

The Collected Poetry of Jason Espada, Volume I – from 1985 to 2005

Table of Contents	page
1. Let's not wait	1
2. Now I am a voice	2
3. Rapid fire gunshots at night	3
4. I won't refuse sadness	4
5. If you suffer, friend	5
6. There is no rose in this garden	6
7. When I'm beaten down	7
8. Tonight I'm a lion cub in the wilderness	8
9. Imagine an underwater system of channels	9
10. Avalokiteshvara	10
11. Who among you will be the brave?	11
12. They speak in you they speak in me	12
13. Three Christmas poems I – There is such an undercurrent	13
14. This morning I felt your pain	14
15. How can I ask you to stay	15
16. I'm afraid these poems	16

Table of Contents	page
17. Some may tell you that love	17
18. Evening Prayer	21
19. A mother crying	22
20. A woman died in labor	23
21. To go out into the unknown	24
22. If you're hurting	25
23. A Dream to call the Angels	26
24. Guardian	29
25. I went searching	30
26. To those who are spending this, their first Christmas	31
27. No one speaks	32
28. This is about a story I heard	33
29. Ignorance, a closed door	35
30. Every other kind of wine	36
31. When I was twelve	37
32. In the past I must have been	38
33. What gods do you hold?	39
34. Bankers run out in to the street	40

Table of Contents	page
35. Omens are gifts from the gods	41
36. Today we celebrate	42
37. Eight short poems	43
38. Three Dhamasala poems: I – I'm a song	47
39. II – prayer, a small candle	48
40. III – You are the poetry, and I	49
41. And one from back in Thailand	50
42. I was the one who treated you wrongly	51
43. My body moans and opens	53
44. I am She	56
45. Torches light the burial ground	57
46. The imitation of immortality	62
47. May I remember	63
48. A Glance Meditation on the Graduated Path	64
49. The true nature of all beings	66
50. The sunlight is all full of night	68
51. With the thought to awaken the life	69

Table of Contents	page
52. That mind that cares for all	71
53. Wishing you peace	72
54. I live in this world	74
55 – 57. Three bc poems	78
58. Taking and Giving prayer	88
59. Who stayed the hand	90
60. I bow to the precepts	92
61. A Prayer to the Saints	95
62. Everyday I go out	101
63. A deity for all reasons	103
64. I want a judge who's been where I've been	107
65. In these times	109
66. In Praise of Tara	112

Let's not wait until our time is almost gone
and we have to speak our truth to each other
in shortened ways
Let's not live as if this moment will be here forever
Instead, let us look with clear eyes
and with nothing between our being together
Knowing all this time, all this life is passing
brings a keen, lucid sense to our pleasure
brings our caring fully to life
allows us to rest in meaningfulness
and all of our words become words of love!

Now I am a voice of all those who never sang
who never had a chance open up to speak
My grandparents, my long ago forgotten ancestors
my flesh and blood relations,
and those who are mute, distant
walking vacant transported to another sphere
even while they are here with us
and all the attempts that could not find language
pressing fierce having urgency and having no form
All this weight moves in me
this brief time belongs to all of us
it is stalked after
with quiet almost invisible breath watching
long waited coolly sought after
Once in a rare time the way opens
and we come rushing out in a startled, ecstatic
triumphant release out into the open
the birth after hundreds of years
and the child is already a man
or a whole continent
with fully developed traditions of waiting and cultivating
as its eyes and ears
voices and hands to work to make offerings
All this born in a moment's time
now you know why words can rearrange whole landscapes
inside and outside
So much has waited to become this form
for so long and with so many lives
that when they gather a point comes
when every one of us can feel their presence

Rapid-fire gunshots at night
people smoking crack on my front steps
diesel bus blowing exhaust
people sleeping in doorways

I need to know this

You don't find these things in
a quiet forest, a secluded beach
although the world is that too
there is more
and already I forget too easily:

a self-absorbed business person,
stressed out and rude
an angry young man
with a radio on his shoulder
degrading images of women
on billboards, telephone poles
people walking around talking to themselves

As long as such things exist
I want to know about it
I need to be here to remember

violence,
people ignoring each other
hardly anyone thinking ahead

I know there is this all over the world
and the evidence is right here in front of me
So I need to be here
where I can feel fear,
sadness, and hope
and more and more of a determination
to work
This is the best place to be

I won't refuse sadness I know
this can become something we need
When held close guarded
fed with reason for hope
a pearl may emerge this worth
out of not-abandoned grief

And I will stay with you
loyal no end
My joy grows from this
and seeing too the knowledge of what can be

And I breathe smoothe breath
beneath the ash
of doubt, materialism
on the smoldering sense that can become alive again
as new days dancing in open fields

O, I can look at you
I don't have to run
because you're not just what you say,
what you admit yourself to be
I know your secret
and it's why I can remain
with no fear:

This becoming needs your presence,
and light,
until releasing rain to replenish
all worlds
all bodies and souls

If you suffer, friend, let me be with you
This is the ground from where I have grown
the shell I flew out of
the substance I have eaten and transformed
Anguish, turmoil, desperate, unknowing choices
these I have swallowed and known
Craving, anguish, egotism, flavors consistent
everywhere they are found
Instead of sorrow, hurt disabling
A striking clarity moves steady hands to work
for what is needed with no thought of success or failure
hands know only to work ongoing work without
hesitation or pause This is nature

There is no rose in this garden
only the force behind a river of form
Branches are bare, like bones
and everywhere the fragrance of your immortal spring
On the ground, withered leaves becoming earth
and everywhere the bouquet
your telling presence
You would hide from me beneath the secrecy of winter
but the blume of all the kindness you give, reaches me
and I follow the redolent turn of this day
and follow the turn of its' long and slow
continuous breath

When I'm beaten down
and the wolves approach
the ones I guarded in my thoughts
step forward to protect me
They emerge from between the layers of my skin
They come out from my breath,
looking fierce, confident,
and they set a halo of peace around me

Tonight I'm a lion-cub in the wilderness
scratching the ground for food
crying out that I've been left alone by my ancestors
to learn to thrive if I can
I turn all my despairing out in to the night
and the air fills with the scent of my family
and I hear lion sounds
having released from this body the instinct to awaken
and the night creatures scatter...
I carry this with me, now I know
I am alone and
my whole family is with me

Imagine an underwater system of channels
one channel opens
and the stream of cool, pure water can be felt moving through
felt all the way back to its source
Contacting a spiritual tradition can be this way
the clean, clear life moving through
felt in this very place, and known to its origin
Teachers, practitioners, deities, protector spirits
virtues faithfully maintained
and given forward through lives
We are welcomed by this, our family
They are eager to assist the awakening life
the heart becomes very quiet watching this work
this far reaching, unceasing compassion

They speak behind their words
move behind the curtains of form
in silence, shaping
All of this is given to you, it is immanent
the life within the life

Avalokiteshvara

A being of great spiritual joy

having within herself vast stores of goodness and health

nutritious, sustaining life, great love

She knows her own nature, in truth, is kindness

rich in the life that is healthy and beautiful

happiness, calm and deep

peaceful fulfillment, complete within

her serene nature is creative

Who among you will be the brave?
able to stand he ridicule
contempt of your peers
Who among you will stand apart?
know the hunger
the cold isolation
Who among you will sacrifice
certainty set patterns
and serve something higher
Who among you will face the terror
the creeping exhaustion holding on
through nights of cruel doubt
Who among you will chance
to reach the prize the richness
Who among you will be the bold of heart
not chastened by the blind plague
materialism that stings
that leaves the gifted forgotten to the bare winds outside
Who among you will leave your home with no promise of return
with only the thought that some, who have endured
have at last held beauty in their hands

They speak in you they speak in me

their powerful words
and strong hearts
live
literally
and have not been bound by the
passing of their bodies
we renew with our own breath
the older family
the thoughts and dedications

They, the spirits
have changed in shape and sound but
they live
in us
they speak in you they speak in me
can you hear all the voices that have become your own?
we are rich because of they
and what has gone before is here fully present
never died only changed
here as our flesh and as our eyes
the strength and kindness and wisdom
sport no separate claims
because it is being passed down
a communal family treasure
reach in and hear the voices that have become your own
voices from the other side of our birth
that will keep resounding
and hear it with laughter, and comfort

3 Christmas Poems (1)

There is such an undercurrent of sadness
to this season

All we cannot speak of
the fragile hold we have
another year's passing away
and it seems that though we know
all the mad turning feels compelled
hardly anyone seems to pause
even if they want to
so that unless we go into a trance of some kind
we feel the pull that goes on
people gorge themselves on what they don't need
and the hypocrisy feels sharper the more need
is paraded before our full table

I dreamed the curse was broken suddenly
and all the adrenaline loaded
their arms draped with gifts
halted in mid-breath and in mid step
and began dressing and feeding
by hand the tired listless hopeless person at
their feet
bathing them in tears
running well manicured soft creamy hands
across the sore and swollen body
touch the puffy face
in the freezing weather
leave their fur around the shoulders of someone sleeping
in a sitting up position

doesn't it make you cold to think?
why do we hide our light?
sometimes we feel outnumbered just trying to breathe
sometimes my family seems so far from me

This morning I felt your pain
and I couldn't go back to sleep
you were there in the room with me
lost and shaking
There is nothing I would not give
if it would ease your pain

In the dim light I held you
and was taken also by fear
by the feeling of being alone
holding back thoughts that turn on themselves
all the fair islands of relief drawing away
the weary stop and horror at watching
hands that have lost the strength to grip
moving farther from being able to hold, to trust

passing scenes shriek their joyful hysteria
successes, fullness and warmth
register bitter, antagonistic jabs
reminder in cold, clay terms
tangible, compelling

loud and heavy sounds shake the room
fantasies whirl - tear the blinds and move the pictures on the walls
"... don't... don't" I whisper
try to ease the risen fury
the strength of wanting contact splits the wall
and runs down the street seeking release
I gather you up in my arms
push back sweat matted hair
and cover your cheeks and ears with kisses

How can I ask you to stay
when you've been leaving for so long now...
There are these two worlds
back to back, it seems
One is always leaving, always leaving
while the other is still, and remains
growing the past with it's love and tears

I'm afraid these poems are poor, poor as the moon's borrowed light
Sad, mysterious and sad
Without this luminous world I'm empty and cold
and so I pray you'll hear through to the love that I speak of
that somewhere else, tonight, sets this world on fire

Some may tell you that love
is only this ecstasy, this union
wanting, and completing the circle of our desire
All this wonder, bring us to life
losing ourself, and finding our own self in every place
They say that love is this caress
and seeking again our timeless form
and I say to this Yes!, Yes! Love is all they say
I would only speak to add
how love reaches out of this joy
moves in this life we lead
and reveals yet more of its character

We know the pleasures of meeting
soft fingertips hands held tight in the evening
this love breathes all through our day
and at the sight of those who despair
knows the heart of the beloved one is there
We take them in
and speak with our hands touching to their faces
We give them from this tree we have found
that is full, and wanting
A life continues

This love is one

Even if we could leave this place
and the ones who need us
a lover would not think to do so
Our caring keeps us steady
where there is so much reaching
and all the fear-movement
and all the covering over of this heart

We have long since been wedded

The joy that has reached us
has fashioned as with two hands
a depth with which to hold
this grace
and also to know the pain that walks
throughout our lives not knowing where or when to turn
pushed on desperate trying many locked doors
seeking solace and release (oh!)

In being born to love we can hear
the nearest sound and
the farthest sound
All that is celestial, sacred and pure
in every stone
each movement of the body
and each day's beginning
and we can also hear
the unknowing struggle going on all around us
and all the cost that comes from senses thick and
ignorant unfeeling and unborn

Compassion stirs and we are not alone in this
To love is our deepest soothing pleasure
and also feeling the pain of those who suffer
Sometimes we move anxious, turning
and at other times this quiet comes, a stillness
all dedicated to finding a way to be of use
This depth gives us the strength to work
without hesitation
We become all a part of this courage
to find a way into this life, again and again

We meet each chance we have
with our whole spirit beneath
the one that brought the lush fertile forest
All this sublime knowing has a use a purpose
to restore this life again

to re-create its own nature
 Love is what we draw from
 to live the very life of love

What is life giving needs to touch
 in all the places that move tense, anxious, confused
 These two ways of spirit mingle
 like two hands reaching for each other
 like the fingers of their hands entwined
 The power and sight that wells
 goes out
 looking for a love
 to give all these treasures that reshape
 a sometimes graceless world that can turn
 to all sharp edges, hurting
 For this love, we would leave our home
 It is the richness and also the reason
 we would give away everything that we have

This love walks, promenades
 through parks at day
 with a sorrowing, anguished companion alongside
 Arm in arm they walk
 slowly they go, with ease
 and with much gentle grace in their step
 They speak as the sun moves overhead
 telling tales of ways to love again

In the evening, this intimacy reaches
 to all the places the touch of this birthing light
 is needed most
 May we speak of joy?, of ecstasy now?, Yes?
 To see even one move, if only the slightest
 fraction of a degree toward release
 when for so long their natural movement
 has been frozen, unable to become any other way
 or to see one driven for so long, driven

to know for oneself what this is
and to trigger a freedom
from a whirling cycle that sweeps away
any sense of control
this pleasure matches every divine kiss
and I know the embrace of love again, fully
when I myself am love

As love is to me, and has been to me
in this way I am learning to give

The same movement that brings us to birth
brings us to reach for the birth again
in the lives of all others we see in the world

and so we can speak the full name of our love
in fact we can allow nothing less

We go on to love, living this life through
and faithful

It is always this way when we finish a sentence
like love finding what was sought
closure and rest
but at such times, another sense entirely, opens
We can feel this completion
also
this beginning

Evening Prayer

Tonight

may all our women be protected

may every child be safe from harm

may those who are about to hurt themselves, or others
be kept back from doing so

May those who have been forgotten be received

may the fearful be comforted, may the lonely be soothed

may those who are without rest be calmed

may the hungry be fed, the cold given warmth

may those who are sick be relieved of their pain

and tonight, may researchers find cures

for every type of illness

may those men, women, and youth who are trapped by addiction
be released

In the world tonight, may greed lessen,

may animosity, from its root, cease

and tonight may every veil of ignorance
be completely seen through

may those who are searching for light,

for peace and fulfillment

be amply rewarded

may this whole planet awaken with joyful music,

a celebratory knowing of all the love that we have!

A mother crying on her son's grave
beating her knees and the grass with her fists
my grief is like this
when seeing what brings life I cannot turn
the force of so many years is too heavy a weight to move
Seeing what is only destructive, my knowing is shallow
and I rail and curse
these rags are ringing wet my face is swollen
everything that is born and dies in this moment is under what I can see
the paths I will follow I know
they are felt in the heaving of my chest
they are sensed in the shaking of my limbs

A woman died in labor
and left her man to grieve
the child's life's uncertain
and all the worlds so filled with hope
are falling around him
dreams twist in spirals at his feet
he looks to see what might yet be
his heart, his home ruined
devastation follows so quickly a great anticipation
All the substance of his hope reels senseless, chaotic
Her voice is lost amidst all this
it is calling and his ears and his body
flame to hear her, he loses the thread
the one that holds his body together
Maddening weight pressing down in
such inane, barren tones
poor, poor sounds
anger, loss, great great loss
Here is a way I can birth you, my love
I need you I need to see you walk again
breathe again speak again I need to see you
touch again smile again
Here is a way I can birth you again from my own heart
from my own body from my strength
This love it holds the secret
you will live and I will see you plain
as our first days together
In every touch in every word, every feeling you will live
I will carry you into this world my love,
my dear sweet one, my love, my precious child

to go out into the unknown
ahead
with senses sharp, listening
All this is transmitted over long generations
The quiet, isolated sense
moving forward, keeping watchful
communicating what is seen
This has been the role of all my fathers
this lives in me
As I pass from these settings
into wilder, unfamiliar, sometimes dangerous places
with only a sense, looking, reaching ahead
that this is where my family will soon be
I care for you in this place where I am now
Although I am alone, away from where you are
I leave the home, and the pull is great
and always my love has this certain weight of feeling
of clearly knowing my work for you

If you're hurting
I want to share your pain
instead of watching you slip
like a ship beneath the waves
If it's too hard
I want to help
instead of see you moving from feeling to non feeling
from life to non life
watching the best part of you
go under
watching is like spears all through me
because I know where you are
and I know where you're going
you're going to that dark and numb feeling
that seductive comfort
it takes the best part of you **IT TAKES THE BEST PART OF YOU**
I watch this mute scene unable to speak
or you unable to hear
as you take all your pain out of my reach
and try to slip
like a ship beneath the waves
Don't go Da, please don't go...

A Dream to call the Angels

I was awake and all morning it was raining silver in my room.

Gradually everything I could see became translucent, visible still in outward structure, but also clear, showing the inside, like through a membrane.

The room's light was stronger, in a soft and gentle way, than the early morning outside, and seem to come not from any one place, but to be arising evenly in myself and all that I saw.

The feelings began with a dream.

I was taking a test in an ordinary over bright classroom with other young people, and everyone had a copy of the test except me. I opened my test booklet to find answers, on separate scraps of paper, to other tests. I brought the booklet to the teacher, a woman with mid-length brown hair, and she brought me back to my seat and held up something with writing on it, telling me to copy the writing down.

At first I didn't not understand, but then I came to realize that to copy this paper down constituted the whole of my test. The paper at first just looked ordinary, then it changed into an ornate colored woodcut - with fancy writing and colored pictures.

It said something to this effect:

‘In the late Renaissance year of 17?__ Father _____
had brought to him his charge, _____ so that he
could be nearer.

It ended with the line,

‘The tutorial is completed.’

At first I thought the young person brought to the priest was some kind of prisoner, and then I realized (beginning the feeling of angels) that the young man was his student and that it was a fortunate event for all involved that the young man was being moved in closer proximity to his teacher.

In reading this over, copying it and coming to the line, 'The tutorial is completed', this bright and beautiful feeling started to rise slowly, clearly felt throughout my whole being. (I was awakened by this.)

It is an indescribable feeling of peace and well-being, pleasurable, billowing at times towards intensely so, a clarity and presence that is palpable, fixed, steady.

The presence of these spirits, angels I can only call them, brought with them gifts in the form of opening me up to certain truths that I had not seen with such a complete clarity before.

It was like being in that soft and warming glow, all over feeling of well being, opened ways of seeing.

I felt something open and began to see the fortune, the wealth of this earth that I am surrounded with. I count among these the elements of making music, of writing and learning. I count among these the people I know and am made rich by knowing, my family, also the beauty and tenderness of people I don't know as well.

I was able, am able still to see the treasure of being touched by beauty and how it waits, all this that is rich in possibility waits to be responded to with an open heart. I feel I have seldom if ever appreciated my surroundings so much. How fortunate I am!

Next, following right after this I began to see the wealth of ideas that have come through to me - I saw each of these ideas - expressed in friendship, poetry and philosophy, as if they were individuals, alive with their impulse and message, like people.

I had to ask as some point that I only be shown enough to keep my clarity. I didn't want to be overcome by the pleasurable feelings that were steadily growing.

I don't know what loosened, but these presences are quite tangible, taking up all I can see and feel, outside, inside, healing...

Guardian

in this life
and the next
I will watch over you
care for you and protect you
At birth, at each initiation
at every danger and in times of deepest despair
I will be there
At every significant joining
and with all that you care for
I will be there to offer this my strength
and this my love
In giving birth, and in struggle
in loss and in grieving times when we can feel so alone
I will be with you, I will make my presence felt, you will know love, the
embrace of beneficence
And at your time of transition,
when all is uncertain
I will be there to guide you To watch
and to lend my encouragement
Through all the cycles
passages of appearing and disappearing from this world
I will comfort and add my life to your life
These worlds awaiting before us
there are whole worlds, also, within a touch
Let us go on together
Our faith making clear
all the ways of our love

I went searching for you but no one knew your name
I had hoped to find you amongst friends and fellows
and this I saw fall softly
sad at seeing how far I am
your voice comes
your sound is a balm to me along the way
I have given everything
for I am a tale of love and longing

To those who are spending this, their first Christmas
without their child
For those alone for the first time
without their beloved
or looking into the eyes of your love
trying to wish back tears
as you exchange gifts
knowing this will be your last winter together
Come, let us join hands
gather around this table
and send love around the circle

Come, stranger, you are not a stranger to me anymore
Come, friend
let us pass our great life giving love around this circle
love born of understanding grief
born knowing separation
we cannot reach anymore with our hands
we have to do something with the power in this heart
Come, let us heal each other
Come, join the circle
where love finds the full expression of its nature
Let us give all we have in us to give
heal ourselves and each other
touch with a sublime power
to caress all the hurt
Compassion
our new family

No one speaks
but we have deep roots in each other
old lovers and family
the ones we were once close to
fathers and sons
brothers
husband and wife no one speaks
and the close friends whose touch was once such a comfort
no one speaks
the time and distance are too great to cross
and so we go on with our back turned
to enter the sad voiceless movement of time passing
Mourning what we've lost
what we never had a chance to know or have known
From within their sealed expression, sorrowing
no one tells you their truth
we can't retrieve or give voice
to what's long gone, it seems
We move farther away
our hands are empty
Suicides don't speak
broken spirits have no voice
and no sound comes from under the weight of addiction
For all that goes unsaid and undone in a lifetime
the chance is too brief for anything less than truth
But sometimes we're forced to leave
the pressure is too great
there is too much danger
and sadness gathered, pressing
too much to see at once
How can we begin?
All this leaving too soon
when we never really wanted to go

This is about a story I heard.

In the first month of 1945,
prisoners of war were being executed.

A group of men with long beards, black coats
the Orthodox Jews
spent their last night with a bottle of wine
And through tear filled eyes they saw each other
most clearly

Through the ice, before dawn a crush of boots
orders shouted, the coats roughly handled
The men whispered among themselves
as they were marched, 'to die without bitterness...'

In the freezing cold in an open field
surrounded by tall trees and a sky full of stars
The older men, the younger men
afraid, shaking, holding each other up
put their arms on each other's shoulders a last time
made a small circle and began a dance
'To life' one of them said
'L'chaim!', the others repeated, 'To life!'

a step later their captors opened fire
with a line of machine guns
there was a moment of pain,
of sadness they'd never see their brothers
or wives or children again
and of unbearable compassion
and everything was silent
only the night was a witness
A presence was everywhere
and the soldiers stood confused for a moment

That they knew -
to look at evil and to have no malice
to remember what is most precious as a war outside rages
and all else is lost
to have resisted hatred to the end
to have seen the worst, the perverse
to have looked directly into its eyes and remained human
They knew that such an action is timeless,
that love continues and is unconquerable,
and that somehow we were all with them

They stood taller than the surrounding trees
their hands gripping each other's shoulders
their devotion was what resounded last
true to the end no end
and in response, the cold night, the open field
became itself clear and kind as the last look they gave
Perhaps it's why the soldiers were startled
The only witness recounts this story
as those who walked away did not yet fully understand
but a testimony has been passed down,
after all these years it remains
You can hear it!
You can see it!
tender and strong, an amazing visage! an appearance surviving throughout
the cold night

Ignorance a closed door, and pride a lock
nothing more than a word can keep us from embracing
So many of the gifts we have go unopened
as we wither and perish in plain view of each other.
Voices insistent, but where is the holding of hands?
All of our relations are waiting
for there to be peace between you and I.

Every other kind of wine puts you to sleep
this one wakes you up
every other touch leaves you sitting there, alone
this one brings you to your feet
and places you in graceful movement
looking from behind everyone else's eyes
You feel the billowing of their robes
the widening of their heart
Every other type of solitude is a fractured jar
but this one is the laughing heavens
and poverty and all the strategies of the poor
you step beyond
in an instant the world lights up

When I was twelve I was pulled from the waves
but it was more than my father's arms that saved me
and shaken from the blackout o.d.
it was more than the commonsense will to live
other reasons calling had their hand in there pulling
souls were waiting magnetic
with something to give
and others needing me
we are drawn with force
by the lives ahead of us
by those we have not yet known
other worlds throw their shadow forward
small, innocent looking turns in the road
were placed there irresistible
full meaning
to lead to sudden well timed discovery
from past what is seen
there's a strong arm pulling
they shield me and shepherd
from a distance

In the past I must have been
one who worked the land
working with faith
watching the ground long before anything is seen above the surface
praying for rain and light
pressing on through hurt-weary times
each day's hunger
working to sustain himself
working with back and arms and with
rough hands that speak to the living earth
materials of his faith

I must have been a warrior once
wading through the fallen contorted bodies of his enemies
fighting a good fight for some honor in need of defending
unable to turn his back on that need
with no malice in his heart
sad that the struggle has to go on
with no pride
his body strengthened by that *idea*
living for the time when it will not be necessary
to crash through walls of threatening will
and bring them down

and I must have been a mother many times
knowing the life within long before any outward sign
knowing their spirits like being with another inside
feeling the growth and movement with hands over my stomach
small bones and flesh from my own body taking shape, forming
I carried hope as well for my children
was sharp and protective over them from inception
my will was strongest in bringing them to term
I lived for my children
I lived to give them life

What gods do you hold?
To what do you bow and spend yourself praying?
To what do you dedicate yourself,
and what holds your devotion?
What is the face on the statue
whose foot you kiss with such reverence
and before which you humble yourself?
What is the shape of the altar
where your sacrifice is made everyday?
What is the form of your practice?
and what is the drawing spirit?

Bankers run out into the street
 and fling handfuls of dollars
 shouting, *'There's more where that came from!'*
 Merchants kick open the doors to their stores,
 arms holding as much as they can carry,
 and push what they have through the open windows
 of passing cars
 People are wandering around with
 pieces of delicious cake in their hands, saying,
'Here, take a bite...'

What's going on here?
 Just for today (or is it?)
 nobody's trying to turn a profit-
 no one's trying to sell *anything*
 The whole city stayed awake all night
 trying to figure out ways to help others

Cabbies and bus drivers won't accept fares
 food is served - no bills are due
 No checks accepted - no credit cards
 Everyone's giving away what they have!
 Has the whole world gone sane?!

All the ad-men have found another line of work
 and today, all the sponsors will say is,
'Come on down! Free gifts!
No strings attached!...'

It's a wonder - Ha!
 Everybody's getting rich
 You can see it on their faces
 and people are saying,
'Why didn't we think of this before?!...'

Omens are Gifts From the Gods

On my way home
I found myself surrounded
by flashing lights and sirens shouting
I tried to get out of the way
only to make matters worse
and block movement of the ones I would yield to
I was directed to turn and wait
and when I asked what the trouble was
the great prophet lifted his arms to the sky
and with trembling voice intoned
"When you see flashing lights
and hear sirens wail- What are you to do?!"
I was awestruck by the sheer power
that flooded through and almost lifted this
messenger of the heaven world
from the very ground on where he stood
and not waiting any reply
he roared, impassioned "You pull over to the side and stop!"
Oh, Salaam, I nodded, palms joined, eyes lowered
The very breath of my oracles deity
made the man's nostrils flare
and I looked expecting to see
flowing robes and great gray beard
but all I saw was blue
He added, "You're going to have to become more sharp!"

I wonder if he knew
or was like those messengers of old
who in their ecstatic trance
were all unaware of the gift that was spoken

Today we celebrate the Dalai Lama
Today we celebrate Thay Nhat Hahn
Rejoice in our kind mothers and kind fathers
Today we celebrate the existence of friendship throughout the world

Today we share our gratitude for all the caring
and compassion that people show to each other
and all the learning, the tenderness, the mercy
Today we celebrate the truth of healing
and are thankful for our happiness and all the causes
of health and happiness

Today we celebrate the fact of beauty, simple, deep,
inspiring
With all our loved ones we join hands
Today we celebrate love
Today we celebrate the yearning of humanity
its cry of freedom, and promise, and faith
Today we celebrate laughter, and just this- seeing each other, being here
together

Today we celebrate our children, an endless joy
Today we celebrate our diversity, richness, intimation
of potential

Today we join and break bread and tell stories around
this table
Today we celebrate life and livingness
Today we celebrate our accomplishments, and the leaving a written record of
the way we have traveled
Today we celebrate our ancestors, translators, teachers
Today we celebrate the wisdom of our elders

and we bow and kiss the earth, touch the bark of a tree
look wonderingly over a valley rain
Today we celebrate a fresh birth, and renewal

Eight Short Poems

1. Surrounded by many instruments
 my many tongues
 sprung from the ground around me
 tho the melody I would tell you
 is simple enough to speak alone
 it's needing to birth around it
 every rich joining in
 clapping
 swaying
 eyes-closed
 raising up, lifting up
 one at a time,
 two at a time,
 like partners lifting each other up in each of us
 faces alight
 filling the room with light
 and fragrance like a dream

Sensing more of this - ocean beneath what we see
 and we speak
 after the long rest
 We come out of our homes
 to meet, and tell of our natural treasures
 and of that haven we long for

2. When life comes back to you
 suddenly you're rich again
 new clothes
 breath returns
 color,
 like new love,
 teaching everyone around wonder
 humbling the waking-sleepers,

and for the aged, turning back the years
joy staying new
for our children, and our children's children...

3. Who knows shy
these comings and goings
A knock on the door,
and you leave
with everything you need
to receive this world
its pouring itself for you
clean breath in your lungs
leads deep into the hills
where people greet you, house and feed you
and every home, in time, becomes your own,
and melody, and food...

4. A listener is mother to the world
This letter won't be written
poetry doesn't happen
unless there's someone to listen
If not for you,
then I was not
Your call
with your longings
your just being there
Without you
whole worlds would have stayed
altogether outside of time!

5. Blight - a word wrongly spoken
out of time,
or not seeing
A hard slap
the child years later still
carries in his chest
barring the way to his speaking
The shape is changed,
only dim forms emerge
Careful, friend!
Your saying closes or opens gates
and there are anxious faces
watching and waiting
their breath following
every word you will say
6. Tell me!
Why do I have such doubt
that you will return?
And now, how can I remember you
when you're gone?
Without you, everything I do is wrong
brings down worlds around me
until your image
saves lives...
7. Sometimes I scare myself,
thinking- where will this end?
and then, comfort
rising high above
anything I could imagine...
Aah, to tell you of this
it's all I live for...

8. Ha!- They put a price on this!
Empty all the treasuries of the world
and you couldn't buy
the first letter of the first word
Laborers rest when they hear of this,
Beauties surrender their play,
Armies lay down their weapons,
Statues weep
as warmth caresses every shape
and leads to people,
wild lucid
giving themselves away

Three Dharmasala Poems

I'm a Song (about the quiet nights in Dharmasala)

Aaah, Listen!

Silence!

Like tall cathedral bells
great peals of wonder
spanning heaven and earth

Take me to you
to your dark embrace
to forget distraction, old hurt
to rest with you
to be made whole again

You match a life I carry within
and I need this touch that can cover
the broad me,
that is deep and fine
so that the morning's child will appear
fresh, and chasing the dawn!

prayer a small candle
eclipsed by the light of day
a prompting to open the door and see who's there
a messenger announcing the arrival of the king,
medicine that grows as it's needed
with grace and comfort
least expected yet hoped for still,
against unbelief
A barren river bed offers up its cries
and stirs the core of heaven to come running
pouring itself in streams
flooding valley plains
Search out the beginning of this movement in us
to reach out, to reach upwards
and it's of the same glory as its end
like holding a small gold coin close
and passing through gates
until you arrive at a city
where everything is made of that same light...

You are the poetry, and I'm just the fortunate one
today who gets to say it...

O, but what have I to give?
I, who arrive late, empty-handed
still surprised at the sudden luxury
of knowing you
At your inviting,
I am hushed,
and so, wide-eyed, I point,
as to a falcon or a robin,
to this meeting made
of so many roads left behind
This time that alights, so briefly,
is the gift itself to me
What could I possibly add that would be worthy?
Of myself, nothing,
but here,
my thankfulness,
a mirror
showing how lovely you are...

(and one from back in Thailand)

I go to be by myself
to draw out these secrets
their pull is stronger than anything else
the outside arranges itself to match these needs
still being born
we will see in the end why this urgency
why every limitation was broken
and everything moved to face this center

I was the one who treated you wrongly
I was the one who overlooked you
Now I lift up your image
let me pay you back for what I have taken
and then let me do what pleases you best
With my own hands let me make recompense

With my own hands, I will harvest the wood
to build you a palace, to build you a throne
With my own hands I will dig from the ground and polish
the stones then learn to build the walls and floors

I will grow the fields make the cloth to dress you
I will mine the jewels with my own hands
and fashion an ornament for you

Learn every healing art
produce with this very body every healing influence
and care for you from the earliest age,
all through your years,
assuring your body is healthy and strong

I will grow the food draw the water prepare for you
all that is delightful, satisfying
Attend every school, engage in all discipline
then give to you the best of what I have learned
From a garden I will work and offer you
the flowers and fruit

Everything that was taken from you,
I will repay, ten-fold, a hundred-fold
Let me create the kind of world you would like to live in
provide you with family, fidelity, harmony
offer this life to match all need
I will be there before any fall

I was the one, but now, because I see you, truly,
this is how I would have you know of me

And if there is any you would have me serve, tell me now
Your parents, your children, grandchildren,
those who would otherwise harm before the thought even enters their mind,
those who would help before the thought has occurred to them, near and
distant relations, neighbors, friends,
I will accomplish this with the practice of peace
Show me, I will do it to your satisfaction and delight
and me?, myself?, as it pleases you

My body moans and opens
remembering the place of my birth
Great surrounding silence
rich and alive, a continual sense of renewal and depth
The beauty is sustaining, it becomes who we are

How many times am I from the mountains
or from the lands where there are rivers,
the lakes and wood, from ocean communities
The people there all know each other
the families know each other
and the parents who grew up together
help to care for the children of their friends
This land sustains us
mighty in its enduring generosity
free with no borders
our breathing extends for miles and miles
All this green and fresh breathes with us
helps our body soothes our mind and strengthens
our spirit
Silences, deep rest for all of us
We turn up in the morning completely renewed
All of our surrounding lands, animals, stream and wind
follow this rhythm, they are a part of our life
woven through each aspect
the rich scents from mountain, stream and fields
we breathe in and out all night long
feed our body heal our mind and feeling
keep us strong
sprouting harvest, fertile soil, clear pure water

I remember this from a distance of untold miles and years
from a place where silences are difficult to find
they seldom go all the way to the bottom
and scents are faint,
only sometimes lightly arriving on a wind

We seem to remember together, and not be sure
 as we look at each other, of what we are remembering
 about where we come from
 about the places and times where we took care of
 one another and our families were fed by many others
 In this place now we barely seem to remember
 the night outside seldom truly rests
 and the wearing goes on, not having fully
 reached bottom having forgotten the earth

Still this is with me
 I remember my body remembers all my home
 my rooted in ancient life
 strong, deep, enduring
 fresh, vital, clear as new birth
 I try to bring this all to where I am today
 tonight. When we harm our mother we harm ourselves
 I saw visions of stores filled with products we've somehow convinced
 ourselves we need
 restless, aimless; wandering having forgotten
 We cover over silence and rest
 not recognizing each other any more, only
 this sense somewhere at times coming more clear uneasy,
 that we were not always like this our past and truer selves
 reach out try to mend the ways we've missed
 We have so much a longer, deeper history
 ours to draw from from the beginning entirely natural
 balanced, in accord, wise like this
 Our forgetting is thin just on top
 although appearances may cover so much territory with
 signs of forgetting where and who we are
 This is brief, will be, has to be by its own reasons
 and we will return our family is here
 our family waits again to rest together
 to renew each other to give to one another
 this rich fragrant life soothing subtle

eases us gently through generations
the mountains become our bones
fields the breath of a gesture

I am She from whom the tides have risen
the creative hand that touches and brings shape
to these features
self-born and mother of all
I am called protectress of my own children
in coming forth as the spirit
awakened in the heart of man

the gentle green of grasses
soft on rounded hills
misted
by the clear pond
in the silence
of morning musty evergreen
bird above with silvered wings
the stillness, a presence behind the work
and the labor of birth

I have created my lover, man devoted
and through my strength, my life blood
my names are known, taking form in his life
We are joined in dark quiet rivers
passionate love
I brush against his cheek
a soft face
close enough to be
an inspiration
strong enough to be heard

Torches light the burial ground
and roar like thunder when the wind blows
Families wail for their beloved one gone
and some others chant in a circle heads bowed
Through the smoke and dust
there are those who sit still
back straight
eyes wide open
breathe in and out all the passing days and nights

A small tarp shelters one
he takes just enough food
and little rest
his darling one has gone
he knows he will soon follow

Some distance from him a fire hisses
bones crackle teeth fall to the ground
Women are shaking, hysterical with tears
and a son is doubled over
No one expected this!

and quiet, nearby, another corpse
skin all uneven in color swollen so that it's hard
to tell if it was a man or a woman who died
birds circle, peck at the legs
and dogs run in and chase the birds

all that's left of some are bones and
a little hair left stuck to the scalp
Images dance across the view of that one
holding still and steady
Visions of all the beauty sought after
Winds move the graveyard dust around his feet
and onto the blanket that keeps his legs warm
specks of pale mixed with tan earth

(he looks)

"All that is left of once vibrant life
All the fighting, loving, small concerns
great effort
and all we forget in a day!"

and the ring of trees sway
a movement like dancing to long breathing in pause and
breathing out a long breath
Their roots reach deep into the earth
and circle the lights of a hundred small fires

Cold days begin
more blankets to keep the body warm
Watching the train of families and friends
never stopping for a moment bringing the dead
Some calm comes after many days
of fires leaping up inside
mind and feelings running out on their own
reliving the past laid over scenes of fires
dying out in the cold morning darkness
Some more steadiness
even through the times when the body shakes
and the mind tightens too much
too hard to hold

The spirits seep in and out of view
all manner of shapes and forms
some splendid, radiant, taking up the whole ground
others so hurting and lost
most move like a great soundless procession passing on

Families stay for less time now, because of the cold
and only the fewer large birds walk freely about
The first snows come and seem to seal the memory
of all the faces that were loved so

Teeth chattering hair forming icicles
 watching shorter days and wind
 there is enough wood only for shorter days outside
 the shelter

The boneyard burial ground loses its ability
 to surprise even one morning when the points
 of elbows shins and hands reached through
 at odd places throughout the fields
 and they were not reaching for anything

Long time few people come
 only the professionals
 dumping bodies and setting them ablaze
 or leaving them barely wrapped
 Heaviness pulses in and out with this feeling
 of being here and being free

Wait and watch
 all manner of images of birth appear
 in nest, from seed, mothers, calves, fishes, stars
 with each in breath a wave rises
 hurls itself forward and draws back again into
 the womb
 Oh, but to know that place!

My child, I woke this morning in a dream
 of cradling you gently in my arms
 and as I began to know where we were
 I leaned over to shield you from the wind
 a few flaps blew in the breeze, the only sound
 and all at once I was awake
 all the illusion was gone out of me
 and this holding was light and so full of joy

I know we must leave
one of us certainly, before the other
and so, here, I feed you my last piece of bread
It's so easy to give you joy
because nothing else moves around us
and seeing goes in fresh clear ways
deep into this life we share
here is rest

and the rains have stopped the snow has
turned all this earth into more of a churning ground
gone is the heaviness all the sadness is past
there's just this wonder that I found my way
here at all
Wonder and this thankful sense that touches
the new and old faces that appear

I heard a bird today far off in the woods
and it means that soon life will return here
a sleeping giant stirs only slowly
more animals appear
the nightly ceremonies grow longer again
weeping and celebration
I hear music a band has gathered
and they play long songs not wanting to stop

Soon I will return home
although I do not know why
healing has turned many things that were inside
completely out into the life of the world
I find you now in many places
like I am finding myself
So much is sweeping in and out of existence
leaving traces and more
their hearts moving in all the world
inside a small tear I found the mother of this great life

that we each follow
knowing the course
and something of how deep this goes within
I offer this calm touch
reaching from a clear and even rest

The imitation of immortality
not to ever sleep
dressing to look young
running wild pursued by a phantasm of death
that has our own face
We lay confidence in our plans
and lean so heavy
All we gather around us
as if to prove our survival
is made of uneasy, hectic patterns
We'd rather not look directly
instead parade pale images
the bloodless forms of an undying dream-reverie

May I remember illness
 may I remember loss
 may I remember fear
 may I remember death

May I remember the power of love, and to love
 may I remember those who are forgotten
 by almost everyone else
 May I remember children
 may I remember the world I live in
 may I remember those who are hungry
 those who are without peace
 those who grieve

May I remember my spiritual guides (3 times)
 may I remember the great treasure of happiness
 the natural world, creative
 May I remember the bodhimind
 Awakening for the benefit of all
 and may I remember equality of view

May I remember my parents
 may I remember my friends
 May I think beyond this time and place

May I remember to practice what works
 'guarding the sense bases'
 emptiness-immanence
 beneficence The beloved
 'unsealing the spring'
 sending and taking
 the interdependence of all...

A Glance Meditation on the Graduated Path

All around me, right now, people are dying
 Everyone I know one day will die
 What do I wish for them?
 I too will die
 What do I wish for myself?
 Everyday I should think: 'Today could be my last day
 How do I want to live it?'
 As it is said, '
 Why not dedicate it now to universal happiness'
 'Death comes to all, and the time of death is uncertain'

The effect of even the smallest of our actions is unfailing
 and this life is precious
 While we are here there is so much that is good, worthwhile, worth
 honoring, celebrating, worth affirming

and, at the same time, many suffer
 for many reasons, physical, social, psychological
 either at the hands of others, or by their own hands

Knowing this much I take refuge in the Lama, the Buddha,
 the Dharma and Sangha,
 and will give up even the slightest of harmful actions
 May ethics, meditation, and wisdom
 develop in me

Individual liberation is the basis,
 allowing for there to be empathy, more extensive seeing,
 and the ability to live fully and to work
 May I see the importance of this

and that, just like me, all others are exactly the same
 in wanting only happiness and not even the slightest hurt
 but without the opportunity or the knowledge
 of the causes of peace,
 let alone supreme happiness,

many continue to know dissatisfaction,
many continue to suffer

May I take them as my responsibility
for now and for the future

May I always meditate on the equality of self and others
and the exchange of self-cherishing for cherishing others

May I help them all in as many ways as I can

The true nature of all beings
is loving kindness and compassion

Remember this when you see
constructions workers working
in the middle of the street;

when you see people
walking arm in arm;
A gray haired woman standing
on the corner, a young man
with a stern expression behind the wheel
of his car

Remember this when you think of
your co-worker; when you see young children,
when you think of your friends, family,
when you think of yourself

When you see someone lost, or absorbed
or when you see animals
birds, fishes, dogs

Strangers, the proud,
the hurt and the hurtful
People doing stupid things,
crazy, out of touch
or just wasteful

Remember this when observing
those who leave the world
the past, the future

those overwhelmed by mistaken
ideas and emotions

remember this is there always unfailing
without diminishing

the nature of all beings is universal love and compassion
remember this when you observe your own thoughts,
and feelings, body, the world

remember this when you see
objects of anger or attachment
the impatient, the fool,
the afflicted

if you see how precious everyone is
you would agree that they are worthy
not only of offerings, but of supreme offerings
the whole universe, every happiness
a gesture representing devotion

and the only giving of something sufficient
is to follow this true nature
to express this everywhere we go
as much as we can, of course
in all situations

The sunlight is all full of night
this deep rest gives it its power
Within each of the forms given by the earth
we taste the source in cool stillness
These ways are turning in a perfect circle
The mother spirit gives birth to the father spirit
whose power and grace derives from silence, perfect peace,
unity, wholeness
flowing through his hands and arms
born man and woman each become the other
Nurturance, and the home of fortitude
becomes all the shining spheres of creation

With the thought to awaken the life
 that is most beneficial to others
 consider caring for yourself the actual practice
 of caring for others
 generate a parent's love

A great many are with you and within you now, this moment
 and the entirety of this vast field
 will be reached both now and eventually
 by the life you create today

For all the uncontrollable suffering,
 have mercy
 generate a life that can ease every sorrow
 and end, finally, the trains of hurt that have been passed on

Fulfill the aspiration of each and every one
 giving what is needed most
 removing every obstacle, resolving every hindrance
 this love goes on, re-creating its own nature
 everywhere it touches it is born

Generate the true force capable of helping,
 the supreme healer
 embracing all equally, excluding none
 this pure motive ends the sense of separation
 and we move in accord with all the spirits in this life

giving with freedom to move through
 our love gains a profound view, open-hearted, magnanimous
 and as close to every being as their most true love

This protector spirit rises in lives
 soothes all that is not yet whole
 leads without fail to sources that sustain
 providing a way to awakening,
 becoming the very source of renewal

with the dedicated awakening mind
joy is complete, Great Peace
as we find within love
the sight and strength for all our work

That mind that cares for all beings equally
giving rise to most wondrous, healing effects
that spirit, uplifting,
producing the verity of richness within
a savior appearing where there was none before
a heart knowing the history of unmatched, unmet need
stilling relentless motion
quelling feelings of loss, disappointed desires
opening sight
that grace,
that peerless beauty producing spiritual awakening
of that joy, that boundless love, I now give praise!
Giver of solace and sustenance,
life from within that brings us renewal
repairs the body, restores our faith
this potential is brought forward,
recognizing its own nature,
and working in countless ways to help us see true

Wishing you peace
quiet in body and mind
that most effective means of becoming clear
opening the mind

Wishing you joy
that most wonderful way
of opening the heart

May you know love
the warm touch of every kindness

May your life become love
that most comprehensive view
the source of all our happiness,
our blissful awareness
and healing nature

May you have discriminating insight
that most useful companion
and concentration
the strength to direct the mind
a most productive way to live

Wishing you an awakened intuition
that most reliable guide fully present

and steadiness equanimity, adaptability
that most practical way of being in the world

May compassion be awakened in your life
that means of generating the strength to work
the source of all our beneficial action

May a full birth be yours
Heart-wakefulness

May mindfulness be yours
may you have the full presence of mind
to see beauty, the depth of life
to be able to learn and develop understanding

May strength and serenity become allied
with being completely awake

May the whole breath and body be clearly known in you
strengthening constitution, constancy of character

May you live amidst ease
know and become the nectar of wisdom

Blend all experiences with love and awareness

and may you be free to walk on all paths
giving from the bounty of your heart
blessing with clarified mind
creating lucid happiness and well being everywhere you go

I live in this world
of joy, and sorrow

of comfort and ease,
and of struggle, and pain

of friendship, and community
and of loneliness and isolation

I live in this world of riches and poverty

where there is health
and illness

Where some people can only try to care for themselves,
while others are at the point where more and more they have thinking about
and caring for others as the aim of their life

There are people serving others in this world -
there are people taking joy in that

I live in this world
where many are in need of a protector,
where many are in need of an advocate

where many people do not have even a basic education...

Today, in this world, there are many who are kept back from doing good
things because of some illness

Today there are many who are broken-hearted
Today there are many who have been hurt in relationships

Every day in this world there are people experiencing pain:
children, teenagers, adults, the middle-aged, the elderly;
those who are alone, those with problems of the mind

I live in this world where many people are in need of some form of human
contact,

I live in this world where many people suffer from depression,
where many people are blocked by depression

I live in this world where many people are experiencing
the absence of love

I live in this world where someone is in danger of falling,
where someone is in danger of slipping - and the result can be severe for
them...

I live in this world where many people use drugs,
or drink to escape
where many people overeat

where many are without peace,
without control, without any freedom of mind

Right now, there are people being trapped by their addictions, overwhelmed
by their delusions,
lost

There are many people in need of strength
light, and peace

I live in this world where people experience misfortune, accidents
and are burdened by regret or are blocked by regret, doubts,
recriminations...

I live in this world where many people are lonely, or numb,
self-absorbed, superficial, or greedy, distracted, afraid, or sad,

where there are those who are feeling ugly, or feeling hopeless

I live in this world where most people
are without any sense of the sacred dimension in life

I live in this world where the deluded the band together
and increase ignorance and suffering

I live in this world where there are many people's
experience is only that of a lower-realm being
(the hell realm, the hungry ghost realm, the animal realm)

Every day in this world there are people with no perspective on their life,
dissatisfied, indulgent

I live in this world where people don't think about death

Every day there are people wasting time, not seeing what they have, not
taking advantage of all the opportunities they have while they still can

I live in this world where the vast majority of people are completely without
any Dharma

(Dharma: Buddhist teaching, or religious teaching; the result of Buddhist
practice or religious practice; and true medicine for the ills of the world)

I live in this world where few people have received instructions in
meditation, and, of these, most are still unclear about the essential points

I live in this world, where, though we may do some good,
though we may improve our lives,
those few who *have* listened to teachings, *and understood*,
many times don't practice

and, of those who do practice, often they are not able
to overcome the obstacles to meditation,
and practice in a way that they progress...

I live in this world where even those people who have received, and practiced, and accomplished a great deal of Dharma still suffer they still fall into experiences that are like the lower realms

and I live in this world where some of the people who have become stable in realization don't share the Dharma as much as they could

I live in this world where though we can help others too often we don't

where though can remove others suffering and give them happiness, too often we don't

I live in this world
where people don't live in the present
Where people don't know their own worth, or the worth of others,
where people don't know their own potential...

Three bc Poems

at once
it is the sun and moon
the sun and the rain
that brings everything out beautifully

it's balm,
and nectar

it's food,
water,
and medicine

it is the embrace
of a mother
or a wife

the encouraging voice of an old friend,

there is no end to bodhicitta

it is a candle
a scripture,

it's clearing the ground to build a house,
or a library, or a school

clearing the path so we can walk
clearing away clouds so we can see

there's no end to this

it's poetry-
showing all good things

and it's hope restored,
mistakes forgotten,
gotten over, gotten past

it's freedom,
and welcoming arms to someone
learning to walk

it's the joy that speeds healing
and it's miracles in abundance

it is paradise itself
and it's every small, kind act
containing worlds

Tell me, Who can speak of this fully?
We all can

this is our birthright,
our very nature wanting to be born,
it's the sun of wisdom and compassion inseparable

drawing all things together
leaving nothing out
no one, no teaching,
no person or place or time

it is universal
and personal
our teacher
our very self
our Lord
and worthy of every praise

it is selfless prayer
wonder of wonders- actually praying itself

it is self existing - just like this...

this goes beyond
anything we can say about it
and yet, it's somehow still
always fully present

awakening, actualizing
from life, bringing forth life,
love itself
our true life

this essential sun
beyond words and the ground of all words
saying, if we were to put words to it,
aah, may all beings be happy...

and we all must find a way to speak,
to reply,

because of this
to say what's in us

how will we live?

this says
"dedicate yourself to the ultimate purpose of all beings"

and, "Don't waste time" "Everyday, every hour is precious"

this says, "here- sweeten your disposition"

and, "see time",

and, "give yourself"

how will we reply?

how will we live?

just this- for me, this is the one point containing all

for me, this is the golden road, with heaven worlds all around
where all benefit, in some way

this, is the most satisfying path,
regardless of struggle, the most fulfilling
regardless of how hard it is to say, it's the biggest joy,
the brightest joy

this is what is reliable
for me, the safe haven,
it is breath, it is sight...

for me, it is giving,
and knowing even now
the pleasure of having its gift received

this is love
and this will, purpose, of human life, lived to the fullest-
oh, many voices, many hearts celebrate this with me now

(What is bodhicitta?)

Bodhicitta is our own true nature,
of wisdom and compassion inseparable...)

how to speak of this?

it's the rain that nourishes growing things
it's the sun that makes everything flourish

it's the embrace of a mother,
or a wife,
melting troubles away

bodhicitta
it's like the encouraging voice of an old friend

it's selfless prayer, naturally
having a purpose past what we see now

it is a word, it is magic,
parting clouds so we can see,
or clearing a path
or building a house, or a library, or a school

this one source everywhere
becomes a hospital, and doctors, and medicine

in lost times, it is inspiration

this is pure light
this is warm touch
and it is clarity, and strength

it reaches over every ocean
over every rocky climb

through whatever barred gates
 past any disbelieving mind
 giving life

who can ever speak of this,
 and what can compare to this?
 there is no end, from what I can see
 and all day, my heart sings that this is in me

What can compare to this?

it's like a hero,
 calling captives out of their dungeon
 it's like a fresh morning
 after one was given up for dead
 (astonishment! disbelief! and then, a great wave
 moving through everything,
 of praise, and generosity...)

it's like fragrance, or memory, or dream that speeds healing
 it is a true word spoken when that's needed
 it is direction, and food, and gifts appearing in our hands to give,
 it is learning, and giving to match someone's need

it is song, universal language,
 universal and for all times currency
 and a true friend,
 it's meeting our own true nature
 what can compare to this?

so then, it is ethics, and wisdom,
 meditation,
 patience, and effort,
 all, natural, and effortless in a way

it is all the forms created to express one intent
 and, it is all the names given,

it is tradition and all our seeing past form and tradition

today I write this because it's the only thing I can think of that draws all things to itself
the only thing I can think of that gives everything else some place in the world

all the teachings, all the differences, all the wonder, all the pain

this- is the ultimate name the one thing most worth praising
this- is the activity of all buddhas,
the very nature of all heroes, and heroines,
angels and saviors

with my little notes at home, today, this is all I wanted to write

it's an elixir
reviving the dead

a teacher
filling your mind with great things

it's a compass

a key

or a lock when you need a lock

it's an oar when you need an oar

an umbrella when you need one

a net holding back poisonous creatures

a shield
first into battle

a word spoken
and not just any word
but just the word you need to hear,
a magic word...

it's encouragement
fresh life
inspiration to continue your journey
with wisdom,
with clear eyes
and with joy

it's food
it's big love...

this is music
and grace

and love's power

love pouring itself

it's the friendliness you meet
and it's food

it's simplicity itself-
good things
for now,
and for generations to come

everything contributes to the power of this practice

it can be like
the first rain after a blazing summer

or it can be like a lion's heart
a warrior who's never known fear...

it's setting things in order

it's saying your name
calling your name
(not like all the others-
your true name)

the graver the danger
the stronger the will to protect

the more something is worth
the greater the will to give

this is peace, and action, as one

moving worlds
not fading
giving to be given
awakened in teachers
to be awakened in me
the fullness of love, given
to be awakened in you
and on and on...

what words are there to express this...?

look!

this is you
this is for you

May the thought of others suffering and need
completely destroy my self-centeredness

and may I set in motion and maintain the causes
for people to be free from suffering

like a vacuum
or like a magnet, completely removing the suffering that people experience

(‘like removing a thorn from flesh, ‘)

like a cooling rain, a balm,
or a warm sun if that’s what’s needed
completely dispelling suffering

like a great rain washing away sorrow
music
light
water, food and drink

or like the sun, destroyer of sorrow,

a great wind,
a swift river,
a laser,
medicine clearing the way,
friendship arriving when its needed most

all of one meaning

and, in a single moment, may I set in motion and maintain the causes for
people to be richly blessed, in every way

May they have every happiness

I pray that whatever hardships I have experienced or know about, whatever
lack, may others not experience those

I pray they will have it easier than I've had

May they not experience any privation or difficulty-
not even the slightest

And I pray that whatever good things I have known in this life, or even just
heard about, may they all experience these, and more,
knowing the love of teachers, family and friends...

Who stayed the hand raised in anger
and how did it happen that someone was moved to give?
Where did a person actually find the strength to save a life?

Somewhere, someone made a vow
to serve

When did meditation become so easy?,
and when did laughter decide to return?
Why did this sheltered place, as if out of nowhere, appear?

Someone is praying
Someone has given over their life

And there will be a harvest
Estranged friends and family will meet again
A fever has broken,
A passage is clear

Someone has found the treasure!
New life is on the way

Comfort enters a home,
as if in person
A writer with something to say find his words,
his touch again
A falling person hangs suspended in mid-air
and is startled, but he knows what has happened

Somewhere quite a clear decision has been made,
a brightness simplifying every arrangement

So write on, sing on, play on,
this verse continues as long as there are growing things

As some eternal spring has been tapped
and its streams flow to meet all the weary
with welcomed, unexpected grace

I bow to the precepts that give life

I bow to the precepts that heal (soothe... pacify...)

I bow to the precepts that protect the mind from suffering

I bow to the precepts that bring peace to self and others

I bow to the precepts that give health

I bow to the precepts that give strength

I bow to the precepts that purify all beings

I bow to the precepts that are the expression of great respect between people

I bow to the precepts that are the expression of reverence for life,

I bow to the precepts that are the expression of this wisdom

I honor the precepts that are the essential character of all good people

I pay homage to the precepts that support meditation

I bow to the precepts that tame the mind, and keep it humble

I bow to the precepts that bestow dignity upon self and others

I bow to the precepts that are true wealth

I bow to the precepts whose practice ennobles

whose practice uplifts

whose practice beautifies the world

I bow to the precepts that can bring safety for self and others

I bow to the precepts that can bring freedom from fear to self and others

I bow to the precepts that create the causes for happiness, now and in the future, for self and others

I bow to the precepts whose beneficial influence, even when practiced by just one person, reaches far

I honor the precepts that clarify the mind

Even the worst person, as soon as they turn their mind to the precepts, gains some improvement in their mind

I bow to the precepts that are the essential nature of the nectar that relieves the sufferings of the six realms the goodness

I bow to the precepts that liberate

I pay homage to the precepts as spoken, written, and practiced

Any person in whom the precepts are strong is an object of refuge, whether they be a layperson or ordained

They are a source of safety and strength

Even without speaking, their presence alone comforts, and can heal

I bow to the precepts that are the essential character of all bodhisattvas and saints, and all good persons

I bow to the precepts that nourish, and that bring happiness

A Prayer to the Saints

Ajaan Mun
 Ajaan Lee
 I invoke you! I call to you!
 Come! Bring your presence here, now

Ajaan Buddhadasa
 Ajaan Chah
 I invoke you! I call to you!

U Pandita Sayadaw
 Ajaan Maha Boowa
 I invoke you! I call to you!
 Come! Bring your presence here, now

Tsong Khapa,
 Gyalwa Karmapa, Rangjung Rigpay Dorje
 Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso
 Lama Yeshe
 Lama Zopa
 I invoke you! I call to you!
 Come! Bring your presence here, now

Kyabje Sakya Trinzin
 I invoke you! I call to you!

Dezhung Rinpoche
 Thrangu Rinpoche
 Bokar Rinpoche
 I invoke you! I call to you!
 Come! Bring your presence here, now

Kyabje Kalu Rinpoche
 Lama Lodo
 Kenpo Karthar
 I invoke you! I call to you!

Come! Bring your presence here, now

Ananda Mayi Ma
Swami Sivananda
I invoke you! I call to you!

Ramana Maharshi
Nisargadatta Maharaj
Swami Vivekananda
Paramahansa Yoganandaji
Meher Baba
Hazarat Inayat Kahn
Pir Vilayat Kahn
I invoke you! I call to you!
Come! Bring your presence here, now

Lord Jesus
Lord Buddha
Mother Mary
I invoke you! I call to you!
Come! Bring your presence here, now

Master Dogen
Bodhidharma
Patriarch Hui-Neng
Venerable Hsuan-Hua
I invoke you! I call to you!

Kenpo Tsultrim Gyatso
Thich Nhat Hahn
I invoke you! I call to you!
Come! Bring your presence here, now

Jamgon Kongtrul
Jamyang Khyentse Chokyi Lodro
Dudjom Rinpoche

Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche
 Tsultrig Rinpoche
 Chatral Rinpoche
 Chagdud Tulku
 I invoke you! I call to you!

Lama Tharchin
 I invoke you! I call to you!
 Come! Bring your presence here, now

Khyabje Ling Rinpoche
 Khyabje Trijang Dorje Chang Rinpoche
 Serkong Rinpoche

Kenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche
 I invoke you! I call to you!

Geshe Rabten
 Geshe Sopa
 Nyoshul Khen Rinpoche
 Gen Lamrimpa
 I invoke you! I call to you!

Geshe Dhargyey
 Geshe Tsultrim
 Milarepa
 Gampopa
 Atisha
 Serlingpa
 Longchenpa
 I invoke you! I call to you!
 Come! Bring your presence here, now

Tulku Ugyen Rinpoche
 Geshe Wangdu
 Akong Tulku
 Lama Kunga

Lama Jigme Rinpoche
 Tulku Thondup
 Pabonkha Rinpoche
 Penor Rinpoche
 Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche

I invoke you! I call to you!
 Come! Bring your presence here, now

Please be my witness
 I pray to you
 Please grant me your blessings
 You Living Buddhas,
 Masters of the Great Perfection
 You who have Jewel-like bodhicitta
 You who are like the sun and the moon

Glorious Sages,
 Foe-Destroyers,
 Exemplars,
 Benefactors of living beings,
 protectors of living beings,
 teachers,
 healers

Pray be my witness
 Please help me to pacify my mind,
 and, just as you have done,
 to accomplish the qualities and stages of the path

Pray, grant me your blessing
 help me to control my mind and emotions;
 to live a good life
 so that I can benefit others
 as it should be

You beings of great wisdom and compassion

I bow to you
I pray to you

You liberated beings
Great compassionate spiritual guides

Please help me to purify the two obscurations-
and complete the two collections

Please help me in this, my hour of need

Immaculate Buddhas,
Foe-destroyers,
Liberators,
Arhats,
Bodhisattvas
you who have indestructible vows
Please give me your blessing

Pray help me to be free of suffering and the causes of suffering
and to have happiness and the causes of happiness
and please help me to help others to be free of suffering
and to have happiness

You who have the qualities of being ripened and free
mature understanding
stable realization
always present kindness and compassion

Please give me your blessing

By the power of the unfailing Three-Jewels' compassion,
and by the natural force of the need that exists
in me and in the world,
in response to the cries and prayers of living beings
in the six realms and bardo,
may the aims of this prayer be fulfilled

exactly as they were made

everyday I go out with a short stick in one hand
and an old burlap sack slung over my shoulder
I dig in random places in the hard ground
looking for food for my family for this one day
or for medicine
looking for any new life at all

too many times well after night fall
I've returned with nothing
and I've had to see all their hopes go unfulfilled
I've had to face knowing we will all have to be hungry
at least one more day

but today I my wanderings
I came across sunlit fields
gardens with ripe fruit hanging on the vines
(luscious with color and sweet to the taste)
I found medicine for all our ills
streams that would help a person recover
with just the smallest sip
The airs, and the fragrance in this place
all carried life
it was as if there was music everywhere...

I dropped my little stick, and bag
dumb with wonder
not knowing how I could say this
or carry back even the smallest piece
carefully I took the seeds
breathed the fragrances deep into my lungs
let that sun warm my face
and the place tell me its secrets
of how close we all are

I could only return with some roots
and a few seeds, hints, intimations
I try to draw this on the ground, and tell about it,

but few believe me

and so I wait for the seeds to grow
for the roots to take hold again
and give others light
I try to remember everything I can,
and say it all faithfully

A deity for all reasons

Because this is universal love and compassion, accepting all, generous, warmly encouraging, like the sun in the sky, extending in all directions, pure, transcendent, and capable of manifesting in a multitude of ways to benefit living beings, it is called
Thousand-Armed Avalokiteshvara;

May all share in these blessings... OM MANI PEME HUM

Because this is Divine Feminine energy, quick to respond, with magical activity, the equivalent of the patron saint of lost causes, spiritual beauty bringing light, giving hope, removing obstacles, calming fear, pacifying suffering bringing harmony to every surrounding circumstance, bringing life, and happiness, and being the sum of all optimism, inspiring, positive energy, enabling all the good things we would do to become effective, to become fulfilled, to become complete, this is called Green Tara;

May all share in these blessings... OM TARE TUTTARE TURE SOHA

Because this is clear wisdom, causing Dharma to arise in the minds of sentient beings, illuminating, cutting the bonds of suffering, and is the lord of all doctors, the lord of speech, of writers and teachers, it is called Manjushri;

May all share in this benefit, and enjoy brilliant freedom and peace... OM AH RA PA TZA NA DHI

Because this is fierce, utterly victorious, powerful, undaunted, unrelenting, of great strength, empowering all virtuous activity, and like a thunder-clap, brilliant, awakening, healing, cutting away all that is superfluous- burdens gone; and because this is protective, bringing a feeling of peace and safety, this is called by the name of Vajrapani; and all other protectors; the essence of all protectors;

May all beings have happiness... may all beings enjoy these blessings...
HUNG BENZRA PE

Because it is illuminating, warm, transcendent pure love, light, and freedom, this is Amitabha;

May all beings enjoy this pure land... NAMO AMITABHA BUDDHA

Because this is love, it is Maitreya;

May all share in these blessings... OM BUDDHA MAITREYA MEM
SOHA

Because this is birthless and deathless, and giving long life, it is Amitayus;

May all share in these blessings... OM AMITAYUS SOHA

Because this is healing, freedom from knots in the mind, and freedom from depression, being health in mind, body, and spirit, radiant, life-giving, it is called Medicine Buddha, Healing Buddha, or Health Buddha;

May all beings be healthy and strong...

May all enjoy this happiness... TAYATHA OM BEKANDZE BEKANDZE
MAHA BEKANDZE RADZO SAMUNGATE SOHA

Because it is utterly pure, giving purity, bringing about the total purification of karma, clearing away the residue of wrong thinking and wrong action, this is called Vajrasattva;

May all beings share this merit... OM BENZRA SATO HUM

Because this is utterly peaceful and pure, soothing, pacifying, healthy and healing, and nourishing, giving in abundance, with much love and joy, with the pure elements in balance, giving that, it is called White Tara;

May all beings have the blessings of a strong constitution, excellent resistance, and, if necessary, great powers of recuperation... OM TARA TUTTARE TURE SOHA

Because this bodhicitta is true wealth, to be given and enjoyed, it is called Golden-Yellow Tara, Vasudara; OM VASUDARA SOHA

Because it is all this, it is called by the name of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, our root guru, and all other gurus and bodhisattvas; Vajradhara, the Adi- or Primordial Buddha, our original nature, the nature of mind, transcending concepts; it is called peace, fulfillment, the great perfection; it is called our true nature, the basis of all.

This is our aim to be realized. This is what is to be actualized, awakened, brought forth. This is what is to be accomplished.
May whatever qualities are necessary for the benefit of living beings awaken in me, and in all others.

Every deity contains all deities. And while this is true, it is also true that the practice of any one aspect awakens that quality, until they are all together, present, and activated as necessary.

Different practices can add something to all that we do as well. They can be mutually clarifying, strengthening, and enriching.

Any one practice includes all practices. For different kinds of people, however, or even for any one person at different times in their life different practices will make the fullness of what this means become more swiftly and easily known, and experienced.

May all beings benefit.

I want a judge who's been where I've been

A doctor who's known sickness

A comforter who once or more had their heart broken
and now has a deep well inside him made of grief

I want a soldier how has experienced the loss he'd cause another
and has not forgotten
who has it clearly in front of him

I want someone I can see is scarred the same ways as me
someone whose words and thoughts are filled with living
whose aims are filled with the knowledge of what it is to be human

I want a giver who's known poverty

A bringer of light who's stumbled through darkness for ages
and now carefully and completely shows the way for those who need it

I want someone to feed me who has himself known hunger

A Savior who's fallen before lifting up

A True Angel not born that way but one who has also been broken, who has
fallen and risen up many times -
Where else would he get the will and the determination to lift up another?
knowing how much is at stake, reaching out to protect all that life

I want to hear the encouraging voice not only of well-wishers
its not enough

I need to hear the voices of those who've had their legs go out from under
them on the long climb
more times than they can remember

and known shame, fear, self-loathing, helplessness, and despair

so they are now without blaming anyone, but with infinite mercy
and pure longing for all who struggle and who need

With who can I speak except the full-born human -
who else would have sympathy - that word full with it's meaning?

I want a judge who's felt himself to be the worst sinner of all
that one I'd trust with my secrets
anyone else on a high seat is a danger - arrogant, capricious, unworthy

some once tarnished trophy shines more brightly than one never worn, never
tested - it's worth more to us all

I want someone who can spell struggle
someone who's lost more than a few battles
had their hearts broken open never to fully recover
so they are without pride, or feeling so different, after all, from those they
once scorned
but with infinite sympathy and dedication

rumped, soiled, bloodied, beautiful,
turning fully human
having also known humiliation and defeat
having been that too and never forgetting
with gratitude for every small thing

In these times
of crazy thick blindness
rage and grief:

what's needed

the strongest of medicines
the most nourishing of food for your limbs
the clearest of days
the brightest star
the most lucid of letters sent to you
the greatest strength
and a beacon to keep this ship on course
to defeat fear
and live on in spite of wars

these are messengers when ordinary lines of communication are cut
prayers on the wing seeking home:

The Cantatas of J.S. Bach
the poetry of Langston Hughes,
the photography of my father -
(with the blessed eyes and radiance of the children
those moments he's captured!)

Rumi, Rilke, Pablo Neruda - Lovers of Life!
Walt Whitman - undaunted!
Beethoven, Mozart, Teleman, bright nourishment

Nathan Milstein, Arthur Grumiaux, Itzak Perlman,
Pepe Romero, Andres Segovia, Vladimir Horowitz,
Yo-Yo Ma, Bobby McFerrin, the celestial Andrea Bocelli -

their names are talisman, warding off evil
in times of sickness, sadness, suffering and death,
these are cure
breaking bonds, freedom of movement again

pure laughter, and pearls of truth
in times of siege, a high fortress wall

messengers:

all your Indian saints, and all your Tibetan saints
and all those nameless Workers whose very lives bring joy, those who have
been and those who are now
pure giving

and the dream of love
of taking the hand of your beloved
and entering the magic of days that are filled
where all is made more than complete
but going from fullness to fullness
the overflowing joy of it all

Now, in these times especially,
shores and woods and high mountains
and their welcoming embraces

Teach children to read, and play with them,
learn to hold their attention
and make them laugh again and again
so that their luminosity fills the room
(this is secret nourishment every parent knows)

Weep openly, and without shame
for your brothers and for the innocent
for the formality and the lies
for the technological advances in cruelty
and for the chaos of the world
then give yourself away in some way to some stranger today, right now

do something opposed to death:
kneel and kiss a hundred bright flowers
as they grow from the ground
improvise a dance right on the spot where you are standing,

or completely forgive some old grudge

feed your family with the bread of hope,
pour for us all from your special reserve
your sweet tea

When the soulless flaunt their brutal will
and their warplanes strike at us all

then
remember our ancestors and read aloud the message they have sent to us
become rain, my friend

this is the radical antidote all around

born of your honesty in the face of this
it's your beauty voiced that saves lives
your unyielding hope and courage

remembering springtime and all the new seasons to come that are in every
seed
and in every eye

In Praise of Tara

Your beauty tames the minds of living beings.
 You draw all beings to yourself.
 Your virtue calms their fears and brings happiness.

You are the one who makes the impossible possible.
 You conquer disbelief.
 You are miraculous activity, beyond comprehension.

You are 'swift to regard', quick to respond,
 the remover of obstacles, grace and blessings,
 the relative and ultimate liberator of beings

Your beauty inspires uprightness of moral character
 You pacify habit energy
 We 'shed our skins', lose our old ways,
 'like leaves falling off of trees'
 You give new strength
 You purify the mind - like the 'stream-clearing jewel'
 You uplift and brighten the mind

You set all things right
 You bring about reconciliation without impediment
 without anything blocking it
 You bring harmony to every surrounding circumstance

You bring out the best that is in us all

You make all practices effective

You are the feeling of 'yes', the sum of all optimism,
 joyful positive energy,
 the feeling of 'I can'

You are light
You are grace in my life

You are playful, youthful, joyful, quick, charming, elegant, inspiring, wise,
warm, strengthening, encouraging, healing;
How can I call you? Tara - hope, positive energy, joyful, pure, wholesome
energy

With your rivers
irrigate my limbs, these fields
With your warmth, your light
bring about the total flowering of goodness...

Because this is Divine Feminine energy, quick to respond,
with magical activity,
the equivalent of the patron saint of lost causes,
grace,
spiritual beauty bringing light, giving hope,
removing obstacles,
calming fear, pacifying suffering
bringing harmony to every surrounding circumstance,
bringing life, and happiness,
and being the sum of all optimism, inspiring, positive energy,
enabling all the good things we would do to become effective,
to become fulfilled,
to become complete,
This is called Green Tara

May all share in these blessings...