

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.