

# **Meditator's Poems**

## **Inspired by Godwin and Nilambe**

### **Preface**

This is a selection of poems written by meditators in the course of their time at Nilambe Meditation Centre: whether inspired by Godwin himself, or the experiences of the centre's spirit and daily life, or by its marvelous setting in nature, high up above a tea plantation, just below a ridge covered with pine trees, surrounded by natural woodland and grassland, and enjoying wide views out over the rolling hill country of central Sri Lanka.

One well-travelled meditator described Nilambe as the most beautiful meditation centre in Asia; and Godwin very much encouraged meditators to explore and relate to the natural surroundings. What other meditation centre had 'Watching the Sunset' on its daily schedule? And he also encouraged meditators to express their experiences in art, writing and poetry.

Many of the poems were offered directly to Godwin – and then the idea came to put out a book for people to write in and read. The following are some of the results, echoing the spirit of Godwin and Nilambe.

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Meditator's Poems - 4

**Meditations**

The misty breakers clash on peaks.

The ocean surges through the trees.

Inside the meditation hall, I think:

“The mountains are but waves.”

But ah, those liberated ones who sang the psalms;

They saw, they saw ‘The ALL’, illuminated in a flash,

The waves, the mountains, light and wind

Inside, outside – a boundlessness.

*Suvimalee Karunaratne*

**Sadhu, sadhu, sadhu**

I must confess, it was a habit  
long since dead in me;  
not the naked homage  
but the ornamenting of it with Pali verses,  
incense, flowers and lamps.

Yet here at Nilambe at chanting time  
the hall becomes a glowing hush  
with something far more palpable  
than an aura round a candle flame  
or the fragrance of a flower.

The simple shrine becomes a blaze of light  
and in the centre Buddha smiled.

“Can you feel ...” he seemed to say,  
“the meaning of that stanza now?”

And I recalled to mind the lines  
that had so baffled me before;

“More beautiful than forest and sylvan shrines  
or parks with lotus ponds ...” so ran the verse,  
'is man's humanity.'

As we gently chanted sadhu, sadhu, sadhuuuu”  
We were as one, bathing in the crystal waters  
of the Triple Gem.

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**Nilambe**

I dragged this bag of bones  
Up the hill to NILAMBE.  
Wonderful Nilambe,  
So high up in the cloud-land.  
I walked and talked,  
Sat and thought,  
And sometimes I even tried to catch the moon,  
but like a fool, it slipped through my hands!

*Chris*

**Days slowly passing by...**

Days slowly passing by;  
Clouds gathering  
    then dispersing;  
Mist covering hills  
    then disappearing into sun's rays;  
And the morning birds  
    singing their songs  
    always in time -  
    (unlike anything else in Sri Lanka!)  
With his begging bowl  
    sometimes empty, sometimes full -  
    (he or bowl?)  
Saffron-cladded monk with a bald head  
    climbing Nilambe hill  
    once again.

*Bante*

**By the reservoir**

At one with Nature –  
see birds skim over water  
snapping at voidness.

In mirror-like lake  
what image is reflected?  
Only passing wing.

Lotus floats unmoved  
as wind ruffles lake's surface –  
anchored in deep mud.

Heavy cloud gathers –  
birds awing swoop all around  
in frantic dance.

*Jeanne Mynett*

**Nilambe Poems - For Godwin**

These silent mountains  
repose like pregnant women  
filled with warm poems.

Each evening the same and ancient sun  
bows and reluctantly withdraws behind  
the same old mountain. And yet  
never is the sunset twice the same.  
The tireless sky-god with invisible brush  
paints coral, amber, pearl and gold  
curtains, cushions, paths and snowbanks  
on silk that languidly dissolves as the stars  
appear in their predicted places  
and the moon.

How many times the sun has set  
And I didn't even watch!  
How many unrepeatable sunsets remain for me?

*Bill Buchanan*

**I was led...**

I was led  
into the forest  
to meditate  
on the tiger  
being seen there:  
what a close look  
I had  
at fear of mind  
and trust of spirit.

*Sami*

Meditator's Poems - 11

**For Leelasena - 'the small cook'**

At lunchtime  
I heard you singing -  
Lunch was good.

*Sami*

Mediator's Poems - 12

**For Peter - 'the fat cook'**

There is the laughter,  
there are the moods:  
but mostly  
you are  
loving-kindness  
to me.

*Sami*

**On the ridge...**

On the ridge  
Standing still, facing the pine wood -  
The wind is howling through the trees  
But I am standing firm at the roots  
With the valley sloping down behind.

Beneath the tress tall grasses bend.  
I wonder at the power of the wind  
Translated into green waves of movement  
And a whistling call.

I cannot face the valley,  
I must face the wind.  
I long to feel it whole in me,  
I know when sound, smell and sight together fuse.

The eagle flying overhead  
Tips its wings for the second time,  
Dipping into the wind in the trees.  
My breath follows its wing  
Until it disappears.

I stand rooted in the shadows of wind and bird...  
For a long time...

**For Godwin - 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2000**

(One month after Godwin's passing away)

High green wormy paradise  
Here I am again,  
Legs crossed, drinking tea,  
Exhaling, sharing blood space  
With creepers and fliers.  
Again by night - small bright candles.  
Again by day - myriad bird songs,  
Distant mountains, meandering river.  
Thank you, Godwin. I remember  
Your beautiful crooked smile.  
Now silence, teach silence,  
Now peace, teach peace.

*Frank Gorin*

**For Godwin - 7 April 2000, Evening Meditation**

Curling of smoke round  
Candle flames: flickering light:  
The drumming of rain.

Two photos catching  
At Godwin's living presence:  
Catching at my throat.

See Godwin's cushions  
Empty - yet carrying still  
His missing presence.

Everything has changed -  
But nothing has changed, sitting  
In quiet candle-light.

The croaking of frogs  
Succeeds the beating rainstorm:  
World is washed afresh.

*Jeanne Mynett*

Meditator's Poems - 16

**If Godwin were here...**

If Godwin were here  
Gracing his memorial bust  
He'd smile, wouldn't you?

*Anonymous*

**Godwin's Ears**

Have you ever noticed  
Godwin's ears?  
Big, long, hairy ears?  
Maybe like Buddha's  
Those yogi's ears  
(Or like Yogi bear).  
How many secrets  
have been cautiously whispered  
in those ears?  
How many sad stories?  
Godwin's ears  
like satellite dishes  
finely tuned  
to the sorrows of this world.  
Godwin, why do you have  
Such big ears?

*Bernard*

**For Godwin**

Beauty of morning  
promise of sun:  
the heart jumps -  
- Silence -

You tell me  
I am no good  
Until  
'I' am gone -  
then what will you say?  
- Nothing  
You will be happy

*Anonymous*

**The Place Where the World Always Whispers**

Rising and falling, rising and falling  
like sound and silence  
like the inwardness of winter  
and the outwardness of summer.

Sitting, we see the undulations of our lives  
as the train weaves its way slowly  
to the foothills of the great mountain  
through darkness and light  
through tunnels and bright valleys.

Looking out we see the landscape  
folding and unfolding like a great fan  
that opens and closes;  
looking in we stumble through the doors  
and windows of our lives, finding fragments  
of forgotten time.

Looking out we see a landscape vanishing,  
receding into the horizon  
as the train moves ever upwards;  
looking in we slip into a nether world  
of silence and forgotten dreams.

THUS, I pray

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May you discover the deep joy  
embedded in life's ceaseless change  
may your pain be washed away  
in the streams that flow to the vast ocean;  
and may your thoughts, like leaves, fall  
gently earthwards and be swept away  
by the wind, there in the place where  
the wind always whispers - Nilambe

*Yehuda*

Mediator's Poems - 21

**Nilambe Haiku**

Peaks rise from the mist  
like islands, as an ocean  
strives to reclaim the land.

*Geoffrey Tarkington*

Meditator's Poems - 22

**2 o'clock in the night...**

2 o'clock in the night.

Sweet Nilambe is fast asleep.

A single candle burns in the night -

Ardent yogi, 'Goenka freak'?

No, just Benga sharpening sharpening his brand new  
pencils.

*Geoffrey Tarkington*

**Deep in the night...**

Deep in the night,  
Sick in my bed,  
A single bird sings.  
Who is lonely?

*Geoffrey Tarkington*

**Nilambe's Child**

And so I shall go back into the world  
And carry with me as much peace and open-heartedness as  
I can.

After all -

I have been forged in thunder and guarded by eagles  
Surely I am equal to the task?

*Geoffrey Tarkington*

**Just Is**

Godwin and gadfly,  
Rainstorm and blood-worm;  
Weeds hold the soul together.

*Geoffrey Tarkington*

Meditator's Poems - 26

**Nilambe, it's whispered...**

Nilambe, it's whispered,  
May be the place  
Of the Buddha's return.

*Geoffrey Tarkington*

**Listening to sounds...**

Listening to sounds;  
Who is the listener, to  
Whom belongs the sounds?

*Anonymous*

**A place more tranquil...**

A place more tranquil  
I have not seen.  
A place more beautiful  
I have rarely been.  
Fireflies flitter by  
Like fallen stars.  
Animal life, both day and night  
No sound of cars  
To break the calm  
Before the storm.

In my sorrow  
I shall leave Nilambe tomorrow  
But Nilambe will surely never  
leave my heart.  
Thank you, Nilambe  
For helping to create  
This work of art.

*Anonymous*

**Evening**

My breath  
and I,  
little mosquito,  
and I,  
and a singing  
night-greeting:  
Bless you  
evening,  
Bless you  
silence,  
in softness enfolding  
your perfumes of night,  
dancing the earth to sleep  
dancing all breath to sleep.  
Be well little creature,  
be well  
earth  
and breath,  
breath  
and earth.

*Anonymous*

**Neither the beginning, nor the end...**

Neither the beginning, nor the end,  
Is Nilambe.  
Many have trod the path on their journeys,  
Many have felt grief and taken joy.

Neither the silence, nor the hubbub  
Is Nilambe.  
Just nature and her soothing sounds  
Calling us to be at peace.

Neither the answer, nor the question  
Is Nilambe.  
But many have learnt  
As I have learnt.

*Hannah*

**The energy is high...**

The energy is high, the moon is round,  
the vibes, the love, the unity is encompassing.

So many different people living together, meditating,  
sharing, learning, trying to understand their world.

Sweet sounds, the flickering of candle light,  
the Buddha's smiling face, words of inspiration.

I feel glad to be one of them, I've chosen  
to be here, in life's greatest challenge,

Even though most of the time I doubt myself  
I'm actually heading in the right direction.  
We are all really, yet most of us don't  
realise which way to go. We've all been  
suffering for far too long, and now the exit  
has been revealed, the way out.

The door to freedom, the window to our hearts:  
It's all possible; every moment we're one step closer.

*Vicky*

**Sitting in the meditation hall...**

Sitting in the meditation hall  
- quiet, feeling little pain in my legs;  
"Shall I move or not yet?"  
Breathing in, breathing out, mindfully;  
"Be aware of your thoughts."  
Yes, I'm absolutely aware of the fact that  
My thoughts are running wild - mindfully.  
So do I - running wild -  
running into the woods, until the rock;  
standing at its top - facing the wind,  
shouting out all frustration, telling it all  
to the wind. Throwing my shirt away,  
the wind touching my skin gently  
heals my pain, my sores.  
I feel I'm becoming lighter:  
I begin to fly, playing with the wind,  
being in the hawk that flies above.  
The first time in my mind's calming down;  
the first time I feel like 'just being',  
pure and intense,  
I wonder whether this could be called  
'Meditation' too.

*Chris*

**First Day at Nilambe**

Talk of silence  
covers  
the echo of no speech.  
Less willing to be somewhere else  
with something else happening  
More remembering  
to open eyes, heart, mind,  
and more  
to what is  
NOW.

*Anonymous*

**A solitary bird sings...**

A solitary bird sings as daylight breaks:

A pure note, uncontaminated by the need for confirmation,  
approval, response.

She sings because it is her time, her nature to sing  
at the break of day.

Sitting in meditation in the twilight hall, I listen to  
her note and wonder:

Might I ever find such purity of intention, being  
amidst, or beyond, the endless succession of thoughts,  
images and self-concerns which constitute my being, my  
'self'?

Am I ever natural uncontaminated being?

What, for instance, if one day I broke into spontaneous,  
heartfelt song here at daybreak, just because it was in  
my nature at that moment to do so?

"Meditators don't disturb the peace and silence of others."

At the end of my song wouldn't I be anxiously and  
self-consciously awaiting their verdict, whether  
directly or subtly given?

And in the full light of day my 'natural' self would  
slink away and hide itself shamefacedly.

Unlike the bird, who when day ripens turns naturally  
From song to feeding, resting – simply Being.

*Jeanne Mynett (25-02-1996)*

## **Transformation - Nilambe Style**

We come with the wounds we cannot heal;  
We come with our fears, the hurts, the hatreds, the guilt  
accumulated through our lives;  
We come with our 'monsters' of anger, greed, ambition,  
aversion, grasping;  
We come with all our illusions – our demands on life, our  
ideas of how things 'ought' to be,  
our criticisms and self-criticism, our minds full of concern.

We come when our lives, or our minds – are falling apart;  
when old patterns of being no longer work for us;  
We come when we know that our old lives are empty,  
seeking something new and meaningful;  
We come when we have had enough of travelling, and need  
somewhere to set down our feet, and sort out our minds.

We come looking for space, for calm, for peace, for spiritual  
experience.

We are not prepared for the painful replaying of our old  
wounds; the uncontrollable resurgence  
of our negative mind states, for seeing our faults and  
mistakes even more clearly in the mirror of our new  
relationships here.

We are taken by surprise: we are not so free as we had  
hoped, not so clam and peaceful. There is no 'quick fix'  
after all – ten days of meditation and all will be well.

## Meditator's Poems - 36

Seeing ourselves, seeing our lives, as they really are - it is not always pleasant or ain-free. And our bodies pain us, too, with their entrenched tensions and holdings.

Long hours of being alone with ourselves teach us how unfriendly we are towards our own self, or how bored with it, always seeking outside distractions.

And others are not as kind, friendly and considerate as we would wish, don't do things 'our way', don't even seem to notice us; hurt, anger and upset so quickly arise.

Where is my clam and spiritual virtue now? Perhaps this 'spiritual life' is not for me after all!

Slowly we come down off our pedestals: our high spiritual idealisms and 'models' drop away as we experience more and more our essential humanness.

Slowly we come to see and even accept our faults and weaknesses, our injuries and woundedness, our 'monsters' and our guilt, our fundamental ignorance and confusion.

They do not disappear, as we had hoped and assumed they would, rather, we change in our way of relating to them. No longer resisting or denying them, we offer them a space in which to come and go; we explore them and make discoveries, we suffer our suffering and laugh at our absurdities.

And in relating to others, too, we allow them more space to be as they are in themselves, and not according to our models of perfection.

Meditator's Poems - 37

We come to see that final Enlightenment is a long way down  
the line - but contentment,  
happiness, a free and loving heart can be NOW!

*Jeanne Mynett (June 2001)*

**I sit on my cushion...**

I sit on my cushion, with awareness – breathing in, breathing out, sitting: endlessly repeated. A fly buzzes around my head; I open my eyes. Opposite I see a row of seated Buddhas-to-be. Some I know their names, others only their faces. Who will finish up the enlightened ones, I wonder? Thinking, thinking ....

My eyes and attention pass beyond, through the open windows – hot, icy-blue sky, brilliant sunlight. I gaze at the splendidly illuminated bush behind Sami's head, the leaves aglowing and translucent green. With awareness I penetrate these leaves, see their chlorophyll combining with the energy of the sun to produce the food the bush needs: photosynthesis I recall with wonder. And transpiration – secretly renewing the earth's oxygen supply, isn't it? Long buried memories of school biology lessons! My attention switches to the nest of the weaver birds hanging directly opposite. I have watched the comings and goings- are there yet any eggs in the nest, I question, eager and curious. Then my eye catches the deep pink glow of bougainvillea blossoms outside Godwin's room – what insects are they attracting by their brilliantly-coloured petals? And is there a scent also? And I trace the loops of a butterfly's flight – to what purpose these loops, or is it pure joy? Wherever my eyes alight I look deeply and question – and my heart fills with the beauty and wonder of it all.

Meditator's Poems - 39

“Keep the attention fixed on the breath and the posture,” the monk instructs. “And watch what thoughts are sneaking in by the back door.”

NO - I throw wide open the front door and welcome them in, these thoughts of beauty and wonder. I may never become one of the enlightened ones this way, overcoming suffering. But I will have seen deeply and appreciated the glowing jewels of beauty, goodness, joy and wonder scattered over and through this suffering world. Thank you!

*Jeanne Mynett*

## **The Day I Died**

Today I was born once more  
into a world that was  
dark and unformed;  
in peace I sat,  
breathing, sensing, being;  
and the first voice I heard  
was that of a bird  
whose song of life  
made my heart so light and happy.

Another voice also was there  
addressed to those  
who were born  
before it asked:  
is it possible  
to heal the wounds  
of yesterday  
to be whole again?

Today I was born once more,  
and was astonished  
when dark gave way to light:  
the rays of the sun  
coming through the trees  
brought warmth to the world,

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and my heart lifted up in praise.  
and as I walked this earth  
I learned to look with care  
at the nature of things around,  
at the loveliness of passing form,  
    placing my trust  
    in the process of life and death.

Today I was born once more  
and at noon I looked up  
and saw the clouds  
- so delicate and soft -  
as they passed overhead;  
    and I saw that  
    the blue of the sky beyond  
    was not scarred by their passing,  
and my heart was filled with Joy

for I also

became like the heavens  
with great space inside,  
    there things arose,  
    and had their time,  
    and went on their way again.

Today I was born one more  
and as evening came in  
the sky took on another hue,  
of yellow, and gold, and red,  
    the colours of fall  
    have their own beauty,  
and I saw that  
we all partake of these things,  
and then in my heart  
    love was born.

and I wanted to share it  
with others,  
for I understood that  
all creatures are from  
the same source,  
    so from my silence  
    my speech arose  
and it also led back there  
giving thanks for this gift of life.

Today I died once more  
To all that had gone before;  
to sorrow and joy,  
to learning and growing,  
to being at one with another,  
and my heart was empty and clear.

Meditator's Poems - 43

In the dark of night,  
as I faded from life,  
there te moon so bright shone forth,  
and I closed my eyes in peace,  
not knowing about the 'morrow.

*Jyoti (1993)*

**Nowhere to Hide**

There is nowhere to go  
and nowhere to be but here,  
so why not relax  
and be present to what is.

No movement of denial,  
no holding what is passing  
    simply being true  
    and truly being simple.

This is the best place to be:  
all life has led up to it,  
so why not trust the moment?  
Let tomorrow come when it will.

When there is only here and now  
then what else is there?  
Breathing, sensing, being;  
and the immense silence beyond  
    - isn't that enough?

*Jyoti (1993)*

**Oh, Nilambe, what is your secret...**

Oh, Nilambe, what is your secret?  
The lotus blooms in the mud,  
Peace and serenity are found in the forest.  
Life is for living with happiness and joy;  
To attain that goal Nilambe shines as a beacon.

The teaching of Lord Buddha taught and lived  
at this meditation centre.

Life begins in the womb of the mother, but  
the way of life is taught here.

Oh, Nilambe, what is your secret?  
All who come here return with an inner peace and joy.  
What a most fantastic world  
I've ever seen.

Your life may melt like wax  
but it gives light to the world.

Remember, the light can shine only in the dark: -  
You too can shine in the society of evil.

There are a variety of religions in the world  
but they all of them teach only one essence:

'Do good and avoid evil.'

May all of us understand this and attain everlasting peace.

**Letting go ...?**

Serene beauty - unblemished and incomparable;  
The right path, well balanced;  
They soothe the heart and soul.  
Gazing at 'me' and extending loving kindness  
For hours and hours - Amazing!!

Being aware ... Letting go ...

Oooooomm ... Oooooomm ... Oooooomm:  
Feel the cool breeze,  
'eyes closed', she said.  
Inhaling - exhaling;  
Feel the rhythm of 'Gentle yoga'.

True, simple and calm existence:  
Heart, soul and body bound by the spell of  
Tranquility.

Being aware ... Letting go ...

But -

Impossible to let go of this SERENITY!

**Beautiful places such as Nilambe...**

Beautiful places such as Nilambe should be training camps.

Train in these places to be soldiers of the Revolution:

The Revolution of Consciousness.

Then retreat no more, and march from these places in your  
droves –

Into the cities, the slums, the workplaces, the institutions,

The hearts of those that dwell in darkness, and, with a cry of  
joy,

Bring about the changing of minds.

*Ed Colozza*

**Anapanasati, Nilambe**

Perched auspiciously  
between teetering towers  
of tea estate  
and the constant  
greatness of wind,  
I cannot help but suspect  
even the landscape  
want us to wake up.

*Kelly Anne Graves*

**Janasutta**

Between the tangles  
of the bamboo tree,  
it emerges:  
A single corner  
of the clear  
Spring sky!

*Kelly Anne Graves*

**4.45 am**

Triangles of bone and cloth  
tuck feet against blue mats  
before the red-headed rooster  
declares his name.

And in darkness  
bodies like wicker chairs  
creak their hellos to the  
rising sun.

With muscles wrapped across form  
and knots tied at junctures  
one remembers:  
the Great Effort  
in stillness.

*Kelly Anne Graves*

## **Equanimity**

Every day  
sweeping  
dead leaves  
from the path  
to burn.

Today  
no leaves  
only golden  
trumpet flowers.

Today, sweeping  
flowers  
from the path  
to burn.

*Kelly Anne Graves*

Meditator's Poems - 52

**I**

The insects keep  
biting me  
so  
I  
just  
Say  
Hello  
and  
Goodbye.

*Monica Buning*

**Leech...**

Leech - I'm learning to love you,  
Leech - But I don't love you yet.  
Leech - I'm learning to love you.  
How far? How far can I get?

*Anonymous*

**Look at the trees...**

G: Look at the trees, they grow  
    Without expectations, so tall and strong  
S: And they grow and they grow  
    Rain comes, wind comes:  
    They just stand there and face it.

*Anonymous*

**His way**

Many years ago, two of us  
Standing together after yoga  
In the meditation hall, chatting quietly.  
Suddenly a stillness, a presence  
Was there, smiling, arms folded  
As was his way.

How he got there I shall never know,  
But he was just there, still, quiet,  
So unobtrusive he almost  
Wasn't there at all. I wonder  
Sometimes when I'm in the hall  
If he's still there, smiling, arms folded  
As was his way.

*Ewen Arnold*

## **The Spirit of Nilambe**

It's in the birdcalls  
And the frog and insect calls too.

It's in the gentle breeze  
And the wind that rushes up the hill.

It's in the sunsets, the views  
And the walks.

The meditation hall overflows with it  
As does his room and chair.

It's in Upul and Paul, Jeanne and Dennis  
And many others.

It's in the peace, the silence  
And the stillness.

It's the spirit of Nilambe,  
The spirit of Godwin.

May he rest in the peace, the silence  
And the stillness  
He made available  
To so many others.

*Ewen Arnold*

**Nilambe**

There is nowhere on earth  
Where the birds sing like this  
And where the gentle breeze  
Caresses one's cheeks like this.

There is nowhere on earth  
Where the sun shines like this.

The stillness, the silence, the peace  
Are all unique.

It is Nilambe.  
It is, quite simply,  
Home.

*Ewen Arnold*

**An evening in Nilambe**

The gentlest of rain falling,  
The slightest breeze,  
Far, far off birdsong,  
And a peace,  
And a stillness,  
At the very heart of everything.

*Ewen Arnold*

**A morning of light**

A morning of light.  
The song of an unseen bird  
Bends the ears of grass.

*Ewen Arnold*