

The Old Mendicant

Being rock, being gas, being mist, being Mind,
being the mesons travelling among the galaxies at the speed of light,
you have come here, my beloved.
And your blue eyes shine, so beautiful, so deep.
You have taken the path traced for you
from the non-beginning and the never-ending.
You say that on your way here
you have gone through many millions of births and deaths.
Innumerable times you have been transformed
into firestorms in outer space.
You have used your own body
to measure the age of the mountains and rivers.
You have manifested yourself
as trees, grass, butterflies, single-celled beings,
and as chrysanthemums.
But the eyes with which you look at me this morning
tell me that you have never died.
Your smile invites me into the game
whose beginning no one knows,
the game of hide-and-seek.

O green caterpillar, you are solemnly using your body
to measure the length of the rose branch that grew last Summer.
Everyone says that you, my beloved, were just born this Spring.
Tell me, how long have you been around?
Why wait until this moment to reveal yourself to me,
carrying with you that smile which is so silent and so deep?
O caterpillar, suns, moons, and stars flow out each time I exhale.
Who knows that the infinitely large must be found in your tiny body?

Upon each point on your body,
thousands of Buddha fields have been established.
With each stretch of your body, you measure time
from the non-beginning to the never-ending.

The great mendicant of old is still there on Vulture Peak,
contemplating the ever-splendid sunset.

Gautama, how strange!

Who said that the Udumbara flower blooms only once every 3,000 years? *

The sound of the rising tide you cannot help hearing it if you have an attentive ear.

Thich Nhat Hanh

**This flower is said to bloom at the birth of a Buddha, and only then*