

Therīgāthā: The Poetry of the Enlightened Nuns (1 of 4)

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Hey, let's see. Everyone, welcome. So, hello everyone. I'm delighted you're here, and so welcome to this four-week kind of dipping into the world of the elder nuns from over probably two thousand years ago. We get to consider their lives, their poetry, their circumstance, their liberation.

I feel very fortunate that we have this body of literature available to us, and that we're going to be talking about it. So, I don't know how many of you did this; maybe none of you. But there was the suggestion, when sending out the reading, that you memorize one of the verses. Did anyone memorize the first one, *Aññatarā*?

"Is that 'well freed'?" "Very well freed." "See? Oh, I'm muted. Let's see. Turn up. Let's see. I don't hear you. You're not muted, but I don't hear you." "Well freed. Very well freed." "What?" "Yes." "Is that the 'well freed'?" "Very well freed." "No, no. The first one is 'Sleep at Ease.'"

"Oh, I love that." "Did anybody?" "My mind is almost." "Almost." "No." "Yes, I tried to." "Yes, let's hear." "Well, did I really get to it? Let me just look at it quickly, and then I'll see if I do." "Why don't we read it together?" "I've got most of it." "Good idea. Ready? One, two."

"Yep. Sleep at ease, dear elder, wrapped in the robe you made with your passion. At peace, like dry herbs in a pot." "Well, very nice. Two of you probably almost qualify as elders." "Oh, what are you talking about, Gil? How can you say such a thing?" "Sorry." "No, no, don't be silly. That was why it appealed, and it was so relaxing."

"Was it really fantastic? And I wrote a little bit about that, but in your own words, why was it? How was it relaxing?" "Well, you know, your writings tended to focus on Pāli words and what seemed to me to be abstract concepts a little bit. I'm curious to hear them elaborated on. But my own mood these days is trying to find peace and rest and calm in the middle of worldly turmoil at the age that I am. And this just addressed it in four lines."

“Nice. I liked it also, ‘wrapped in the robe that you made.’ I like that part. Now, I don't know what it means in Pāli and in the ancient times, but to my mind, it means it's related to—not so literally—but wrapped in the life that you've made.” “Yeah, I had that metaphorical understanding too.”

“Helen, do you have anything you want to say, since it seems like it was meaningful for you?” “Yeah, yeah. I mean, I love the tenderness of the first line—the love and caring there. Very maternal, whatever the ages of the respective people are.”

“And then I was also with your point. I loved the image of the dried herbs in a pot, because they're dry, they're old, desiccated, but yet they're conserved, preserved, and ready to flavor at any time.” “Great, I love it.” “Revive, or bring, or add to whatever you put them in.”

“Very nice, thank you. So it was nice to hear, and nice that you highlight the tenderness of the first line and how the whole anthology begins with that tenderness. At least for me, that kind of sets the tone for reading the whole book.”

“And the question there: Who's speaking to her? Is it the Buddha? That's one traditional understanding. It's the Buddha who's speaking. Another way—and we don't know—but another understanding would be another nun, and that's how I read it.”

“So, what other verses were there? There were eighteen verses there. Did anybody memorize some and would be willing to share? You might be shy about sharing your memory or what you memorized, but really, this is what they did in the old world. They memorized, and these nuns composed these poems to be orally recited by people who memorized them.”

“So it's kind of like giving voice to these elder nuns so many years later and respecting them by doing your best to recite it. It doesn't have to be perfect. That's the least important part of it. Yes, let's see. Is it Fishelson?”

“So, you're muted.” “Fishelson is my last name. Barbara is my name. I don't know why it says Fishelson.” “Yeah, I have a very hard time reading the small Zoom names, so I'm going to make lots of mistakes.” “That's okay.”

“So I am new in a lot of ways to Buddhism. But I am even more new to poetry. I am an avid reader. I have been reading my entire life, and I've never gotten poetry ever except for one of Diana Clark's classes.”

“We did a poem in one of her seven AM sits, and I got it. But that was the only time. So I said, when this came through, I thought this is an opportunity for me. And I had this copy of this book, another by Henry Wainwright, and, you know, I've had this for years.”

“So anyhow, I chose the poem. Let me bring it up. *Puṇṇā*. And I brought it up because when I casually read it at first, I just felt like it reminded me of being able to fill myself with something good so I can move out the stuff that isn't so good.”

“I'm going to read it, but I'm going to read it with it in front of me too, because no matter how many times I've tried to memorize this, I just don't seem to be able to do it. And I don't know what that means. *Puṇṇā*, be full of good states. Like the moon on a full-moon night, full of insight, shatter the mass of darkness.”

“Now, the first several times I worked with this poem, I didn't know there was that last line. That made a difference for me. What I struggle with is I don't really get the connection between a full moon being full of insight. I get the point about if you're full of insight, you will be able to shatter the darkness.”

“And using your note, Gil, it talked about that as a term that is an expression for awakening. I couldn't quite make it work for me. Why is a full moon full of insight?”

“Ah, it's possible that those two sentences were not supposed to be exactly tied together. The full moon is full of good states. It's the ‘full of good states’ for the first sentence, and then with those full states, full of good qualities, then there can be a fullness of insight, the fullness of really seeing everything in a deep, profound way.”

“I guess I'm trying to maybe be too picky or something, but I still don't understand why a full moon has more fullness than the moon itself.” “Oh, well, from humans looking up in the sky, it's not always full. Sometimes it's pretty empty. It's gone. It's new, and it shrinks and shrinks and shrinks.”

“And so I think you have to not understand the literal moon. The moon is never always full.”

“Thank you.” “But from standing on the earth, the way we see it, that's the reference point that we have to understand.” “I can be pretty literal.” “Yeah, that's good.”

“Thank you. So I was touched by you saying that you're new to poetry this way. You chose this verse and you talked about your challenges with it. But was that all, or was there something that touched you as well, that you chose this verse?”

“I don't know that I can say that it specifically touched anything in me, this particular poem. But I found that after working with it and repeating it to myself on my walk, saying it and saying it and saying it, then when I went back and read the rest of them again, I started to have a glimmer of, ‘Oh, this is what poetry is about.’”

“Ah, great. Well, thank you very much. So I think the order is that now it's Michael. You're

muted.”

“Just a comment on the full moon. It just seems as simple as saying that is the place when the moon is completely full of light, of illumination, which is clearly related to me to insight and *paññā*.” “Great, very nice. Thank you.”

“And Leslie.” “I just wanted to comment that was my favorite also, and I've always loved the full moon. When I'm out in it and look up, it feels—everything feels so clear, and that's the kind of feeling I have with insight. So, just on a feeling sense, it seemed to really be true.” “Thank you. Very nice.”

“And Sherry.” “Yes, I'm actually a little confused about which poems we are in the text. I never received that email about that.” “Oh!” “But I have been reading this book for two years, two or three years.”

“Oh, which is the first, *The First Free Women: Poems of the Early Buddhist Nuns*?” “Yeah.” “It's beautiful poems in there. I'm quite inspired by the poems.” “Yes. It's not a good reference to understand the poems in their own right. It's a modern rendering, or modern interpretive rendering, or modern kind of inspired poetry—poetry inspired by those poems.”

“It's not a translation. So, as long as you know that, I think it's wonderful to read Randy's poems. But if you want to get closer to the elder nuns from twenty-three hundred years ago, you want to try to read translations that are trying to be as literal as readable.”

“Great, and can you put that in the chat, of what those are? Because I think that the people who signed up for this were supposed to have gotten an email. I think most people received it, so some people didn't. So maybe it went into your junk mail, or maybe you missed the link. I don't know. Very strange.”

“Yeah. Thank you.” “Okay, that's fine.” “Okay. So who's next that has their hands up? Maybe was it Ten Mori next?”

“Yes. Hi, everybody. It's such a pleasure to be here, and it's really amazing to see people I've seen in other classes, and even the last month-long we did. So it's nice to share space again. I really loved the poem of the mortar and the pestle, and the crooked husband.”

“In part because I think what's so revolutionary about the *Therīgāthā* is that we really are hearing the words of some of the first women who were allowed to be part of spiritual practice and leadership of spiritual practice at that time. And so, of course, the material concerns they would have would be what they're freed from, like domestic concerns. They're freed from even some of the other poems.”

“And I'm really curious how you're going to translate them, Gil. They're talking about leaving their husbands who've been abusive and the conditions of their immediate suffering. And so I think it's just so practical. She's like, ‘I don't have to do this backbreaking labor. I don't have to be around a husband that bothers me. I can just focus on being free.’”

“And I think about that with the work of the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* and what we do to release attachment and craving. Like, how few venues women at that time had to be able to have places of reflection, places to heal, and understand their conditions. And these were those brave pioneers who began to document their lives in that way.”

“So I just loved it because the Buddha is so rich with other kinds of metaphors, like lentils and what we're doing with ox carts and wheels. But here we get to see the metaphor of the women of these times, and it's just very meaningful. So I'm really excited, and that one really just spoke to me as an Indian woman.”

“These are my foremothers in this lineage, in this tradition, and it made me really touched to see that. And Sherry, to the point of what Gil was saying, that book that you have there is actually a lot of controversy related to it because the person who created it actually created beautiful poems, but he decided to veer from the actual translations.”

“Some of them actually have a sexual nature to them, which actually really made many South Asian feminist Buddhists angry, even people who are traditional Buddhist Pāli scholars. So I'll drop a link in there so you can see it. It doesn't mean—I think Gil is right—you can look at it for beauty. You can also look at it for new insight into those poems.”

“But much power and concentration and discipline has been created by interpreters of the tradition to hold true to these words as they've been written, because there's an unbroken chain of thousands of years of true transmission of what people have said. And so, for that reason, especially with patriarchy, we want women's voices to be the women's voices as written. And Gil is an excellent translator to trust in that regard, and that's why I was so excited to take that class.”

“But I'll share that link in there. Gil, to me, this was such a way to find a home as we go through the rest of the text. And so I just thank you for including this. It was really beautiful.”

“The one comment I want to make right now was that I think what you said: We should really appreciate that there was no place to go back in the ancient world. There was no Insight Meditation Center down the street where you could go sit and meditate. There were no psychologists or therapists to go to get help. There were no institutions.”

“There was no Social Security, no welfare. I mean, there was nothing. There was no schooling,

no education. They couldn't go anywhere. The only way to go and really learn something, learn spirituality, was actually to become a nun."

"And when we appreciate how deep suffering is, can you forgive them for the last poem in the eighteen? She talks about leaving her children behind, and that is kind of pretty shocking for people in the modern world. But even in the modern world, there are parents who commit suicide because somehow their suffering is so deep, and they leave their kids behind. That's even worse."

"So what can we imagine the suffering someone had was, that they felt this was their only option: to go forth this way, even leaving their children? But they could become nuns, and presumably that included some kind of nunnery, convent, place where they would be sheltered."

"Sheltered. That was the only option. That's why they became nuns." "Right. And I think the very first ones, there might not have been a place. But with time, there were *vihāras*. In time, there were monasteries for them."

"Just like in Europe, in the Middle Ages, for Christian women who didn't want to get married or who had interests beyond household." "Yeah." "So, thank you. So, Kramer."

"This one is the one also I chose, and it has such a voice to it. I feel like I'm totally bringing my personal culture into someone that was written very far away at a very different time. But I could have written this poem. It feels to me like someone being like, you know, like, 'Screw y'all. I'm going home, and I'm finding enlightenment.'"

"I mean, which is obviously a certain amount of read on top of it. But yeah, this is one of my favorite poems of the collection." "Which number? And are you going to recite it?" "Oh, I can. I mean, I'll read it. It's the one we've already been talking about. It's 'Freed.'"

"Well freed, very well freed. I am freed from these three crooked things: mortar, pestle, and crooked husband. I am freed from birth and death. What leads to becoming has been pulled out."

"I can just imagine some sort of person with a lot of spunk that feels a little—and, you know, a twinkle in their eye—like writing this and moving forward. It just delights me." "Yeah, someone who's really happy. That's for sure. Yeah, great. Thank you."

"And Linda." "Well, thank you for picking me, Gil. I'd like to let Denise go, though, because I see she has her hand up." "Oh, sorry." "Yeah, yeah. Sorry. It's a little hard to see it, so I'll go after her." "Thanks, Linda." "Sure."

“So the one that really touched me was *Mettā*, on the friend. Because, like you know, Gil, one of the things that you have been such a great inspiration for me around is community building, *saṅgha*, and community. And so this one, she says, ‘O *Mettā*, having gone forth out of faith, delight in friends. By cultivating skillful states, attain peace from bondage.’”

“And I also like that translation, ‘peace from bondage,’ rather than freedom. Peace feels like it's more here-ness, because sometimes freedom can feel like it's something future-y, where the peace is so embodied in here and now. And so I just really appreciated both the delight in friends, and I imagine these women finding fellow, or other women, to practice with and to go forth.”

“It brings so much joy. And I know that for myself, just the practice in having noble friendship is so beautiful. Without friendship, it would be very hard for these women to have had the safety, really, to go forth.”

“Very nice, very nice. May the lineage of Dharma friendship continue for a long time.” “Yeah, yeah.” “Thank you. JD—oh no. Anyway, I said Linda. Now I don't know. They're jumping around the tiles. What's going on?”

“I'll go, thank you. I chose ‘The Supreme,’ so *Uttarā*, if I'm pronouncing that correctly. And I want to say I was really grateful for the footnotes and the alternate translations. So I would tell it to myself with some different versions, but I will just go through it as it's listed, and then I'll explain where I would sometimes change up the words.”

“Controlled in body, speech, and mind, having pulled out craving at its root, I've become calm, released. And that one, I just thought was really interesting because the word ‘controlled,’ at first I was a little like, ‘Oh, I don't like it,’ because it sounded like somebody controlling me. So I would add self-control in body, speech, and mind.”

“But I also liked the last line with your footnote saying the alternate translations. I think we were kind of having some warm weather too, so this may have been influencing it, but it could also be: ‘I've become cooled and quenched.’ And that felt very much in the body for me.”

“And then the line, ‘having pulled out craving at its root,’ shows up in one of the others. I think it was the *Saṅghā*, which I also liked, but I was also saddened by the really giving up their children. So that one I didn't choose to keep with me during the week or so we've had this. But that was just what I wanted to share with mine.”

“Great, very nice. So thank you very much. What you highlighted—the translation of cool and released and quenched in the footnote—I never settled on how to translate that because it's

hard to be a translator sometimes. And that's one area where I'm still kind of unsure what we should do.”

“I appreciated that there were the two versions because I would go back and forth between the two. And ‘calm and released,’ clearly that makes a lot of sense. But the idea of becoming cooled and quenched, like I said, I could just really feel that in my body. So sometimes, when I would say it to myself, I would sometimes say that, my own substitution.” “Great, thank you.”

“And then now JD.” “Thank you. You've already mentioned, and a couple of other people have already mentioned, number eighteen, *Saṅghā*. It was very helpful to me to also read the footnote there and understand that community meant the community of sisterhood, of monks, or whatever that community would be, not just the wider community.”

“But I was taken by that poem, and maybe I'll just read it. I tried to memorize it. I could keep missing a line, so I think I'll just read it. And just imagine that this is a very, very short version of the Buddha's enlightenment himself.”

“Having gone forth, letting go of home, child, cattle, and what is dear, discarded ignorance, and pulling out craving at its root, I am at peace, released, quenched.”

“So that was important to me to see it that way for two reasons. One, it was just a beautiful condensation of a journey to liberation. And also, just to contrast how we're—I think many of us, and society itself, culture—is more tolerant of the idea of the Buddha, or a man, leaving to go on this journey than we would be of a woman.”

“I feel that way. I feel that's what's in the culture around me. And it's interesting to me that it probably would have been true then, maybe even more so than it is now. But I think it's still with us now. So that's been a big part of my reflection around that poem. I've really been sitting with that part of it.”

“Yeah, it's well worth reflecting on that topic and being challenged by it, and reflective about it, and not come to quick judgments about it, but try to really get behind what are the deeper and deeper layers of letting go of home and so forth. And somebody commented about, ‘Didn't the Buddha leave his son behind?’ Yeah, he did. He did.”

“And who scolded him?” “Yep.” “Well, there's quite a few modern women who are scolding him. They come and tell me.”

“Johnny.” “Thank you. Hi, all. I'm following in Linda's footsteps with ‘Supreme,’ and what came to my mind is my great interest in the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination.”

“And so, when she was talking about body, speech, and mind, I thought about human existence. That is what we are made from, created within, something like that. And I actually did enjoy the ‘released’ part because it seemed like it was leading toward the release of that craving.”

“So that struck me as just *nibbāna*, and that was written in your footnotes to the *Bhikkhu Bodhi*, I think, translation. And so I just really appreciated it. It sort of seemed like a summary of so many of the poems that fell before. I think it was like on the twentieth page.”

“And as I strolled through, it was like, ‘Oh, this leads to something that I’m inspired by these days with those links of dependent origination and looking at my life through the eyes of what I crave.’ Whether it’s something to be averse toward or something wanting to get, to apply to my life. And so it really kind of opened my heart to hearing the nun speak this way.”

“So thanks for providing those footnotes as well.” “Thank you very much. Good, and then Jane.”

“Hi. All right. Well, thank you, everyone. Hope I didn’t freeze. All right. I did memorize this. So one of my favorites, well, was number one. I really loved that.”

“And in a way, for me somehow it also connects to five, which is another *Tissā*. Is it pronounced *Tissā* or *Tissa*?” “Okay, *Tissā*.” “*Tissā*. Be yoked to good states. Don’t let a moment escape. Those who end up in hell grieve the moments they neglected.”

“And I just felt like that one really stood out to me as a good one to just continue to repeat as a reminder. I feel like it’s so easy in probably all ages of the world, but especially this one, to neglect moments occasionally and, or often. And I just really want to keep repeating this reminder to not let a moment escape.”

“And I also have questions about it. I read all your footnotes, and I was wondering if you could expand on what *Tissā* is and the three teachings, like that aspect.”

“Yeah. Well, *tissā* can also mean three, and it’s a reference, I think, to one of the most important concepts in Buddhism as a practice, which is called the three trainings. And the three trainings are ethics, meditation, and wisdom. And so that’s what I take it to mean.”

“And I think the expression in Pāli for the three refuges is *tīṇi saraṇāni*, I believe. So I think that’s what the wordplay is about.” “Thank you. I appreciate that.” “Yeah, yeah, that one really spoke to me. Thank you.”

“And then Dana.” “Hi. Initially, I was really drawn to the first one, ‘An Elder.’ And I immediately thought of a family member, an older family member who has come from a very difficult past

and has been working really hard and making a lot of progress to change habits.”

“And I just imagined reciting this for this person, and it just, to me, feels so caring. A wish for someone that you care about. ‘Sleep at ease, dear elder, wrapped in the robe you made with your passion. At peace, like dried herbs in a pot.’”

“Nice. And the same with *Puṇṇā*, really. Just a heartfelt wish. What you just said a few minutes ago about these women leaving their children, their husbands, everything, because they're hurting. They're in a place where this is their only option.”

“And for me to think about leaving my family in that much pain and carrying that mass of darkness with me. And then for someone to say, just maybe the person's even sleeping and they're looking at them and saying, wishing, ‘*Puṇṇā*, be full of good states like the moon on a full-moon night. Full of insight, shatter the mass of darkness.’”

“Just a wish for this person to be able to put down that burden.” “Nice. Yeah. Yeah, it's huge. The burden is huge.”

“And I think we have to also consider that some of these women that had husbands and family, children, it was not a family of choice that they had. It was not children of choice that they had, not a husband of choice that they had. It was all arranged, and it was all what other people wanted to see happen.”

“And they had no choice but to go along with it. And so it was a life without freedom in a very dramatic way. So for them, family was not a choice that they went into and, you know, once you make that choice to have family, you should stay there. But it wasn't. So some of them, it was not a choice. They had no choice in the matter.”

“Beth.” “I do. However, I really love so many of the poems, so it was a bit hard to pick one to memorize. But I really like the *Saṅghā* one that we are touching.”

“For me, it shows a lot of the courage, and the name *Saṅghā* as a community and as her name. And I think someone just put now in the message how it's so common today. So it came to mind so many people I know in different countries that need to leave the family, the children, to go to work.”

“I know of people that have left their country. And once I was asking how old was their child, and they said twenty-two. ‘And how long have you been living here?’ ‘Twenty.’ ‘How many times did you go back home?’ ‘Once.’”

“So that reality continues. And I understand that in those days, and in some countries still, marriage is not a choice, and they are forced into it. So for me, the courage became quite

strong in this poem.”

“Yeah. Well, thank you. And I don't know if we're not going to read all the poems in the book in these four weeks, so I'll make a selection. I'm probably not going to select these, but there is one where what it looks like is that the nun is the mother for the monk that comes to visit her.”

“And so her son is a monk as well, and she teaches him and makes the difference. She becomes her son's teacher, which is also another way that the family dynamics can play out. And there's one poem where it's kind of the woman who is maybe the dysfunctional one, trying to keep the man trapped, or has trapped the man, and he is the one asserting his desire for freedom.”

“So whether it's different when it's a man rather than a woman is a whole other question. But, you know, this phenomenon happens in all directions.”

“Lish, thanks.” “Hi. I picked the fourth one that's called ‘Three’ because it spoke to me. It said to me, ‘*Tissā*, train in the trainings. Don't let what binds overcome you. Unbound from all bounds, walk the world without.’”

“And ‘train in the training,’ right here, right now, for me, keeping it simple. Don't let what binds overcome you. Even just like putting my hand up, I felt a tightness in the body. And the bind is there, but it's not going to overcome me. I have agency.”

“And then this ‘unbound from all bounds,’ combined with ‘walk the world without affluence,’ for me is—the suffering comes both from the binding, but also from the overwhelm, the flooding. And so this middle way, both being unbound from the bounds but also being able to walk even though there's floods, is powerful for me as a practitioner right now. And I really appreciate that. Thanks.”

“Great, thank you, Lish. And Nancy.” “Excuse me. Excuse me. I feel a bit naïve or something. I appreciate that the authors of these poems were in dramatically different circumstances than my own.”

“So I have so much freedom and so on in comparison to them, and in comparison to many people who are alive today. I do have so much scope of action and freedom compared to many others. And yet I am bound.”

“I should be more—I have so much, and yet I too need to attain peace from bondage. So I thought of them as one of those amazing experiences one has, that something so ancient could speak to me here and now in such different circumstances to say, ‘*O Mettā*, having gone

forth out of faith, delight in friends. By cultivating skillful states, attain peace from bondage.' True then, true now."

"Wow. Yeah. Yeah, wow. I think, to kind of follow up on what you say, we can look at verse twelve, *Dhammadinnā*. Did anybody choose that as their poem that they wanted to kind of try to memorize or emphasize?"

"Why don't Nancy, can you read that one then?" "Sure." "It's meant to be as a follow-up for what you just said." "Sure, sure. One should be pervaded by the mind that generates desire for the end. One whose thought is not attached to sensual desire is called one bound upstream."

"And so why it follows what you said: The first two lines represent having a very strong desire to be free. This desire for the end is the end of suffering, the end of craving. And here the instruction is: One should be pervaded by the mind."

"That's strong. That's like serious desire. And the mind that generates the desire. So that's not saying, 'Oh, you shouldn't have too much desire. Desire is a problem. Don't have any desires.' It's the opposite."

"There's a certain healthy desire that is appropriate to have, and that you should really get behind it. And so sometimes people who live a comfortable life might feel the same bondage as some of the ancient women. But there's too many outs. There's too much entertainment, too many distractions, too many ways of getting comfortable."

"But for some of these ancient women, there was no Netflix or something. And it is upstream. It's going against the popular culture. That particular metaphor there is being used to go against the popular culture."

"And so, is it Shokuchi?" "Thank you. Well, the poem that I haven't memorized yet, but I will, the poem that touched me was from *Dīrā*. And it's very personal to my own journey."

"Each of the words chosen touched some place in me, starting with 'touch.' And as I'm reading it and thinking about memorizing it, I've changed the rhythm of the last line, the last two lines. And it made me wonder. It makes more sense to me the way I'm reading it than I think the way that it was meant."

"But I'll read the poem just so I can read the last two lines, and maybe you can enlighten me a little bit about your decision. So, *Dīrā*, touch cessation, the happy stilling of concepts. Become pleased with release, the unsurpassed peace from bondage."

"I don't know if you could hear in my reading how I altered that a little bit." "But just in the

pronunciation, right?” “No. ‘Become pleased with release, the unsurpassed peace, from bondage.’ I put another comma in there.”

“Oh, I see.” “I put a comma after ‘peace.’” “That’s nice, because it seemed to me that release is the unsurpassed peace. And what are we released from? From bondage. Anyway, that’s an alternative. That makes sense for me.”

“It does because, look, I don’t read Pāli. So I don’t, you know—I know I’ve studied Sanskrit, so I know these combinations of words can be read several ways. And I didn’t know, as a translator, how you were relating to that. Except you do have a note on it, but yeah, some note. I’ll go back and read.”

“I’m intrigued by what you’re saying, so I’ll go back and read the Pāli and look at it and see what’s allowed.” “Thank you. And just after I read it and liked it, then the name of *Dīrā* is very close to my given name, Deirdre. I thought that’s interesting too.”

“So anyway, I could say more, but it gets kind of personal. But thank you for that. Do any of you here have a name that means something like a good quality that has been meaningful for you in your life, that you have that name?”

“Well, Lakshmi is smiling, so maybe I shouldn’t call on you then. It’s because you didn’t raise—oh, you have your hand up. What a coincidence!”

“Yeah, my name, my given name, Lakshmi, is—I’m named after the goddess of wealth and prosperity and abundance in Hinduism. And that name came about based on Hindu cosmology and the time and place of my birth. And as I get older and older, I really reach for my name and for the attributes of the goddess Lakshmi, and every inspiration to just kind of grow and heal.”

“So yeah, I very much resonate with what I’m seeing in these poems with the names, and then the self-referential, the self-referencing of the names in the writing of the poems. And I find myself gravitating at this time particularly toward the *Dhammadinnā* poem and the *Tissā* poem that talks about boundedness and unboundedness.”

“And one point, one-two, the *Dhammadinnā* poem really does feel like an antidote to the boundedness, about desire and finding motivation as a way of overcoming. And the training, like, do the training. Just do the training. Just come back to the training.”

“I just really appreciate the spirit of that. And I’m in India right now. I just got here a couple of days ago to care for my mom, who just had surgery. And I’ve been interacting with a few of her friends who she’s known since primary school.”

“And as I read these poems, I am just so clearly, directly reminded of them and the spirit with which they—like, just how they are, how they present. And I find these poems to be really encouraging and instructive. Some of them are kind of softer, nature-based, with the moon, and then the others are like, ‘Just do it.’”

“It's that clear and simple. Just, just do it. And it very much reminds me of the aunties in my life, and it makes me think about how empowered all of these aunties are. People have existed in this patriarchal setting. There's been a lot of oppression. There's been a lot of restriction.”

“And in spite of that, or despite that, I don't know what the language is. It's, yeah, *Therīgāthā*. I find that the women that I know here are incredibly clear, direct, focused, and cannot be discouraged. And I feel that same spirit with these poems and the connectivity that I'm feeling between the different women that are highlighted here.”

“Fantastic. So this is a wonderful, wonderful thing to say because of how confident these poems are. And so you're kind of saying this confidence, in some ways, still exists in women in India. So thank you. Or in Cambodia, maybe? Let's hear that.”

“Yeah. Okay. This may not be appropriate, okay, because I'm not talking about my given name in English, but my first Dharma name, which was given me by Maureen Stuart Roshi, who really didn't know Japanese very well. But she knew Zen well.”

“Oh yeah, oh yeah, yeah.” “Anyway, she named me Aiko, which means compassionate light. But the compassion word there is actually never used in a Dharma name, because it is the word that runs from sexual desire to the most purified compassion.”

“Yes, exactly. I have always treasured the name for that because it was a profoundly central issue in my life at the time. And I'm always grateful to Maureen. Anyway, thank you.”

“For those of you who don't know about Maureen Stuart, she was a great pianist, and some of her Zen students, she taught Zen by playing piano with them, through the medium of how you participate in the keyboard. Is that right there?”

“Well, she believed Bach had said everything worth saying.” “Okay, so we're coming to the end of the hour, and I appreciate this a lot—all these comments and discussion this way.”

“And so, what's interesting about this anthology is how the poems change as we go through it, and change in emphasis, change in style, change in length. They're organized progressively. And given our four weeks, I'm not going to send you all of it. But I'll choose something for next time, and hopefully send it out by tomorrow evening, if not earlier.”

“So you have a week to look at it. And some of these poems, I have introductions to go to the chapter of a particular length of poems. There's a chapter of two-verse poems, a chapter of three-verse poems, a chapter of four-verse poems. So there's an introduction to the whole, and some of them that are a little bit longer poems, I have an introduction for each poem.”

“So I'm going to go home tonight and think about what the next set would be. And I'm just very happy to be here with you and have this conversation. And I know many of you haven't spoken, and so I hope that it's still meaningful for you to be part of this and participate this way. And I would have liked to have heard all of you.”

“So thank you very much. And I'll meet now for a few minutes with the people who are in their certificate program. So you can stay, and everyone else, you can wave or unmute and say goodbye. And we'll see each other next week.”

“No, not next week. I think it's two weeks.” “Yeah, I think so too.” “Thank you, everybody. Loved it.” “Thank you, Gil.” “Bye.” “Thank you.” “Thank you, Gil.” “Thank you, everyone.” “Thanks.” “Thanks a lot, everyone.” “So nice to be together.”