

The poet's wisdom¹

I feel like going on a great pilgrimage, so I sit very still for how long I know not.
Then my whole being is a radiant light, and there is this sweetest of voices, so clear.
I think it's God, but then it looks like some ancient sage that I know not.

Then it appears as Buddha, smiling, with gentle words, still echoing:
Your heart and my heart are very old friends: just look within, you will truly see.

Be like the sky and embrace all alike: there is space for everyone.
The sky holds the sun. It never says, "You are taking my space."
The sun shines on the world. It never says, "You owe me."
A love like that lights up the whole sky and brightens the world.

Someone I met once, and still love, gave me so much darkness.
So much darkness that I could not see. Over the years, my eyes see better:
After all those years, I understand that this, too, is a precious gift.

So I breathe in all the love of that moment, shining bright,
I breathe out all the darkness that was inside me: there is light.
There are those in our lives who make us feel life's worth living:
Never forget them; better still, be close to them and learn.²

The purpose of life is not happiness: it comes, it goes; it never stays.
Life's true purpose is to learn and grow beyond joy and pain.

Be at peace with our body, be at peace with our senses,
Then our mind is peaceful, too. There's nothing to do then:
Just welcome peace with a smile, let the breath softly shine.
True wisdom is always there waiting behind everything.³

It makes us laugh about those who wonder if the fish in the water is ever thirsty;
It makes us laugh to hear people drown in water to purify themselves.
The waters do not purify the fishes and the creatures: they're still eaten up or die.
We must purify ourselves by inner washing, with body, speech and mind pure.⁴

It makes us laugh when we hear people go to find God or Buddha in some place.
The Bodhi tree is right where we sit in joyful peace,
When we act with kindness even to those who deserve not.

All the great rivers flow towards the ocean: all life flows, moving, changing.
The river waters fill the ocean, but the ocean is never full: nirvana is never full.

¹ This is inspired by a reflection on **Kabir**, a 15th-century Indian mystic poet and saint whose writings influenced the Bhakti movement of Hinduism, and his verses are found in the Adi Granth, the Sikh scripture. Born into a Muslim family, he was later strongly influenced by his teacher, the Hindu bhakti leader Ramananda. Kabir is known for being critical of both Hinduism and Islam, declaring that the former was misguided by the Vedas and the latter by the Quran. He questioned as meaningless their respective rites of initiation such as the sacred thread and circumcision. During his lifetime, he was threatened by both Hindus and Muslims for his views. When he died, both Hindus and Muslims he had inspired, claimed him as theirs.

² See Reflection, [A Truly purposeful life](#), R120, 2010.

³ On smiling in meditation, see [Brahma, vihāra](#), SD 38.5 (3.2.4).

⁴ See [Vatthûpama Sutta](#) (M 7,20), SD 28.12. See Reflection, [Holiday, holy day](#), R174, 2011.

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The great rivers empty into the ocean, losing their names: we lose our self in nirvana:
We only truly awaken when we are empty of views and lose our names.⁵

A sky full of clouds is dark: the sun shines not and we lose our way.
If even for a moment we free ourselves from what we think to feel the moment,
Then a tiny light breaks through, enough for us to see where we really are.

Those we love – let them be like flowers – and we, the bees who love to labour,
Flying into the flower, taking just the sweetness we need, enriching the flower so.
We, too, need to be like a flower, to open before those we love:
We give them the sweetest of our heart, tasting which they are free.⁶

We may travel to the four quarters, but wherever we go, there we are:
If we change not with the beauty and wisdom where we are, we've gone nowhere.
We may even try to reach the world's highest point or deepest depth,
But the world's end cannot be reached by going:
Yet the world's end must be reached, if we are to be free.⁷

This world is our eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind: we are its maker.
This is our world, this city of flesh and bones wrapped up in skin with nine openings.⁸
When we understand this, we have reached our journey's end.⁹
For now, we need to keep moving, letting go of the past, smiling at the future,
But always in the present.¹⁰

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⁵ See [Pahārāda Sutta](#) (A 8.19), SD 45.18.

⁶ Dhammapada 49.

⁷ See [Rohitassa Sutta](#) (S 2.26), SD 7.2.

⁸ See [Gaṇḍa Sutta](#) (A 9.15), SD 29.15.

⁹ See [Sabba Sutta](#) (S 35.23), SD 7.1.

¹⁰ See [Bhadd'eka,ratta Sutta](#) (M 131), SD 8.9.