

Everything of worth is defenceless

I will begin by asking you to close your eyes....and to take a few moments to become more silent....now imagine that you are sitting in an orchard, maybe somewhere in France (Spain, Italy...), maybe somewhere in the 19th century..... and you are not alone in that orchard....a few meters from you Van Gogh is standing, very still and absorbed.....staring at some apple blossoms.....a bit more to the right you see someone sitting at a table....you don't know him and in gazing at him you hear the warm, soft wind whisper that this man is a poet and has written on silence as the angel of higher truths.....right now he is not writing though there is a pen in his hands...the man is waiting and is looking at the treetops.....in the orchard you see some old and gentle tree spirits as well, they are singing old hymns of heroic kings and queens....and then you see the Buddha....you didn't expect this...to see the Buddha here in this orchard in the 19th century somewhere in southern Europe....but there he is.....standing in reverence...with folded hands.....in golden light..... intimate with the universe..... and the orchard now is also shining in golden light....

Now open your eyes and come back to the 21st century....

The poet in the orchard is Maurice Maeterlinck. The world desperately needs the Dhamma but also a bit of Belgian culture so i thought i introduce you to Maeterlinck. Maeterlinck won the Nobel Price in 1911. He was a playwright and a poet. With the award (the Nobel Price) went the commentary "in appreciation of his many-sided literary activities, and especially of his dramatic works, which are distinguished by a wealth of imagination and by a poetic fancy, which reveals, sometimes in the guise of a fairy tale, a deep inspiration, while in a mysterious way they appeal to the readers' own feelings and stimulate their imaginations".

Isn't that wonderful? A wealth of imagination, deep inspiration...in a mysterious way appealing to the readers' own feelings and stimulate their imaginations... By the way Maeterlinck was born in Ghent and we have already used some of his work in our centre, specifically on our days on beauty and silence - where we use poetry and music to reflect and contemplate on the Dhamma. It is exciting to let local artists, contemporary or from the past, communicate with the Dhamma or vice versa. From Maeterlinck we used one of his essays "The Secret of Silent Being". A few quotes from that essay (all is my translation):

"silence is the element in which all great things are created and then come into being to rule this life in a majestic way"

"as soon as the lips are asleep, the souls awake".

"Silence is the angel of higher truths and the interpreter of the unknown".....

"The secret of silent being is the essential silence and a sacred refuge that will never be lost so when the firstborn should ever meet the lastborn they will be silent in the same way, in their kisses, in their sadness, in their consternation..."

In that essay - at least that's how i read it - he pleads for more awe, for more reverence in relation to life, to death, to love, to friendship etc....more awe and more reverence in relation to what is deeply human, to what is deeply real. And one can do that by being more silent because in silence the mysteries of life and love, the mysteries of death are more shown, not necessarily revealed but in silence we are more touched and caressed by those mysteries.

Now...what i hope in a sense is that this language (silence is the angel of higher truths, as soon as the lips are asleep, the souls awake etc)....sounds rather old-fashioned and solemn...with old-fashioned i really mean "not from this time", "not contemporary use of language". Speaking for myself i really love such language, such language has something ceremonious as it were, something fulfilling at the same time and it takes me along into the clouds and beyond.....the language Maeterlinck is using tempts me, seduces me into something much much bigger and much more real than everything i know.....it is as if something is calling.....what I particularly like about Maeterlinck is his receptivity for reverence, his being open to what is sacred, to what is holy, and looking for ways to express this...by using words which are dressed in holiness...words which are referring to something beyond...words which are bowing for what is sacred in this universe....words which are cherishing what is so precious, so dear, so valued....

From the Ariyapariyesana Sutta:

"This Dhamma that I have attained is deep, hard to see, hard to realize, peaceful, refined, beyond the scope of conjecture, subtle, to-be-experienced by the wise."

In the depth of the Dhamma the beauty of bodhicitta is shown, a wonderful, delightful, mysterious force which enchants living beings and transforms them from self-centred, cramped persons into selfless beings, pervaded with love and compassion - illuminated. The Dhamma is a Jewel because it leads us from a dry and barren abyss into green and fertile meadows and orchards. The Dhamma is a Jewel because it sets one on fire to be a force for good in the world and it burns evil. It is a guarantee for change, real change, real transformation.....transformation of the ordinary mind into an orchard of imagination, into a mind completely unknown to us but this unknown mind is our heritage, growing into this mind is really what we are born for.....The Dhamma is abundance, it's an explosion of colours just like a painting by Van Gogh is (I think Van Gogh was a very generous man), The Dhamma is an explosion underneath all worldly, samsaric patterns....it wipes them out, crushes them, banishes them.....

What is the meaning of life nowadays for so many people in our world? Maybe an evening out in a posh restaurant with an exquisite wine, with many ah's and oh's.....gastronomy as the highest possible in life..... or is it maybe cycling up the Mont Ventoux in France because that needs to be on one's bucket list.....or maybe a bucket list is the meaning of life...or maybe it's the life of some rockstar who acts as a so-called rebel but really is no more than a three year old with a smelling nappy....sometimes i find it painful how we all, as humans, are wasting our potential, our heritage, by only using what i would call our barbecue-imagination.....if the sun is peeping, it is a fine day, blue skies, well, let's barbecue!

Who are our heroes anyway? The cooks? The cyclists in the Tour de France? The barbecue manufacturers? The people who are promising groundbreaking insights through online courses? The ones who fulminate on Twitter?

Are these not all expressions of quite some poverty in how we live our lives, of quite some waste of human potential, of painful ignoring of what is deeply deeply and truly the highest? Are we really listening to what is most intimate in the universe? Are we really listening to what is ultimately possible? It seems we are living our lives in the shadows of the forest, anxious, blind, confused, while great beings are out playing in the golden sun, free, full of joy and delight, shining and bright!(and without a barbecue)

The Dhamma offers a totally different perspective, the Dhamma isn't playing around in that field of dark, confused ego-games. The Dhamma is an explosion of joy....the Dhamma elevates, lifts us up....thousands and thousands of joys and delights and blessings are poured out over us....our mind is lifted up to the level of a free individual so that we don't need to try and possess others anymore.....the Dhamma enables us to live in a glorious, majestic, noble way, the Dhamma gives wings to our mind so the Dhamma IS precious, the Dhamma IS a jewel, a jewel of the mighty Conquerors, the Dhamma IS a gem, it is a life elixir.

Do we believe that?

I think most of us do believe that. I really hope so! Otherwise why would we practice the Dhamma? But we need to be cautious not to pull the Dhamma downwards. The Dhamma IS the most precious jewel in the universe.....which means the Dhamma is not in the same ranking of values like veganism, diversity, democracy or secular mindfulness. There is a hierarchy in vision, there is a hierarchy in values! I am talking here about a Jewel. About the Jewel of the Dhamma. Please let it remain a Jewel. Let us not reduce it into a wellness therapy a bit infused by some or other feel good practise to fix and cope with our samsaric existence. A samsaric life, a life in samsara is not to be fixed because it IS hopeless. An ordinary mind IS hopeless, a reactive mind IS hopeless so why should i try to fix it? Or use the Dhamma to try and fix it?

If i do so the Jewel isn't shining as a Jewel anymore, the Jewel loses its brightness and brilliance, its shimmer....it is no longer a Palace of Beauty, no longer a shelter from suffering, no longer a path which releases and liberates....so where is our compassion then? If we really want to be compassionate we need to see the Dhamma as the most precious Jewel in the universe.

Bhante: "our roots need to be deep, it need to be roots in the sky". A Flemish mystic from the 14th century, Ruusbroec, talked about "hanging in God" and he used the image of an upside down tree....so our roots are in the Transcendental....our roots need to be roots in the sky....

In a sense we all know about the Transcendental...in a sense.....because one can definitely say the Transcendental is something completely, completely, unknown to us, so very different from what our mundane consciousness is able to perceive....there IS something unfathomable, there IS something ungraspable.....there IS something sacred and holy....

Maeterlinck again: "The supreme poetry has no other purpose than to keep open the highways which lead from what we are seeing to what we are not seeing".

So poetry (art) is to lead us closer to what we are not seeing, poetry/art is to lead us closer to the Transcendental. To that wondrous, ineffable adventure of going beyond, of transforming self-centeredness into selflessness.

To travel to the Transcendental we don't need Thomas Gradgrind as a guide. Gradgrind is a character from the novel "Hard Times" by Charles Dickens and he is obsessed with facts, figures and targets....Gradgrind believes that poetry and imagination are rubbish and the only thing that matters is utilitarianism and what can be measured.

Nowadays it seems to me that our language has become more and more profaned...a language where a kettle refers to a kettle and a fly to a fly and of course if a kettle is a kettle well then it's a kettle...and let's use the term kettle by all means if we want to refer to a kettle....i don't want to complicate things butthere is a language which does not refer to something graspable, to something measurable, to something fathomable...and there is such a language because there exists something which *is* unfathomable and very very deep and hard to see.....very very deep and hard to see....

We are living in an age in which we can think that everything, *everything* can be described, pinned down, explained... an American journalist once said..."for every complex problem there is a simple and clear solution... which is wrong".

Very often i am staggered by the network of Reality - and what i see is only a tiny part of a huge, enormous, dizzying set of conditions. And i walk, i wander,

in that universe of conditions, amazed, yes, amazed but also very often, so very very often, i am walking in a rather clumsy way. So very clumsy.

I do reduce Reality, i do reduce that unfathomable and infinite play of conditions, to a few constructions and storylines like 'this is who i am' or 'everything will be alright' 'he doesn't like me''i am a stream-entrant' or 'measuring is knowing'. A huge, infinite rampart of opinions not really rooted in careful reflection but based on prejudices, assumptions, standards within certain contexts, all kinds of unpleasant vedana etc...

By the way i have been musing on how opinions not rooted in careful reflection could look like. Well, it's not of vital importance really that i have been musing on that topic but anyway...i simply liked doing it...And in my imagination such an opinion has greasy, long hair, with a rather savage, ferocious moustache and with banners in its heart....

And if i am not cautious, and this happens more than once i'm afraid, those banners will form an army that needs to be defended, protected, an army that wants to conquer and defeat, an army that wants to wave and cry victory, that wants to crush and separate.

That's why i as a poet myself try to create a precious highway, with sacred words, or mundane words dressed in sacred robes, referring to something that can NOT be grasped, nor measured nor explained in a straightforward, simple way. Remember Maeterlinck: "The supreme poetry has no other purpose than to keep open the highways which lead from what we are seeing to what we are not seeing".

And we need to honour this, we need to stand up for this....we don't need to be afraid of what is sacred and most precious and we don't need to be afraid to express this. For quite some time i have been aware that i am a devotional man, that i am a religious man meaning that i do believe there is "something" transcendental, that i, we, can connect with that "something" transcendental.....and that something transcendental can flow through us, we can channel this mysterious stream of love and compassion which turns an earthling into a glorious, noble, victorious awakened being.

But i was ashamed, it didn't fit with the kind of identity i had constructed over the years, an identity of me being someone reasonable, one who doesn't believe in fairy tales, living in the 20th and 21st century, a child of my time, feet on the ground.

I have thrown away that identity. Now i enjoy lifting my feet off the ground, jumping into the open air, jumping towards the clouds and beyond.....the perspective is much wider - i am devotional, i am a religious man and i *believe* in sacredness. The sacredness of the Dhamma!

So, do i allow this sacredness in my life? If you are an artist, do you allow this sacredness in your art? Is there room for what is holy, for what is sacred? In

making choices? In the way we lead our lives? If that wonderful and mysterious force which enchants and transforms and which we call "bodhicitta" is to overflow us, is to flood us, is to conquer the world, then we need to invite that bodhicitta in our poetry and art. Not to defend or protect but to animate and nourish.

There is a Dutch poet, Lucebert, who wrote the verse "alles van waarde is weerloos", "everything of worth, is naked, everything of worth, is defenceless"

We can't defend the Dhamma and we don't need to defend the Dhamma! We don't need to protect the Dhamma! Sure, outside our Order and Movement and inside our Order and Movement, there are several kinds of threats and pitfalls....secularism, rationalism, the Dhamma-as-therapy, scientific reductionism.....and: we don't need to defend the Dhamma! Defending, protecting is way too crude and gross for something as precious as the Dhamma.

Imagine someone coming from the 19th century orchard into this Marquee again....maybe Maeterlinck maybe Van Gogh maybe someone else....and that person carries with him/her the Dhamma as a crystal ball and if you should hold that crystal ball in front of your heart you would be purified and all suffering would vanish, you would see, you would be illuminated, you would recognise Mara, you would be free and floating in metta.....now, anyone and everyone would get the opportunity to hold the crystal ball, there is no need to fight or protect and after holding it, one could pass it on....just pass it on because the crystal ball is not of that nature that one can keep it for oneself....i imagine everyone would very cautiously hold the ball in front of one's heart, very moved, tender, soft, grateful, open, vulnerable, full of life and keen not to keep it for oneself but to pass it on because one simply longs to pass on something as precious as that, something precious as that can as it were only be shared, be revered, with grace, with elegancyit would be hard to put into words how amazed we would be, how astonished, how full of awe and reverence...how full of gratitude...how the energy and inspiration would run in our veins.....i imagine i would take that crystal ball, that gem, into my hands as if i hold a dewdrop, a dewdrop which releases, which liberates...

We can relate to this so precious Jewel by bending, bowing, folding. Bending knees, bowing heads, folding hands. It would not resonate at all with the Dhamma, that gem, that beautiful dewdrop, to build fences around it to protect it, that would be harsh, rude, vulgar, crude....the Dhamma, that Palace of Beauty can only be approached through beauty and subtlety, through ever more and more refinement....defending is none of this....and how would one defend what is utterly real? Reality and the path into Reality don't need defence....

It would not resonate with the Dhamma either if we would use language which says..... well, the Dhamma is just one of many paths to liberation and you don't need to revere this particular path because there are so many many ways to liberation and all are equally valid and worthwhile....That would also be harsh, rude, vulgar, crude....

What is most precious we need to relate to in a sacred way, because it *is* most precious and sacred...

A few weeks ago i was in Vajrasana on a chairs' meeting. Going into the shrine room was breathtaking...when entering the shrine room i was touched by the myth of the Highest possible...when doing a puja there it felt so right, so just, so appropriate and it was deeply moving..... the Buddha-rupa is grand, magnificent, majestic, big, fabulous, splendid....for the first time in my life i really had to look up to a Buddha-rupa and not just look at some smaller rupa just before me which i can give a pat on the head so to speak.....but i had to look up to the Buddha, who is really much more higher than me, i could really really bow for the Buddha who really really transcends me.... it felt so so appropriate to finally be able to bow for the Buddhadhamma and to feel in my bones that i was so much smaller and the Buddhadhamma so much bigger....

So our shrine rooms, our centres, the way we talk, the way we sit in meditation, how we wear our kesas, our music and poetry, our paintings, our tea cups.....it can all be expressions of the grandeur of the Dhamma, of the Dhamma as a gem! Please, let it be expressions of the Dhamma as a gem!

I always have a mala with me, in my pocket....i even sleep with it...and through the day i am touching it so now and then, or i take it out of my pocket and put it around my neck or wrist....this mala reminds me of White Tara...reminds me of the Transcendental....it opens my mind, lifts my mind up, the shadows of life become less grey - this mala "imagined" brings me closer to that universe where one simply and spontaneously *has* to revere....

So this mala isn't just a mala, a shrine room isn't just a shrine room, a rupa isn't just a rupa...what the world needs more is that we as Dhamma-practitioners articulate more this sacredness of the Dhamma, this majesty, this grandeur....We don't need to reduce this articulating.....reducing this is reducing compassion and clarity!

The Dhamma isn't just another detox-therapy that one can do, it isn't about stress reduction, it isn't about some online game to pump up my ego ...the Dhamma frees from suffering...the Dhamma illuminates, the Dhamma enchants....

Andwe resonate with that. Because we are human beings we resonate with what is truthful, with what is real, with what is beautiful, with what is the highest. It is natural that i love the Dhamma, it is natural..... Isn't that mysterious in its own way?

When i fold my hands something very very essential is happening...a communication between the universe and me which is unfathomable but which we can try to put into words by imagination...to come a bit closer...closer to the mystery of the Transcendental...so when folding my hands my fingers are talking...talking to one another about what is real, about what is sacred and most precious...when folding hands it is as if i come from the shrinking cold into a warm house with the wood stove burning and a bowl of hot soup waiting for me...when folding hands it is as if the universe is forming lips and then kisses me...folding hands is maybe the most intimate thing one can do, being intimate with the universe, intimate with one's highest potential, intimate with the highest well-being of another living being, being intimate is maybe something like being totally absorbed by what is really really helpful for oneself and other living beings.....being intimate is making love with the bodhicitta....burning all egoistic tendencies and celebrating the majesty and beauty, it is feeling the heavens between the palms of your hands...

Let's try it...if you want to...close your eyes, bow your head, fold your hands...and let yourself be kissed by the universe...by what is most precious in the universe, by what is most intimate...the Dhamma.....and the fire of bodhicitta....

Can you feel the power...the transformative power of the Dhamma flowing through us...recognising Mara...unmasking Mara...can you touch what is beyond by bowing your head and folding your hands, can you touch our roots in the sky? And if we are touched by the roots in the sky...can we tell the great story of this transformative power which is like a whisper and at the same time like a tornado...can we tell the story, like a poet, like a troubadour, realising that everything of worth is defenceless, that everything of worth is naked and therefore needs to be communicated and imagined in an ever more subtle and refined way with reverence and sacredness.

As a poet myself, good or bad, i want to give words to what is beyond, i want to touch upon what is sacred, i want to come closer to what is beyond a daily and ordinary consciousness...i want to elevate the mind, elevate our consciousness ever more higher and higher....i don't want to be old-fashioned though i wouldn't mind being old-fashioned... i just don't want to give in to a language which is stripped of wonder and majesty, of mystery and holiness....as a poet and as a human being and as an Order Member i aspire to lean backwards sitting in a beach chair together with friends and contemplate and enjoy the sacred clouds coming and going, the holy blue skies, the endless and mysterious ocean with many many unknown creatures.....it is simply delightful to venerate blue skies and clouds and oceans, to gaze at the Unseen, together with good friends, in good company, to feed and elevate our heartsand i don't want to *just* lean backwards and contemplate blue skies....i also want to tell a great story, one of those stories that matters, even the story that matters most, and i want to tell

this together with others in our centres, in our palaces of beauty and compassion, a great story full of shadow and danger but also a great story about how shadows are passing and how blue skies can be seen again, about the sun shining....about orchards shining in golden light...about the Buddha standing in reverence in that orchard.....a great story about brave people who stood firm because they believed in something good, in something precious, in a path which leads us from shadow to light, a path which transforms, a path which can be shown, a path of majesty, a sacred path in which Mara is seen and unmasked, a sacred path which leads us to the marvellous Unknown....a path which allows us to give the Transcendental its place back in the human mind....

Let us be rooted in the sky, let us hang in the Transcendental, let poetry show us the Unseen. The Dhamma is a Jewel, the Dhamma is a Gem and the Dhamma is sacred so let us relate to the Dhamma as a Jewel and as a Gem and as sacred... in our language, in our rituals, in our shrine rooms, in our tea-breaks, in our sleep, in our centres, in our giving, in our loving, in our living....let us be ruled by majesty, let us be ruled by the Jewel of the Dhamma.