



The Little Monk

written & illustrated by

Michael
Arthur
Finberg



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c h i c a g o

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The Little Monk....

To the little monk in all of us

Part I

Leaving the Monastery

The war had been going on

for quite a long time, the drought, even longer. No one quite knew just how long, since people's memories seemed to be short concerning most matters of any consequence. In the little valley where this little story takes place, peace and plenty seemed never to have been part of everyday life.

Misery was simply accepted as natural. Very much like weather turning bad, or someone getting sick. People simply hid inside their homes, or looked for something extra to eat. Indeed, eating and hiding were very popular pastimes in the main village, where the events I am about to tell took place.

Actually, the events of this little story took place a few miles from the village, in a small little monastery about the size of a thumbnail. This is where the little monk lived. Please understand, dear readers, that in this entire Universe, there was only one monastery. The inhabitants of the village were not even sure what a monastery was. It occupied very little land. So everyone ignored it.

If, however, you lived in this little monastery, it was quite difficult to ignore its existence. Every morning the bell would ring to wake up the monks. Actually, it was a very early wake-up call. The stars would still be shining and singing to each other, when all the monks filed outside to the courtyard to take roll call. Yes, indeed, it was such a spectacle. Six men in red robes, and all had shaved their hair, all except for the last one. This was the little monk. This is the hero of this little story. We should all be proud of his little exploits. But I am getting ahead of myself. Yes, everyone always seems to be in a rush, nowadays!

Back to our story:

Every morning, after roll call, the monks would eat their breakfast of rice porridge and tea. Some of them liked strong coffee. This short ritual would quickly be over and the main part of the day would begin. Actually, this was the only thing the monks did; they would each take a position inside the main hall and sit down and close their eyes. That was all!

Before the reader starts to scratch his head, let me explain the procedure, with a little more detail. The monks would not just sit down and close their eyes. This was only the beginning. They would actually count their breaths:

ONE, TWO

ONE, TWO

ONE, TWO

Very much like that.

The abbot of the monastery called the procedure, LOOKING INTO THE HEARTMIND STREAM. The little monk did not like doing this seemingly silly exercise. His legs would hurt after ten minutes and he would start dreaming of traveling to distant lands and introducing himself to the inhabitants of these exotic places. After a few hours, the little monk would be lost in an imaginary fog and not hear anything, until the abbot nudged him on the head with his stick. If the abbot did not get to him first, then one of the missiles would.

Let me explain a little more. As reported earlier, the little valley had been at war for quite a long time. Nobody really knew how it all had really started. Was it because of the drought? Or had the inhabitants of the valley been fighting before the lack of rainwater? No one was really quite sure! In any account, missiles would occasionally be launched not too far from the monastery. They never landed anywhere; they simply made a very loud noise. How tiresome!

The little monk was annoyed by this daily occurrence. Having to hear something coming but never hearing it land. What a queer business! The abbot would tell the little monk: "Do not listen to the missiles, my son. They never land and they cannot hurt you. Listen and pay attention to your breath. This is the key to your salvation." Alas, the little monk refused to listen. His mind would wander and think about traveling to exotic lands. After all, this business of counting one's breaths seemed rather silly to him.

In face, he didn't fully understand how he even came to be at the monastery. As far as he knew, this was where he had lived as long as he could remember. Memory seemed to always play tricks on him. But, in fact, no one in the monastery knew when he had arrived or why he was there. No one remembered anything about these crucial details. This frustrated the little monk to no end. "These stupid people," he muttered to himself. "How are they ever going to amount to anything?" He paused in his train of thought for a moment, and looked at the wall in front of him.

"Surely, there must be more to life than just sitting and counting one's breaths," he thought to himself. "Perhaps if I can leave the monastery, maybe then, I can find out the meaning of all this." His face lit up and he smiled. He now had a plan. He would make his escape and go over the

mountain, to the next valley. Maybe there he would find what he was looking for. Yes! It all seemed terribly important now. This was his new mission! To go over the mountain and find the true meaning to life. He would not rest until he accomplished this. He felt a surge of energy. He would escape that very night.

*

And so, with strong determination, the little monk planned his escape. There was only one obstacle. At the gate of the monastery, there stood a little orange tree. This little tree was of little consequence, except for the fact that on one of its branches sat a little bird whose feathers were yellow and red and sometimes glowed in the dark. This little bird would break into the most beautiful of songs when anyone came near it. In fact, the melody was so exquisite, that all who heard it would stop dead in their tracks and instantly be lulled into a stupor of drunken ecstasy.

As soon as the little monk approached the orange tree, the little bird called out and said, "Good evening, little monk! Where are you going?" This little monk replied: "I am leaving the monastery in order to find out the meaning of life. Please, let me go through!" The little bird closely examined the little monk and gave a little peal of laughter. "You must be careful! It is not safe out there. There are terrible things that you will have to face. Especially the dreaded giant of the ten thousand rivers. Some say he is at least one hundred feet tall! Are you prepared to meet him and slay him?"

The little monk became a little frightened, but only for a moment. With his composure regained, he said softly, "Yes, I am ready to go out and meet my destiny." The little bird flew up into the air and with a loud screech, circled three times above the little monk's head and disappeared into the frosty night air. The only trace the little red and yellow bird left was a glowing trail of golden feathers pointing in the direction of the next valley and the terrible UNKNOWN.

*

The little monk had not gone very far when he noticed something on the ground. It was long and made out of wood. "Oh, This could be useful," exclaimed the little monk. "I can use this as a walking stick." He picked it up and felt it. A strange sensation of heat lit up the little monk. It wasn't

long before he actually caught fire. The little monk started running in circles. Since this was of little use, he threw himself down and began rolling around on the dry and parched ground. But still the fire in him raged on. He quickly realized that he was still holding the stick, and just as quickly dropped it.

When the little monk did this, the fire subsided. This had all been quite a fright. He had been so busy trying to put out the fire, that he failed to realize he no longer was in the valley of his little monastery. Indeed, he wasn't quite sure where he was! The landscape looked very different. He was puzzled by how he had gotten into this new and alien-looking landscape of swamps and jungle. How could a silly stick produce all this? Perhaps this was all a dream. Perhaps he was still in his bed sleeping with all the other monks.

" you must be careful
it is not safe out there "



Now you must understand, dear readers, that monks dislike tricks being played upon them, just like anyone else. In fact they dislike it with a passion. "All right, who's playing this trick on me?" shouted the little monk, with a hint of growing impatience. "I do not like this type of game. No! Not at all!" The jungle was silent. Or, rather, no one answered his question. Only the sound of birds chirping in the distance could be heard. "I wonder if there are any snakes here?" thought the little monk. "I am so afraid of them. Once I saw one in the courtyard of our monastery, but it was so long ago"

This was the state of affairs for a few days. The little monk was in the jungle and couldn't seem to understand why he was in it, let alone find a way out of it. In desperation, he began walking in one direction. He remembered what the abbot had said to him once: "If you are ever lost, pick any direction and walk in a straight line with no wavering thoughts. Eventually, you will get back to where you came from." This seemed like sensible advice to him, in this time of great discomfort and confusion. The little monk picked a direction and started walking. Just making the decision made him feel instantly at ease. Little monks get frightened easily, so this form of encouragement is always welcome!

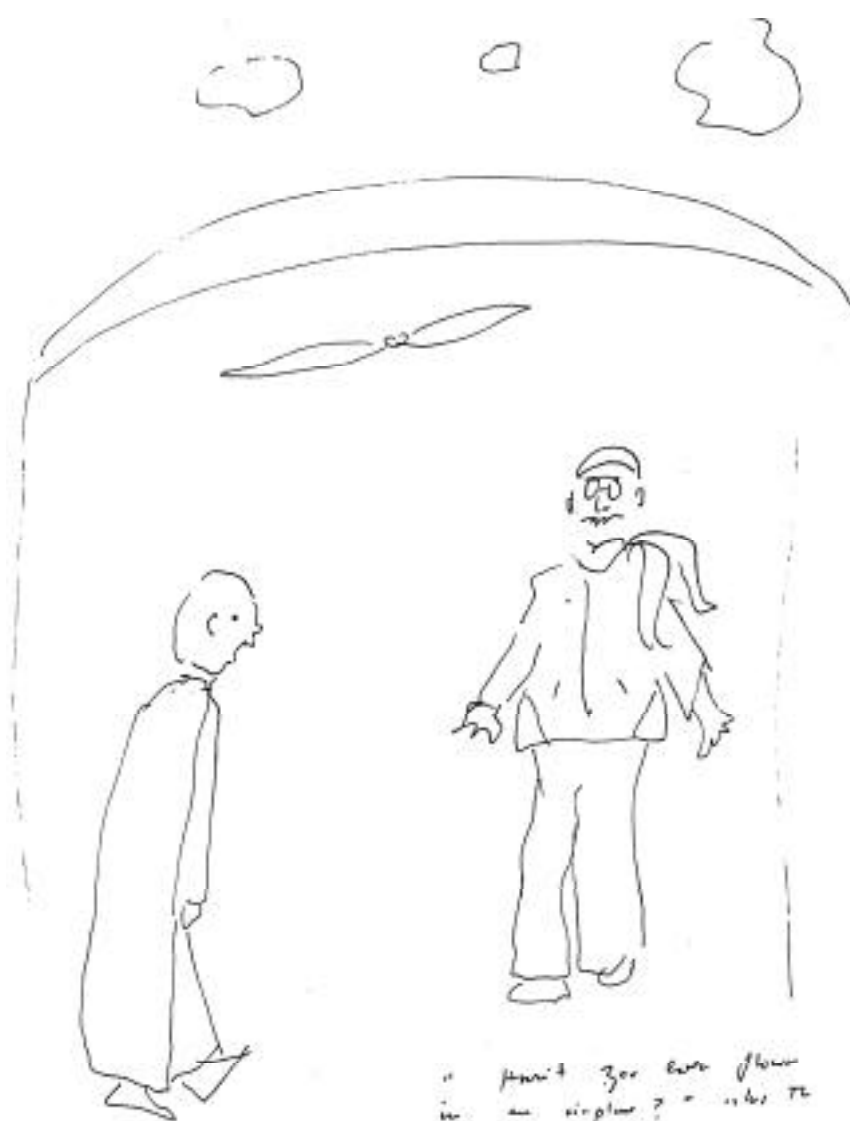
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It was not long before he came upon a clearing and saw a little airplane hangar. The hangar looked empty and the runway was covered with cracks. Little weeds grew out of them and seemed to wave their greetings to the little monk as he approached the hangar for a closer inspection. Inside he could hear the sound of metal. Someone was attempting to repair a broken propeller on an airplane. This kindled the little monk's curiosity. He had never really seen a plane before. He wondered to himself, "Could this be the strange missile that takes off and makes such a loud noise, yet never lands? Oh, I certainly hope so! I've always wanted to see it." This little excited wish made the little monk momentarily forget his fear.

His fear quickly came back, however, when two feet, which were under the plane, pushed themselves forward. A man had been working underneath the airplane. "How queer!" said the little monk. "You are not dressed in a robe!" The man looked at him with a puzzled, yet annoyed look. "Why should I be dressed in a robe, you little mouse! Who are you and what do you want?" The little monk replied: "I am searching for the meaning of life.

Can you answer my question?”

The man laughed. “But of course! I can tell you the meaning of life, but first you must help me with my airplane. Then, we’ll go up for a ride!” The little monk was frightened by this offer. “Do you mean, this missile will take us up in the air and we shall never come back?” asked the little monk. “This is not a missile,” said the man, thumbing his mustache. “This is an airplane. I built it myself. Haven’t you ever flown in an airplane?” “NO, I HAVE NOT!” answered the little monk, with some anguish in his voice. You must remember, dear readers, that monks become frightened very easily.



"Hört Zee over vloer
in de vloer?" "Ja, de
Difot."

“You’ve been walking in a straight line, haven’t you,” asked the pilot. “Well how did you know that?” asked the startled monk. “Everyone walks in a straight line, that is, until they start walking in circles, then they no longer walk in a straight line!” laughed the pilot. He looked straight at the little monk and continued, “Yes, indeed, they no longer walk in a straight line. That’s why they come to me!” The little monk looked at the pilot with some bewilderment. Was this another trick? This business about straight lines and circles seemed rather confusing. The little monk was beginning to have a headache and was wondering when the afternoon meal would be served. He had not eaten for days and asked the pilot if there was some food anywhere near the hangar.

“We don’t eat anything around here,” answered the pilot. He then said, “Would you like me to show you how your mind can talk to your heart?” The little monk was hungry and wasn’t interested in such a silly idea. “Mind talking to heart? OF WHAT USE IS THIS?” the little monk thought, rather annoyed and growing more so with every moment. This business about the mind talking to the heart was all well and good, but it was food that seemed the most important thing now. The little monk’s stomach was the thing making the most noise at the moment, and a rather fearful one at that.

“It’s easy,” said the pilot. He went over to a corner of the hangar and took a piece of paper out of a desk drawer. Pilots always have plenty of paper. That’s how they can navigate in unknown territory, dear readers. The pilot then took out a pen from his shirt pocket and told the little monk to come closer.

Oh, dear readers, what courage it takes to write down this little story. There are not too many little monks running around in hangars. Much less, pilots who teach them how to communicate with their minds and hearts! Yes, this certainly is a strange state of affairs! But, let us all take a deep breath and plunge onward

The pilot then gave the little monk a sheet of paper and a pen and asked him to close his eyes. “Now remember,” said the pilot, “the mind and the heart are very close friends. The problem is that they don’t know how to talk to each other! Such a strange state of affairs, indeed.”

The little monk had his eyes closed and was having trouble holding the pen and listening to the pilot at the same time. Nevertheless, he strained to

listen and not lose a single word. The pilot continued: “Now take the pen in your left hand and say, ‘With my left hand, I shall write what my mind thinks.’”

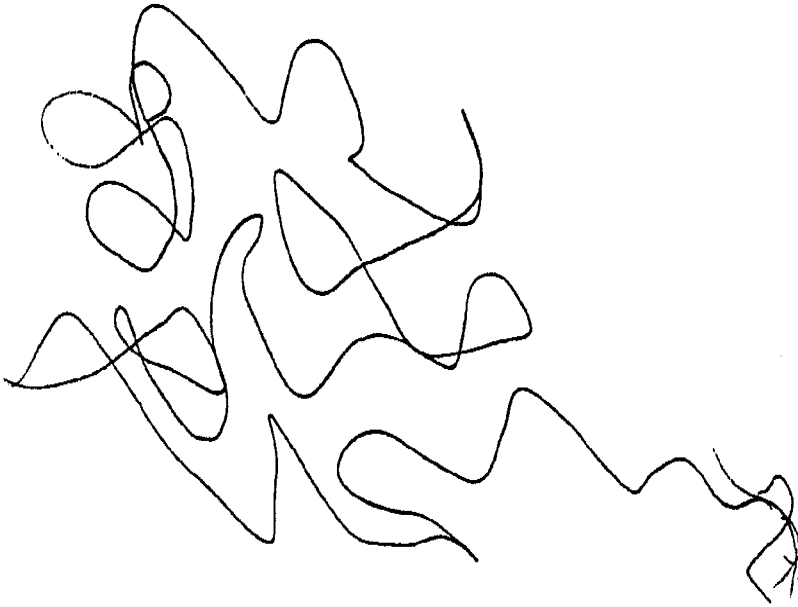
Dear readers, the little monk was left-handed. But, since most people write with their right hands, the pilot had to compensate for our courageous friend. But, let us continue

“Now, with your right hand, say: ‘I shall draw with my right hand what my heart feels.’” This all sounded simple enough.

The little monk repeated both commands three times. He switched the pen to his right hand when he said the second command to himself. This done, the pilot said, “Now, it’s time to introduce yourself! Write with your left hand:

HELLO! MY NAME IS L.M.

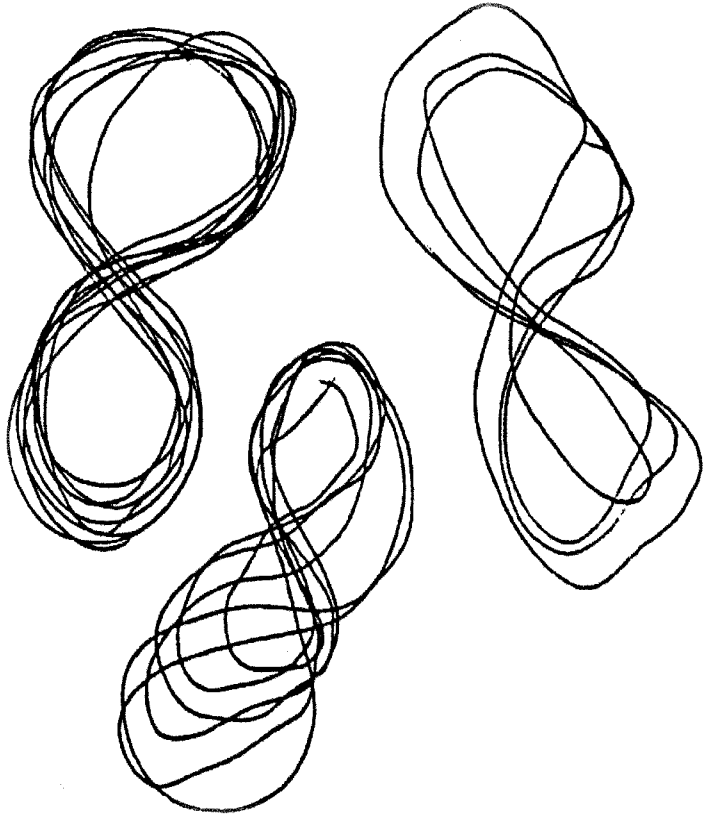
Now switch hands and just draw whatever comes out of the pen.” The little monk switched hands and tried to draw, but nothing would come out. “You are trying too hard. Just relax,” said the pilot. The little monk tried to relax and eventually the pen took on a life of its own. This is what came out:



The little monk was amazed. “Is this my heart answering back?” he asked. “Yes, your mind has given diplomatic recognition to your heart,” answered the pilot. “Now ask it something.” The little monk wrote:

WHAT DO YOU WANT?

He switched hands and began to draw. This is what came out:



The little monk gasped. These shapes had a haunting beauty to them. Was this really the language of the heart? How exciting it all was! It was like finding a long-lost friend. Dear readers, you all know how important this is! Good friends are very hard to find! When you find one make sure to treat him or her with great care!

*

Many hours later, the little monk asked the pilot why he lived in an airport. Actually, this airport consisted of one small hangar and an even small-

er runway. In fact, the little monk couldn't quite understand how the airplane could take off from such a small runway. So he inquired, "Please tell me, Mr. Pilot, how do you take off from such a small runway?"

The pilot looked at him and laughed: "Dear little monk! My airplane has not taken off in five hundred years." The little monk was puzzled. He thought this was all a very queer business. "Then why do you repair your airplane?" asked the little monk.

The pilot laughed again and said, "I repair my plane, but as soon as I try to fly, something always seems to get stuck. I don't really mind, however. Look at the sky! Look at all those attractive clouds. Don't you just feel you could lose yourself in them? Look at the sky. It is everywhere. Just like the heart. It produces rain and it produces sunshine. Isn't it strange how people are always looking down to the ground and ignoring the sky? Even though it affects them so much?"

The little monk was more confused than ever. He wanted to leave this strange man and this strange airport. But, as you well know, dear readers, the little monk was lost and couldn't quite find his way home.

*

The little monk began to weep. He really was frightened now; he could not be sure whether he would ever find his home again. He was confused, and out of desperation he began walking in a straight line. If something succeeds once, it is always a good idea to try it again, dear readers!

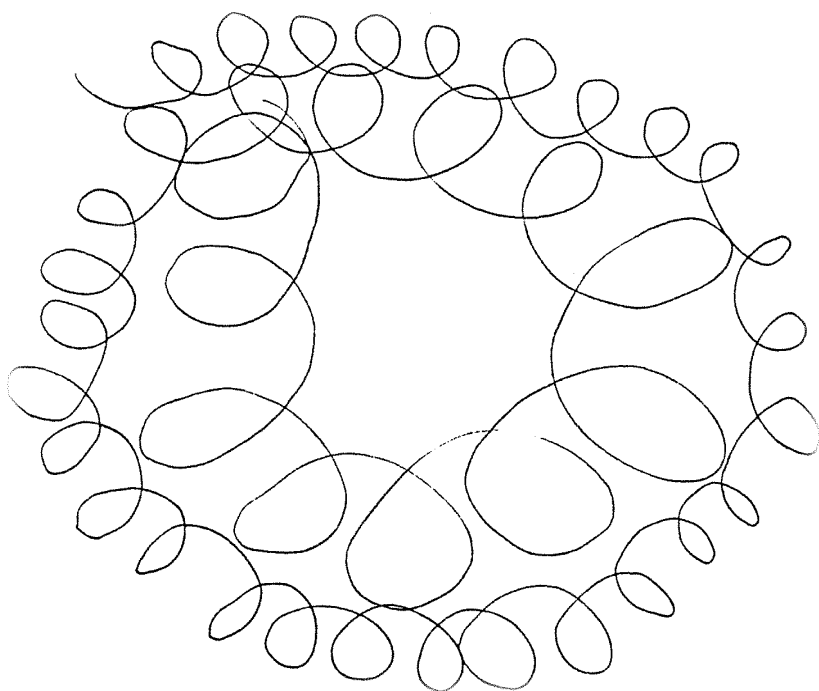
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The little monk walked on and on into a deep mountainous area. He had seen mountains like this only in pictures the abbot kept in his desk. The abbot had told the little monk that in mountains like these, there were often dangerous people. The mountains looked quite beautiful, however. They were sharp and craggy. Much like mountains in China. The little monk knew that these kinds of mountains like to kiss and embrace the mist. As the path he was on began to rise, the little monk began to shake with fear. As you readers must surely know by now, little monks get frightened easily! But, do not worry, sometimes in life there are many surprises.

One enchanting surprise was about to burst forth. "Who are you, little monk?" a soft voice called. The little monk turned around and just above

him saw a most unusual sight. It was a beautiful little princess. At least, that's what she looked like at first, but on closer inspection, she looked more like a warrior. And a very beautiful one at that! The little monk took out his paper and pen from his satchel. You must remember, dear readers, that the pilot gave the little monk plenty of paper to practice talking to his heart. Should we all be given such a precious gift!

The little monk drew with his right hand something like this.



Now pictures like this do not find themselves expressed every day. The little monk was not sure whether this was real love, or some temporary form of insanity. We all are often faced with this difficult dilemma. Many times we make a mistake and refuse to see the real person that is behind the beautiful mask. This can sometimes be painful. Learning to see is hard to do.

But, let us not get lost from our story, dear readers. After drawing his picture, the little monk asked: "Hello and who are you, beautiful princess?"

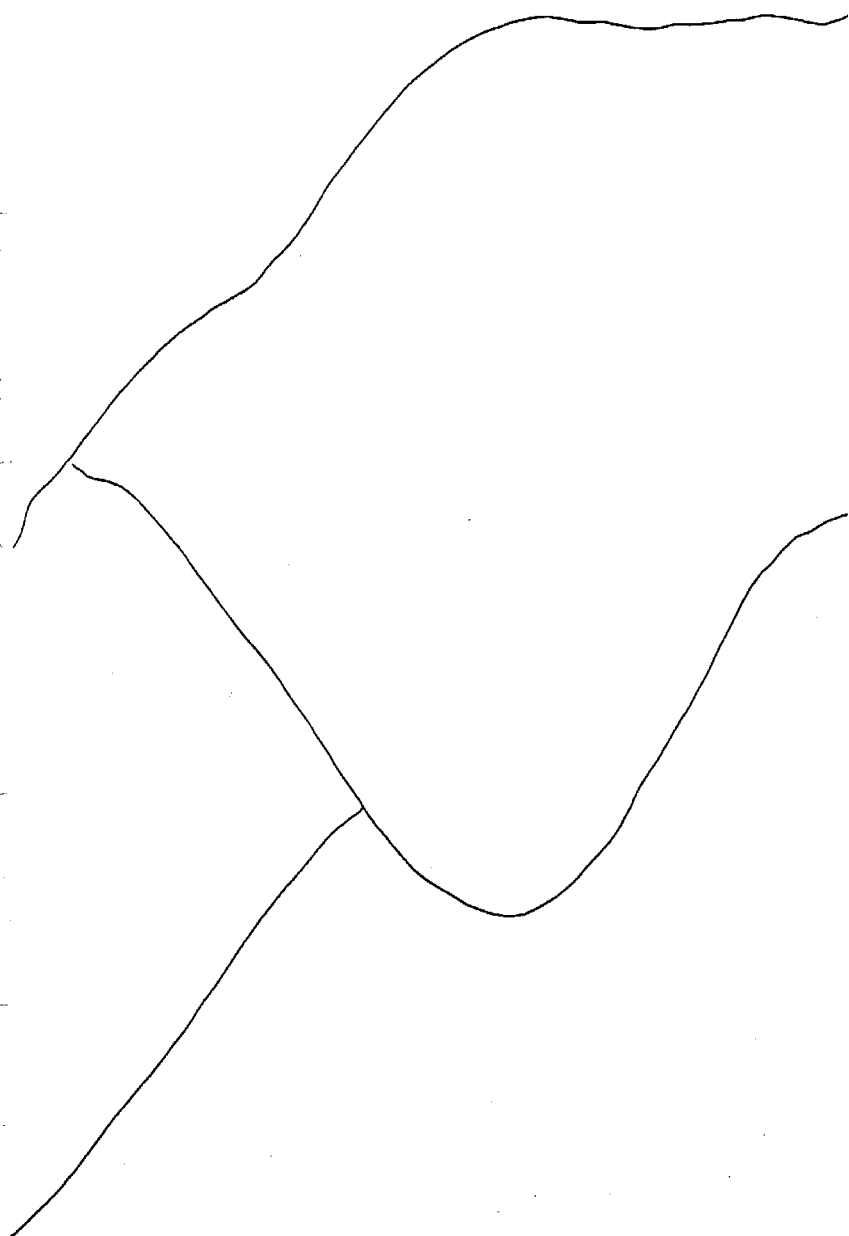
"I am not a princess. I am a sorceress, and my name is Je Zhou. You are traveling through my territory and no one can go further from here with my escort," she said. The little monk seemed resigned to this. After all, you never refuse your host's company when you are visiting his, or in this case her, house.

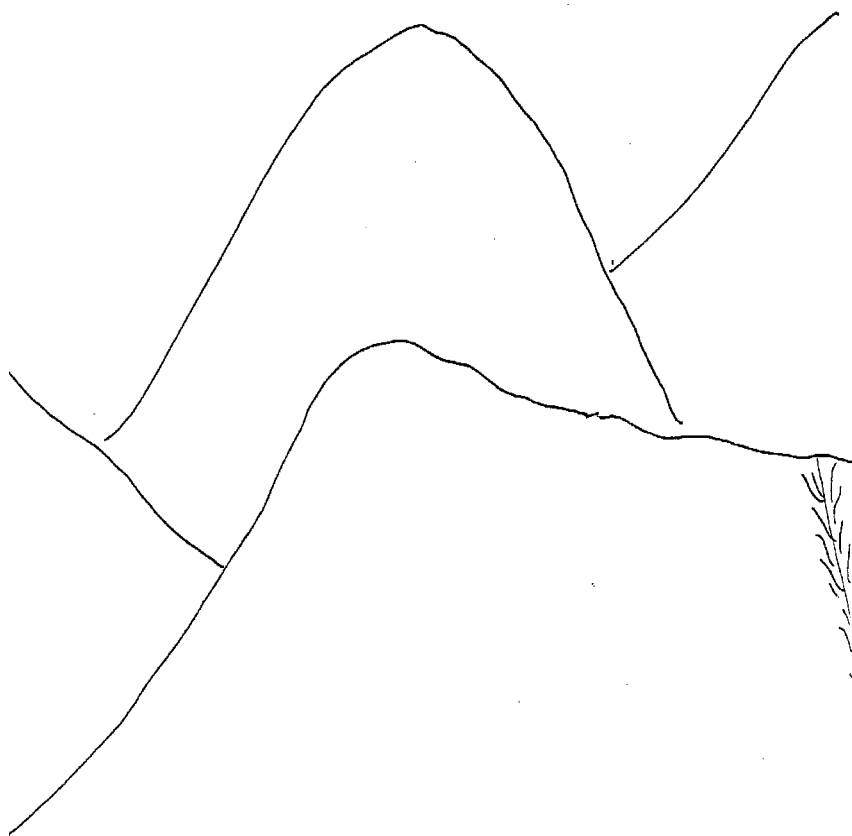
"The unaimed arrow never misses," said Je Zhou.

"Excuse me what did you say?" asked the little monk with a blank look on his face.

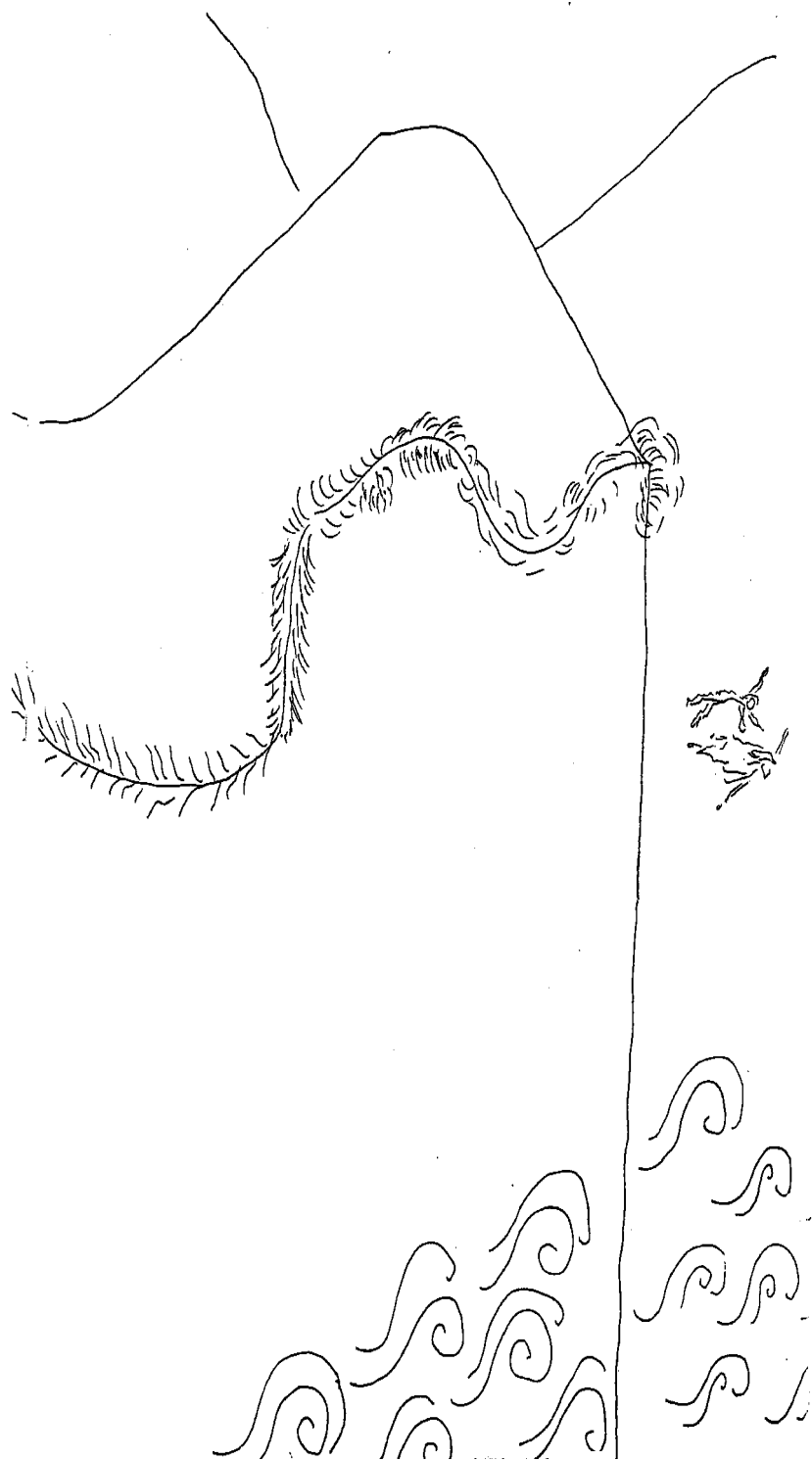
"I said, the unaimed arrow never misses." Je Zhou shouted this time to make sure the little monk heard her. A tone of impatience vibrated throughout the path they were walking on.

"I'm sorry, " trailed the little monk.





" The sorceress jumped and with
one hand gobbled the little monk. "



“Oh, it’s quite all right,” Je Zhou said. “Most people never do understand,” she softly muttered and looked beyond the next mountain. They were now so high, that the river down below looked like a small little snake. This lofty height gave the little monk a dizzy feeling. He never did like heights. But he had to hide his fear in front of this fearless sorceress. It was the least he could do. After all, the little monk was a guest in her house. What manners, to start shaking in the presence of your host. This was not proper.

“A buzzing mind is always trying to hit too many targets,” said Je Zhou. “Never do that. The heartmind is always bigger than that. It can expand and expand until it completely envelops the target and there is no longer any need to aim.” Je Zhou was now getting an arrow out of her sorceress’ quiver. She materialized a bow and proceeded to aim her arrow. The entire mountain seemed to expand until it seemed the sky was permanently blotted out.

The little monk was getting used to the impossible by now. As the mountain expanded, so did the sorceress and finally the fruit tree she was aiming at merged with the arrow. There was not a hint of tension on the sorceress’ brow. She held her breath and stood perfectly still. This is magic, mused the little monk. The abbot had always said to avoid this dangerous business. But it all looked quite fun to him.

“I never scatter the heartmind,” said Je Zhou. “Avoid the tension of your personal dramas. Let the boundaries melt. Don’t aim, just flow. There is no good or bad experience. There is only balance and imbalance. There is a scattered mind and a blending mind. There is a scattered heart and a blending heart. Don’t let the heart and mind pull in opposite directions. Let them communicate. Let them sing together. When they sing it is the process of life in creation. The energy is not frozen. The heartmind river is in full flow.” So said Je Zhou with a grin on her face exposing a set of pearly white teeth.

*

The small party had now been traveling for an entire day. Yet who could really say how long they had been traveling? Time itself seemed to have a different dimension here. The gorges that lined the path and swallowed the river down below seemed to be getting bigger and bigger. The little monk felt quite small and insignificant. Birds below looked like dust motes and the clouds above seemed to be singing in unison with a howling wind. The air

itself got sweeter and sweeter, the higher the little party went. This adventure took the little monk's breath away. This was not too difficult an occurrence from these heights.

*

Dear readers, even the best mountain climb must come to an end someday; this little adventure was no different. Both monk and sorceress reached the summit of this particular mountain. Ahead of them was the ocean, deep and sparkling blue and green. A most breathtaking sight, even for a sorceress who was used to many things. She looked out at the sea and softly hummed to herself. "Little monk," she slowly spoke, "it seems to me that there is no connection between getting ready to do something and actually doing it. I sincerely feel that getting ready to do anything is seldom necessary, because one is already ready!"

The little monk was confused by this statement, yet he sensed that a deep truth was being transmitted. He listened and leaned closer to the sorceress. She continued: "Indeed, when our heart and mind are in constant balance, less and less action is necessary. Solutions come naturally. This superior balance leads to calm and one develops a keen sense of alertness"

"This sounds like wise advice," uttered the little monk, "but please tell me, what are we going to do up here on this peak? It is cold and there is no food. I am hungry and very tired."

"That's easy to answer!" shouted the sorceress. "We are going to jump off this peak into the sea!"

"I cannot!" screamed the little monk hysterically.

"Stop turning this into a personal drama," the sorceress spoke with a sternness the little monk had not heard before in her voice.

"LET GO!" encouraged the sorceress. Expanding into the sky and the sea, the sorceress jumped and with one hand grabbed the little monk.

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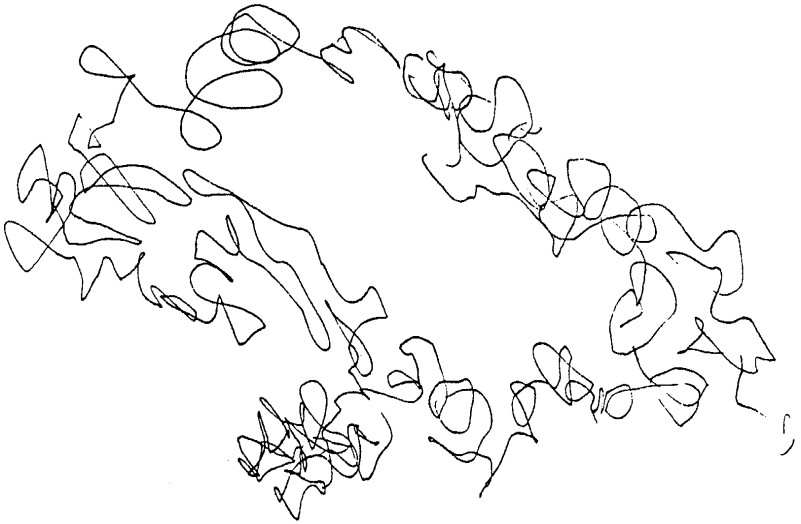
“So this must be heaven,” thought the little monk. But it was actually a soft and sandy beach out on an island. He had no idea how he had gotten here. The sorceress was nowhere to be seen. Indeed there was not a single inhabitant anywhere as far as the eye could see. This was not too difficult. This little island was the size of a coconut. It bobbed up and down in a lazy way. What a strange island to be stuck on!

The little monk found some insects to eat. He didn't like eating insects, but there was nothing else to be found and this brave little monk certainly didn't want to starve to death. Dear readers, our story is far from finished. We need our little friend to continue his journey and inspire us a little more.

The only thing to do on the island was to watch the waves come and go. This was an endless task. The little monk remembered the abbot saying that the ocean waves were like the beat of our hearts and like the breath that came out of our lungs. The secret to the Universe was in his wavelike activity. But the little monk was frustrated. He really had no idea what the abbot was talking about. No! This little monk wanted to know the meaning of life. This was truly a matter of consequence.

Life seems to always come in circles and the little monk's was no exception. It was time for a new adventure and a new encounter. But all he had encountered so far was the hot sun and the burning sand of this coconut island. He took his robe off to wash. The sea breeze was getting cooler. He took out his paper and drew a picture.

It looked something like this:



The little monk liked his drawing a lot more than his previous attempts at talking to his heart. The sorceress had given the little monk a special chant to use when in danger, but with the warning that it could be used only once. The little monk decided to keep it safely in the most secret corner of his mind for a real emergency.

As he thought about this, there was a sudden SPLASH! Out of the water popped a dolphin. Its sleek and shiny silver coat glistened with sea water.

“Hello, little monk. How are you?” smiled the dolphin.

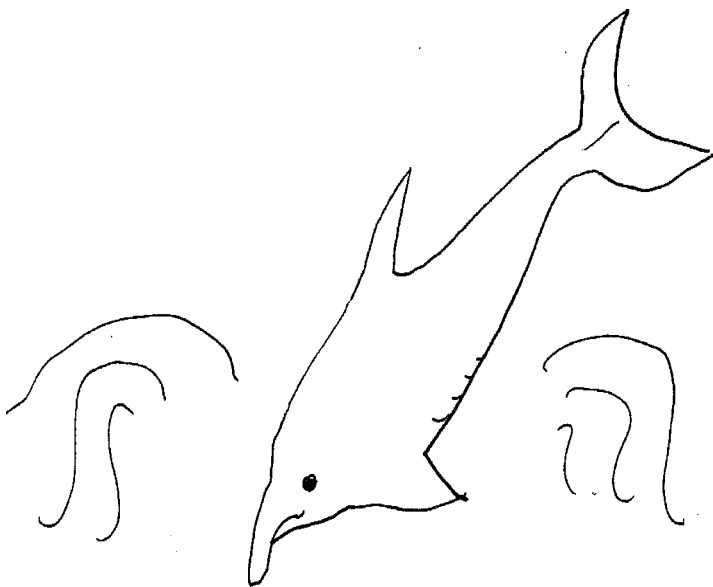
“Hello,” answered the little monk.

“You seem to be far from home, can I help you?” asked the dolphin with a hint of true sincerity.

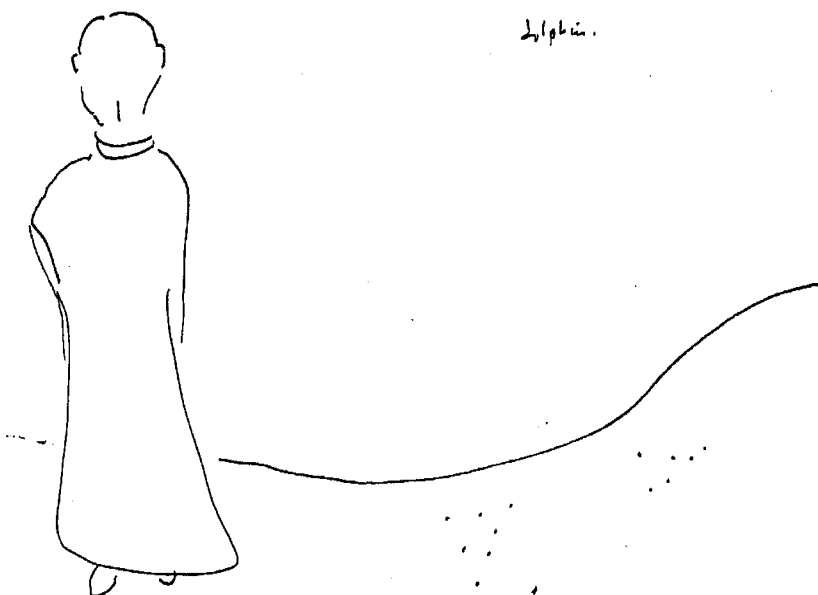
“I am lost on this island,” said the little monk. “Do you know the meaning of life?” asked the tired traveler to the dolphin.

“That depends”

“On what?” asked the little monk.



"you seem to
be far away from home.
can I help you," asked the
dolphin.



“On whether you would like me to surf the waves with you on my back.”

The little monk had lost most of his fear by now. This happens when one has been on the road for quite some time. The little monk was learning to be open to whatever happened to come his way. This is a true sign of growing up, dear readers. Please pay close attention!

“But of course!” cried the little monk. So on he jumped, right onto the back of this beautiful silver animal.

What an adventure it was to ride on the back of a dolphin! But the biggest adventure was yet to come. As monk and dolphin glided through the waves, a curious thing happened. The little monk had a sudden urge to ask the dolphin a question of great consequence. “Please tell me Dolphin, Sir, how does one get the most out of a wave?”

The dolphin replied: “By feeling it. It’s that simple. Let your heartmind sink into it.”

“I’m not sure I understand,” said the little monk.

“Every wave is born, lives, and ultimately dies. When an old wave dies and you’re under it, it could be painful. Learn to listen to the song of the waves. When a wave has grown old and is ready to leave the ocean, it will whisper softly to you and wave its farewell. Never cling to a wave, because it wants to rest and many new waves are born every second. Greet them all and say hello. This is the wisdom of the waves.”

The little monk was moved to tears. How sad and yet how sweet. Perhaps one day he too would be able to listen to the waves and hear their subtle melody.

Dear readers, this is truly a gift to hear such words of wisdom. Animals are often smarter than humans. But many times we fail to listen to them. The little monk and his dolphin friend swam across the waves and eventually encountered a lone fisherman. He was chumming the water and looked quite absorbed in his work. He didn’t notice the monk or the dolphin until they were right in front of him.

The little monk waved and smiled. He then asked the fisherman: “Dear Fisherman, Sir, can you please tell us how to get to the nearest shore? I am searching for the meaning of life.”

The fisherman, who continued to look quite absorbed, slowly looked up and said: “I have been fishing in this spot for the last eight hundred years and I have never caught a single fish, but if you come with me I will take you to shore.

The little monk was delighted and said good-bye to his dolphin friend. The dolphin waved and squealed a sad good-bye. Saying good-byes are always difficult, dear readers, especially if you are saying good-bye to a close friend. The little monk remembered the good advice of the dolphin and stepped aboard the rickety little boat. Once aboard, the little monk asked the fisherman: "Dear Fisherman, Sir, why have you not caught any fish in this spot and why do you stay here so long if it is not fruitful?"

The fisherman cast a strange glance at the little monk. "Don't you understand? I fish here because there is always the chance that my luck might change. Every day I steer my little boat to this spot and anchor it firmly. This is my sole goal in life. It gives me a reason for living." The fisherman ended his discourse with a slight sneeze.

The little monk was annoyed by this answer, but was beginning to get used to such strange discourses. The more he expected less, the easier it became to discover new and exciting things. Indeed, this new and strange process of letting things fall away was something to look forward to. It was a gift of sorts.

As the fisherman turned the boat around and started to steer home, the little monk listened to the song of the waves. He tried to blend with them as they gently hugged the fisherman's boat. Many times, while sleeping in the monastery, something would disturb the little monk. Something invisible and untouchable. Dear readers, we all seem to be disturbed in our sleep from time to time. Somehow an ocean of unknown waves pulsates within us all. These waves whisper to us about the future, yet we often fail to listen to them. Humans are sometimes terribly timid!

The little monk asked the fisherman: "Do you listen to the waves when you are fishing?"

"Yes, I do," said the fisherman. "They are my friends, every time I leave shore and come here they welcome me back. We've known each other for so long. We have long conversations."

"What do they say?" asked the little monk.

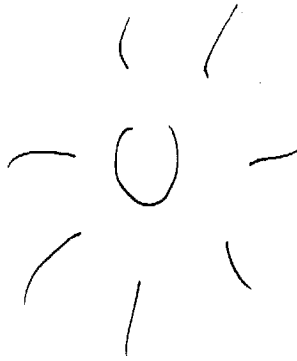
"They tell me to be free," answered the fisherman.

"Are we near shore now?" asked the little monk.

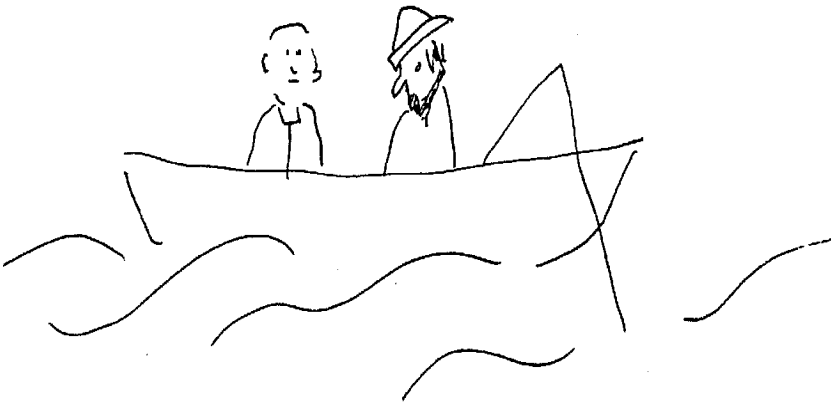
"Yes, I think so," said the fisherman.

"How far is it?" asked the little monk.

"Not too far," answered the fisherman, as he pulled on the fishing net.



"The little man asked
the fishermen do you listen
to the winds - when you are
fishing"



The little monk could now see the shore. There was sand on it. This was quite normal, but beyond the beach seemed to lie even more sand. "Could this be a desert?" asked the little monk to himself. Indeed, it was starting to look like one. Who could possibly live in such an unfortunate place? The little monk became suddenly destitute. Would he ever discover the meaning of life in such a forsaken place? Where did the fisherman live? All these questions buzzed inside his head.

The boat finally reached shore. It seemed to have taken quite a bit of time. But, at last the little monk was able to step on solid ground again. He had not done so for quite a long time. He looked at the fisherman, who was now walking straight ahead into the desert sands. With little warning, he seemed to fade away. Now, the little monk had no intention of being left alone in this lonely and desolate place, so he quickly began to run after his new companion. As I told you before, dear readers, good friends are most hard to find. Perhaps this fisherman was one of them!

The little monk followed him from a distance. The fisherman was walking at a very brisk pace and it was not easy going. Especially since the flat land was now giving way to huge sand dunes made of sand so fine that each step made one sink deeper and deeper into them. The fine particles had a way of getting into the eyes, which made the journey most unpleasant to the little monk. Indeed, everything in this environment seemed to get fuzzier and fuzzier, the closer one inspected things. Nothing seemed solid at all.

"Could the heartmind be also like this?" thought the little monk to himself. "How can one possibly control anything in this environment? The little monk's heart began to feel like a tight knot when he thought things like this. Indeed, readers, we seem to be always tying knots of many kinds when we want to control things that cannot be controlled. We seem to control our Universe with knots. This is a peculiar habit of humans and even of monks, so entrenched are we in our ways

The sun was beginning to set. The fisherman reached a small little lake and sat down beside a rock. He motioned to the little monk. "Would you like something to eat?" he asked.

"Yes, please," answered the little monk.

Out of nowhere the fisherman took out a huge apple from his pocket and gave it to the little monk. The little monk was quite startled. Not only did he have a new friend, he had also found a magician.

"How did you do that?" asked the little monk.

"Oh, it's not so hard," retorted the fisherman. "In matters of the heart, everything is magic. For the heart lives in a spirit island, where the laws of space

and time do not operate. Matter and energy can take on any form. Have you ever seen the law of gravity actually operate in a dream?" asked the fisherman to the little monk.

"I don't remember my dreams very well," muttered the little monk, almost ashamed to admit such a dark secret to his newly found friend.

"You should learn how to talk to the heart," said the fisherman. "It needs to be constantly reassured that all is all right. It is sometimes afraid. When you are on the edge of a fear, this is when the gap between the heart and your mind becomes the most noticeable. People are so funny. They always want to measure things. Is something higher or lower? Is that thing better or worse? These are not affairs of the heart. Do you understand?" asked the fisherman, looking quite serenely into the distance.

The little monk was not quite sure how to answer this question. Life to him seemed too complicated at times. There were so many things he didn't understand.

"Where do we go when we die?" asked the little monk to his new found friend.

"We return to the spirit island," answered the fisherman. "Where else can we possibly go?" This all seemed so basic to the fisherman, but the little monk was not completely satisfied with this answer.

"Does the heart live in this spirit island?" asked the little monk.

"But of course!" shouted the fisherman. He was now beginning to get a little annoyed. He continued: "We go back to the heart. It does not understand space or time. Look at this wall."

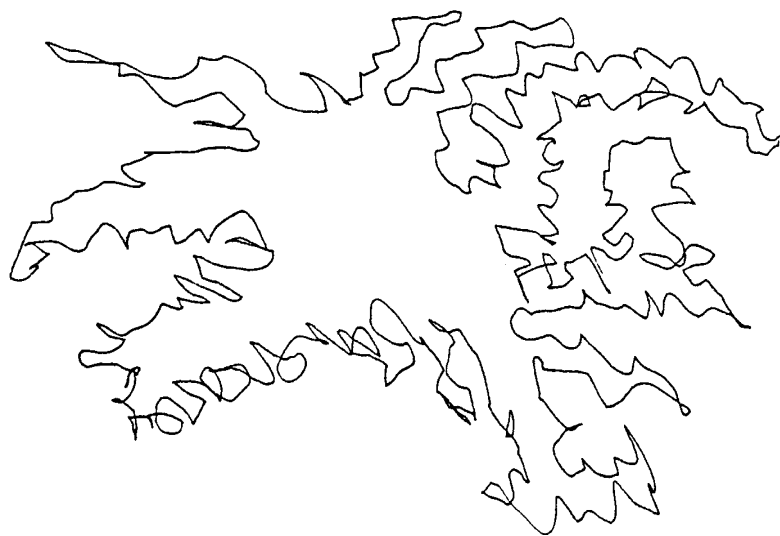
"What wall?" asked the little monk.

"This one," said the fisherman, and out of his pocket he picked a pebble which he threw into the lake. It soon blossomed into a wall.

The little monk was startled. This was such a strange way to live!

"This wall is just four lines and some angles. This is how the mind sees it, but the heart might see it differently. The mind and the heart are often fighting with each other. When the mind fights the heart, the heart can be a monster. We must learn to treat the mind gently. When hunger and fear stalk the heart, this is the time to sit still and listen to it. When anger squeezes the heart, it is time to tame the heart. The mind never wants to understand the heart, for to do so would be quite catastrophic. The experience would be" The fisherman's voice trailed off. It was now evening and darkness had descended on their little camp. The little monk was getting sleepy.

When the little monk woke up, the fisherman was gone. This made the little monk fearful. To be stranded out in the middle of nowhere was a truly frightening experience. To comfort himself, the little monk took out some paper and drew a picture with his right hand. This was what he drew:



Such is the speed of the heart! We are often so ignorant of its temperament. Indeed, the heart moves at the speed of light. If we could but tune into it a little more often, what a great relief it would be, dear readers who have had such patience on this journey of the heart. On this journey of the mind. Yes, the heart and mind do not even know they dwell in the same body. Such is the sad state of affairs on this little planet.

The heart and the mind seem to want different things. How often do you, dear readers, talk to yourselves? Does someone answer? The mind and heart talking to each other is like the sound of two hands clapping. Confusion is everywhere! Just on the edge of the heart. Like an ocean tugging on the shore of an island. The island of the heart.

The heart does not understand words. It does not care to know about space. It becomes uncomfortable with time. There is no BIG or SMALL in the Universe of the heart. There is no PAST and there is no FUTURE. There is no GRAVITY and there is no LIGHT. The heart is a fluid world. The heart has total understanding. It has total recall. Dear readers, the heart likes to eat. If you speak to the heart long enough, it will release a monster and you will need to tame it.

But, we are leaving our story! Dear readers! We have a frightened little

monk to comfort. This little monk had a very curious mind. He was now trying to find out how to leave this most inhospitable desert. The little monk remembered to walk in a straight line. This had worked in the past, dear readers; so let us be patient and hope it works again.

*

On and on our little monk trudged. This desert seemed endless. It was getting cold again; the sun was setting. Nothing but sand dunes could be seen. This life and death business seemed endless. As the little monk began to lose hope, he saw a little mouse in the distance. He was running away from something unknown and possibly frightening. The little monk shouted to the little mouse:

“Hello there! Little mouse what are you running away from?”

The little mouse stopped and smiled at the little monk. “Are you lost?” it asked.

“Yes, I am,” said the little monk. “Can you please tell me where I can find the meaning of life?”

The little mouse laughed and said: “You will never find the meaning of life.”

“Why is that?” asked the little monk.

“Because, you can add two and two and get four, but you cannot get three!” retorted the little mouse, and off he fled into the distance.

*

Dear readers, please don't despair! Our little monk was not lost. He remembered the words of the abbot. He had once told him that one should always put the matter at hand to the purpose at hand. The little prince saw enormous quantities of sand. This gave him an idea. Why not simply dig a hole and find a way out beneath the ground? It struck him as a grand idea. The little monk began digging without stopping to rest.

Eventually, he found a tunnel and walked along the side of it. It was pitch black and the little monk could not see things clearly. The only thing he could do was feel the earth beneath his feet. After an hour of this slow and delicate work, he reached a small little door. It seemed to be locked, and forcing it open failed to bring relief. The little monk could smell a sweet fragrance coming from the other side. Smell, as you know, readers, is a tool of the heart. How often we can tell so much by just one whiff of our nostrils!

A small little light guided the little monk, this little light led to a small room. It was there that the little monk encountered a great mystery. Like all good mysteries, it would be unwise for me to reveal, but, let me say that the

little monk discovered an old wizard. Now, this wizard was somewhat blind. His age may have had something to do with it. This prevented him from seeing the little monk, but he could hear his approaching footsteps quite clearly.

“Who goes there?” cried the wizard.

“IT IS I,” cried the little monk. “Dear Wizard, can you please tell me the meaning of life?”

“Why do you want to know that?” asked the wizard, with a tone of contempt. “Can’t you just use your imagination?”

The little monk looked confused.

“Yes, my son. Simply imagine yourself as something. Everyone else will, too. Most people are very ignorant and simply do what they’ve been told to do. Invent your own life. Charge into your fears! It’s never as bad as you think and things are never as good as you think, either. Invent a goal and follow it. Review it frequently and see if it’s still worthwhile to follow.”

The little monk was rightly impressed. He was so impressed that he asked, “What is your goal, if I may ask, dear Wizard”

The wizard smiled and said, “I am building a device to take me to the stars. I have discovered how to separate the spin and center of a mass, and this will create a local gravity field. My little spaceship will then be propelled into orbit. Travel to the stars will become very economical.”

The little monk felt that this was a great way to live, but that somehow this wasn’t the answer he was looking for. So, he asked the wizard: “When will your spaceship take off?”

The wizard replied: “It is taking off right now! Hop in”

The little monk was never averse to a new adventure, so off he went to the stars.

As the spaceship took off with a silent humming sound, the wizard looked at our little monk and whispered: “Unless you leave everything behind, how will you ever know who you really are?”

Dear readers, this voyage must now take us to the very outer edge of our galaxy and beyond. Being a curious and adventurous spirit, our little monk did not mind this, for in the search of ultimate truths, all comforts must be abandoned and great courage must be pulled up from the very depths of the traveler. Indeed, to be free can be quite nerve-wracking; the saddest person is often the slave who has lost his chains!

The little monk was looking out through the spaceship’s window. All the bundles of stars seemed to be talking to each other. “Could they be talk-

ing about the truth?” wondered the little monk to himself. “It would be nice to ask them and find out, but how does one talk to a star?”

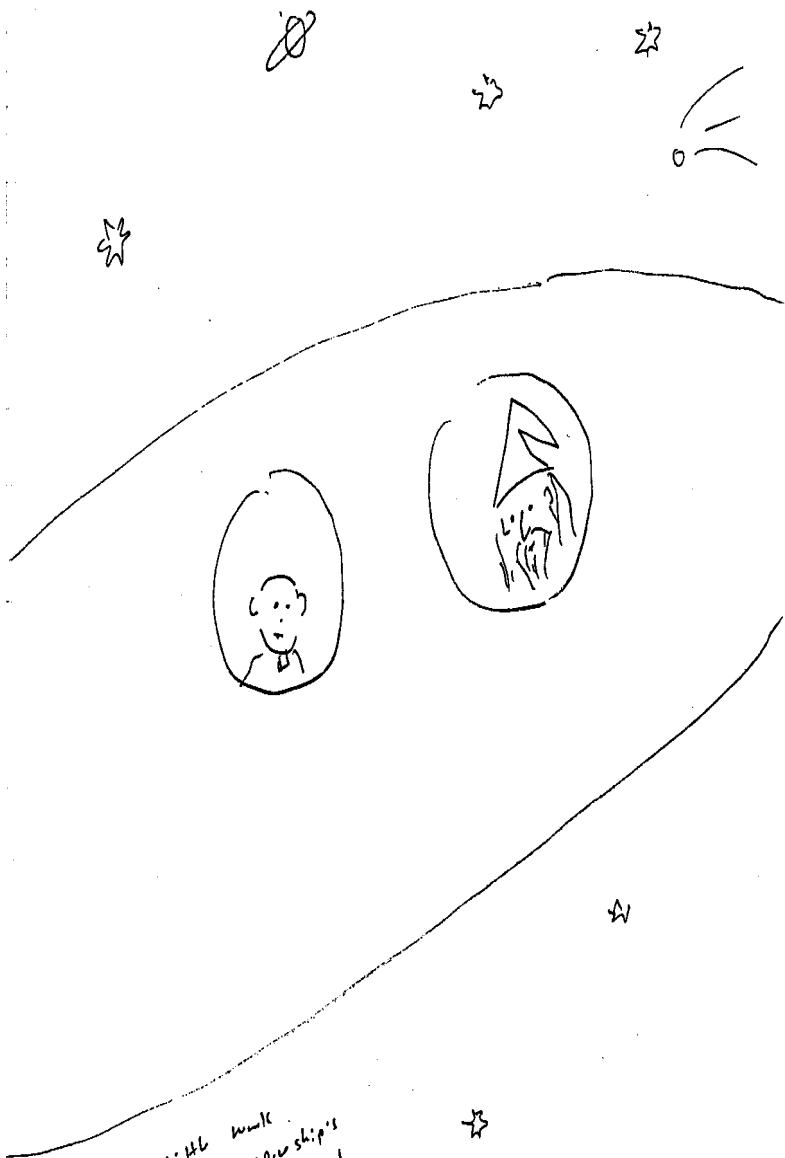
The old wizard was silently steering his spaceship with a handle made out of wood and metal. Despite his near blindness, the wizard had little difficulty navigating through such uncharted waters: he seemed to have a moment-by-moment focus which generated a power the little monk had difficulty resisting.

“What are we doing, Mr. Wizard, Sir?” asked the little monk.

“We’re simply waiting for the next thing to happen,” replied the wizard. “We are flying in a straight line, that is all that is necessary. Very few people know how to fly in a straight line. I think I’ll open a school for learning how to fly in a straight line.”

“Such a conceited person!” thought the little monk.

Indeed, dear readers, the art of flying, or walking in a straight line needs a lot of discipline. Letting go of everything that weighs on one, every fear, every love, every hate, every belief, every non-belief, could be quite a list! To deny a thing and to embrace it is often the same act. Perhaps it is easier, dear readers to simply walk away, or to smell a flower. The business of life can be so confusing!



"The little man
looked out the ship's
window. All the sunbeams
seemed to be talking
to each other."

*

Dear readers, far out in space there are many planets and stars; they often like to talk and give away their secrets to all those who care to listen.

It is a good idea to listen to the planets and stars. And also to the demons inside us, they are our best friends. It is these kind little demons that help us to be free. They force us to ask many and all kinds of questions, day in and day out. Until the day comes when asking questions is no longer necessary.

But let us get back to our story

*

The little monk started to cry. Something deep inside him began to stir. He noticed the wizard looking at him and said, "I feel so sad"

"Perhaps you hope and fear too much. Are you hoping to get something and are you afraid what it will cost you?" inquired the wizard with a penetrating tone of voice.

"I am no longer quite sure what it is I am seeking," answered the little monk. He looked at the stars with a sad and forlorn gaze.

"Well," said the wizard, "just make sure the heart knows what the mind is doing"

"I'm not sure I understand," said the little monk with a tone of frustration.

"When the mind and heart start talking together, you will know it and you will know what to do. It is often useless to ask questions about it. It is hearing the word but not listening to it," said the wizard, with a smug look of satisfaction.

*

Dear readers: Perhaps this is a good time for you to practice talking to your heart. This is why I shall leave you a blank space on this page, for you to draw on, before we all rejoin our beloved little monk on his quest for truth. Remember to let your heart express whatever it wants to tell you.

I hope this is enough space!

*

The little spaceship had been cruising in some far-off galaxy for what seemed a million years, or more. The little monk wanted to stretch his legs and asked the wizard to land on the nearest planet. "The nearest planet is covered with clouds of blue gas," said the wizard. "We will have to land blind, for I forgot to install radar, I hope you don't mind"

"Not at all," said the little monk.

As the spaceship descended, the gas clouds would occasionally open and the little monk could see some reddish form of earth; what this could be left much to the imagination. The forming edge of the clouds would hide the planet and just as surely the dissolving edge of the clouds would unveil it.

"Do you think we will land safely?" asked the little monk, in a tone of concern, to his wizard companion.

The wizard simply replied: "When the heart and mind become separated, then you lose your freedom."

The little monk did not understand this answer. "Such a complicated creature, this wizard," thought the little monk. "He talks in riddles and cannot speak in simple language."

The wizard continued his discourse: "Out in the desert, wandering is not seeing the root. Bushmen who live in the desert see the root and dig it up. They have a most nourishing drink. The rest of those who wander continue to have thirst."

The little monk thought this was all good entertainment, but not the real meaning of life. It seemed to him this could take a lot longer to find. But now there was not time to think further. The spaceship was landing.

*

Light and gravity: one pushes outward and the other pulls inward. Just like the heart and the mind. Our space travelers were beginning to learn this, dear readers.

The little monk now found himself on an alien planet very far from home. Was it possible to walk in a straight line from here? The little monk asked the wizard, "Dear Wizard, Sir, how will we return to our solar system? I wanted to know the meaning of life, but now I would like to get back home, for I am very tired."

The wizard said: "Do a vow of silence for one year, my little friend, and

do not communicate at all with anyone. You are trying to understand everything and you will understand nothing this way. Try to understand yourself and you will then understand everything.”

The little monk was in a state of deep dejection. All this traveling and for what? He had come no closer to discovering the meaning of life than when he left the monastery. The truth of the matter was simple. The little monk had been told to walk in a straight line and let nothing stand in his way; to even go in a wrong direction, as long as it was a straight line. The little monk was also told to have one goal and not two; if he split his energy, the goal would be lost.

Now, his straight line had led him to this planet, far from home. His wizard friend was now also gone. When the little monk was not looking, the wizard had disappeared. Dear readers, the whole episode had the little monk in tears. How would he survive in this faraway world of blue gas and reddish earth? If our little monk could fly, he certainly would have tried to leave this desolate place. Let us all pray for our brave friend.

Part II

Living On A Red and Blue Planet

It was the seventh day since the little monk had landed on the red and blue planet. He had been walking for quite a long time and seemed to be getting nowhere. The planet was a waste of red sand and wind-swept dunes as far as the eye could see. A feeling of desolation overwhelmed the little monk. To be lost and abandoned in such a dreadful place. What had the world come to!

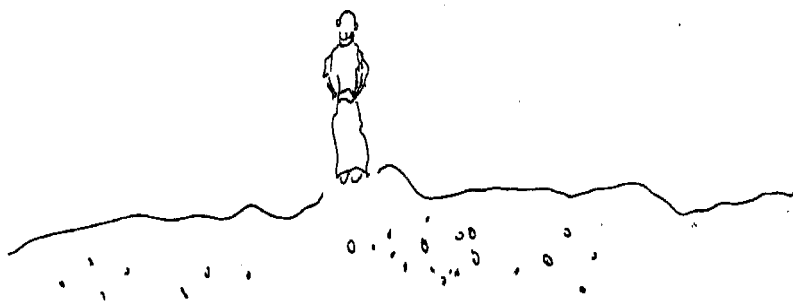
“Ah,” said the little monk to himself, “I shall surely die here in this forsaken place. This is not a safe haven for little monks. Perhaps if I walk a little more I shall find a place of refuge.” No sooner had the little monk uttered these words than a faint glow could be seen just across the horizon. The glow became brighter the closer the little monk approached it.

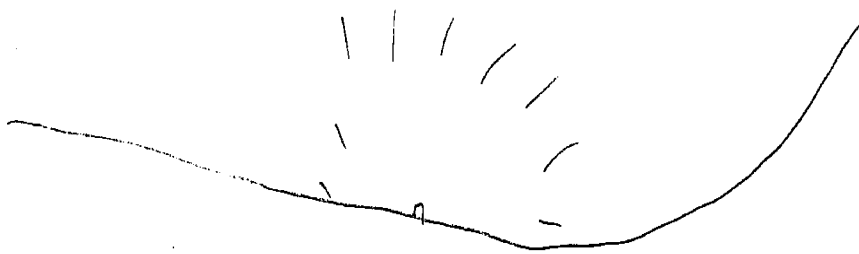
“What could this be?” asked the little monk, to no one in particular. He began to see the outline of a castle. This castle was shimmering brightly, the closer the little monk approached it the more this odd shimmering dazzled his eyes. The castle was made out of diamonds. This was a most awesome sight for the little man. He came from a place that prided itself on modesty. The sheer majesty of this diamond castle was overwhelming. The little monk took a few seconds to shield his eyes and recover his composure.

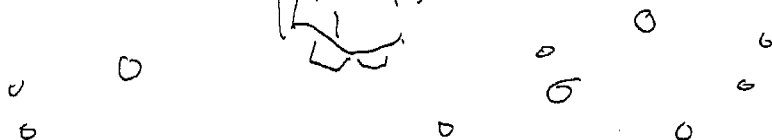
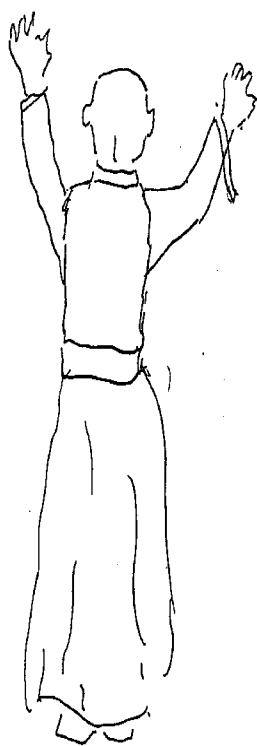
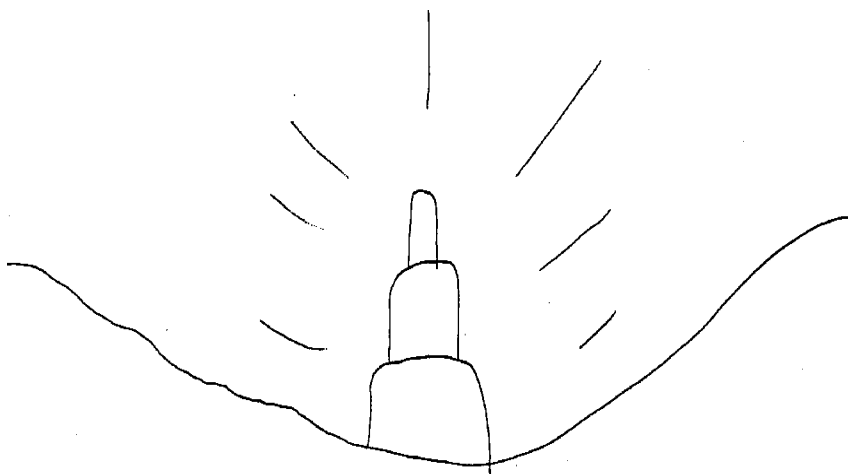
“Is this it?” the little monk asked himself. “Is this the place where one could find the meaning of life?” The little monk quickened his pace. Was this a dream? And was the castle merely an apparition inside the dream? These were deep questions that needed to be answered. Our brave little monk was destined to enter this castle and see for himself what the source of this brilliant white light could be.



" A faint glow would
be seen - just across the
horizon . "







*

The door was open. No one had locked it. The little monk entered and, once inside, could see that this castle was quite large. There was a long hall leading to a big room. Inside the room there was a large throne. It was empty, yet the little monk noticed that someone had been sitting on it recently.

“Hello,” cried the little monk, “is there anybody home?” There was no answer. The little monk was curious. “This is quite queer such a big place and there is no one to welcome me. This place is so empty, I don’t really feel at home here,” muttered the little monk to himself. Our story would have ended here, dear readers, but naturally as you all know, a story cannot end with such an inconclusive state of affairs.

The curtain behind the throne opened up and out stepped a small little man. “Hello there, how do you do?” he said. The little monk was startled. “Uh, hello, and who are you?” asked the little monk. “I am somewhat lost, actually.” The little man, or, should I say, the castle’s guest-keeper, slowly walked up to the little monk and shook his hand. “Splendid! No one has made a reservation in a thousand years. Welcome!”

The little monk was relieved to have found someone to talk to. His new companion was a little odd. But he could live with this. He had seen many odd things on this long journey, and he reasoned that a little monk could put up with a lot more. Also, it was well within the realm of possibility that this little man could be able to answer some of his questions.

*

“Dear Sir, could you please tell me how to see beyond the limits of my eyes?” asked the little monk.

“That’s easy,” answered the guest-keeper. “All you need to do is slow down.”

“Slow down?” asked the little monk.

“Yes, just slow down. It’s not that hard. Try to stretch your mind out until an opening occurs. Let the pauses and spaces become more full. Try to stretch the gap between each thought. Go deep down and see where they bubble up. Embrace more distance.”

The little monk was absorbed in this lecture. The guest-keeper continued: “Sometimes it gets a little dark and murky down there. Perhaps a little

clouded. When the heartmind is slowed down, one begins to feel a more resonating quality within and without. The actual difference between in and out begins to melt away.”

The little monk asked in a tone of expectation: “What use is this?” The guest-keeper laughed and continued: “That’s when you start talking to them.”

“Start talking to whom?” the little monk asked.

The guest-keeper answered with a hint of surprise: “That’s when you start talking to the great guides! That’s when you feel their limitless compassion. They shower you with it. The fullness of their radiance is given to you.”

The guest-keeper paused; he slowly began to gaze across the room. The guest-keeper smiled, almost as if listening to someone’s compassionate whisper. He closed his eyes and sat down on the floor.

*

The guest-keeper had been sitting in silence for what seemed many hours to the little monk. But he could not really be sure. Time seemed to stretch and contract on this planet.

“Are you awake?” asked the little monk to the guest-keeper. “I have always been awake. It is you who are asleep,” retorted the guest-keeper, as he lifted his eyes and smiled to the little monk.

“One can never get too much of that precious stuff, you know,” said the guest-keeper.

“What precious stuff?” asked the little monk with a hungry look.

“Oh, you know that precious white light,” answered the guest-keeper. Even as he said these words, the guest-keeper began to glow. The little monk noticed this immediately.

“Are the guides giving you this glow?” asked the little monk. The guest-keeper looked up again. “Well, yes and no. They give me the tools and I use them. The more I use them, the more they help me. It’s all quite simple.”

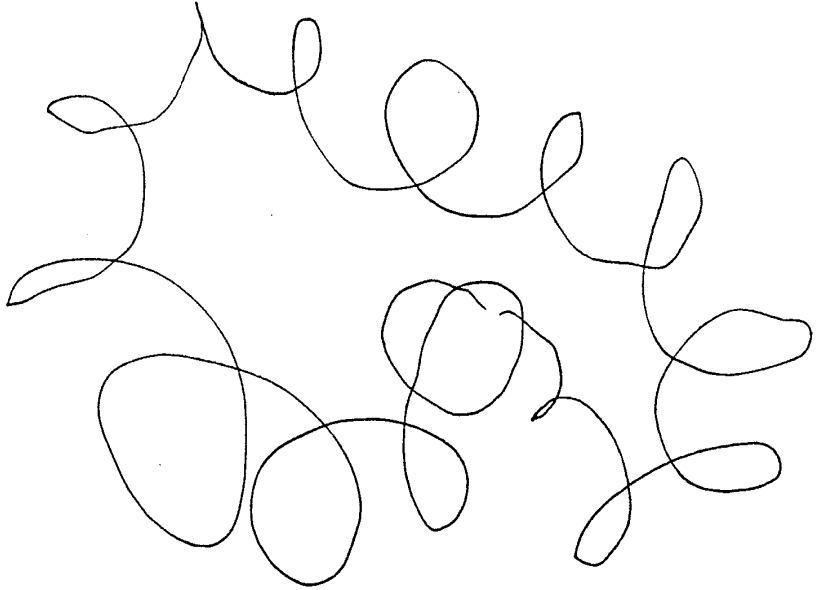
The little monk pressed on. “So, you really do talk to spirits!”

The guest-keeper looked annoyed. He then said: “The spirits are in us and we are in them. There really is no difference. The first step, one learns, is to pull back from one’s senses. Sounds get a little muffled and distant. Strangely, they also get louder, but the loudness does not disturb you. As you move away from sound, you put yourself in a sort of soundless realm

an echoless chamber. Everything seems to be happening on the other side of the sense wall. That's when they come."

The little monk was getting lost. But he begged the guest-keeper to continue. He also took out his sketch book and started to draw. As he drew, the guest-keeper added: "When you tune into the light, you are doing this for the benefit of all beings. The light clears you and as you clear you clear every being everywhere. The great guides are so limitless in their compassion. Their care and concern cannot help but touch us. Everything we do is holy. How can we possibly miss? This powerful MINDHEART WIND carries us to our destination. We are given the opportunity to clear out everything that needs clearing in ourselves. We have all the time in the world. The great guides will be with us until we have all finished this task. This is the commitment they have made to us. They will help us, if we are only willing to help ourselves."

The little monk felt his heart swell up and quickly drew another picture. This is how it looked:



Dear readers, the entire castle soon started to glow.

The guest-keeper paused for a moment and spoke again: “One must drop all attachments to any idea of what one is and what one has to be. This is important.” For emphasis, the guest-keeper thumped the floor. “Any view is limiting. By having no view, one has access to all views. One begins to see why people suffer, and the answer is quite simple. Chasing an illusion leads to enormous frustration. The meat-grinder of desire is seen for what it is. How can one not have compassion for beings? The great guides know what we’re going through. When you discover this for yourself, you will start to hear them. Indeed, you will at last begin to be like them. You, too, will have that glow.”

The little monk listened quietly. He knew that a deep truth had been spoken. Suddenly the entire castle started to shake. The glow of the room became more intense, and the guest-keeper began to fade away.

*

The entire palace began to heave violently. The little monk became terrified. The floor swallowed him up in one big gulp. Was this truly the end? The little monk heard a sinister laughing coming out of the walls as he fell down into some deep bottomless chaos of passion. A great pressure, like the pounding of a thousand hammers began to squeeze the little monk; he suddenly was seized by a strange temptation to fight something. This strong sensation bred terror inside the heartmind of our little hero. In truth, the little monk was not even sure whom or what he was supposed to be fighting. The terror began to turn on the little monk. He tried to strike out, but found himself striking his own head.



" for he was now
The violent energy is now!!

The little monk tried to run away from this violent energy. It was useless, for he was now the violent energy himself. A true volcano of passion and heat.

The little monk found himself overwhelmed by this intense environment of terror. He saw fields and mountains of re-hot iron. The sky was filled with sparks of fire. Heat was coming from all directions. What was there to do? The little monk could walk on the burning floor to run away, or stay and be reduced to charcoal. Not a pleasant choice either way.

No sooner did he muse about this ghastly choice, than the heat was replaced by cold icy blasts of air. A frozen world appeared before his startled eyes. Nothing moved, for everything was buried in cold white snow. The little monk felt intense pride and self-satisfaction. This pride made it hard to communicate with himself. He could not smile, or laugh. Deep down, the little monk felt sad. This was a fate worse than death, he thought to himself. The little monk blacked out and fell into the snow.

*

When the little monk woke up, he found himself in a strange room. It was bathed in a shimmering fluorescent white. He began to feel a sense of poverty. This fed his need to run after things in this strange new world. It was a very strange place. Everything he wished for, he instantly was given, but this made him feel more deprived. The little monk could get no satisfaction from searching for things. It was a frustrating experience. He was filled with an insatiable hunger.

The little monk's belly began to swell. His mouth shrank, and his throat became thin as a reed. Images of people eating and drinking filled the little monk's mind. These images only made him more distressed. He felt full, yet envious of all these people still eating and drinking. The joy of being satiated brought no pleasure. Every time he tried to pick up some food, it simply dissolved in his hands. When he tried to swallow food it got stuck in his throat. If any did fall into his belly it began to burn. The little monk felt no joy in possessing or holding on to anything; but he found it difficult to let go of things as well.

"What a terrible existence," exclaimed the little monk. He shut his eyes and wished he were dead. Anything was better than this, even the heat and cold of his last experience seemed preferable.



"The little man's
body began to swell. His mouth
shrank, and his throat was thin
as a needle."

*

“So, how was it?” asked the guest-keeper. The little monk was sprawled out on the floor. His head was throbbing violently; the large room looked untouched. The guest-keeper was smiling.

“So, how was it?” he asked again.

The little monk leaned on the wall next to him and weakly said: “I suffered quite a bit.”

“Most beings do,” echoed the guest-keeper. “Now you too can have compassion for them.”

“How?” asked the little monk.

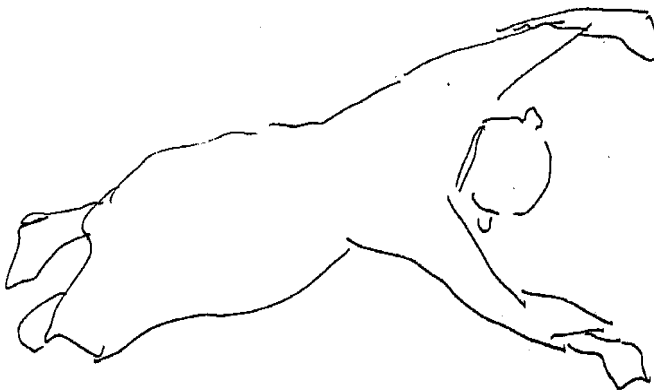
“By not getting stuck in greed or anger,” answered the guest-keeper. “You know how it feels, so why get stuck in it?”

“It doesn’t feel very good,” intoned the little monk. “Actually, it feels quite gruesome.”

“Yes, indeed,” exclaimed the guest-keeper. “Somehow beings still fall into this unsavory pit. They never learn.” And with that he gave a deep sigh.

"So, how was it?"

asked The guest-leaper.



*

The little monk began to feel a little better. The feeling was so soothing. Somehow he felt blessed. Someone was sending him radiant grace waves and as they splashed on his heart and mind the little monk knew that tuning into these waves entailed a hidden responsibility. Indeed, tuning into the radiance meant having to share it as well. Anxiety needed to be transformed into these waves of compassionate grace. Getting in contact with unwholesome emotions was a source for discovering care and concern.

Suffering could be seen as a gift. The dust in the heartmind wind was blowing there for a good reason. It was actually stardust, radiating outward for the benefit of all beings. It took awhile for the little monk to understand this.

Whatever arises is what needs to be dealt with. This was the practice that the guest-keeper had taught the little monk. This was also the meditation. Seeing suffering and transforming it was an offering to the great guides and to all sentient beings. The courage to face whatever is happening at the moment was what was ripe for transformation. It was an opportunity to complete what had to be completed.

The little monk began to understand that adversity in life was not the result of some evil spell but that it was actually a most potent blessing. This insight released the little monk from a lot of mental suffering. Life was a purification rite. The care and concern of the great guides who had lived this and gone beyond it by dropping all attachments was the shining grace wave splashing on the little monk's face.

The guest-keeper had said: "You can never make a mistake. The great guides are infinitely forgiving. Their compassion is that great. The very urgency of being demands it."

The little monk had lost track of how long he had been in the diamond palace. He found himself alone again. This seemed to be the usual pattern. This palace seemed to be no ordinary palace. It had one strange guest-keeper and ten thousand rooms. The little monk had little hope of exploring them all.

“Good evening,” shouted the little monk to the wall. Alas, this wall could not talk back. It could not even echo the little monk’s greeting. For the large room he had been in was an echoless chamber. Sounds disappeared and never came back. Such a queer thing, indeed.

Now, you must understand, dear readers, that the heartmind loves to laugh and hates constriction. Rules and regulations are often a hindrance for the heartmind, because it loves them so much and likes to get lost in them. Often the heartmind likes to play tricks on itself. Instead of talking to itself, it likes to write books about itself. The heartmind likes to avoid problems by keeping itself busy with echoes and games; usually it finds itself wandering off in some new activity, every five minutes.

The heartmind likes to churn. When an emotion comes up, it likes to grab it and play with it. To really listen to itself, the heartmind needs to be still and this it finds exceedingly frightening. Solving a riddle needs concentration. The little monk was not interested in sitting down and quietly listening to his own echoes within himself no, this little monk liked to wander. And so he wandered out of the room and up a staircase to another room. How natural for our small hero to do so.

In this new room, he found a small little boy. This boy was no larger than a strawberry.

“Good evening,” said the little monk.

“Good evening,” replied the little boy.

“And how long have you lived here?” inquired the little monk.

“I have lived in this room for quite some time,” answered the little strawberry boy. “I don’t really remember how I got in here. But I feel very comfortable. What are you doing in this galaxy so far from home?”

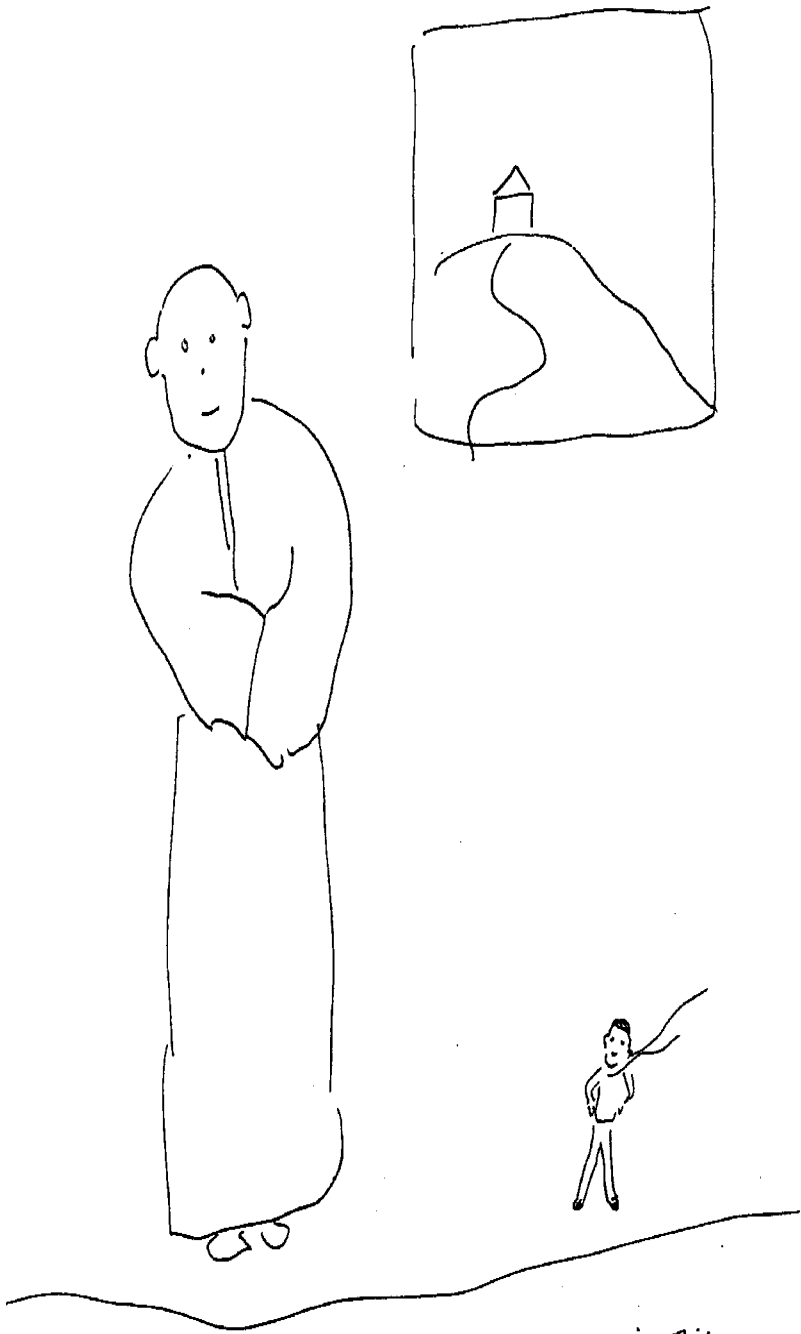
“A wizard brought me here and abandoned me,” sighed the little monk. “He was a strange man. He talked a lot about deserts and wild bushmen and how to dig up wild roots and not be thirsty; but he failed to put radar in his ship and somehow landed here.”

“What an odd story,” laughed the little strawberry boy.

The little monk looked at his new little friend and wondered how much to confide in him. Dear readers we are always searching for someone to trust in! So often we become disappointed when we are let down by someone we felt we could confide in.

“There are no wizards on this planet,” said the little strawberry boy. “Here, there are only two kinds of people: guest-keepers and visitors, like yourself. Did you like my friend? He often gets carried away. He likes to entertain his guests, you know they don’t come that often. He really is a friendly fellow. Please, make yourself at home!”

The little monk didn’t know quite what to think. This little boy was quite small and quite friendly. He wouldn’t play tricks on him, or would he? This was a strange planet. Indeed, this entire journey had been strange.



"I have lived in this
room for quite sometime," answers
The little strawberry boy.

“Would you like something to eat?” asked the little strawberry boy.

“Yes, please,” answered the little monk.

The little strawberry boy took a plum from his pocket. It was quite small, however. The little monk was not sure how much nourishment he would get from a plum so small. But he took it and swallowed it.

“You should listen to your little guardian angel,” spoke the little strawberry boy quite solemnly.

“My little guardian angel?” asked the little monk.

“Yes, your little guardian angel,” repeated the little strawberry boy. “It sometimes won’t come, but if you listen to it you will hear it speak. It will say ‘don’t do this, and don’t touch that.’ Just listen to it and obey! Don’t argue with it or you’ll drive it away.”

The little monk thought this to be quite an important little secret. Guardian angels, indeed! What would this little boy think of next?

“Are you living for enjoyment, or for others?” asked the little strawberry boy.

“I am trying to find the meaning of life,” replied the little monk.

The little strawberry boy laughed. He looked out the window and pointed to a small house in the distance. He then said, “In that house live two brothers. One is shallow. One is deep. Both are dangerous. Both are always fighting each other and I often listen to their screams. They think they are so important!”

The little monk could not hear anything. “Perhaps they are asleep,” thought the little monk.

“They are not asleep,” answered the little strawberry boy. “They are hiding, waiting to pounce on you. The first chance they get, they will do so!”

The little monk thought this a strange reply, for the house seemed quite far in the distance.

“Make no mistake,” said the little strawberry boy. “The shallow brother is shallow and the deeper brother is deep, both are dangerous. Both must be killed. Then, you will discover the truth. Not a moment before.”

The little monk was quite puzzled. How could two people, so very far away, harm him? Before he could say anything, the little strawberry boy answered: “The shallow brother is who you are. The deeper brother is who you feel you need to be. It is the you who is in your body and thinks it owns it. It is your reputation. It is an illusion, but quite a deep one. That’s why the shallow brother always follows his deeper brother. The shallow brother

is just a name.”

How strange this all is. Not just for little monks, but for all of us, dear readers. Trace this all back to the end and it's not there.

“Do it, don't talk it,” said the little strawberry boy. The little monk was confused, as usual. The little strawberry boy continued: “Don't be a teacher. Do it and don't talk it. The heartmind needs to be listened to. When you listen to it, it becomes clean. The two brothers are slain and only a sweet emptiness is left behind.”

The little monk was still not quite sure what the little strawberry boy meant by all this.

The sun was setting on the little house in the distance. The little monk wondered if he would ever see the two brothers; no one seemed to ever come out of the house. The little strawberry boy was also watching the house.

“You are what you are. Take it from there. I knew a woman who wrote twenty-five books. Her heartmind found many a distraction. The two brothers had captured her in their tight little web and it was a gruesome sight. She recently told me she was beginning her twenty-sixth book!” the little strawberry boy grinned in satisfaction.

The little monk asked: “What about the guest-keeper?” The little strawberry boy thought seriously for a moment. Then he said: “He likes to watch movies and listen to opera! He's been doing it for quite some time. But I think it helps him from becoming too bored with his life.”

The little monk was startled. He felt this too cruel an answer. He asked, “Do you mean there are no spirits and protectors?”

The little strawberry boy laughed: “Of course there are! But sometimes we need a bigger push than that. There is a guiding intelligence that lets us do our own pushing! This is what we are all striving for. A one-on-one relationship with our heartminds. No talking. Just caressing.”

“Please, explain further,” pleaded the little monk.

“Well, there's not much more to explain. Just surrender! The more you give up, the more the Universe helps you. The more it is easier to listen to the heartmind. You will have to work things out. But, you always get more than just the tools you need. You're made to pay attention. You know that you're always loved and protected; there is no need to fear. It's sheer poetry. GIVE IT UP!” The little strawberry boy seemed quite pensive.

The little monk then inquired, “Give what up?”

“Give it all up! You'll survive and the freedom is quite tremendous. You're almost there. You are a monk aren't you? You've already given up quite

a lot. Now, you just have to give up all your questions and be simply silent. Listen to that intelligence inside you. Stop listening to the intricate little stories that the two brothers are always cooking up to keep you distracted from the purpose at hand. Use one brother to kill the other. When both are gone, all obstructions end. Then you can really see.”

“This could take time,” answered the little monk.

“It can’t be done in a rush. You do it step by step. But you have to do it. Not talk it. Pretty difficult, sometimes. Words cannot describe it.” The little strawberry boy yawned.

“You must be getting tired,” remarked the little monk. “I think I shall take a nap, myself.” Both of them lay on a couch and went to sleep. It had been quite a day. Deep truths often exhaust the listener and speaker. Perhaps it is time, now, that we all should take a nap as well before going on the final leg of this journey into the mindheart relax, dear readers, for we have only a little further to go.

Part Three

The Journey Home

When the little monk woke up,

he no longer found himself inside the diamond castle. Instead, he seemed to be back on top of the red sand dunes. He remembered what the abbot had told him: "You should always have direction and focus and learn to harness whatever energy there is." This certainly seemed like sensible advice.

The little monk closed his eyes and started humming softly. A small flash of light flicked on in his mind. This was a distress signal. Would anyone hear it? Sometimes, dear readers, we have to look deep inside for answers to our problems. It is an exercise we often take upon ourselves with extreme reluctance!

Yet, it wasn't too long before the little monk could hear the slightly audible whirring of helicopter blades. The little monk held his breath and squinted into the horizon. Now he could hear them CLANK, CLANK, CLANK. How strange it was! He could hear the helicopter but not see it!

"What an odd thing," thought the little monk. "Why would there be a helicopter out here, in the middle of nowhere?" Indeed, helicopters were not known to be flying in this part of the galaxy. The little monk tried to see further, into the horizon, but with no success. The sound was getting louder. Suddenly, the little monk turned around and there it was - right behind him!

"HOP IN!" the pilot said. The little monk could barely hear him amid the din of blades and sand. But he certainly did not want to linger in this inhospitable terrain. The little monk jumped in and the helicopter roared and heaved up towards the sky.

"Where are we going?" asked the little monk to his new guardian angel. "I don't know," answered the pilot. "Ask me another question." The little monk wasn't prepared for this answer. It was he who liked to ask the questions and not the other way around. After some pause for thought, he asked: "How does one fly?" The pilot looked out the window toward the sea of red sand below. After what seemed hours, he simply said: "It's a matter of balance. You've got gravity, and you've got lift, and you've got to thrust forward and have some drag. JUST FEEL THE BALANCE POINT BETWEEN THESE FORCES. Leave your worries on the ground and let the heartmind relax."

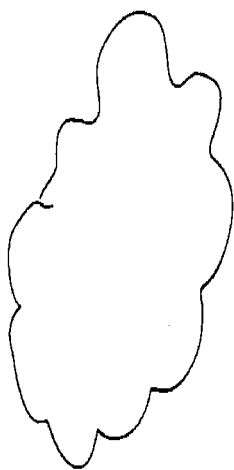
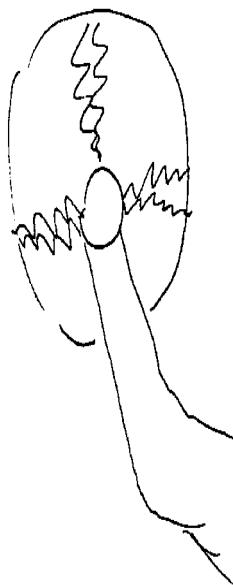
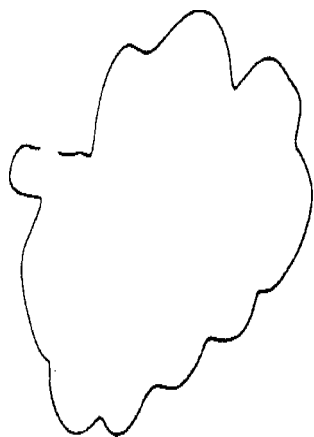
The little monk didn't really understand, but then, there were many things he didn't understand on this voyage. The pilot continued: "Blend with nothing and dissolve all bonds. It's as simple as that!" With that, the pilot took the helicopter to higher and higher altitudes.

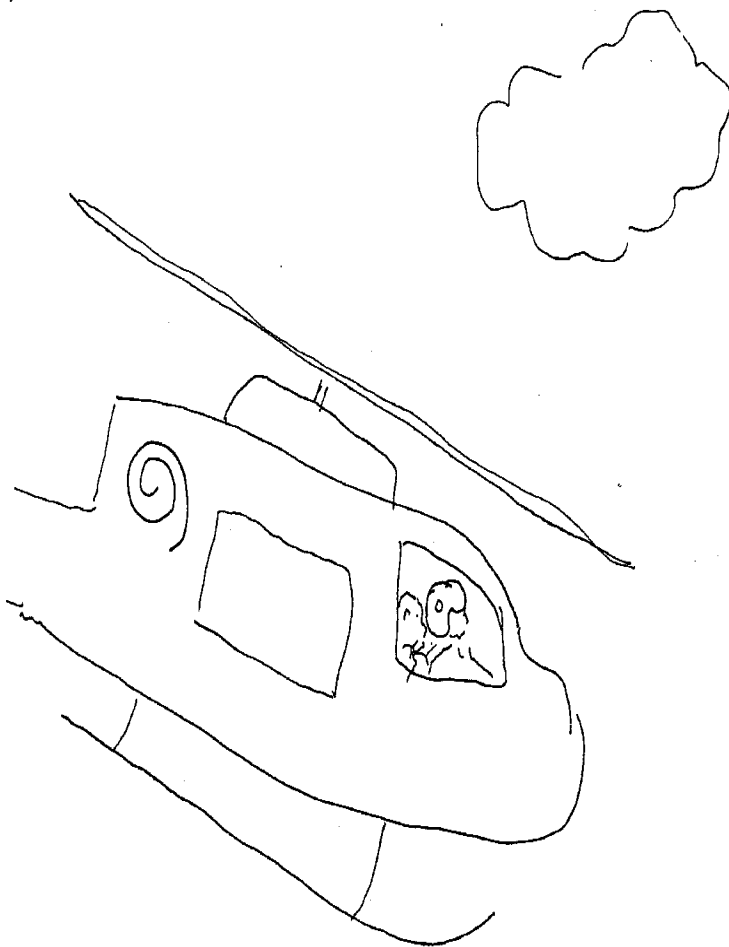
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The helicopter was very high now; in fact it had almost left the planet's atmosphere. The little monk became afraid. But the pilot seemed to have little worry. "Are you not afraid?" inquired the little monk. "Not at all," said the pilot. "I actually enjoy having fear, it opens many doors for me. It tells me things I need to know." The little monk remained silent. What could one really say to that? Actually the little monk was now getting quite tired of asking so many questions.

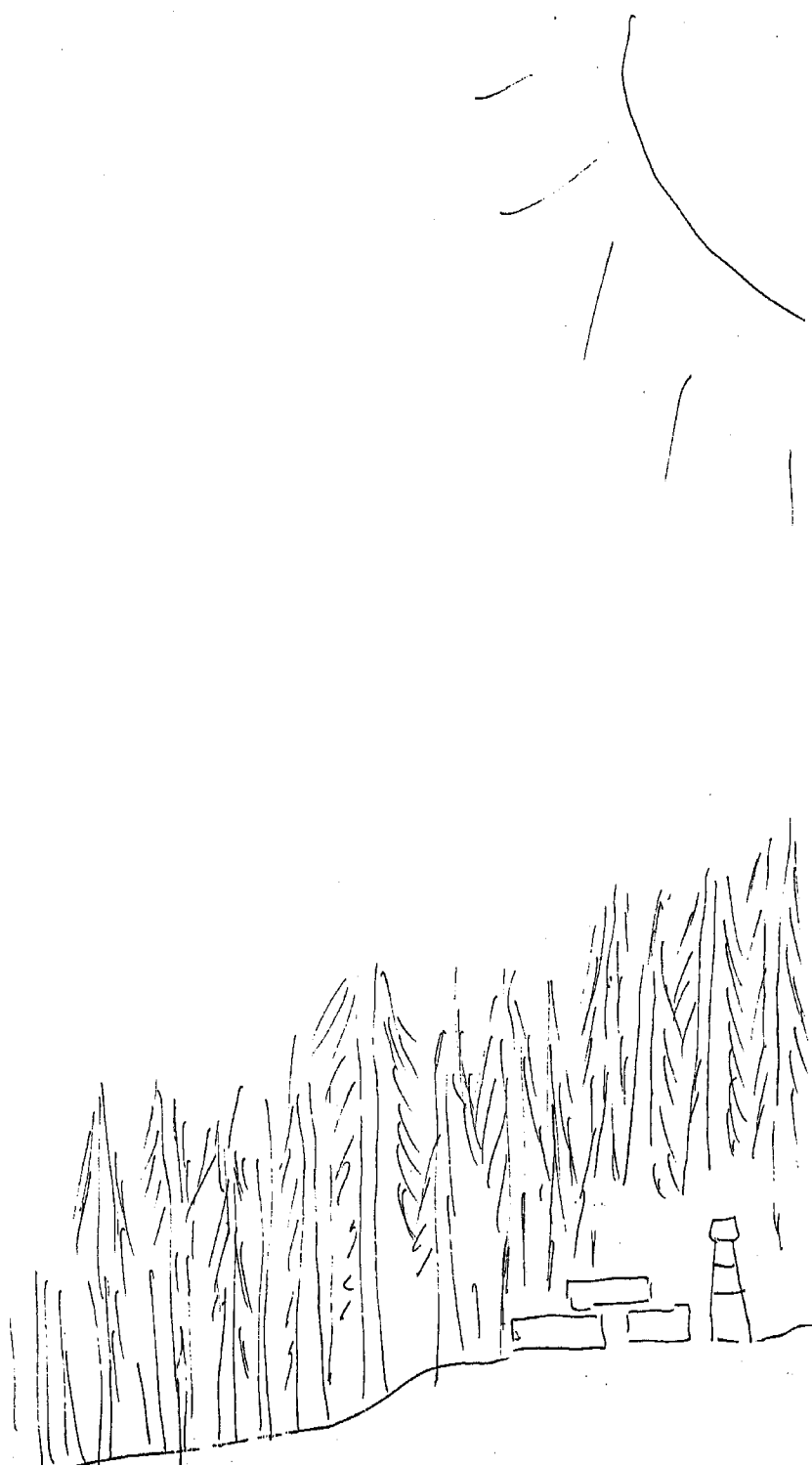
"We will soon be there," uttered the pilot, quite matter-of-factly. "Where is that?" asked the little monk. "It's where I take all the spiritually sick people," answered the pilot.

No sooner did he say these words than a clearing through the clouds could be seen. This hole gave a new view of what was below. The little monk could make out the forms of trees, thousands of them. Indeed, they were the proud citizens of a new planet. This new world was covered with forests. What a relief after all that red sand, to see dark greens and fresh browns. The pilot pointed to a clearing among the trees. The little monk could see a cluster of buildings and a small tower. "That's the place," yelled the pilot, amid the din of rotors and blades. The helicopter began its descent.





"It's when I take all the
spiritually sick people," answers the pilot.



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The little monk and pilot landed near the buildings, in an open space made especially for the helicopter. It seemed the pilot had done this often in the past; he seemed quite comfortable with the routine. The doors opened in one of the buildings and out ran two people with a stretcher. The pilot shut off the engine, looked at the instruments on his panel, and then waved to the incoming orderlies. "It's all right, we don't need a stretcher, this one can walk in."

The orderlies stopped running and the pilot jumped out of the helicopter. He went to the side and flung open the door. "This is our final destination," smiled the pilot. "Everybody out!" The little monk jumped down. Before he could say anything, the pilot had gotten back in to his cockpit and started the engine. The rotors and blades came to life and the helicopter took off. "I have to go!" shouted the pilot. "More incoming wounded. It was nice to have met you."

The helicopter left behind an explosion of wind and dust. The orderlies and the little monk covered their eyes and waited. Soon all was silent again.

"Welcome to our spiritual hospital," exclaimed one of the orderlies. "We've been expecting you." "You have?" asked the little monk. "Yes, we always know when our patients are coming," answered the orderly. The little monk didn't know quite what to make of all this. Nevertheless he felt these people could be trusted. He had come this far and somehow survived. Yes, faith can sometimes be very important, dear readers!

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"I see you've met our pilot," said the orderly. "It took us quite a bit of time to find him. Our first pilot couldn't lift off and our second pilot couldn't land, once airborne. We found a third fellow who could take off and land, but couldn't fly calmly, many of our patients complained about the bumpiness of the ride. We finally found this last pilot and are very happy with him."

So, dear readers, we find our hero in a spiritual hospital. How funny that events have taken such a curious twist. The orderlies took the little monk inside the main building. Inside, the little monk could see many empty rooms with beds. "Where are all the patients?" the little monk asked. "You're the only one," answered one of the orderlies. "Actually, we have two

other patients, but they don't reside in this ward. They can be found on the second floor, but you are not allowed up there."

"And why not?" asked the little monk. "Because we are the doctors of the mindheart, and we feel you are not ready to join us in our mission of mercy. You need more instruction. We are prepared to give it to you, are you prepared to listen? The little monk was startled, yet also excited by this stroke of good fortune. He did not need much time to think about it. "Please, teach me!" the little monk pleaded. "I am ready."

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The orderlies vanished into the darkness of the hall they had been walking through, and the little monk was left alone with no instructions on where to go or who to see. This prospect was not appealing to our hero, but he was learning to be patient.

A door suddenly opened and out walked a man completely dressed in red. He wore what looked like a strange sort of flight suit. "Hello," said the man. "How are you?" he further added. "I am fine," replied the little monk. "Are you here to teach me about the mindheart?" asked the little monk. "My, you're a curious one," replied the man in red. "What would you like to know?"

The little monk wasn't sure quite what to ask. So, he simply said: "How can I be happy?" The man in red motioned the little monk to follow him and walked in the direction of a large door. He opened it and motioned to the little monk to follow him inside.

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The room was filled with cushions and rugs. The little monk noticed that the walls were bare. A single lamp hung from above. His senses had little else to report. The man in red sat down and motioned to the little monk to do likewise. Once both were sitting on the floor, the man in red asked with a stern voice: "Are you here to slay the giant of the ten thousand rivers?" The little monk was not sure what to say. He had remembered the warning of the little bird; but all that seemed so long ago.

"I really don't know who he is," the little monk finally replied. "Does he live here?" The man in red laughed and said: "The giant lives in a very secret place and your job is to find him. When you succeed in this, then you will

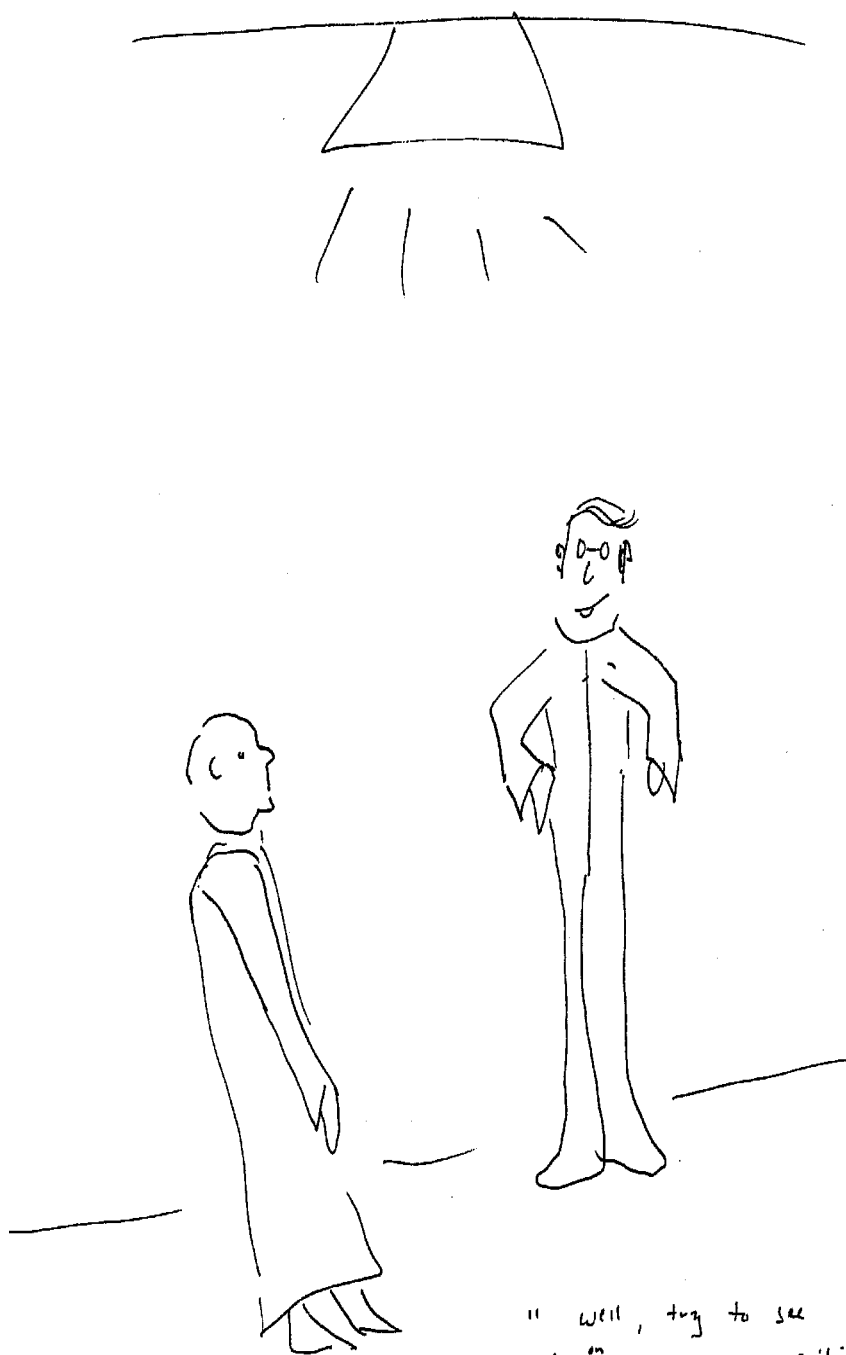
be happy; and not a moment before.”

The little monk was upset by this answer. When would all the riddles and cryptic remarks come to an end? The little monk wished that someday he would find someone who could talk simply and honestly about the important things in life, about true matters of consequence. Surely, he thought, this was not so difficult a task.

The man in red sensed that the little monk was lost. “Well, try to see this lamp on this ceiling in your mind and completely let your mind swallow it up. Switch off your other senses. Let your heartmind completely absorb the light like a sponge. When you do this successfully, you will be able to walk through walls and read other minds.”

The little monk laughed. “What good will this do?” This man seemed incredibly foolish to the little monk. Surely there was another way. He began to get up and walk out when the man quickly rose to his feet and shouted: “You have passed the test!”

Dear readers, we are now coming to the end of this story. The time to speak in simple truths has arrived. We shall now rejoin our little monk in one last adventure of the mind and heart.



The man in the red suit began to fade away. The little monk was becoming used to this. Everything certainly seemed temporary. Nothing seemed to last. Nothing at all. The little monk noticed how his own mind and heart seemed to change every second of the day. How it was difficult to remember what he had seen only moments ago. Yes, nothing seemed to last. The world was one large ocean wave building and cresting, only to reappear in another place, in another time.

The man in red had disappeared, but in his place now stood an old man. His hair was white and long. He had a long beard. His cloak was brown. The little monk noticed that he was no longer in the room, but in a beautiful garden. There were flowers and a running stream.

“Hello, my son,” said the old sage. “I have been waiting for you so long. You certainly took your time getting here.” The little monk felt at ease with the old man. There was something about him that was peaceful and radiant. As if it was natural to be this way. As if there was really no other way to be. “Hello,” the little monk replied. “I’m not really sure how I arrived here or where I’m going. Can you please tell me how to be happy?”

“You must learn to look at your mind more closely. This is all one has to do. When the demons come up from the dark corners of your mind, LOOK AT THEM! These demons are rooted in three poisons: greed, anger, and delusion. Greed is like colorful bubbles. It intoxicates the heart and mind. The senses see something desirable. The misery has begun; like oily soot, the mind and the heart become. A sticky and greasy feeling invades our being. As we run after these colorful bubbles we stumble and fail to capture them.”

The old sage paused for a moment, and continued: “This is when anger arises. Like boiling water, our heart and mind become. This rage burns like a fire and consumes us. We strike out and hit ourselves. The heart and mind become poisoned with agitation and our peace is disturbed. All anger kills. The body is the first to feel it. We become filled with pain. A deep sinking hurt overwhelms us. We are dying.”

The little monk stood still and listened closely. At last he thought: “This is something simple that I can understand.” And the old sage seemed to read his thoughts, for he simply smiled and went on with his little discourse. “Now, you must remember that greed and anger are based on the delusion that anything we can possibly grasp is permanent. This seems to give many

people a false sense of beauty, but the truth of the matter is that we all must die and that there is a real possibility that we may be reborn again, only to repeat this grim cycle again and again.

We must learn to tidy up the thoughts in our mind. This helps tidy up our emotions which are simply mind in motion. The stream of our consciousness is all there really is. It has been flowing for some time and will continue to flow for quite awhile longer. Do you understand?" asked the old sage.

"Is this stream anywhere in particular?" asked the little monk. The sage widened his eyes and said: This stream is everywhere. It is in you and it is in me. Like a massive river it flows on it is one giant mindheart stream. We are separate and yet also part of it. All is interconnected. The greed, anger, and delusion begin to feed on each other, a viscous spiral is created which plunges the individual and the world into a downward coil of negative and destructive emotion. Have you ever been angry?" asked the old sage.

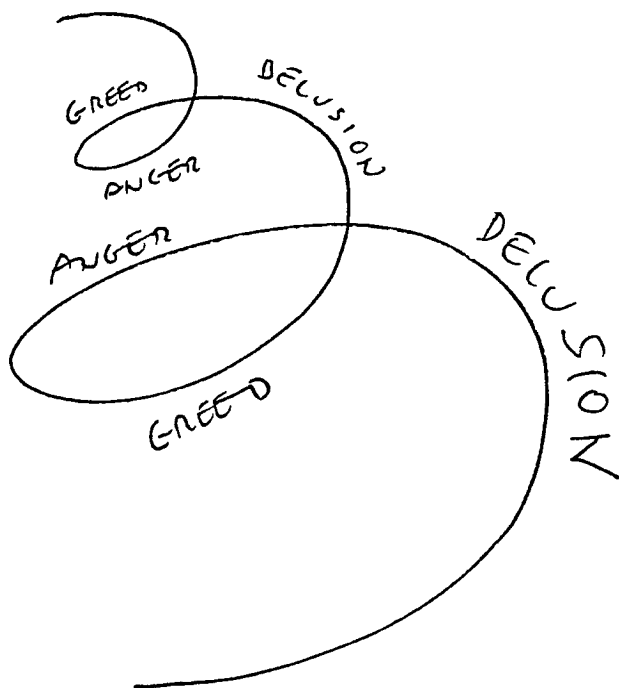
"Many times on this journey," replied the little monk. "How did it feel?" asked the sage with more urgency. "It felt quite bad," answered the little monk. "That's because you were caught in a misery spiral," exclaimed the sage. His eyes lit up. "A misery spiral pollutes your mindheart stream. It fills it with toxic psychic waste. You get stuck to the spider web of existence and the more you struggle, the tighter it holds you. The strands become stickier, and the spider comes in for the kill. Think about it."

The little monk was horrified by these images. Could greed and anger really be the roots of such misery? Was it possible that our hearts and minds were filled with so much waste? How could one possibly solve such a problem? The sage was reading the little monk's mind.

" We must learn to fly
up the thoughts in our mind "
said the sage.



The little monk took out his drawing paper and drew a spiral going downward. You must remember, dear readers, that our little hero was now very inspired. It looked something like this:



The spiral seemed to have a fascinating momentum of its own. This toxic spiral looked dangerous and if it was true that everything in the Universe was interconnected, couldn't a negative thought somewhere somehow generate a misery spiral that would engulf the Universe into a terrible headache?

The little monk was astonished by this simple, yet powerful truth. Was this why his little valley seemed never to be at peace? Had some negative thought somewhere in the valley spiraled downward into misery? Granted, it was a local problem, but how long before the next valley became engulfed? The full dimension of the problem began to unfold. The little monk felt a great responsibility now.

"When we dump poisons into the stream of the mindheart, we always do it out of ignorance," said the sage. Ignorance is like smoke, it hides the truth. Delusion looks like muddy water. The three poisons feed on each other. When we lie and steal, the stream of the mindheart becomes more polluted. When there is killing and adultery, the stream becomes black.

Alcohol and drugs make the stream froth and gasp the mindheart is agitated.”

The little monk wanted to vomit. These truths were too much to bear. He asked, “How can we clean the mindheart stream?”

The sage looked at him intensely and continued: “Cease agitating the mind. Do not lie and do not steal. Do not kill and do not become intoxicated. Do not destroy a relationship that is stable. Only then can one be calm enough to look at the mind and at the heart.”

*

The little monk now understood the problem. The abbot’s words began to come back to him. He understood why the life of a monk needed to be simple. The mindheart of every individual had been suffering for millions and millions of years. Poisons had a tendency to dig themselves deep into the mindheart stream of every living being. The task is to understand this process and cease the spilling of the toxins. Dear readers, we all have to deal with this psychic waste management problem. We can begin by employing a little virtue in our lives.

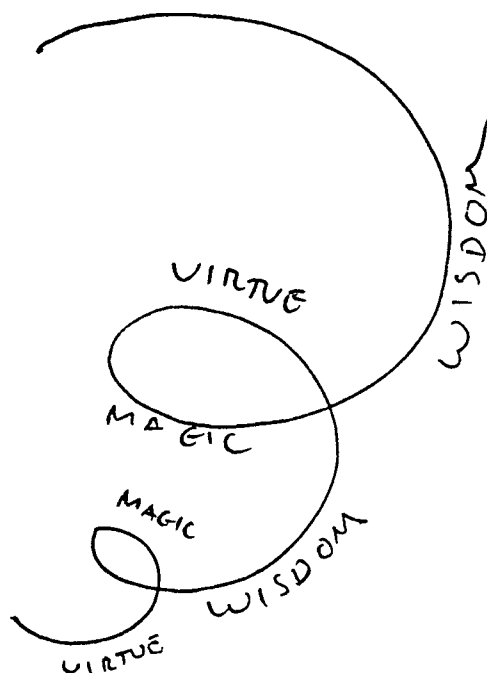
“What is the next step?” asked the little monk. The sage looked calmly. He then said, “Use word magic. You have a little virtue now. Now simply look at the demons as they come up from the dark corners of your mind and simply give them a name. When the demons are forced to identify themselves, they will simply vanish into thin air. Word magic can only be used by a mindheart that is calm and virtuous.

"When we dump
poisons into the stream of
the mind, we always do
this out of ignorance," said
the sage.



Word magic helps to clean up the mindheart river. The more this process is repeated, the more one's wisdom is increased. Being good and doing good help one to know oneself. This process feeds on itself. What we are given is a new and wonderful gift. I like to call it the wisdom spiral. It always leads to happiness. It cleans up the mindheart river. It will clean up the mindheart ocean. Just as a thought can change the Universe, a thought can be changed in a flash! So miraculous is this process"

The little monk took out his drawing paper once more. He was truly inspired now. This is what he drew:



The sage was smiling at the little monk. He gave a side comment: "Of course, breathing is important when using word magic, so make sure you find a good teacher."

The little monk then asked, "Is this all there is to know?"

The sage looked pensive for a moment and then slowly spoke: "Yes, this is all there is to know for now. But if you continue this practice, then something deeper will occur."

"What is that?" asked the little monk.

"Deep knowing will be yours." replied the sage.

“Deep knowing?” muttered the little monk, as he furrowed his brow.

“Yes,” answered the sage. “Deep knowing, and it has nothing to do with magic. It is something very special. It penetrates and knows deeply the true nature of things.”

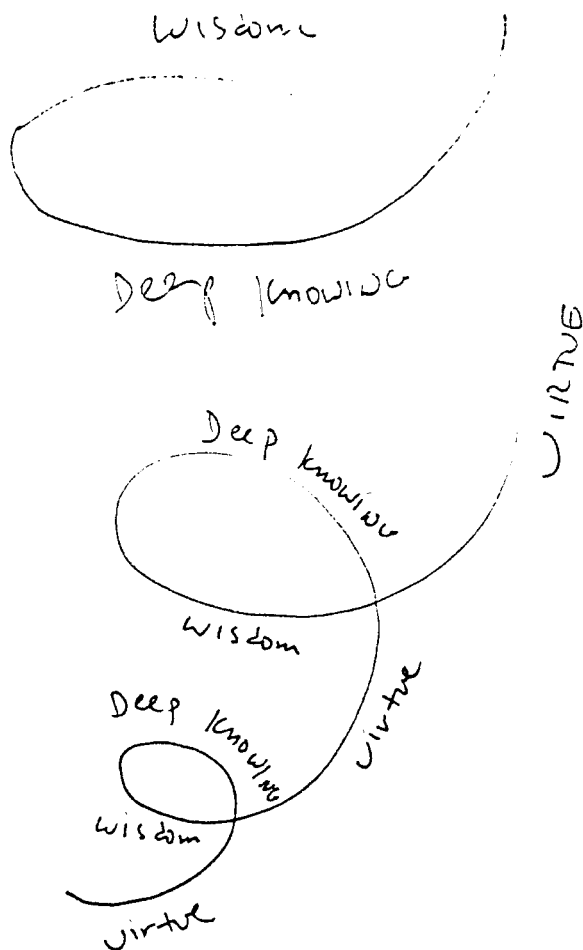
“And what is that?” asked the little monk.

“That all things that are born will pass away and that they are unable to fulfill their promise of happiness,” said the sage. “Because all things are like phantoms in a picture show. There is nothing behind them or inside them. They are all part of the flux and flow which has no beginning and unless the mindheart stream is cleaned no end. If you clean and free the mindheart stream then happiness is yours,” said the sage.

“What then happens?” inquired the little monk.

“There are no longer any attachments. The unconditioned arises. This is the highest gift. This is the supreme happiness,” finished the sage.

The little monk felt there was a very deep message here and took out his pen and paper again and drew a new picture:



It looked like this.

Dear readers, we are almost at the end of our story. I hope you have enjoyed it. The Universe is filled with spirals and webs and mindheart streams. It has demons and angels. Please be good and learn meditation. Mindfulness is magic. It also leads to deep knowing. It can help you deal with the giant of the ten thousand rivers. He dwells within us all. I shall not tell you more about him. You will have to discover more about him on your own.

The little monk was now very happy. He now knew what needed to be done. He thanked the sage and calmly started walking in a straight line. When he became tired, he fell asleep and the next morning woke up in his private little cell inside his little monastery. All the monks were gathering inside the courtyard, as usual. But there was a difference now. No more mis-

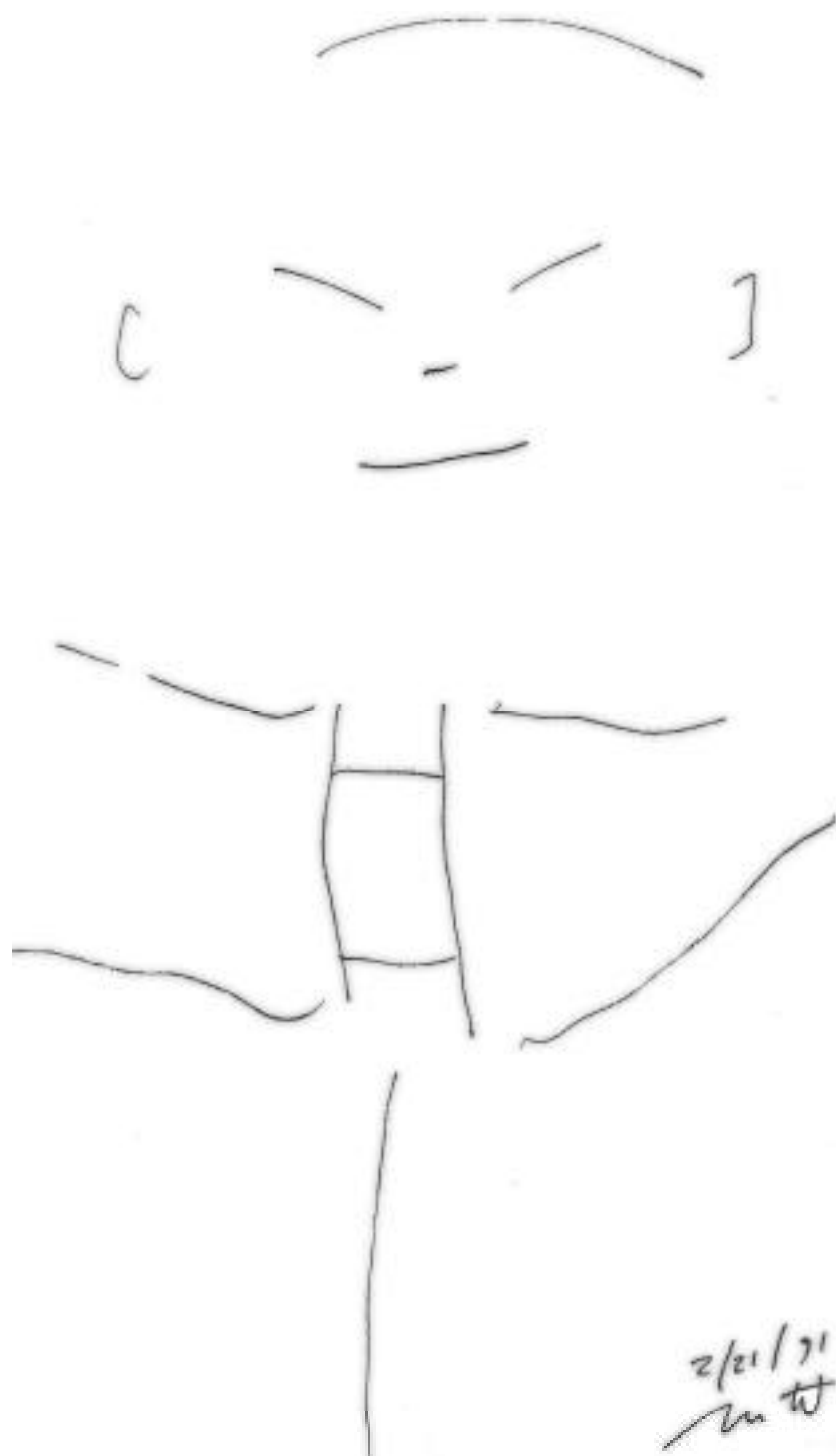
siles were being launched. He could not hear their thunderous roar.

After breakfast, the monks all sat down in the hall and began to watch the mindheart stream. The abbot went over to the little monk and asked him: “Did you have a pleasant sleep?”

The little monk smiled and said: “Yes, it was quite peaceful, but I dreamt many strange and wonderful things. Has anything changed?”

The abbot was smiling and said with some satisfaction, “Well, I no longer hear the missiles. I’ve also heard that the rains have returned. Perhaps there will be a harvest. It’s possible someone’s had a positive thought somewhere. Perhaps this thought has a little loving kindness. Perhaps it has a little generosity. And perhaps it has a little clarity.”

The little monk felt this to be a good omen. He thanked the abbot for his kindness and shut his eyes. there was no time to lose. He had finally found some real light. He had finally found some real peace.



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from scars publications and design:

additional books

sulphur and sawdust
slate and marrow
blister and burn
rinse and repeat
infamous in our prime
anais nin: an understanding of her art
the electronic windmill
changing woman
hope chest in the attic
the window
close cover before striking
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