

Dharma Verses

Justice
just is.

The just is
of a sparrow.
The just is
of a lamppost.

Everything
obeys the Law.

*

The world is vast
like the dark hallway
of my grandmother's house.
The house vanished
many years ago
and still the world is vast.

*

Self-Esteem:
there is no self
to esteem.
The fork is bent.
The knife is straight

The Three Disabilities

all beings are deaf:
the incoming tide
carries seaweed
to the back of the cave

*

all beings are dumb:
the sharp nib
of the fountain pen
just scratches the paper

*

all beings are blind:
the weight of the snow
removes the last leaves
from the ginkgo

In This Dream World

In this dream world
being crushed
by the doors of hell
not knowing
if I'm coming in
or going out.

*

In this dream world
one interlude
follows the next
with such sweetness
that I forget
if something
was meant to happen.

*

In this dream world
a pheasant cries
from deep in the bush.

Each day the same voice.
Each day a different place.

Zazen

desolate zazen:
my shadow on the wall
continues to sit

*

exhausted zazen:
a moth flits
from mat to mat

*

twilight zazen:
we're all
bones and shadows

Sesshin

Manjusri dances
between the candles.
His black sword
reflects no light
and yet
everything is ablaze.

*

Yaza

Late at night
below the back deck
the white dots of daisies
silently become
a scattering of stars.

Stretching out my legs
I'm at the edge of the universe.

The Life of the Buddha

Shakyamuni's Birth

'Above the heavens, below the heavens
I am the only one.'

The words were fresh, linen
sheets billowed in the wind.
A washing basket lay nearby
like a small ship beached on dry land.
And as the newborn moved forward
confidently, step by step
the clouds overhead compressed
and sent down
the finest shower of rain.

Shakyamuni's Awakening

The morning star
was already there
through his great exertion
through each bead
of perspiration
through the buzzing of cicadas
and the swirling of dust.

The morning star was there
just waiting to be seen.

Shakyamuni Proclaims the Dharma

They didn't shift their weight
from side to side
or, reaching back,
run their beaks through their feathers.
This ancient assembly
with wrinkled necks and bald heads
squatted motionless on the rock
and simply listened
to each unfolding sentence
uttered by the Buddha
on Vulture Peak.

Shakyamuni's Parinirvana

When he lay down and died
it was rather disturbing
how the demons shed tears
along with the gods in heaven
and the animals on the earth.

But his death was just
another opening.
And all of us, at that moment,
became a little more human
with our horns and halos
scattered in the long grass.

The Six Realms

Hell Realm

unrelenting heat:
with this fever
each falling petal
burns the flesh

*

Hungry Ghost Realm

screech of a hawk,
the wind swirls
clouds of snow
across the frozen pond

*

Animal Realm

increasing cold:
throughout the afternoon
a wasp keeps walking
around the rim of a cup

Asura Realm

dark summer rain,
inside the zendo
the smell of incense
the sound of thunder

*

Human Realm

on the ceiling
of a rented room
blue light flickers
from a black and white T.V.

*

Deva Realm

the horse chestnut
flings up
pagodas of blossoms
fifty feet into the sky

black swan:
its eyes as red
as its beak

even on a still morning
my karmic forces
keep circulating

*

striking the big bell
at the end of the year:
everything goes . . .
everything comes back

*

cu-ru-cu cu-cu
the mourning dove calls
out of the darkness
I can think of no response—
all my words have gone away