

The Wave
The Blooming of a Lotus #21



1. Aware of a wave on the ocean, I breathe in.
Smiling to the wave on the ocean, I breathe out.
Wave on the ocean, Smiling
2. Aware of the water in the wave, I breathe in.
Smiling to the water in the wave, I breathe out.
Water in wave, Smiling
3. Seeing the birth of a wave, I breathe in.
Smiling to the birth of the wave, I breathe out.
Birth of a wave, Smiling
4. Seeing the death of a wave, I breathe in.
Smiling to the death of the wave, I breathe out.
Death of a wave, Smiling
5. Seeing the birthless nature of the water in the wave, I breathe in.
Smiling to the birthless nature of the water in the wave, I breathe out.
Birthless water in wave , Smiling
6. Seeing the deathless nature of the water in the wave, I breathe in.
Smiling to the deathless nature of the water in the wave, I breathe out.
Deathless water in wave, Smiling
7. Seeing the birth of my body, I breathe in.
Smiling to the birth of my body, I breathe out.
Birth of my body , Smiling
8. Seeing the death of my body, I breathe in.
Smiling to the death of my body, I breathe out.
Death of my body , Smiling
9. Seeing the birthless nature of my body, I breathe in.
Smiling to the birthless nature of my body, I breathe out.
Birthless body, Smiling
10. Seeing the deathless nature of my body, I breathe in.
Smiling to the deathless nature of my body, I breathe out.
Body deathless , Smiling
11. Seeing the birthless nature of my consciousness, I breathe in.
Smiling to the birthless nature of my consciousness, I breathe out.
Consciousness birthless, Smiling
12. Seeing the deathless nature of my consciousness, I breathe in.
Smiling to the deathless nature of my consciousness, I breathe out.
Consciousness deathless, Smiling

The Wave. Commentary by Thay

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The phenomenal world seems to be marked by oppositions: birth/death, coming/going, being/nonbeing, one/many, defilement/purity, and so on. Mindful meditation enables us to see beyond such notions as these. The three seals of Buddhist teaching are impermanence, selflessness, and nirvana. Because things are impermanent and without a self, we say that they are born and die, come and go, still exist or no longer exist, are one or many, are defiled or pure. But Buddhism does more than reveal the phenomenal aspect of reality; it puts us in touch with the true nature (Sanskrit *svabhava*) of phenomena. That true nature is nirvana. Nirvana cannot be described by means of either/or concepts. Nirvana means the putting to rest of all oppositional terms and notions. It also means the putting to rest of afflictions like desire, hatred, and ignorance that are born from these notions. In the *Udana* (Words of Uplift), Buddha speaks of nirvana in the following way (let us be very careful not to be caught in words and ideas, because the Buddha has also taught that it is impossible to say anything about the true nature of nirvana):

"Monks, there is a place which is not the place of earth, water, air, or fire, limitless space or limitless consciousness, limitless non materiality, perceptions or no perceptions, this world or that world. I do not talk about this place as coming and going or not coming and not going, as being born and dying. This place does not come into existence or pass away and it does not need to rely on something else. It is the ending of all sorrow. It is nirvana."

And again in the Udana:

"Monks, there is something which is not born, which is not conditional, which does not become, is not made, is not a composite. Supposing that this no born, non conditional, not-become, not made, not compounded is not there, how could there be a place for the born, the conditional, the becoming, the made, the compounded to return to?"

Suppose that while we are listening to the Buddha speaking like this, we are caught in the words, "There is a place which ...This place." Then there will be no way we shall be able to understand, because the reality of nirvana goes beyond all ideas of is or is not, one or many, place and no place, this and that. This exercise uses the image of a wave and the water as a metaphor for nirvana. The wave is birth and death; the water is nirvana. The wave is born and dies, rises and falls, is high and is low, comes to be and passes away, is many and is one. This is not true of the water in the wave. We should remember that this is only a metaphor. In our common perception water still belongs to the phenomenal world, like clouds, vapor, ice, and snow. Because we are able to look deeply at the phenomenal world, we are able to discover its birthless and deathless nature and to enter the world of suchness. In Buddhist studies, we talk about the process of going from the mark to the nature (*svabhava*), from the sign to the essence. A bodhisattva is able to see the nature of all that is and therefore is no longer afraid and no longer desires to hold on. Thus she can ride on the waves of birth and death with complete equanimity.