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Six from the Book of Silences

Robert Bringhurst

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Uddalaka Aruni: A Song for the Weavers

Earth is woven of water, as water
of air. The world is earth, and the earth
is all this. This is that. That is you,
Svetaketu, my son. The outer is inner.

The sea has no end, in spite of its edges.
The seed is the tree's thought. The seed
is the speech of the tree. The seed is the tree
thinking and speaking its knowledge of trees.

The mind is the white of the egg in its opening
shell, the mind is the ripening
meat of the seed. Out. In. Out. In. What is
is the weaving. We with our breathing

are sitting here carding and spinning the air.

Wáng Bì

Wáng Bì of Wei
 lies dead in his hut
 at age 24. His mind
 is now one with the mountain.
 His flesh has been grass,
 voles, owls,
 owl pellets, grass.

The use of the *is*
 is to point to the *isn't*.
 Go back, said Wáng Bì:
 Look again at the mind
 of the sky and the heart
 of the mountain. The mind
 is unbeing. The mind
 of heaven and earth
 is unbeing. Go back,
 look again. What is,
 is. It consists
 of what *isn't*. *Are*
 is the plural of *is*; *is*
 is the plural of *isn't*. Go back,
 look again. What *isn't*,
 is. This
 is the fusion of substance
 and function, the heart of the sky
 and the mind of the mountain.

To be, said Wáng Bì,
 without being: this
 is the way to have virtue.
 Don't fondle it, stand
 on what *isn't*. We sink, said Wáng Bì,
 when we set out to stand on what is.

Jízàng

I can affirm
that there is nothing to affirm
and there is nothing to deny.
What neither is nor isn't is
what is. It is
unthinkable, unspoken. So
we speak of it as ultimate
and ordinary, absolute,
routine. And this
two-sidedness
is its function.

Línjì Yìxuán

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Take no shit, said Línjì.
 Behead the Buddhas. Cow the pig of the world.

Take hold of it, use it, but do not
 give it a name: this is the ultimate principle.

Sleep, eat, pee:
 this is the essence of the way.

Build a boat in the mountains,
 a ferry at sea,

but no speculation, no fortification, no bridges,
 burned or unburned.

There is nothing to do. The answer
 is perched on your lips like a bird.

If it nests in your mouth, how will you speak?
 How will you weave if it nests in your hands?

Singing and dancing! These are the signs
 of the silent and still.

Is? No. Isn't? No. Is and isn't? Neither is nor isn't?
 No! No! None of these and more.

Host and guest, we eat one another
 for breakfast. This too is the way.

What you see in the eyes of the deer as it wheels
 and flees is not terror but horror.

Only a man with no hands
 can reorder the world.

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To hear in the chirp of the bird the original
isn't, and in the answering chirp of the bird
that what is is what isn't and this is
the whole of the dusty world
is to die a good death,
trampled by watersnakes, torn
on the antlers of the snowshoe hare.

There is nowhere to go. Nothing
is *there*. What is
is all *here*, and what isn't
is everywhere.

You can begin by renouncing
your home, if you are so brash as to think
that you have one. Know this: the true face
has no features, the true man no name
and of course no address.

Dying is one more simple thing everyone does,
like scratching the ear and undressing.

Thought and not thinking
are one. Is and isn't
are one. Sword, swordsman, stroke
and not striking are one. One and not one
are one. One is not two. One is also
not one. This arithmetic
lives in the flowering
heart of the world.

Danxiá Zǐchún

The whole earth closes
like a fist and touches,
once, the rimless drum,

and slowly opens
like a rose
while no one listens.

The skull on the hill
wakes from its dream
before morning.

Impeccably dressed
though it is
in moonlight and moss,

and well fed, and well
rested, it gives
not a thought to returning.

Nánquán Pǔyuàn

Let me tell you a story. The gardener
and the cook sat together
in the garden. A jay sang. The gardener

tapped his fingernails against
his wooden chair. A jay sang
again. The gardener tapped

his chair again. A jay
did not sing. The gardener,
for the third time, tapped

his wooden chair. The cook was sitting
quietly, while all this
was happening, sipping his tea.