

*Here
at
the
Edge
of my Seat*

*This collection of poems is dedicated to my teachers
and fellow students of Vipassanā Meditation.*

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S C R A T C H I N G S

these scratchings on the wall
may they vibrate with
goodwill towards all

thoughts that bounce
inside my head
they do not stay there

wherever I walk
they leave a tread

sit to meditate
and then get up
to agitate?

scratchings on the wall
thoughts that will not
lie still at all

may you find
your rest
your place to nest

goodwill and scratchings
find your place—
yes!

CDM November 2, 2007

S U N

The sun is shining—
to live in this world
how cruel!
The clock ticking—
what we find in this world
how cruel!
Trying to help our neighbor
as the world spins on
how cruel!
What can we do?
Keep smiling
and do our best
as fools!

CDM May 9, 2007

A G I T A T I O N

Oh the layers, the layers
the peeling papers

in the attic reminiscing
while mangy dog
sniffs the foundation, pissing

Too much to do!
exploding particles, nothing new

The quivering jello
he seemed so mellow

agitation, that close relation
sanity packed up, on vacation

CDM May 14, 2007

WHAT'S NEEDED

the more you know
the less you can say

the more you say
the less we hear

'tis sweetness
and compassion
needed today

CDM May 14, 2007

MEDITATING ALONE AMONG FRIENDS

knowing nothing of this nibbāna
I only know the unpleasantness of this world

knowing nothing of this nibbāna
I only know the dissatisfaction of this world

so grateful to those who show the path
leading down to the shore

so grateful for the clarity
of those who walk ahead

the path I know, is not walked alone
what would be the point,
to walk ahead
leaving others behind?

to find real help
in a sea of worthless causes
how rare—

to be a real help
to provide a moment of buoyancy
is it possible?

the sea crashes on the rocks
wave after wave

depression and anger
and fear and boredom
and strain and pain
and lust and laughter
and levity—

the inner foam and gravel
grinding on the surf

something has broken free
drifting softly in the current

and gently I resume the swim
towards an unknown shore

CDM May 16, 2005

T H E E D G E

The edge of the moment cuts both ways,
the future ahead, the past trails behind,
curving left, right,
or straight ahead—
harmlessness, egolessness,
and wisdom
be our guides.

The novice knows
where the attention should lie.
The eyes half open,
the fingers a little feel,
motivation some right,
tool in hand,
attend now, you fool!

Buttering the bread,
fluffing the pillows,
petting the cat,
it all falls flat.

This edge, this moment,
the novice knows...
Petting the cat?
We can do better than that!

CDM May 25, 2007

S A L T

mighty majestic mountains
shimmering across the plain
what do we know here
when atmospheric conditions
make peaks seem so near?

partial knowledge
is not a mountain
partial knowledge
is not a wide plain

yet this thing so precious
that we know
what little we know

how can we say
without making foolish
display?

feel the feet
dirty sand between toes
no gaze can meet

walk the earth
while tears drip down
salt of our experience
falls naturally
to the ground

CDM June 3, 2007

F L O W (I)

this life may come and go
What's my job?
To feel the flow

this heap of action
makes a mound
feel the vibration

more clearly
more deeply
until the feeling runs aground

CDM September 26, 2007

F L O W (II)

here we stand
with heaps of stuff
the giant inner volcano
makes shaky ground

feel the rumble
the subtle roar

feel the vibration
clearly, then,
a little more clearly

assembly
sustain
then, what,
where'd it all go?

gathering wisdom
trying to stand tall

harmlessness
joy
and compassion

the ethical
tripod
prevents our fall

CDM November 2, 2007

C Y C L E S

the time is marked by cycles
epochs marked by change
what is the meaning of now
when all I feel is strange?

time isn't over
neither is change
peace in knowing properly
the maddening flow
of every day

CDM November 6, 2007

THE FLAVOR (1)

What is the flavor of my savior?
What is his temper, his nature
What is the character of my guide
and can I be by his side?

It seems to me
no person is he
deeper we must go
no gender, no temper
just the nature
of the world, to know
change, revealed
the hidden faults, felt
the breezes of the world, experienced
with accuracy
with clarity
equanimity

CDM January 17, 2008

THE FLAVOR (II)

To a young man quite unhappy
feeling dissatisfaction
with a life of ease
a great rescue it was
many years ago
those kind words a friend said
“ten days in silence
yet no mantra,
no pretending to be
something other
than what we see”

And so I went on
to my first course
and found gratitude
to my first guides
present and calm
embodiment of compassion
at the head of the hall

And the voice! The rumble of thunder
the instructions of the Teacher
a fountain of wisdom
evoking action
and understanding

And later, on paper,
Buddha's words came through
two thousand plus years
of confusing turns
of language and interpretation
yet resonated with
the step and misstep

on the hard road of life

And neighbors were there
walking this same road
as daily we tried
to find freedom
and happiness
in spite of difficulty

Some years have passed
my own experience
has deepened somewhat
and still I ask—
what is the flavor of my savior?

And the answer
I must split in three
the nature
the teaching
and the company of those
that walk with me

Yes, my neighbor
we will walk the walk
even if separated
by many miles

Be my neighbor
through
all these trials

CDM February 4, 2008

T O E S

Feel my toes—
I can
feel my toes!

I was taught
a technique
to feel
my toes?

the enthusiastic new
meditator
having sweated
and exerted
for 10 days

having received
immense benefit

can only say

when asked

I can feel
my toes!

CDM November 2, 2007

C H O I C E

I have a choice—
happily now
I have a choice!

said the enthusiastic
new meditator
when asked
why he has stopped
with the usual carrying-on

A new way has opened
the possibility of win-win
The old us versus them
is no longer certain
for the predicaments I'm in

Having gained
a little bit of clarity
a little bit of strength
new possibilities are seen
and I'm just
so happy now
to have a choice!

CDM November 2, 2007

A N O R D I N A R Y D A Y

The breath catches,
the feeling explodes,
observe the inner boiling,
aaaaahhhh!!!!!!...nicca!!!!

the moment passes,
the breath comes calm
the feeling quietly buzzes,
the inner vibrator on please,
ooooooohhhh!!!!!!.....nicca!!!!

the moment long gone
time feels slow
calm, and breath set on low
mmmmmmmmmm.....nicca!!!

the wind does blow
to and fro
can I survive
the subtle storminess
inside?

CDM May 25, 2007

THE BRUSH

I am my own flush toilet
Flushing the impurities out
Thick black goo of mind emerges
Thin dribbles of mess—disgusting!

Be the porcelain,
firm, resolute!
No fidgeting, no dreaming,
Stop that!

Calmly the water flows down,
down to the bottom
Ardently the water flows up,
up to the top

The eddies of change
never swirl the same way twice
Again and again
the inner eddies, adrift,
never swirl the same way twice

There is a knocking on the door
Time for Mettā?
Get out the white rubber brush
...Clean!

(well, a little bit cleaner, anyway,
can someone please
turn on the fan?)

CDM November 28, 2006

F A L L E N

my dear teacher
may you be happy
peaceful
may your efforts be successful

may countless beings
benefit from your efforts

by some miracle of
good fortune
this speck of dust has risen
on the wind
blown along in a storm
of success

liberation is coming
with every moment
of awareness
and equanimity
liberation is coming
may everything gained
be shared with all beings

the searing sun
burning down
from the heights
the cold hard ground
frozen at night

crawling along
this life

the ant
has fallen
into the Grand Canyon
of compassion

For Mr. S. N. Goenka

CDM November 28, 2006

S W E E T M A C H I N E R Y O F U N D O I N G

Dhamma Giri, what an amazingly
well-oiled machine!
anti-craving is the super-lubricant
mental impurities are the fuel
consumed with astonishing efficiency

Awareness, *anicca*!
awareness, *anicca*!
oh little fuel pellets of personality,
look how they agitate so!
astonishment! gratitude! insight!
still the engine hums along,
producing happy whiffs
of nothingness

The factory director is at home resting,
production continues none the less
he has labored here almost 30 years
tuning, refining,
shouldn't the workers know what to do?

What is it that they produce at this factory?
they seem to be burning garbage!

Shock! awe! what *is* that factory worker doing?
his work area is such a garbage pit
how did he get into such a mess?

Standing in some thick black sludge,
what is it—lust?
shattering tall brittle poles of ego
with a hammer
even as he habitually
piles them ever higher?

Apparitions of sweet old ladies
appear softly before his eyes,
“take a little break,
and another, and another”,
they coo unhelpfully to him
even as they pile
pleasant cool mounds of ice cream,
sweet sticky piles of candy,
unhelpfully in his way

Now little devils appear
armed with hot skewers to poke his ribs
“we are here to stay, you must run from us”,
they exclaim
even as they flicker
in and out of existence

And how can he work
with that *noise*—
proud orators
shouting in his ear
each convinced they have
the cleverest plan
for all to hear?

Yet somehow he has managed
to clear some space around him
and she has also
and the other one, too

Look—fine little tufts
small patches of lawn
are growing
where garbage was once piled
how *is* it done?

“*Sati sampajāno!*”
“*Sati sampajāno!*”

The factory director
is at home resting
none the less
his voice echos across the floor
clearly penetrating every obstruction
“So clear, so *simple*”, he says

The architect took such pains
to rediscover the design
and unveiled it only 26 centuries ago

A few good friends
kept it for us
slyly saying “perhaps you might
like this work also?”

Alfalfa sprouts of gratitude
calm tears with happiness and relief
having been offered
such a sensible job as this
In an absurd factory

the workers would keep
all the produce for themselves
—no!

The subtle hum
of well-oiled machinery
may it travel far
may the green grass
of happiness
grow under every pair of feet

*Written for my fellow meditators at the close of a course, during my only
visit to Dhamma Giri, where Goenkaji was not able to attend as planned.*

CDM November 27, 2005

THE STRANGER

In the early morning dawn
of my meditation
the pink glow of effectiveness
brought faith
and commitment
to this path

Time has passed
and renewed vigor
is applied
to the task again

As the dimness recedes
brightness grows
insight brings clarity
to this pitiful little mind

And confidence grows
confidence in the teaching
confidence in the teachers
such strong confidence
of nature's way
of revealing light

Yet self confidence
has strangely lagged
always preferring
to be several paces back

Now 14 minutes into this hour
or 14 years into this life of meditation
a stranger steps
into my inner sight
“Look,” he says,
“the sun has now appeared
—see where you are placed”

And I see before me
that old stone prison
that feared destination
suddenly diminished

Mold growing on walls
that were once daily scrubbed
cracks in the foundation,
signs of neglect

Its proud sign, now sad,
can still be read:
“Pompousness Palace
showing the fabulous you
only 10 times better
for all to see”

Has that formidable jailer
of genuine confidence
shown its true age
its true weakness
and its inevitable decline
into dust?

CDM November 27, 2005

AFTER THE HOUR OF DEMONS

the demons visited the man, gripping
searing pain made of nothingness
hollow laughter filling empty universes

the demons visited the man
he was made of paper
the paper burned
in a earthen room
that crumbled to dust

the phoenix of experience
arose from the ashes
the man opened his eyes
walked out of the room
out of the building
into the morning fog

the world was still there
soft crunch
footsteps on gravel
overlaid by a buzzing
a vibrating
a fire still burning

how is it that we know
the entire inner world
must burn, burn down to
ashes? We only know
this world, and its empty,
gripping
demons

what lies beyond?
wanting to know
what lies beyond?
This vision, this dream
this wanting
demons to dust
crumbled
gone
in a soft wind —
the moment
of happiness

CDM November 30, 2006

M O R N I N G S I T

in young morning light
with sun bright burning
to the east we are turning
yet we sit—
we sit in morning
and again
on the flip side
at the start of night

protected from elements
warm with blanket
and cushion
watching the inner fires alight—
the oxygen of attention
but, with diligence
no fuel in sight

the wise know the burning
the calm
the end of yearning
great fires
burned to ashes
then blown away—
the wise, they say,
know the ending
of fright

we pupils only know
the churning
the endless yearning
but we watch the inner fire
having learned
proper sight

in the young morning light
fiery sun in sight
round the earth we go
and again on the flip side
in the dark of night

on the earth we sit
and hourly mutter
sadhu, sadhu, sadhu —
may the wishes
of the wise
take flight

CDM November 27, 2007

S T E P P I N G

There is a ridge line
over which we cross
the moment of knowing
the moment of awareness

another ridge
another hill
over we go

a soft little step
on a bare
rocky path
out of the swampy valleys
of ignorance

CDM December 22, 2006

U N D O N E

How can I claim experience as a meditator
when, having just served a course
the hard shell has cracked
and fresh eyes have emerged
seeing the world
for the first time?

Naked to sensation
experience undone
and this person, humbled
once again

CDM February 2, 2008

IN THE WILDS

Searching for pleasure
shrinking from pain
wandering the big swamp
having lost my name

Oh, craving and aversion
great jokers,
we've been fooled
and fooled again

Searching for stability
anicca is here
searching for heroes
anattā is there
searching for peace
dukkha becomes clear

Oh, great god of equanimity
where are you found?

Mind observing body
vedanānupassanā
a little dry ground

Never mind the muck
the warm sun or wind
never mind the burning
of the skin
within

Mind feels it all
encompass the whole
find a little peace
within the turmoil
of now

CDM March 18, 2008

T H E F I N D

Oh the power of an hour!

The Buddha made it clear
it was each moment he held dear

For me an hour's fine
it often takes that long
to find a few moments
of peaceful integration
of these fragments
of mind

CDM February 15, 2008

C O U R S E

It is my work time and my holiday,
it is my marathon, self-paced, where I move along.

To be in nature, all alone,
and together with others,
to develop focus,
one point in space and time.

To be minimal, no wasted exercise of the jaw,
yet to feel it all, to let it all say,
the expanding universe,
from tedium to excitement and plays...

It is the time to jump the track,
the downward spiral
of action, blind reaction,
which is nature's tack.

To find oneself breaking free,
to find remaining problems
there to see...

It is, you may have guessed,
that awesome force—
my annual 10-day
Vipassanā Meditation course.

CDM April 4, 2008

WHO CAN STOP THE SUN?

The sun is shining
and I bow down to you my friend
you who are living by the truth
who are working with the truth
who are purifying your mind by the truth

The teachers are teaching my friend
and I bow down to those
who are living by the truth
working with the truth
purifying their minds by the truth

Down I go
with the gratitude I know
at your feet
while the sun is shining

What ever I have gained
let it work for those who remain
and the warmth I feel
must travel to those who aspire
to live by the truth
to work with the truth
to purify their minds by the truth

And if there is a gate
I will stop and wait
for you to pass on through
my turn will come
but first I serve you
while the sun is shining

CDM July 3, 2008

J U M P I N G

Life is not linear
oh no it is not
the mind goes in circles
and jumps from spot to spot

When attending to anicca
in the body we feel
for a moment we are steady
finding peace
in the real

CDM July 5, 2008

WHAT I GOT

All these years of meditating—what have I got?
a whole lot of dukkha—thanks a lot

Each time I come
to a course like this—

Each time I am forced
to view the push from within—

O misery, creator of history,
a few moments of liberation
are what I seek

I am meditating, I am meditating—
eradication of agitation
in dribs and drabs

Stumbling along
in my quiet way—

Vipassanā course you have come!
Vipassanā course here you go!

To experience dukkha
in these four ways—

O this is the path!
I had forgotten—
now I know

CDM August 24, 2008

C R O W S

perception is dying
we feel the remains
the old myths broken
we feel the remains

flying free
now we see
the old life changed

a flock of birds
may scatter
having known
what is the matter

we move afield
deconstruction
and diversity
condition the new life
the new real

CDM September 6, 2008

B O U N D A R Y L A N D

diving down beneath the waves
deep in trouble
will buoyancy save?

leaping up to starry heights
then fall and stumble
from lack of sight?

all around both high and low
good and evil are what i know

what is the cause
where is the escape
of the terror of this place?

keep open eyes
oh fearless one
your work is not done

halfway between heaven and hell
this is the nature
of the boundary
on which you dwell

CDM October 23, 2008

E C H O S

Meditator, cell neighbor—
your stillness
your coughing
your foot dropping
have wakened me

Worker, O Dhamma worker,
why do you support me?

Teacher, O Teacher
why do you speak?

Can we learn
from the enlightened one?

Together we listen—
echos across the years
are what we seek

CDM November 2, 2008

E N O U G H

my intentions were good
but not good enough

learning the hard way
whether efforts

were sufficiently
up to snuff

CDM November 2, 2008

C R A W L

Why is it torture
to crawl onto my cushion?
Why sit here
forever now
feeling numb?
Oh, my teachers,
how did you arrange it?
The fabric of my agony
is loosening now
to feel relief now
a little liberation
a little peace
hard won

CDM November 9, 2008

P A S S A G E (I)

We are traveling
through the middle
and find suffering

we are traveling
through the raw
and find joy
in simple truths

we are traveling
and this middle body
has hope
because we know our bondage
and are working
to be free

P A S S A G E (II)

It began 6 years ago
when my dear wife Susanne
found colon cancer threatening

life changing, stressing,
and touching down
with four major surgeries

three rounds of chemo
one round of radiation
and being lifted up

by the help of so many
friends and supporters.
And now we learn

in this time of healing
to breathe again
to expand our travels

and look out again
and see that amongst
the living, the billions

of the air and soil,
to move and work
amongst the living

with care and compassion
is the best way to travel

CDM January 31, 2009

W A S I T E V E R ?

was it ever easy?
once,
it was

sticky residue now,
pleasant taste
long gone

work some more
and some more

after tears
after joy
is there peace imbued
within my song?

CDM November 20, 2008

A L L

All are my friends
none is my enemy
and what that really means

is that I strive
to understand
with my own experience

to know
all possible
human actions

the odd and the irritating
the eerie and amiable
with loving kindness

and ripples of *anicca*
as group after group
for we do all come
in waves—

an ocean of humanity
lapping at the shore
of truth

CDM December 9, 2007