

1.  
Children of the world,  
of all types born to play each role of mankind,  
to carry on the precious lineage of the human race,  
with its multitude of aspects.  
So it is just as in the way our children learn,  
that that same world will appear before our very eyes.

2.  
And to the teacher, I asked,  
“What is this place we find ourselves in,  
amongst the middle hills of Eastern Nepal,  
whose name even, “Maratika” stirs something unspoken.”

And the guru replied,  
“This is known as the place of immortality,  
where one great saint of India, through meditative absorption,  
attained a state of mind beyond birth and death.”

He continued to say,  
“Here, there are 2 caves,  
the upper one located just below the monastery that contains symbolically shaped rocks  
and natural features  
in which both Hindus and Buddhists find sacred qualities  
and a kind of obstacle course, where you may test your aptitude.”

“But to reach the lower one  
you must continue down a long winding path around this hill.  
In front of its doorway you’ll find a wash place,  
fed with water that emerges from underneath that cave.”

3.  
Then the teacher asked me, in return,  
“How did you arrive here,  
to Maratika,  
to this place of immortality?”

And I answered, “It’s a story of two places, interwoven as one.  
The first lies high above the Himalayas,  
In the region of Mustang, in the northernmost part of the country of Nepal.”

4.  
To arrive here is a long arduous journey,  
but I came to learn that pilgrimage is about overcoming the obstacles  
and reaching the destination.

The entrance to the valley of Muktinath is guarded by a great female energy.  
Her hair flowing in the fields is combed by the ploughs of men,  
her body of water stretching endlessly into the distance,  
reaches on and on.... until dissolving into the ocean.

“Muktinath”,  
Mukti – salvation, Nath – place, Muktinath – Place of salvation.

5.  
There are 3 main roads that lead into the upper part of the valley,  
two on both sides of its steep incline  
and one down by the river,  
that itself cuts the valley in half,  
yet is a main entrance way to Muktinath cradled above.

A central ridge  
and mountain peaks all around,  
standing like guardian sentinels over the place of salvation.

6.  
Many many years ago,  
one lama, a practitioner of the holy teachings,  
came from Tibet and settled here.  
His one extended family developed into one whole village,  
where the boys usually carry on the tradition of becoming married lamas.

7.  
When these 4 dancing fellows became still from the dance,  
they turned and said to me,  
“Please do not be confused by our elaborate and decorative attire,  
and many instruments of rites,  
for these are but symbolic of sacred meanings  
to aid the practitioner meditating upon their form,  
to remind one of the essential aspects of existence  
as is our dance  
and our worship too.”  
And they passed around a drink of barley beer,  
a nectar of offering for the purpose of the ritual.

And I asked them in return,  
“What is this place, Muktinath,  
what is the meaning of the place of salvation?”  
and they told me as follows:  
“There is a central point within the valley  
that has a million doors,  
it is the central ridge you must have passed to reach this place.

Around those cliffs and slopes of sandstone rock,  
you will find 4 villages located at its four corner points.  
2 of these, positioned at the higher end of the valley  
have little monastic communities living within a temple complex,  
go visit these places for there one can find the precious jewel of dharma,  
of the teachings of Lord Buddha.

8.

Then they asked me how I had arrived at this place of salvation, to Muktinath.  
So I began to recount the second place of my story,  
located at the opposite end of the country from here,  
at the place named, 'Lumbini'.

9.

Lord Buddha Shakyamuni, the supreme teacher of all Buddhist paths was born in this  
land of Lumbini.

Many communities of monks and nuns,  
known as 'Sangha',  
practitioners of the teachings of Lord Buddha,  
have gathered from Sakya monasteries located in places all over the world,  
to perform the Monlam prayer festival.  
During this period of 10 days at the last part of the lunar year,  
a special prayer is recited here at the newly built Tashi Rabten Ling monastery  
that was inaugurated only a couple of years ago,  
encoding, as do all Buddhist temple structures,  
many different symbolically sacred representations  
in its mere design, shape and form.

One of the principal reasons for its establishment  
was to house the Monlam prayer festival  
when 'The Aspiration prayer of Samanthabhadra' is recited 100,000 times,  
a prayer that is principally a dedication of all the virtuous merits of all beings,  
so they may benefit from these,  
so they may reach enlightenment.  
Enlightenment is the principal goal of Buddhism,  
a state beyond the sufferings of existence,  
where one is freed in the perfect realisation of one's own nature of mind.

10.

Taking refuge is a principal aspect of Tibetan Buddhism.  
Like if you were out on a mountainside during a storm, you would seek shelter,  
like this you take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, collectively known as the  
three jewels,  
as a shelter from the usual sufferings of existence.  
Among many other meanings,

Buddha represents the enlightened mind,  
Dharma - Speech, like the teachings, prayers, mantra recitation etc...  
and Sangha, the body of practitioners who follow the path of the teachings,  
support on the journey to enlightenment.  
The guru is considered an embodiment of these three aspects of refuge.  
For in order to reach enlightenment,  
one needs a guide,  
a supreme master who has already traversed that path,  
who can by experience lead one there.

11.  
For life is like a butterlamp,  
it keeps on burning until the oil is dry and there is no more fuel for the wick to remain  
alight.

12.  
So my four dancing friends had then directed me to the village of Dzong  
Where they told me I would find an old monastery of the Sakya sect of Tibetan  
Buddhism perched high above the sandstone cliffs at one corner of the ridge.  
Once there I was invited to a ceremony,  
again, with great symbolic display,  
yet each symbol merely a specially designed object  
Carrying a silent meaning by virtue of its very shape and structure.  
The symbol itself is not worshipped,  
But its meaning reflected on and contemplated  
So that the essential understanding  
May be revealed directly to one's own mind.

13.  
So taking a clockwise direction around the central ridge,  
I passed through two small villages,  
One so quiet that it seemed that no one was there,

the other, busy with the local inhabitants in full swing of their daily activities.

In the meantime, I continued to speak of the place Lumbini,  
And an offering ceremony of long life  
to the elderly master.

14.  
The Guru manifests as an embodiment of enlightened mind.  
Like invisible made visible.

During the long life offering ceremony,  
our own immortal nature is invoked through making prayers to a personified deity form  
of that state.

The ultimate long life is immortality,  
a state of mind that never moves from its essential being,  
yet beholds and shines forth all the beautiful qualities of the mind,  
a state of mind beyond the sufferings of ordinary existence  
that does not need to be developed as such,  
but just accessed,  
for it is and always has been there  
in the minds of all beings.

The young eventually grow old  
and become accomplished practitioners of the various lineages of practise  
and subsequently pass them on to the next generation.  
In this way the methods of practise and teachings are immortalised  
as they are handed down from generation to generation,  
from master to disciple in an unbroken fashion,  
remaining perfectly in tact and unspoilt by misunderstandings.

For it is said that birth and death,  
life and dream state are all but figments of a vast imagination...  
they happen, but they do not affect the immortal state of mind in any way.  
To have taken control of the process,  
to have mastered one's mind,  
is enlightenment.

Achieving immortality,  
conquering death,  
does not mean that one does not physically die anymore.  
One must pass out of the loosely grouped gross elements of physical body that have  
formed a temporary shelter,  
when the lamp of life force is dry.  
That is its nature.

13a.  
The four dancing lamas had told me of another monastery  
Of the Sakya tradition of Tibetan Buddhism,  
Located at the other remaining corner of the central ridge.

Considered to be at least more than 500 years old,  
Jharkot monastery stands at around 3500 metres above sea level.  
As well as having an ongoing academic curriculum for the little monks of the monastery  
and local children of Muktinath,  
it also houses a Tibetan medical school.  
Tibetan medicine is made from natural herbs, flowers and minerals,  
many of which are only found here in these high Himalayan regions.  
All diseases are considered to be an imbalance of the 5 elements of the body.  
Tibetan medicine seeks to restore the balance.

For what we teach our children  
is the key to the future of our world system  
and what they teach us  
is the key to the future of existence.  
The ongoing debate between the adopted habits of one generation  
And fresh ideas of the new one,  
Causing parents and children the world over  
to suffer merely trying to understand one another.

12a.

Amongst issues of how to raise money for the ongoing restoration and education of local children,  
the parents and members of Jharkot monastery  
are deciding how to deal with the children's travel to their winter school location in Kathmandu,  
as from December to March it is extremely cold here and facilities, fairly basic.

11a.

'Faith' or rather 'trust' is a kind of an abstract thing,  
its energy,  
the backbone that gets us through,  
a way that we find the means to go on.  
For the physical body is like a great time machine running on its own generated energy  
that starts ticking at the moment of birth and stops ticking at the moment of death.  
A perfect machine that the mind may use to process its enlightenment,  
a state of mind beyond the mechanisms of birth and death,  
mind that continues.

10a.

Although the predominant topic of this meeting was how to keep the traditions of Buddhism alive in the mountainous Himalayan region in general,  
the three Sakya gompas of Muktinath were represented here  
as well as many other monasteries from the district of Mustang  
The repairing of old temple buildings, safe storage of old texts and reviving the lama dances were just some of the issues raised.  
But underlying all of this is a determination to encourage the young members of the community to join the monasteries  
to continue to uphold the teachings of Lord Buddha.

9a.

As an offering to Lumbini,  
that was just a few years ago scarcely forested scrub ground,  
the elderly master had created a nursery for all types of plants  
that may be suited to this difficult climate,  
making offerings of them to all the establishments of the area,

now beautified by such a colourful display,  
worthy to the birthplace of Lord Buddha.  
Here, is the first Tashi Rabten Ling monastery,  
A pioneer temple of Lumbini.

I meditate on the nature of birth in this sacred garden,  
Where immediately after the Buddha was born,  
He is claimed to have taken 7 steps  
In each of the four directions,  
Thus proclaiming his perfect intention  
to help all beings.

For it is through Lord Buddha's taking birth  
that all the deeds of his life were to unfold.  
If he had not taken birth, then these would not have taken place  
and the vast canon of teachings that followed would not have been revealed.  
Teachings that contain so many different methods  
to come to understand a way of existence beyond suffering,  
to reach the enlightened state of mind.

8a.  
The offering of light in all traditions is a highly revered and sacred act.  
For it is to awaken what is currently dark...  
it enables vision,  
it subdues fear.  
... and just one small light can illuminate an entire room.

7a.  
Muktinath-Chumig Gysatsa, or 'One hundred springs'  
is a place of worship for both Hindus and Buddhists  
and the destination of many pilgrims to this valley.

It is a place where all five elements come together in harmony,  
Where trees grow at an unusually high altitude  
And water appears in many forms and strength of speed,  
And stone structures, known as stupas,  
are built in memory of the dead

Under the main shrine of this small temple of the complex  
flames of blue fire appear from water and stone.  
One more used to burn on earth, but went out a few decades ago.

6a.  
As I returned down the valley,  
I watched the landscape for prominent symbols  
And everywhere I looked

There were sacred shapes revealing their hidden codes.

5a.

I look East to where I have come from,  
To the valley of Muktinath and the rocky road leading to here,  
to the ancient fortress town of Kagbeni at its mouth.

I look north to where I want to go,  
to Upper Mustang,  
along a seemingly endless trail of cave cities.  
I look west to where I cannot go,  
for there is a mountain blocking the way.  
I look to where the river of Muktinath flows into the main river of the Kali Gandaki.  
By Hindu tradition,  
aeons of sins may be purified by dipping in the water three times at this confluence point.  
I look south, to where I have to go,  
Across that bridge.

4a.

As the musical instruments cannot sound without players,  
it is silent in here,  
silent, but loud,  
for even though the room is dark,  
the objects that appear in my vision speak to me of many things.  
The young 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, flame of knowledge burning in his mind.  
Elderly Dalai Lama,  
flame of compassion,  
flame of wisdom.

3a.

And in reply to my story,  
once again the teacher spoke,  
“This place, Maratika, the realm of immortality  
is one where religions stand side by side,  
For in the eternal state of mind,  
There is no difference between caste and creed,  
Colour or race,  
Simply a natural compassion for all beings  
abiding within a still, calm mind.”

2a.

Children of the world,  
Fresh manifestations of the human race,  
Please safeguard your future.  
Preserve the virtuous ways of the human mind  
Which is written in every sacred tradition of the world



Simple guidelines that are not there to block your happiness,  
But to protect you from unruly distractions  
That lead both you, yourself and others to suffering.

So we, set in our old, habitual ways  
Instead should say,  
“Children of the world,  
please share with us your fresh ideas,  
we want to hear what you have to offer.  
And in return,  
We will exchange our knowledge of life with you.”

1a.  
For to conquer death, is to conquer life,  
to be able to dance with its manifesting elements,  
whilst resting in the immortal nature of one’s own mind,  
so that when one does experience death,  
just like when dreaming, one merely experiences a change of appearance.  
Still mind,  
Infused with the energy of its natural being,  
Pure compassion,  
Pure love,  
Most precious jewel  
Of our heart.