

## *Mexico, Land of Bugambilia*

*Ven. Samu Sunim*

*January 2017*

Bugambilia is called “Four-o’clock,”  
For they flower in the afternoon  
Throughout the year.

Its flowers are homeless  
They grow out of small trees, shrubs, or herbs.  
Often they climb fence or vine or other trees,  
to contest their tropical beauty in bright red, pink, yellow, or white.

Having myself indulged on the ways  
of tropical flowers—suddenly an old rooster belched  
out his cockcrow to remind me that it’s Four-o’clock  
In the South.

I looked around bewildered.  
A young vendor sitting under a palm tree  
Called me hard with waves of the hand.

In no time he pulled out a machete and started cutting coconut. Coconut juice was 20 pesos, add two spoonful of mescal 50 pesos.

Another three big spoonfuls of tequila will make me Cocoloco. He said, “Cocoloco will change all bad times into good times. They are all from cactus, very good.”

For a moment I felt like a modern Rip van Winkle for my loss of memory. Then the Mad Monk Jung Kwang walked right into my heart. Jung Kwang wanted to become the Dirty Mop to clean the missteps of people. Mad Monk wanted to live free from obstacles.

Jung Kwang wanted to be born as a woman in the next life. Where are you? I like to take you to pulque pubs and cantinas.

## *Turtle Release*

*Ven. Samu Sunim*

*January 2017*

All night, ocean roared.

After a long journey through Pacific Ocean

Mother turtle landed on the beach.

All night, ocean roared.

Mother turtle had a dream laying eggs

Each egg would produce pretty tortuguitas.\*

All night, ocean roared.

Mother turtle returned to the Pacific

Soaring with hope from her dream.

All night, ocean roared.

After forty-five days tortuguitas broke

Out from their eggs one by one.

All night, ocean roared.  
The world outside was harsh for tortuguitas.

First they had to break down the sand castle  
Their mother erected for their protection.

Four small legs had to work hard  
Seeking ocean, home of their mother  
Often swarmed by predators.\*\*

The ocean is the bosom of our eternal mother.  
All night ocean roared lapping against the beach.

\*local Spanish word for baby turtle

\*\*The survival rate before they reach adulthood is one out of one hundred according to local environmental agent.

## *Sunyata*

*Ven. Samu Sunim*

*January 2017*

For thirty years I followed Emptiness.  
Now Emptiness follows me.

In the true emptiness without form  
Wonderful beings produce wonderful worlds.  
No Buddhas above, no sentient beings below.

Counting little stars in the dark night of Milky Way  
I blend with unborn infinity.

What is Sunyata and Emptiness?  
Hair borne on the wind of ghost.

Sunyata, sunyatasunyata

## *American Women's March*

*Ven. Samu Sunim, January 2017*

A thousand years of submission  
A thousand years of oppression  
A thousand years of misogyny

Women's March, January 21, 2017  
changed all.

It was peaceful revolution that touched  
many to tears.

Like an active volcano, women in the world  
rose up in solidarity with each other.

Would women be our future!  
Let their compassion and wisdom prevail  
"When men go low, let nasty women go high!"  
Let them be our guardian for all beings  
on our planet!

No turningback, No turningback, No turningback!  
Our rallying outcry reverberated all day long.

## *Lo and Behold!*

*Ven. Samu Sunim*

*December 2016*

If you wish to see your Buddha within  
Find peace in hardship.

If you want truth in the changeable world  
Be happy among the living.

If you need a life companion, be worthy,  
Never too late for love and compassion.

Look, a wild turkey family traveling  
through the snow!

## *Let's All Get Along*

*Ven. Samu Sunim*

*March 2014*

I have a friend who is homeless.  
I ran into him three years ago  
On the northeastern corner of Madison and 60th St.  
Ever since, Ken has perched himself there.

All his belongings in one shopping cart,  
Sitting in a wooden chair or an office chair with wheels as it happens,  
He eats, reads, and sleeps under open sky.

Half of Ken resembles Michael Jordan\* of the Chicago Bulls;  
The other half Rodney King\*\* who pleaded before the batons of the LAPD.  
Like Michael, he is tall and graceful.  
Like Rodney, he has the natural dignity of an underdog without bitterness.

Ken does not engage in any act of begging,  
Nor does he seek shelter, no matter how cold.  
One icy morning, I saw him all bundled up.

When I suggested going to a shelter,  
“I’m used to the elements,” was his curt reply.

Since I hail from a homeless and mendicant tradition,  
And have struggled for right livelihood in the business world of the market economy,  
I felt an affinity and was eager to learn from Ken’s homeless lifestyle.

Renunciants go through severe ascetic practice to realize “Nothing originally.”  
Ken’s homeless life affords him complete freedom of movement.  
He can enjoy his journey of life free from restraints.  
This alone is a great accomplishment.

I was curious how he obtains his food.  
He tells me it does not take much to keep his body-mind nourished.  
I occasionally see him collecting cans and bottles.  
He also cleans up nearby construction sites after workers leave.

I then realized he draws people to himself.  
People are inspired by his lifestyle  
And attracted to his deportment.  
I am one of them.

We brought him offerings.  
Some sought advice and counsel.  
He enjoyed Starbucks coffee and a hot breakfast.  
I compared him to a modern sadhu.\*\*  
Someone corrected me, saying he is a life coach.

Ken's counsel is always simple and clear.  
We suffer due to our ignorance.  
"The rich suffer, the poor suffer.  
Black people suffer, white people suffer.

We learn from suffering.  
We are brothers and sisters,  
We're all an interrelated bunch!"

It was Ken's Rodney King-like outcry for peace and reconciliation,  
"Can We All Get Along?"

\*Michael Jordan, (1963- ), former professional basketball player for the Chicago Bulls in the 1980's and 1990's.

\*\*Rodney King (1965-2012), African-American construction worker who was videotaped being beaten by the LAPD following a high-speed car chase in 1991.

\*\*\*Sadhu: In Hinduism, a religious ascetic or holy person.

## *Snow Rider in Manhattan*

*Ven. Samu Sunim*

*February 2014*

Snow is a wonderful gift from empty sky.

When fluffy flakes flit through the air,  
Trees put on white blossoms,  
Snow drifts carve out shifting dunes.  
Like a dream, the world is transformed into an unearthly wonderland!

Snowbound, everything stands still, stranded and muffled.  
All of a sudden people go on retreat doing nothing.  
It's all innocent and spontaneous.  
In a moment spanning infinity,  
Perfect delusion blends with perfect enlightenment.

The empty world is an open meditation hall.  
Old Man Winter makes sure  
The meditation hall is free from greed and hatred.  
When Gautama saw the morning star

Yeh, Bunga Bunga, Nirvana is Samsara again;  
Keep shoveling snow for pedestrians.  
In distraction, I see a glove stuck in the wirefence  
of Second Avenue subway construction, waiting for its owner.

Humanity shines!

## *Winter Solstice*

*Ven. Samu Sunim*  
*December 2013*

We lived cold in the dark.  
Silence and solitude reigned over the world.  
A lone candlelight flickered.  
From nowhere a night owl hooted  
Shattering mountain of silence.  
Tears of gratitude.

## *Summer Yongmaeng Jeongjin\**

*Ven. Samu Sunim*

*July 2012*

I came to the retreat with no idea.  
Cold rubdown in early morning was cool;  
108 prostrations were not bad.

The endless sittings were killing me, ouch, ouch!  
Sunim tells me I could gain entry into the first gate of Seon (Zen),  
If I go through 36 big ouches.

But hwadu study beat me completely, dumb, dumb dumb!  
Sunim tells me it would be easy as touching my nose  
While washing my face, if I become a dumb and stupid fart.

I still have no idea.  
Yet from time to time tears formed in my eyes.

\*Intensive silent retreat

## *Street Tree in Winter*

*Ven. Samu Sunim*

*March 3, 2012*

You stand bare and naked on alien land.  
You bear it in great fortitude but never show it.  
I wish I could imitate a little bit of your forbearance from time to time.

You stand alone outdoors in cold and snow.  
Yet you don't seem to mind it at all.  
I wonder if your complete indifference comes from self-abandon or supernatural power.

It hurts to see you suffering on the street in exile.  
Yet I need you out there in cold and snow.  
Without your presence among skyscrapers my city life would be unbearable.

Yeah, you're my hero!  
Still I pray that you're in the woods with your companions.  
I am a conflicted human being.

*Tree Seon/Zen*

*—Meditation Standing Up—*

*Ven. Samu Sunim*

*March 1, 2012*

I love trees.

When I see trees

I feel at ease in the world.

Trees stay where they are planted

And never falter.

I adore trees.

They are immortals in the open air.

Stretching out their multi-arms skyward

They stand tall and graceful.

Listening to birds chatting and singing on treetops

I feel comfort and happiness.

I believe trees.

I trust the work of invisible root and visible trunk.

With earthlink of the root and skylink of the trunk

Trees inform sentient beings of changing signs of each season.  
Viewing flowers in spring  
I feel reassured of renewal and continuity of life  
And know summer will be upon us soon.

I meditate with my patron trees.  
Meditation with trees is to learn to stand as one of them.  
Standing as one of them is standing free from body-mind.  
Standing free from body-mind is being at home with wind and clouds.

There was a clear, loud cry in the sky.  
It was Dharma talk from a crow.  
Trees remained in silence and solitude unperturbed.  
My pilgrimage and Seon study with insentient beings have just begun.

## *Three Poems From Mexico*

*Ven. Samu Sunim*

*February 2012*

### *1. Cold rubdown at Tapalehui\**

The sound of the stream washing our ears clean  
We began the day  
Listening to the clack of wake-up moktak  
And rubbing our bodies with cold water.  
Crows of a rooster in the distance broke the darkness.

After a brief shock  
with a feeling of fright and comfort  
The naked body responded.

Body heat spread after the second rubdown.  
Born wild yet to be tamed  
I let out an exclamation, Ah-AHHH...

And startled the little stars above in the ancient sky.  
The day rolled.  
The flowers continued to bloom  
The leaves kept falling.

Lay monastics struggled with their old karmic obstacles  
And kept waking up from their defilements  
To usher in the new year of 2012.  
The stream in the valley of Tapalehui flowed on unmindfully.

\*Tapalehui is a retreat center in the province of Morelos about 2.5 hours from Mexico City. Our Mexican sangha has been using their facility for the last 10 years for winter Yongmaeng Jeongjin.

## *2. Highrise Apartment Buildings for Magpies*

Palmeras\* grow straight soaring up in the open sky  
Free from branches, to bear coconuts beyond the reach of human hands.

In Tapalehui there were three residential palmeras  
All serving as highrise apartment buildings for magpies.

Residential palmeras were different from those on the streets or beaches.  
Their large, long leaves hanging down like thatches halfway from the stem

The suspended dead leaves provided perfect shelters for working class magpie families.  
Apartments with no doors or windows  
The birds had no trouble flying in and out.  
There were no signs of wear and tear on the outside.  
They were so good with maintenance  
Some of them were able to sublet their apartments to flying ants.

On the dirt road to Tapalehui  
Where the four seasons coalesced into each other everyday  
Where birdsongs and insects' chirping reverberated  
Where visitors were afraid of scorpions  
The nature of the physical world was alive and well.

\* Palmera is the Spanish word for palm tree.

### ***3. Acapulco Bay***

All night waves roared in from the Pacific  
splashed against the shore with the rising tide.  
All night palm leaves swayed with their disheveled hair  
And tried to reach the broken waves in vain.

At daybreak  
Waves were calm  
Palm leaves stood still.

As the day wore on  
Palm leaves stood still  
Languishing under the beating sun  
Dreaming of the night and moonbeams.

Every night I went to bed with a pillow of waves  
Every night covered with the shadow of palm leaves.

All night waves washed my body over and over again  
All night palm leaves touched me over and over again.

In the morning  
I found myself picking broken dreams  
In the sand and between rocks.

## *Light in Winter*

*Ven. Samu Sunim*

*December 2011*

Five sparrows on the utility line.  
One flew away, the other took flight in a different direction.  
After the third sitting, the third sparrow was gone,  
The fourth one followed her companion.

Candlelight in the meditation hall,  
ultimate bliss of sitting alone together  
under empty sky, this holiday season.

*Journey of Wild Grassroots*  
—*In Sympathy with the Anti-Capitalist Occupiers*—

*Ven. Samu Sunim*  
*October 2011*

When autumn comes  
Let me discover my roots as a blade of grass  
In the wild grass commune.  
In woods when trees start shedding their leaves;  
In prairies when cattle lose their taste for grazing;  
On the roadside when men stop mowing:  
We shall be free, wild in the open air.  
As grassroots we enjoy our common ground.  
Together we lie down on the earth to look out.  
Our soul is soil.  
In the sound of waves from distant mountains  
The sight of moonbeams from deep oceans  
The smell of violent wind from empty sky  
We recall our journey as a blade of grass.  
As a raindrop, a cloud, morning mist;

A tree, a flower, moss or a rock  
As a bee, a dragonfly, a June bug or an earthworm  
So we roamed the world endlessly.  
So many beings, so many lives in a single blade of grass!  
So many blades in the grass family,  
So many grassroots to preserve topsoil, protect our wild “earth household.”  
Hundreds and thousands of uncommon grassroots  
linked underground in solidarity and harmony with all beings!  
In the changing landscape of red, yellow and pale gray  
Thinking blades indulge a pensive mood.  
Feeling blades evoke strong aspirations in the Bodhi heart of the Dharmaworld.  
Where neither coming nor going, not even staying,  
Mountains sail out in the Milky Way and earthworms travel on Interstate highways.  
When autumn departs  
my reincarnation is complete.  
Barren leaves and the receding notes of crickets put my “interbeing” into oblivion.  
It was occupied, now liberated, after a visit to the outhouse.  
So long to my beloved underdogs!  
When spring comes grass will grow green!

## *When Tired & Lonely*

*Ven. Samu Sunim*

*December 2010*

When you're tired and disappointed,  
Write a poem.  
If you can't write a poem,  
Be silent.  
If your feelings are painful,  
Go to the park.  
Watch the vibrant eyes of squirrels  
Listen to the chat of sparrows  
And stand in line with the homeless.  
There shall be no outcasts in the world!

When you're full of complaints,  
Write a poem.  
If you can't write a poem,  
Have a glass of cold water.  
Go for a run

Watch your steps  
Look up to the sky.  
Complaints are but a taint,  
They are uninvited guests.

When you're angry and hateful,  
Write a poem.  
If you can't write a poem,  
Do 365 prostrations invoking compassion\*  
Lower your body-mind with each bow and rise again as a true person.  
Surrender yourself to the Buddha within  
Empower yourself with love and compassion.  
There shall be no scumbags in the world!

When you're poor and miserable,  
Write a poem.  
If you can't write a poem,  
Remember you're still among the living.  
Be grateful!  
Learn to be content with what is available.  
Being poor hurts  
It is a blessing in disguise if you don't mind.  
There shall be no poor and lost souls in the world!

When you lose hope and are in despair,  
Write a poem.  
If you can't write a poem,  
Watch your mind.  
Plains and streams play together to entertain all beings.  
Is this not good enough?  
Is this not good enough?  
Wake up early tomorrow  
Go for the sunrise.  
There shall be no helplessly abandoned in the world!

\* If you don't like to perform prostrations, then climb up a mountain.