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

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**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.” Rennyo 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 Rennyo’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 Rennyo
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 Rennyo 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
Of ......certainty.
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 of ....others?
'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  
maybee...  
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
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
Namuamidabutsu.

#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 
Namuamidabutsu, Namuamidabutsu.


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.

Namuamidabutsu
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.