

तारका तिमिरं दीपो मायावश्यायबुद्बुदं स्वप्नं च विद्युदभ्रं च एवं द्रष्टव्यं संस्कृतं

tārakā timiram dipo
māyāvāśyāyabudbudam
svapnam ca vidyudabhram ca
evam draṣṭavyam saṃskṛtam

Like stars, or darkness, or a lamp,
A trick, a dew drop, a bubble,
A dream, a lightning flash, a cloud,
—So should one view the conditioned.

So should you see all of the fleeting world:
A star at dawn, a bubble in the stream;
A flash of lightning in a summer cloud;
A flickering lamp, a phantom, and a dream.

Sutta Studies

phenapinḍūpamam rūpaṃ
vedanā bubbulupamā
marīcikūpamā saññā
saṅkhārā kadalūpamā
māyūpamañca viññāṇaṃ
dīpitādiccabandhuna

yathā yathā nijjhāyati
yoniso uparikkhati
rittakaṃ tucchakaṃ hoti
yo nam passati yoniso

...
etādisayaṃ santāno
māyāyaṃ bālalāpini
vadhako eso akkhāto
sāro ettha na vijjati

This body's like a ball of foam,
And feeling is like a bubble;
Perception is like a mirage,
Formations like a pith-less tree,
And consciousness is like a trick;
—So says the kinsman of the sun.

However one reflects on them,
And carefully investigates:
They are empty and deserted
To one who sees them properly.

Their lineage is only this:
A nonsense-babbling fantasy,
Revealing itself a killer.
No essence is discovered here.

Samyutta Nikāya 22:95

Three Views of Transience

This famous verse serves as a climax to the Diamond Sutra, a foundation text of the Mahayana tradition. Here we see the Sanskrit version in its original script, along with a transliteration and literal translation, as well as a version translated from the Chinese (quoted in Mu Soeng, *The Diamond Sutra*, p. 135). The same sentiment is articulated in the Pali verse on the right, taken from the Samyutta Nikaya. Notice that the Pali verse is referring to each of the five aggregates in turn, while the Diamond Sutra passage lumps them all together as "conditioned phenomena." Notice also how the Sanskrit verse is more of a specific list of metaphors, while the Chinese version tends to be more poetic and somewhat less literal. Of course we recognize the Pali and Sanskrit words for bubble: *bubbula* and *budbuda*.

The sentiment is clearly the same, however, in each of the different renditions. When we place them together like this, we can trace a movement that is common in the development of Buddhism: The Pali texts may contain a detailed psychological teaching; the popular Mahayana texts capture its essence in more generalized terms; and the Chinese versions of these texts point more to concrete natural images compatible with its own rich poetic tradition. —A. Olendzki

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meditation. The tigers were apparently gone, but the rats, insects, snakes, and wild chickens were plenty of company for me.

I had certainly been aware of the possibilities of illness and had brought a water purifier and lots of medicines, but within a few days I was sick in a way that made my Korean experience (2 weeks of severe dysentery) look like a walk in the park. I had a fever and terrible diarrhea and was vomiting. To make matters worse, I had bitten into a hard object in my food and broken a tooth. In Thailand the monks went to the village to beg for food, and we took what we got. I am normally a vegetarian, but I was eating chicken and fish. The food was actually quite good. But something was making me sick.

I was terribly discouraged. Once again I'd been extremely excited about going there to practice and instead I was spending much of my time lying down, when I wasn't running to the bathroom with diarrhea or running outside to vomit. I was also feeling a lot of fear. The conditions we were living in were quite primitive, and I seemed very ill.

Maha Boowa dealt with my anxiety first. He had a relaxed, jovial air and didn't seem at all worried. "Listen,

ten," he said. "You've taken all the medicines you have. You've taken all the medicines we have. It's time to let nature take its course. We don't think you're going to die. If we thought things were that serious, we'd find you the best medical help we could. This just seems to be the problem many Westerners have when they first come to Thailand."

Instead of letting this illness keep me from practicing, he said, I should practice with it. Forget about words like dysentery, fever, even illness. The sensations I was experiencing were as good for practice as any other. What I needed to do was focus on them and stay with them. It is when the mind wanders from its concentration that the difficulties arise. Suddenly it's your illness, these are your feelings, and you're full of self-pity. But when your concentration returns, they're just sensations again. He told me just to work with it, to see the impermanent nature of it all. The unpleasant sensations and the mind-states that accompanied them: All of them were empty. None was solid.

I told him that most of the time I couldn't sit. He said the physical posture was less important than the quality of the attention. I should sit when I could and at other times just practice in bed. "Listen," Ajaan

Maha Boowa said, "you're probably discouraged. Have you thought about going home?" I admitted I had. "You could do that," he said. "You could stay a week, then go back to the United States and talk at parties about your heroic week at the Thai forest monastery. But what would you have accomplished? Either way, the illness will run its course. But if you practice with it, you'll do something for your mind." He meant not my thinking mind but the larger realm of mind that we open up to when we meditate.

I don't think I could have done it without Maha Boowa's help, his calm, light-hearted encouragement to practice with my illness moment by moment. But with him there I was able to, and I can honestly say it was an extraordinary experience. My body was falling apart; I was spending much of my time in bed, but my mind was often positively blissful. Even as I was running to the jungle to throw up there was sometimes joy.

Ajaan Maha Boowa told me it had other implications as well. "We don't know what is going to happen when it is time to die," he said. "But the skills you are learning now will help you then."

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