

Still ahead

This is all based on a dream, the first, a happy one, I had on returning home from a good retreat. In the dream, the retreat is the most beautiful and peaceful place we could imagine or wish for. There are high misty forested mountains on one side; a pleasant green, sunny and spacious garden with fragrant flowering plants, and shady trees on another; a sandy beach with crystal-clear lagoon of corals and colourful fishes to the west; and a vast spacious valley with cloudless blue skies, ringed by distant mountains and the horizon.

At night, a million stars twinkle and comets fly in the eternal sky. The weather is just right. We can dress in comfort, sit anywhere to meditate, simply observe nature, and feel the peace within.

When the time comes for us to leave the retreat, happy and at peace beyond words, we leave a note in our meditation hut to welcome the next person. We thank this person for taking time off from the world to just being happy and true to himself. For that, there is one more happy and peaceful person in the world. We gratefully welcome him as one among those who make a heaven of our living space.

This is the note left by the happy person before me in the meditation hut:

“This hut is just the way I found it, and now I pass it on to you, knowing well you will feel the still and bliss I’ve found within. As you read this, may you leave behind what needs to be left behind, like the trees here shed their bark and leaves, reaching higher for the bright skies, giving shade below to whomever comes. Be like the seeds that eagerly sprout from the dirt, growing into leaves, buds, flowers, and fruits, giving beauty and bounty to this place and to us. May you be like the spacious silence here that heals where words have hurt and uplifts where thoughts have weighed us down.”

I have finally arrived, truly at home, at peace. Let me rest this earth-like body where it really belongs, unwavering as the ground on which it sits. A gentle rain falls outside, whispering that I’m safe within. Just as the heavens softly shower upon all alike, nourishing them, slaking their thirst for life, may I be like the water, most of which I am, finding its own level, still.

My meal is taken, my drink is drunk. Sitting here rightly warm in peace and joy -- what more do I need? No fire I kindle; my heart is warm, as the living blood that courses my limbs. No bugs, no flies are here. Nature’s wild, too, are at rest in their forest. So, rain, rain if you wish.

A gentle breeze blows around me, kindly cooling. The air is fresh, tingling my nostrils. The wind inside me, the wind around me, is the same wind. It is the same wind, coming, going; coming, going. Impermanent. They are the same moving breath we all breathe. Life is one.

Now I sit my body down, giving it a rest it well deserves. Arms and legs gently folded; back-bone resting on back-bone, body upright like the Bodhi tree. My eyes are closed, seeing what eyes see not. Free is the body, free from pleasure and pain.

While the body rests, the thoughts still play. Rest my heart, be still, speak not. For, there is none to hear us. Be silent; then, we will hear what ears hear not, and feel what heals the heart.

My heart leaps up in the radiant stillness before me. This light, once hid by word and thought, now frees us from all. No eye, no ear, no nose, no tongue, no body – pure mind. Nobody, all mind.

Left behind what's to be left behind. Left ahead what's to be left ahead. Even the present is frozen in eternity: still, yet moving, nor here nor there, everywhere yet nowhere. Now, here. Only so much for words. So still the heart.

Like a divine dream, my sitting and walking pass slowly but surely. Then time and the world tap me on the shoulder: it's time to leave. It's my turn to leave a message now, for you:

“Tis time for me to take my leave. This place of peace is not mine, but its peace is with me forever. I leave in peace, taking nothing; for, I have found myself. I leave this place so that you can now have it, be it. It is this peace you have come for. Peace is not a place, but your own heart. This is a place for sitting, for standing, for walking, for resting, for loving. If you are truly here, then you will take it with you wherever you go.

This is a place for forgetting, a place for remembering. This is a place to forget our pains and pleasures, to leave the past where it is. This is a place to remember how peaceful and happy we can be; to remember the good we have done, the good that we are, the good in others, too.

This is a time to truly renounce the world, a time to rise above the “all” that is our eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind. Just as a seed grows well in the wet dirt and warm light, out of the shadows of other trees, we need to spend time in self-knowing, awakening to true bliss. True renunciation is the letting go of the body, silencing of speech, stilling of thoughts, so that we see our inner light.

This is a time to let go, to free our minds of views, Buddhisms, religion, self. True peace is not a building, nor clever talks, nor a high guru, nor the latest gadgets. To free the mind is to touch the basics: ‘Am I really at peace?’ We need to learn to sit, to breathe, to be still in our inner space, a space that embraces everyone and everything. It begins here.”

The dream ends. It's time to awaken.

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