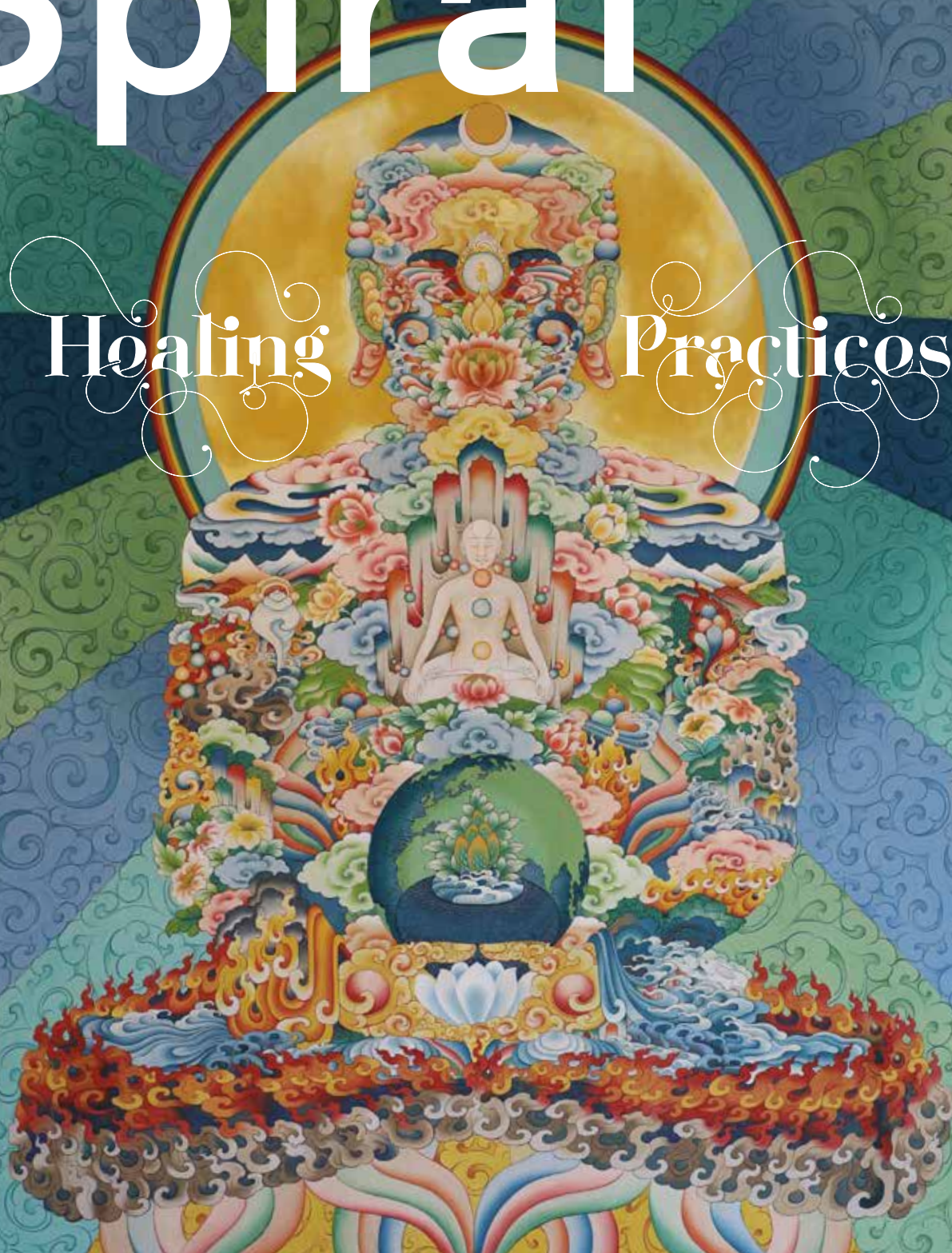


# Spiral

2022

Healing

Practices



**THE  
RUBIN**

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Gyempo Wangchuk uses locally sourced mineral colors on canvas to create traditional and contemporary paintings in his studio in Bhutan. He is a senior member of Bhutan's only contemporary art organization, Voluntary Artist Studio of Thimphu (VAST Bhutan), and he trained in the arts and crafts of Vajrayana Buddhism at the National Institute of Zorig Chusum.

### Artist's statement:

For any type of healing to occur, it's important that the four elements—the air, fire, water, and land represented in the cover painting—be in balance. The urn held by the Medicine Buddha is filled with medicinal herbs, and the earth behind it represents the planet's potential to heal itself. The meditating figure in the center is our mind, which must also be balanced and strong, like the rocks behind the meditator, to enable healing. This potential exists in every one of us.

# RECOVERY AND REPAIR



**ONE BRIGHT SPOT** in the darkened times of the past couple years has been a larger sense of interconnectedness. At the Rubin it has enabled us to extend our reach and think beyond the Museum walls, connecting with new and familiar audiences all over the world to share the relevance of Himalayan art to our physical, mental, emotional well-being. This year we're taking a closer look at individual and collective forms of repair as we explore modes of healing.

The exhibition *Healing Practices: Himalayan American Stories*, organized in collaboration with members of the Himalayan diaspora, features interactions between voices from local communities and traditional and contemporary

objects from our permanent collection. It shows how certain practices with a longstanding history are still relevant today, whether it's a belief in talismans or—in a modern twist—downloading and sharing an image of the Medicine Buddha on your phone. This look into lived culture through art explores new rituals enacted for the current moment as we seek protection from illness, ways to ward off disease, and express wishes for longevity.

In addition to the medical issues we're grappling with, there are mental health challenges as we live with the fallout of isolation and heightened emotions of fear and anger. Our healing journey continues in the Museum's Mandala Lab,

a multisensory installation that uses Himalayan art and its underlying principles to aid people in turning afflictive emotions (known as *kleshas*) into wisdoms.

In this issue of *Spiral* we take a broad look at healing through the eyes of artists, Buddhist practitioners, medical professionals, a cartoonist, and more. You'll discover how women are at the center of a renaissance in the use of psychedelics and meet abstract visionary artist Allyson Grey; hear from Ruth King on the intersection of mindfulness and race; travel with Sienna R. Craig as she helps a Nepalese immigrant find solace in a new land; and learn how breath is the beating heart—if not the lungs—of the Mandala Lab, with untold benefits for individuals and groups alike.

As we navigate a period marked by environmental, health, and social justice crises, we invite you to take a deep breath and join us as we explore healing practices onsite, online, and on the printed pages of *Spiral*, hopefully inspiring you on your own journey of well-being.

**Jorrit Britschgi**  
Executive Director  
Rubin Museum of Art

Mo Riza created the 3D printed illustrations featured above and alongside the "Healing through . . ." series in this issue.

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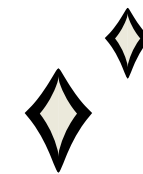


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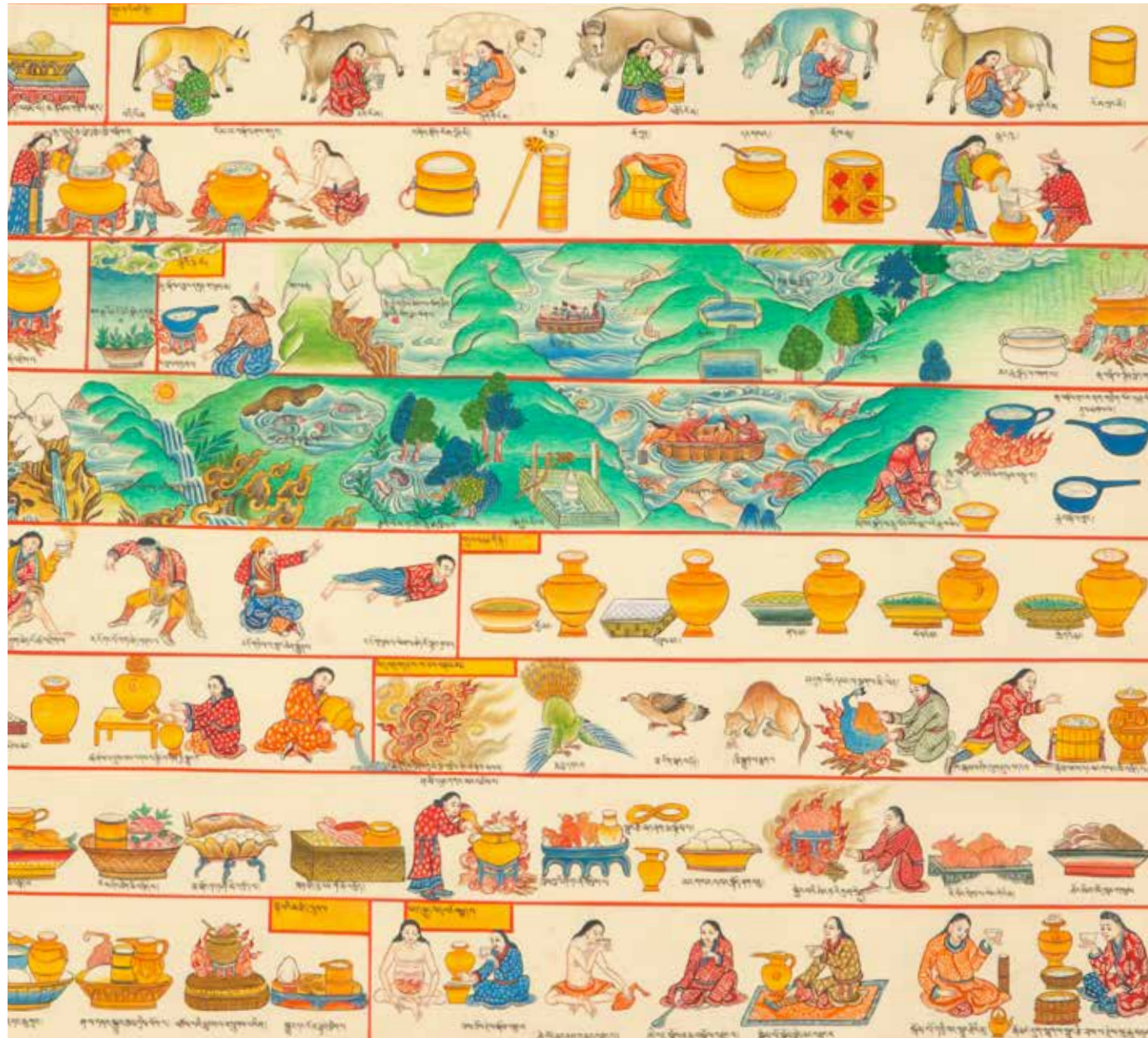
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# ON THE FRONT LINES



Knowledge Of Dietetics—Dietary Restrictions (Chapters 16–18); Rebgong, Amdo Province, Northeastern Tibet (Tongren, Qinghai Province, China); Hua Khar Jainsta; 1995–1996; pigments on cloth; Rubin Museum of Art; gift of Shelley and Donald Private Collection; C2014.9.22

## DR. KUNGA WANGDUE AND PEMA DORJEE INTERVIEWED

BY *Michelle Bennett Simorella*

**HEALING PRACTICES: STORIES FROM HIMALAYAN AMERICANS** highlights how Tibetan Buddhist practices for well-being have been a powerful source of support for individuals and communities throughout times of personal and societal crisis, including during the COVID-19 pandemic. Featuring objects from the Rubin Museum’s collection alongside stories from Himalayan Americans, the exhibition reveals the complexities of what it means to heal and illuminates how people have adopted and adapted traditional Tibetan healing practices for today’s world.

The exhibition was developed in collaboration with an advisory group of artists, medical professionals, spiritual leaders, activists, educators, and art therapists interested in the intersection of art, healing, and activism. For *Spiral* magazine, two members of this group, Dr. Kunga Wangdue, a Tibetan medicine physician, and Pema Dorje, a nurse, shared how they infuse Buddhist ideas into their care for others, explained how the art in the exhibition inspires their own healing and those of their communities, and offered advice on everyday practices for well-being.

**DR. KUNGA WANGDUE** was born in a remote village in Tibet and entered monastic life at age ten. After being briefly jailed with other young monks protesting for human rights, he studied Tibetan medicine, eventually becoming a physician in India before moving to the United States.

**Michelle Bennett Simorella: What is one fundamental difference between Tibetan medicine and Western medicine?**  
Dr. Kunga Wangdue: Tibetan medicine is a holistic practice with an approach of focusing on the mind, body, and spirit. In Western medicine, they look at disorders as chemical or mechanical and neglect the subjective issue of the patients. In terms of treatment, Tibetan medicine focuses more on the individual and considers both subjective and objective aspects.

**How is diet incorporated in the holistic approach to wellness in Tibetan medicine?**

Our bodies are made of what we eat. If we eat the wrong foods, they can accumulate in our body and manifest as illness. That’s why diet is the number one cause of imbalance in the body. Whenever I am treating patients, I always ask them to avoid the foods and drinks that are harmful for them and try to take those that are good for their condition. There are four different types of treatment in Tibetan medicine: diet, behavioral, medicine, and therapy. The dietary regimen is mentioned first. It not only helps treat disease but also prevents disorders from accumulating in the body.

**Historically Tibetan artists have created exquisite works of arts with powerful images as practical guides for well-being. How do these types of artworks inform your medical practice?**

We learn the many different illustrated medical thangkas in medical college. It is the visual explanation of Tibetan medical theories. In my practice, when patients come to see me and they don’t understand the concept of Tibetan medicine, I show them the illustrated thangkas. It helps them to understand their condition and how the treatment will help them.

Two medical professionals share how Himalayan art and practices helped during the pandemic

**Could you expand on the holistic approach of treating obstacles to well-being?**

There are many people who don’t have any physical illnesses, but if mental problems like sadness, depression, and stress are untreated they can slowly affect physical well-being. Unhealthy physical health can affect our mental health, and mental health can affect physical health. That clearly shows that there’s a bridge between the body and mind, which we call energy or *duawa*. To have a healthy life we need to take care of both mental and physical health.



Detail of Medicine Buddha, Bhaisajyaguru; Tibet, 18th–19th century; pigments on cloth; Rubin Museum of Art; gift of Ralph Redford; C2008.19 (HAR 57001)

**Is there a particular artwork in the exhibition that inspires you in your personal or professional life?**

When I have the Medicine Buddha thangka or statue in front of me, it reminds me that I am a follower of the Medicine Buddha who practices knowledge of medicine with love and compassion for all beings suffering from mental and physical illness. This reminds me that, as a Tibetan medical practitioner, I must follow the ethics and principles of Buddhism. There is a long chapter in *Gyuzhi*, the primary Tibetan medical textbook, for physician ethics, morals, and responsibilities. So it's a good reminder for me to be the best version of myself when treating patients.

When I'm facing some difficulties with treatments and patients, I meditate on the Medicine Buddha and pray. I am much more relaxed after meditation and prayer, and with a relaxed mind many different ideas and solutions often come to mind.

**Queens became the epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and greatly impacted the Himalayan and Tibetan communities of New York City. What practices did you employ to deal with the gravity of the situation?**

A lot of people in our community know me as a Tibetan doctor, so I was informing them about the disease through social media based on CDC information and my knowledge of Tibetan medicine. I have a friend who closed all the doors

and windows. Many times, his kids asked him to open them, but he refused. He told his kids that the virus could come through the windows. People had irrational fears based on incorrect information. That's why having the right information and the right source of information is the key thing.

**When you and your family got COVID you decided to share your experience online. What was your motivation?**

At the beginning of March 2020, I had an itchy throat. My wife got a fever, and I could tell that this was not the cold or flu. It's totally different. Then my daughters and my sister-in-law showed symptoms. There was no treatment for COVID-19. My wife called her family doctor who said to quarantine at home and call 911 only if you have breathing issues. I checked all the medical records in Tibetan medical texts. There's a chapter that talks about epidemic disease in the future. There are many signs and symptoms that exactly match COVID-19. It says try to keep yourself at a distance from others, block air passages, and take some herbs and herbal tea. After taking Tibetan herbs for five or six days, all my family members' symptoms were relieved.

Then one day I went on Facebook Live and talked about my experience. I wanted to share my experience because we got better, and I knew many people were afraid of dying from the virus. I had small bags of herbs that my mom sent from Tibet, and I thought this was an opportunity to help people, so we started giving them out for free.

**Did you need to change or adapt your methods of treating patients because of the unprecedented nature of the pandemic?**

The number one thing is I tried to educate them through online teachings, social networks, and phone calls. Online teaching is wonderful because we can reach a lot of people to talk about health and prevention.

**What was the treatment that was most sought after and appreciated by patients during the pandemic?**

Many people called me after I shared my own experience. They appreciated that I was living proof that I didn't die. It gave a lot of people hope. Then I taught them how to use the precious pills. People misunderstood and thought the precious pills are for every disorder, but that's not true. Every precious pill has its own designated treatment. Many people were also taking the wrong diet, so I gave them dietary advice according to Tibetan medicine, because not everyone can get herbs.

**What is a simple tip you could give our readers for life longevity?**

Stress, depression, anxiety—those are the biggest factors that reduce our lifespan. So try to always take care of both the mind and body. Have a balanced life. That way you get not only a longer life but a happier life.

**PEMA DORJEE** is a registered nurse and the current president of the Tibetan Nurses Association, which has over six hundred members in New York and New Jersey.

**Michelle Bennett Simorella: As a nurse of Western medicine, how do you incorporate aspects of Tibetan well-being and healing into your work?**

Pema Dorjee: Patients coming to the hospital are very acute, very sick. I see not only they're physically sick, but they also they have huge anxiety. I try to get rid of these negative emotions. I try to bring positive emotions to the patients, so that it will affect not only their mental well-being but also, indirectly, their physical care. When a patient is aggravated or angry, I try to calm them. Let's do some breathing exercise, let's take a deep breath. Breathe all the good energies in, breathe all the bad energies out. I also try to make patients stay in the present instead of the future. They worry what's going to happen to me? Will I have a surgery? Forget about everything—just try to stay in the present moment. That basically comes from a Buddhist perspective.



Eleven-Headed Thousand-Armed Avalokiteshvara; Tibet; 14th–15th century; pigments on cloth; Rubin Museum of Art; gift of Shelley and Donald Rubin; C2006.66.178 (HAR 190)

**Are there any artworks in the exhibition that inspire you in your work?**

I really like the idea of compassion incorporated in art, because compassion is something that not only bonds people but also brings good energy. When I see a patient, I don't expect anything from them, but I imagine or visualize them getting better. When the patient gets a little better, I'm happier because I think my practice and my job are working.

**In our exhibition advisory group, you suggested that the image of Avalokiteshvara is a remedy for hate because this deity embodies compassion. Why is compassion important for individual and communal well-being?**

Hatred is a natural emotion that anybody

can have, but if you show compassion to someone showing anger to you, the hatred is going to subside. The power of compassion is such that anything can be possible. Compassion is an antidote.

**New York has seen an unprecedented rise in hate crimes and violence directed toward Asian communities since the beginning of the pandemic. What toll**

**has this taken on healthcare workers in your community?**

The message sent by the administration and leaders in America started badly from the top down and made the Asian community feel vulnerable. I feel we can fight back through education, through having a better message, and having more compassionate, understanding leaders. We need to heal together, not in a segmented way.

I try to bring positive emotions to the patients, so that it will affect not only their mental well-being but also, indirectly, their physical care.

**Queens was the epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic in New York City and greatly impacted the Himalayan and Tibetan communities. What support networks were most helpful in meeting community needs during that period?**

In the Himalayan community in Queens, there were a lot of people who didn't know anything about the pandemic, especially elderly people. How is it spread? How can we avoid it? We created a hotline with a group of nurses who could answer those questions. We had ten or so experts on call 24/7.

Then we realized a lot of people were already sick in the community and didn't have access to medical facilities. What they really needed was Tylenol and thermometers, but the stores were closed. We stepped in, got all the supplies from other states, and we started distributing to the community. We had two designated staff who rode small bikes and delivered supplies to the households. After COVID was getting better in New York but started picking up in India, we raised some funds from donors and sent close to eight nurses from North America to help.

**Of all the support and care that healthcare workers in Queens received, what had the most powerful impact on you?**

Queens was very depressing during the pandemic. All the nurses were working—and not just our regular jobs but also trying to help a community get better. When we were able to help them, that felt like a kind of joy for us. They started calling us later, saying, "Because of you guys, I survived. Let me know if you need any help with the community." They are more engaged in the community now, because we were able to provide services to them.

**What practices did you employ to support members of the Tibetan Nurses Association as frontline workers?**

We have a WhatsApp group of three to four hundred members who constantly

talk about the issues and in that way we're able to help each other. Nurses who were working in nursing homes were having a very rough time. We stepped in to help those nurses, providing them with living situations so they didn't have to live with their families. They could live outside of the family in an apartment with other nurses. Or we provided daily food, so they didn't have to worry about eating. At that time, nurses had to change their uniforms frequently, so we provided new uniforms. We had a donor from Arizona who donated close to three hundred uniforms to us.

**Did members use any particular practices during the pandemic to counter anxiety?**

One thing I did that helped me during the peak of the pandemic was waking up at least thirty minutes early and straight away praying—all the mantras, all the texts, especially for Green Tara and White Tara. I asked, please protect me, and that really reduced my stress level. Also in our WhatsApp group, we talked about how to reduce stress through various ways, including a medicine called *thang*. We were able to get a good collection of *thang* from Tibetan doctors around New York and distributed it to our healthcare workers at that time.

**What are some tips you would give our readers to improve their individual and collective well-being?**

New York is a very stressful, busy area. We need to calm down a little bit and focus more on mental well-being. I strongly feel it's the mind that controls your body. If your mental well-being is good, your physical well-being will get better. Compassion is also important in that it generates more happiness. So if you're able to generate all the good qualities of a compassionate heart, you will have a good mental well-being and indirectly have better physical well-being as well. 🧘

*Healing Practices: Stories from Himalayan Americans is on view at the Rubin Museum from March 18, 2022, to January 16, 2023.*

**Michelle Bennett Simorella** is director of curatorial administration and collections at the Rubin Museum of Art, bringing two decades of museum experience and leading collaborative projects. Working in Kathmandu, Nepal, for several years expanded her knowledge of art and practices in the region. Michelle has degrees in art history and nonprofit management.

**Pema Dorjee** is president of the NY & NJ Tibetan Nurse Association (TNA), a nonprofit organization founded by Tibetan nurses in the New York City area. The organization helps nurses with degrees from India and Nepal with credential evaluation services, licensing in different states, and job searches, as well as providing mentoring services to nursing students. It also offers health-awareness programs to Tibetan, Nepalese, and other Himalayan communities. Pema Dorjee works at Long Island Jewish Medical Center, New York.

**Dr. Kunga Wangdue** was born in Tibet and began his Buddhist studies at the age of eight at Drapung Monastery in Lhasa. He graduated from the Tibetan Medical and Astrology College in India in 1996 and completed an internship under Senior Menpa Kunga Gyurme, former personal physician of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. From 1998 to 2002, he served as a clinical practitioner in Nepal. Dr. Wangdue is the vice president of the Traditional Tibetan Medical & Astro Association New York.

**(Opposite page) Tenzing Lhamo Dorjee** is a cartoonist, illustrator, and designer who uses storytelling and humor to connect with Tibetans around the world. She has a BFA in design from Cornish College of the Arts in Seattle, Washington. Her featured work includes the comic series *My Tibetan Tendencies*, informational gif set *Taboo Tibet*, and story about her childhood bully published on *The Lily*. Tenzing is a proud member of the Yakpo Collective and has exhibited her art in Seattle, New York, Toronto, and Lhasa.





## A Nepalese immigrant finds solace in faraway Vermont

BY *Sienna R. Craig*

**WE WIND OUR WAY ALONG** Vermont State Route 113. The car is warm, even as the outside temperature gauge registers six degrees Fahrenheit. The sky is arctic, adamantine. Santosh\* tells the story in Nepali. I listen and drive us up the mountain, toward the *gonpa*.

“They confirmed it was because of a girl. We told *aama*\*\* today,” he says.

The young man beside me is twenty-four. Santosh has an electric smile and a sense of fashion that involves tapered pant legs and hair gel. There is swagger and deference in him, by turns. He has always worked hard. But he has also, always, been lucky. In 2019, this good fortune took the form of winning the diversity visa lottery. Even in the Trump era, he prevailed.

“My *bhai* had everything that he wanted and needed,” says Santosh, referring to his younger brother. “I had even just sent him 45,000 rupees for a new mobile phone.”

Santosh had arrived in Hanover, New Hampshire, on Halloween. I recall him talking with me about how he found the costumes amusing. He could not understand much of what was being said around him, but the sense of play and connections to the dead reminded him of Nepali festivals, Holi and Indra Jatra. In those late autumn days after his arrival, I found Santosh a host family. His skills in the kitchen, his fastidiousness, landed him a restaurant job with ease.

“It was messages on that mobile that confirmed it was about a girl . . . He was kind and trusting, a bit gullible and dim-witted,” says Santosh, describing his younger brother in Nepali terms—*sojo*, *laato*—that have contours of meaning lost in English. “He’d asked friends to explain to him what ‘break up’ meant.”

Asha Kama (b. 1958, Punakha, Bhutan); *Presence*; 2010?; acrylic on canvas; 8 x 5 ½ in. (20.3 x 13.9 cm); Shelley and Donald Rubin Private Collection; C2011.064; image courtesy the Shelley and Donald Rubin Private Collection; photograph by Bill Orcutt

\*A pseudonym.

\*\**Aama* is Nepali for mother.

The pandemic has rankled Santosh, as it has all of us.

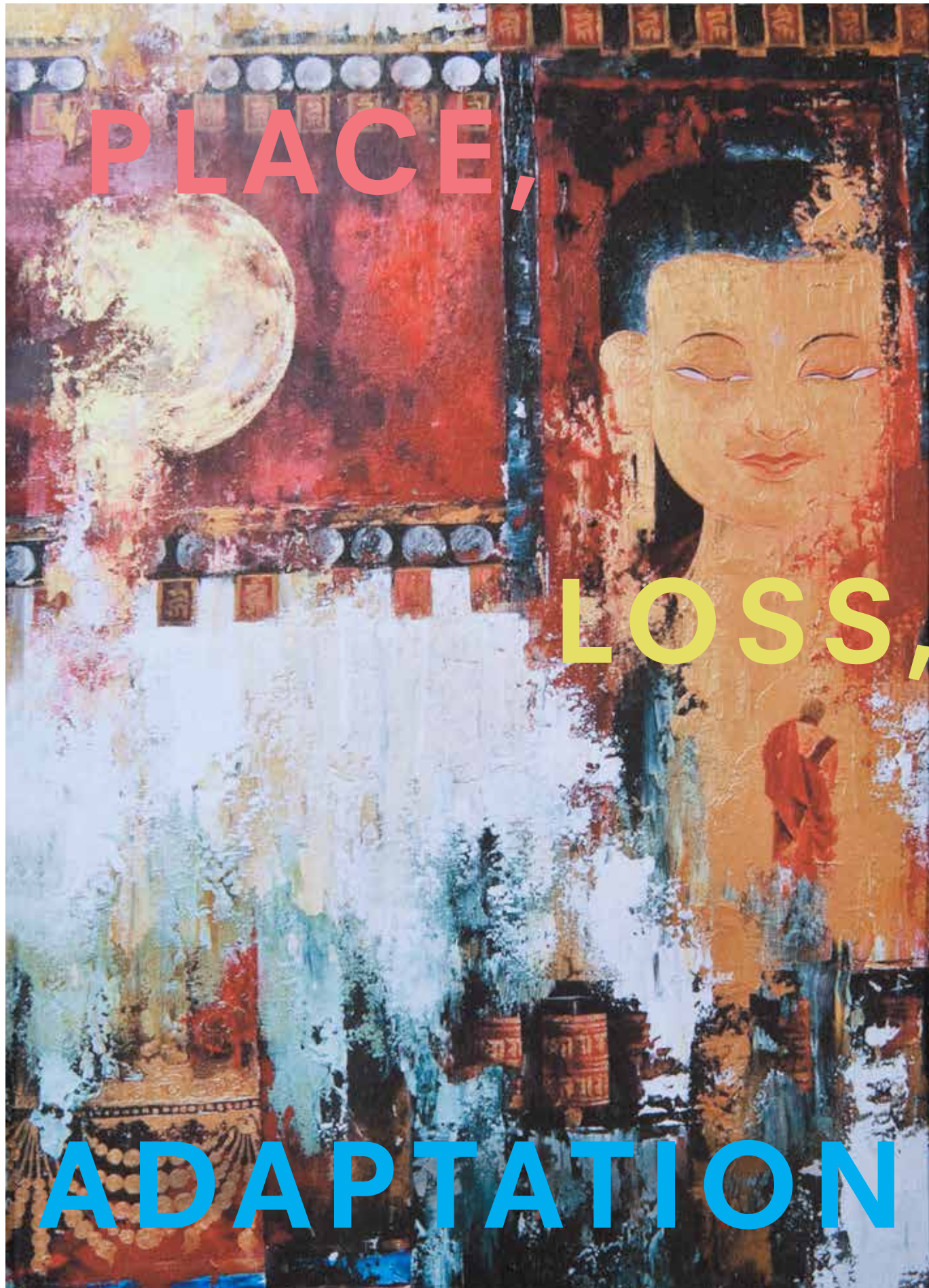
Despite the almost instantaneous arrival of his green card (more good fortune), he was too new of an arrival to qualify for unemployment. Some savings and other forms of social support bore out until he could begin working again. Fear and adult children returning home to live with the family that had taken Santosh in led to the undoing of his first domestic arrangement, but we worked something else out.

“They found him hanging from a tree about a fifteen minute walk from our family house. In the week before, he seemed not well. Our *didi* tried to talk with him,” Santosh explains, speaking of his elder sister. “Even *aama* asked if we should go to the hospital. But he said he was fine and would not talk. He said maybe it was just *gyastric*,” Santhosh continues, referencing a stomach ailment common in Nepal, “but then his mobile was *switch off* and he didn’t come home.”

Now, deep into the COVID winter of early 2021, Santosh lives with a divorced dad and his daughter, East Asian Americans. They love his cooking. He loves his privacy and the trust they put in him—a departure from how he’d been treated by the previous household in which he’d lived.

“He didn’t know anything about anything, not about girls, not about responsibility, not about love . . . One of his friends did the same, about a year ago, over a girl. I think he must have thought a lot about that. If his friend found that his life was not worth keeping, then maybe my brother thought the same. Maybe he thought, *It doesn’t matter if I die*.”

When I heard the news about Santosh’s younger brother, I thought about what I could do. Sure, I could slip him an envelope of cash and a *kathag* offering scarf, telling him to send this offering home for the *ghewa*, the Buddhist ceremony that marks the end of a deceased person’s journey through the *bardo*, the in-between realm between death and rebirth. But this did little to bridge the gap between home and away,



between a mother wracked with pain and a son making stir-fry and burgers for college students in New England. The dissonance was palpable, like the sting on a cheek after a slap.

“We haven’t talked with the girl or her family. What good would that do? My father said that if he wanted to get married, this would be okay with him, even though *aama* said wait and finish your studies. But in the end I think it was that she broke up with him, and this was all he could think about . . . There have been three or four suicides in our village in the last six months. Not all of them have been young like my brother—some have been men in their thirties or forties—but it is becoming a *trend*.”

Santosh may be a Tamang\* kid from the middle hills of Nepal, but it occurred to me that he might find solace in a Tibetan Buddhist monastery. It might be the closest thing to a kindred architecture of grief and belonging. I called up the American couple who are the caretakers for this *gonpa*, part of a Buddhist community with roots in Eastern Tibet and Bhutan but also in the French countryside and Vermont’s North Country. I asked if we could visit, offer incense and butter lamps, and just sit for a bit. We would wear masks. We would take care. They said yes.



\*Tamangs are one of the largest ethnic groups in Nepal.

“My parents have worked so hard. They got married when my mom was eleven. Both of her parents were dead by the time she was two. She had nothing. She was raised by relatives until she was married off. My mother and father are fifty-five now. Old for Nepal. Not so much for here. My father raises pumpkins. They have fields. It is not so developed even though we are close to Kathmandu.”

We turn left at a general store, flanked by a fading Coca-Cola sign, and head

## We have arrived at a temple that echoes the familiar at an unforgiving and disorienting time.

up the mountain. Icicles cling to bare branches beside a frozen brook. I tell Santosh that it is probably very difficult to feel love and sadness and anger all at once. He nods.

“Only a few people have gone out, gone far away. I am the only one in America. I worked all through school. Getting fodder. Milking cows. Stuff like that. But we managed. Once, when my mother was sick for six months, I had to do her milking too, in the mornings before school . . . I did well in school until Class 10, and then I became more focused on earning money for myself and my family. I started businesses. My other brother runs those now.”

We arrive at the *gonpa* and head up the snowpacked driveway slowly. Several buildings come into view. The main shrine room and accompanying domestic spaces are painted the color of corn. The eaves and roofline are a rusty red. Prayer flags flutter at the edges. The rainbow of the Buddhist flag hangs above the entrance.

“*Didi*, it is really a *gonpa*! I didn’t know.” I am pleased by Santosh’s sense of surprise, the way he sucks in his breath and lets it go in the winter air. We have arrived at a temple that echoes the familiar at an unforgiving and disorienting time. We greet the caretakers, a husband and wife who have lived here for fifteen years. They welcome us quietly. We have brought incense, fruit, flowers, *kathag*. They have candles, ready and waiting. There are some awkward, gentle movements as we select candles and receive a vase for the flowers, a tray for the food offerings. We take off our shoes, walk into the main prayer hall, and prostrate three times. They do the same.

The altars are made of cherry, but they slope like the sides of the Potala Palace. Bronze casts of Tara, Maitreya, and Padmasambhava tower over the room. Their faces are unadorned by color. The pale peach peonies on the altar mirror the inside of the conch shell, resting on its ridges. Pears and apples crown wooden bowls beside bottles of perfume and large, stately candles. There is an austere majesty to dharma aesthetics in Vermont. Bright winter sun streams in the windows. I study the row of photographs of Tibetan teachers on one wall. I notice orientations to light and direction.

Santosh takes the packet of incense I’ve brought and splits it in half. He lights one bundle, I light the other, and we place them in the incense holder at the foot of the altar. The room is soon suffused in sandalwood smoke.

“This is more incense than we’ve had in here . . . ever?” The male caretaker remarks. I smile, explain that this is how they do it in Nepal. Then we just sit. When Santosh stirs, we follow him up off the cushions, toward the door. They say they’ve been to Kathmandu once, and to Lumbini, where the Buddha was born. Santosh tells them that his home place is not far from Kathmandu, and that he, too, has been to Lumbini. The husband of the caretaker pair asks for Santosh’s brother’s name, so that the sangha who will gather later this evening can hold him in their prayers. Santosh speaks the name slowly. The caretaker writes the name on a notebook he keeps in his front pocket.

We take our leave and begin driving down the mountain. “This is such a beautiful place. I feel more peaceful now.”

On the way down, Santosh seems lighter. We talk about food. *Alu phing*, samosa recipes, experimentations with *achar*—how he now uses cashews instead of sesame seeds to make the sauce for his momos. I think about adaptation and its echo: loss. 🌱

Sienna R. Craig is a professor of anthropology at Dartmouth College, where she has taught since 2006. A cultural and medical anthropologist, Craig enjoys writing across genres, from narrative ethnography to poetry, fiction, and children’s literature. She is the author of *The Ends of Kinship: Connecting Himalayan Lives between Nepal and New York* (University of Washington Press, 2020) and *Healing Elements: Efficacy and the Social Ecologies of Tibetan Medicine* (University of California Press, 2012), among other works.

## HEALING THROUGH MOVEMENT

by Jessamyn Stanley



**Yoga is one of my favorite ways to practice wellness, and it’s about more than fancy poses—it’s about connecting to your breath and taking up space. Practicing yoga never has to be more complicated than taking a deep breath.**

**Let’s practice yoga together right now. Start by closing your eyes, relaxing your shoulders, and taking a deep breath. Fill up from the tips of your toes to the crown of your head. Feel how it relaxes that spot right in between your shoulders or the wrinkles in between your eyebrows? That’s yoga in action.**

**Yoga means union—it’s about bringing together all the pieces of yourself without judgment or critique. People will say you’ve gotta practice every day, or in the morning, or for a particular amount of time. But you really don’t need to sweat the details. Whether it’s five minutes or five hours, any time that you devote to finding stillness within yourself is time well spent. And honestly, the days you don’t practice yoga are the days that teach you the most about it. So be kind to yourself. Honor your body for what it brings to your journey, and don’t ever worry about what it looks like.**

**I hope you find a movement practice that works for you. It doesn’t have to be yoga. Really, anything will do. As long as you’re connecting to the breath within your mystical meat suit, you’re getting all the practice you need.**

Visit [RubinMuseum.org/Spiral](https://RubinMuseum.org/Spiral) to practice yoga with Jessamyn Stanley in a class called “Back in 30.” It’s a great way to break up the day, get a little yoga in, and connect with yourself.

Jessamyn Stanley is an internationally acclaimed voice in wellness, highly sought after for her insights on twenty-first-century yoga and intersectional identity. As a successful award-winning yoga instructor and entrepreneur, she is the founder of The Underbelly, co-host of the podcast Dear Jessamyn, and co-founder of We Go High. She is also the author of *Yoke: My Yoga of Self-Acceptance* and *Every Body Yoga: Let Go of Fear, Get on the Mat, Love Your Body*.



## How wise awareness can help us meet the rough edges of racial distress

BY Ruth King

# MINDFUL OF RACE

**RACISM REMAINS ONE OF THE MOST ROOTED** and painful impasses of our time. The traumatic scars and history of racism impacts all of us, without exception. It most profoundly impacts our capacity to genuinely love, and it blinds us to our humanity.

Racism is fed through unawareness, oppressive systems, and the misuse of power, and deepening our understanding of how we have been conditioned to think and react is at the root of racial harm and racial healing.

Those of us who dare to turn inward to this examination will often feel the soreness, tenderness, and vulnerability from the habitual ways we have met the rough edges of racial distress, and it is easy to feel overwhelmed. Although these feelings may be difficult to metabolize, it is possible to do so. Our thoughts and feelings are not permanent states; rather, they are crucial experiences to attend to, and it begins with understanding our minds. This is the role of mindfulness meditation.

Mindfulness has its roots in the 2,600-year-old tradition of Buddhism. The practice of mindfulness meditation supports us in experiencing more mental ease and harmony. It does not help us get rid of racial ignorance or ill will, nor will it erase anger or despair. Rather, it offers a way for us to slow down and investigate our experiences with care and wise attention. It supports us in bearing witness to our racial distress and conditioning without distortion, elaboration, or judgment. We can notice, for example, how racial perceptions live, what thoughts we are giving birth to, and how we feel thinking about them. We can acknowledge where we get stuck and discover what supports letting go.

Simply stated, mindfulness is the practice of present-moment awareness, with an understanding that what we are aware of has a nature, or what is known as the three characteristics of existence:

- The nature of impermanence: Change is constant, and all phenomena arise and pass away.
- The nature of selflessness: There is no enduring or reliable self; we are a series of ever-changing elemental processes, all arising and passing away.
- The nature of unreliability and dissatisfaction: “Shit happens,” and we are not in control of having things our way.

These natural laws, core to the nature of our existence, can offer insight into how we relate to racial distress—specifically, what supports more distress and what supports release from distress. Despite the painful truth that racial injury, ignorance, and injustice have spread virally throughout the world, the three characteristics of existence stand.

I have a simple mantra for remembering these three characteristics: “**Life is not personal, permanent, or perfect.**” These natural laws are true to all existence. They are like gravity. Gravity has a nature—it’s not personal. Once you understand gravity, you do not drop a glass and expect space to catch it. Seasons also have a

nature—they are not perfect or permanent. Once you understand the seasons, you know how to dress and go out into the world. As the story goes, everybody is a genius, but if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing it is stupid. Fish have a nature. Fish exist in water. Fish do not climb trees.

Relatedly, race is not who we are. Race is a social construct that points out the nature of diversity. In and of itself, race is not personal, nor is it a problem. The problem is how we perceive race, socially project onto race, and relate to race as if it were personal (all about our individual or racial group experience), permanent (the idea that views about race never change), or perfect (the idea that whatever is happening should be to my liking or meet my standard of what’s right). We are all perfect in our imperfection, which is always changing. In *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind*, Shunryu Suzuki put it this way, “What we call ‘I’ is just a swinging door which moves when we inhale and when we exhale.” When we don’t recognize or comprehend the true nature of all existence, racial distress proliferates.

Over the years, reminding myself that life is not personal, permanent, or perfect has kept me from falling into sinkholes of despair and destroying rooms with rage. It invites me to pause and turn inward. It gives me a chance to ask myself, “What’s happening? Where are you gripped right

## We are shaped by our conditioning, but we are also shaped by wise understanding and the quality of our awareness.



now? Are you taking this situation personally—to be a personal experience instead of a human experience? How many people before you have felt this way? Where else in the world are people feeling similarly gripped? Do you believe that how it is now is how it will always be? Are you distressed because you are insisting that this situation be other than it is, right here and now? How can you care for the pain you're in at this moment?"

It is impossible to be unbiased when we are unaware of how we have been conditioned in racial likes and dislikes, fears, aversions, and judgments. In other words, racial distress is a real experience, and how we relate to racial distress is habit. Instead of being fearful of other races or convinced we know everything we need to know about race, an exploration of racial conditioning or habits of mind can be a gateway to deepening our understanding of humanity.

Sometimes people like me, who have been generationally and deeply traumatized by racial ignorance and distress, will find it challenging initially to sit still for such an inquiry. We may think this approach is too passive, too compliant; or that we are giving up, masking, or glossing over injustice. But that's not it. To embrace our true nature is not to deny that racial injustice is endemic in society

or that certain racial groups are not, in fact, targets of harm. It's about having a practice that supports us in tenderly embracing the truth of what is happening in the moment with an understanding of its nature. This is what is meant by being mindful of race.

We are shaped by our conditioning, but we are also shaped by wise understanding and the quality of our awareness. When we are unaware of the nature and impact of our actions, we cause much unintentional harm. Entrenched beliefs and closed minds are what wars are made of. Our challenge is to become more aware. Mindfulness meditation is a practical way to transform our understanding and actions. It's not just a technique or mental exercise; it is a radical practice of self-compassion and respect that supports us in softening the rough edges of racial distress so we can untangle our habits of harm and respond to racial distress more wisely. I would go so far as to say that we need these practices to support us in staying present to the horrors of racial suffering and to experiencing freedom from it. Yes, I said freedom! Knowing from the inside out momentary freedom is a potent stabilizer when facing racial distress. Another way to say this is that we can know increasing moments of freedom within racism and despite it.

This law of all existence is difficult to grasp in the heat of racial distress. However, with mindfulness practice, we begin to recognize, through our direct experiences, that we can know a deeper freedom—a freedom that is not dependent on outside circumstances being different.

Addressing racism requires a multitude of individual and relational

interventions. Sometimes we need to speak out and organize with others to heal and to resist systems of oppression. There are also times when we may need a good counselor or therapist to examine our stories, unpack our traumas, and recognize the internalized source of our wounding. Mindfulness meditation allows for yet another opportunity: wise awareness.

Without wise awareness, habitual patterns rule our lives. Our mind wraps itself around our views, our perspective narrows, and we tend to feel "dead right"—or just plain dead. With mindfulness practice, we learn how to get still and receive the present moment without preferences. We become interested in what's happening right now and the impact it is having on us. In this potent pause, we can ask, "Is how I am thinking and feeling contributing to suffering or to freedom?"

No amount of racial warfare or social resistance is more healing and sustaining than the freedom each of us is capable of experiencing internally, despite our circumstances, through mindfulness meditation. This practice brightens the mind, allowing us to see more clearly our own reflection and that of the world. With such clarity, we can do what must be done with care and understanding. 🌱

**Ruth King, MA**, is the founder of Mindful of Race Institute, LLC, supporting individuals and organizations in applying mindfulness-based principles with an exploration of our racial conditioning, its impact, and our potential. King teaches meditation retreats worldwide and is the author of several publications including *Mindful of Race: Transforming Racism from the Inside Out*. She is also featured in *Black and Buddhist: What Buddhism Can Teach Us about Race, Resilience, Transformation, and Freedom*. [www.ruthking.net](http://www.ruthking.net)

## HEALING THROUGH FOOD

by Edward Espe Brown



**Food is not just matter—the proverbial “fuel for the body”—but human endeavor, our blood, sweat, and tears brought to table in a form that nourishes all our other goings-on.**

In cooking and eating, we're shifting from the world of exploitation—getting what we can—to the world of nurturing, where we receive the bounty and blessings of nature: green grassy asparagus, yellow tart lemon, mellow earthy potato, robust purple beet—each ingredient so distinctly, and sincerely, what it is, without any wish to be other or better, freely offering what it has to offer.

Likewise, our hearts are here to freely offer what they have to offer, tasting, cherishing, connecting, enlivening hands and feet to gather ingredients and transform them into food. Our hearts long to do this, so they do not need to be told what to do but simply freed from the dictates of maximizing return. Hearts, no longer constrained by the need to have the results “measure up,” are liberated. Infused with heart energy, our bodies come alive—as does the food!

Thus, we can remind ourselves that stepping into the kitchen can be extraordinarily generous, a plunging-in to giving life to life. Rather than merely being a lot of work, our soul comes forward, and our spirit lifts with the vitality of our heart in action.



### Roasted Potatoes

In this recipe, the humble potato is roasted to sweet nuttiness. Add garlic cloves or fresh rosemary as you wish. Makes four modest servings.

#### INGREDIENTS

- 1 pound potatoes (red, Yukon gold, fingerlings), cut into fork-sized pieces
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- ½ teaspoon salt
- Fresh ground pepper, to taste
- 12 cloves garlic, unpeeled (optional)
- A few sprigs of rosemary, half-inch segments (optional)

- 1 Heat oven to 425 degrees Fahrenheit.
- 2 Toss the potatoes with olive oil to coat, and sprinkle on salt and pepper.
- 3 If you're adding garlic, leaving the skins on the cloves encourages them to roast to softness instead of crispness. Not everyone wants little branchy things with their potatoes, but I follow my nose with the rosemary. Now you wing it!
- 4 Spread the potatoes on parchment paper on a baking sheet and roast for 30 to 45 minutes until soft and perhaps slightly browned.
- 5 Bon appétit!

Edward Espe Brown found his way to Zen practice in 1965. He was the first head cook, or tenzo, at Tassajara Zen Mountain Center, and his bestselling book, *The Tassajara Bread Book*, was published in 1970. In the years since, Edward helped found Greens Restaurant in San Francisco and wrote several other cookbooks. His latest book, *No Recipe: Cooking as a Spiritual Practice*, is about finding your own way in the kitchen—and in life.

## How artists in Nepal help foster healing and bring a sense of inner peace

BY *Swosti Rajbhandari Kayastha*

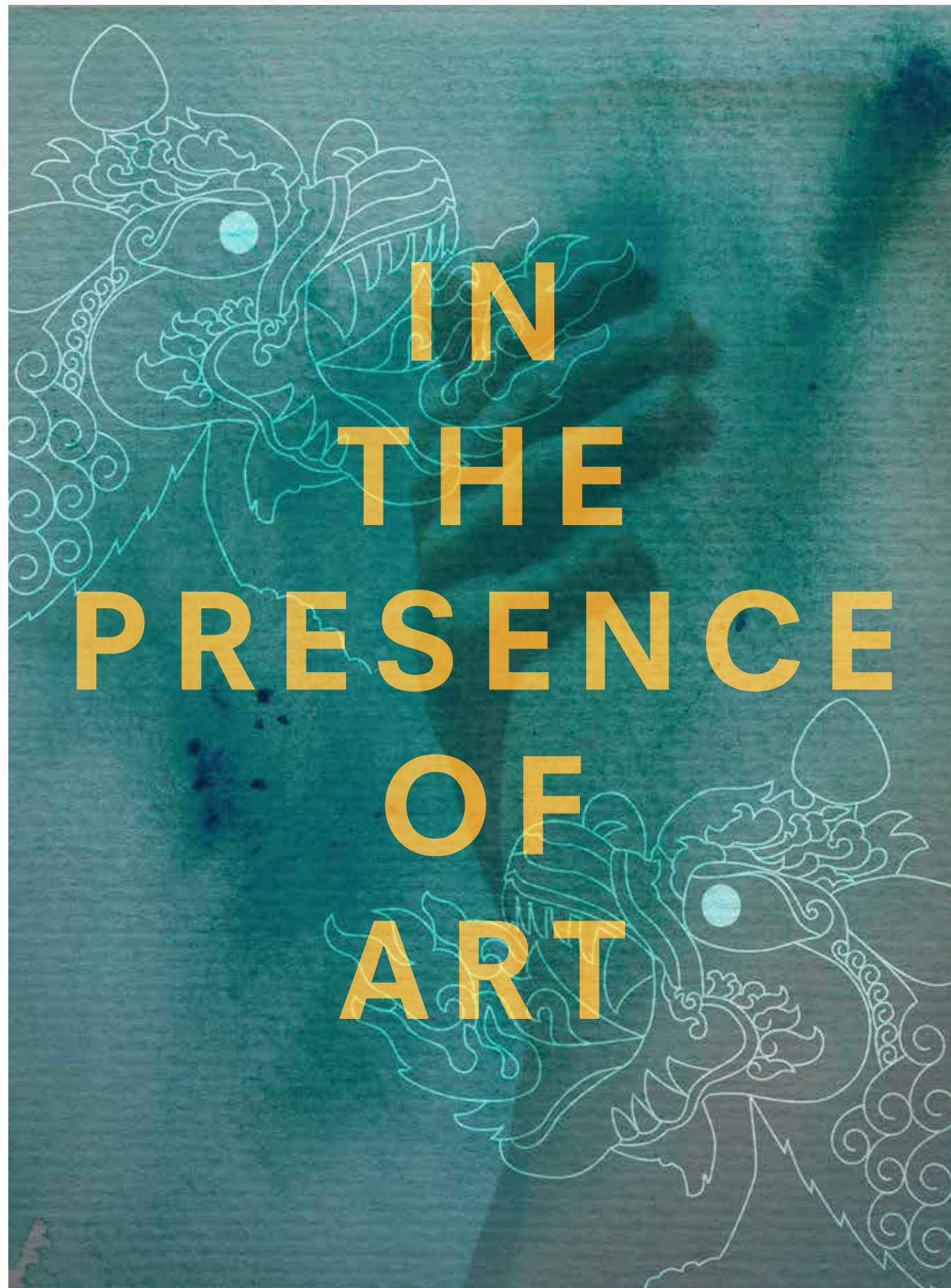
**ART HAS BEEN LINKED WITH CULTIVATING WELL-BEING** since ancient times. In an age-old Nepali practice, healers would draw lions on rashes. The lions—made from varied colors with different chemical properties—would engulf the offending shingles and alleviate this skin ailment. People are more dependent on allopathic practices nowadays, but the concept of healing through contemporary art is becoming increasingly prevalent in Nepal, particularly in the aftermath of the 2015 earthquake.



I myself experienced the power of art to change one's outlook and restore emotional balance in 2018 when I visited the group exhibition *Sight and Sound* at Gallery MCube in Patan. Salil Subedi's sound installation looked like an alien object—a wire-mesh disc suspended in the air with several small speakers broadcasting various radio FM channels and emitting a jarring cacophony of noise. On the ground below the suspended disc, on a round patch of organic red mud, was a huge singing bowl of the same size, representing our direct connection to the earth.

The artist invited me to step into the bowl and asked me to relax despite the noisy ambience, which I found quite disturbing. I had to resist the urge to step out. Just then he swirled the pestle around the outside edge of the bowl and struck it hard. The vibrations of the bowl swept over me, instantly calming and grounding me, and I was enveloped by a sublime connection with the earth. The radio noise vanished, and there was absolute stillness in and around my body and my mind. With tranquility seeping in, I experienced how art can connect us to a sense of inner peace and foster healing despite the chaos around us.

I first met Salil when he was working as a journalist at the turn of the century. Learning of the healing potential of the didgeridoo, a wind instrument developed





Nepal Earthquake Art Project in Barpark, 2015

by the aboriginal people of northern Australia that produces a powerful repertoire of overtones and sound vibrations through various breathing techniques, Salil self-taught himself the instrument. He subsequently gave up smoking, restored his physical and mental health, and found his life's quest as a performing artist. This transformation and ensuing contentment inspired him to heal others through his artistic practices.

After a period of national civil unrest in 2007, Salil travelled to remote areas of Western Nepal as part of a radio project. Sensing the tense environment, he played the didgeridoo and was amazed at how the people opened up and found tranquility in the performance. He organized a workshop where people worked together to make their own instruments, building trust and connection among them.

“The body matters, and it is key and a vital part in healing trauma,” says Salil. “We are connected to the earth, and this connection is necessary to keep us rooted and stand upright.”

After the fatal earthquake of April 2015, Salil felt a call to go to Barpark, the epicenter of the natural disaster. He organized a didgeridoo workshop for students with materials he carried to this difficult-to-reach location. He laid out a seventeen-meter-long white cotton cloth on the school playground and allowed the children to freestyle paint on it. Some painted random objects and patterns, and many wrote “I love . . .” followed by names. It became clear that those names belonged to people who had died. The activity allowed the children to express their emotions around the loss of family and friends. With much excitement and noise, they then lifted the cloth in the air and made a joyful procession around the village filled with debris from the quake.

A few months later Salil collaborated with Kathmandu University's Center for Art and Design on a rehabilitation project for the ancient heritage settlement of Bungamati. The earthquake had mostly destroyed the old houses and beautiful wooden architectural elements. The students helped build temporary shelters and painted murals to enliven the environment. Salil organized a performance, circumambulating the settlement with his didgeridoo while the students followed, picking up interesting objects from the rubble to arouse a feeling of revival through preservation, conservation, and reuse.

“The body matters, and it is key and a vital part in healing trauma,” says Salil. “We are connected to the earth, and this connection is necessary to keep us rooted and stand upright.” Salil also believes art helps amplify our connections with each other and that every human deserves healing. In our capitalistic world, access to healing practices often comes with a huge price tag attached; Salil feels it is his responsibility to bring healing to the public through art, especially through the effects of sound.

Other artists in Nepal share Salil's commitment to healing through art. Manish Lal Shrestha, an artist, curator, and director of Gallery MCube, believes that sharing is at the root of this practice, as evidenced by his popular *Get Well Soon* project and the interactive knitted artwork *Project 1336: Life in a Lane*. Another artist, or rather activist (artist and activist), Ashmina Ranjit embraces collaboration and voice in her work. She sees healing through art as particularly effective because it affects both the conscious and unconscious levels of the mind. Her workshops incorporate painting, dance, and trauma-release exercises.

In January 2021, several visual artists—including Erina Tamrakar, Manish Lal Shrestha, Jupiter Pradhan, Sauranga Darshandhari, and Kapil Mani Dixit, among others—participated in an exhibition of works created during the pandemic. At the opening, Salil collaborated with them on a musical performance. Following the disconnection of the pandemic, Salil wanted to restore a sense of connection with one another and with nature. He emulated nature sounds with the didgeridoo, which attracted nearby birds who then joined the audience, inspiring awe and serving as a reminder of the importance of being in harmony with the environment. Believing that calamities like the pandemic happen because of our inability to acknowledge nature as a living, breathing entity, Salil views the soothing melodies as a form of compassion that heals us and our surroundings. “I believe we are all spiritual beings on a spiritual quest, and art is a wonderful vehicle to help us come closer to that experience,” he says.

Two other recent events in the Kathmandu art scene helped uplift the minds and hearts of a community eager to finally emerge from the confinement of the pandemic lockdowns. The E-Arts Nepal showcase *Himalayan Art Exhibition 2021* drew a particularly high number of young people, and the recently opened Museum of Nepali Art inaugurated a one-day Art Fair with live painting and music.

As I walked through the fair, I saw the value of such events in invigorating and energizing people distressed by global troubles. In the presence of art, we experience wonder and a beam of hope opening our internal awareness. Verbal expressions are not easy for everyone, but visual and auditory expressions are outlets of communication that work on multiple levels to assist the journey of healing and its possibilities. 🌍

**Swosti Rajbhandari Kayastha** is a scholar of Nepali art and culture. She serves as a lecturer of museum studies and Buddhist art history of Nepal and the regions at Lumbini Buddhist University. She also works as a curator at Nepal Art Council and writes the column “Heritage Tale” in *ECS Nepal*. She can be reached at [swostirjb@gmail.com](mailto:swostirjb@gmail.com).

## HEALING THROUGH SOUND

by Phoenix Song



The entire cosmos is sound. When you are not feeling well, your cells do not vibrate at their optimal frequency. Sound healing has the ability to retune your body instrument. As an improvisational singer and musician, my practice is to be present, listen, trust, express, and let go. Through breath, I give voice to energy, emotions, and stories that want to release and transform. As we surrender to each breath, we can surprise ourselves with sound and play our unique songs.

### Free Your Voice Meditation

- 1 **Release the noise:** Take a comfortable breath, and on your exhale, let out noise, stress, tension, and emotions with audible sounds. Take another breath and exhale more noise. Do this for a total of seven breaths. There is no right or wrong way of doing this exercise. You are giving your body permission to release noise. Sounds can range from sighs, yells, cries, gibberish, yawns, laughs, groans, and more.
- 2 **Nourish and feel pleasure:** Take seven conscious breaths, and on your exhales, make sounds that give you pleasure. The sounds do not need to be “happy.” If you are experiencing grief or rage, it can be very satisfying to wail or growl or scream. Stay in the present moment with each breath and release pleasurable sounds that will help ground, center, and nourish you.
- 3 **Express your music:** Take seven more conscious breaths, and this time on the exhales, let out the music that lives inside you. This could be a long tone or intricate melodies and rhythms depending on your mood. This practice allows you to listen deeply to your body and play the music living inside you. With these exhales, you sing your improvisational heart/soul song.
- 4 **Enjoy the silence:** Feel the effects of these vibrations in your body. You have been giving voice to your ever-changing inner landscape. Thank yourself for the gift of your presence, curiosity, and expression.

Visit [RubinMuseum.org/Spiral](http://RubinMuseum.org/Spiral) to watch and hear Phoenix Song demonstrate this sound practice.

**Phoenix Song** is a queer, non-binary, Korean American adoptee performer, teacher, and sound healer featured in *San Francisco Magazine's* Best of the Bay for yoga music. They studied Western and Indian classical music and are a Tamalpa Associate Teacher of expressive arts. Phoenix helps people free their voice and rhythm in private and group classes to sing, sound, and speak their truths. They also lead sound baths, grief rituals, ancestral healing, and diversity/solidarity trainings. [www.phoenixsongmusic.com](http://www.phoenixsongmusic.com)



Every plant, mineral, and natural source can be used for healing

BY Elena Pakhoutova



**THIS PAINTING DEPICTS A SPECIFIC EVENT:** the Medicine Buddha, seated in the center of his mandala palace, explaining the science of healing to four groups of disciples—gods, saints, Buddhists, and non-Buddhists. Yet the painting can also be viewed as a metaphor for the inclusive, holistic nature of Tibetan medical knowledge and practice—representing the entire physical world, where everything can be used for healing, as the story of the medical student Jivaka tells. His master asked him to find a substance or a plant that could not be used as medicine. After a long search, Jivaka returned empty-handed, but his teacher congratulated him and said his training was complete—now he knew that there is no substance on earth without healing properties.

The Medicine Buddha's palace is surrounded by four mountains in the cardinal directions. Each is a perfect environment for certain medicinal plants, springs with healing waters, minerals, and precious stones associated with specific curative qualities.



BITUMIN



CARDAMOM



SANDALWOOD



MYROBALAN

## NORTH

*Abode of the Northern Himavant Mountains*

The Northern Snow Mountain, endowed with the power of the moon, encompasses a medicinal forest of plants that are bitter, sweet, and astringent in taste with cool, blunt potencies that cure hot disorders, such as bile ailments.

- |   |                                      |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| 1: White sandalwood   | 11: White aconite                    |
| 2: Hare   | 12: Saiga antelope                   |
| 3: Camphor  | 13: Red sandalwood [trunk]           |
| 4: Eaglewood/ aloeswood   | 14: Rhinoceros                       |
| 5: Elephant   | 15: Birthwort [branch]               |
| 6: Chinaberry   | 16: Spleenwort [leaf]                |
| 7: Gentian  | 17: Kapok stamen, calyx, and corolla |
| 8: Licorice   | 18: Grape [fruit]                    |
| 9: Civamcivaka [winged creature with bird legs and human torso] | 19: Sparrow                          |
| 10: Coleus leaves   | 20: Himalayan black bear             |

## WEST

*Abode of the Western Malaya Mountain*

The Western Garland Mountain, endowed with the power of the sun and moon, is the source of six superlative medicines, among others, and where medicinal waters and hot springs abound.

- |                             |                               |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 56: Nutmeg                  | 67: "Boy" limestone           |
| 57: Clove                   | 68: "Male" limestone          |
| 58: Bamboo pith             | 69: "Female" limestone        |
| 59: Saffron                 | 70: Dark lead bitumen         |
| 60: Cardamon                | 71: Iron bitumen              |
| 61: Monkey                  | 72: Five kinds of hot springs |
| 62: Cubeb/greater cardamom  | 73: Copper bitumen            |
| 63: "Girl" limestone        | 74: Tibetan elk               |
| 64: "Neuter" limestone      | 75: Silver bitumen            |
| 65: Deer                    | 76: Gold bitumen              |
| 66: "Five medicinal springs | 77: Peacock                   |



Lobsang Drubjam Tsering  
Medicine Buddha Palace (copy of first painting from the set of Tibetan Medical Paintings from Mentsikhang Lhasa) Rebgong county, Qinghai Province, China; 2012–2013  
Pigments on cloth  
Rubin Museum of Art  
SC2013.6



NUTMEG

## EAST

*Abode of the Eastern Gandhamadana Mountain*

The Eastern Fragrant Mountain, endowed with the power of the sun and moon, encompasses a medicinal forest of arura (*Terminalia Chebula*) plants, a key ingredient in Tibetan medicine. In his palm the Medicine Buddha holds this plant, which is said to be the mythical source of the myrobalan fruit and have seventeen qualities that cure all sorts of disorders.

- |                                |                            |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 21: "Beak-shaped" myrobalan    | 27: "Nectar" myrobalan     |
| 22: "Golden-colored" myrobalan | 28: Peacock                |
| 23: "Small black" myrobalan    | 29: "Fearless" myrobalan   |
| 24: "Dry" myrobalan            | 30: "Victorious" myrobalan |
| 25: Leopard                    | 31: Sparrow                |
| 26: "Enriching" myrobalan      | 32: Saiga antelope         |
|                                | 33: Tiger                  |

## SOUTH

*Abode of the Southern Vindhya Mountains*

The Southern Piercing Mountain, endowed with the power of the sun, encompasses a medicinal forest of plants that are hot, sour, and salty in taste with hot, sharp potencies that cure cold disorders, such as phlegm ailments.

- |  |                    |
|--|--------------------|
| 34: Bonducella fruit   | 43: Saiga antelope |
| 35: Civamcivaka [winged creature with bird legs and human torso] | 44: Cassia         |
| 36: Buttercup [flower]   | 45: Cinnamon       |
| 37: Rhododendron [leaf]  | 46: Sumach         |
| 38: Eurasian cuckoo  | 47: Musk deer      |
| 39: Clematis [branch]  | 48: Asafoetida     |
| 40: Himalayan black bear   | 49: Elephant       |
| 41: Pine tree trunk  | 50: Capsicum       |
| 42: Parrot   | 51: Long pepper    |
|  | 52: Sparrow        |
|  | 53: Black pepper   |
|  | 54: Peacock        |
|  | 55: Pomegranate    |



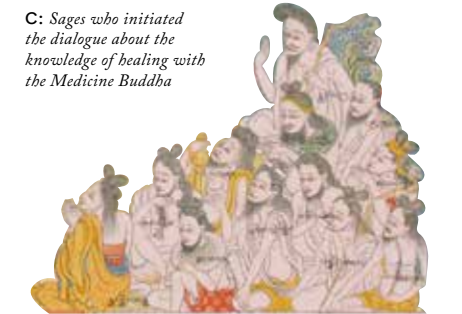
BLACK PEPPER



**A: THE MEDICINE BUDDHA**



**B: The retinue of bodhisattvas and attendants receiving instructions from the Medicine Buddha**



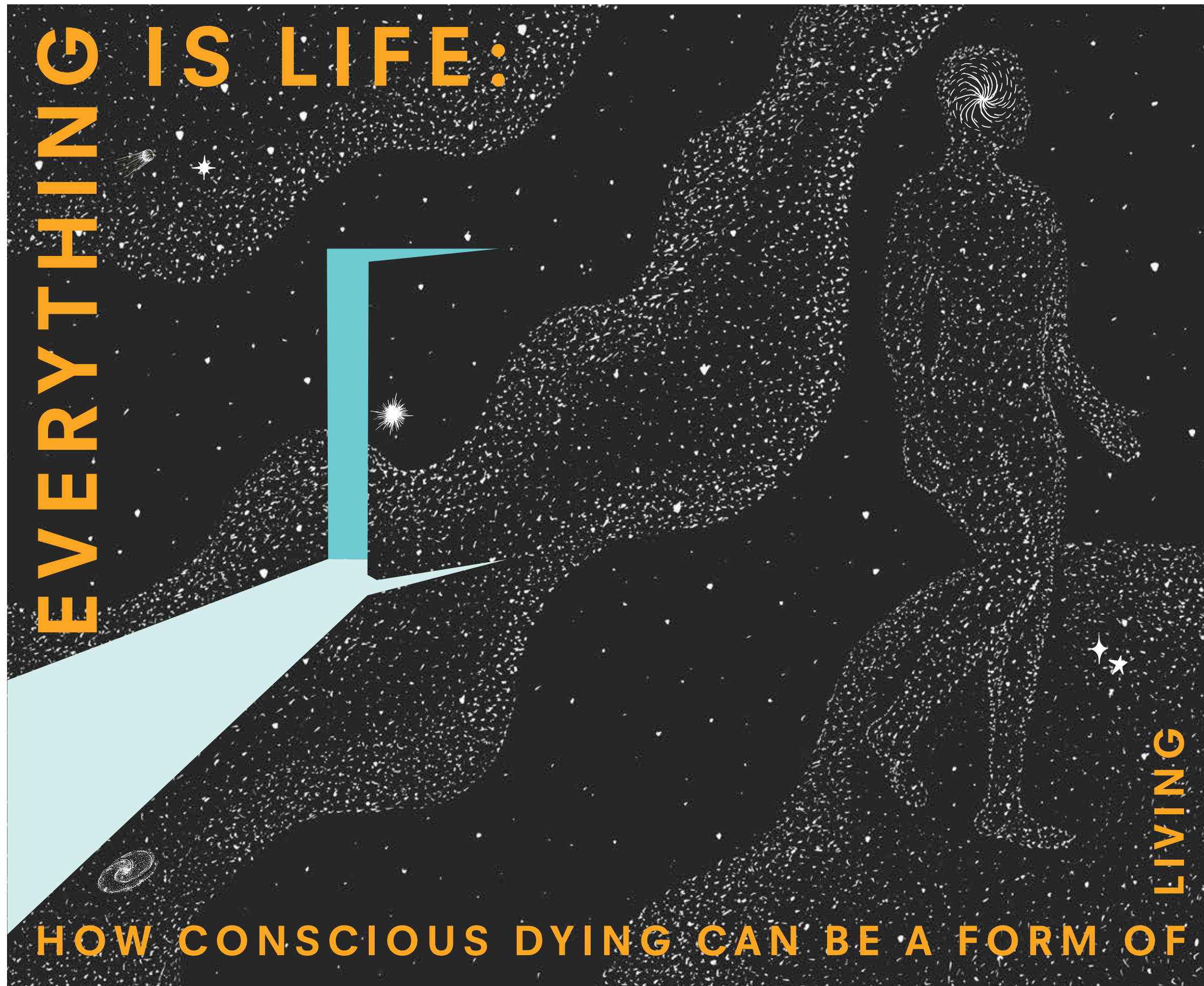
**C: Sages who initiated the dialogue about the knowledge of healing with the Medicine Buddha**

\*A translation of the caption at the bottom of the painting:

"From the *Blue Beryl* treatise, *The Ornament of the Intention of Bhaisajyaguru, Master of Remedies*, explaining the *Four Medical Tantras*. This painting illustrates the first chapter of the *Root Tantra, The Introductory Scene*. At the center of an emanational abode amid the medicinal forest called Bhaisajyavana, on the summit of a mountain endowed with potent and powerful remedies, within a celestial palace with four gates, the Teacher of Remedies (Bhaisajyaguru) explains the science of medicine to many assembled gods, hermit sages, Hindu divinities, and Buddhists. The teaching is given in the form of a dialogue between the hermit sages who are the natural brilliance of the five types of pristine cognitions—the mirror-like pristine cognition which purifies delusion, the pristine cognition of emptiness which purifies hatred, the pristine cognition of sameness which purifies pride, the pristine cognition of discernment which purifies desire, and the pristine cognition of accomplishment which purifies envy."

Elena Pakhoutova is a senior curator of Himalayan art at the Rubin Museum of Art and holds a PhD in Asian art history from the University of Virginia. She has curated several exhibitions at the Rubin, most recently *The Second Buddha: Master of Time* (2018) and *The Power of Intention: Reinventing the (Prayer) Wheel* (2019).

See this artwork in detail at [collection.RubinMuseum.org/objects/1572](https://collection.RubinMuseum.org/objects/1572).



## An Interview with Father Guidalberto Bormolini

BY *Jon Pepper and Patrizia De Libero*

**FATHER GUIDALBERTO BORMOLINI** has devoted his life to supporting those seeking knowledge about conscious dying—and living—whether for themselves or in service of others. Well-versed in both Western and Eastern traditions, his Everything Is Life institute in Prato, Italy, is a vibrant center of healing and instruction.

This interview was conducted in Italian and translated to English. It has been edited for length and, where needed, for clarity.

**Jon Pepper and Patrizia De Libero: What is conscious dying and how can being present in the moment of death be a form of healing?**

Father Guidalberto Bormolini: Death is considered by many philosophical doctrines to be a source of healing. Because according to many philosophies, including Christianity, life can be seen as a prison. It is like an exile—being far away from the motherland. So death is considered the supreme liberation. Saint Carlo Borromeo asked an artist to draw a gold key in a painting, where the grim reaper was represented. The painter was surprised and asked why—isn't the reaper death? The saint answered, yes, but death is the key that opens the door of life.

Dying consciously is a way of healing, but dying unconsciously is not. If we remember the healer during life or especially at our last breath, then death can be the meeting with the supreme healer—the divine therapist, as it were.



### Can the practice of conscious dying help us in day-to-day life?

Having death in front of us generates many precious gifts, but I would summarize them in two ways. The first is *carpe diem*—if I know that I will die, then life becomes precious. Therefore I live it fully and in depth until the very end.

The other is that by contemplating death I become aware that the invisible is more important than the visible. The meeting with the spirit, with the divine, becomes relevant here and now, in this world. While I know that my life is moving toward death, my life from now on must also be filled with what is important after death, which is the invisible world, the spirit. If I immerse myself in the spirit, it is more likely that I will live a life “of the spirit” to the point that it might be possible to meet god in this life. So by contemplating death I can anticipate this meeting, because it is truly what matters most.

### How could this practice help in repairing the past? For instance, by helping our ancestors who came before us?

In Christian mysticism we say we belong to one unique mystic body. Many traditions all over the world say we are all interconnected—a microcosmos united with the macrocosmos. Therefore there

is clearly a need of being liberated for many, if not for everybody. In the Christian tradition the liberator is Jesus Christ, who with his death and resurrection liberated the dead.

In our small world, in my opinion, we can do the same. Our own personal liberation can also be the liberation of many. This is the gift we can give. Salvation is not something that is individual. It is always something that is communal. I heal myself because in this way I also heal others. Individual healing is the way to heal the community.

### Is there a practice that can help a loved one as they die? Something that offers healing as they move from this world to whatever comes next?

There are many things that can be done on the human plane. They are mainly listening, being present, nourishing with love, and reassuring the person. But the most precious of all is being able to help this soul orient toward a great aim after death.

If we can help a person begin to visualize the world in which he or she will reside after death, then they will recognize this place after death. Because even the Tibetans say the greatest risk after death is not being able to recognize the divine light, the vital light that is coming toward us after death. The habit of being anchored toward possessions, material goods, and so on makes our encounter with the invisible world unfamiliar. For this reason, we might not only miss the opportunity to recognize the divine light, but also end up traveling disoriented into this new life.

### We are speaking about practice, preparation, and healing now, before we die. What about the idea of healing after death?

There are many different approaches in the spiritual paths to this fundamental question. Because the anguish of death is based on two main pillars: first, death as an annulment, and second, death as a guillotine—an absolute end.

Once I “go over”—however it went—it is over. This is unbearable for human beings, and therefore since ancient times there have been different perspectives on death. One is that death is not the conclusion or annulment, but rather a passage to a true life, maybe a life fuller than this life.

Another idea is the possibility of progression, evolution, and healing after death. Eastern religions have answered this enigma through the theory of transmigration of souls, or reincarnation, according to which I am given a new life after death.

### Do you see a difference between healing and curing?

Sometimes in the physical plane there are illnesses you can’t heal—cancers or diseases that deteriorate one progressively. Here we can’t heal the body. But we can still cure the inner person. The impossibility of a physical healing can bring a greater possibility of a psychological and spiritual curing, because the sickness that devours the body obliges us to ponder deeply.

Do I want to correspond with the dying body? Or do I want to totally heal

The impossibility of a physical healing can bring a greater possibility of a psychological and spiritual curing.

## HEALING THROUGH GATHERING



by K Scarry of  
*The People's Supper*

myself, which means to set myself free from this sick body? Because if I identify only with the body, the sickness will devour me and everything that I am completely. But if for me the body is like a suit of clothing that has served its purpose, then I can let it go and wear a new body of light.

### What is the role of meditation in healing?

The supreme healing resides in meditation—in the prayer of the heart. Why? Because according to some cosmological myths, the universe has been created from music, from a sound. So when we practice our own prayer of the heart, our mantra or invocation has more power if it is sung, not as a melody but rather in the attitude of the recitation. A dry or mechanical recitation of the prayer can concentrate the mind, but that is not enough. It must be a song of love that unites with the song of the whole universe.

The leaves, the flowers, the rivers, the stars, the dawn, the sunset—everything sings. The oak trees, the animals, the wind—everything that exists sings a secret song. If we sing our own song of the heart, we become part of this symphony.

In the bible it is said that after the departure from Eden, suffering and pain were created. Meditating with the prayer of the heart can heal this suffering to reunite us with the original sound. In order to heal we need to find Eden, but Eden is not a mythological place. It is a concrete place. The bible describes it as a place with four rivers. This place with four rivers is within us; the heart is the place where four rivers flow.

The divine heart is the only one that can give life unceasingly. There is life and healing when we receive love from the divine—from the cosmos, from the people around us, from the air that we breathe, which is permeated with divine love. Once we receive all this love in this way, we can give it back. If we are part of this dynamic, we will heal completely once and for all.

**Father Guidalberto Bormolini** began as a violin maker, but soon after receiving his diploma he met Father Gianvittorio Cappelletto, who introduced him to deep meditation. This set him on a path to study philosophy and theology and eventually become a consecrated priest. He founded and directs Tutto è Vita (Everything Is Life) in Prato, Italy, a center that offers palliative care and teaches end-of-life providers.

**Jon Pepper** is a former musician, book designer, and entrepreneur who has almost fifty years of experience with meditation and spiritual pursuit. He is currently a trustee of the Gurdjieff Foundation of New York.

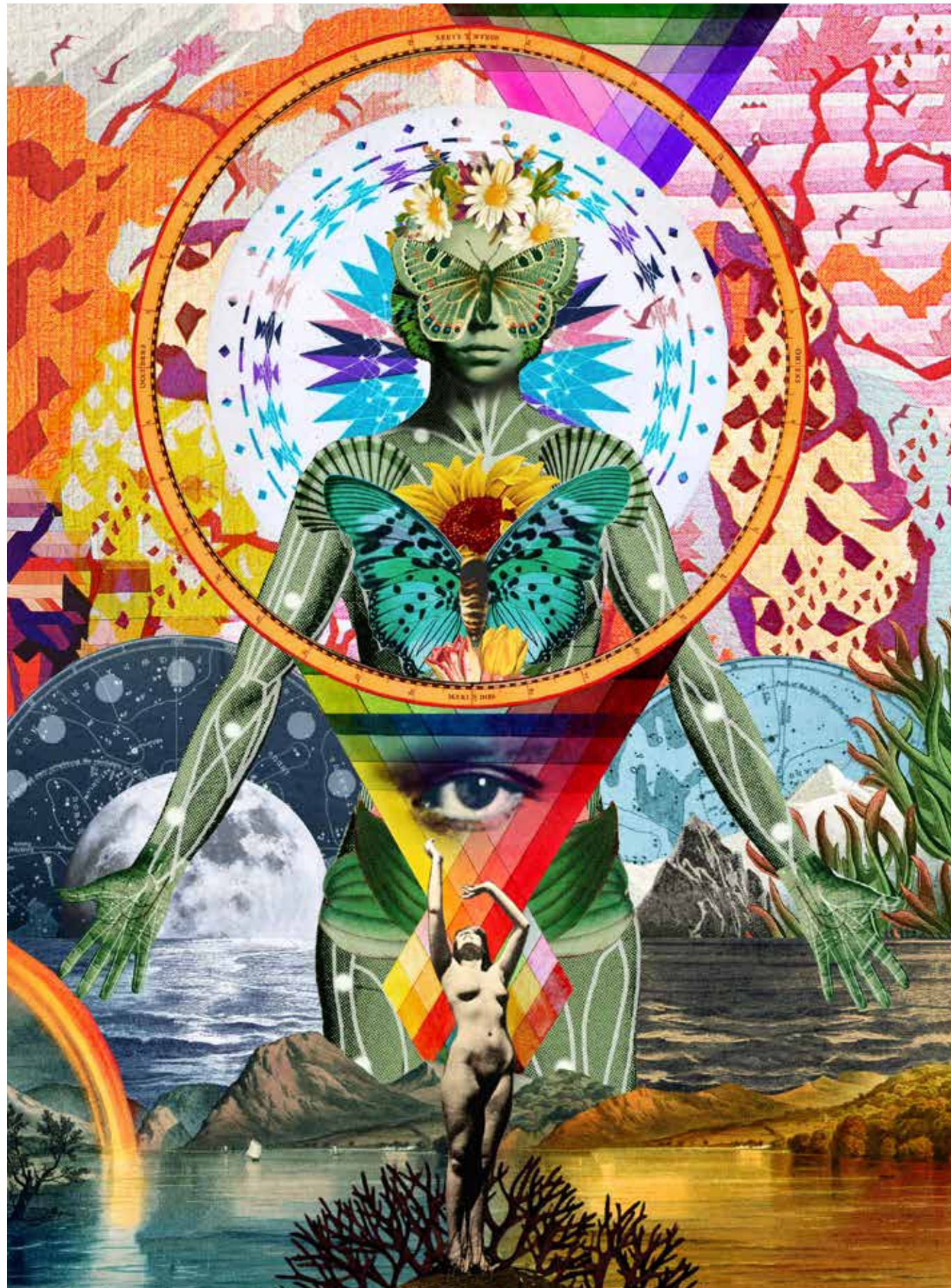
**Patrizia De Libero** is a native of Rome, Italy, who has studied many spiritual traditions and embraced the Gurdjieff Work since her college days. She runs Kairos Pilgrimages, an organization connecting people to sacred places. Patrizia is a yoga teacher and certified death doula, and she runs the Everything Is Life school of conscious dying and living in North America.

The best thing you can do as a host is to know why you want to gather. Perhaps you want to have a conversation about a topic that is dividing folks in your community. Or maybe you are craving connection around a particular experience. Imagine yourself washing the dishes after everyone has left. Then reflect: How do I hope to feel in this moment? What do I hope my guests are saying about our time together? Design your gathering with these answers in mind.

- 1 **Know who to invite:** The why of your gathering helps inform the who. If you want to host a conversation about racism in the United States for a multiracial group, for instance, make sure everyone is aligned in understanding that racism is a problem in our country today.
- 2 **Use intentional and clear invite language:** Guests should arrive with an understanding of what they are walking into, so they feel ready to engage. Explain why you are inviting this individual or group, affirming that their presence and perspective matter in your space.
- 3 **Create the container:** Set some ground rules for engaging. Think about what might get in the way of deep connection and name it out loud. For example, if you're gathering colleagues from work, you could acknowledge the different levels of power in the room and encourage people to let go of those roles for the night.
- 4 **Model it:** As the host, your willingness to be vulnerable, present, and attentive becomes an invitation for others to do the same.
- 5 **Ask good questions:** Prepare questions that everybody can answer and that allow for varying degrees of vulnerability. Some examples: What is something that might surprise others about what it's like to be you? What is a belief you hold that has changed a lot in the last five years?
- 6 **Follow up:** Pay attention to what people say and notice what lingers with you. In the following days, reach out to thank people for specific things they shared.

**K Scarry** is enamored with life around the table and currently works as the director of The People's Supper, which uses shared meals to build trust and connection among people of different identities and perspectives. The People's Supper is a sister project to The Dinner Party, a community of mostly twenty-, thirty-, and early forty-somethings working to transform our most isolating experiences into sources of meaningful connection and forward movement.





# AT THE CENTER OF A MESSY, BEAUTIFUL EXISTENCE

A PSYCHOLOGIST RECKONS WITH HOW SPIRITUAL PRACTICES  
CAN DISTRACT US FROM THE REAL WORK OF HEALING

BY *Ingrid Clayton*



**THE FIRST TIME I FIRST HEARD** the term spiritual bypassing, my mouth became dry and time started to slow.

*What do you mean I might be using spiritual practices—that saved me from my addictions—to avoid my feelings?*

It was a revelation. At the time, I was in graduate school for my PhD in psychology and ten years sober. Psychotherapist and author John Welwood coined the term, and in an interview with *Tricycle* he defined it as the “tendency to use spiritual ideas and practices to sidestep or avoid facing unresolved emotional issues, psychological wounds, and unfinished developmental tasks.”

It had never occurred to me I might be “using” spirituality as voraciously as I had alcohol. But the idea that I could pray hard enough, long enough, in the right posture or to the right Higher Power was so compelling that it propelled me right into magical thinking. Coupled with the fact that spiritual practices were a more presentable form of avoidance than drugs and alcohol, I was subconsciously sold.

Yet the more I learned about the defense mechanism, I realized the consequences may have been less obvious, but they were still keeping me stuck. With my head in the spiritual clouds, I couldn’t access my deeper roots, the ones that informed my addiction to begin with. And if I couldn’t become more present to my wounds, how “recovered” was I really?

I became so captivated by the conundrum I did my dissertation research on the subject of spiritual bypass in twelve-step recovery and published a book, *Recovering Spirituality*. The biggest takeaway—for me—was that spiritual bypass, like all defenses, has both helpful (adaptive) and unhelpful (maladaptive) qualities.

I had to look at my underlying motivations for prayer, meditation, and affirmations. Was I using them to check “in”

with myself and something greater, or to check “out” from my life altogether?

Many years later, I was looking to check in. I was feeling a little lost and restless. At the time, I was working with a client in my psychotherapy practice who had called a psychic. Hearing about their conversations, I thought, *I want to call this guy*. So I did.

I was looking for guidance when the psychic pulled the High Priestess tarot card several times. “The probability of receiving the same card, in the same upright position, this many times is extremely unlikely,” he said. In his view, I needed to *become* the High Priestess—an embodiment of the divine feminine, inner knowledge, and intuition.

“You have a voice you want to share, but it’s inverted, and you can’t let it out. But you will put yourself out there, like the Fool who steps off a cliff and risks everything,” he said. I felt inspired, but I had no idea where to begin.

A few days later, essays started waking me in the middle of the night. I was flooded with story after story while my literal defenses were down, usually at 3:00 a.m. My eyes would pop open, and I’d have to get out of bed, tiptoeing to my computer. I started to recognize this was the voice I’d been sitting on for thirty years.

Beginning from the outer edges of my personal experiences, the essays seemed to be circling around my pain, moving closer and closer to the heart of it. My first marriage and divorce, my alcoholism and sobriety, all the ways I didn’t trust or know myself.

I’d kept these experiences compartmentalized for so long; it was like huge parts of me were totally walled off. I’d spent decades stuffing my reality under layers of bad choices and attempts at healing in private spaces—therapy and self-help groups—where childhood secrets were bound to flourish without reaching their familial foundation. I had

**I stopped searching for something to help me override the human condition and started to drop down into it.**

tried to drink my painful past away, and then I tried to “fix it” with sobriety, therapy, spirituality, and anything that held a promise of *overcoming*.

It is said when the High Priestess appears in a reading, she is calling you to follow her into your own depths. To search within yourself for answers, often with the aid of undiscovered or repressed creativity.

I definitely received the call. I stopped searching for something to help me override the human condition and started to drop down into it. Even if the High Priestess was make-believe, it didn’t matter. The writing felt like a calling and I fiercely trusted it.

I’d spent so many years hoping the people who had hurt me would finally help me. I thought they *could*. But as I reclaimed my story, I saw how I was

doing the work I’d always wanted them to do and saving myself. Rather than waiting for anyone else to believe what happened to me, for the first time in a very long time, *I believed me*.

I didn’t know I was writing a book on overcoming childhood trauma. I didn’t even think I’d experienced *real trauma*. The writing became an unfiltered way for me to witness things in black and white, and then to observe them from a therapist’s perspective. I needed to retrace my own steps, to go back and give myself permission to feel, to see what I saw, and to regain the parts of me that were left behind.

Before I allowed myself to descend, I just thought I was broken. I had tried everything, including compulsive prayer, to help me tolerate my psychic pain. But the truth of my story ultimately became my personal textbook and pathway to my freedom. By engaging with it in the present moment, with some psychological knowledge as a tether, I could finally see the through line. All the ways I’d tried to cope—my perfectionism, people pleasing, addictions, codependency, striving, bypassing, dysfunctional relationships—were trauma responses.

All my attempts to wriggle out of my truth, whether it looked presentable or not, didn’t actually free me. All my hoping that something or someone else could do it never brought me relief.

Today, I’m not free in the sense I always longed for—24/7 perfect, zen-like, nonattachment, joy-filled abundance. But I’m no longer bypassing my shame or blaming myself for being too sick or unhealed. I’m in the center of what is a messy and beautiful life. It is still tethered to a wealth of spiritual belief and practice, but always with the intention of dropping in. I trust what I will find in the center of my being is always a gift, even if it involves some hard work to get there. 🙏

Ingrid Clayton, PhD, is a clinical psychologist in private practice and the author of *Recovering Spirituality: Achieving Emotional Sobriety in Your Spiritual Practice*. She is a regular contributor to *Psychology Today*, and her current project is a memoir on childhood trauma: *Maybe It Wasn’t That Bad: A Psychologist’s Reckoning of a Childhood No One Believed*. In addition to raising her beautiful son, she believes gaining the courage to write this book is her greatest achievement to date.

## HEALING THROUGH WRITING

by Tenzin Dickie



**We live our lives in the first person, confined to one limiting (fractured, opaque, partial) point of view. In many ways this is why life is such an open wound for so many, and why literature is so necessary to us.**

**In life we can only inhabit one self, but in literature we can inhabit many selves. We can step into another person’s shoes, sleep in their skin, share their consciousness. In literature we can break free from the tyranny of the first-person point of view. We can inhabit a third-person point of view or even second-person. My personal favorite is the close-third, where the writer focuses so closely on the perspective of one character that there is no distance between that character and the reader.**

**Stream of consciousness is a novelist’s technique, but it is also a Buddhist’s touchstone. When reading or writing a stream of consciousness passage, or a close-third person point of view, are you only you? Or do you also become the other perspective you are inhabiting?**

**For me, it is always a relief to know I am not the only real person in the world. Everyone else is quite real too, strangely enough. In life, I don’t have access to anyone else’s interiority but mine. In literature, I have access to the interiority of so many others. How liberating it is to get out of my skin.**

**You can always write your way out of your skin. Journal. If something confusing or difficult happened, write your way into clarity and comprehension. Consider the following questions and then let the words flow:**

- What happened?
- How do you feel about it?
- Why do you feel the way you feel about it? Is it the incident itself, or something else?
- Was someone else involved? How did they seem to feel about it?
- Why?

Tenzin Dickie is a writer and translator. A former Fulbright fellow, she works at the Buddhist Digital Resource Center in Boston. She is editor of *Old Demons, New Deities: 21 Short Stories from Tibet*, published in 2017 by OR Books.



## Can breathing in sync with others help us learn more about ourselves and the world around us?

BY *Howard Kaplan*

**IT SEEMS TO ME, THE NOSE IS HAVING A MOMENT.** Classes on mindfulness and breathwork offer transformational experiences through the simple act of inhaling and exhaling, while James Nestor’s book *Breath*—a how-to and how-not-to guide about breathing (nose breathing for the win!)—hit the bestseller lists.

Breathing. We all do it, but are any of us doing it well? From the first breath we take till our last, our minds and bodies run on fuel supplied by a combination of oxygen, nitrogen, and other assorted gases. And since breathing comes automatically (though with more difficulty if you have asthma or a lung disease), what would happen if breathing became more mindful, more purposeful?

Breath is at the heart of the Rubin’s Mandala Lab, a reinvented space on the Museum’s third floor, where visitors see, touch, feel, and yes, breathe their way toward self-understanding. This interactive installation draws on Tibetan Buddhist teachings and neuroscience to provide sensorial experiences that help us gain deeper knowledge of ourselves and others, inspiring connection and empathy. In turn, this helps us overcome the afflictive emotions of pride, attachment, envy, anger, and ignorance—known as *kleshas* in Buddhism—that interfere in our understanding of the world and cause suffering.

The installation comes at a time when our country is experiencing the concurrent pandemics of systemic racism and COVID-19. In 2020, George Floyd told of officers, “I can’t breathe,” more than twenty times while begging for his life. The coronavirus has filled emergency rooms

with people who are fighting for their breath and need to be placed on ventilators. And the politics behind the virus have deeply divided us, revealing more than ever the need to come together as communities and as a nation. As we know from experience, a divided nation will not stand; success occurs when we work in concert with others.

### **Every Breath You/We Take**

When you enter the north quadrant of the Mandala Lab—which is associated with the air element—you’re invited to sit in front of *Untitled (Coalescence)*, a sculpture by Palden Weinreb, a New York-based artist who draws from Buddhist teachings and combines the ancient and the contemporary in his art practice. A pulsing white light brightens and dims to echo our breathing patterns encouraging deeper, more thoughtful, slower breaths. Can these regulated breaths have physical, psychological, and emotional benefits?

The sculpture seems to function as a mandala within a mandala, as the light sits in the center of a series of nested spheres, much as a deity is represented in the middle of sacred diagrams. At once you begin to inhale as the light increases,

then exhale as the light dims. One cycle lasts about eleven seconds (10.73 seconds to be precise), with approximately five seconds in and six seconds out, the most effective mind-body rhythm.

“The piece invites a meditative experience that encourages viewers to delve into their own thoughts,” Weinreb explains. “While this sets the stage for a multitude of interpretations that align with the concept of a mandala, the pulsating light acts in a continuous cycle to draw viewers into contemplation and separate themselves from their surroundings,” he adds. “Much like a mandala, the light flowing through the sculpture could be seen as an instrument for meditation, setting the stage to invite the pursuit of enlightenment.”

This section of the Mandala Lab invites you to think about envy and how it affects your treatment of others. Being covetous of somebody else’s success or material gains will not do much for you. Buddhist practitioners work to replace envy with positive actions that contribute collectively to a greater good. According to psychologist and neuroscientist Richard J. Davidson, founder of the Center for Healthy Minds at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, connection is one of the pillars of a healthy



Palden Weinreb  
(b. 1982, New York, NY;  
lives and works in New York, NY)  
*Untitled (Coalescence)*, 2021  
PU resin, LED lights, microprocessor  
Rubin Museum of Art  
C2021.1.1  
Courtesy of the artist

its offshoots including alternative nostril breathing. In fact, the lost art he references in the book's subtitle has a long history; breath has been a part of yogic practices and world religions including Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity for millennia. Tummo breathing, for example, is an ancient meditation technique developed by Tibetan Buddhist monks.

In Tummo, a practice named after the goddess of heat and passion, practitioners raise their body temperature significantly using breath and visualization techniques. About a century ago, explorer Alexandra David-Néel visited Tibet—and is believed to be the first Western woman to have done so—and described her firsthand accounts of witnessing monks melt frozen sheets of cloth from their bodies while practicing Tummo.

### What the Lama Said

In many languages, the words for breathing and spirit are the same or closely related. In yoga, breath is the tool for energy and transformational experiences, and a mindful breath is essential to Buddhist practice. I was reminded of the importance of breath in a spiritual context when taking mindful meditation classes with Lama Aria Drolma, a formally authorized Buddhist teacher and lineage holder in the Karma Kagyu tradition of Tibetan Buddhism. During sessions Lama Drolma would frequently tell us to focus on our breathing when we get distracted or lose focus. “The breath,” she said, “will bring you back.”

Lama Drolma described in a bit more depth the importance of breath in meditation. “When Buddha became enlightened, he saw that we were all interconnected,

mind. What if we used our breath purposefully to elicit a feeling of connection with others? When multiple people participate in this section of the Mandala Lab, you get to see this idea in action.

Inevitably, there comes a moment when everyone in the installation is breathing rhythmically to the same light pattern, the same amount of seconds in, the same amount of seconds out—a synchronized union among disparate strangers. When everyone is doing the same thing, you recognize that you're no different than the person beside you or across the room. And if we're all the same, how can anyone be jealous of anybody else? In this way, slowing down the breath and syncing up with others may help us cut down on envy and add a little more equanimity to our lives.

### Catching Your Breath

James Nestor's book *Breath: The New Science of a Lost Art* could be considered the bible on breathing. His journey to discovering the benefits of nose breathing and the hazards of mouth breathing (snorers, take note) takes him to Stanford University for observation, and it even involves sleeping with his mouth taped shut to prevent him from using his mouth to breathe. Breathing through the nose allows air to be warmed while also removing impurities. As a bonus, nose breathing activates nitric oxide, which releases oxygen, which is beneficial for our bodies. Mouth breathing does not.

Nestor wasn't the first to discover the positive effects of nose breathing and

and that was the nature of all beings,” she said. “In meditation practice the breath is used as an anchor to still the mind and acts as a bridge between the mind and the body. Mindfulness meditation helps to bring our attention to the present moment by focusing on the breath and seeing what arises in the mind without judgment. When the attention wanders off, bring the mind's attention back to the breath. When you're swinging between past and future your mind becomes very stressful. Our breath always gives us the opportunity to connect with what is happening right now.”

Her words sound even more prescient when experiencing the Mandala Lab, focusing on Palden Weinreb's light sculpture. Breath can bring us in contact with ourselves as well as others. I realize now how important the simple phrase “Take a deep breath” can be, whether it's gaining focus in meditation class, navigating everyday stresses in life, comforting a friend in need, or simply returning to the present moment.

Breathing can help. 🌿

Experience the power of breathing in the Mandala Lab, located on the third floor of the Rubin Museum.

**Howard Kaplan** is an editor and writer who helped found *Spiral* magazine in 2017. He currently works at the Smithsonian and divides his time between Washington, DC, and New York City.

## HEALING THROUGH PLANTS

By Christopher Griffin  
and Puneet Sabharwal



**To bring a plant home is to embark on a partnership that transcends soil, water, and sunlight. Plant care is about more than keeping a plant alive—it is a way to facilitate curiosity about our vast, interdependent ecosystem. When you develop new rituals and plant-centered traditions that recognize your place within nature, you honor your responsibility to nurture your surroundings.**

**The rituals of tending to houseplants look a little different for everyone. Some forms of plant care involve steamy weekend showers, gentle daily misting, or meticulous pruning, while others might incorporate regular propagation and sharing cuttings with friends. You might talk to your plants over morning tea, meditate on their growth, or show them off to visitors and internet strangers. Whatever routines you develop, you will soon find that creating space for plant care does as much for your own well-being as it does for your plants.**

Here are two possible rituals for your plant journey:

### NAME YOUR PLANT

**Modern buying culture is designed around disposability, and too often houseplants are treated like expendable tokens of sympathy or celebration that are lucky to survive a few weeks in a new home before suffering a neglectful demise. Giving your plant a name transcends this relationship by honoring its existence as a living creature.**

### MINDFUL GARDENING

**Tending to your garden as a means of meditation can lead to lovely botanical explorations. Ground yourself and be fully present in the moment; play your favorite music and let it fill the room; put on an outfit that makes you feel fabulous; pour yourself a delicious cocktail; and begin your viridescent adventure of nurturing the nature you have brought into your home. Don't rush the process of caring for your garden; enjoy it and make it something you look forward to.**

**Christopher Griffin** is the assistant director of the NYU LGBTQ+ Center and cares for over two hundred green gurls in their lil Brooklyn oasis of an apartment. An educator at heart, Christopher started their Instagram account, @plantkween, in 2016 as a way to share the many lessons, lush adventures, and simple joys that come with being a plant parent. Christopher recently released their first book, *You Grow, Gurl: Plant Kween's Lush Guide to Growing Your Garden*.

**Puneet Sabharwal** is the CEO and cofounder of Horti, a plant subscription company. Raised in North India, Puneet spent his childhood living in a religious commune with his family and is currently training to become a psychedelic therapist. He cares for more than seventy houseplants in his Brooklyn apartment, where he loves to host folks for chai time. Puneet recently released his first book, *Happy Plant: A Beginner's Guide to Building Healthy Plant Care Habits*.



ILLUSTRATION BY OSHEEN SIVA

# PSYCHEDELIC

**THE HEAT WAS STIFLING.** As the steam rose from water being poured over the fire-heated stones in the center of the sweat lodge, Maria Farfan laid down for a reprieve from the heat. It was the Colombian native's first time participating in an indigenous ceremony in the highlands of her homeland, and the first time she consumed ayahuasca, a psychoactive tea derived from several plants endemic to the Amazon rainforest.

As her body melded with the earthen floor, she was suddenly overwhelmed with sadness as she remembered how she'd polluted or wasted precious natural resources throughout her life. "I recognized all the damage that I had done to the earth," she said. But in that moment of realization she also had a vision. She became a part of the earth. The flowers began speaking to her. The mountains were breathing with her. And

as Mother Earth forgave her, a pink rose bloomed from the center of her heart. "I felt that my apologies were well received by Mother Earth."

Since that first psychedelic journey more than ten years ago, Farfan has dedicated her life to learning how indigenous peoples use sacred entheogenic plant medicines in North and South America and how to facilitate these types of experiences for others looking to heal or expand their consciousness and deepen their spiritual practice.

Farfan is part of a burgeoning global psychedelic movement, commonly referred to as the psychedelic renaissance, that is infiltrating mainstream culture. After decades of criminalization, states across the United States are now decriminalizing or legalizing the use of magic mushrooms and ayahuasca. Major research institutions, including Johns Hopkins Medicine and the University of California, San Francisco, are conducting clinical trials researching the potential for psychedelics like MDMA and psilocybin to treat people suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, addiction, and other mental illnesses, with promising results. And financial investors are ready to pounce on what is expected to develop into a profitable new psychedelic pharmaceutical industry.

But looming over the excitement around psychedelics and their potential to heal are overarching concerns shared by Farfan and other female doctors, historians, and psychedelic advocates, who have been largely underrepresented thus far in what they describe as a male-dominated field. As psychedelic medicine is increasingly commercialized, they worry about the potential for harm if used without the proper guidance and oversight.

"We have to be very careful in delineating how it's used," says Sara Garcia Velasquez, a physician from Mexico and associate medical director at MAPS Public Benefit Corporation, which promotes the research and development of psychedelic pharmaceuticals.

In recent years, multiple deaths have been reported among people who have participated in ayahuasca retreats in South America. Sexual assault of women in these types of psychedelic plant medicine ceremonies and in clinical psychedelic-assisted therapy sessions settings is an ongoing issue. And for people with a predisposition for psychotic disorders, using psychedelics can increase the risk of psychosis. This is why it's critical to conduct a diligent screening process

# RENAISSANCE

◆

The women spreading cautious optimism about ancient rituals and sacred plant medicines

BY *Teresa Tomassoni*



before selecting people to participate in the many current psychedelic drug trials being conducted globally, says Katrin Preller, a neuroscientist researching the efficacy of psilocybin as a treatment for alcoholism at the Psychiatric University Hospital Zurich in Switzerland.

Putting a price on psychedelic medicine may also prevent some populations who could really benefit from their use from having access to them, exacerbating existing inequities in healthcare for the uninsured and other marginalized communities, says Velasquez. Already, the popularization of sacred plant medicine is jeopardizing access to these medicines for the very people who have traditionally used them for centuries, says Farfan. In Mexico, for example, the peyote cactus is endangered due to overharvesting for commercial purposes.

How to address these myriad challenges in the growing field of psychedelics is part of an ongoing discussion with few clear answers as of yet, says Velasquez, who

**Remembering the sacredness of these medicines is vital, says Buch. When that spiritual intent is removed, she said, "It's just a drug."**

has been overseeing MDMA-assisted therapy trials for people with PTSD. However, learning how ancient cultures have integrated plant medicine into their daily lives for thousands of years may provide some guidance.

"If we put psychedelic science back into its cultural context, it actually explodes with opportunities," says Erika Dyck, psychedelic historian and professor at the University of Saskatchewan in Canada.

For millennia, indigenous peoples all over the world have used entheogenic plant medicines such as peyote, San Pedro, iboga, ayahuasca, and sacred mushrooms for healing, achieving expanded states of consciousness, and communing with nature and the divine. Some of the most ancient Hindu texts, known as the Vedas, reference Soma, a plant-based elixir believed to have had psychedelic properties that was consumed and offered to the gods during religious ceremonies, says Kamyia Buch, a psychedelic educator based in South India and founder of the Entheogenic Society India, an online and in-person network dedicated to fostering awareness around the traditional use of psychedelics worldwide.

Remembering the sacredness of these medicines is vital, says Buch. When that spiritual intent is removed, she said, "It's just a drug."

Traditionally, these medicines were rarely used in isolation from other spiritual practices. They were combined with other disciplines including meditation and pranayama, or breathwork, says Buch.

Even currently, when indigenous peoples from South America partake in ayahuasca ceremonies, for example, they are encouraged to abstain from certain foods or behaviors before and after they ingest the medicine so as to prepare the body and maximize its potential for healing, says Farfan. In Native North American peyote ceremonies, she says, the medicine is just one part of a very structured and communal ceremony that involves singing, feasting, and calling upon the natural elements for guidance. "The ritual itself is a healing practice."

These processes are just as important as taking the actual medicine, says

Farfan, who is enrolled in a one-year psychedelic assisted therapy program at the Integrative Psychiatry Institute in an effort to bridge ancestral healing traditions with contemporary psychedelic medicine. They prepare the body and mind for what can be a physically and emotionally taxing experience, albeit powerful. The ritual and ceremony are means for remaining grounded during expanded states so participants can more easily integrate the spiritual experiences they may have. The ceremonial context also helps sustain the long-term healing effects of these medicines, she says.

Drawing from these indigenous practices, the psychiatric community involved in conducting clinical trials with psychedelics has already begun to create more ritualistic structured parameters for participants. For example, in the MDMA-assisted therapy sessions Velasquez oversees, participants are required to engage in several therapy sessions before and after being administered MDMA. In the session where they consume the medicine, they are accompanied by a

facilitator the entire time. They may also listen to specific music to potentiate the session. All of these things help create what is commonly referred to as a safe "set and setting" in order to minimize harm and create an optimal experience for those taking psychedelics.

And it's working. Study results, thus far, have shown a significant percentage of people with PTSD showed improvement after participating in MDMA-assisted therapy sessions. "They were no longer subjected to this repetition of pain and trauma they'd been subjected to for so many years," says Velasquez. Much credit is due to the indigenous peoples who helped pave the way for this breakthrough science, she said.

"We wouldn't have gotten to where we are without incorporating ancestral traditions of ritual." 🌿

**Teresa Tomassoni** is a journalist reporting on social and environmental issues, particularly as they pertain to indigenous peoples. She has lived, studied, and reported in Latin America, Asia, and Australia, and holds degrees in journalism from the CUNY Graduate School of Journalism and international health and social work from LIU Global, a program of Long Island University.

# Finding the Divine in a Creative Life

**INFLUENCED BY HER EXPERIENCES WITH PSYCHEDELICS,** Allyson Grey has created abstract visionary art for over forty years. In 1996, she co-founded CoSM, Chapel of Sacred Mirrors, an inter-spiritual church with her life partner, Alex Grey, as a space to contemplate and honor art as a spiritual path.

## Allyson Grey's secret writing and visionary art

INTERVIEW BY  
*Teresa Tomassoni*



**Teresa Tomassoni: How have mystical experiences influenced your work and helped you transcend what you thought was possible as a visionary artist?**

Allyson Grey: In 1969, I began experimenting with psychedelics, primarily LSD. At that time, I saw myself as an agnostic Jew and art student activist, committed to ending the draft and Vietnam War, supporting civil rights and the women's movement. In 1971, I read the book *Be Here Now*, wherein Ram Dass tells of his personal transformation after taking LSD by himself in silence in a dark room where he witnessed "the White Light."

Taking his experience as an opening, I dosed LSD in a way I had not yet tried—lying quietly alone in my dark bedroom. In that journey, I saw Secret Writing wafting in ribbons through the air and hovering over all surfaces. This ineffable, untranslatable symbol system made of light was, to me, God's communication, and I thought, "God is the word chosen to represent this undeniable connectedness with the holy." Secret Writing transformed my life and my artwork, as did the elements of Chaos and Order in subsequent LSD journeys. An artist's content and subject matter is their most important creative choice.

To portray "the White Light" has always been the highest intention of my art. Later, Ram Dass became our teacher who greatly influenced our lives.

**How has the act of making art become a healing spiritual practice for you?**

Concentrating while making art, especially when the practice is labor intensive, can be a personal meditation to calm the soul. Meditation is the royal road that contributes to the mind's focus and wellness. As a part of our spiritual life, Alex and I practice a seated meditation every morning and a painting meditation for several hours every evening before bed. Meditation practices such as walking, chanting, mantra, prayer, or making art with a spiritually focused intention all encourage us to experience consecutive moments of NOW.

**How can art liberate us?**

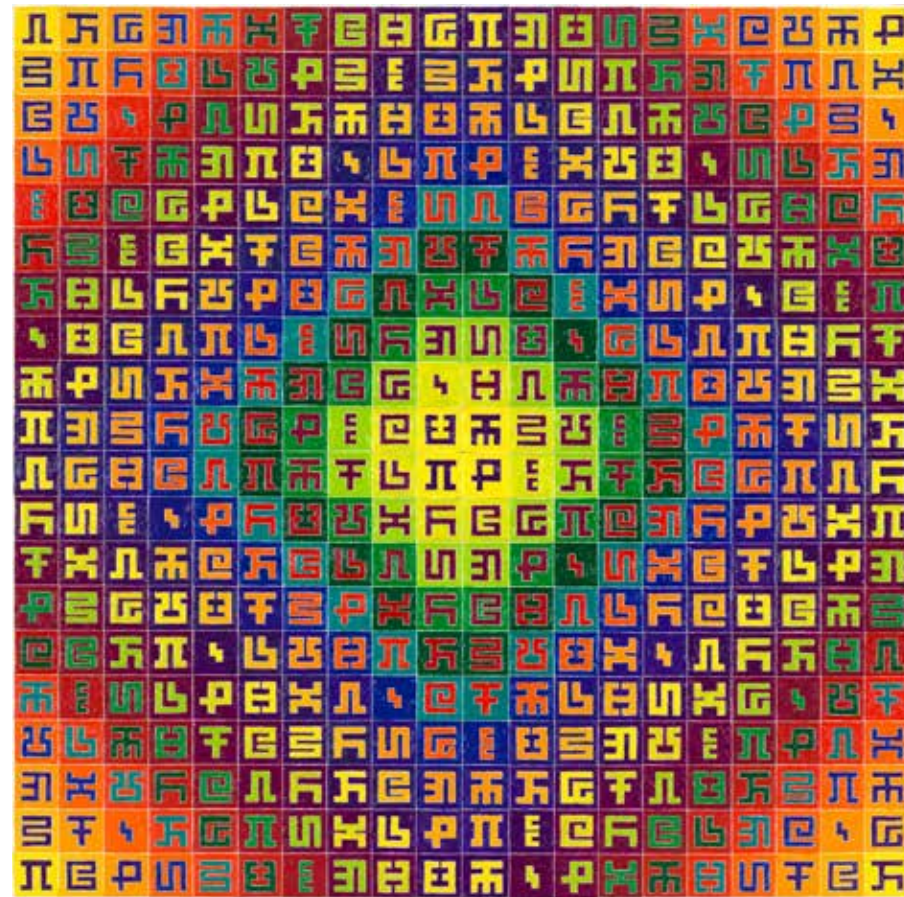
Buddhists teach a principle called liberation through seeing. Art can serve as a meditation tool. For example, someone may meditate on a mandala drawing or painting, which represents a centric image that evokes wholeness, totality, infinity, timelessness, and unity. Or they may meditate on a Tibetan Buddhist thangka painting of the deity Vajrabhairava,

conqueror of the Lord of Death, to vanquish a fear of death or loss. In studying this painting, viewers may see the deity breathing in rainbow ribbons and exhaling grey smoke. They are encouraged to follow the lead of the pictorial representation as they breathe through their meditation with the intention of liberating the mind. Any object, and especially art created for this purpose, has this capacity to bring enlightenment to the practitioner. Buddha is said to have held up a lotus flower during a meditation that resulted in one inspired student experiencing spontaneous liberation.

**How can one who does not necessarily identify as an artist cultivate a creative healing practice?**

Everyone was once an artist, a dancer, a singer. That creativity is a healing force is well known to practitioners of art therapy. By taking a subjective thought and turning it into an objective “thing” outside of our mind, we can study and release a negative thought or positive intention. Those who have had trauma—and who hasn’t?—can feel that benefit and uplifting in every creative act.

**How can art help us transcend limited notions of spirituality and even heal us from possible harm induced by inherited religious practices or beliefs?**



Allyson Grey; *Complimentary Mandala*; 2016; 24 x 24 in.; oil on wood panel; © Allyson Grey, 2022

Most of what we know of the world’s religions comes from art, including the written word. Our art can pictorialize or objectify a difficult past and be a healing force. Art can envision a positive future and can aid in vanquishing negative thoughts and emotions. It is a spiritual practice to let love infuse our creative life and let the past die behind us. To enhance the benefits of creativity, play spiritual music, listen to a spiritual teacher, pray or recite mantras while creating art. To infuse your art practice with spirit, allow focus and concentration to guide your creative time.

**How do artists heal others by sharing their work? Is this an intention of your work?**

Any act with the intention to benefit others offers healing. Embedded with positive intentions, art may plant a seed of liberation in the mindstream of the viewer.

**How do you foster collective healing through art?**

Because Alex and I characterize art as a spiritual practice, we hold Art Church on each new moon, a time of intention setting. In Art Church, CoSM members make art together in silence with a music playlist relevant or conducive to a chosen theme. An upcoming theme, for example, is *Creating a Life You Love*. After the meditation we show our results and share our experience of the art meditation. Places like the Rubin Museum or CoSM offer an environment conducive to meditation and healing through the observation of art.

**Allyson Grey** is a conceptual artist, abstract painter, co-founder of CoSM, Chapel of Sacred Mirrors, and a long-time mentor and influencer of the contemporary visionary art movement. She has been the editor and co-author of countless articles and over a dozen books, including eleven volumes of *CoSM Journal of Visionary Culture*, co-founded with Alex Grey. Allyson has been a featured presenter at many conferences, including the Women’s Visionary Congress, Horizons Conference, and World Psychedelic Forum.

About the Museum

# The Rubin Museum of Art

WHERE CONTEMPORARY MINDS MEET THE ART AND WISDOM OF THE HIMALAYAS

Through Himalayan art, cultures, and ideas, the Rubin Museum of Art examines big questions about what it means to be human today, with the intent of creating a more compassionate, resilient world. With its globally renowned collection, largely centered around art from the Tibetan Plateau, the Rubin fosters understanding and appreciation of this region by relating its art and ideas to our shared human experience today. Inspired by the philosophical traditions of Buddhism and Hinduism and aligned with ongoing research into learning, behavior, and the brain, the Rubin offers innovative exhibitions and programs that examine provocative ideas across the arts and explore the mind. Through this work, the Museum serves as a space for reflection and personal transformation, opening windows to inner worlds so visitors can better navigate outer ones.

**MUSEUM HOURS**

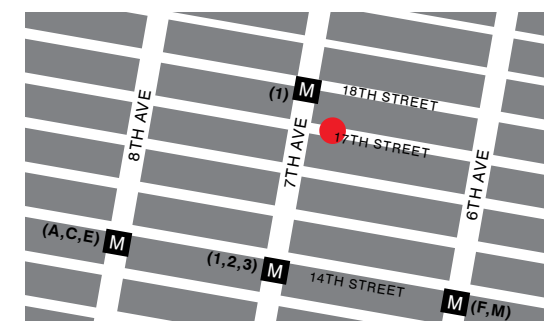
Monday CLOSED  
 Tuesday CLOSED  
 Wednesday CLOSED  
 Thursday 11:00 AM–5:00 PM  
 Friday 11:00 AM–10:00 PM\*  
 Saturday 11:00 AM–5:00 PM  
 Sunday 11:00 AM–5:00 PM

\*Free admission every Friday from 6:00–10:00 PM

Visit [RubinMuseum.org](http://RubinMuseum.org) for up-to-date open hours.

**VISIT**

The Rubin Museum of Art | 150 West 17th Street | New York, NY



**CONNECT WITH US**

Explore the collection, attend an online or in-person program, and receive the latest updates on our exhibitions and event listings!

- Visit us online at [RubinMuseum.org](http://RubinMuseum.org)
- Join our email list at [RubinMuseum.org/ENews](mailto:RubinMuseum.org/ENews)
- Follow us on social media @RubinMuseum



- Download our free app, *The Rubin*, and enjoy audio content about art from our collection in the palm of your hand.

## Exhibitions

Through the lens of Himalayan art, we journey with all who are curious to explore our shared human experience and consciously and insightfully navigate the complexities of our world today.



**Gateway to Himalayan Art**  
Start here for an introduction to the rich artistic traditions of the region, illuminating key figures, symbols, ideas, practices, materials, and techniques presented throughout the Museum.

**Mandala Lab: Where Emotions Can Turn to Wisdom**  
Consider the power of transforming complex emotions in the Museum's newest interactive space, featuring five thought-provoking installations inspired by Buddhist principles.

**Masterworks: A Journey through Himalayan Art**  
Journey across geography and more than a thousand years of history, tracing artistically and historically significant works from the Rubin's collection as well as new acquisitions and gifts.

**The Tibetan Buddhist Shrine Room**  
Step into the *Shrine Room* for a moment of contemplation, beauty, or wonder. An ongoing focal point of the Rubin Museum and a visitor favorite, this immersive installation features art from the collection and is inspired by traditional shrines.

**Shrine Room Projects: Rohini Devasher/ Palden Weinreb**  
In dialogue with the *Tibetan Buddhist Shrine Room* at the center of the gallery, contemporary artists reinterpret traditional religious iconography and practices through sculptural installation, painting, and video.

**Healing Practices: Stories from Himalayan Americans**  
**March 18, 2022–January 16, 2023**  
Explore the diverse ways that Tibetan Buddhist artworks and practices have served as road maps to well-being with objects from the Rubin Museum's collection set alongside stories from Himalayan Americans. The exhibition highlights the many ways these living traditions are transformed and adopted for today's world.



## Programs

online and in-person

The Rubin presents an array of thematic public programs, from dialogues on mind science to art-making workshops for families that dive deeper into the art and ideas of Himalayan art.

**Brainwave**  
**Fall 2022**  
Our longest running talk series investigates how our minds shape our everyday experiences by combining the most compelling advancements in science with wisdom rooted in Himalayan traditions.

**Family Sundays**  
**Sundays, 1:00–3:00 PM in the Mandala Lab**  
Join the Rubin Museum every Sunday in the Mandala Lab for an afternoon of activities both kids and grown-ups will enjoy. Recommended for ages 3 and older with accompanying adults.

**Empowering Caregivers**  
Designed specifically for caregivers, this program invites participants to examine the power dynamics in their lives and open their minds to a different understanding of their own agency.



**Mindful Connections**  
**For visitors with dementia and their caregivers**  
Every month trained guides facilitate an online experience designed to promote engagement with works of art and other participants.

**Himalayan Heritage**  
Rubin Museum educator and Himalayan region expert Tashi Chodron hosts a recurring program that explores the culture, art, history, and sacred traditions of the Himalayan region through discussions, performances, and meetings with guest speakers.

**Mindfulness Meditation**  
Practice the art of attention in this weekly forty-five-minute program for beginners and skilled meditators alike. Each session is inspired by a different work of art from the Rubin Museum's collection and includes an opening talk, a twenty-minute sitting session led by an expert teacher, and a closing discussion. A podcast of each recorded program is also available online.

For current listings, visit [RubinMuseum.org/events](https://RubinMuseum.org/events).

*All programs subject to change.*

## More Than a Museum

We mix arts and culture with a social experience. In addition to our exhibitions and programs, discover unique items from our shop, or make the Rubin the lively venue for your next private in-person or online event.

**The Shop**  
Take a memory of the Museum home with you or give a gift from the Rubin! The shop's selection of jewelry, textiles, books, and other treasures includes an array of unique items, many unavailable anywhere else.

All proceeds from the shop support the Rubin Museum of Art, and items can be purchased in store or online at [RubinMuseum.org](https://RubinMuseum.org). Members receive a 10% discount on all purchases.

**Private Events and Rentals**  
Whether you're planning a virtual event or need to make a professional conference more inspiring, consider the Rubin Museum for your private event or rental needs. Our expert events team makes it easy to plan, with a range of

wellness experiences, happy hour packages, art workshops, and family-friendly experiences that can be customized for an in-person, virtual, or hybrid event. Learn more at [RubinMuseum.org/space-rentals](https://RubinMuseum.org/space-rentals).

## You Make It Possible

The Rubin Museum is only as strong as our supporters. You help us create a space for learning, contemplation, inspiration, community, and art. Join us! Visit [RubinMuseum.org/support](https://RubinMuseum.org/support) to learn more.

**Become a member or give the gift of membership**

Members get more! Benefits include free admission, shop discounts, exclusive tours, talks, and programs, and much more.

Membership to the Rubin Museum of Art is also a special gift that friends and family of all ages can enjoy throughout the year.

**Make a donation**  
Your support helps make art and timeless wisdom come alive for thousands of people each year, bringing inspiration and meaning into our visitors' lives.



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## A MAGAZINE AT THE INTERSECTION OF ART, SCIENCE, AND HIMALAYAN CULTURES

*Spiral* asks big questions at the center of our shared human experience: life and death, connection to one another and our world, identity, states of consciousness, the cosmos, and the nature of existence. The Healing Practices issue offers insights into individual and collective modes of repair and recovery, exploring how we seek solace and undergo transformation.

#HEALINGPRACTICES

# RubinMuseum.org

Visit [RubinMuseum.org/ENews](https://RubinMuseum.org/ENews) to stay up to date with exhibitions, programming, and more.

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