

Poetry

BY M.V., MONTANA

Midnight

Ippen hovers at the foot of the bed,
fuda in hand, rags for clothing,
a warm smile.

After gassho his eyes meet mine.
I can hear him although his lips are motionless;
he whispers "You own nothing...don't pretend otherwise."

I accept the small strip of paper from his fingers,
Japanese characters on one side, English on the other.
It reads "If you can't surrender, you'll break like uncooked spaghetti!"

I smile and bow and then he is gone.
In the morning I will awaken in some forest,
Ippen and Shinran sitting side by side eating noodles.

I will be naked under my scratchy robe.
I will surrender by the glow of their fire.

BY KARAN GARDNER O'NEILL, ARIZONA

Tzu Shiou (Practicing Compassion)

Let your faith be one of reliance upon Other Power --
one of gratitude that includes no legalism or moralism
that would support your comparing yourself with others
to demonstrate your spiritual superiority.

Let your faith offer insight but not impose.
While it may be missionary, let it not be insensitive
to the views and values of others.

Maintain respect for the dignity of each individual.
Never condemn others or ridicule them.

Religion is not a matter of externals nor of judgment
and measurements, but a deep inner condition which leads
a person to reflect realistically on life and relationships
with others.

The teacher does not stand above the disciple. All are on the
same footing, sharing in the same truth and life. Neither priest
nor layman, neither teacher nor disciple...

We must all confess our own bombu condition and then spend our
lives expressing our gratitude for the gift of compassion.

So let it be written; so let it be done -- quiet your heart, and just be.

Namu Amida Butsu

BY GREG HEATHCOTE

Void avoiding

No suffering and no end to suffering
Joy arisen and empty
Living out this inbred life in the Land of Bliss
'My' 'Amida' daily dying by inches

Non-dual is the great kindness and shame
A tear overflowing happiness and grief
Crying Namo Amida Butsu
Namo Amida Butsu

(© Gregg Heathcote, 30 July 2002)

War crime

Locked into my incendiary chamber
Furiously fighting fire with fire
Tortured and torturer taking turns
Applying coals to Newcastle

But 'friendly fire' wounds very well
And free the foregone conclusion
An ashen space for Amida's stage
A plain at pains for purity

To the ground my burning indignation
Equal all on this sweeping level
Yes, even here is Pure Land plain

Plain as our cruelly stupid complicity

(© Gregg Heathcote, 3 August 2002)

T-time: a poem unfinished

Annihilating despair again blisters within
My bitterly corrosive shadow
In its impotence raging and writhing
On the boil under this skin

Not to belittle your hell my dear demon
But I seem to be your stormy cup of tea
Through your teeth some sweetness, old boy?
Midway meeting now to taste if we can't finally be friends

Brutally bullying is our past together
And our home world's fate is everywhere fouled
So deeper refreshment is presently in order
In this poisoned cup of ours, one good drop

(© Gregg Heathcote, 2 September 2002)

Gyo odori - dancing practice

Move
Be deeply moved
Move on more
With integrity, connection, ENERGY
Let go

Let's go
Gently, wholly, bodily
Go down
Go down deeply
Go down where we are now
Go down where we're going to go

Living light
Yielding weight
Settling into sliding
Falling about all over the place
A shadow caught with his pants down
Molten on the ice
Dark substance skating
Frozen in DANCE

(© Gregg Heathcote, 14 September 2002)

Home birth

Soiled seed
Radical earth
Internecine symbiosis
Co-evolution express

Wild culture
Native life
Ended meanness
Equilibrated excess

Beauteous, bounteous, sensuous

'Competition' in original sense
The naturally Selected Vow
Nembutsu of naturalness

(©Gregg Heathcote, 26 October 2002)

Speculum

To the west of the centre
Reflections in infinite recession
Illusion's grand procession mirrored through life
Grooming the vanity of 'my' Namoamidabutsu

Yet focussed within the living eye
Space everywhere emergent in perfection
Dharmas upon dharmas fallen through and through
Seeing naught but ways clear

(© Gregg Heathcote, 1 April 2003)

Ultra vires

I thought I wasn't really evil
But to Mara's mockery I truly do attest
Being powerless to protect those I love
I hatefully empower that with which we are most sorely oppressed

Still, cruel though the standing trial
Bereft of wisdom to self-acquit
Life's sentence is naturally just nembutsu

And for that my impotent evil is, albeit painfully, fit

Bitter time served in the blameless face of such freedom
What an ultimately wholesome but bloody pill to swallow
Mugeko as a massive last meal made of light
The cell's openness bursting my aching heart's hollow

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BY KEN KAJI

(88) A Basket Full of Water

Speaking quite frankly, a man confessed that his mind was like filling a basket with water. “I am profoundly gratified in hearing the teachings during our Dharma gatherings. Afterwards, however, I retain nothing of the reverence.” Rennyō offered the advice, “throw the basket of yours into the water; likewise, immerse yourself in the dharma. Not having faith is what is wrong. The zenchishiki will say it is bad to lack faith.”

Immersing self in dharma

This one phrase
embedded in the litany
of Rennyō's many teachings*

Shown like a bright 'unobstructed light'
from the labyrinth of times past
speaking directly to me

For like the seeker who beseeched Rennyō
About his mind, that was like a loosely woven basket
unable to retain sincerity or gratitude,
I, too, felt my lack of true reverence

His answer, " throw your basket into the water,"
Means to forget self, and others
And to just take the plunge

Recently at the otera
My two year old grandchild,
Ojuzu on his tiny wrist, placed his hands in gassho
And shouted "Namu!"

Sometimes it takes a child
To teach their white haired guardian
about clarity of view...
and immersion.

* from Goichidaiki Kikigaki, Jottings of Rennyō Shonin. Translated by
Elson B. Snow

*I also will become a forest dweller long before knowledge of
liberation penetrates the undulating waves of samsara. I shall
accumulate bundles of good karma. The activity of visualization
relies solely on sitting quietly, listening intently, carefully sifting my
thoughts I shall be an exemplar comrade of all the Buddhas in the
ten directions, and gather up the 84,000 rays of emitted by the*

Amitabha Tathagata.

Gemstone in the Forest

Somewhere west of this grassless pond, a sanctuary now in disarray
Where gray tides endlessly pile up and recede
Researchers with cleated boots, doctoral degrees have kept from us
a secret

It is the place on this continent of the world's most ancient grove of
redwoods
That they have purposely hidden from public scrutiny and
understanding
Lying in the nirvana of dense forest, unpenetrated by dusty trails,
the clay rut of roads

The age of these remarkable gnarled trees
May exceed 2000 years for the trunks
Are of exceedingly broad in girth and of giant dimensions in height

The reason for the secrecy of their location
Is obvious. The fear is that commercial interests
Would be tantalized and be unable to resist in plundering their
potential yield

But a far worse enemy is the curious, the ignorant,
and the recreational voyeur, numbering in the tens of thousands
that would, ceaselessly out of boredom, plunder and carve the
hearts out of the virgin forest

Totally unknown to earth's common dweller
is the dense horizontal domains, the layers, the other worlds of the
giant redwoods

that has been created by centuries of tangled extensions, branches,
exigencies of growth

It is vast, a land of ultimate felicity that spreads in ten directions, moss
carpeted embedded in golden pools and plants that sparkle, wish
fulfilling gems, a special community of unknown
creatures whose feet have not touched the scorched soil thousands
of feet below

a colony of white ibis fly into this heavenly habitat each season
to mate, nest and raise their young among the flowers bejeweled
with the light of seven gems
Their songs are melodious, elegant, full of praise as they wade in
the captured pools of water

Leading up to the various tiers of verdant platforms, thirteen in all,
We are beset, frequently, by black ravens that encircle the travelers
And dive in a group, always led by a boisterous leader, to tear at our
flesh

Only those impaled by sincerity, and singleness of mind and deep
desire
to view an unfettered uncompromised reality, continue the arduous
climb
despite the blister of hardships and frequently being suspended

For in that uppermost carpet of celestial places there are incredible
images
of the moon and the sun, bodisattvas flanking either side, in the
prescient center
a single lotus flower sits, and clear sky is filled with radiant
reflection.

BY KENYA-LEE PROVINCE

Refuge

i am
a simple one
i can cast off
neither body nor mind,
so i must abide
in
Amida's heart,
that sacred
soft
and silent
place
inside of love
where not a single question
is asked
of me,
but all of mine
are answered
without
a
word.

Released

how graceful
how perfect
dancing
nembutsu
with nothing to hide
no stick
no drum....outside
the Temple gate

Welcome

NamuAmidaButsu
IS
The ultimate
Reality....
The perfect
'INCLUSION'
That knows nothing
Other than
ITSELF.

Myth

Myth does not equal...lie
Myth does not equal...true
MYTH equals...MIND...beyond language
Beyond.....time;

An infinite...EVENT,
Another way
Of saying, yes
 To life..
A song of permanence
And change
Without warning,
The wax and wane
Of worlds
We do create
Yet never name,
While we use the word...'believe'
To silence doubt
To fix the game
In favor of
Survival
In the ..dream.

MYTH holds the HEAT
To fuse the sand
Of 'search'
Into the GLASS
Ofcertainty.
Within
Amida's golden light
A silver moon
Alone
Is 'myth'
Reflecting
In
A hundred million
 streams.

Sacred Ground

why do we
guard
our own 'myths'
and
combat
those ofothers?
'Sacred Ground'
though never
solid,
supports
ALL.

Hanamatsuri - Birthday of Buddha and the Burial of Pope John Paul II

five million people
flow....together...
in PEACE
past a single
point of light
now.....still,
now gone beyond
their needs...
they carry candles
through the night
as one
great river
 of bright
gratitude.

Close-Calling

YOU,
a bonbu?
NO.....well
maybe...
me tOO
so, WHO
cares??????
Oh,
YES...
 namu
Amida BUTSU

Thinking of Buddha

it is not that i am pious,
perfect,
or bent on being Buddha
here
or in a pure-land
pleasant time....
i only went
to school
because i could not stay home.

my 'cunning self'
that should be gone
is not...
i stand
NOW

convicted of my crime.
it is quite simple...really
AMIDA and
His Precious
VOW
are just my
ONE
favorite
THOUGHT.

(Additional poems)

i am
a simple one
i can cast off
neither body nor mind,
so i must abide in
Amida's heart,
that sacred
soft
and silent
place
inside of love
where not a single question
is asked
of me
but all of mine
are answered
without
a
word.


~~~~~

how graceful  
how perfect  
dancing  
nembutsu  
with nothing to hide  
no stick  
no drum.....outside  
the Temple gate

~~~~~

You,
a bombu?
NO.....well...
maybe....
me TOO....
so WHO
cares???????
namu
Amida....BUTSU.

~~~~~

it's not that i am pious,  
perfect,  
or bent on being Buddha  
now  
or in a pure-land  
pleasant time.....  
i only went

to school  
because  
I could not stay home.

my cunning 'self',  
that should be gone  
in NOT.....  
i stand  
convicted  
of my crime.  
it is quite simple....really,

Amida and His  
Precious Vow....  
are just  
my favorite  
THOUGHT.

### ***On John Paul II***

five million people  
flow... together...  
in PEACE  
past a single  
point of light  
now .....still,  
now gone beyond  
their needs.....  
they carry candles  
through the night  
as one  
great river

of bright  
gratitude

***On Ruth Tabrah's Death***

Conditions to meet  
Conditions to part...  
Yes...we suffer  
The insidious violence  
of  
Impermanance.....but,

The Shaka Nyorai  
Revealed  
AMIDA,  
Who  
Embraces both  
Conditions  
Without  
A second  
Thought.



Toy train  
WRECKS?  
we are gods  
with motion on our minds  
de-railed by stillness  
distracted by  
our own  
ability

to think up  
chaos  
where it would not  
exist  
without  
us.

how marvelous  
how miserable  
how true.  
i would say with  
Saichi  
Namu  
Amida  
Butsu.

trying  
to keep my ego  
in check  
i pull back  
on the leash.....  
my attention  
focused  
on the  
pressure...  
the 'dog'....wins.  
i have seen  
nothing  
along the path  
on my morning  
walk

Some battles  
are not  
worth fighting  
others  
are not  
worth winning

A heart-mind  
that listens  
and responds  
is that not  
The PureLand  
within  
the marrow  
of the  
bones...  
Amida's Ocean  
in a single  
tear.....  
is that not  
Kannon ?

### **Freedom?**

we have  
nothing  
to trade

for  
our  
'safety'

no exchange  
is possible

Grace alone  
provides  
The Way

for you  
for me  
Namu  
Amida  
Butsu.

~~~~~

When I am scared Amida breathes for me.
When there is no peace in me, Amida takes the weapon from my
hand.
When I can't
Forgive, forget
Or forge ahead,
Amida CAN...
So I 'rely'
On Him
And hope the rain
And tears
Will stop before morning.

Burning Time

River of fire, river of water;
The incandescent
White Line..... is Faith.
We must each hold to
That heart-mind vision.
We are 'embraced' even when
We are torn from our foundations..
We are guided even when we are adrift
On a burning tide of waste....
We are exposed to the True
In the midst of the unthinkable.
The Name holds..
Like an anchor down
In deep mud....
The lotus bends
And rolls
Before the rising
Wind...and
Water.....
Wounded
She whispers
Namu Namu Amida Butsu.

~~~~~

Nothing happens by 'chance'.....  
ALL of it is.... "magic"...  
inconcievable.  
beyond our comprehenssion, our calculated 'working'..  
NOT superstition.... not that,  
only  
Absolute Reality

IS....  
totally OPEN  
to interpretation,  
but not to  
subtraction  
or addition  
by  
ANY  
Living Being.



Kukai and Shinran are seated in a Cosmic Cafe.  
They share a table, and gently take food from one another's plates.  
They know... they are not....two,  
but neither are they  
one.  
They are  
an unthinkable  
solution to  
difference...  
to unity  
and seperation.

They chant together..  
Namu, Namu,  
Amida Butsu

THIS NAME  
is

the most hidden



within the  
obvious...  
the most  
obvious  
within the  
hidden...

namuamidabutsu.....  
so simple  
so impossible  
to explain

a mystery  
so imminent  
so complete  
that  
nothing else  
is needed.....

nothing there....  
but  
six characters  
alone...  
and nothing  
lost  
or  
missing.

They share  
the tea  
and smile

without  
confusion.

~~~~~

Still

Death does not 'kill'
or 'conquer' or 'divide.'

It keeps us...'Still'
So we can learn
To fly
Beyond our 'selves'
Outside
This story told to us
As time.

For then we see
The Pure Land with
The eyes
Of 'sight' itself
And learn to love
The Truth
Within
The
'Lie.'

Fire In The Cage

Mind will be
Awakened

Sparks will
Fly
Into a thousand
Dry leaves

New fires
Will be taken
By the
Wind
Of words
Well spoken

To the ones who
Need
That warmth
To breathe
Their freedom
In a cell

Together
in nembutsu

Across ten thousand miles
Across a thousand years
Outside of 'chance'
We are each
Given
Once again
To one another
As need unfolds
As hope demands

We are not ...one
We are not ...two
Neither separate
Nor same
Beyond the...false
Beyond the...
True
Beyond what we can
Dare
To
Dream.....

A million shades
Of gratitude
Now color The PureLand
Of Grace.....
We join hands
We dance
The Faith.....
We are the angels
Of
The Name

Na Mu
A Mi Da
Butsu

~~~~~

Wisteria  
Drapes the trees  
In deep

Purple  
As bumble bees  
Gather  
For the feast  
Of days.....

How well,  
How often do we  
Glorify  
The breath we breath  
And raise  
A word...a hand  
In praise  
Of what is Real and True.....

The All  
That is but One...  
The Name  
That is  
Complete  
Within the simple  
Turning of a  
Phrase...  
Namu  
Amida  
Butsu?

~~~~~

na mu a mi da butsu

The jewel is ONE

The facets are innumerable
The colors
Unimaginable
Reality
IS
Deceptively simple
In six character
Sound
Complete.

Reflection

Christian, Buddhist, Jew, Hindu, Muslim, Bahai.....There IS only ONE
Reality.....and WE ALL LIVE, MOVE, and HAVE OUR BEING within IT.

Whether I think of myself as a 'lost sheep' or a 'burgeoning
Buddha'.....It's all the same... I am just here... just now... just as I
am.....In constant, imminent need of 'God', Amida Buddha, Indra,
Allah or Ja.

I am never alone, abandoned, nor actually disconnected from every
other person and phenomena in the 'Multiverse'.

(no matter what I 'think')

Right and wrong exist for me. I am a creature of here and now, and
must find my way through the dense jungle of phenomenal
existence.

Trust in Other Power does not relieve me of the responsibility for my
own choices. But, it does make living with the results of those

choices less painful when I am 'wrong', and sparks increased gratitude when I am 'right'.

Fog and mist can be haunting, even beautiful conditions when experienced in nature; but when there is no movement in the gray.....it sifts the mind through a colander of discontent.

Within that very lack of color sadness wanders well beyond the borders we have set for her, to find that tears have mingled with the rain...

The soul is rent by indecision

not by pain.

~~~~~

Step aside.....let others pass..  
the trail is steep  
don't force the pace...  
rest awhile  
and watch the movement  
of the mist beyond  
the veil.  
you are embraced,  
sweet child,  
for  
failure is impossible  
in faith.

## ***Mind Of Sorrow -- Mind Of Joy***

The grass  
is cut  
down  
to the dust  
but  
with the rain  
it does  
return  
for it is  
made  
to grow  
again.....  
and yet  
again

'Just as it is'.....  
with sorrow  
at the root  
and joy  
in  
the  
blade.

## ***Tea With Amida*** ***Q&A***

Do I need my 'self'  
More than I need...You?



Do I need my  
Little daggers of delusion  
My single-lane confusion  
More than I  
Need  
Namu Amida Butsu?

It does not matter  
What you 'want'  
Or need  
Or have  
Or do not 'want'.  
I made  
And did fulfill  
the Vow...

You live  
Within  
My grace.

You were not 'found',  
For you were never  
'lost'.

There has never been  
A place  
Where you were  
That I was not,  
Or a time  
That you  
Drew  
Breath

Outside  
Of  
My 'embrace'.

### ***Changed***

No matter where I go  
Or what I do,  
No matter which prison  
I seek re-entrance to,  
I am grasped,  
Embraced,  
Changed..

I know 'The Way'...  
I know  
The Name...

There is  
Now  
No escape  
From the freedom  
Of  
Namu  
Amida  
Butsu

## ***Reflection On Obon***

Lanterns

Floating on  
Amida's  
Oceanlike  
Vow

Lights

Without number  
Calling  
Our names

Joy

Now  
Here  
And  
Forever

Bow

To  
Rising  
Life

Allow

Pure Land  
To sever  
All  
Confusion.

## ***Amida Buddha***

The poem

Is not about  
Amida.  
AMIDA  
IS  
THE POEM.

The light

Is not about  
The Buddha  
THE BUDDHA  
IS  
THE LIGHT.

The Name

Is not about  
Anything...  
THE NAME  
IS  
EVERYTHING...

No inclusion

Is required...  
For  
Nothing  
IS  
MISSING...

With no one

Left out

There is nothing  
To DO  
But breathe in  
THANKSGIVING

Namu  
Namu  
AMIDA  
BUTSU.

---

**BY JIM DAVIS, THE OZARKS, USA**

***Gathas***

While there are many ways of describing the same thing,  
I simply chant the nembutsu.  
I don't get caught up with the finger that is pointing,  
when the moon is much more awesome.

While there are some who feel they can discriminate  
between those who do and do not have shinjin,  
I simply chant the nembutsu.  
Remembering there are no Popes in Shin  
I leave such distinctions to Amida herself.

While many have forgotten their original enlightenment,  
I simply chant the nembutsu.  
Knowing the light of Amida shines within us all,  
how can any not know shinjin?

While many have forgotten the power of the Vow,  
I simply chant the nembutsu.  
Knowing nothing we can think or do  
can every separate us for the workings of that Vow.

While many seem to think that symbols are out of place in Shin,  
I simply chant the nembutsu.  
Knowing that Shinran inscribed scrolls with symbols  
that even he had reverence for and worshipped.

While some would deny keeping the faith up to date,  
I simply chant the nembutsu.  
Amida is beyond our past conceptions  
and Her light is ever new.

---

**BY AL CANTWELL**

***Haiku***

Does bombu fish know  
He is swimming, swimming in  
Amida Ocean?

-----

Amida is Love,  
and nembutsu her love song –  
O sweet serenade.

-----

Bombu at nighttime  
and bombu throughout the day;  
fine just-as-I-am.

-----

The easy practice  
so difficult to believe,  
this Path of No Doubt.

-----

This my greatest sin:  
to lose sight of gratitude  
– hell's my only home.

-----

Shin, soft as a cloud;  
Zen, hard like a diamond.  
Texture of my heart?

---

**BY MS. BARBARA MACCARL**

***Almost Wasted***

Throughout life Amida called,  
Sent messengers to beckon.  
Teachers to open heart and mind,  
So mired in seas of ignorance  
Like a recalcitrant child

Who takes evil delight in confusion.  
Suffering becomes ego,  
Ego is suffering.  
To have called The Name,  
And been embraced by Light,  
The mind opens and comprehends  
The dark useless dross that  
This life has been.  
So grateful for Amida's compassion,  
To never give up.  
This spirit now soars  
With gratitude and purpose,  
This life not wasted.  
Namo Amida Butso,  
Namo Amida Butso,  
Namo Amida Butso

## **The Homecoming**

The wonderful power that embraces my being,  
Truth is everywhere,  
The water I drink, the air I breathe,  
A great love descends and there is peace.  
The gentle power with the strength of steel becomes  
A bridge over treacherous chasms,  
A fragrant garden, inviting one to quietude,  
A warm and brilliant light guiding one home  
How many times have I travelled between birth and death?  
How many wounds have been suffered, tears shed,  
Before finally arriving here  
Where your name was heard  
And the gentle power in your voice called



Awakening profound compassion... always there,  
But buried beneath the rubble of the world.  
Now tears of sorrow become tears of joy,  
A wandering heart, can finally rest.  
Namu Amida Butsu

## **Why Now**

A life lived of happiness, sorrow, love and partings,  
But always with a seeking heart  
Waiting, waiting, the time will be right  
Teachers, places, abilities  
Swirl into a vortex of momentum  
Lifting, caring, guiding  
This moment in time  
Birthed by circumstance, but,  
Acted upon by a recognition  
Far beyond a cellular level  
Feet matching footprints  
Made many years ago  
Walking to the beat of a drum  
That plays so resoundingly, it is like  
A heartbeat felt underwater  
Muffled, steady, eventually becoming  
The only thing that you can hear.  
Your very existence wraps around  
This universal pulse  
For there is no other recourse  
The karma has been lived  
The players are assembled  
The cause has been given,

May the effect be worthy  
Why now? Now is the moment.

## Listen

Do not be foolish and feel you know  
For mysteries abound  
Just trust in me and say my name  
For I am all around

In dreams you live and walk this land  
Sometimes you realize  
A tiny little bit of truth,  
In a world that's full of lies

I promised I would come for you  
Help you to the other side  
My vow was made for one and all  
My great karma will abide

The path of sages has come and gone  
The truth's been obfuscated  
Through wars and death and ego great  
Through confusion I have waited.

So still your mind and listen now  
End this samsaric pain  
From nothing let your heart love pure  
And simply say my name

---

**BY JERRY BOLICK**

***Receiving Refuge***

Canggu, Bali, Indonesia  
July 2, 2010

To take refuge is to play  
in the quiet of the 10,000 things.  
Among the falling raindrops,  
small, white-crested birds, fly!

In his book, "Zen Wave," a study of haiku poet, Basho, Robert Aitken Roshi writes:

"*NamuAmidaButsu* ... is the cord that will draw the dying person to ease of heart." I like the image he presents here, particularly the phrase ease of heart, because it emphasizes the assurance given in traditional Pure Land teachings, assurance of the future, assurance of lasting peace after death, but does so with a telling image of movement in the present.

We are assured that the future holds the transition from human life into the embrace of the eternal, from turmoil into lasting peace, which is to say, we are assured that it will all be OK, then. But these teachings are not just about death, but also about life. Assurance is something we experience here and now. The *NamuAmidaButsu* that is pulling us to ease of heart is pulling us now. Given to us by Buddha, by eternal, timeless reality, *NamuAmidaButsu* emerges into time on our lips; on our lips, the movement of the eternal, continually assuring us, continually drawing us closer to fuller realization, in the present moment.

And neither is the unburdened heart restricted to those on their deathbed, because as living beings, we are all, by definition, dying. When I see clearly that I am, not that I will be, but that I am the dying person, then I see Buddha's message is directed to me, Buddha's assurances are for my benefit. Then I begin to hear the teaching in a different way.

Within the life of NamuAmidaButsu, the anxieties we experience due to the myriad changes that occur as we live and age, the fears, small and large, of what the future holds, our resistance to the inevitable, all become infused with the assuring movement of eternal care and concern, extended to us in and through NamuAmidaButsu. And in this we can know the ease of heart that is the content of our liberation and the certainty of eternal refuge -- it will be OK then, and it is all OK now.

### **#1. I wrote the first poem after reading the following by Ryokan:**

"Yes, I'm truly a dunce  
Living among trees and plants.  
Please don't question me about illusion and enlightenment--  
This old fellow just likes to smile to himself.  
I wade across streams with bony legs,  
And carry a bag about in fine spring weather.  
That's my life,  
And the world owes me nothing."  
-- From "Two Poems for My Friend"

I've trees and plants in abundance where I live.  
Mountains in name only.  
But I don't live among them,

nor do I wander through them  
as the masters did through theirs.

I tend more to move through a human wilderness;  
more comfortable with curiosity than purpose,  
I climb mountains of steep and slippery "relationships."

Passes can be very high and howling winds carry unexpected names,  
including the corporate; in this world  
even the unenlightened freely admit to a fictitious nature.

But here, too, there are silent, peaceful meadows,  
blanketed with sheets of snow in winter  
and spectacular flowers in spring,  
those strange, delightful,  
unpredictable flowers that sprout only from human seed.

And wading across high mountain streams,  
even here, one can pause  
and drink deep of that shimmering gift.

Different paths, same wilderness.  
Different wilderness, same path.  
Either way, neither or both,  
at this age fifty-five  
I've finally uncovered my life:  
to find and share the poems.

Reading Ryokan is like receiving  
an unexpected message from a  
close friend and brother: it goes  
straight to the heart.

With palms together  
Namuumidabutsu.

**#2. This is the kind of poem, one of this living and dying we do, that I  
hope to find and to share.**

In memory of Kazume Nakagawa (February 4, 1914 - January 30,1999)

***Obachan***

You may not get this;  
one of those times  
you just had to be there,  
just had to take part.

She was small and bent over,  
even in the wheelchair.  
And I'm, well..., tall.

And there was history and culture  
and years  
and the toll of years  
between us.

So we never had the time for that  
small talk, the kind  
used to "get to know,"  
but which often enough  
tends only to clarify the distance  
between us.

No, the distance was clear enough;  
but there we were  
eye to eye.

So we just stepped across,  
"cross-wise," you might say,  
across all that stuff  
and met right in the heart:  
four hands touching,  
forehead to forehead,  
four lips uttering  
Namuumidabutsu, Namuumidabutsu.

Electric. Warm. Humbling.

I can still remember  
the rush of tears, still recall  
the move of the dance,  
the music of the living shared  
between us.

It was one of those times  
you just had to be there,  
just had to be a part.

### **#3. Thoughts ...**

The joy of dharma fellowship:  
the joy of living and of grieving  
together, knowing  
it will be alright.

Namuumidabutsu

***April 1, 1999***

The morning light of spring  
finds its way  
through the window,  
gently touching  
the scroll  
on the altar.

Even through closed eyes  
I can feel it,  
illuminating  
the shadows  
inside.

***It all comes down to this:***

Poems appear  
right at that point  
in our living  
and our dying  
where the eternal  
breaks in to time.

All else,  
no matter  
how artful  
or profound,  
is stilted, contrived  
and ultimately false. Watch. Listen.  
What a joy this is!



Faceless,  
as we are,  
we leave no thing  
behind, except  
the false notion  
that we do.

Our living and dying  
is as light  
and free of tracks  
as the birds' flight.

That we are being lived,  
that purpose and meaning  
are thereby given,  
does not relieve us  
of the desire to live  
purposefully, meaningfully.

More so,  
seeing it is a gift  
reveals the joyful essence  
of the effort.

***On Gratitude:***

finger held match  
burst of flame  
lit incense  
curling smoke  
calling aroma  
answering nose

skin on skin  
bones on wood  
bending back  
moving lips  
sound silence

***On chanting Juseige...***

A rush of warmth  
pours over the page  
singing praises  
of the Vow.

Thus endowed  
edges soften  
frailties shine.

***A nembutsu poem, for Al Bloom***

There's nothing  
quite like home.  
The door open  
to sounds and smells,  
to shadows and hues  
as close as skin;  
at times, to the soft comfort  
of longing.

The door open,  
home works.  
It works every time,  
for every need,

in every way,  
even in the dark.

Traveling  
different roads  
works too,  
cause we all have home.

See, there, as you step:  
the path, the gate, the door.

***Granddaughter, while you were sleeping...***

I brought you with me this morning, early.  
Light was there, but sun remained silent.  
Moon watched, showing only part of its face.

I stopped and cupped a flower;  
its petals, almost imperceptibly,  
whispered cool damp into my palm.

Encouraged, I spoke your name to the mountain,  
aloud, along the path,  
into butter sweet grasses,  
to the morning air, and again.  
Birds demur at such times;  
but they always hear.

We breathed and remembered the waiting.

As is only fitting, sun comes in its own time and in many voices.  
The blessing came first to my turned shoulders,

then in spreading gold across the hills  
in new day:

India Rose.

***Where time lives...***

I followed time the other day.  
You know how it is  
when you think you've forgotten.  
Well, actually, it goes home.  
And you can follow.  
Love grows there.

Like I said, it was as if  
I'd forgotten, kind of sitting there,  
and I caught it  
resting just on the edge of shifting light,  
in the turn and flutter of leaves, a swaying branch.  
It lives too in the clunk of plates  
set on the table, the bending waist,  
out-stretched arm, in the release  
of finger tips.

Totally indiscriminate,  
I found it on my own lips  
and on yours too, in our voices  
and even in the words rolling off  
into new ideas  
and into that silence  
just above skin browning in the sun.

It was there  
in shuffling bare feet,  
a bent knee, in a touch, a returned gaze  
and in the quickening breath  
before tears.  
Oh, and in smiling eyes too.

So I followed it home.  
You know, you can do that.  
It's a place where love grows.  
Where time lives.

***Haiku retreat at Jikoji Zen Center Retreat,  
Los Gatos, CA.***

Hillside grasses wave  
to winds shushing the pines.  
The sun wants quiet.

Crows call from nowhere.  
The woman stands in silence,  
hearing haiku.

Along the shady trail  
sun splashes browned leaves  
to gold.

Before the sun's reach, moon  
---blue shadows  
through sheer white.

Manure on the trail

but no flies, in this shade  
bay leaves scent my fingers.

Pulling out his map  
the bicycle rider stands  
still in the cross roads.

Sitting at the wall  
mind washed white with breathing, here  
I leave home

Remembering dreams  
of waking, fall's advancing  
fog lifts my eyes.

coming upon  
Roshi's memorial -- the jays  
are silent

On this morning's darkened streets  
puddles -- stepping over  
the moon.