

Mind Moon Circle

Journal of the Sydney Zen Centre



Zen and Equality

WINTER 2020

Winter 2020

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Cover: *This Painting - is called* by Brendon Stewart

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Zen and Equality

Winter 2020

Here is the Winter edition of Mind Moon Circle for 2020. A big hug and thank you to all contributors who have generously offered their reflections on the theme *Zen and Equality*. We hope you enjoy this collection of stories and images reflecting on the equality and oneness of all beings and the plight of those who suffer inequality.

As we currently weave our daily lives around the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, we offer deep compassion to those most vulnerable to illness, disconnection and poverty.

With love and gratitude,

Jillian Ball and Janet Selby



Cicada at Kodoji, photo by Glenys Jackson

One breath

Jillian Ball

'I can't breathe'. These three words echo in our hearts as footage of the tragic death of George Floyd continues to shake the world and the sensibility of many people. The subsequent Black Lives Matter protests have brought awareness to the world's minority groups facing long histories of racism and bigotry. Truths about slavery, black deaths in custody, massacres and genocide have long been denied, minimised, silenced. The courage and determination of many people of all races to stand up as one for equality is opening up well needed dialogue.

For nearly nine minutes, Derek Chauvin, a Minneapolis police officer pressed his knee into the neck of George Floyd, an African American man, a father, someone's son. We cannot even imagine what happened in those moments in the mind of Chauvin, also someone's son. Or the bystanders filming the incident. But the footage brought a powerful turn. So long have black and coloured people witnessed police violence. Now white people with their white colonial supremacy and protection could bear witness on their mobile phones and TVs to the raw brutality of these injustices.

But what about our own backyard. For centuries Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders have lost their lives in custody and brutality amid the circumstances and consequences of dispossession. Their pleas have been met by national silence. Their violence is normalised and their names and lives rarely remembered by our society. To understand the howls of these people, their stories and ties to Country we need to listen deeply and acknowledge the truths of history. We may then begin to understand their lived experience of racial inequality with open hearts and minds.

My eyes were unexpectedly opened to the insidious nature of racism hidden in cultural stereotypes while on a walk with friends along the Larapinta Trail, the backbone of the West MacDonnell Range in the NT. Often our group walked in silence enjoying the rocky ranges, vast red earth and the chatter of the grey hooded babblers, shrike-thrush and rainbow bee-eaters. We pressed our ears to the cool soft trunks of the river gums, listening as they drank water from the riverbank. The wind, the birds and the trees spoke to us about place. We were respectful of this ancient land of the Arrrente people who had lived here for over 40,000 years. In the early morning, we watched from our sleeping bags as the Seven Sisters of Pleiades rose keeping a low trajectory on the earth's horizon. We kissed the parched earth with each step along the stony trail. We walked alongside the Ochre Pits, an avenue of yellows, creams and deep blood red ochre, the natural essence of Indigenous art and ceremony. It was more than an opportunity, it was a privilege, to be granted permission to enter this area and we offered gratitude to the present and traditional custodians.

However, an undercurrent of racism had inadvertently joined us on the trail in the form of our guide. He demonstrated blatant contempt in his words and actions towards the Aboriginal people we met along the way. We were subjected to long-winded tirades justifying his ill-informed comments about Aboriginal people, mistruths about their history, traditional practices and culture. His tone expressed hatred and ignorance. But here is the thing....although sharing my shock, concern and anger with my companions, I Initially left it to others, one person in particular, to call

out his racist attitudes and actions. Instead, that evening, I focused on smoothing over tensions in the camp and dodging around him.

“What’s going on?”, I asked myself, “Why am I being so avoidant?” According to Ibram Kendi¹, there is no such thing as being non- racist; you are either racist or anti-racist. To be anti-racist requires taking an active antiracist stance through direct action or by expressing an anti-racist idea. I knew my compassion for Indigenous people was deep. I had worked in cross-cultural mental health for over 30 years and had long taken part in nonviolent protests for social equality.

It was only in the light of deeper reflection under the stars that night, that I was able to get in touch with the nature of my fear and inaction. I recognised the familiar signs: a quiver in my chest, shaky legs and shallow breathing. Fear of conflict was a long-term traveller of mine. What was skilful action with this person, our guide, whose care we were entrusted to? It seemed all wrong. We were on a reserve which recognised Indigenous people as the owners which surely commanded respect. And my thoughts ran on. “What if I challenged him and he lost it, what if....”. As I welcomed in the darker, more edgy parts of my emotions, I felt my mind clearing and was eventually able to approach him on his racist comments and behaviour while also enquiring into the seeds of his actions. Not surprisingly there was a story of a loner, of being misunderstood and abused. In challenging his views, my heart connected with the deep grief, the fear, the powerless and anger of the Indigenous people and their ancestors on whose land we walked, ate and slept.

Our teachers have guided us in meeting racist ideas, structures and systems with an open heart and mind. Compassion, kindness and peace are bigger than a heart constricted by ignorance, hate, discrimination and violence. An act of power rooted in love².

Mark Arthur³, Black Buddhist author and meditator from the UK, wrote this poem in response to witnessing the death of George Floyd.

¹ Ibram X. Kendi. *How to be an Antiracist*. Random House, UK, 2020.

² Thich Nhat Hahn cited in Valerie Brown ‘How to fight injustice without hating’. *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review*. 2020.

³ Mark Arthur. One Breath. <http://www.google.com/mindfultherapy.ie/one-breath-poem-by-mark-arthur/>. Tricycle, 2020.

One Breath

My tender heart trembles,
Reacting,
the mind spins this way and that...
Looking for escape.

I cannot accept this.
Feeling powerless
Separate
Broken.

I can't breathe....
This is the legacy of suffering.

The wisdom, as always,
is about turning towards this pain.
A deep, deep wound.
Admit it's there
Feel the feelings in this heart
Listen
Open
Don't look away
Heal.

Breathe...
This is compassion for oneself.

And then,
with the steadiness
that comes from unflinching,
Loving awareness,
Speak and act from the heart.
Let it be known
Protect
and Serve
Don't look away
Ever.

Live...
This is compassion for the world.

True solidarity.
A radical acceptance.
That sacred space between
the out breath and the in breath...
Death and Rebirth
No separation
Them
Us
One.

Love..
This is a prayer for all beings ~



Larapinta. Photo by Jillian Ball

Ghost Stories

Brendon Stewart

Save a ghost. A challenge – save a ghost.

A ghost, come on.

This painting –



is called -

Toyota Dream ~ Sydney Cove ~ Deerubbin ~ Keating@Redfern ~ Total Control ~ Scarborough ~ Tjukurrpa ~ Robert Forrester ~ Eddie Koiki Mabo ~ 26th. January 1788 ~ Freeman's Reach ~ time ~ Makarrata ~ Rudd, Apology ~ Sorry Day ~ Black Deaths In Custody ~ Dreaming ~ Uluru Statement from the Heart ~ Settlement ~ On Country ~ Antipodean ~ Immigration ~ Sarah Cobcroft ~ Reconciliation

My painting is story telling about our family ghosts and how to survive and save them.

In 1794 near Freemans Reach on the Deerubbin River; we call it the Hawkesbury these days, an ancestor of mine, Robert Forrester is accused by Judge Advocate Lt. David Collins, to have shot dead a young Aboriginal man from the Darug people. Robert Forrester arrived in Sydney Cove, together with 207 other convicts on board *Scarborough* sometime in January/February 1788.

Robert and his wife (probably a common law wife) Isabella Manning (or maybe Isabella Ramsay) had a daughter, Margaret, who married Richard Ridge in 1809 and their son John, married Charlotte Cobcroft in 1839 and in 1873 their daughter, Louisa married William Stewart.

All long time ago grandparents!

This painting –



is called -

Sarah Cobcroft, by Joseph Backler 1856. NSW State Library Portrait Collection.

Sarah Cobcroft arrived at Sydney Cove in June 1790 as a free settler on board *Neptune*, with the Second Fleet. She was a registered midwife and later in life started a home for girls and babies; an orphanage.

A long time ago grandmother

Secret river ghost stories. Is Kevin Rudd's apology enough? And before him Paul Keating's speech in the Redfern park. Am I complicit in Robert Forrester's actions? Certainly, my family is

curious about this history, tinged undoubtedly with historical guilt. Sarah Cobcroft's gutsy decision, on the other hand to set off by herself and sail so far away; what strange courage was that; I get seasick on the Manly ferry crossing.

Treaty Now.

There has been a concerted pressure to exorcise the actions and consequences of my people's arrival here in this country; settling and invading all at once. I don't know the particulars of the young Aboriginal man; I don't know his name or even what set this tragedy off. I do know that many like him died along the Hawkesbury, along the Deerubbin and over the decades my people have come to forget.

Saving these ghosts opened my eyes that were wide shut.

Haiku Diana Levy

the ibis chick
shrieks about starvation
Mum honks back

still waters
in them somewhere
a frog, tocking

White's Creek reserve

Take your Feet off our Necks **Beyond Equality and Differentiation**

Subhana Barzaghi

The world of differentiation

'I cannot breathe' George Floyd's last words epitomize the gross inequality, the brutality of racial discrimination and the power of a white policeman's boot that squashed the life force out of him. George's three final potent words have been a catalyst for the black lives matter movement that has spearheaded and uprising around the world. It triggered a call to stand up against racial discrimination and injustice.

Our troubled world is full of unpredictability and especially living in the midst of a pandemic where the fault lines in both democratic and socialist societies are revealing chasms of; gross inequality, racism and sexism where the disadvantaged, marginalised and vulnerable, and aged are particularly at risk. Hopefully, the lessons from this pandemic are revealing how we are all in this together. The warp and weft of our interconnected social fabric means that we depend on each and everyone to take due care to do their part in order to protect one another.

I was struck by the comments of Kiara Goodwin a black female editor of the magazine *Everygirl*, *"If you don't see colour you don't see me"*. My identity as a black woman is a part of who I am. Is it all of me? Hell no. But, as one of my friends accurately put it, refusing to see colour is disregarding the distinct beauty that my blackness brings to the table".

If we don't see and engage with the world of differentiation, then we cannot appreciate the uniqueness of each and every ordinary yet treasured face. If we don't pay attention to the colour of the face, the tone of the voice, the cry for help, the raised clenched fist, their family signature, their cultural conditioning, then we cannot fully honour and respect our and their unique manifestation on the grand stage of the theatre of life.

At a time when most of us are feeling more adrift, anxious and stressed we need to maintain a practice that builds resilience and equanimity where we come home to ourselves. There are ways to honour differentiation from a ground of stillness, presence and listening to one another. The Indigenous practice of *dadirri*; deep listening has strong resonances with *zazen*.

Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann and indigenous from the Daly River region in the Northern Territory elder reflects about *dadirri*, *"We are one with the land – sacred and unique. We feel dadirri, the deep spring that is aware inside us. We call on it and it calls to us. When we listen to the land, we are made whole again. We listen to the sacred stories, told and sung to us as we gather around the campfire. We are not threatened by silence – we embrace it, as we have done for thousands of years in Nature's serenity. There is no need for words – only to be aware. In this contemplative way, dadirri spreads over us and enriches our lives. It renews us and brings us peace. We do not worry. When there is pain, or loss or suffering, we own our grief and allow it to heal slowly.....through this silent awareness. We ask others to take time to know us: to be still and to listen with us, to walk with us through the*

trees and sit by the riverbanks, to be aware of the land and its creatures, to respect and understand the peace that stillness brings.”

In the light of this racial inequality are we willing to investigate our own white privilege that stems from being the colonizers on this vast wide sunburnt country with the opportunities and resources that we have access to? This inquiry takes a hard look at our own behaviour, scratching below the surface to scour away those rusted on layers that we take for granted simply due to the colour of our skin. While we know that the move to equality requires a sobering dismantling of everything that sets us apart from our brothers and sisters of colour, yet it is not an easy task to unpick the emotional layers. To see through our attachment to positions of power and privilege is necessary and challenging yet ultimately freeing.

One of the greatly admired and venerated Supreme Court Justices in the U.S. was Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. She became a lawyer when women were not valued or welcome in the legal profession. Ruth quietly yet determinedly uprooted individual and systemic sexism by advocating for women’s rights and gender equality throughout her long successful legal career. “I ask no favour for my sex,” Supreme Court Justice said in 2018 addressing gender inequality, **“All I ask of our brethren is that they take their feet off our necks”**.

I was a radical young feminist in the eighties and nineties struggling to find a way out of the restrictive meld of my family expectations. I was given two choices once I left school; my father wanted me to be a secretary and mum a nurse. I tried both neither suited me. I stumbled into Buddhism at 20 years of age in India with a belly full of enthusiasm and a youthful head of idealism searching for freedom and happiness. I willingly adopted the promises of awakening and the philosophy of liberation that the Buddhist path upheld yet paradoxically I found myself also navigating my way through another set of sexist, restrictive, religious beliefs and structures.

Ten years later, I had shaved my head, donned the white robes of a *maechi* and took the 10 precepts as a novitiate Buddhist nun in Sri Lanka. Suddenly and unexpectedly strangers were being deferential to me. When I stepped onto a crowded rickety bus heading towards Colombo men and women would get up out of their seats and insist that I have a seat. I was young, fit and healthy and quite happy to stand squashed shoulder to shoulder like the rest of them. I simply wanted to blend in, but the Sinhalese would have been insulted if I had not accepted their offer. The fact that a white western woman had taken on the Buddhist robes in their country was perceived as an act of respect, one of taking off my own cloak of conditioning and entering into their world. By respecting their religion and ethical values I was given greater privilege and status than tourists or even their own dedicated humble ordained Buddhist nuns who sadly had a lower social status. If you were black, a woman of colour and poor you were at the bottom of the pecking order.

I had taken robes to live a life of voluntary simplicity, to follow the deep yearning for liberation and to practice with a Sangha. I chose to renounce; possessions, hair, appearance, dress code and roles. I was there to wake up, to be a person of ‘no rank’ yet I found myself inadvertently stepping into another world of spiritual hierarchies, sexism and rank.

Behind the traditional Vipassana monastery walls, it was another story. I loved rising before the crack of dawn sitting silently in the meditation hall for hours on a cool concrete floor protected from the sweltering heat outside, sweeping the grounds mindfully with a straw broom. After a day's practice sleeping in a ten by ten-foot room on a simple straw bed drifting off to blessed rest. The daily thrill was feeling the stimulating cold water run down over my bald head and my heart soaking in the dharma talk every evening. The four monks were kind and incredibly dedicated. I was in awe of their 'tiger mountain practice' their vow to sit rigorously through the night for a month and not lay their head down on the pillow. Every morning in single file they walked stately and mindfully out the monastery gates around the dusty villages on their daily alms round - begging for food. Women were not allowed to join the monks on alms round. As a newly ordained junior nun I was at the bottom of the hierarchy. Following in the ancient tradition we ate one main meal a day in the large dining room. The Swiss nun and I were directed to sit on a wooden platform lower than the monks. The monks ate first, we were required to wait and then the women could savour what was left over.

I railed against the sexist attitudes and the place of women as second-rate citizens that is still embedded in the Buddhist tradition today. I tried to throw off my cloak of anger, but confusion reigned, and I felt myself shrinking back into that quiet, shy, complaint little girl. 'Don't rock the boat' had been instilled in me. Wasn't I there to transcend all that? If I complained about the treatment of women, I was seen as a troublemaker. Raising gender politics was viewed as unspiritual. But to say nothing felt like a betrayal of basic human rights. I wrestled with speaking up or letting go, speech or silence, eventually I found refuge in the practice of bearing witness. I contemplated whether I could practice renunciation even of my feminist views? I vowed to give up my honest justifiable right to complain at least for a day or two.

This didn't last long as it was the 'egg hierarchy' that was my undoing. Occasionally a few eggs turned up on the serving tray from alms round. Those yellow-yoked wonders were highly prized and often snaffled up by the monks first, leaving the nuns without any. The moment I spotted the eggs, my mouth watered with desire, my stomach churned excitedly only to be left gutted. I scolded myself for blowing things out of proportion. 'It's just an egg', I told myself. I fantasied sneaking out of the monastery down the road just to buy a hard-boiled egg, but I was a nun and had just taken a vow to not carry money. This was the practice of no escape. Scarcity created a desirable food hierarchy, at least in my mind yet sexism and inequality created a quiet rebellion.

The Buddhist teachings ask us to investigate Right View the initial fold on the Eight-fold Noble path. If you see yourself as greater than, less than or equal to, you are caught up in an identity view. This sets us apart from others and maintains a false sense of perception of self. All identity views are a delusion of the self because we are caught up in an ongoing process of 'selfing' and 'othering'. Holding Right View is to transcend this dichotomy and see all views as just a view.

It is easy to see the suffering that we create when we are caught up in thinking I am better than or less than others, but what is the problem with seeing ourselves as equal to others? Isn't being equal a desirable outcome? In the Sutra, 'equal' refers to seeing ourselves as being equal to other members of a group. For example, this is my football club, my social group, my spiritual community, my political party. While this

may give one a sense of belonging the dangers are over-identification with one's group that sets up divisiveness, them against us. The practice of liberation asks of us to inquire into our core 'identify view' and see through the construction of self. Zen master Dogen instructs us; to study the Buddha Way is to study the self, to study the self is to forget the self.

The ocean of oneness

However, if we only see the world of differentiation then we are left with difference and cannot see the unified world of sameness. The essential light of awareness in you is the same light in me. Seeing with the interconnected eyes of wonder and oneness requires us to free ourselves from judgment and discrimination, to look deeper than the individual characteristics of name, colour and form that defines us. It is a seeing that frees, that is not caught by right or wrong, it sees the whole person.

As Ramana Maharshi the great south Indian sage said, "The mark of a true sage is to see all with an equal eye". This is an eye of wisdom free of discrimination. To taste this freedom, we can dive deeply into the koan, "What is our original face?"

Aitken Roshi mentions that, "In Zen Buddhism - dualistic teachings of form and emptiness, universal and particular, enlightenment and ignorance can be very useful. But if they are reified as concepts, they take on a life of their own and are hard to shake off" (Gateless Barrier p.157). Yamada Koun Roshi warned Zen students of pernicious oneness. This kind of perception smears everything with sameness. This is not the true sense of oneness the Samadhi of unity consciousness that we awaken to.

Beyond Equality and differentiation

In case 24 of The Gateless Barrier, a monk asked the priest, Feng-Hsueh, "Speech and silence are concerned with equality and differentiation. How can I transcend equality and differentiation?" (p.155)

Feng-Hsueh said,

*I always think of Chiang-nan in March;
Partridges chirp among the many fragrant flowers.*

I find this case curiously relevant right now and worthy of deep reflection. Particularly Feng-Hsueh's poetic response that transcends speech and silence, equality and differentiation. Those poetic lines are a true embodiment of direct experience that cuts through all the mental chatter, our judgments and dualistic ideas of better than or less than. Partridges chirping and fragrant flowers free me and you. As Soen Roshi reminded us, "You are a fragrant flower in a flowering universe".

To step beyond differentiation and oneness requires us to realise the vast, formless, timeless, nameless mystery of who we are that is spacious and empty yet full and overflowing with the moment. The effervescent mystery keeps coming forth as the call of the Currawong, partridges chirping, the white camellia flower in blossom, the growl of hungry koalas, black, white, people of colour, rich and poor, you and me.

A monk asked Tung-Shan, "Among the three Bodies of the Buddha, which one does not fall into a category?" Tung-Shan said, I am always intimate with it".

Through zazen, emptying the mind and deep listening we can awaken to this intimacy and true embodiment of the Way. Each of us has our own light, our own unique voice. To hold the world of oneness and differentiation with an equal eye is to see with wisdom. The open, empty spacious heart can hold multiplicity and universal oneness, they are not contradictory but intimately co-arise as two faces of the one dice. The world of differentiation, oneness and beyond is encapsulated in this beautiful poem by Wu-Men as a final blessing. (Gateless Barrier p.213)

*Moon and clouds are the same
Mountains and valleys are different
Is this one, is this two?
All are blessed, all are blessed.*

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Dadirri Source: <http://www.workforce.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Dadirri.pdf>

Ruth Bader-Ginsburg <https://www.rollingstone.com › movies › movie-news › watch-ruth-bader-g...>

The Gateless Barrier, (1990) translated and with a commentary by Robert Aitken, North Point Press, San Francisco.

What I hear when people say, “I don’t See Color” in The Everygirl
<https://theeverygirl.com › i-dont-see-color>



Portrait of Dulumunmun
Yuin Elder, Uncle Max (Dulumunmun),
90 cms x 60cm, Acrylic on plywood
Caroline Josephs, 2014

Ancient Footsteps

Myvanwy Williamson

Where I lay on the floor,
I imagine ancient footsteps,
Passing by with the sounds of the Ngunnawal tongue.

Long before the boats were built,
And delivered by greed to these shores,
Did families sleep where I sleep?

Who was born where I was born,
Before the hospital was built?

At six years old,
On January 26,
I wore temporary tattoos of the Australian flag on my cheeks.
Still the land held me,
Endless and forgiving.

When the flags faded,
I carried on playing in the bush.
My pink cheeks allowed to move throughout the trees with ease.

My blood,
Carried across the ocean,
Their blood,
Beneath my feet as I grew.

This land is not mine,
But I belong to this land.

If I want to let it embrace me fully,
I have to bear witness,
To the ancient footsteps,
And the grief their children carry today.

A Story of Disadvantage and Survival

Helen Sanderson

He ran up to her in the playground, his dark eyes brimming with distress.

‘What’s up Johnnie?’, the teacher asked.

‘He called me Blackie,’ he blurted.

‘Who?’

‘Benny.’ It was his brother, who had called the insult. Holding him she spoke gently and urgently to his hurt. ‘But you are black, darling, and there’s nothing wrong with that.’

Johnnie was a wild boy with a tender heart whose fists flew freely, a survival mechanism. Fight to win then the other kids wouldn’t mess with him. Small gangs of eight-year-old kids roamed the playground creating mayhem, but though Johnnie was the toughest and strongest, and the other little thugs gravitated to him, his own brothers and sisters could break his heart.

The family had come from western NSW and were living now in the inner city. Bush kids. There were a number of Aboriginal families in the area, with connections back to country. Many were cousins. Somehow the families found out this white teacher cared for these children and came to her with a question or a problem. And she discovered that if she got to know the families, the kids might settle down a bit and actually start to learn. The brothers and sisters would hang out in her classroom as she got ready for the day. A safe place. They’d help her tidy the room, or colour in, or draw, or play or just talk.

One day Irene popped out to do something leaving her handbag in the room. One of the brothers helped himself to some money, quite a bit as it happened, and spent it on rubbish, sweets and bits of junk. When she found out she was outraged. ‘You didn’t even share it with your sisters and brothers!’ she accused. But she was careful after that. It was a fool damn thing to leave temptation lying around.

It wasn’t clear who was educating who. Was she educating the children or were they and their families opening her eyes to Aboriginal disadvantage, and grace? Their humour sometimes in the face of suffering was keen. They knew how to laugh. One day two young women were waiting to collect children at the end of the day. When Irene said hello, they mentioned the Stolen Generation, and said they’d been taken away.

Mabel, the mother, asked Irene to come around and fill in the census form. It was the 1981 census, just 14 years since the 1967 Referendum, which first enacted including Aborigines in the census. They hadn’t been recognised as citizens before that. Anyway, when she went around to Mabel’s house and filled in the form, there were seventeen people sleeping there that night, in a two-bedroom terrace house. The form provided had too few spaces. And there was only one person sleeping in her little two bedroom semi that night.

‘How do you manage with all those people?’ Irene asked.

‘How do you manage with just you?’ answered Mabel.

They lived barely two kilometres from each other yet worlds apart. Still their worlds intersected with learning and tolerance on both sides, eased by curiosity, kindness and humour.

Years later, Irene answered the phone. It was Johnnie. He was not well. He was diabetic and couldn't afford his medication. Maybe he was also drunk, but he said, 'You were like a mother to me. I never forgot you.'

Of all the children she taught over nearly twenty years, these were the only ones who kept in touch .

Mabel is possibly still alive but Tom her husband died years ago from lung cancer. He'd been a smoker. He was a lovely funny man and enjoyed playing jokes on his kids. Together they had 11 or 12 children.

The oldest daughter, a beautiful woman lost a baby to measles, as she lacked immunity, and the baby was too young to have the vaccination.

One of the sons was killed in a fight. Three of the boys spent time in juvenile prisons. Irene visited one in gaol and discovered his brother was there at the same time. Two for the price of one.

Then one of those boys graduated to an adult prison and the other died of an overdose. Another brother became mentally unwell after connecting with some tribal matters that were too much for him. He'd also spent time in a children's gaol.

One of the girls had her children removed because of drinking, and three of the girls reared some of their nieces and nephews to help their siblings out. One of the daughters came down to Sydney from the country, with her little girl to see a doctor. When she got to the hotel she'd booked, they said they didn't have room. It was because they saw she was Aboriginal. She went and stayed at Irene's place. That same daughter married the son of one of the revered Aboriginal elders and became very knowledgeable about cultural matters.

They all kept up a strong connection with their mother. And several of them lived close to her and to the country they thought of as home.



Water Dragon.
Photo by
Glenys Jackson

“All Animals are Equal. Some Animals are More Equal than Others”

Animal Farm, G. Orwell (1945)

Sally Hopkins

Like some many really important questions, ‘Justice’, ‘Power’, ‘Liberty’, the more you look at Equality, the more difficult it is to make easy judgments. It is tangled. A sort of conundrum. Mulling and mulling I get like the centipede who, when asked how one of her legs moved after another, got so confused she fell into a ditch.

We arrive equal - all naked and helpless, utterly dependent. We all die.
Equal indeed.

But inequality is there from the beginning. Were we born in the midst of plenty and peace? Or was it drought, famine, plague, war? Was our family poor or rich, kind, loving, tolerant, or mixed up, violent, utterly distressed? Our upbringing inevitably shapes us - the culture, creed, customs of our group, our schooling. The long shadow of history influences everything way past anyone’s knowing. Then too the DNA, the instinct, of all humans, but also birds, animals, many forms of life, makes Others, difference, strangeness, a threat, something to be defended against, or fled from.

We are swaddled in all this.

Despite the 30’s Depression, and the World War I have never been seriously homeless or hungry or treated as a non-human. Life in quiet little Adelaide was safe, and, with no TV and little radio, hearing about terrors elsewhere made them seem less seriously disturbing, stories in a book. It was a profound shock when going to England 1956, spending hours off the ship in Colombo, Bombay, Aden. Actually seeing, hearing the beggars, the homeless living on the street, the poverty. Such degradation amidst such wealth. Hearing the contempt of some of the passengers. I’d never before seen a single beggar. Differences, yes, but nothing like this. I’ve found a poem I wrote then, pleading to Forget. Run away, in fact from a problem so huge. In Italy one day I was taken for a German. Loathing and scorn were poured at me.

What if this happened to you EVERY DAY?

Starting to see through the accepted norms of our upbringing is painful whoever we are, whatever the history. Comforting certainties are seen as flawed. We get glimpses beyond. Often quite terrifying.

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created free... that they have inalienable Rights to Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness”. So says The USA Declaration of Independence written in 1776. YES! YES! Noble sentiments!

Except, it was never true. Never before or since. The writer of that was Thomas Jefferson, the owner of 175 black African slaves. He, like all of us, was trapped in his time, his culture, his class, despite his high ideals. Black Africans not seen as fully human (as desperate Irish in the next century were not), as Aborigines here, who even in my youth remained ‘Boys’ to their dying day. At best, seen as lesser beings, part of the Whiteman’s Burden, children to be taught and civilized. In my youth I never

actually saw any Aborigines, but I heard station owners from up north speaking of them in the most contemptuous terms.

Truly seeing the vast inequalities in our world is a shocking challenge, for what is the answer? If it were simple it would have been solved long ago. The world gets emotional, sentimental, about one tiny little drowned boy, but thousands of drowned desperate people in the Mediterranean are rarely thought of, the survivor rarely made welcome. Those stuck in camps for years, ignored. We do not say we ‘welcome the poor, the desperate, the starving’. We strengthen borders, we say “we choose who comes here”. The world reacts to the death of one black man unable to breathe - but millions of lives are unchanged, the abuses go on. ALL lives matter- and yet, and yet.....

History here in Australia throws long dark shadows for all we like to think we are a country of the ‘Fair Go’. Plenty of folk know otherwise from sad experience. How do you function if you are always seen as inferior, less civilized, stupid, a hopeless case, ‘not like us’, a threat?

What is the inducement for real change, more equality, if you see the world in terms of winners and losers? Or is it ‘me and mine’? How can I open my heart and mind to How it truly is when the problem is so huge, answers not clear?

Our practice calls us to really look and keep looking, even when we wish to look away. It demands we drop our warm blanket of prejudices. How it is REALLY?

Thich Nhat Hanh says, “*Call me by my True Names*”. He does not say people on his side, people like him. He says everyone - the child raped, the pirate who raped her. He says with Walt Whitman, ‘I include multitudes’. We could say, “The Aboriginal in an overcrowded house, drunk, violent, angry”. “The white police officer, not seeing generational trauma, only seeing a threatening nuisance, a lesser person, who is breaking the law.” “The Asylum Seeker trapped in New Guinea” and “The government official who sees his duty is to make us safe – other lives less worthy.” We live with this confronting puzzle all the time. How can we act? What is the next step?

Nelson Foster, Diamond Sangha teacher at The Ring of Bone zendo goes further to include not only all humans but all life, everything. He said:

“Do not disregard a single thing”.

A profound challenge - a lifetime’s practice.

As Robert Aitken often said, “Not enough. Not near enough yet.”

A Quote –
contributed by Sean Loughman

The Sayings and Doings of Little Heart

Case 2

1. The Case

step.

this

Just

2. The Verse

*Little Heart doesn't seek for the peak
At the top of the stair.
She takes each step with scrupulous care.
The view from Sumeru
Enjoyed right then and there.*

“I might say: if the place I want to get could only be reached by way of a ladder, I would give up trying to get there. For the place I really have to get to is a place I must already be at now. Anything that I might reach by climbing a ladder does not interest me.” - Wittgenstein.

Wittgenstein L., *Culture and Value*, ed. by G.H. von Wright with H. Nyman, transl. P. Winch, U of Chi Press 1980 p. 4

Black Lives Matter

Mari Rhydwen

It all began with *Emma*. I went to see a recent film of Jane Austen's *Emma* earlier this year, and found myself feeling uncomfortable, rather than enchanted. Instead of being carried along by the story, I found myself wondering where the wealth on display in the elegant houses of early 19th century England came from and answering for myself, 'the colonies'.

As a child I had been raised on the stories about the family members who had lived and worked in the British colonies. They were engineers, educators and doctors who had gone to Egypt and the Malay States and India to earn a living and also 'do good'. The story is complicated by the fact that as Welshmen, they were denied jobs that matched their skills in the UK and generally took work in the British colonies only because that was where they could use their expertise. The stories my mother told me as I sat at the end of her bed while she drank her morning pot of tea were fascinating. There was great uncle Tom who taught at the university in Dhaka who married his cousin on the rebound after he was jilted at the altar by an Indian princess. Great uncle Jack built railways in China, then bridges in Fiji and got drunk with the Prince of Wales. He fell in love with a woman he met on board ship in 1905. She promptly left her husband, a NZ doctor, and her four children to elope with Jack but died in childbirth soon after giving birth to his only child. Jack never remarried. Later, after WW2 uncle Randal divorced his first wife and returned from working in Africa with a new Ghanaian wife. So, 'the colonies' were a place of romance where many of my family members went of necessity to find work and, according to the story I was told, contribute to the education and wellbeing of the local people. *Emma*, like Austen's other novels, is set at a time when the British empire was ascendant, and slavery was still practised. I watched the film, I found myself thinking, 'I bet there was slavery, or at least the exploitation of foreign peoples, involved in the making of those family fortunes.'

It was, in the words of the old cliché, 'as if the scales dropped from my eyes' and my whole understanding of history was transformed. Of course, I knew the history intellectually all along, but something had shifted. I found myself wondering how people could behave like that, just as when I read Behrouz Boochani's book *No Friend but the Mountain* I had found myself grappling with how anyone can allow such cruelty to be meted out to people who came here seeking refuge. But this was different. I had always known that Australia's treatment of refugees in the 21st century was unconscionable, but I had never quite made the link between the Britain I knew through my family stories and my experience growing up in Wales where I even had black relatives, and the slavery and other tools of colonial control on which the Anglosphere's status as a world power was based. I don't mean I didn't know the facts. I just didn't know what they meant.

On May 25th George Floyd was murdered by Derek Chauvin who knelt on his neck as Floyd uttered 'I can't breathe.' Across the world people came out, and continue to come out, despite the pandemic, to protest that Black Lives Matter and it became obvious that we in the Anglosphere cannot be whole until we heal this gaping wound. This wound is now revealed: the exploitation of those who continue to be treated as lesser beings on account of the colour of their skin. Of course, there are other ways of

discriminating, on the basis of language, or gender, physical ability, or religion, attributes which may or may not be immutable. One can learn to speak English only and thus erase the traces of a stigmatised ethnicity. I know. I did. But skin colour cannot be erased or hidden. Moreover, while all discrimination is offensive, the blatant harassment of people of colour by our law enforcement agencies who act in our name and ostensibly for our protection, is issuing us with a challenge.

My Ghanaian aunt had always been an important influence. Not only did she introduce me to good food (she must have been the best cook in Wales), but she opened my eyes to different ways of thinking. She was the first, perhaps only person I ever saw breastfeeding her baby in buttoned-up Wales, though this may have been because it was generally too cold to expose much flesh. She also let me stay up and watch anything I wanted to on tv—I was particularly fond of watching plays based on Somerset Maugham stories—and she told me countless stories to back up her claim that it was the British who were uncivilised, not Africans. The one that sticks in my mind is her account of going to a flat in Birmingham when she worked there as a district nurse. When she went inside she saw that the back of the bedroom door of the woman she had gone to attend to was slung with numerous dildoes. I had no idea, until she told me, that such things existed or what they were, and even then, as a young teenager who had led a sheltered life in Wales, I had no idea what anyone might do with such a thing. After that I was thoroughly convinced that she was right, the British were indeed uncivilised.

I came to Australia having studied anthropology and linguistics at the School of African and Oriental Studies in London. It was here I had met and subsequently married, a New Zealander with a shared interest in Zen, who subsequently took a job in Australia, which is how I came to be here. SOAS had also fostered my professional as well as personal interest in people whose lives were very different from mine, an interest that has endured throughout my life.

So, when I arrived in Australia, one of my first questions had been, ‘Can you introduce me to some Aboriginal people?’ No one could. No one I met knew any in Sydney but some knew ones from elsewhere whom they had researched, so I decided to do some research too. Of course, when I got to Barunga in the Northern Territory my main ‘informant’ (as we were then expected to call the people we paid to tell us about their culture and language) said, ‘Oh Mari, you didn’t have to do any research. You could have just come here and said you wanted to meet us and talk to us.’ Actually, I had not intended my research to necessarily lead to a career—that’s another story—but over the years my work has taken me back, again and again, to working with people of colour, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, and not only working with, but developing deep friendships too.

One evening I was driving to Perth airport, with my black partner Muddhi in the passenger seat, to pick up my daughter Lucy. We were running close to time and I didn’t want her, as an unaccompanied minor, to arrive at the airport and find no one there to meet her. But the police were doing random breath testing. I was all ready to explain to them that I was in a rush, and why, and I expected they would let me go but Muddhi, sitting beside me wearing his usual expensive designer clothes and gold Omega watch (which he had told me protected him from being mistaken for a bum) became deeply agitated. I realised he was really afraid of me challenging the police. So, I didn’t say a word, I just did the test. I also got to the airport in time. But I was

shocked. I've been stopped by the police several times in the past, but I have always been able to negotiate and resolve any issues with ease. But later Muddhi told that the police were not charmed by me personally when they stopped me—I had been stopped once or twice and have always been waved off with a smile and a warning—but were responding only to my whiteness and middle classness, to the stereotype I fitted. I don't think I quite believed him at the time. I do now. I finally get that my 'normal' is not normal at all, it is 'white privilege'.

Wumenkuan Case 24 deals, as koans are wont to do, with the core matter of our practice, the back foot and front foot of walking the Way, the dark and the light, emptiness and form, in this case expressed as equality and differentiation.

A monk asked Priest Fengxue, "Speech and silence are concerned with equality and differentiation. How can I transcend equality and differentiation?"

Fengxue said,

'I always think of Jiangnan in March;
partridges chirp among the many fragrant blossoms.'

The monk is aware, intellectually, that, as soon as we open our mouths we are in the world of differentiation, of form. How then can we express the Way in which form and emptiness are seamlessly united? Fengxue effortlessly opens his mouth and responds. He evokes a world in which there are trees and birds, blossoms and placenames. He invokes the memory of another by quoting his poetry, while speaking for himself alone. This is the world of black and white, male and female, sacred and profane, good and bad, me and you. And it is the world that includes them all, without discrimination. So how do we free ourselves like this?

Listening is a good start. It is no accident that the Bodhisattva of Compassion hears the cries of the world. It is also no accident that in Aboriginal languages, the word for *listen* is also word for *understand*. Thanks to social media, people across the world heard and understood the cries of George Floyd saying, 'I can't breathe.' This evoked a response, the Black Lives Matter movement, that has reverberated globally. Five years ago, David Dungay Jr, a young Aboriginal man had uttered those same words before he died in custody, surrounded by six prison guards, and now his case is again being brought to our attention. We must not wait until we hear the cries of yet more people being murdered to start to listen and to understand.

It is a relief now to find more and more Aboriginal people writing and speaking back, instead of only anthropologists and linguists like me writing about Aboriginal culture and language. Aboriginal people are writing and speaking about themselves for non-Aboriginal people, in order to help us understand what we are evidently not yet understanding. One such writer is Tyson Yunkaporta whom I first met when we both worked at the NSW Department of Education. We would sometimes find ourselves in Bourke or Dubbo, and hang out together after work, exchanging ideas and telling stories. Like his innovative *8 Ways of Learning* work in the Education Department, his recent book *Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World* is about different ways of learning. One of these ways is a powerful guided meditation that can connect us all to the place we live, to Country. Recently at an online Anthropocene-related forum he recounted a story I had told him many years ago that my father had told me when I was seven as we trudged up the Welsh mountain, Cadair Idris, in the

cold mist and rain. I was amazed Tyson remembered the story, but upon reflection, I think it had resonated because it made sense to him. It is how people connect to their place, through their old stories of how it was formed and by whom, passed down orally through generations. But, more crucially, it was because he knows how to listen.

He also knows how interconnected we earth beings are. In the book he writes, 'It is strangely liberating to realise your true status as a single node in a cooperative network.' He continues, 'sustainable systems cannot function without the full autonomy and unique expression of each independent part of the interdependent whole.' This is a book informed by Indigenous knowledge systems but, surely he is talking of the Net of Indra, albeit by another name?

Listening is a good start, but here is something else for you to try if you wish. Soon after the George Floyd's death, Robert Rosenbaum, a Soto teacher, wrote that he preferred to think of the story of George Floyd and Derek Chauvin as a sutra and then to approach it as he would his own dreams, recognising himself in every role. He considered all the times he had not listened with attention to what people said, his sweetheart, his teachers, even himself and wrote, 'I think about what it would be like to kneel on someone's neck and not hear them, I think about how the more pressured and upset I get, the more likely I am to retreat into a rigidity which shuts down any responses to the sights and sounds beseeching me.' This practice of deeply listening to the cries of the world, entails embodying not just the pain of the obvious victims, but also the cries of those perpetrators who act badly because they are tired or are themselves ground down by years of neglect or abuse or ignorance.

This is something I am doing, and yes, grappling with at times, along with anything else that opens new ways of understanding. I acknowledge with gratitude that many other people are doing this too and kindly share suggestions about what to read or watch. Even after a lifetime of close involvement with people of colour, personally and professionally, there is so much more to hear and understand. In Zen, our initial focus is often on realising our essential nature, that we are not separate. Ongoing practice involves the endless task of understanding the implications of this, which may well include questioning and dismantling long held, and often culturally sanctioned, assumptions that keep us at arm's length from others. These are the people like us, 'equally empty, equally to be loved, equally a becoming Buddha'¹ who, not only because of colour, but because of religion, politics, gender, sexual orientation, ability, values, musical taste, level of tidiness or whatever, we cannot yet recognise as our self.

¹ Jack Kerouac The Dharma Bums.

A Moment Shimmering -- When the Heart Opens...

Caroline Josephs

Singing and Stringing...a Heart Connection to Country, to my Black Sisters.



Above: Carol and Gulumbu with me.....in the Women's shelter at Garma, NE Arnhemland. I am wearing pendant made by Carol. Gulumbu was later to become my 'yeppa' or sister.

My first connection with Yolngu women in North-east Arnhemland came through string.

String is about relationship, about the liminal quality of that connection between places, between country and ancestor, between ancestors and current listeners to the story. String was, and continues, as a most important item in many Aboriginal societies. Hand spun from plant fibres, human hair fur

and in Arnhemland with feathers added, string is considered to bind people together manifesting and mediating their relatedness to one another and to the land. String is

also used for ceremonial and sacred purposes, stringing together places marked by the Ancestral Dreamings, as Ancestors walked earth during the Dreaming.

Around my neck I wear a pearl-shell pendant on a handcrafted string of brown and white. I discovered it hanging on a nail hidden behind other more elaborate necklaces in the Arts Centre whop at Yirrkala. I had gone by bus there from the Gulkula area in the first few days of *Garma* – to view the museum and the array of handcrafted Yolngu artefacts, barks, woven baskets, necklaces, sculptures, dilly bags, old and new. And Wandjuk's finely enscribed paintings, on bark.

Garma is a large gathering to celebrate and share Yolngu culture. People come from all over the world and all parts of Australia, to share in song, dance, craft, music, storytelling, going bush. I visited Garma in 2001 2002, and 2003.

The necklace I am wearing is an oval of pearl-shell joined by a dab of beeswax to its brown and white string. The string, two plies of brown and cream colour, is made from the inside bark of the Kurrajong tree. (The brown from another tree). String for Yolngu binds people together, inter-connecting them to each other and to the land. It is the manifestation of the ancestors' trackings through the country, as well as holding other meanings. It is meaning itself.

At *Garma*, I wore the concave pearl-shell side of the pendant hidden from view, and the mottled brown and white back of the shell facing outwards. It was one of a kind. It spoke to me of the small and the seemingly insignificant, the shiny hidden part of something not revealed all at once. Only later it is revealed to me that *Yolngu* relate

their personal histories as ancestral stories and ancestral songs, each reflecting the other, creating a series of life events -- albeit *necessarily fragmented, partial and elliptical* -- that are intimately related to others both locally and further afield...It seemed a connection of the most profound kind that the *cartography of Country is also a cartography of the mind*.

Map of country, map of the mind. Places are spoken or sung into being. i
I am writing the story into being.

I was in the women's shelter at *Garma* (a wonderful shady, breezy construction of bush poles and hessian walls, with a roof of leafy branches - and a beach-sand floor). It was Day Three of *Garma* Festival of Indigenous Music and Dance in North East Arnhemland,. My first visit. The place was *Gulkula*, an extensive stringybark bush site, an hour or so drive from Yirrnga on the bay where Mandawuy Yunipingu at that time led *Yothu Yindi* and the *Yirrnga* Music Development Centre, about 40 kilometres from the white mining township of Nhulunbuy, about one thousand kilometres by road from Darwin and 14 kilometres south east of Gove airport where we had first landed in the dark, after a day of travel from the southern city of Sydney. This was where *Garma* was being held, a coming together of *Balanda* and *Yolngu*, hosted by the *Yothu Yindi* Foundation.ii

One of the women sitting in the shelter weaving baskets, indicated the necklace I was wearing, and smiled, 'I made that.' My hand went to the shell pendant to touch it with pleasure. A connection was made through the wearing of the necklace with its maker. An unexpected moment, opening into possibility. I was stepping over a threshold into connection with *Yolngu*. A liminal moment. I wasn't fully aware of that at the time, just the feeling of delight, of going somewhere in the next few moments, moving ever so slightly, into another world, *Yolngu* world.

"Oh, may I sit with you?" I asked the maker of the stringed pendant. There are smiles, and I sit with her and another woman. I write their names in my notebook in case I cannot retain the strange-to-my-ears sounds of an entirely new language. I sit down to join them on the sandy floor of the shelter to talk and watch their making dilly-bags out of pandanus.

"Can you teach me to make string?" I ask the maker of my string and shell pendant, after we have shared some conversations with an older woman I learn to be Gulumbu (much later she was to become 'yeppa' for me, sister). I don't know where the question comes from. It comes from nowhere, a spontaneous gesture arising from my pleasure in the necklace I am wearing and its earth, sea, air connections for me -- the shell of the sea, the string of the tree, the wax of the flying bee. Perfect in its simplicity. The three elements in the pendant -- twined string, brown and beige, natural colours of the barks of two trees, the beeswax, brown, and the oval shell, double-sided. The sheen of the pearl side contrasts with the brown and light markings on its other side. And the unexpected added delight of finding its creator.

"*Djerrkngu* can," says the young woman whose English name I find, is Carol, and she indicates an older woman. She says something in language to *Djerrkngu* and soon I am learning how to spin the two plies of the bark fibres using the heel of my hand and twining them, rolling them on my thigh, together into a strong and attractive string.

Much laughter and conversation arise as I sit beside *Djerrkngu* mimicking her movements and responding to her gentle guidance. I am twining myself to these people and to the land we sit on, to the stringybarks that rise not far from our shelter and surround us. I am trying to find the way into *Yolngu* meanings by embodying what they do and how they do it. I feel instant ease with *Djerrkngu*. All the while we are conversing about things that women talk about when they are making things. Our lives. What brought me here.

The Women's shelters, and shelters for the men's business spear-making and master *yidaki* classes face the ceremonial ground prepared for each evening's *bunggul*, the dancing and singing.

"Where does your mob come from?" I ask *Djerrkngu* my teacher, as I make string. She tells me about her grandmother's, her mother's country, and more. Then she turns to me and asks, quite unexpectedly, "And where does your mob come from?" This is a question very few people ever ask. I am surprised. Not sure how to tell it. I tell a brief story of my paternal and maternal grandparents' migrations and their escaping from pogroms in the last part of 19th century Latvia, and the Ukraine, their subsequent travels to Glasgow, to Manchester, New Zealand, Sydney. I did this perfunctorily somehow, not sure of what it would mean to *Yolngu*. I have this way of dealing with my Jewishness...a kind of testing of the water, especially with people whose attitudes I cannot discern. Will there be submerged prejudice? How will I deal with this? Will it remain unspoken? I was, however, quite unprepared for the response.

All at once the women put down their work, and on either side of me they begin to gently stroke my arms and to intone a crying song "Aww....Awww....Awww.... Awww..." It continued on... And on. I am in a space of feeling nurtured and cared for...and Unknowing. Eventually the song fades, and turning to me, one says, "We know, what it is....to lose Country!" They know about the Jewish people. My heart...is ...melting. A shimmering moment in time.

Yolngu community had been living in relation to this place for tens of thousands of years. In contrast, I had come to this place at the end of a long series of travels and migrations of my family. In spite of my long searchings I had been unable, even with myriad attempts, to find any record before that generation.

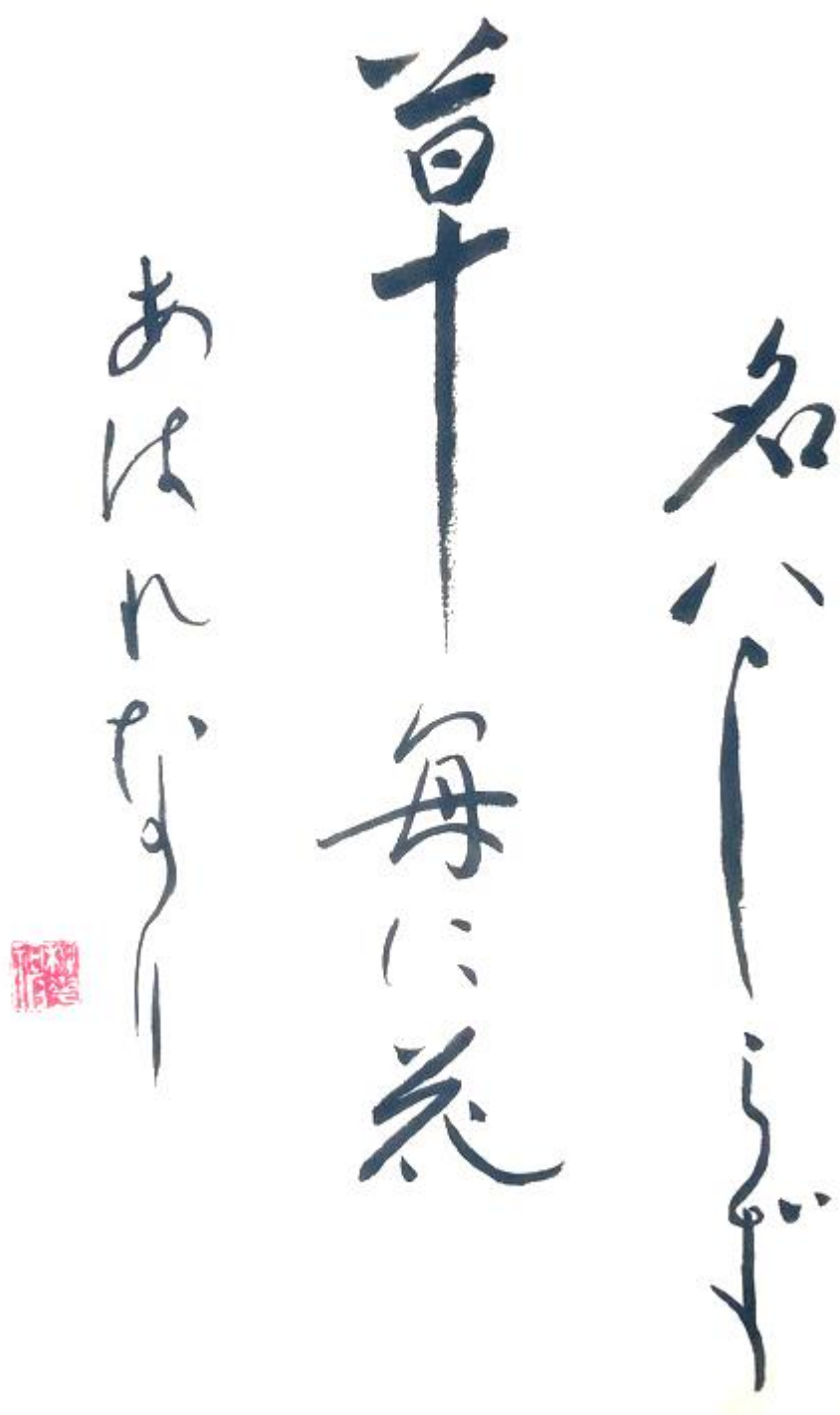
The women of Arnhemland, these *Yolngu* artists tell me that they know about the Jewish people. They have been in Israel. They have walked the *Via Dolorosa*, in Jerusalem, where Jesus had walked. They know the stories of the Holocaust. This was the last thing I had expected. Their Christian Mission education, being part of a Christian group in Nhulunbuy now, and their Art exhibitions abroad have led them into the Holy land of the Christian and the Hebrew. They understand. They have been sharing the sadness and grief of my ancestors and my disconnectedness from roots, in a land they had inhabited for millennia.

A threshold crossed. Never forgotten.

i Magowan, 2001, op.cit., p. 43.

ii *Yothu Yindi* Foundation has grown out of the *Yothu Yindi* internationally renowned *Yolngu* music band but now covers development in many spheres of *Yolngu* life.

*First Nations people are warned two esteemed people mentioned here have passed away.



*Their names I know not
but every weed has its tender flower.*

Sampo
1647 – 1732

Calligraphy by Glenys Jackson

Severs Beach

*South Pambula, Sapphire Coast, Bega Valley Shire, Far South Coast,
New South Wales, Australia.*

Janet Selby



The Indigenous Yuin Nation have occupied this area for aeons. They called this place Panboola – Beautiful Waters.

Paradise actually.

On a recent visit to the far south coast of NSW, my friend took me to a place in Ben Boyd National Park called Servers Beach, near the town of Pambula. A bush track

meanders down from the car park clearing to a finely built board walk. It might be for the protection of the tidal flats which would become flooded with the tide. Or it might be for swimmers, families and fishers to gain easier access to the clear waters for their recreation.

Oh, look! There's a midden. More: left and right, and under the boards, scattered everywhere.

Then revealed through the scrub, the pure golden sands open up spectacularly to the glassy waters of the Pambula River. Looking east through the gentle headlands, the waters open up to the ocean expanse. Looking west, the waters turn a wonderful glassy green where there is a deeper channel. Scattered on the sands are rich red Devonian rocks typical of this coastal area, adding contrasting colours: red-green.

The sky is gently covered with layers of thin high cloud rendering a soft glow to the landscape. Each smooth rock exposed on the beach is covered with wavy-edged purple crusts of empty oysters: red-green-purple.

On the small headland that defines this flat expanse of tidal flats, I am amazed that white shells form a depth from the exposed sand, deep into the land. My eyes follow the extent of the empty shells, up the hill, between the old sandstone bush rocks, then higher up into the scattered gums.

I find my feet eager to scamper up those rocks - shells everywhere, all over, under, throughout that place.

In fact, the whole headland seems to be just shells – mussels, oysters, pippies, plus many more I couldn't identify, but probably just as delicious.



I sit on a rock perched higher above the sand and the perfect green waters. Embedded in that land, on that rock, I hear the chatter of the women and the kids. This special place for feasts, community, laughter – the language easing from the land.

What a privilege to visit, to immerse, to *be* here. I pay my respects to the people who for 3,500 years functioned in this place until recent years, and I am

grateful that I could experience its spirit, deep in the rocks.

After our visit, turning to go back along the board walk, full of the fresh experience, we encounter an oddity – an “old” persimmon tree near the remnants of a fresh water creek flow. Evidence of the changes of culture in this area. Enough for another study.

Yuin Nation

...we live in this wonderful area of the Yuin Nation. For me, the Yuin nation stretches from Nowra across to Goulburn, from Goulburn down to the Victorian border and from the Victorian border in as far as Cooma - and that there is the Nation of the Black Duck... Anthony Moore.

https://livingknowledge.anu.edu.au/learningsites/kooricoast/01_welcome.htm

Midden

A 'midden' is an occupation site where Aboriginal people left the remains of their meals. At some sites substantial deposits grew over generations of use of the same area, and some middens are a few metres deep. When Aboriginal people had visited a certain area, they sometimes intentionally left the waste remains of the food they had consumed as the top layer of the midden pile so that the next people to visit could see what had just been harvested and would choose something else to eat so they didn't over-use the resource. Middens thus represent a blueprint for sustainable harvesting of coastal resources but are also an archaeological treasure trove.

(Guide to Aboriginal sites and places - Creative Spirits

<https://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/land/guide-to-aboriginal-sites-and-places>)

Middens on Severs Beach

It is fortunate that they have been preserved thanks to their less accessible location and their inclusion in Ben Boyd National Park. They are the best preserved mounded middens on the east coast of Australia, so they are locally, nationally and internationally significant.

(Indigenous Coastal Heritage

<https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/read/43540221/part-5-a-indigenous-coastal-heritage-sapphire-coast>)

Pambula

The name Pambula is derived from its Dharwa name, pronounced "panboola", meaning 'twin waters'. Pambula is a historic village with its first European settlers thought to have been the Imlay brothers who established cattle runs on the Pambula River flats in the 1830s.

Ben Boyd National Park was established in 1971 covering 8,900 hectares. The park consists of two sections, on either side of Twofold Bay and the town of Eden.

Benjamin Boyd

Scottish colonialist Ben Boyd is considered Australia's first 'blackbirdier', the name given to operators who shipped South Sea Islanders to the colonies and paid minimal wages to evade anti-slavery laws.

Devonian red rocks

The world's first forests caused a leap in oxygen levels, creating rust-coloured iron oxide that stained the sediments which later became rocks.



Photo: Glenys Jackson, *Cicada Rings Bells*

All things bright and beautiful

Gillian Coote

Once, across the river from our house, a small group of well-dressed Asians walked down to the mangroves carrying a wire cage. For a long while they seemed to be doing nothing until they suddenly all moved down to the river's edge and carefully lowered the cage into the water. I couldn't see what was going on even with binoculars, but later, when I heard of a Buddhist practice called life liberation, I wondered whether the caged creatures may have been crabs bought from the fish market and, that before releasing them, while they seemed to be just standing there, the little group may have been chanting a traditional prayer, something like this: "*May all sentient beings, endowed with consciousness and the breath that supports their life, be freed of all that endangers their life and be relieved of their fears. May all sentient beings, both myself and others, be freed from all obstacles that bring untimely death.*"

Liberating other species' lives like this goes back a long way. During the T'ang dynasty, Po Chu-i wrote about his decision to release two fish.

*At dawn a servant brought a basket of spring vegetables.
Under the green parsley and bracken were two white-baits;
They uttered no cry but lay with their mouths open as if gasping pity on each other.
Turning them out of the basket on to the ground, they lay there more than a foot long,
still lively.
Is it to be the fate of the carving-knife and chopping-board,
or are they to be eaten by ants and crickets?
Though I bestow this favour upon you, how far I am from desiring anything in return;
Do not trouble to seek, on my behalf, among the mud and sand at the bottom of the
lake, for silvery pearls.*

Though there is a long tradition of gaining merit from compassionate action, Po Chu-i is not seeking gain. This is the true attitude of religion, of poetry, towards everything and especially towards sentient beings. To ask nothing from them, to give them all the freedom and happiness consistent with our own existence. To refrain from killing them.

Most creatures are audible. They have voices. Birds and animals communicate their contentment and *joi de vivre* when living in good conditions, the chickens' soothing low clucks as they scrabble around the paddock, the occasional bellow from a cow, bleating from sheep, snuffling from pigs. And they communicate terror when they are killed violently, and pain and distress when living in poor conditions.

Perhaps fish are voiceless. But though I have not yet heard a fish squeal in fear, fishing with my father out at sea when I was a kid, I heard and saw them beating their tails endlessly on the bottom of the boat until their flapping lost its intensity, and then stopped altogether. I grieved with them as their lives ebbed away, empathising with their intense distress, their desperation to return to the ocean. I couldn't throw them back. My duty was to be dad's little helper, to sit quietly while he fished. Girls are bad luck in fishing boats, he told me, and I was grateful to be invited.

But the desperate fish were visible. I saw them. And I see crabs imprisoned in tanks in upmarket restaurants, testing the limits with their legs and feelers. I see living fish and patrons choosing this one, that one. I see waiters slide their nets into the tanks to remove the chosen creature which is whisked into the kitchen to be killed and cooked.

And while fish, crabs, lobsters and oysters are all being raised in commercially farmed environments, the consumers of these creatures rarely see how they live and die. Whether their conditions are as close to their natural lives as possible. Whether they are treated with respect as sentient beings, from which understanding Issa, a poet from Japan, wrote:

*Do not kill the fly:
See how it wrings its hands;
see how it wrings its feet*

Life liberation may seem a quaint and esoteric ritual these days when, rather than religious or poetic attitudes, the ethical relationship between us, the dominant world species, and all other species, is much more likely to motivate people to intervene on the creature's behalf. We want animals to lead normal lives and have normal behaviours. One animal rights group states their primary role is: 'To liberate animals from places of abuse, i.e. laboratories, factory farms, fur farms, etc and place them in good homes where they may live out their natural lives, free from suffering.'



When people know animals and birds intimately, they are more likely to raise them with respect and care and kill them with respect and care. In Australia, some farmers support ethical food production, which is in turn influencing the way, for example, pigs are raised commercially. At one NSW free-range farm, the pigs take six months to reach maturity and spend eight to ten weeks with their mothers before being weaned, compared with some commercial farming operations where piglets are weaned at 1 ½ weeks, fed intensively, have restricted exercise and reach slaughter weight in fifteen weeks. When people know about these unnatural living conditions, they become concerned and demand change. And, as consumers here become more important to the major retail chains than the producers, there is now a deadline – 2014 – on accepting meat only from pigs which are not kept in sow stalls.

*Wilma the Wombat at Kodoji.
Photo supplied by Jill Steverson*

In fact, the more visible and audible the animal, the more fortunate it is and the less likely to be abused. An animal performing in a television soap is protected by a great many more welfare laws than one in a feedlot and it is *because* dogs and cats are such popular domestic animals and so visible and audible in our lives that their slaughter and consumption is widely banned. My grandchildren have a puppy called Patch, a supremely tolerant little animal, submitting without fuss to being heavily loved, which means lots of hugging, being lugged about and dressed up. Patch is an extension of themselves, low to the ground, delighted with life and highly energetic. Love makes all things equal. The children cannot imagine anybody killing and eating him. I haven't told them that right now dogs are whimpering in cramped cages waiting to be eaten in Korea, Vietnam and China.

Other animals escape slaughter too. In honour of their exalted status, Hindus consider the slaughter of cows unthinkable and offensive so they roam free throughout India, even along busy streets in major cities, eating whatever they can find along the roads. The downside of their freedom is that each year, hundreds of cows die from eating plastic bags containing vegetable waste. In Hindu-majority countries like India and Nepal, their milk also plays a key part of religious rituals - boiling milk on a stove or leading a cow through the house is often part of a housewarming ceremony. Gandhi said, "I worship the cow and I shall defend its worship against the whole world." He called her "the mother to millions of Indian mankind. Our mother, when she dies, means expenses of burial or cremation. Mother cow is as useful dead as when she is alive. We can make use of every part of her body – her flesh, her bones, her intestines, her horns and her skin." Though even in modern India, the people who 'make use of her', who kill other animals and deal with their hides, are the most lowly people in the caste system, the Untouchables or Dalits. Because higher caste Hindus, Buddhists and Jains practise 'ahimsa' – non-violence and non-killing, and consequently eat vegetables. *Though the many beings are numberless, I vow to save them.* is the first of the Mahayana Buddhist bodhisattva vows.

In Japan, influenced by the Buddhist prohibition of killing, a decree was issued in AD675 which banned the consumption of cattle, horses, dogs, monkeys and chicken, though people still ate fish and birds. Long ago, Chinese and Japanese fishermen noticed the excellent fishing capacity of the cormorant - as hunters and gatherers, we watched how creatures behaved to increase our kill rate – and they began to use the birds, tying a line around their throats tight enough to prevent swallowing, and sending them off from small boats. The cormorants would catch fish without being able to fully swallow them, and the fishermen would retrieve the fish by forcing open the cormorants' mouths, engaging the regurgitation reflex. The birds were then rewarded with bits of fish and thrown back in the river to repeat the process. Watching this long ago in Japan, Basho wrote:

*The cormorant fishing boat –
How exciting! But after a time
I felt saddened.*

There is much to be saddened by after the initial fascination - sorrow for the fish, for the cormorants forced to regurgitate what they have swallowed and for the men preying on the greediness of birds.

During the Meiji Restoration, when the Emperor began consuming beef and mutton, the AD675 decree lapsed and Japan's national diet changed. Now Japan is Australia's

largest beef export market, the animals killed here, in industrial slaughterhouses, unseen by the Japanese.

Concern and compassion towards animals were evidently non-existent while Confucius was at Court in Old China, even though important Confucian ceremonies included animal sacrifice. One day the Imperial stables burnt down; when he learnt about this, Confucius did not enquire after the horses, rather he asked, ‘Was any *man* injured?’

As long as there were still powerful myths and legends around animals, either they were not sacrificed, or their killing was highly ritualized. In Ancient Egypt, the cow was sacred to the goddess Hathor, and not used in sacrifices. In indigenous cultures, sentient beings are revered, with rituals around their killing. Aboriginal people do not eat the totem animal, fish or bird with which they are associated. In Native American culture, all creatures are understood to have souls. In Zoroastrianism, special care of animals was taught, their slaughter only allowed with an expiatory rite.

In Islam, butchers have a formula of excuse, Bismillah – ‘in the name of God’ and a bowl of water is placed before the animal, who must be killed while still conscious. A well-sharpened knife makes a swift, deep incision that cuts the front of the throat but leaves the spinal cord intact. The animal is then hung upside down to bleed to death, still conscious, a method of slaughter prescribed by Islamic law called *Dhabiha*. Which is why our cattle must be live-shipped to Muslim countries.

In Judeo-Christian culture, humans believe they have dominion over the animals, who are not considered worthy of being admitted into Heaven. Though in Sunday School we sang, *All things bright and beautiful, all creatures great and small, all things wise and wonderful, the Lord God made them all. He gave us eyes to see them, and lips that we might tell, how great is God Almighty, who has made all things well*, a major turning point came when I was told that our beloved pets would not go to Heaven when they died. They would be locked out. Why? I thought Heaven without them would be more like Hell.

Fortunately, since then I have found richer and more ethical understandings of our relationship with animals based on the interdependence of all sentient beings. Thus, in old China, the aura Confucianism had built around filial piety was somewhat undermined by the Buddhist understanding of the equality of all living beings, where one’s parents were simply two persons among many. But even Mencius – probably the most famous Confucian after Confucius – felt compassion for animals. “The ideal man in regard to animals, when he sees them alive, cannot bear to see them die. When he hears their cries of agony, to cut their flesh is impossible. For this reason, he keeps far away from the kitchen.” Mencius’ advice to stay as far away as possible from the killing of animals and their intensive rearing to avoid being exposed to their agony is still current but these days a great many people are working to turn ‘out of sight, out of mind’ upside down, with the aid of technology.

As religious sentiment has weakened, humans gradually left behind the ritualized event of killing animals to their anonymous mass slaughter. Everywhere, creatures which had been honoured and worshipped began to be seen as existing entirely for man’s advantage. When settlements became too large for individuals to rear their own stock for personal consumption, abattoirs sprang up located far away from human

settlements. Early maps of London show numerous stockyards on the periphery of the city, where slaughter occurred in the open air. These open-air yards were known as a **shambles** and streets named "The Shambles" can still be found in some English towns, places where butchers once killed and prepared animals for consumption.

But the super-intensive food production now practised in Australia and elsewhere is new to humans. Today, with one billion chronically hungry people in a world of seven billion, a caring relationship with the creatures we eat survives only in tiny pockets, when more than forty billion creatures - chickens, fish, sheep, pigs and cows - are killed every year for food in the US alone and meat demand is estimated to double in the next forty years. The very least we can do is maximise humane and compassionate lives and deaths for all of them.

Staying on-campus at Newcastle University for a playwrights' conference many years ago, I awoke before dawn each day. Anguished bellowing filled the air. I discovered there were stockyards down the road, the cattle brought in from the surrounding farms before being packed into trucks taking them to the slaughterhouse. I dreaded going to bed each night.

Now that the city has expanded, the green parts covered with housing and the stockyards moved even further out. You'd never know your house was built over the agony of frantic cattle, though some intriguing studies on morphology suggest that the ground is imprinted with what has happened on it, that the ground knows. The ground hears. What is imprinted in the ground beneath the abattoir? And how about in the bodies of the abattoir workers?

From a meat industry website: Abattoir workers manage animals before they are killed; they stun and then kill them. They remove hides and internal organs and split the carcasses using saws. They trim, bone and slice carcasses so they are ready for sale or further processing. They may pack the meat into cartons. They may also be involved with processing hides and by-products as well as loading meat into trucks. They usually have to stand up all day and their clothing and hands become soiled with blood and fat. An Abattoir worker needs: good hand-eye coordination, to enjoy manual and practical work, to be physically fit, and to be able to work safely. An abattoir worker would normally work 38 hours per week, Monday to Friday, but in large operations may work shifts. They need to maintain high levels of hygiene. The working conditions are usually kept clean, well-lit and ventilated. They usually wear protective clothing.

What the website does not say is that abattoir workers see, hear and absorb the animals' terror. When slaughterhouse workers representing over two million hours of experience were interviewed, without exception, they described the effects the violence has had on their personal lives, with several admitting to being physically abusive or taking to alcohol and other drugs. They told the researcher that they have beaten, strangled, boiled, and dismembered animals alive, or failed to report those who do.

Such ill-treatment and torture of animals by children is often seen as a symptom of psychopathy, yet workers must endure the trauma they inflict on the animals day after

day. Like the ground perhaps imprinted with what has happened upon it, their bodies are indelibly imprinted and their minds alive to the power and shame of reducing living, feeling beings to bloody carcasses. But we consumers remain clean and unscarred, rarely hearing these voices of despair and fear, not knowing what torture the animals and their killers endure. We are distanced. We distance ourselves. The suffering is too painful.

And as with the mass slaughter of creatures, so humans are killing other humans in ever-greater numbers. There were more human deaths in the twentieth century than at any other time in human history delivered by ever more sophisticated methods. This century, the mass killing of other humans is becoming automated and distant, so that just like the slaughterhouses, the soldiers don't see or hear the pain they inflict.

I worked as a boom operator on a student film in the 1970's in a major Sydney chicken factory located down a long dirt road on the outskirts of the city. As we moved around the processing plant, we heard the din of thousands of squawking chickens as they were unloaded from stacked cages on trucks before being stunned and trussed onto moving belts of steel, stripped of their feathers and turned into packaged bits and pieces. Turning chickens into meat means getting them fat fast. Too fast. There are strange anomalies, defects, growths. We saw strange blue-black bits of flesh tossed into garbage bins. Chickens reach adult size in six weeks. Because their legs cannot support their heavy bodies, many suffer from painful leg deformities, lameness and crippling. One morning we saw a couple of chickens who had escaped the trucks and somehow managed to drag themselves into some scruffy bushes and hide there. We wished them well but felt they would not survive. And unexpectedly throughout the day, turning my blood cold, we heard the women who stun the chickens ululating, wailing, the sound erupting and echoing through the vast shed.

When the film crew went to the staff canteen for lunch on our first day, we were shocked to find the main item on the menu was chicken in all its forms. We had seen with our own eyes the brutality of the broiler industry but did not know then that chickens reared for their eggs had possibly worse lives than the fifty thousand creatures we witnessed being pushed through the processing plant each day.

Since then, the news began filtering out that, after being de-beaked, most birds are imprisoned in small wire cages with several other hens, with less space than an A3 sheet of paper. As well as chronic stress, they too suffer from chronic leg pain, painful eye and ear infections, swollen feet and knee joints and untreated wounds. And with this information, many people who buy eggs began to insist that laying hens are given a better quality of life, at the very least to be able to leave their tin sheds and roam around under the blue sky.

Again, there is a glimmer of change, with tighter controls being proposed in NSW via a legal code adjusting the labelling of free range eggs, so that the density for free range hens must be reduced to 1,500 birds per hectare, and beak trimming only permitted if the reduced stocking density and other environmental changes fail to address the cause of feather pecking and cannibalism. Though this is currently being opposed by the Egg Corporation, which wants to intensify free-range egg production

stocking densities to 20,000 chickens per hectare, these days a quarter of the eggs sold are free-range. Clearly, consumers are willing to pay more for eggs from happy chickens. Clearly this will influence the producers.

At the staff canteen in the chicken factory, we queued up for lunch with the wailing women who stun the chickens but these days, this close connection between killer and killed is rare. Such is the distance now between creature and meal that parents who feel it is their duty to close the gap take their children to the baby animal enclosure at their agricultural show. But who can be sure whether children realise that the fluffy little chickens running free in the adorable straw are destined to end up in a plastic bag in the freezer? That the milk they enjoy comes from a large animal called a cow, that their leg chops come from fluffy little lambs, that ham and bacon are other words for pig, an animal they find endearing? Even more confronting is that the cuddly bunny rabbit, a favourite pet, is increasingly being subjected to the cruelty of intensive rabbit farming, raised in cramped conditions with no daylight.

We know all these creatures are capable of feeling, are conscious, aware and responsive, just like Patch and other family pets, but until we see evidence to the contrary we slide this knowledge into the background in return for cheap food, relying on animal welfare laws to guarantee that the creatures have been raised and slaughtered as humanely as possible. But this, in fact, is *not* reliable. There are disturbing conflicts of interest by which departments of primary industries oversee the administration of animal welfare laws, their first loyalty often to animal producers and their profitability.

For many years, animal rights activists have stood up and shouted the truth about cruelty to animals, birds and fish, first in print, now increasingly in the visual media. When Australians were shown cattle shipped live to Indonesia enduring agonising deaths on television, there was such outrage that, for a while, live cattle shipments were put on hold until the abattoirs met more humane criteria. For a time, Australians felt morally superior to our Northern neighbours.

We are not. Hidden away from sight, many Australian factory farms keep creatures in worse conditions than European animals, primary producers arguing that giving them better conditions would impact on their profitability, while in our slaughterhouses, animal advocates have filmed pigs being tasered in the eye while restrained in Tasmania. Horrific pig bashings have been screened from a recently inspected abattoir in the Hawkesbury area, which was only recently given a tick of compliance. In other horrific scenes, shot by workers in a covert operation with animal liberationists Animals Australia, sheep were seen to be skinned alive and left to bleed out while hanging on hooks.

The ensuing call for mandatory closed circuit television cameras to be installed in slaughterhouses has so far been met with refusal, meat industry spokesmen believing that self-regulation remains the best option for weeding out shonky operators. They say they don't need additional inspections and anyway, it would cost too much. Case closed? Perhaps not, as people become increasingly aware of how their food is raised and produced and bring pressure to bear on their retailers and politicians. Certainly, cameras are installed in slaughterhouses in Europe and the USA, and contribute to the transparency essential to ensuring their respectful and compassionate treatment.

Once upon a time, grace was said before a meal. I remember Sunday roast at my grandparents, when we said: *For what we are about to receive, may the Lord make us truly grateful.* I remember wondering why we thanked God for the food but not the animals for giving up their lives. In some communities, the animals are still thanked. These days I recite: *We venerate the Three Treasures and are grateful for this meal, the work of many hands and the sharing of other forms of life.*

Acknowledging that the plastic-wrapped stuff on the supermarket shelves comes from living creatures and saying a quiet thank-you to the creature being eaten recognises their sacrifice, though cynics say it says more about absolving our guilty consciences from the violence done, more about how *we* feel than the animals' suffering. Perhaps. But it is a doable first step, a softening of the stockaded knowledge of their immense suffering that we hide away.

Another step would be eating plant food more often. This may well become a necessity as the world runs out of land to grow food. Cattle now occupy almost one quarter of all cultivable land and growing crops for animal feed takes up another 25 per cent. In the US almost 70 per cent of the grain and cereals grown are now fed to farmed animals and much arable land is planted purely to produce biofuels.

All this must change and is changing. Algae could feed millions and animals, allow 16 million hectares to be planted with human food and save billions of litres of irrigation water a year. Algae in the form of seaweeds are already eaten widely. Commercial algae farms can now produce 55,000 to 110,000 litres of algae oil, compared with just 3930 litres of ethanol biofuel per hectare grown with crops like maize.

Cultured meat would require far less energy and space to grow, with the process engineered to use only 1% of the land and 4% of the water, compared with conventional meat and scientists are working to a deadline - June 30, 2012 - for making cultured or artificial chicken meat in commercial quantities to win the PETA prize of \$5 million. Vladimir Mironov, who grows muscle tissue from turkeys, so far only in small quantities, says: "Of course there are people who think this is Frankenstein food. They see it as unnatural, but there is nothing unnatural here. We use animal cells and grow them in a cultured media. The only difference is that we don't kill any animals." In Holland, a research scientist is confident of having enough beef cultured from bovine stem cells to mince and press into a beef burger by October this year and showcased at a fashionable restaurant.

And then there are the insects, currently at least fourteen hundred species which are eaten in Africa, Latin America and Asia – locusts, grasshoppers, spiders, wasps, worms, ants and beetles. At the night markets in Beijing, we saw them skewered onto sticks in their thousands. In Venezuela, giant Amazonian tarantulas are a delicacy. The European Union is offering member states \$US3 million to promote the use of insects in cooking. And in the search for food protein, micro-livestock farming, their mass production is also being investigated, to see if insect rearing can be expanded. Knowing insects might be offensive to Westerners however, researchers are also investigating how they might just extract their protein. If piglets, chickens, ducks and sheep are abused, what are the chances that micro-farmed grasshoppers will be treated well? Who will speak for the insects?

Issa wrote not only about animals, but flies, fleas and lice as equals to himself because he knew the creatures so well and so intimately. His poems are full of humour and entirely devoid of condescension.

*I'm sorry my house is so small,
But practise your jumping,
Please, Mr. Flea!*

We have a long way to go before there is enough of a shift in consciousness so that people feel fiercely protective of all creatures. We have some time to go before a diet of algae and insects is commonplace. We have some time to go before conditions in abattoirs and slaughterhouses, broiler farms and all intensive animal farming outfits can be viewed from people's computers, with mandatory closed circuit television coverage. We have some time to go before these hidden places are opened up to consumers. Until then, those who flinch when they see a cow being bashed around the head or a crab trying to climb out of a tiny tank in a swanky restaurant have a responsibility to speak out on their behalf. It is the least we can do.



Some Animals seen at Kodoji – Photos supplied by Jill Stevenson

Koala; lyrebird; red belly black snake; sugar glider.

poo on the path
every night in this tree
a possum

looking at us
the turtle circles
again and again
Grose River

drowned or blown away
a sliver of pink tongue
dead flying fox

Haiku by Diana Levy



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