the solitude of Jesus in the desert or in the garden praying before his arrest, or of the Buddha sitting under a tree on the night before his enlightenment. In the safe container of the retreat, good food prepared for me, day planned and simple, I practiced the solitude of childhood.

For the first few days, I felt trapped on the surface of my life, full of the heightened self-consciousness of a traveler. I was aware of little besides thinking—all of it shallow and repetitive. Should I wear my sweater or my fleece jacket? Should I have oatmeal or an egg? It was as if there was a buzzing electric fence around my experience, as if the membrane that existed to maintain the boundary between self and other also kept me out. By the third day or so, I woke up utterly tired of maintaining my usual separation, tired of the stories and opinions and the tension I wore like electrified armor. It was not a grand shift, just that my attention became more free to investigate life rather than being an indentured servant of the self, constantly summoned back to think about what the self thinks about this or that. One morning, I tasted a local egg from a local

farm that tasted so wild—I swear I could taste the chicken in the egg. That doesn't sound like much in this super-exciting world, but it was really something to notice—the life inside life.

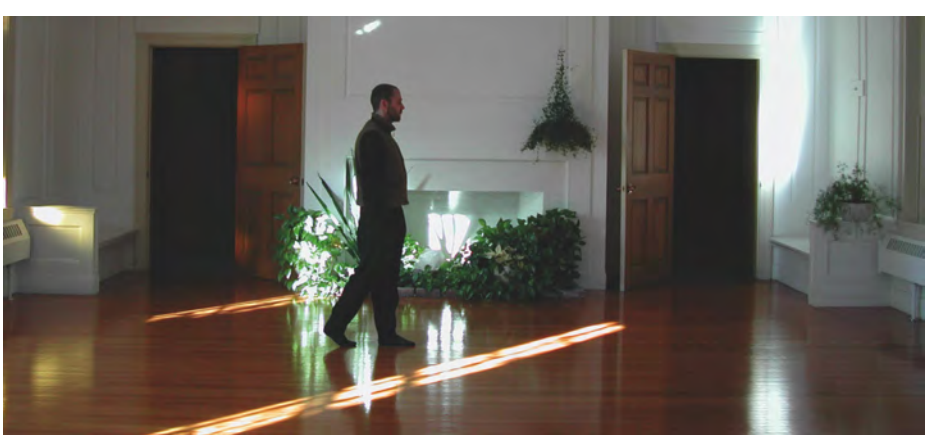
As the days passed, I became more like a child. I had the kinds of impressions that children have, the kind that Rainer Maria Rilke described in a letter to a young poet: "And when you realize that their [adults'] activities are shabby, that their vocations are petrified and no longer connected with life, why not then continue to look upon it all as a child would, as if you were looking at something unfamiliar, out of the depths of your own solitude….?"

Jesus taught his followers to be like children. The Buddha built his enlightenment on a memory from childhood. Just before his enlightenment, split off from his fellow ascetics, broken and despairing from years of fruitless search, he remembered being a young child, sitting alone under a tree, watching his father and others in his community engaged in a plowing festival in the distance. He was in seclusion in the liberating way that children can be in seclusion.

According to some versions of the legend, the child who would become the Awakened One saw some insects whose homes were being torn up by plowing. He felt a burst of compassion, experiencing a fluid balance between inside and outside, secluded yet connected to life. This was the platform of the Buddha's awakening. But he defeated the temptations and fears of Mara, grounded (he literally touched the earth) in the experience of childlike solitude.

On retreat, surrounded by sangha, I went from the surface of my life to the depths. My experience and my sense of myself became less rigid, more fluid, more like a child. I sensed currents that move far below. I went on retreat braced for loneliness and found connection. What looked like austerity from the outside—no talking, no entertainment—was really a place of discovery and play.

Do you remember that freedom? "Sati," the word for mindfulness in Pali, the language of the earliest Buddhist texts, means to remember. Sitting before a statue of the Buddha shipped to New England from Asia, surrounded by others who had traveled great distances to practice silence and simplicity, I "re-membered" or "re-collected" disparate parts of myself. I remembered pretending as a child to be a spy and a jungle girl, all the while sensing my connection to life and the whole of life.



Every morning at the retreat we rose before dawn to bow and chant to Guan Yin, the female Buddha of Compassion. Head to the floor, arms extended with hands up in a gesture of surrender and supplication, I practiced sacrificing my separate self to a greater consciousness and force of compassion. Raised as a white Anglo-Saxon Protestant in America, I found this gesture exotic, a trip to a remote part of my own humanity. But there was also a sense of homecoming in it. I remembered being a child engaged in a kind of serious play. I remembered playing outside and creeping over the living-room furniture pretending to move carefully through the jungle, entering a hidden kingdom, practicing being awake and aware in my whole body and mind. I remembered how wonderful it was to be alone and unseen, to be capable of courage and grace. On retreat we were not as we are in life—doctors, students, professors, writers, men and women, young and not young. Here we were fellow beings, seeking peace and freedom. The teachers told us the Buddha compared enlightenment to the experience of being forgiven our debts, to having a break in a fever, to emerging from the wilderness of loneliness and longing. In the darkness before dawn, we gathered together, putting down our separate burdens, seeking forgiveness of debts, asking to receive our daily bread of life without trespassing into future, without turning away or trampling past what is offered here and now.

After bowing, we meditated. At times, it felt like Communion, as if I was receiving the new life that is offered when we engage in the small act of renunciation that is returning to the present moment. "Heaven and Earth

give themselves," taught the twentieth-century Japanese Zen master Kodo Sawaki. "Air, water, plants, animals, and humans give themselves to each other. It is in this giving-themselves-to-each-other that we actually live."

The Sanskrit and Pali word for enlightenment, "bodhi," means "awaken." Over the course of the week, I began to realize that awakening is the practice of letting-go.

"Do everything with a mind that lets go," taught Ajan Chah, a great Buddhist teacher in the Thai Forest Tradition, a founder of Theravada Buddhism in the West. "Don't accept praise or gain or anything else. If you let go a little you will have a little peace; if you let go a lot you will have a lot of peace; if you let go completely you will have complete peace."

On retreat, letting-go can be a practice. It is the slow process of opening like a lens to the radiance at the heart of our real lives, here and now. We are enlightened as we learn to let the light in and let it shine out. This happens as we learn to be with life just as it is, receiving what is always being offered, always waiting to be received.

In Pali, the word for effort is "viriya." It comes from a Sanskrit word called "*vīrya*," which literally means "state of a

strong man." In Vedic literature the term is often associated with heroism and virility. The Buddha expanded the definition to refer to a practitioner's energy or vigor or persistence or exertion. But the effort he described isn't necessarily effortful striving—that's often a way to run away from our experience. As the week passed, I began to realize the effort I needed to make to awaken is a gentle effort of allowing—and a child's willingness to be alone.

Here is Rilke again: "What is necessary, after all, is only this: solitude, vast inner solitude. To walk inside yourself and meet no one for hours—that is what you must be able to attain. To be solitary as you were when you were a child, when the grown-ups walked around involved with matters that seemed large and important because they looked so busy…."

One day, I served as "practice leader," sitting up on a stage in front of the sangha during a meditation. I had picked up a cold, and as I drew in breath I swallowed my cough drop whole. The adult ego returned in a flash. I wondered how it would look and sound if I started choking, if I spat the cough drop into the bell. Yet sitting up on the stage, I faced the others and felt their energy. I saw there is something that can come through us. I noticed that my thoughts and expectations made a sound, and when I surrendered them there was a very deep silence. The question "Who am I?" became "Why am I here?" I glimpsed that I was not there to be a *someone*, but to be a seeker among seekers, an opening to a greater light and a stillness that could be shared and received.

In life, I came to this truth, this complete letting go, as a last resort. On retreat, I remembered that J.K. Rowling, the creator of Harry Potter, once told a Harvard graduating class that that rock bottom became the solid foundation upon which she built her life. I remembered that the Buddha's awakening began with his accepting his failure to attain liberation in an effortful way. I remembered that he remembered his childhood, and that he touched the earth, his mother, who like any good-enough mother affirmed his right to sit there, just sit there like a child, exploring his true nature. On retreat, the teachers encouraged us to be with our experience without judgment, welcoming all the orphans of our consciousness.

I remembered what I usually forget, that strength isn't always strength, and solitude isn't always solitude. I realized that enlightenment can be child's play.

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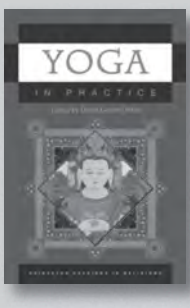

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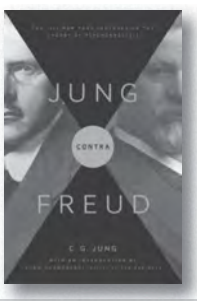

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"Togetherness depends on authentic aloneness."

Alone, with Others

Joshua Boettiger

Watering the Root

The solitary Jew lives with the cyclical reasoning that the world was created for her sake,[1] yet her task in the world—it is made abundantly clear elsewhere—is to serve others. Ben Azzai says in the Talmud that it is prohibited for a man to not take a wife,[2] but oddly enough, he was never married himself, saying in his defense: "What can I do? My soul is bound up with the Torah." The tension between alone and together is a creative tension. As human beings we balance our longing to belong to another, or to the collective, with our desire to be true to our individual paths.

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai

Judaism is well known as a tradition that insists on community. It does not privilege asceticism, there is no concept of individual salvation, and sacred texts are preferably studied in tandem with someone else, reading out loud. Jews pray most often in the first person plural, and in order to remember the dead, sanctify God's Name, or hear Torah read, one needs to pray with nine others. We remember God reasoning in Genesis, "It is not good for man to be alone," and so we deduce from all this that Judaism does not value being alone. Yet if we follow this line of thinking, we misunderstand the invitation within the tradition.

Togetherness depends on authentic aloneness. Let's offer a parallel: Jews are the people of the book, a people to whom words are particularly sacred. Yet the word would mean nothing if it did not arise from a developed and disciplined silence. To whatever degree we could hope to hear the word, we must cultivate the silence.

So it is with the vision of community. A community that does not value the necessity of the aloneness of each of its

Jacob Wrestling with the Angel, Gustav Doré, 1855

adherents and that does not trust what arises out of that aloneness will be an autocratic community, one held together by gravity and habit but not by the living God.

What Judaism insists upon is that the one who is alone return from her inner work and, to paraphrase Bunny Wailer, "water the root; not just taste the fruit." The root is the evolving tradition of the communal, collective body. The one who goes up the mountain or into the desert for forty days is honor-bound to return to share what she has received, and in addition, to know that the integration within the collective of what has been received will involve compromise—since this is the cost of belonging. We water the root when we return, and attempt to put into form what we have formlessly received.

Levadoh

Judaism's insistence on togetherness has sometimes caused its adherents to lose sight of the necessary inward journey that ultimately makes togetherness possible. Perhaps in the naming of the primacy of community, the invitation to go up the mountain or into the desert has been largely lost. Yet it is there—we can see its imprint everywhere.

Jacob was alone, in Hebrew *levadoh*, when the angel found him by the banks of the Jabbok River and wrestled with him till dawn, bestowing upon him the name *Israel*, one who wrestles with God. This wrestling, this naming would never have happened without the levadoh that preceded it. In another well-trod tale, Moses comes down off the mountain, where he has been alone receiving the Torah. He comes down despite the pain and misunderstanding that he knows await him below should he try to bring back the teachings to the collective. But it's not just that Moses *should* come down the mountain—the very *reason* Moses is on the mountain is in order to come down again. The act of prophecy itself is predicated on the experience of going into the place of aloneness and returning again. We learn from the experience of the classical prophets that to be alone is code for being alone with God. That is what is implied. And it is only when we are irrevocably alone that we realize we are not alone. This is the leap of faith we take when we risk aloneness.

Rabbi Shimon and the Cave

The story of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and his son is a great example of the journey between retreat and return.[3] Father and son are forced to seclude themselves in a cave for twelve years to hide from the Romans. They

 Moses down from the mountain. From *Bible Pictures and What They Teach Us*, George Foster, 1897

study Torah all day and are magically sated by a carob tree and a stream that appear in the cave next to them. They attempt to return when they are told the threat has passed, only to have their zealousness get them into immediate trouble. When they see a man plowing and sowing his field on the Sabbath, they are enraged—everything they set their eyes on catches fire because of the intensity of their judgment. God sends them back to the cave with a fierce rebuke: "Have you emerged to destroy my world? Return to your cave!" They stay in the cave for another twelve months, presumably until they are ready to endure the costs of belonging and compromise. As Moses learned when he came down the mountain, Torah is only Torah when it functions in the marketplace: in real-time, in real relationship, in imperfect togetherness.

The story of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and his son is a cautionary tale, and in the way of cautionary tales, it belies an invitation. Go into the cave to save yourself. Return when you are ready to save another.

Reinterpreting Levadoh

We are talking here about re-embracing aloneness. But we should also talk about re-interpreting aloneness. Perhaps part of the confusion here is that we misunderstand the experience of aloneness. We take it too literally, and we associate it only with literal separation, retreat, and physical isolation. Another way to understand aloneness is how Leonard Cohen described his monastic routine with his fellow monks on Mount Baldy: "There was no private space and virtually no private time, we were all working shoulder to shoulder. There is a Zen saying: 'Like pebbles in a bag, the monks polish one another.'"

True togetherness allows us to feel that we are alone with ourselves *while* we are with others. We can enter this realm in different ways. On mediation retreat, purportedly an experience of being alone, I have experienced powerful togetherness—a silent community supporting each other's aloneness. On the other hand, while davenning with many worshippers in a synagogue—purportedly an experience of being together—I have felt profound aloneness, being held by the community and its intention, and being free to go towards my own experience. In the presence of such moments, it is clear that we don't need to choose between being alone and being with others. An authentic experience of each leads us towards the other.

We can also enter this alone/together realm with one other person, a witness, a lover, a true companion. Someone who loves us is someone who sees us in our aloneness, and as Rilke wrote, stands guard over our solitude. Not only can we be aware of our solitude in another's presence, but we can also help another be aware of their own solitude. This is not the same as being "lonely" in another's presence. In some ways, it is the opposite of that. It is through feeling our aloneness that we can then feel truly *with* another.

Judaism reminds us that the spiritual encounter is not always on the mountaintop or in the desert. The Zohar, the mystical commentary on the Torah, does not describe individuals on mountain tops as much as it does a group of merry pranksters traipsing around the Galilee, with much weeping and rejoicing. Even though Moses was the one who ended up

being up on the mountain—alone with God—receiving the Torah, the original intention was that the entire community would be up there. Aloneness, most of the time, happens with others.

Back to the Insistence

Why the Jewish insistence on community? The reasons for this are many, and are multifaceted. But let's look at it for the corrective it offers in our contemporary "spiritual marketplace," where we most often speak about the spiritual path as one that begins and ends with the fulfillment of the individual seeker. Maybe an insistence on community can help balance the cult of the individual seeker, and the idolatry and narcissism that this search can sometimes foster. It compels us to ask the question, either on our way into the cave or on our way back out: What have you learned that you can give? Community gives a shape and larger purpose to the solo journey. And while our contemporary model of search contains pitfalls, it also has the potential to enrich the collective beyond measure. The collective, in fact, depends on this kind of seeking.

Mordechai Kaplan named an ancient tenet of Judaism when he asserted that belonging is more important than believing. Something happens, is made possible, in the human heart when we are told we belong. It is something underneath language, something embodied. Belonging to a tribe teaches us how to belong to all humanity, to all creation.

But it is not so easy to belong. Because it involves a deep compromise, and we can feel that it corrupts the "purity" of our aloneness, we resist belonging. Yet this is the way of the world. We belong—to our people, to all life—whether we like it or not, whether we know it or not.

The Dance of Vitality

This movement between alone and together is a dance of vitality. The one returning from her authentic aloneness, bringing the fruit of that to the community, and the one setting out again into the wilderness—both are necessary to have a community that is transformative. Think of the community like a mikvah, the ritual bath that Jews immerse in to mark various transitions. In order for a mikvah to be kosher, it must have water flowing in and water flowing out. In order for a community to be kosher, it must have people flowing in and people flowing out. Any tradition needs to cultivate this alone/together dance to experience vitality.

Title page from first edition of the Zohar, Mantua, 1558

In our synagogue in Vermont a verse from the book of Exodus is inscribed over the doorway: "God led the people by way of the wilderness."[4] The wilderness is the place of being alone. The word *midbar*, in Hebrew, includes the root d-v-r, the root for "word," or "thing." It is in the wilderness of our solitude that we encounter the word, the thing, that will connect us to God. It is only through that being alone in the wilderness that one can merit becoming part of a people. The ideal is that we each will go into our wildernesses from time to time, that the community will make room for this and affirm this, and that it will receive us back again.

[1] Mishnah, *Sanhedrin* 4:5
[2] B. Talmud *Yevamot* 63b
[3] B. Talmud *Shabbat* 33b
[4] *Exodus* 13:18

The Art of Happiness has been lost perhaps because by chasing it, we have chased it away.

Our Five-year-old:

Alone But Not Lonely

Ragunath Padmanabhan

Our five-year-old son, Aum, had been playing on his own at the farm for two hours. About an hour into it, my wife, Nisha, admonished me: "You really enjoyed your childhood with your two siblings, kids in the neighborhood and at school. Now look at him, being alone, no one to play with and nowhere to go. Do something!" Four years ago, we'd made a conscious leap into a rural India, leaving high-tech careers in the Silicon Valley to do natural farming.

Nisha has just as much conviction about our decision as I do, and yet, on occasion, she and many other loved ones have genuinely felt bad because Aum does not have company. He is our only child and he doesn't go to school (we farm-school him), and there are only three kids in the nearby farms, none of whom have much time for him since *they* go to school.

Everyone in Aum's life is concerned about his loneliness. Except Aum and me. The evidence that he is not "lonely" or "bored" is right in front of everyone's eyes—when we are not engaged with him, Aum is busy most of the time with his own thoughts, things, games, dancing, etc. Occasionally he throws in his share of mischief and tantrums, just to remind us that he is a kid. Otherwise, I have never seen him unhappy for the reasons most adults in his life feel he "should" be unhappy.

Aum does not have the company of his peers as much or as frequently as other kids. We don't have a TV at home. We have never bought him any toys except one Lego set and one Tinkertoys box that Nisha got after she felt bad about not having bought any toy for him. Most of his clothes are gifted by family and friends. We give him one or two candies a week and ice cream once a month. He doesn't have cookies, chocolates, carbonated drinks, fast food, or any snack that comes in a package and is sold in a retail store. He must be one miserable kid, right? If I say, "No," one might respond with, "Well, he doesn't know what he is missing, and he is being brought up in an extremely protective environment." Not true either.

He knows the reasons for all the choices we have made for him, and he has willingly embraced them. In fact, he is ever-ready to explain his choices to anyone who wants to know. He has tasted/experienced everything other kids have and is presented the opportunities many times, given our frequent visits to many relatives and friends in different places. Of course he gets tempted at times and rebels. Steering away from the extremes of bribing and punishing, we manage to strike a balance and help him stick to his better choices.

He doesn't have grand ideas and concepts for what would bring him happiness. He is just fully living his life. Everything has meaning for him. He doesn't overlook this moment expecting another; he is not chasing after anything

and has no plans for tomorrow. He goes around as if he has an unlimited reserve of energy, curiosity, time, faith and willingness to be engaged with whatever and whoever comes his way as if … as if he intuitively knows what he wants. If he could answer the question "What do you want in your life?" it would probably be, "I don't know, but I want it all anyway, moment by moment." And he does not seem to be bothered if many of those moments are spent alone. But it does rattle quite a few others.

To my mind, the rural and middle-class people of the last generation and before had the right perspective on elusive states like peace, happiness, joy, etc. They communicated—through many proverbs and clichés—that meaningful engagement at work and being with family and friends, and with oneself, pretty much covered all the real causes of happiness and peace. The meaning for engagement could come from both tragic and comic life situations (and more often than not, their lives were full of tragic meaning). People did not make a decision with the sole focus on whether it would make them happy. Happiness was just one of the considerations. Perhaps meaning was a more important consideration. There is no other way to explain sacrifices that I know of in history and even in my own family. My own father has always been a happy-go-lucky man all his life, in spite of having access to very limited resources, very few choices, and very many responsibilities. I look at him, and I know I can be happy, no matter what.

Being in the farming world, someone asked me recently whether there is a specific gene in fruits that give them sweetness. He speculated that if we could find that gene, then we could increase the quality and quantity of sweetness in fruits. But what if sweetness is not an isolated characteristic of a fruit? What if it is the culminating effect of the entire growth process—from seed to ripening? Of course, we don't eat fruit that is not ripe and sweet. But do we eat fruit only for its sweetness? Would anyone be satisfied to extract only the sweetness of a fruit and take it as a tablet? Can happiness, then, be had at any moment as an instant thing to be consumed? Yet, we behave every moment of our lives as if our only aim is to avoid everything that would bring unhappiness and seek things that would bring happiness:

Being alone, having nothing to do, sacrifices, inconveniences, criticism, waiting, bad luck, randomness, an uncertain future … these are supposed to bring unhappiness, and we avoid them.

Constant engagement of mind and/or body with work, people, or entertainment; selfishness; creature comforts; instant gratification; security; certainty; greed … these are supposed to bring happiness, and we seek them at any cost.

The Art of Happiness has been lost perhaps because by chasing it, we have chased it away. The Art of Suffering has been lost perhaps because by running away from it, we have tightened its knot on us.

Many saints and religions have said that it is human nature to be constantly oscillating between cravings and aversions. Knowing this, throughout history, people in all cultures created norms, rituals, customs, traditions, practices, ceremonies, and attitudes to contain excitement and embrace difficulties (the middle path, the golden mean). In fact, "to mature into an

adult" was supposed to mean that one has learned to discern and implement his or her cultural baggage without superficially considering it as a burden. Even blindly following one's culture was considered better than simply being blind to it. Yet that is precisely what seems to have happened on the backs of our over-sized, over-paced materialistic and technological growth. If we were to personify our zeitgeist, it would be a person with over-sized hands, legs, and brain. And a small, feeble heart. No wonder we eat but we starve; we have more of everything and feel empty; we can do everything super-fast and yet do not have enough time for anything.

Our idea of moving to a farm in a village was to create a space from scratch in which we could reinvent many of those old, middle-path practices to suit our current potentials and pathologies. Outside of the context of our farm (and sometimes even within), I find it difficult to follow these values and practices because, I guess, the human psyche has seen too much evidence of the inefficacy of the old secrets. I often feel like a fully suited man on a beach. But it is only because we have hurriedly created suffocating spaces that have given birth to many unskillful and even vicious cycles. What we need are airy and nourishing spaces where we can relearn the old arts.

I am only thirty-eight, yet I feel like an old man of another era when I catch myself reacting to someone's complaints or ambitions that are normal in this era. I am neither poor, nor rich, nor middle class. I am in the process of going off-the-class. Yet, I'd like to keep the older middle-class attitudes towards life. Without the aid of great philosophy or religion, all the secrets of everyday happiness—hard work, honesty, grit, grace, patience, wonderment, contentment, romance, even innocence—were all there in that class. I'd like to be a permanent student in that class and have my son Aum be the teacher.

Julia Buendia Allone was proud of her name....

The Angel of the Stories

John Simmons

Illustrated by Anita Klein

Julia Buendia Allone was proud of her name, even though it made people uncomfortable. People said there was no more difficult name in the world. How do you pronounce it? I don't mind, said Julia, it's up to you. But people still wanted to know. They shied away from calling her "Alone" although that was the obvious pronunciation to many. Perhaps they felt that labelling her with such a name represented a small act of cruelty. So Julia herself took pity and decided to distance herself from the perception of loneliness. Her English mother had named her Julia but she abandoned the liquid "ll"s of Allone, retreating to the Spanish roots of her father with the sudden certainty of a sound like a "y."

Why? In truth she felt alone. At night her thoughts matched the darkness. Her head lay on the pillow which became a shell in which she listened to the hissing of her own thoughts and feelings. She was a writer. She was desperate to be a writer. So she wrote every day, constantly rewriting the same subject. The subject was herself, and she addressed her subject obsessively, listening to the thoughts of her feather-filled pillow.

One morning she woke and was aware of a sensation in her shoulders. It was not a pain, more like a tingling. Perhaps she had slept in a draft? She had a warm shower and noticed that she had two small bumps on either side of her backbone. She caressed them, as if to bring herself luck, and sat down to her writing.

The next day the bumps had changed. They had grown, becoming bulbous. She found herself straying from her subject, for the first time writing about the flowers on her window sill. She wrote on her rooftop, looking down at the people strolling through the street below.

She nurtured her bumps, showering them with love and soap. But then the bumps changed, they opened up like a bud in early spring. The buds were beautiful and they gave no pain.

Julia decided she should go out into the teeming streets, walking between the white-painted houses of the town. She wandered through places where she had never been before. People she hardly knew stopped her, calling out from the doorways of bars or from benches in the squares, and they told her how beautiful she looked. Strangers admired her, expressing their admiration with a word or a lingering gaze.

She looked in the mirror, back in her bathroom. It was true, she looked well, there was a glow about her. But when she turned her back, looking over her shoulder, she saw that the

buds were now opening into what seemed to be flowers. The burgeoning flowers were exquisite and she knew that she had to write about them.

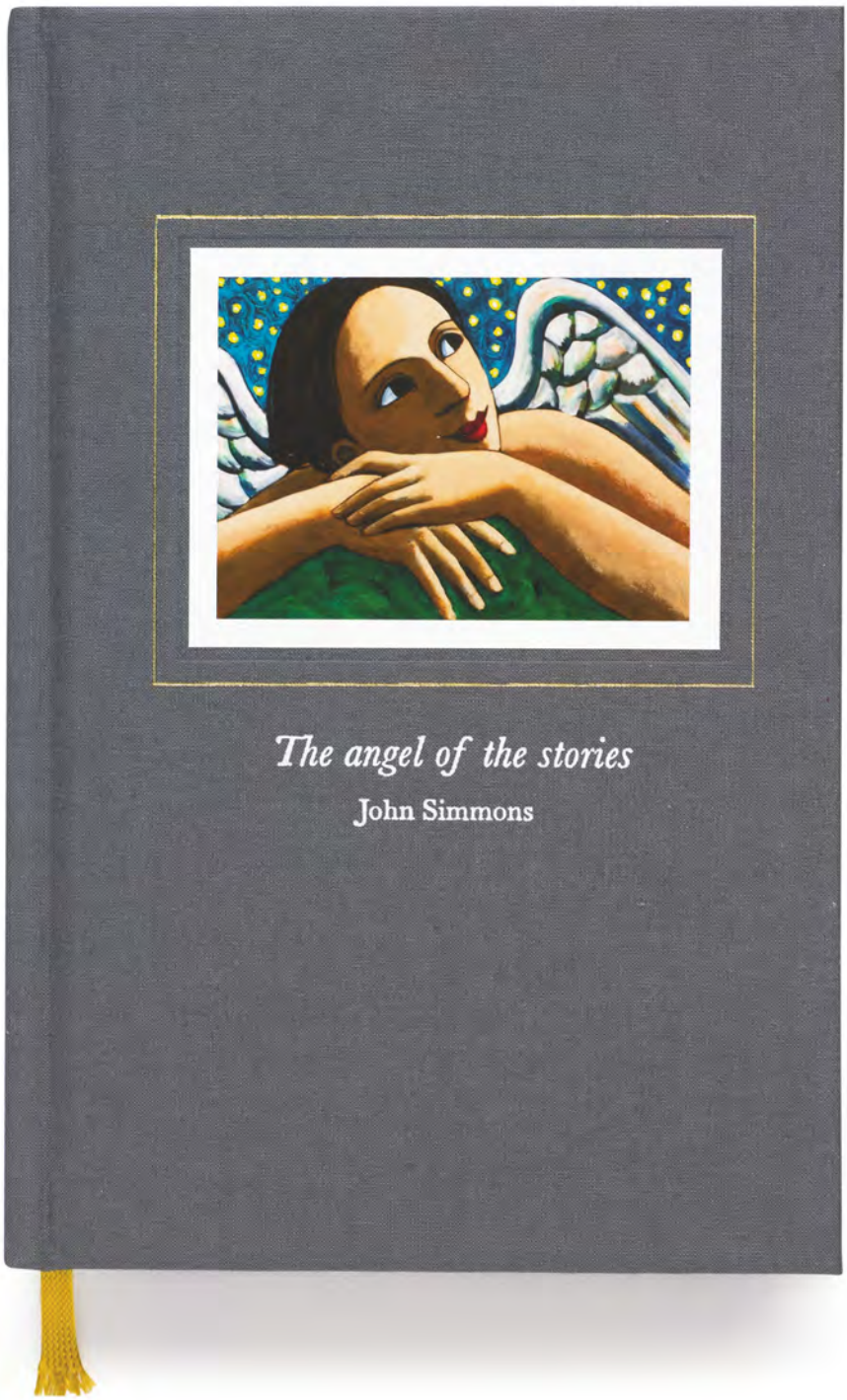
She thought about the doctor. It had been years since she had last visited the doctor. The unfolding flowers in her shoulders were unusual but she comforted herself that she felt no pain. And she had never felt better inside herself. She was writing in a way that she had never previously written. She feared that a doctor might treat her by removing the source of her wellbeing.

That night she woke from a deep dream and discovered that her pillow had lost all its plumpness. It was now just a pillowcase. It didn't matter because she felt wide awake. The moon was shining, directing her to step outside onto the roof garden, where the flowers were wafting their scent onto the breeze. She looked down into the now-empty street to see that it was lit by the moon as if by daylight.

Julia felt drawn to look upwards at the pure whiteness of the moon. There was no cloud in the sky and the sheer emptiness seemed like an invitation. She looked back briefly and she smiled when she saw the wings on her shoulders. She stood on the railings of the roof, and she plunged off the side like a diver into the depths. But she didn't fall, she soared, higher and higher, enjoying the sensation of the slow-beating wings, up and up towards the moon.

Then she knew that she had reached a point of balance, that she could rest in the air and look down at the round blue earth beneath her. She saw that the earth was wrapped in millions of thin lines, but that the lines were an invisible presence. She realised at last the secret of her name, discovering that she was not alone but that we live in a world where we are all one.

Excerpt from *The Angel of the Stories*, by John Simmons, with artwork by Anita Klein. Published by Dark Angels Press (www.darkangelspress.com).


The angel of the stories
John Simmons

Sacred Gathering

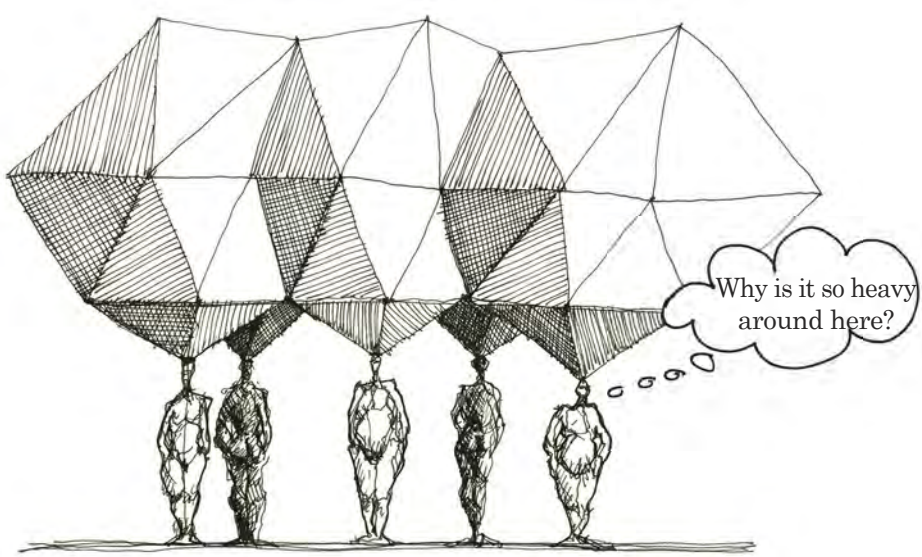
Nuns / monks at eight-hundred-year-old birthday celebration / rituals of the Buddhist Drukpa Lineage, Naro Photang Shey (Shey Monastery), Leh Ladakh, Indian Himalayas, India. © Timothy Allen
http://www.humanplanet.com

Collaboration

COLLABORATION is a new book on the art of working with others. What follows are brief excerpts from the book, along with a conversation with Barry Svigals, representing those who worked collaboratively to produce the book.

Humor

Perhaps the most obvious attribute of a successful collaborative group is that they laugh together. There is a chicken-and-egg thing going on here. Is it humor that opens people up, or openness that allows us to laugh? However it happens, humor is something to be encouraged. We are nourished by the levity of our collaborative conspirators as we engage the imperatives of our work. When the conversation turns contentious, we need to find perspective; what better vantage point than our good humor? A good friend once remarked that 'whimsy is the most powerful force in the universe.' Invite it in.



Trust

Trust is the foundation for everything collaborative. We know that a great range of influences contributes to the establishment of trust. Other factors erode trust, such as preconceived ideas about what can and cannot be achieved, judgments about the abilities of others, suspicions about the purpose of the project, and more. We all bring so much baggage into the room – and we haven't even started! The fate of the collaboration seems to have been decided long before the meeting has begun. That is why concern, suspicion and unspoken criticism must be articulated and resolved at the outset. To do this is to affirm the terms of an honest enterprise, a trustworthy exchange. It includes every individual and their point of departure. Confidence in the process begins here, and it will flourish if openly pursued.

Candor

Even where the collaborative spirit is abundant, the penetrating voice of candor is often silent. For many reasons, we don't often receive rigorous criticism from those knowledgeable enough to provide it. Many do not want to speak out of turn, even when seniority and rank have been, in principle, checked at the door. As Richard Saul Wurman tells us "Stop saying 'uh-huh' when you don't know. Ask questions." But it is up to the leadership to grant permission to ask challenging questions, to offer incentives that turn candor into a prerequisite. To succeed, we must be able to both invite and sustain the honesty our work demands.

The Group Genius

For some, collaboration is not a deliberate choice; it is a way of solving problems that is deeply interwoven into the communal experience.

In an attempt to measure individual intelligence through a series of nonverbal puzzles, it has been rumored that anthropologists asked a group of aboriginal people to assemble a pile of interconnected blocks as quickly as possible.

When the signal was given, they converged around the first pile and put it together in record time. Then they went down the line together, pile by pile.

The anthropologists tried to explain that each person needed to work independently, but this rule was incomprehensible to people who saw themselves as inextricably connected to others in pursuing a communal purpose.

The Lone Genius

Many of the signals we receive from an early age tell us to rely on our own resources – something about our 'bootstraps.' Our education system celebrates individual accomplishments, each of us wrestling with the material alone, barred from helping one another. The system offers little support for the collaborative spirit. We celebrate the role of the lone genius, the myth of the hero leader, the unique potency of the mad inventor.

Twenty-two versions of the incandescent lamp preceded Thomas Edison's and yet most Americans credit him with its 'invention.' As for the Wright Brothers, about twenty heavier-than-air mechanical flights had been documented prior to their first successful glider flight in 1902. By design or default, Edison and the Wrights were consummate collaborators who stood on the shoulders of many before them; how could they not be?

Yet the history books tell stories of brilliant, solitary minds – minds that we believe to be fundamentally different from our own. What if this isn't true?

For more information about *Collaboration*, please email collaboration@svigals.com.

A Kind Of Compassion

A Conversation with Barry Svigals

Barry Svigals (far right in photo above) is an architect, sculptor, and managing partner at Svigals + Associates, a renowned New Haven-based architectural firm. He is also a faculty member at the Yale School of Architecture. ***Parabola*** met with him at a coffee shop in midtown Manhattan, where he answered our questions with care and attention.

—Jeff Zaleski

Jeff Zaleski: *What do you hope to accomplish with the book* COLLABORATION*?*
Barry Svigals: The hope was first of all to understand better the process of trying to communicate with someone. And secondly it was a very deep belief that even a small change in understanding can have an exponential effect. Stepping back further, there's no question that our fates our inextricably connected; we feel this particularly in this millennium. The problems are simply too complex and multitudinous for us to have the hubris to imagine that any one of us can solve even the problems most proximate to us.

JZ: *Hubris arises from ego. How do you get around ego when collaborating?*
BS: To a certain extent ego is the elephant in the room. Every chapter in this book has something to do with ego. But to answer your question, "How do you get around ego?"—you don't!

We need the ego. The ego is essential. We cannot walk down the street without the ego. The problem is that it is unbounded. It doesn't allow us to see ourselves and others. When we usually talk about listening, what we typically listen to is the conversation in our own head and voice. To get around ego is impossible. It is like asking the elephant to leave the room, but there is no door big enough to let the elephant out. So, we have the elephant in the room and it has to be included. In the book we suggest ways in which the ego can be included. And we give it permission to fail.

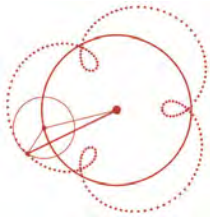
JZ: *The creation of this book must have taught you much about collaboration and its spiritual side.*
BS: Every aspect of creating this book was a learning experience. And one thing we saw was how uncollaborative we were even when we wished to be. There is no question that we are shining a light on something, and when you shine a light on anything you tend to see all sides of it.

This is a practice, and we tend to bring inappropriate indices of successes and failures to most of our personal endeavors. Although we might find it surprising that a collaborative group with high aspirations fails at something, one could argue the opposite. Because you are raising the bar quite high going in and you are bound to see more readily the gap between where you are and where you wish to be. The hardest spiritual work on the planet is to try to work in everyday life as compared to being in an ashram or a monastery. We rarely talk about how difficult it is for a person in a family with all its responsibilities to live a spiritual life while the kids are crying, diapers need to be changed, a job has to be done, all those things.

JZ: *So there are profound implications to collaboration.*
BS: There is enormous importance to a dimension of collaboration that is almost a residual: One learns about oneself. Only in the presence of others do you get a perspective on yourself that is unfettered—at least in its initial reception—from the typical filters that you have for yourself. We can't see ourselves entirely by ourselves. So collaboration is a route to self-knowledge.

Collaboration is a process, a process of learning, and it's as much a learning about oneself as about others. Moreover, we can learn about others only through ourselves. In fact we can have a sense of the other only through a greater understanding of who we are. So collaboration is a kind of compassion, actually.

JZ: *How is that?*
BS: Collaboration involves including the other on an intimate level. In fact the best collaboration happens when we break down barriers that we have in our dealings with the world. And those barriers are the very barriers that prevent us from seeing who we are.



The Story of Patacara

From *The Commentary on the Verses of the Theris*

Translated from the Pali and retold by Margo McLoughlin

Acariya Dhammapala | Buddhist

At the time of the Buddha, in Ancient India, the city of Savatthi lay on a great trade route leading south to Ujjain and north to Rajagaha. It was here that the Theri, the nun known as Patacara, was born.[1] Her name at birth is lost to us, but not her story.

Patacara's father was a wealthy merchant and treasurer in Savatthi. Patacara and her brother grew up in luxury, attended by many servants. Among them was a boy from a nearby village, just a little older than Patacara. His daily task was fetching water and sweeping the courtyard. Playful and clever, he became the children's companion and playmate. The three children formed a close friendship.

Patacara was a beauty. Even before she came of age, she drew attention whenever she went with her mother to the market. When she was sixteen, her parents resolved to marry her as soon as possible. One day, they informed her that they had chosen a young man of her own caste. But Patacara's heart was already taken. She had fallen in love with her childhood friend, and the two had formed a plan to run away.

One evening Patacara slipped out of the house while her mother was bathing. Taking a few small valuables—a carved ivory pendant and a collection of silver bangles—she went to meet her lover at the city gates. For three days they journeyed on foot to his home village, where they set up their household. In time, Patacara became pregnant. As the baby grew within her, so did her longing to return to her family for the birth of her first child.

"Sami, my lord," she said to her husband, "let us go to the house of my family." Her husband nodded and agreed, but every day he made some excuse to delay their departure. At last, Patacara said to herself, "This dear fool will not take me." She put the house in order and, asking the neighbors to inform her husband, she set off alone.

When her husband returned from cutting firewood and learned where she had gone, he blamed himself: "Because of me, my beloved wife is on the road without protection." Following her footsteps, he soon caught up with her. But they had waited too long. Patacara's child was born right there on the road. As soon as her child was born, Patacara's desire to see her family lessened, and she willingly turned back to the village with her husband. A year later, all happened a second time as before: she became pregnant, and the same longing returned—to give birth in her family home, with her mother at her side. Again, her husband delayed. Again, Patacara set out on her own, heavy with child, carrying her young son on her back.

It was the start of the rainy season. Her husband caught up with her as a great storm arose and her labor pains began. Lightning flashed all around, and great thunderclaps echoed in the sky. Rain began to fall in an unending torrent.

"My lord," she said, "Please find us a place that is sheltered from the rain."

Her husband went looking here and there and found a thicket, where the ground was covered in dry leaves. Quickly he built a rough shelter and led her there. Then, taking his axe, he went to cut some sturdy branches.

Meanwhile, Patacara gave birth on the bed of dry leaves, while the rain continued to fall. All night, she huddled there, holding her newborn child and her young son close to her and waited for her husband to return. When

daylight came, there was still no sign of him. Weak from giving birth, she went in search of him and found him, dead, by an anthill, bitten by a poisonous snake. In great grief, Patacara continued on her journey to Savatthi, blaming herself: "It is because of me that my husband has died."

Towards midday day they came to the banks of the Aciravati. The river was swollen with rain following the storm. Patacara knew she hadn't the strength to carry both children across at the same time. She took her older son and sat him down a good distance from the water, on the bank, telling him to wait for her. Then, with her newborn wrapped close and high on her chest, she waded into the raging river, taking care with each step. Reaching the other side, she climbed the bank, sat down and nursed her son. Tenderly, she set him on the ground. As she went down to the river, she kept looking back to where her infant lay. How could she leave him there, unprotected? Halfway across the stream she saw a great hawk circling, drawn by the sight of the flesh-colored bundle lying on the ground. Fearful, Patacara raised both hands in the air and called out, *"Su! Su!* Be gone!" Again and again she cried out, making a great sound. But the hawk paid no attention. Swooping down, it gathered the infant up in its talons and carried it away. Meanwhile, Patacara's older son, hearing his mother call out, and seeing her raise her hands in the air, thought she was calling to him. Joyfully, he ran down the bank and into the river, where the current swept him away.

Patacara wept and wailed. She made her way to shore and climbed the bank to rejoin the road to Savatthi, sobbing and repeating, "My husband has died on the road. Both of my sons are dead: one was swept away by the river; the other was taken by a hawk." As she went along, she saw a man approaching.

"Good sir, are you a resident of Savatthi?" she asked, clinging to the thought of her family and the comfort they would give her.

"Indeed I am," he replied.

"In Savatthi," she continued, "there is a certain street. Do you know it? In that street is the house of my family. My father is the treasurer of the city. Do you know him?"

"I do," he said quietly, "But please, do not ask for news of your family. Ask for news of any other family in Savatthi."

Terrified, Patacara insisted, "But they are my family. I am asking you for news of my family."

"Dear woman, did you see how the heavens poured down all night long?"

"Indeed, I did, sir. Why do you ask this question?"

"I will explain. Something has happened in the house of the treasurer."

"Tell me!"

"In the storm last night, the house collapsed, crushing and killing the treasurer, his wife, and son. All three are burning on the funeral pyre as we speak. From here you can see the smoke." He pointed towards a dark cloud in the distance.

It was at that moment that Patacara lost her mind. She began to wander, unaware that her clothes were falling from her, muttering and repeating:

Both of my sons—their time is done.
And on the road, my husband, dead;

My mother, father, and brother
Lie burning on the funeral heap.

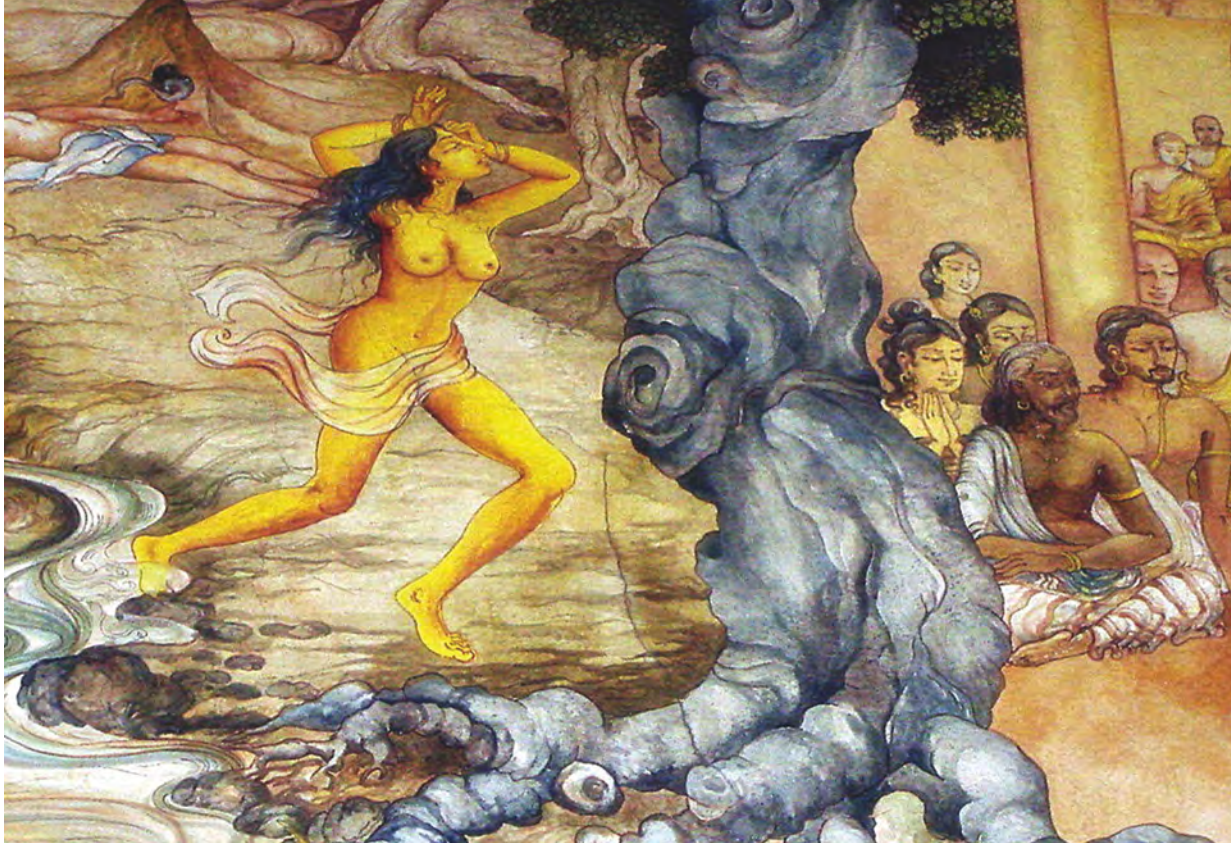
Seeing her, men called her "Madwoman," and threw sweepings at her, clods of earth and other refuse. Stumbling and weeping, driven here and there, she came to the outskirts of the city where she wandered into the grounds of Jetavana, the Buddha's monastery.

It was the rainy season, and the Buddha was in residence. Seated in the midst of a great assembly, he was teaching the Dhamma. He saw Patacara at the edge of the gathering, naked and filthy, her breasts swollen with milk for the child she had lost. Despite her appearance, the Buddha perceived her readiness for insight. Drawn by the Buddha's voice, Patacara ceased her babbling and approached. The crowd saw her and cried out, "Do not let that madwoman come any closer." But the Buddha said, "No. Do not prevent her. Let her come." As she stood before the Buddha, he spoke to her directly, saying, "Sister, come to your senses." So it happened. Through the power of the Buddha, she recovered her mind.

Immediately, she became aware that her clothing had fallen off. Filled with shame, she crouched down and covered herself. A man in the crowd threw his cloak to her. Wrapping herself in the cloak, she bowed to the Buddha.

"*Bhante*," she said, "be a support to me. I am friendless, childless, without parents or family or home." She recounted her sorrows: "One son was taken by a hawk. One was swept away by the river. My husband died on the road. My mother, my father, and my brother were killed when their house collapsed. All three were cremated on the same funeral pyre."

The Buddha replied, "Patacara, each of us will die. Neither our sons, nor husbands, nor any relative can be a shelter, protection, or refuge for us. The path



to freedom is accomplished by attending to our own actions, through restraint and purification of conduct." He spoke these verses:

No children will be a refuge,
Nor any relations at all.
The one who is taken by death
Will find no shelter among kin.

Knowing this, understanding this,
the wise one, restrained by virtue,
quickly clears the obstacles
on the path that leads to freedom.[2]

As the Buddha finished his teaching, Patacara attained the first stage of enlightenment—the fruition state of stream-entry.[3] She requested permission to enter the order of nuns. The Buddha brought her to the Bhikkhunis and ordained her himself.

Patacara then devoted herself to the practice of insight. One day, she took a clay jar, filled it with water, and washed her feet. When she poured the water out, she noticed that it made a path in the dust. The stream went a short distance and stopped. A second time she poured the water out. This time the path made by the stream of water was longer. A third time she poured the water out and watched as the water went further still. Memories of her family came back to her. "Just as the first stream was short, so was the life of my children. Just as the second stream was longer, so were the lives of my husband and brother. And the third stream, longer than the others, is like the life-span of my parents, who lived into old age."

Deeply penetrating the truth of impermanence, Patacara was fully awakened. She spent her time with others, both inside the community and outside, comforting and teaching them. She became a great teacher and guide. Her poem of awakening comes down to us through the ages:

Young Brahmins, they enjoy their wealth, caring for their families.
Seeds of grain are sown in the ground and the field is tilled by the plough.

Why do I, endowed with virtue, following the Buddha's teaching,
Neither indolent nor proud, still not attain release?

When I washed my feet, late at night, three times I poured the water out.
I watched and saw the path it made, from the higher ground to the low.

Whereupon, I composed my mind like a noble steed, a thoroughbred.
Taking my lamp in hand, I rose and entered my simple abode.

I checked the bed, as I do at night, then approached the couch to rest.
What happened next? I took the needle and lowered the wick, like this.

With the quenching of the lamp-flame my mind was completely freed.

Commentary

In the stillness and silence of meditation each of us is alone with our practice. At the same time, we are supported by the presence of others whom we know to be encountering similar demons of regret and longing, fear and doubt, drowsiness and the insistent habit of constructing a self-identity through the mental activities of remembering, planning, and imagining. We think our experience is unique, and often we suffer in our isolation. But once we make contact with others and share our stories, we discover that we are not alone. We can learn from others, and they can learn from us. Patacara's story of loss was important initially only to her—significant because it was through that experience that she lost her right mind and then regained it in the presence of the Buddha's infinite wisdom and compassion. When she joined the order of nuns, her story became important to others. Among the seventy-three poems in the collection known as the Therigatha, more verses refer to Patacara than to any other nun. "I went to a nun I thought I could trust," are the words of Uttama. "She pulled out the arrow hidden in my heart," says Patacara Pancasata. Through her practice, Patacara was able to move from the particular details of her own loss to an understanding of the universal truth of impermanence. As a teacher and mentor to other nuns, she demonstrated that transformation is possible.

[1] The translation of Patacara's name is open to various interpretations: *pata*—cloak and *acara*—walker; or in reference to the fact that she went about without any cloak; or, according to the commentary on the Buddhist Legends, because of her happy demeanor after she was ordained. See Dhammpala, Acariya, *The Commentary on the Verses of the Theris* (Therigatha-Atthakatha Paramatthadipani VI), trans. William Pruitt (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1998), p. 147. Note, in Pali, *c* is pronounced *ch*.

[2] These verses are 288 and 299 in the collection known as the Dhammapada.

[3] This refers to the first stage of enlightenment, in which the practitioner attains unshakeable confidence in the Triple Gem—the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha.

… then one morning in the midst of it all, the fox came.

The Fox

Ted McNamara

What do I remember about that summer? The ending of a marriage, the returning raw to Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, passing through the sweltering city heat receiving one day, one hour, one moment as it came, trying to remain sober. Working it through, acknowledging the pull and the lure of the highs and lows, but going with neither (to those attractions I heard myself say by the river—"been there, done that"). I kept on walking, not denying the pain, simply letting it pass through the body, and then one morning in the midst of it all, the fox came.

I remember sitting in the garden with my eyes closed, in the precious light-time before the first stirrings of dawn. When my eyes opened they met his, sitting gazing up ever so quietly by my feet. We shared as it were the one whole breath, and so wondrously touched was I by his vital wilderness that I was carried straight to the curving hymn that is bowed around the arch of stillness. In such pregnancy of waiting, listening, sensing, there was in me an attunement toward prayer.

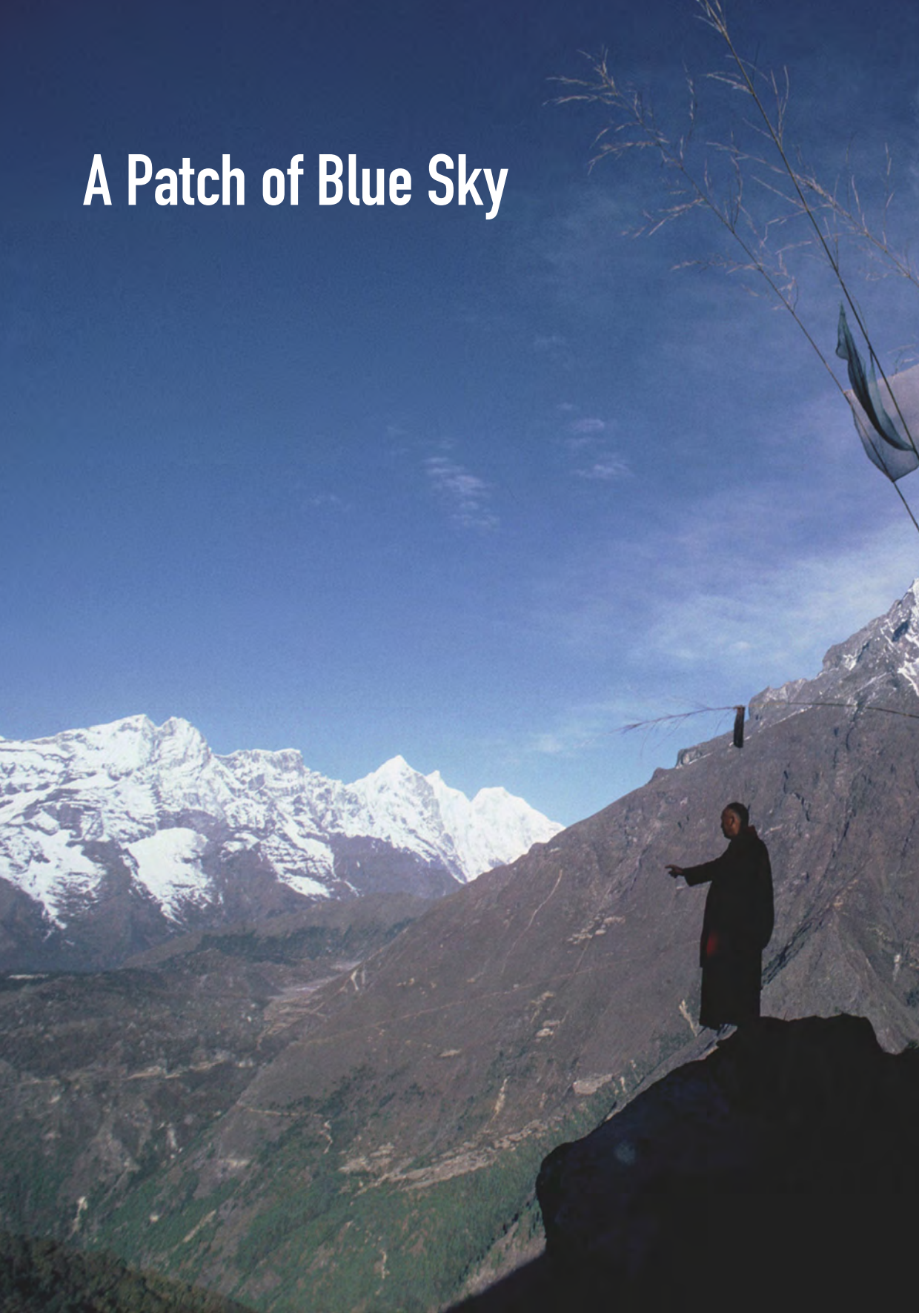
But everything is in movement, and at the appointed moment the animal rose and slipped away. I remained a long while close to the feeling that I had received the gift of attentive company.

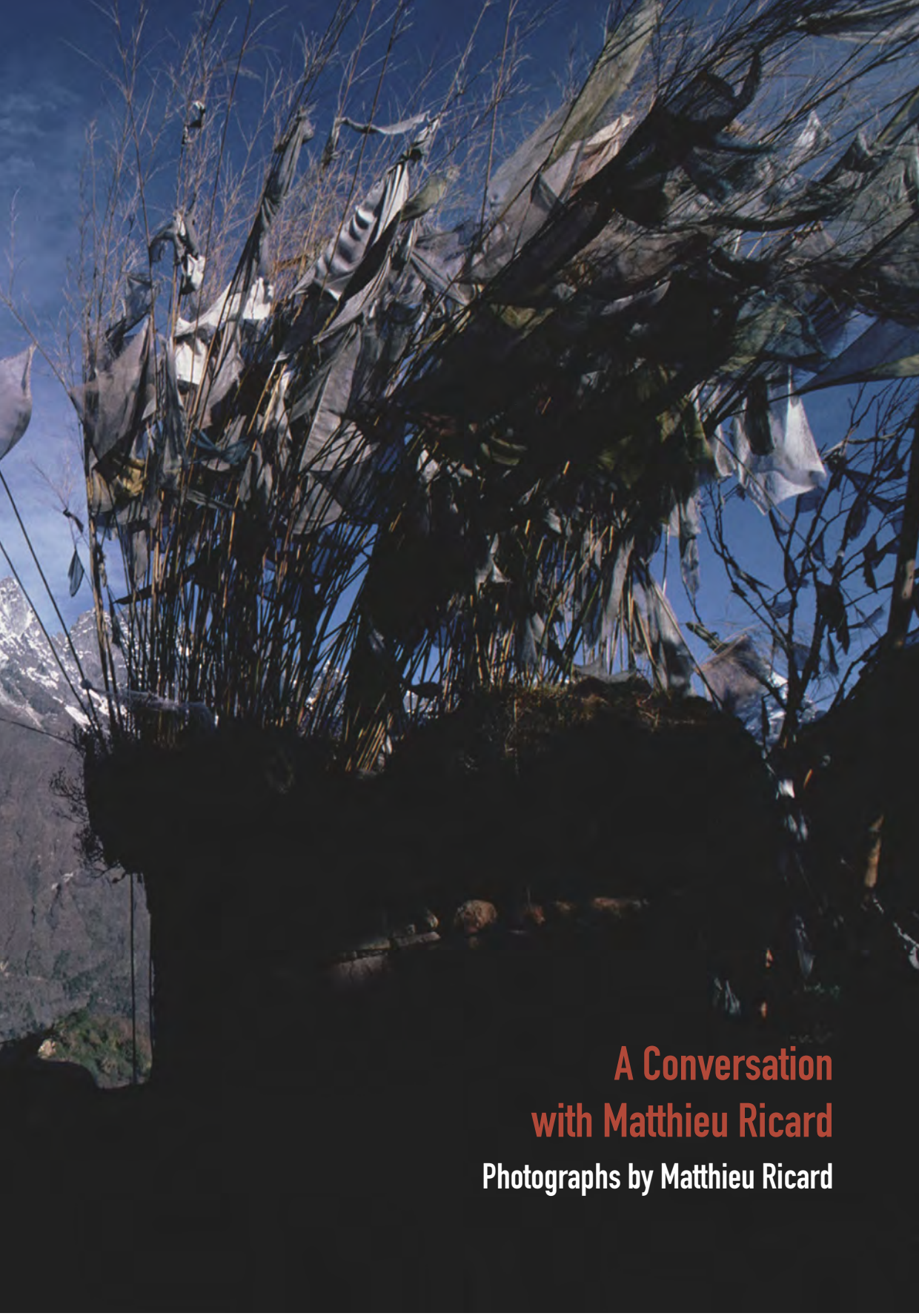
The days passed and to both my surprise and wonder, each day he would return to join me in my sitting, and gradually he would stay longer. I would go about my work, and he would sleep by the bamboo or in the honeysuckle. When I approached him without attention or awareness of my body, he instantly became more alert and prepared for departure; when I was more sensitive he remained, and thus in the practice of approach, a trust formed and blossomed. In time he followed me through the French windows and slept by my bed.

Thus it was as the months of June, July, and August swung by; but everything passes, and one day during the cooling of September he was not to be seen, neither the next, or for days after. Then came a morning in early October, it was just after 5 a.m., his head peeped through the whispering floor length curtains. There was such a joyful reception in me for him, and all the more when I stepped onto the veranda to see a young vixen. They playfully stayed awhile. She remained back a little, but he came right up, and I stroked him. Then he turned, and together they traveled away.

The years have passed and sometimes I gaze upon his photograph and wonder not why he came and went, somehow it is more—and less—than that … the silence … given silently by a living friend, and I was helped to be in my aloneness that memorable summer.

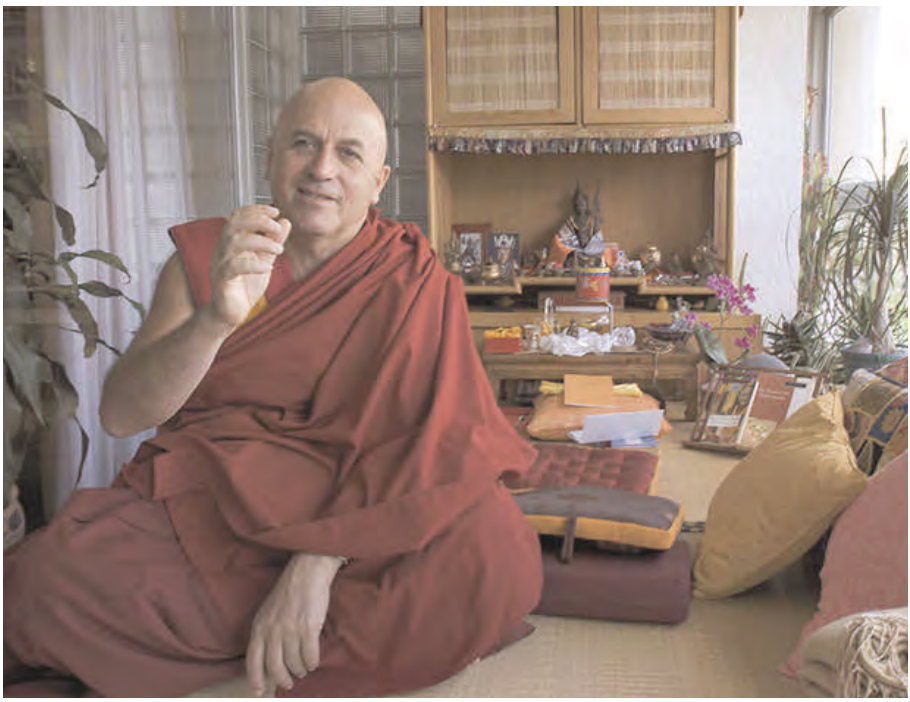
A Patch of Blue Sky





A Conversation with Matthieu Ricard

Photographs by Matthieu Ricard



MATTHIEU RICARD IS A BUDDHIST MONK at Shechen Monastery in Kathmandu and, since 1989, French interpreter for His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Born in France in 1946, he received a Ph.D. in Cellular Genetics at the Institut Pasteur under Nobel Laureate Francois Jacob. He first traveled to the Himalayas in 1967 and has lived there since 1972. For fifteen years he studied with Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, one of the most eminent Tibetan teachers of our time.

Ricard is an active member of the Mind and Life Institute, an organization dedicated to collaborative research between scientists and Buddhist scholars and meditators. He is engaged in research on the effect of mind training and meditation on the brain at various universities in the U.S. (Madison, Princeton, and Berkeley) and Europe (Leipzig). He has been called the "happiest man alive" by several neuroscientists who have studied his brain. I would describe his personal presence as *gracious* and *expansive*.

With his father, the French thinker Jean-François Revel, he is the co-author of *THE MONK AND THE PHILOSOPHER*, and with the astrophysicist Trinh Xuan Thuan, of *THE QUANTUM AND THE LOTUS*. He is the author of *HAPPINESS: A GUIDE TO DEVELOPING LIFE'S MOST IMPORTANT SKILL* and *WHY MEDITATE?* As a photographer, he has published several albums, including *THE SPIRIT OF TIBET*, *BUDDHIST HIMALAYAS*, and *BHUTAN: LAND OF SERENITY*.

Present at the following interview were Matthieu Ricard, Caroline Pfohl-Ho, David Ulrich, and Christian Rhomberg, at whose home the interview took place on September 15, 2005.

—David Ulrich

David Ulrich: *Matthieu, thank you for offering us time in your busy schedule. We are trying to understand how a larger intelligence is available to us, and how we can come together to contact this intelligence. Philosopher Jacob Needleman asks: "How to come together and think and hear each other in order to touch, or be touched by, the intelligence we need?" He speaks of people coming together to "share their perceptions and attention, and through that sharing to become a conduit for the appearance of a spiritual intelligence."*

Matthieu Ricard: You see, first of all, there are many understandings of even the word intelligence. Usually there are two parts in Western education. One is the acquisition of as much information as possible, of geography, science, and this and that, and second is the so-called development of intelligence, which is posited as the faculty of reasoning and of understanding, which typically those famous IQ tests are supposed to show you. You are trying to develop a tool of reasoning, of making associations, of analyzing situations— which is really only a tool. And a tool, like a hammer, can be used for building or can be used for destroying. And, as the Dalai Lama often says, a typical example of that is 9/11—an extremely smart use of intelligence, with the means to create enormous human devastation. An intelligence that did not hesitate to use human beings as bullets to destroy other human beings. So that's a typical

example of a sharp intelligence which, without the proper motivation, can be an enormous tool of destruction.

Intelligence itself is just like strength, skill, energy, money, or whatever and can be used to destroy or to build. Intelligence can be accompanied—especially in education—with the development of human values, an acquisition of the crucial importance of the motivation that underlies every one of our actions. We cannot predict the outcome of many of our actions because there is a limitation in what we know—how things are going to unfold, to happen, and the consequences. Yet even the most dumb person can check his or her motivations. Am I doing this just for myself, out of selfishness or to actually harm others, or I am doing it for the double welfare of myself and others?

So we come to the idea of the total need of actually first developing human values and the right motivation, which is loving-kindness. We are part of others in a way, so we cultivate love for everybody including oneself. That's a very important component of life and of education. And so intelligence alone—it's great to have it—but without the values, it can't be anything.

Now there is another aspect of intelligence that is a deeper understanding, which is linked with wisdom and relating to the deeper nature of mind, and also of understanding the nature of phenomena, because those are interdependent. That kind of intelligence is more like a type of wisdom, which has a clear insight into the nature of reality and of your own mind and consequently of the minds of others.

If you clearly identify in your own mind the wish to be safe, the wish to be happy, the wish to be flourishing, then you can also appreciate that and understand that in others' minds. I would say that kind of insight is more than intelligence. Insight is deeply linked with values, with the distinction between destructive and constructive emotions and states of mind. And also a correct perception of reality is very important. If we superimpose our mental constructs

onto reality and say, for instance, things are permanent and I want myself, my dear ones, my possessions to last.… Whereas in the constant dynamic flow of transformation, all of our perceptions of reality are going to suffer from that attitude. All of a sudden we are confronted with sudden change and then your superimposition will collapse and cause suffering. So insight is broader into the nature of things and also the quality of things, in terms of consequences of happiness and suffering. So that is true intelligence, or true insight, or true wisdom.

DU: *It's entering a larger flow. We enter a larger connection with other people and with the world at large.*

MR: Well, larger in the sense that you begin to realize what it is. Not that you are making it larger than what it is. But you realize that for instance loving-kindness and happiness cannot be a self-enclosed phenomenon. Selfish happiness is a contradiction. If you are suspended in space, love and kindness and compassion would have no meaning. Real happiness can only occur through and with others. Precisely because your understanding of interdependence and cultivation of loving kindness is a fundamental component of happiness. That is why selfish happiness does not work. That is also why a fundamental understanding of reality is important. Because interdependence and loving kindness are closely connected. Why? If you realize that you cannot have happiness without the happiness of others, because of the fundamental interdependence between self and others and between you and the world, then you understand the value and the essential need for developing loving-kindness and compassion. So it's not just an abstract notion, developing loving-kindness; it is also at core of yours and other's happiness. So a larger perspective means actually understanding things as they are. It does not mean fabricating a sort of wishy-washy cosmic consciousness. It's understanding that the real fabric of reality is interdependence—for phenomena, for living beings, and for the

environment. And hence the Dalai Lama often emphasizes the concept of non-violence: to human beings, to animals, and the environment, because they are totally linked. You cannot disassociate them. If you disassociate them, you run into trouble.

DU: *Yes, I feel that the concept of interdependence is very much in line with what we are thinking about—and especially the recognition of our interdependence and the need for coming together. When we come together, when we recognize compassion and genuine connection with each other, it seems to bring greater insight, it seems to being greater realizations. I am an artist and I often work individually—but I find that when I collaborate with others, and I really open to their insight and energy, it brings something greater to the moment.*
MR: Sure. That makes sense. And you see interdependence also then comes with the notion of what we call universal responsibility. It's a win-win, lose-lose situation. I was listening to Kofi Annan [then UN Secretary-General] this morning when he was trying to push his reforms. And he said, "Now, either we rise together or we fall together." That's a different way of expressing the notion of universal responsibility and interdependence. In the time of tribes, you could consider that when one tribe wins the hunting grounds, there was a winner and loser. Nowadays, if you harm a situation, the ecology, or a group of people, you harm everybody and you harm yourself in the end. So it is now the time when precisely those values of interdependence and universal responsibility, which are based on genuine loving-kindness towards each other, should triumph over just selfish, very narrow-minded attitudes. If you seek immediate reward—filling your pockets now—you don't care about the environment or the next generations.

But you see this has to start with changing your own mind. I always think that the real nutshell is transforming yourself to better transform the world. It's a sort of formula. It's the epitome of

all that. You cannot really do humanitarian works, change your psyche, do something constructive without first eliminating some kind of mental toxins from your mind that make you individually work in selfish ways. So in that sense interdependence and the change of your mind to loving-kindness, openness and so forth is how universal responsibility can be applied.

DU: *How does interdependence take place in the teacher/student relationship? Is there a passage of knowledge, a passing of intelligence? In Buddhism certainly there is the connection to the wisdom of the lineage, and would that represent a kind of intelligence?*

MR: Sure, you know that one of the many obstacles to learning is pride. I know enough, or I am smart, or I don't need you. So humility, we say, is like water: the waters of quality always gather in the lowest place. Not on the top of the peak. The peak is pride. And your place is humility—a genuine humility that gathers all the waters of quality you receive. You can also see the example of the fruit tree. When it branches out, loaded with fruit, it tends towards the ground. When there is no fruit, it can raise to the sky. So likewise, humility does not mean a self-depreciation: "I am zero. I know nothing. Everyone is smarter than me." That is stupid. That's not how you do anything. Humility is a sense of knowing how much you still have to learn and an appreciation of the qualities of those who know better. The teacher, in turn, is someone who has developed this quality of knowledge of the path and has nothing to gain or lose in having or not having disciples. It is natural, spontaneous, like a mother who would like to help a child to know that if you put your hand on a burning plate, you're going to get burned. So, teaching is a spontaneous outflow of wishing to share in a beneficial way. Not because there is something to be gained from it. It's simply natural genuine concern. If you know something, you want to share it. It comes naturally.

So it is that—a genuine earnest interest and wish to learn with openness, humility, and confidence. If you ever go mountain climbing, then you know at some point you have to rely on what the guide says. If you tell him you're too smart and resist him, it's not going to work. At some point, you have to trust. Once you have chosen your guide, you cannot change your mind halfway. That's why it is important to properly choose your guide. If you choose a crook, then you're both in trouble. [Laughter.]

DU: *That reminds me of the wonderful little book,* MOUNT ANALOGUE *by René Daumal.*
MR: Oh yes, René Daumal was a friend of my mother's [painter and watercolorist Mme. Yahne Le Toumelin].

DU: *Was he? He talks about mountain climbing and how we depend upon our guides and we depend upon each other.*
MR: That's why it is very important if you can learn spiritually from someone else, that it be someone who is authentic, someone who really knows more than you, not the blind leading the blind. It is a matter of confidence and trust. It's not blind faith, but confidence in someone who knows more than you when you have recognized as much as you can that it is authentic. Then you have to trust at some point, because it helps you to grow. You have to be confident, that with this person, I can progress on the path. That's all you really need, not a blind devotion or submission.

DU: *Do you think that a community of seekers helps us in our search for intelligence? I find that when I am working with others, again I feel that something more is available then when I am working alone.*
MR: Well, you know there are different things to that. And It's not like there are some vibes going around all over the place which I think is a bit spooky. It's more like—we have a saying: community simply reinforces your sense of commitment, of engagement, of discipline almost. When I'm meditating otherwise I just may want to do something else. Like lie down. So if you are in a group, there is a kind of common discipline. We have an image for that which is very nice. In India they use the Kusha grass for making brooms. You have a thousand fibers of Kusha grass. Individually, they cannot make a broom. If you gather them together you have an efficient broom. So this notion of sangha, of community, is actually companions traveling together on the path. And they help each other when someone is weak, or not always going in the right direction. You see the strength of their commitment, their practice, or you see their weakness. Somehow the whole thing helps you together. It' better to be ten companions traveling in the forest than just alone… Someone knows some pitfalls, some other ones have more presence. Someone is weak in the way, someone is strong in the head. The whole thing works better together. So I think the notion of community, as

friends, of companions, is certainly most helpful.

This notion of emergence is important also. A crowd does not behave the same way as one hundred separate individuals. There is something more coming up than the simple sum of each individual capacity. That is what we call an emergent phenomenon When what emerges from a hundred persons or elements is more than just one plus one plus one, etc., equals one hundred. You have one plus one plus one equals one-hundred-and-twenty. Because there is something more that emerges.

DU: *Could you talk more about this idea of emergent phenomena?*

MR: The emergent phenomena usually is dependent upon its basis or cause. Without its basis it is not an emergent phenomena. It has a quality of a life of its own. It's simply that there is a quality that is more than the arithmetical sum of each element. In biology it is very clear, a single neuron doesn't do anything. Suddenly when you have twenty billion neurons, and there is the basis of what we call at least the normal action of intelligence—which is not intrinsically present in the neurons—what emerges is the brain faculty of consciousness. In the same way in physics, the quality of one single element has specific qualities that change or transform when related with others or when placed under the lens of observation. A particle, for instance, can become a wave when subjected to our methods of observation. When alone, it goes back to its intrinsic state of being a particle.

In physics, when two particles, let's say photons, are spinning together in a synchronized way and are then separated, even by a large distance, and one changes the polarity of its spin, the other will change instantaneously, and does so faster than the speed of light. The two together are inseparable, interdependent.

In other words, elements on a lower level combine to produce something that is more than the intrinsic quality of the element—new qualities appear, and that is an emergent phenomenon. And also an element on a higher level can influence the elements on the lower level. We call this downward causality, which implies that consciousness can influence the mind or the body—and brain function or intelligence affects the individual neurons. So we might say that

emergent phenomena tend upward to form a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts, but is informed by its basis, which is the consciousness and intelligence that guides it. Causality is not one way. If we say that in upward causality, elements on a lower level combine to form something on a higher level, then downward causality implies that something on a higher level influences the lower level. You can call this a reciprocal causality. Thus causality is mutual, both upward and downward, and intelligence shapes reality as reality shapes intelligence. Human beings both are formed by, and form, their environment. On the ascendant or emergent side, the environment and body influence the mind, and on the descendent side, consciousness influences both the mind and the body.

CPH: *How is devotion understood in Buddhism?*

MR: It is a kind of conviction that the qualities of compassion and loving-kindness can be developed, that you can know the nature of the mind, and that the luminosity that you recognize in spiritual masters can be attained. It's simply that you begin with an appreciation of what your teacher has to offer. It is a kind of respect and a keen interest. You recognize and trust in their authenticity. You recognize that they embody a kind of luminosity, a clarity, a wisdom. And that is something that you want. So it follows that you develop a yearning and an aspiration for that kind of clarity and luminosity. There is something here that you want—to put the teaching into practice yourself. Through training the mind, they have eliminated some of what we call the toxins of anger, self-interest and so forth. There is a clarity and alertness, and you know it is authentic. So you develop a faith that turns into a conviction to follow the path. Once you put the teaching into practice and verify for yourself the effectiveness of what is taught, you develop a deep conviction to the path. That is devotion.

And there is another side to devotion. When you are in contact with a person who radiates loving-kindness and compassion, you are drawn to follow the path, to learn to embody those qualities in yourself. In Buddhism, the lineage is like a series of small candles, each one representing a person on the path. Some candles are strong, some weak and are easily blown out in the wind and so on. But the candles are lit, one to another, and the flame stays alive and strong. You know it is not any one single candle that carries the flame, but the sort of ongoing succession of them. The ultimate goal is personal transformation. The candles stay lit through the transformation of the individuals on the path. This becomes a sort of luminosity of the mind, an awareness that can be shared.

Tibetan masters have been known to say that if the student does not surpass the teacher, then it is the teacher that has failed.

DU: *And one final question, you are an artist, a photographer. What role does creativity play in the formation of intelligence?*

MR: Creativity is all too often just a manifestation of your emerging tendencies. You are this way or you are that way. And these emerging tendencies come out through your creativity. Very often creativity is confused with a spontaneous expression of one's habitual tendencies and conditioning. The artist says, "Look at me." It is selfish and narrow-minded and can be confused with knowing the nature of your own mind. It does not free us from our conditioning or from ignorance, nor does it help develop loving-kindness and compassion. Really looking at these emerging tendencies, looking at the tendencies of your own mind is very exciting, more interesting than going to the movies. Learning to shed the skin of one's habitual tendencies, conditioning, and negative emotions—and to discover the real nature of your mind—is true creativity. Now there is another side to what we call intuition or inspiration. And there is nothing mysterious about it. Sometimes with nature or with art, you experience greater insight, a real moment of enlightenment, or a luminosity that connects you with the world or nature or others. By understanding the nature of your own mind, you naturally come to what we call intuition and insight. These moments come from your practice, from developing loving kindness and compassion, and they are moments of what I would all genuine wisdom.

Consciousness is an experience. It goes deeper and deeper into the experience, behind mental constructs and behind the veil of your emerging tendencies. You come to your natural wisdom. So intuition or inspiration is really the experience of your own wisdom. It is like seeing a small patch of blue sky amidst the clouds—and you try to widen that patch through personal transformation.

For further information about Matthieu Ricard, please visit http://matthieuricard.org and http://karuna-shechen.org.

Syncletica's Seed

Alison Coluccio

Spelt seeds and stalks

When Christian monasticism is young, and Christianity itself freshly legal, a strange folly of the Spirit prompts some to sell all they own and take refuge in the wilderness. This movement is unauthorized, Ruleless. It is a call to a living martyrdom, a thorough rupture from community, not self-sufficient but rather God-sufficient, a life given in pure devotion.

"Like seeds we are born of mystery
and bear mystery deep within,
to keep and to sow again."

The utter oddness of this activity, particularly for women who are themselves property, worries people: Is it good, is it right, is it holy? Is this what God wants of us—some of us, anyway—or is it madness?

Syncletica, a woman whose story dates to the fifth century, is one of those desert dwellers, sheltering in a relative's tomb outside of Alexandria.[1] Far from moist grainfield, childbed, or city, Syncletica's imagery nevertheless is ripe with those things she surrenders; her many teachings are parables of home. Yet she doesn't rave or seem beset with longing. Instead she speaks to monasticism's worth with lucid contentment:

> For just as within the same grain plant there is both the chaff and the seed, so from the same God there are both people who live devoutly in the world and people who have chosen the solitary life.[2]

Emmer, einkorn, or spelt, the wheats Syncletica dreams of are breeds ancient to us, whose chaff and seed hold tightly to one another and are, in the living plant, inseparable. Syncletica's metaphor casts the solitary as dependent upon the protection of the "people in the world." And this may be true. Stories tell of desert hermits sustained for years without physical nourishment. But stories also tell of pilgrims carrying lentils across the shifting sands to pay homage to these holy ones. No less vulnerably does monasticism's very future hang in this balance: the degree to which any strange movement can claim to be Christian requires the acceptance of the wider community and institutional church.

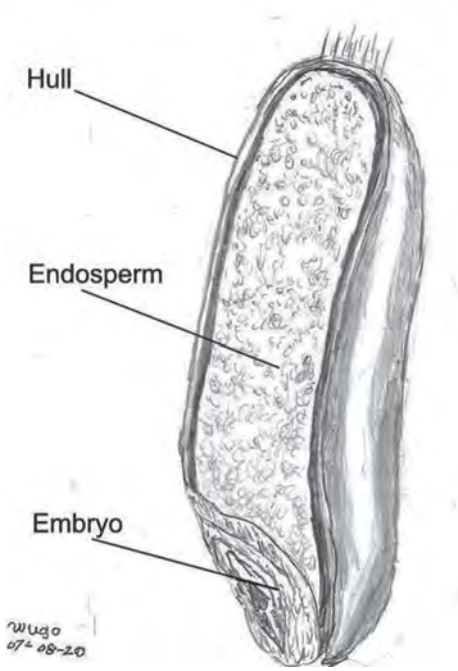
Crucial to Syncletica's metaphor of seed and chaff is her assertion that the life she has chosen—of austerity, of childlessness, of unproductivity, of aloneness—is the more valuable. This apparent barrenness is the fruitful life, she claims, and in her claim is an origin story. This is how monasticism is born and perhaps continues to be born among us. There are still some who know this urging to the wilderness or cloister, who still crave a map of meaning. We ask where in life is the locus of fecundity, of richness, of joy? The Christ whom Syncletica loves said, "Very truly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."[3] And so for a map, in the sand of the tomb, Syncletica draws for us a seed.

FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS Christianity has tolerated and cherished the odd ones who step outside the stream of marriage and family, whose toil is for spiritual fruits, as if hoping a tiny bit of our chaffiness might cling to them in the resurrection, or we might be remembered in heaven for the lentils we offered on earth. But

what if Syncletica's map was not merely an apologetic for a new Christian celibate class but, more importantly, an invitation to each of us?

If we open a seed of grain, we find it largely crafted of three types of tissue. Two are obvious: the durable husk of the seed we often think of as the bran and the fat endosperm interior we humans find so delicious, milling into flour, slathering in butter, rolling into sushi. The third is nearly invisible in grain and yet is, from a plant's eye view, the whole point: the embryo. The embryo is the nascent plant-to-be, microscopic leaves and roots awaiting time, sunshine, and moisture.

The development of the seed is in fact delicately conducted by the embryo. With hormonal cues it signals the endosperm and seedcoat to grow at its pace, while they filter the vast and uncontrolled environment of changing rainfall, sunlight, and temperature. The embryo does not prefer the interior of the seed to the exterior but is in fact



Wheat seed

reliant on both, protected by both, fed, in different ways, by both.

If Syncletica's seed might be reimagined as a map of our selves, could we call the rich interior the stuff of solitude and the sturdy seedcoat the being out in the world part? Could we trust that both are necessary and nourishing to the invisible spark of the Holy within us?

It is tempting to value one above the other, to segregate within us the chaste and contemplative as a holier refuge from the mundane, or conversely to prefer the clarity of good and loving actions in the world to the perceived fuzzy sanctity of spiritual journeys. So too do humans manipulate the grains we rely on. Yet we have learned that polishing our rice to gleaming white perfection leaves us sorely lacking nutrients we require, while overly rigid seedcoats are indigestible and untasty.

A healthy dose of perspective comes from the recognition that ultimately neither seedcoat nor endosperm will break into the light with the newly germinated embryo. The endosperm's starches are used only until the tiny roots push the first small leaf into the air. For the plant's desires, our grains are over-engineered; a larger seed does not translate into a larger or stronger plant. In fact, seeds that appear to be the runts of the litter, shrunken, tiny, improbable things, stand at least as good a chance as a chubby seed with a flimsy exterior. No, whatever this resurrection is that Christ invites us into, it is pure embryo, living plant. The seed's true work is but waiting and surrender.

YET TO BECOME ONE who can wait well and yield readily, we practice. The cues from the nascent embryo within us may seem

quiet amid the stir of thunderstorms, the pulse of vitamins and toxins, the beat of sun and shockingly cold night. But the embryo is there, without a doubt, because no seed without those dividing cells deep at its base is a seed at all. And so the call already exists, heard or unheard. And there is sweet comfort in this: we are responding, however imperfectly, however unconsciously. We have already begun.

Waiting is akin to listening. If I am to wait well, the places where I bump up against the outside world must not overwhelm me. In this great home world there is so much information, and it is for me to meet, to hear, to sift, and to reconcile. The seedcoat is as valuable for its sturdiness as for its porousness; it is pliant yet patient. It lies in contact with the soils of germination, tasting the moisture: Is it enough? Is it good? Is it time? A healthy seedcoat is thin but woven with surprising complexity and structural density. While physically more distant from the embryo, it is extremely responsive to it. These two parts of the grain, embryo and seedcoat, most determine the viability of the plant-to-be. In Syncletica's map, it is her naming of living in the world as "devout" that is most lovely. In the times of togetherness, the "I" which meets another —be it lover or idea, weather or work—never stops being nudged along by what lies at my core. The fabric of how I greet those outside places is continuously strengthened, made more sure, by the interplay between the hidden Holy and the world itself.

Meanwhile, the endosperm, that sweet interior tissue, grows. It is undeniable, the deliciousness of the endosperm, the gift of the interior life: to pray with full attention, to turn my

Amma Syncletica

full heart upon the Divine. This is the stuff of the seed that caresses the embryo most directly, the tissues that cannot be shy but must dare enfold fully that growing embryo, continually matching the shape and rate of its growth, curve for curve, leaving no gap. Without this nutritive part of our lives we are bitter and brittle, the embryo within us uncushioned. We have no way to absorb what we need, no pockets to put treasures into. Even if all the work done here in our interior seems hidden, useless, it is no less crucial. And while covered, it is never invisible.

Meanwhile.... One of the most surprising pieces of wisdom in this metaphor comes from the delightful simultaneity of development. Segregating solitude and togetherness into discrete pulses of time or naming one class of people as celibates

Saints Theopemptus, Theonas, and Syncletica

and the other as marrieds obscures the reality we live every day: No matter who we are or what our vocation is, humans live with contact and quietude interlaced. There are few among us who haven't known the loneliness of the crowded room or the joyful communion of pure solitude. The most sexual person lives days, possibly years at a time, as a celibate. Each mouthful may be a feast, each pause a fast. Alone and Together infiltrate one another. Turn towards one and the other does not cease. There is always a meanwhile.

And so we are invited into Syncletica's paradox: "Whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray"[4] says the Christ, and yet He has rolled her tomb door away. Her secrets are known, her solitude filled with sisters, her map here for us all to read and ponder. "[S]o from the same God there are both," she says. Both solitude and living devotedly in the world. The tomb and the city. The barren virgin, the weary young mother. The seeds stored in caves and those still green on the plant, each lit by the same unseen. The locus of joy is *here*: that both can be and are, that all of our lives may be rich in secret prayer and loving union regardless of our vocation or circumstance.

Syncletica asserts that the life she has been called to is part of holy work, despite all appearances, no matter how weird or unproductive it may seem. Nor does she discount the different paths that others lead; these too she names as sacred. In her story of desert monasticism is the reminder that the Spirit may move us toward things yet unnamed, acts of love which seem like madness, into an emptiness on whose ground we must draw a new map. And while that newness may feel lonesome, it can never truly be so, home as we each are "within the same grain plant." Like seeds we are born of mystery and bear mystery deep within, to keep and to sow again.

[1] Forman, Mary, "Amma Syncletica: A Spirituality of Experience" in *Vox Benedictina: A Journal of Translations from Monastic Sources* 10/2 (1993), p.199–237.

[2] Pseudo-Athanasius. *The Life & Regimen of the Blessed and Holy Syncletica*, Elizabeth Bryson Bongie, trans. (Toronto: Peregrina Publishing Co, 2001), p. 48.

[3] John 12:24 New Revised Standard Version.

[4] Matthew 6:6 New Revised Standard Version


Pomengranate with seeds

Atsumori

Taira no Atsumori

Retold by Kenneth E. Lawrence

Zeami Motokiyo | Japanese Noh

ATSUMORI *is a play from the repertoire of Noh, the traditional masked drama of Japan. The play* Atsumori, *based on a story originally from the fourteenth-century military chronicle* TALE OF THE HEIKE, *is a masterpiece of the genre, written by the brilliant dramatist Zeami (1363–1443). It is a tale of mutual compassion and the interrelatedness of all things. It includes the comfort of aloneness, the effects of clan membership, the actions of the individual when in a group, remorse when alone and when together with others, and how our lives and our souls become intertwined through our actions.*

This world is but a dream.
Awaken to renounce it!
Or is that too a delusion?

A MAN COMES, a priest from the capital. Alone and weary from wandering, he hears the tolling of a distant temple bell. The sound itself becomes rest.

It has been a long journey. When he departed the capital, layered clouds had parted revealing the drifting moon, a small wheel rolling. Turning southward, he had passed the small waterwheels of Yodo and Yamazaki, the waters of Koya Pond, and the river Ikuta. Now he watches the waves rise at Suma shore. At Ichinotani, his final destination, he has arrived.

The delusions return. He sees those past times and circumstances, recalling them as if now. Two foes grapple on horseback, then crash to the ground. A youth of fifteen or sixteen, a slashing sword, an arc of scarlet. Blood splatters the shore as the head thumps to the ground. Joining his palms together, the monk praises Amida Buddha.

But he is not alone. Nearby, the sound of a flute. Its song joins the voice of the blowing meadow wind. Such taste! So very exquisite! He decides to rest for a time at this place and seek out the flute player.

On a high meadow grasscutters pass, returning homeward at twilight. Their road, like his, is along Suma Bay. Back and forth, from hill to shore, their daily lot. How miserable the toil of their wretched lives! He calls one of them over.

"Say, you, grasscutter! Just now from the high meadow I heard the sound of a flute. Was someone among you playing?"

A nod.

The monk is astonished. "How touching," he says, "to play with ability beyond your status."

"With ability beyond your status," echoes the grasscutter, offended. He quotes a proverb. "'Do not envy those above you,' they say, 'nor despise those below.'" The monk apologizes. Truly this was a foolish thing for him to say. In their verses poets praise the flutes of grasscutters and the songs of woodsmen, and melodies of bamboo flutes are famed throughout the world. For a time the two sit in silence.

Finally, the monk breaks the silence. "May I ask … All the other grasscutters have gone home, yet you alone remain. Why do you stay?"

But the grasscutter can give no reason. "Evening waves wash the shore," he says. "Their sound draws me, and I have come. But do not abandon me. Bestow upon me the Ten Invocations."

The monk is taken aback. “Wishing for Buddhahood,” he assures the grasscutter, “all living things are saved, none abandoned. The Ten Invocations I shall grant.”

The grasscutter bows his head gratefully. “Though a single call of Buddha’s name would be sufficient,” he whispers, “each day and night you pray for me, my name unspoken yet clear. Please perform a service for that name.”

The monk looks to the sea. Waves rise and return to Suma Shore, then as now. “Who are you? How did you...?”

“I am, in fact, a person with a link to the slain warrior Atsumori.”

“Atsumori?” The monk turns to see him, but as if erased the grasscutter disappears, and the monk is alone. Joining his palms, he hails Amida Buddha.

Kumagai no Naozane and Taira no Atsumori, Woodcut, c. 1811

A villager comes, a man going to the seashore to relax his heart. The monk beckons to him and asks him what he knows about the death of the Heike nobleman Atsumori. The villager is puzzled. The request was unexpected. He did live in the area, true, and this place was the site of a great battle between the Genji and Heike clans, but details about the battle? The elders in his village told tales of the war. They spoke of how the Heike were driven from the capital, and how the survivors of the battle fled in defeat to this place. The Genji, however, seeking to annihilate the Heike, had launched a surprise attack and driven the Heike to the sea. The villager decided to relate the story as he had heard it:

"The Heike fled, and one among them, a young nobleman named Atsumori, raced to the shore to board the imperial barge. He realized he had forgotten his treasured flute, a gift from the Sung imperial house of China. He returned to retrieve the flute, but by the time he got back the fleet had already sailed, leaving him alone on the shore. Atsumori urged his horse into the sea and they began to swim desperately toward the ship.

"Just then an enemy warrior, Kumagai no Naozane, caught sight of Atsumori and shouted out a challenge. Whirling his horse around, Atsumori closed fiercely with Kumagai. The two crashed to the ground between their mounts. But the powerful Kumagai got Atsumori under him. He ripped off Atsumori's helmet and struck off Atsumori's head. On the body in a brocade bag he found Atsumori's exquisite flute and realized his victim must have been a highly cultivated youth. He presented the flute to his commander, and all present wept, their tears wetting their armor. These were the circumstances of Atsumori's final moments, as I have heard.

"They say that Kumagai became a monk in order to pray for Atsumori, but that can't be true. Such a man would never have killed Atsumori in the first place, so I don't believe it. Kumagai too should be killed. Only then would the tortured soul of Atsumori find solace."

The villager had been kind enough to tell his story. Now what is there to hide? "I am Kumagai no Jiro Noazane," the monk confessed. "It was I who struck down Atsumori at the battle of Ichinotani." The villager, stunned, begins to sputter out an apology, but the monk

waves him off. “I renounced the world and am now called Rensho, a Buddhist priest. In battle I saw a Heike warrior and recognized him as an enemy warrior of rank. We struggled, but I overpowered him and ripped off his helmet, meaning to take his head. But then I saw he was a youth, no more than fifteen or sixteen. His face was powdered, his teeth blackened. Clearly he was a young man of high rank. I wanted to spare him, but I was not alone. I glanced behind me and saw many of my fellow warriors riding up. His life was forfeit regardless. ‘I do not wish to kill you,’ I told him, ‘but behind me are many men from my side. I will take your head myself, and afterwards pray earnestly for your soul’s repose.’ So I struck off his head. After that I became so distressed and realized such suffering that I cut off my topnot and shaved my head, becoming the figure you see before you. I have returned here, the site of the battle, to pray for the soul of Atsumori and comfort his spirit.”

The villager bowed his head. “I am sure his spirit will be grateful having you chant sutras for the repose of his soul.”

“Yes,” replied the monk, “I will stay and earnestly pray for his soul.” The villager bowed and took his leave, leaving the monk alone.

On the pebbled beach the monk spreads his moss-hued robe. Passing the night on this bed of rock, he chants prayers for the enlightenment of Atsumori. The sun sets. Night comes. Along the coast of Awaji plovers’ cries are heard

A voice: “Tell me, Rensho, why do you drowse? Atsumori himself has come.”

How strange! The grasscutter, now clad in a warrior’s armor, has returned. Sounding the gong the monk has continued to chant, not drowsing even for a moment. Now Atsumori has come! “Surely this is a dream,” the monk cries.

Soundless, the warrior glides to him. “Why need it be a dream?” he asks. “To clear karma of this waking world made real, I have come.”

The monk is confused. “With one invocation of Amida Buddha, countless sins and obstacles are instantly cleared away. I have called the Name unceasingly for you. How could the rough seas of sinful karma afflict you still?”

Kumagai no Naozane and Taira no Atsumori, woodblock print by Katsukawa Shunshō, c. 1780

"I am grateful," Atsumori replies. "The blossoms of spring rise to deck the trees, urging highest illumination. The autumn moon sinks to the depths of the sea, grace descending to save the lowly. But sins run deep as the sea."

They speak together through the night. Atsumori's tale is very much a confessional one.

"The mansions of our clan, side by side, lined the streets, like leaves thick on branches, a glowing array. The glory of the Rose of Sharon lasts but a single day. Our glory was the same. We are momentary sparks from a flint stone, our light fades before it is sensed.

"These lessons of life are indeed sad.

"Yet those high up cause grief for those below. With rich, unknowing arrogance, the Heike ruled the world some twenty years. But truly a generation passes as swiftly as a dream. Like leaves of autumn, we were tossed and scattered by winds from all directions, each single leaf a boat floating on the waves of sleep, never to return, even in dreams.

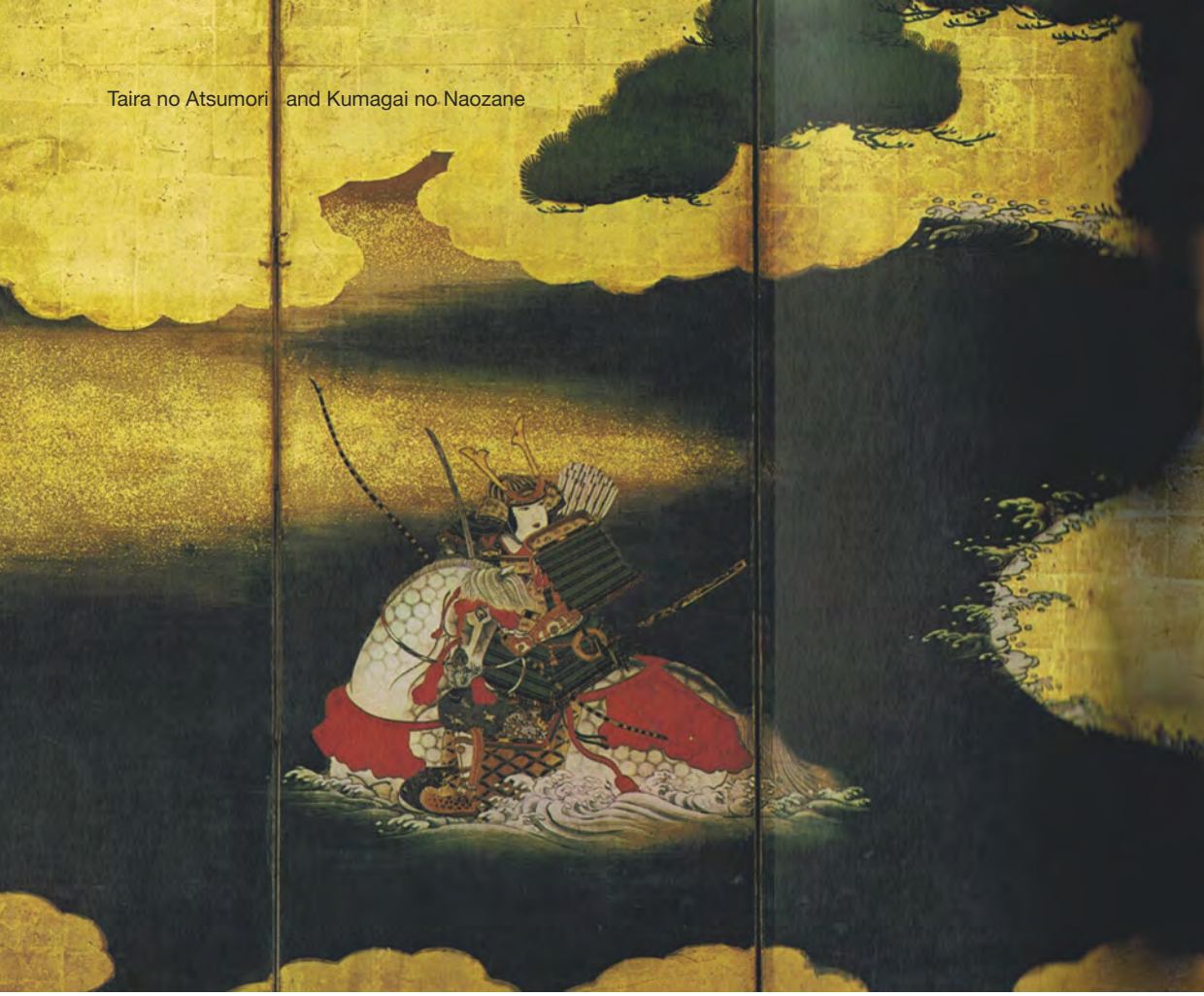
"Like caged birds longing for clouds, or ranks of homing geese wandering, uncertain and aimless. Days, months, years pass in waves. Yielding to our misery, languishing like the salt-dripping seaweed, alone and forlorn we pass our days secluded here at Ichinotani.

"From behind, mountain winds roar down. As the field lies cold at the seaside, so too our ships huddled at the sea's edge. Nights and days indistinguishable, as plovers cry. Our sleeves too dampened by waves and tears, which drench the tide pebbles, our rocky pillows. In seaside shacks we huddle together, befriended only by seafolk.

"Faint smoke rises from our cooking fires as worries pile up like heaps of brushwood.

"We ourselves belong to Suma now. Such is the miserable fate of our clan.

"Then my father called us together. 'Tomorrow will be our final battle,' he announced. 'This evening is our final


Taira no Atsumori and Kumagai no Naozane

farewell!' So, joining together, we consoled ourselves with song and dance."

"I recall that evening's entertainment!" says the monk. "From our camp we overheard the sweet tones of a flute!"

"The flute I kept with me to my death," says Atsumori, turning away. They sit in silence together, both recalling the tuneful melody accompanying songs and ballads. Many voices had risen together, matching its rhythm, that one melody traversing this sad world. All singing, all dancing, blowing and playing, guided by discerning hearts.

"In time," continues Atsumori, "the imperial ship departed, abandoning the entire clan. I rode to the shore in desperation, but already the ships were far off in the distance. Stranded and bewildered, abandoned and alone, I reigned in my horse. Just then, from behind at that moment galloping up you came. 'You cannot escape!' you shouted and charged. I drew and wheeled my horse about."

The monk, distant, recalls. "In the pounding waves we meet, swords drawn, exchanging rapid blows in the breakers. On

horseback we grapple, then fall upon the wave-swept shore, one atop the other."

Atsumori nods. "Finally struck down, life fades; I die." Suddenly the spirit, recalling the tortures of hell, draws his sword, his eyes aflame. 'My enemy is here!' he cries. Bent on avenging his own death he charges the monk and is about to strike. The monk, however, continues his invocations, praying with kindness that together their two souls may be reborn in paradise on a single lotus petal.

The sword, released, falls to the ground. Atsumori, with head bowed, whispers: "'Discard evil friends,' they say, 'but call near virtuous enemies.' Now I understand: it is said of you! Foes no longer, let our souls rise linked in salvation. Let each assure the other's life to come. We two, once mortal enemies, have truly become friends, joined together in Buddha's Law. Oh, please pray for my release!"

* * *

A fading shadow, a soft wind, an echoed whisper: "For my soul, please pray!"

A Thousand Roots

An Introduction to the Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke

Tilo Ulbricht

If I had never read any of Rilke's poetry and knew nothing of his reputation, and a friend advised me to read his poems in chronological order, what would I make of them?

I would discover that he was prolific in his youth, but would not be impressed by his first publications, which show an almost alarming facility for writing derivative rhyming verse, dreamy and romantic, at best with a certain charm:

> What is happening in me I do not know,
> nor what bliss it is I'm longing for;
> my heart is taken in a dream,
> my longing is a song.
>
> Joy runs in my girl's veins
> and her hair is full of sun,
> her eyes like the Madonna's
> bringing miracles to life.

A young man's poem, but hundreds of young budding "poets" might have written that, and never have matured into actual poets. But then, suddenly we find this:

This is my struggle:
lured by longing to wander
through all my days
until, broadend and strong,
I reach with a thousand roots
deep into life,
and through suffering
am matured: beyond life,
beyond time.

A hint of something completely different, and even more so in:

If you were a child in a happy flock
How could you possibly understand
How it was that I grew to hate the day,
A constant hostile danger,
And felt abandoned: a stranger.

Only perhaps on some night in May,
With the scents of Spring, would I be
Secretly content.

By day imprisoned by the tight ring
Of cowardly duty, devotedly performed;
Escaping in the evenings, not hearing
The sound of a tiny window opening
And a butterfly taking my longing
On a silent voyage to ask the stars:
Where is my home?

After knowing Rilke better, we might call these Rilke's first Rilkean poems.

The poet feels himself to be an exile: Where is my home? To express this longing, to discover what it means to be at home—perhaps to return—is the task of the poet. From his letters and his strange peripatetic life, we realize that one thing was very clear for Rilke: he had to be a poet, and he knew it. It was his calling, his duty, and he had to be true to it. But what does it mean—to be a poet?

He questions his presence here on the earth, as if he were asked: Are you here?

When the clocks strike as close
as within my own heart,
and all things saying,
voices asking:
Are you there?

Then I am not the one who wakes in
the morning,
night gives me a name
which no one I spoke to by day
would taste without fear-

And every door
gives way in me…

Then I know, nothing is lost,
no gesture and no prayer
(for they have too much weight).
My whole childhood is still here
always around me.
I am never alone.
Many who lived before me
and strove to leave me
yet wove,
wove
on my being.

And if I now sit down beside you
and quietly say: I suffered:
do you hear?

Who knows
who is murmuring it too.

And now, more strongly expressed than before, the fact, indeed the necessity, of suffering, that life is a process. Something can grow, develop—and where that leads is a mystery.

There is a feeling that everything that happens in life tends to be a distraction. Rilke longs for silence:

For once if everything just were still
and accidents, events which miss the mark
fell silent, and the next-door laughter
and all the noises my senses make
did not so hinder my being awake...

Then in one thousandfold movement
my thought could reach where you begin
and entirely hold you as long as a smile
to be able in gratitude
to give you to all of life.

Later, he describes our civilization as it appears to him:

The desire of cities is only for themselves
and in their land sweeps everything away,
breaking animals like bits of hollowed wood,
consuming many peoples in the fire.

Their inhabitants just serve what there prevails
and fall out of balance and all restraint;
their snails' tracks they call progress,
go faster where more slowly went before,
feel like glittering whores, noisier
and noisier yet with metal and with glass.

It's as if a deception daily fooled them:
no longer can they be themselves at all.
Money has all their strength and keeps increasing
great as the East Wind, but they are small,
made hollow, waiting, for the wine and poison
from all animal and human life
to seduce them to ephemeral existence.

Was Rilke aware of the ancient Hindu teaching regarding the great cycles of human life on our Earth—that we are now in the Iron Age, the Kali-Yuga?[1] He certainly saw how life is now.

In 1902 Rilke lived in France and was secretary to the sculptor Auguste Rodin, near Paris. Rodin kept insisting, "Il faut travailler toujours" (*One must always work*), a saying that made a great impression on Rilke, because he saw Rodin living that, and he tried to live it also, working tirelesssly at his poetry, writing hundreds of letters. Rodin emphasized the importance of seeing "things." The word "Dinge" (*things*) occurs over and over again in Rilke's poems, especially in his later work. But the English "things" is weak. What did Rilke mean by "thing"? Something beyond the external appearance … one might be tempted to say "the-thing-in-itself," were it not for unhelpful philosophical associations; "essence-of-a-thing" might be better. Sometimes Rilke was able to *see*.… In some of his poems the word "form" might be more appropriate than "thing": a manifestation has to have a form—a form such as a tree, an animal, a cathedral, a human being … a "thing" is an expression of something beyond form: the formless from which all forms arise.

In his *Neue Gedichte* (*New Poems*, 1909) we see Rilke attempting to reach to the essence of "things." These poems have been much praised and some often translated, e.g., "The Panther." But can a human being experience what a panther feels? Perhaps, for the most part, these poems are actually failures, though necessary experiments in his journey to get closer to the inexpressible essence of "things."

Sometimes then he turned to biblical themes, as in "The Departure of the Prodigal Son," which long ago made such an impression on me that I tried to translate it, but had to abandon the attempt until many years later.

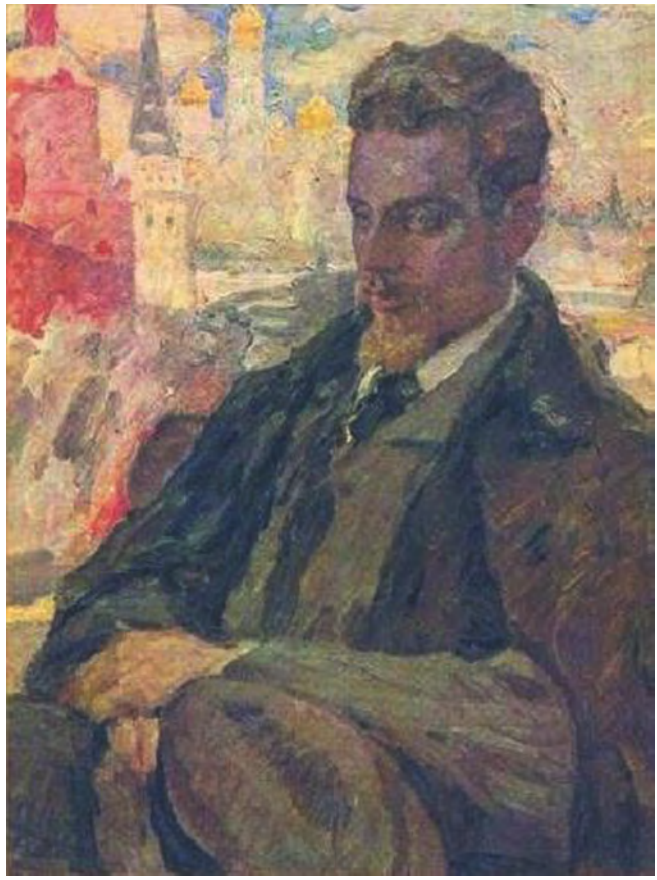
To go and leave all that confusion,
what is ours and yet does not belong to us,
the image mirrored in the fountain
shattered when the water trembles;
to leave all that which once more clings
to us like thorns—and leaving.…
all this.… and that…
already no longer seeing
the so habitual and familiar…

and then after all, to see: gentle and accepting,
like a beginning, new and very near,

and sensing how grief quite impartially
all things befell, filling
childhood to the very rim—
and yet to go, wrenching hand
    from hand,
once more tearing what had
    been healed,
to leave: whereto? Into the unknown,
far into a warm but foreign land
as indifferent as a backdrop
behind events: here, a garden,
there, a wall;
to go: why?
Go into the dark, from some
    impulse
neither understanding nor
    understood,
impatient and expectant….

To take all this upon oneself, let fall
in vain perhaps what has been held,
in order to die alone, not knowing
    why-

Is this the doorway to another life?



To leave the known, not knowing … is painful, is suffering. The poet expresses it—but what is a poet? What is poetry?

We can approach this question, remembering the oft-told story of how Rilke, staying in yet another castle, Duino near Trieste, out in the open on the headland by the Adriatic, *heard* the opening lines of what became the *First Elegy*:

Who, if I cried out, would hear me
In the orders of angels? If an angel heard
And in a sudden movement I were taken
    to his heart,
Into the presence of his greater Being,
Would I not be consumed?
For beauty is the beginning of fear,
A movement we can hardly bear,
And we marvel that it serenely refrains
From destroying us.

We have got used to saying that a poet "writes poetry." Yes, these days it needs to be written down, but if it is really poetry it first must be *heard*. Writing it down is a recent innovation; the tradition is essentially oral.

Again, we ask: What is poetry? Where does it come from? In ancient traditions "the poet is meant to be able to gain access into the deepest layers of reality. By virtue of this ability, the poet was traditionally conceived as a mediator or a channel between the essence of things and the magic of words, crystallizing his perceptions into sounds and images that pierce through the veil of trivial usage and bring miracles out of language.… Etymologically speaking, the Greek word *poiêsis* literally means creation, and specifically refers to creation in the realm of the *logos*. Although the scope of the term *logos* has tended to become

more and more limited to the plane of rationality (the realm of the discursive mind), its etymology suggests the idea of a gathering or a collecting, thereby alluding to the distillation of a unity of understanding.... out of a multiplicity of perceptions."[2] Poetry is therefore close to *mythos*, "the essence of what is told ... leading us to think about ... what appears and what is behind appearance.... *Mythos* and *logos* are not at all in opposition, as contemporary historians of philosophy believe. The early Greek philosophers used *mythos* and *logos* in the same sense."[3] Similarly, René Daumal points out that according to ancient Hindu scripture, there are two kinds of language, one having its source in eternity, and the other subject to grammar and change.[4]

We could say: the poet *listens* ... and translates what he hears into what we regard as language, into words. Hence poetry itself is already a translation.

How then is translation from one language to another to be done? Not by copying or imitating the form: metre, word order, line length or rhyme, since these are attributes of a particular language. The translator of a poem must be a poet, and his task is, by listening intently to the sound of a poem, to hear that sound behind the words which the first poet heard, and to express it in another language: a new translation.

This brings us inevitably to consider Rilke's *Duino Elegies*, his mature work, and, with Eliot's *Four Quartets*, the great poems of the twentieth century. There is something about the *Elegies* that has attracted a very wide variety of poets, translators, and others (Heidegger often quotes Rilke).

The meaning, the meaning... that is the real difficulty with the *Duino Elegies*. Very difficult to translate, yes—but what did Rilke *mean*? For me the meaning does not emerge consistently from the translations I have read, and despite felicitous passages, taken as a whole they don't sound as poems. Finally, it was so often finding "dasein" translated as

existence that led me to attempt a new translation.

We can understand *existence* from its roots: *ex esse*, literally *to be outside*. It refers to our outer, earthly life. When we merely *exist*, we are concerned about ourselves in the external world, and it is these concerns which lead us outwards, away from ourselves. *Being* has to do with another world, the mysterious feeling of being alive inside, in touch with the essential self.

For many today, being is a difficult word. You will not find a historian writing about someone that he had great being, and yet the real difference between two people is not their nationality, language, age, political views, or sexuality, but the level of their being. Paradoxically perhaps, a human being has the possibility of experiencing different levels of being, sometimes in rapid succession, as Rilke tells us.

It must be said unequivocally that the *Elegies* are difficult poems. A reader must work—by reading them attentively again and again—to approach what lies behind the words, and avoid reading too much *about* them, in order not to further clutter the mind with "explanations." I will therefore try to follow that advice, and end with Rilke's *First Elegy*.

Who, if I cried out, would hear me
In the orders of angels?[1] If an angel heard
And in a sudden movement I were taken
to his heart,
Into the presence of his greater Being,
Would I not be consumed?
For beauty is the beginning of fear,
A movement we can hardly bear,
And we marvel that it serenely refrains
From destroying us.
Every angel is terrifying.
I hold myself back and swallow the
luring call
That came out of the dark, the sobbing.
Feeling now my need, to whom can I turn?
Not to angels, not to humankind, not
to animals
Who already know that in what I call the
world,
The world as interpreted by me,
I am not at home. There just remains perhaps
A hillside tree I daily pass,
Yesterday's street, and the false faithfulness
Of a habit which liked being in me,
Stayed, and never left.
Oh and there is night, night, when
the wind,
Full of the space of the cosmos, feeds on
our faces....
For whom would she not stay, longed-for
Gently undeceiving night, with effort
standing
In front of the solitary heart.
Is she easier for lovers?
Oh but they just use each other to cover up
And hide their own fate.
Do you still not know?
From your arms stretched wide
Cast out emptiness into the space
We breathe; and perhaps the birds
By their more sensitive flight
Will feel the air extended.

Yes, Spring each year did need you,
Stars called you to feel them,
From the past a wave welled up towards
you,
Or through a window as you passed, the
sound of a violin
Opened. All that was your task.
But could you? Did not expectation
Always distract you, as though everything
foretold
The coming of a beloved?
(And where will you hide and protect her
In the face of the force of alien thoughts
Which come and go, and at night, take
lodging?)
But when there is longing in you, sing of
the lovers,
Even though their famed feelings are not
immortal enough;
The forsaken ones you almost envy;

They touched you more than the ones
fulfilled.
Seek afresh from now the never-attainable
words of praise.
Remember, the hero lives on; defeat
Was only a means to be: his final birth.
As for the lovers, spent Nature takes
them back
Into herself as though lacking strength
To create them again. Have you
communed enough
With the poems of Gaspara Stampa[2],
that some girl
Also by her lover abandoned would be
inspired
By her greater intensity to feel,
To wish to be such as she was?
Now, should not those oldest sufferings
Become more fruitful in us? Is it not time
we lovingly
Freed ourselves of our loved ones
And tremblingly endured
As the arrow endures the bowstring's tension
Contained, so that in its release it can be
more than itself:
For there is no place where one can
merely stay.

Voices, voices. Listen, my heart, as only
Saints have listened, so lifted up by the
great call
That they still knelt and kneeling stayed,
Undisturbed, such was their listening.
It is not that you could bear God's voice, no,
But to hear the movement, the
uninterrupted
Call, sounding out of silence.
From those who died young it comes
Like a murmur towards you.
Whenever you entered a church in Rome
or in Naples
Didn't their fate speak softly to you?
The inscription, rising in relief, demanding—
As not long ago on that tablet in Santa
Maria Formosa[3]—
What is it they wish from me? That
quietly I free myself
Of the apparent injustice, which might
hinder
Their spirits' free movement.

Yes, it is strange to live no longer on the
Earth,
To give up customs barely learned,
Not to impart to roses and to other things
Which harbour promise in themselves
Some future significance in merely human
terms.
To be no longer what one was
In endlessly anxious hands, and even to
let fall
One's own name like a broken toy.
Strange, not to go on desiring one's desires.
Strange to see all that covered one, now
disattached
And fluttering in space. The state of being
dead is hard work,
It needs making good until the eternal
Begins to be felt.
But the living all make the same mistake
In their too sharp distinctions, for it is said
That angels often do not know whether
they are moving
Amongst living or dead.
The eternal current through both realms
Draws all ages with it, always, and it is
Its sound which prevails in both, and
Everywhere.

In the end, those who left early no longer
need us
For one is weaned of earthly things as gently
As a child outgrows its mother's breast.
But we
Are in need of those great mysteries,
For it is from our sorrows that so often a
new opening
To the spirit comes. If they were not,
could we be at all?
Is that legend in vain that tells, in the
lament for Linos[4],
How the first notes of song dared to
break through
The arid stiffness, and how then in that
startled space
Which an almost godlike youth suddenly
left forever
The void began vibrating, and vibrating
still,
Seizes us, to comfort and bring help.

The poems quoted are all new translations by the author.

Notes to the First Elegy

[1] *orders of angels. The Celestial Hierarchy*, a famous very early medieval text by Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, is the earliest written record of the ancient teaching of these orders, and lists them in three groups of three. The Angels are the lowest order—that is, closest to man.

[2] *Gaspara Stampa*, sixteenth-century poetess who was abandoned by her lover but never abandoned her love, to which she testified in three hundred poems.

[3] *Santa Maria Formosa*, church in Venice that Rilke visited in 1911.

[4] *Linos.* In Greek myth, brother of Orpheus. It was said that his sudden death left such a void that it was filled with a kind of music.

Notes to article

[1] The first clear expression in the West of the Kali-Yuga is to be found in Nietzsche's writings, especially *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, and towards the end of Hermann Hesse's novel *Demian*. Later, Réné Guénon gave a clear intellectual exposition in *The Reign of Quantity*: the Iron Age is the last in the great cycle. It begins with the Golden Age, a period of great stability and very slow change, in which the wise are recognized, and rule. In the Silver Age, things are changing more, though still slowly. In the Bronze Age, change is faster, people are turning more outwards, "doing" more. Finally, in the Iron Age, which is the shortest of the four, change becomes more and more rapid, the wise long ago ceased to have any say in the form of our outer life, and we all become more and more materialistic. It ends in self-destruction, but from the flames arises the phoenix of the next Golden Age.

[2] From the World Wisdom online library: www.worldwisdom.com/publiclibrary/default.aspx. Ch 13, "On the Foundations and Norms of Poetry," by Patrick Laude

[3] Martin Heidegger, *What is called thinking*, translated by J. Glenn Gray, Perennial, 1976.

[4] René Daumal, *Rasa or Knowledge of the Self*, translated by Louise Landes Levi, New Directions, 1982.

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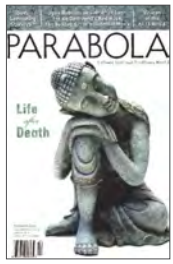

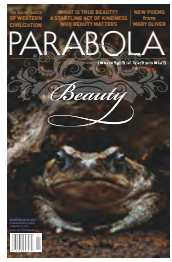

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Portrait of Poets

Each face with its particular lines, the fall of hair,
tucked behind the ear, ruffled with thinking.
The shadows of our pens faithfully following
each seen thought and sudden insight.
The quietness, apparent now, that envelops us,
sitting, bunched, hunched, relaxed, paused
around the square of hand hewn wooden tables.
Autumn light streaming in, highlighting the season,
the particular place and time.
Facing each other—like the black animals on my yellow pen
From the International Fund for Animal Welfare—
with as much honesty as we can and no humility clauses,
all trying to feel the others, sense the others.
Does the difference between us diminish in that moment?

It has become my burning question of late:
Why do I not feel the lives of others,
understand their aliveness, uniqueness?
Hearing your breathing now, those close to me,
shoes on creaking floor, pens hurrying with sudden vision.
Our wish to be real, to see clearly, connects us.
This warm room where we sit,
full of tangible life, helps us,
a space inhabited by reality:
witness to hot cinnamon rolls and intimate confessions,
steadfast in its support of our wish to become truly ourselves.

—Patricia Hemminger

Said and Unsaid

You cannot say, *I need you*
so you say, *I like your shoes*

I cannot say, *I see your gods have failed you*
so I say, *your eyes look so sad*

You fold your arms, *the sentence for my crimes is life*
I lean in, *let's look at those chains*

You look past me, eyes wide, *I am alone*
and the night is coming for me

my heart pounds
knowing what waits there

your breath stops to keep
the next door locked shut

but my left foot
is already in it

outside the trees
are restless with light

in the settling quiet
each filament of dust

streaming in from earth or star
delivers us, mote by mote

from the hour of undoing
into the hour of mercy

on what wings
we cannot say

—Frances Hatfield

Walk in Somewhere and Return

we're lucky, we have shops, bars, a town square,
somewhere to walk to it's not like that everywhere
windows tinted the vans slide past, no need to wave,
shuttles to Starbucks, soccer from the set-back shades
of houses that would like to be mansions
evergreens, ornamental maples, mono-lawns
swingset optional hoop and the double garage
required, where the kid's social must-haves are in charge
to survive and it could be woodland but isn't
and it could be a neighbourhood, but it isn't—
too close and too far apart—and the dogs all bark
they have a lot to say but with you there's no spark
just call hi, how are you and move on smilingly
complete I don't know how a people grew to be
so frozen lonely not even nosy they don't
really want to know the price you paid what you won't
do for a living anymore they don't want to
know you at all at the very most they'll list you
their best boasts eyes restless, averted while they talk
like those Christmas update letters that are reports
of all the good news and none of the rest selling
to you like a PR receptor site—meaning
is important, friendship between people, places
where you can walk in somewhere and return, spaces
that have a center, where we can learn the pattern
of ourselves, both altogether and all alone.

—Diana Durham

elegy of this day being

At the throat, brushed green
like tile I shine. The devil says “hum-drum”
as the eel struggles, futile like a wagging tail.
So many broken, hating with the hardness of crocodiles
and ants, pulling along their dead,
to consume, knowing nothing of sorrow or forgiveness.
All night I sit with my naked thighs
on the carpet, red from the heat. What point could there possibly be
to all this pain, the death of others, the sickness that swarms in mid-air?
Hurricanes hit the graveyards.
A gull tilts on a telephone wire. I wish to bid goodbye.
I wish for ice-cream cones in my fridge,
a handful of poppies to give some child, any child, I meet.
I see dead eyes in my dream,
glossed with mucous and vacancy unbearable.
How do I serve when the world is so cold?
The humpbacks know this, the midgets
and also the centipedes.
I want to hide in rooms where
infants are sleeping or salamanders nurse their young.
The darkness is in me. The ground deceives me,
changes colours as I go. Let us go now, my nightmares
and I, go under the light, go until
our heart's blood is free-falling, exposed.

—Allison Grayhurst

Ruah

As I slept,
You entered me,
As if I were a desert tent
And you, a thief who crept
By night across dark dunes
To slip inside as I lay empty,
Pitched on sand. But when
I woke, I found you, here,
Close as my breath, no,
Breath itself, and I, a tent
Lit from within

—Sarah Rossiter

Patricia Hemminger is a freelance science and environmental writer, and associate editor of *Pollution A–Z*, published by MacMillan Reference Books.

Frances Hatfield's work has appeared in *Quarry West*, the *Monterey Bay Anthology of Poetry*, and *Numinous*. Her first book of poems, *rudiments of (f)light*, is forthcoming from Wings Press. She lives on the California coast, where she practices the arts of psychotherapy and gardening.

Diana Durham is author of two poetry collections, *Sea of Glass* and *To the End of the Night*, and the non-fiction *The Return of King Arthur: Finishing the Quest for Wholeness*. Recently she wrote, performed, and co-produced a new audio-play retelling of the Grail story, *Perceval & the Grail*. She speaks and runs workshops on the Grail/Arthur myths and the art of consciousness. www.DianaDurham.net

Allison Grayhurst's poems have been published in various journals throughout the United States, Canada, Australia, and in the United Kingdom, and she is the author of the book *Somewhere Falling*. She lives in Toronto with her husband, two children, two cats, and a dog. She also sculpts, working with clay.

Sarah Rossiter is a spiritual director and a writer. Publications include a novel and a short story collection. Poetry has appeared in a variety of journals and periodicals.


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Unveiling Common Ground:

On the 110th Anniversary of Peter Rabbit

Val Thorpe

IN ONE OF THE MOST DELIGHTFUL children's illustrations ever created, Beatrix Potter uncovers common ground where varied faiths and perspectives on life can come together to share a moment of connection and merriment. Potter's intriguing scene can offer us a charming oasis of deeper insight during these troubled times.

At the heart of her classic *THE TALE OF PETER RABBIT* (a bestseller since its publication in 1902), Potter illustrates, with watercolor whimsy, Peter Rabbit's lost little blue jacket and his shoes. They are arranged on a cross by Mr. McGregor to create the effect of a scarecrow to frighten off intruders.

We may recall that Peter Rabbit is that radish-snatching, McGregor-taunting rebel of picture-book lore. Setting out, young Peter relishes a lavish world of lettuces, French beans, and radishes in farmer McGregor's garden with hardly a thought of the real danger he is in. When the sharp-eyed McGregor spots him, however, Peter runs the race of his life, sprinting more like a boy than a rabbit. He runs right out of his shoes, leaving one among the cabbages and the other in the potato patch. Then, catching the brass buttons of his brand new blue jacket in a gooseberry net, he comes to a full and sudden halt.

Knotted in one of the most treacherous binds of his life, Peter struggles to free himself. Envisioning himself in Mrs. McGregor's pie, he is soon on the verge of giving up, when he hears the song of some nearby, friendly sparrows urging him to keep trying. Encouraged, Peter slides out of his ensnarled jacket. Out-racing the old farmer, he eventually finds his way back to his awaiting family. An angry McGregor then sequesters all the worldly goods Peter has left behind and puts them to use.

To deter critters like Peter himself from venturing into the garden, Mr. McGregor places Peter's lost little blue jacket and shoes on a cross-brace to create a wonderfully animated scarecrow. Peter's jacket is entirely unbuttoned, exposing the elegant wooden cross on which it is hung in a delightfully revealing way. In Potter's later picture-book *The Tale of Benjamin Bunny*, this scarecrow appears undressed, as it were, and gracefully displays itself as a bare wooden cross.

Potter's illustration of Peter's belongings on McGregor's scarecrow-cross is a whimsical monument to Peter's terrifying ordeal in the garden. It adds pathos as well as gentle comedy to Peter's misadventure

as it marks both the hazards and the ultimate optimism that come together in Peter's tale. The clothing on the cross takes center stage within the frame of Potter's picture; and through her ingenious use of perspective it assumes a much larger portion of the illustration than the now diminutive farmer hoeing cabbages in the background.

Potter's depth of insight and unfailing sense of humor are boundless and complex. To frighten other creatures from venturing within this delicious plot of seeming heaven, Peter's brand new jacket is spread out on a universal symbol of balance. Here is an image of clear cultural and spiritual significance. Not only does it include a reference to the Easter story, but it also evokes the emblematic intersection of philosophical and material reality found among differing cultural and faith traditions around the globe.

Potter's inspired drawing of the blue jacket that dresses this cross includes an arms-flung-open liveliness. The shoes, dangling from the jacket on strings to create the illusion of legs, are playfully turned up at the toes with rare dynamism. Echoing their owner, they seem to imply that a young, insubstantial Peter is tipping backwards. They form an image suggesting a lack of balance in Peter's life as his abandoned shoes flip up and over and all about. This image also embodies the promise of future balance as Peter's shoes (as a merciful stand-in for him on this telling cruciform) move in some degree of symmetry, each on either side of a well-recognized sign of equilibrium.

A universal sign featured in the mythologies of varied cultures across every hemisphere and every age, the cross signifies new life and enhanced awareness. A form reaching outward and upward, the cross is a classic symbol of

interpenetration and connection. Signifying a universal branching out, it is a structure planted in the ground that reaches both below and above.

One of the oldest human symbols, predating Jesus by thousands of years, it has been widely incorporated into both secular and sacred art. Demarcating four divisions suggesting the four elements, the four seasons, the four directions, it signifies cosmic union and reunion. Among diverse faith traditions, it represents the intersection of the sacred (the vertical line) with the earthly world (the horizontal line). The cross is also analogous with the tree, a mark of rootedness in the underworld that soars up to a higher world as it bridges all realities.

The cross's added connotation of death and resurrection ties it into another universal theme epitomized in the Christian tradition. The intersecting lines of the cross symbolize the meeting of opposites, the encounter of life and death. Among many traditions, both Christian and non-Christian, this ageless emblem where life and death meet also implies an ultimate victory of life over death through rebirth. (The fact that Peter is a rabbit underlines renewal as well, for the rabbit is an ancient symbol of fertility and rebirth.)

Potter's placement of the cross in this crowning illustration of *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* is evocative, meaningful, and filled with gentle irony. Her depiction is as amusing as it is profound.

Beatrix Potter (1866–1943) was raised as a Unitarian.[1] While she was not religious in the strict sense of adhering to a rigid set of theological principles, she was widely versed in Hebrew and Christian scriptures. Her writing sings with the cadences of what she referred to as the "sweet rhythm of the authorized translation" of the Bible.[2] She had difficulty, however, with aspects of religion that lead to intolerance and conflict among varying belief systems. She once observed: "All outward forms of religion are almost useless, and are the cause of endless strife." She questioned further: "What do creeds matter, what possible difference does it make to anyone today whether the doctrine of the resurrection is correct or incorrect, or the miracles…? Believe there is a great power silently working all things for good, behave yourself and never mind the rest."[3]

The point of the miracles in her view was not to evoke cold analysis and endless arguments. For some people the resurrection of Christ is a profoundly significant and devout tenet of faith. For others who did not grow up with this doctrine, or who choose to bracket it or reject it, the physical resurgence of Jesus is

not a part of their deeper understanding of life. Debating ceaselessly about this creedal devotion rarely convinces either side in the end and can become tiresome and irksome. And most sadly of all, the heated division and controversy that can result from combative argument usually achieves so little. Potter might suggest that such contention senselessly misses the whole point of the cross, which, if nothing else, is a passionate act of inclusion and love.

She observes in her journal: "Surely a pious heathen is more acceptable than a wicked so-called Christian." On learning that a child who was not baptized was denied burial at an English cemetery she contended:

> I believe that it is still a common superstition that a child goes to the wrong place unless baptized. How can anyone believe that the power above us—call it Jehovah, Allah, Trinity, what they will—is a just and merciful father, seeing the ending from the beginning, and will yet create a child, a little rosebud, the short-lived pain and joy of its mother's heart, only to consign it after a few days of innocence to eternal torment?[4]

Potter fully embraced a spiritual life that could include everyone. While she admitted that as a watercolorist she came up with many of her "best designs in church," and while contemplation and prayer were important to her, she found "manners of worship" of small consequence.[5] She challenged dividing lines among differing faiths and sought common ground. Her achievements embodied in every way her hope that we might stop arguing and get about the business of living better, friendlier lives. She sought an uplifting, cheerful, and flexible approach to living, and she adopted a truly transcendent perspective on faith.

"Lighten up" seems to be an important aspect of her creed. The silly inclusion and pronounced presence of a cluster of highly curious birds in her drawing of Peter's cross exemplifies her views. As they study Peter's abandoned jacket, they lend special comedy to the occasion. Their quizzical examination of the clothing on the wooden cross as if it might be some sort of human being floundering in a pair of footloose and fancy free slippers brings to mind centuries of puzzled reflection on the resurrection of Jesus.

Potter's drawing negates neither the views of those who believe Jesus rose from the dead nor the professions of those who deny the Resurrection. It moves beyond religious dividing lines, and even beyond religion itself. What is happening around this symbol of life and death and rebirth—this ubiquitous sign of cosmic union and reunion—is far more mysterious than Potter's busy little birds can fathom. So, too, all of our puzzlings about life and death are bound in limited knowledge of that "great power working all things for good." The great truth Potter's cross affirms is that Peter has been saved, he has escaped death. It is thankfully only his clothing that the old farmer has snatched and not Peter's life. Potter's drawing of the scarecrow-cross transcends creedal boundaries with a touch of resurrecting humor that can lift us all.

[1] See Judy Taylor, *Beatrix Potter: Artist, Storyteller and Countrywoman* (London: Frederick Warne, 1986), as well as Linda Lear, *Beatrix Potter: A Life in Nature* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2007). Also, to learn more about Beatrix Potter, visit beatrixpottersociety.org.uk.

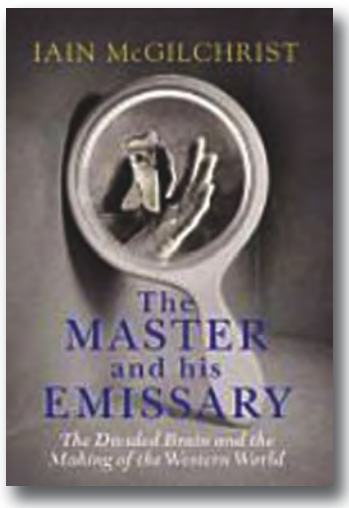
[2] Humphrey Carpenter, *Secret Gardens, A Study of the Golden Age of Children's Literature* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1985), p. 143.

[3] Leslie Linder, ed., *The Journal of Beatrix Potter from 1881 to 1897* (London and New York: Frederick Warne, 1974), p. 104.

[4] *Journal*, p. 104

[5] *Journal*, p. 236.

BOOK REVIEWS



The Master And His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World

IAIN MCGILCHRIST. YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2009. PP 604. $25 PAPER

Reviewed by **Felix Dux**

Réné Guénon characterized the modern era as the "reign of quantity." Iain McGilchrist might reply that it is "the reign of the left hemisphere." In *The Master and His Emissary*, he argues that the distinctive characteristics of the modern spirit—its utilitarian, exploitative attitude to nature, its narrow rationality, and its uncomprehending rejection of metaphor and myth—are all expressions of a way of thinking that is dominated by only one half of the brain.

The fact that the human brain is divided into two almost independent halves or "hemispheres," which are connected only at the base by a narrow band of tissue, has been obvious to students of human anatomy for many centuries. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this gave rise to some simplistic theorizing, which crudely assigned particular functions or roles to the different hemispheres. Some of these ideas were eagerly taken up by journalists, management gurus, and the like, to the chagrin of mainstream neuroscientists, most of whom have become wary of approaching the subject at all.

This wariness is understandable. The more neuroscientists study the brain, the more complex and subtle its workings turn out to be. Just about everything we do, think, or feel involves coordinated activity among many brain regions, so that the idea that specific functions or capabilities, such as language or empathy, can be tidily "mapped" to particular parts of the brain must be profoundly mistaken. Nevertheless, in synthesizing the work of numerous researchers, McGilchrist finds a developing consensus that the differences between the hemispheres are indeed real and significant.

More to the point, he finds that these differences are not concerned with things the brain *does*, but with different kinds of *attention*; the two hemispheres are associated with fundamentally different ways of relating to the world. In brief, the left hemisphere brings a narrowly focused, discriminative attention. It views objects in isolation from their context and seeks to categorize and systematize them. The attention of the right hemisphere, by contrast, is broad and flexible. It perceives the world as a connected whole and each entity in it as a unique individual without any categorization.

These different ways of attending are meant to complement each other. Our primary perception of the world is made by the right hemisphere; it receives impressions directly, without interpretation or discrimination; it doesn't try to "make sense" of the world. "Making sense" is where the left hemisphere comes in. The left hemisphere does not perceive directly, but relies instead on the right hemisphere to provide it with its raw material. It is the left hemisphere which

analyzes, classifies, compares, and makes judgments. Its role is to "unpack" what the right hemisphere presents to it. But, crucially, for this new re-presentation to come alive it must then be returned to the right hemisphere, where it can be woven into the totality of perception.

McGilchrist illustrates this by the example of a concert pianist. When preparing for a performance, the pianist will analyze a piece of music in great detail, plan closely how each measure is to be phrased, each chord voiced, but when it comes to the actual performance none of that is in his mind; all those detailed preparations have already done their work by enriching his relationship to the piece. His task now is just to play.

The reason the third stage in the relationship is so crucial is that the left hemisphere working alone is woefully limited. On its own, it can understand the world only in its own terms—in terms of systems and categories with no room for context or ambiguity. In other words, it cannot see the wood for the trees. In fact it doesn't even see the trees; what it sees are not real trees in all their many-sidedness, but just concepts, ideas about trees. Worse still, the left hemisphere does not see this as a deficiency—it cannot appreciate its own limitations.

Thus, using his work on the brain as a platform, McGilchrist is really telling us about two modes of relating to the world. That they seem to emerge from different halves of the brain is almost incidental—it could even turn out to be mistaken, as he cheerfully, if somewhat archly, reminds us at the very end of the book. It is the modes of attending, and the relationship between them, that matter.

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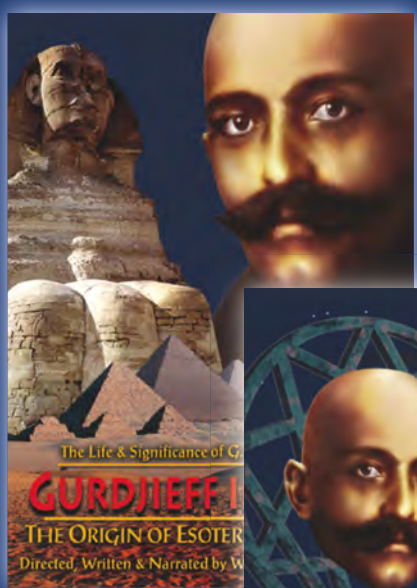

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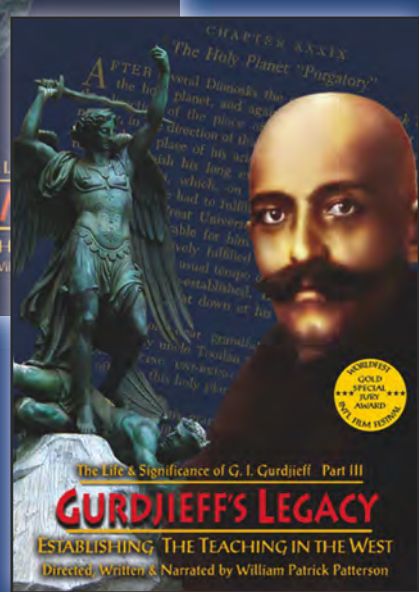

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It is also in the relationship between the two that danger lies. So profound are the differences in outlook between the hemispheres—or rather between the two modes of relating to the world which they embody—that the left hemisphere is tempted to usurp its subordinate position. Instead of returning its understanding to the right hemisphere, it tries to act alone, interpreting the world solely in its own terms. This leads to a contest, in which the center of gravity, the source of initiative, shifts from one hemisphere to the other. This manifests as struggle between a mindset that values the explicit over the implicit and is suspicious of metaphor and ambiguity, and one that is at home with the implicit and the metaphorical, but is less concerned with rationality or consistency.

This conflict is the real subject of the book. Although McGilchrist devotes six lengthy chapters and a mass of impressive scholarship to the scientific argument I have just summarized, that is only a preamble to what really concerns him, which is the effect of the resulting imbalance on human history and on the future of the modern world.

His ensuing survey of the history of Western consciousness is rich and wide ranging—too wide ranging to be easily summarized. The common thread, however, is the idea that at different periods left- or right-hemisphere modes of attending to the world have come to predominate in the life of Western societies, so that the values of different periods—their intellectual, religious, artistic, and social preoccupations—are to some extent expressions of these different ways of being.

What makes this survey so stimulating is that he combines a necessary degree of intellectual detachment with a sincere respect for the strivings of the poets, philosophers, artists, and musicians whose work he cites. This sincerity communicates itself to the reader and gives life to his ideas.

There are numerous intriguing examples in the second half of the book, but one observation turns out to be particularly significant: an imbalance towards the left-hemisphere can be self-correcting. Eventually the limitations of a left-hemisphere view of the world become so obvious that they lead to a natural re-balancing. McGilchrist sees an example of this in the way that the Romantic Movement, with its interest in myth and folklore and its reverence for nature, grew of out the rationality of the Enlightenment in the late eighteenth

century, not as a reaction but as a natural continuation.

What troubles him is that in our own age, this natural rebalancing does not seem to be working. The successes of science, technology, and utilitarian economics have been so stupendous in terms of technical achievement and human welfare that the left-hemisphere attitude is able to shrug off its equally obvious failures—the rape of nature, the loss of reverence for the sacred, the failures of attempts to systematize the foundations of mathematics or to make sense of the mysteries at the heart of quantum mechanics (the theories of particle physics can be verified to mind-boggling numerical precision, but as to what they *mean*, nobody has a clue). Instead of a corrective re-balancing, the imbalance seems to have become self-reinforcing.

I mentioned Guénon at the beginning and, for all the profound differences in outlook between them, he and McGilchrist both leave me with an impression, a vision, of our world hurtling in a particular direction, towards some kind of limit. This is not to suggest that McGilchrist is morose or pessimistic; on the contrary, his *élan* and love of life are apparent on every page. Rather, this impression simply emerges from what he has to say, without judgment. Decrying this state of affairs is already an interpretation. Instead, I need to try to relate it to myself. What is life asking of me?

That a book can lead me to question myself is praise indeed—I can think of no higher recommendation. Like any really interesting book, it is to be valued more for this than for any answers it gives. In fact, going over in my mind the wealth of ideas McGilchrist presents, I find that a

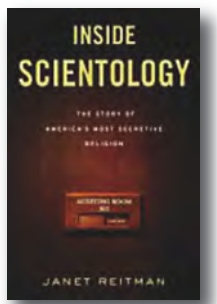
few of them strike a false note with me, but in a productive way, because they point to a deeper possibility.

One such false note concerns McGilchrist's characterization of ancient art, particularly the art of Egypt and pre-classical Greece. He particularly draws our attention to the comparative lack of naturalistic detail and individuality in the representation of the human form, and the intriguing tendency (verified by statistics) for faces to be shown looking to the viewer's right (the field of view of the left hemisphere), a tendency reversed in the naturalistic art of the classical period and the Renaissance. In all these characteristics, the thrust of his argument leads him to emphasize the similarities with Modernist art. However, I find that the differences—although, ironically, they are much harder to adumbrate in a "left-hemispheric" fashion—are much more profound.

When I look at great examples of ancient art, or of some Medieval religious art, something within me resonates. It seems to me that the artist's principle concern was with this possibility of resonance, and that his lack of interest with naturalistic representation arose more from this than from a "left-hemisphere" tendency to reduce human individuals to mere categories. I know of no Modernist art that has this quality; some artists may have tried to reproduce it, but, lacking some necessary quality in themselves, were unable.

What is this missing quality? This is not something that *THE MASTER AND HIS EMISSARY* addresses at all, yet reading it has helped to reinvigorate the question in me.

Felix Dux is a freelance mathematician and consultant living and working in England.



INSIDE SCIENTOLOGY: The Story of America's Most Secretive Religion

JANET REITMAN. HOUGHTON MIFFLIN HARCOURT, 2011. PP. 444. $28

Reviewed by **Bill Williams**

Ever since science fiction writer L. Ron Hubbard founded Scientology in 1954, there has been considerable confusion about the exact nature of this secretive group. Scientology has been labeled a self-help organization, a cult, a religion, a social movement, and an alternative to psychotherapy, but none of these labels seems entirely accurate.

Now Janet Reitman, a contributing editor for *Rolling Stone* magazine, has written a spellbinding book, *Inside Scientology*, based on numerous interviews and years of research. Taking us inside the organization, Reitman describes shocking practices, rituals, and tactics, including the theft of government files and harassment of critics.

Scientology is a successor to a previous self-help system described in Hubbard's 1950 best-selling book, *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*, in which he proposed using one-on-one "auditing" sessions to uncover past traumas and unlock a person's hidden potential as an alternative to psychotherapy. Scientologists have waged a campaign against modern psychiatry, believing, Reitman says, that "psychiatrists, in cahoots with drug companies … are part of a broad, government-endorsed conspiracy to subjugate the human race."

In the half century since its founding, Scientology has become a veritable cash cow. When Hubbard died in 1986, he left a personal fortune of roughly $400 million. Local Scientology franchises are under intense pressure to raise money, according to Reitman. New recruits sometimes pay tens of thousands of dollars for ongoing auditing sessions that promise happiness and spiritual fulfillment. Under pressure to take more expensive courses, some recruits end up in bankruptcy, owing thousands of dollars to the church. Scientology has been called the "McDonald's of religion" because of its business savvy.

The movement began calling itself a religion to broaden its appeal, Reitman

says. She describes Scientology's dogged effort to gain tax-exempt status at the U.S. Internal Revenue Service, which viewed the group as a business rather than a religion. After a twenty-five-year campaign of harassment that included the filing of two hundred lawsuits against the IRS, Scientology finally won a tax exemption, plus forgiveness of $1 billion in back taxes.

"The sheer magnitude of the church's exemption was astounding," Reitman says. "The deal guaranteed tax exemption to all of Scientology's 150 U.S. entities."

After Hubbard died in 1986, a young, charismatic Scientologist named David Miscavige assumed control, after which he conducted a "brutal purge" of the organization's leaders. Reitman says that Miscavige was prone to violent outbursts, and according to witnesses, he "publicly slapped, kicked, punched or shoved

executives who angered him." Reitman provides numerous examples of harsh treatment meted out to those who disobeyed or fell short of their assigned goals. Some, for example, were forced to sleep under their desks instead of in a bed.

One of the book's most chilling episodes involves the well-publicized case of Lisa McPherson, a Scientology practitioner who suffered a psychotic break while living at a Scientology headquarters in Clearwater, Florida in 1995. After McPherson was involved in a minor traffic accident, she removed her clothes and started to walk naked in the street. An ambulance quickly took her to a nearby hospital. Against the advice of a doctor, she agreed to leave the hospital accompanied by six Scientology officials who said they would care for her. Seventeen days later she was dead. Prosecutors charged her Scientology caretakers with criminal abuse and neglect, but the charges were dropped later under mysterious circumstances.

According to Reitman, Scientology's leaders maintain an enemies list, read the incoming and outgoing mail of underlings, and regularly file lawsuits against critics.

Reitman is a scrupulous researcher. Her book, which includes more than forty pages of detailed notes, is a model of investigative reporting. She is not the first writer to tackle this subject, although this is perhaps the most thorough account of the secretive group to date.

Despite all the controversy surrounding Scientology, the group still pulls in new members, many of them the children of dedicated practitioners. The church claims millions of members in 165 countries, although some experts say there are no more than 250,000 adherents worldwide.

Until the dawn of the Internet, Scientology's inner workings were largely a mystery, but in recent years, numerous disillusioned former members have created web sites or written exposes, which have sparked a huge exodus of members, some of whom concluded that they had been duped.

Miscavige has spent millions of dollars on a campaign to lure Hollywood celebrities into his fold in the belief that star power would bolster Scientology's appeal. Perhaps the biggest catch is the actor Tom Cruise, now an outspoken advocate and practitioner.

Hubbard's teachings are regarded as infallible doctrine. The group's theology is based on Hubbard's concept that

spirits known as "thetans" older than the universe occupy human bodies and keep returning in a process similar to reincarnation. Scientology attempts to put followers in touch with their pure thetan core. Traditional religious concepts such as worship, God, love, compassion, and faith are "wholly absent from its precepts," the author says.

Inside Scientology will be essential reading for anyone with a serious interest in the group. The author avoids demonizing Scientology and quotes members who say the teachings have transformed their lives for the better. She could have profitably devoted more space to explaining the group's beliefs and practices, however. A glossary of insider terms also would have helped. Among them: Suppressive Persons (skeptics, journalists), Wogs (non-Scientologists), and the Bridge to Total Freedom (release from suffering).

My main quibble is a forest-and-trees problem. The author spends so much time on details that the big picture gets lost. As an impartial reporter, Reitman may have been reluctant to express an opinion about Scientology, but there is a difference between opinion and analysis. In the end, what conclusions did she draw from the avalanche of details about this mysterious group? She does not say.

Although this is not a Scientology-bashing book, the author's reporting raises serious questions about unsavory practices that have given Scientology a bad name.

Bill Williams is a free-lance writer and former religion book reviewer for The Hartford [Connecticut] Courant. *He is a member of the National Book Critics Circle.*

BOOKS & MEDIA

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PROFILES

Timothy Allen is an English master photographer who has covered a wide range of global stories. Recently he spent two years "shadowing" BBC film crews during the production of the TV series *Human Planet*. For more information, please visit www.humanplanet.com.

Joshua Boettiger serves as the rabbi for the Jewish community of Bennington, Vermont. He also teaches Jewish meditation and works as a builder of ritual structures.

Tracy Cochran is executive editor of ***Parabola***. Her blog can be found at www.tracycochran.org.

Alison Coluccio is a research technician studying plant genetics at Cornell University and a novice in the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans.

Kenneth E. Lawrence, a writer and musician living in Seattle, lived in the Tokyo area from 1988 to 1996, where he worked at the National Noh Theatre and studied the chant, music, and movement of Japanese Noh theatre. He and his wife, Kumiko Negishi Lawrence, are Soju Kai ("Twin Trees"), a group dedicated to giving lecture/demonstrations on Noh and presenting Noh-inspired performances.

Margo McLoughlin is a storyteller and writer living in Victoria, British Columbia. A graduate of the Harvard Divinity School, she leads workshops and performs in Canada and the U.S.

Ted McNamara was born in Ireland and presently resides and works in London.

Ragunath Padmanabhan spent eight years in Silicon Valley with his wife, Nisha Srinivasan, before returning to India to farm. He is a core member of ServiceSpace (servicespace.org., formerly CharityFocus). His and Nisha's blog can be found at greenlocal.org.

Brother Paul Quenon entered the Abbey of Gethsemani in 1958 and received his novitiate training under Thomas Merton. He is an accomplished writer and photographer who has published several books including, most recently, *Monkswear* (Fons Vitae).

John Simmons is a London-based author of several books on language and communication. *The Angel of the Stories* is his first published novel, a unique collaboration with the artist Anita Klein (www.darkangelspress.com).

Barry Svigals is an architect, sculptor, and managing partner at Svigals + Associates, a renowned New Haven-based architectural firm. He is also a faculty member at the Yale School of Architecture.

Val Thorpe has devoted four years to the study of Beatrix Potter's landmark illustrations in *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*. Weaving together excerpts from Potter's journal and letters with biography, history, and investigative interpretation, she is exploring hidden narratives among the visual elements of Potter's classic. A master portrait sculptor featured in the Yale Collection of American Painting and Sculpture, she currently serves on the Board of Directors of the Catharine Lorillard Wolfe Art Club.

Tilo Ulbricht is a poet and founder and chief editor of the online magazine *In-Between* (www.in-between.org.uk). He has recently completed a new translation of Rilke's *Duino Elegies*.

David Ulrich is a photographer and writer who teaches at the University of Hawaii Manoa. His photographs have been exhibited in over seventy-five one-person and group exhibitions internationally. He is the author of *The Widening Stream: the Seven States of Creativity*. His work can be viewed at www.creativeguide.com, and his blog with yoga teacher Laura Dunn can be found at www.theslenderthread.org.

Jeff Zaleski is editor and publisher of ***Parabola***.

ENDPOINT

Trinity. Jerónimo Vicente Vallejo Cósida (1510?–1592?), 1570.
Cistercian Monastery of Tulebras, Navarra, Spain

A supreme example of Alone & Together, and one of the greatest mysteries in Christianity, is the doctrine of the Trinity, which defines God as three divine persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The three are distinct yet are co-equal, co-eternal, and consubstantial; that is, they are of one being.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, many artists attempted to picture the Trinity through a representation of Jesus Christ with one body and one head but three faces. At the same time, some of these representations included a Shield of the Trinity, a diagram that spells out the paradoxical, mystical nature of the Trinity. These multi-faced representations ended in 1628, when Pope Urban VIII banned as heresy all depictions of the Trinity "as a man with three mouths, three noses, and four eyes." Most such representations were burned, with that by Jerónimo Cósida, a Spanish Renaissance painter, sculptor, architect, and goldsmith, one of the few to survive.

Detail: Calm and Storm courtesy of Jan Blencowe

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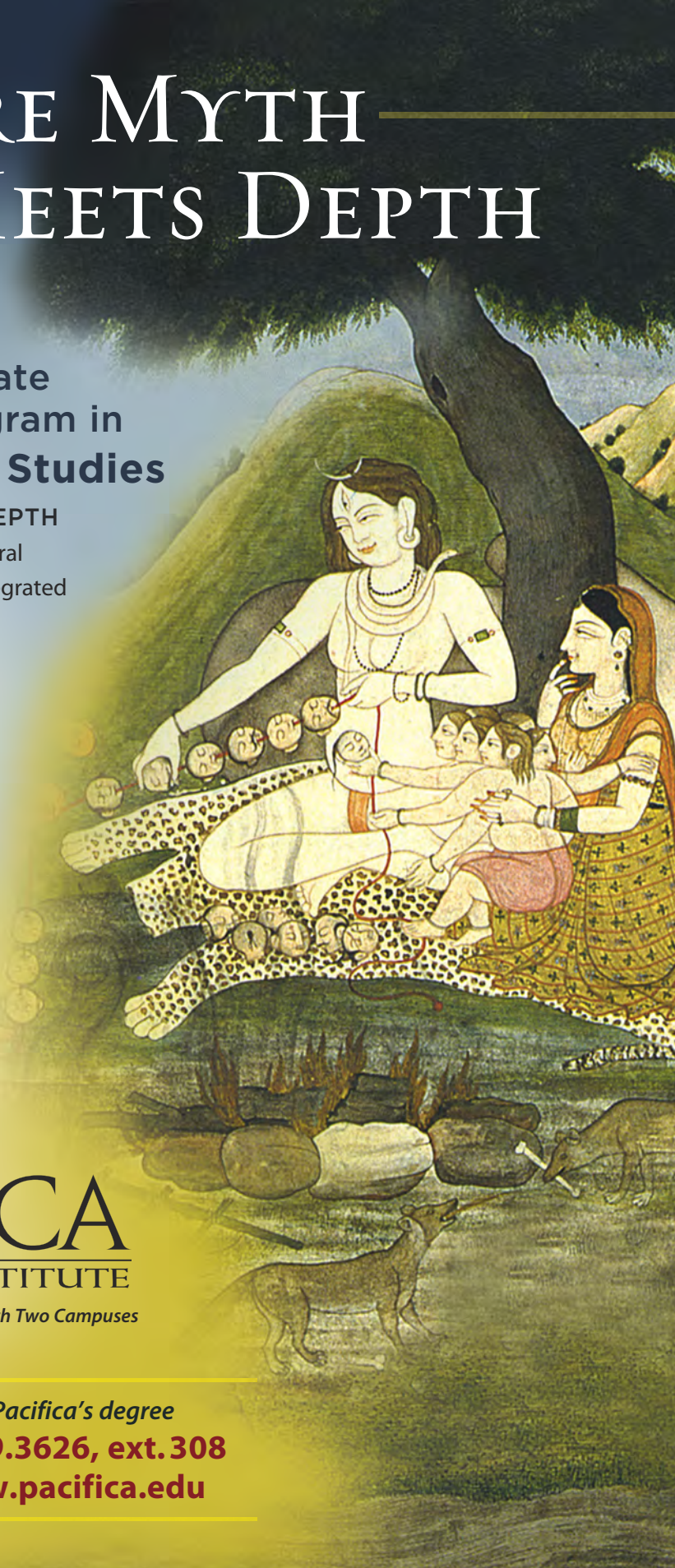

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