

Dreams As Drops of Water

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I'll never really know how he felt.

Alone on the water.

Even when I try to imagine it, it seems abstract. Yes, I feel sensations. I've been on the water. But never on *that* water. Floating. Freestyle. Alone.

Maybe my imagination blocks me: because of my fear of being alone. Or is it my fear of deep water?

I didn't know that I feared deep water until one day when my stepfather brought me out to the middle of the ocean, the dark blue all around and stretching out as far as the eye could see. I couldn't feel my feet under me. I became queasy. I needed to be on dry land.

Three years ago I was giving a workshop in the Rockies. A student came in bearing a quote from what she said was the pre-Socratic philosopher Meno. It read, "How will you go about finding that thing the nature of which is totally unknown to you?" ... The student made big transparent photographs of swimmers underwater and hung them from the ceiling with the light shining through, so that to walk among them was to have the shadows of swimmers travel across your body in a space that itself came to seem aquatic and mysterious.¹

The word dissolution comes to mind. I didn't think it up on my own, though it was Patrick who sprinkled this, like a light rain, in my direction. But it's stayed with me. It's not so much fear of deep water as it is of dissolution. What if my being dissolved – melted away, extending outward from the small skiff that my stepfather navigated – merely by looking at the rippling surface beneath?

The question the student carried struck me as the basic tactical question in life. The things we want are transformative, and we don't know or only think we know what is on the other side of that transformation. Love, wisdom, grace, inspiration – how do you go about finding these things that are in some ways about extending the boundaries of the self into unknown territory, about becoming someone else?²

Patrick spoke of dissolution as a kind of freedom. A dilution of his body, an absorption into his surroundings. A surrender. A terrifying beauty. An endless unknown. For Patrick, it wasn't so much about becoming someone else, another human – but about becoming another body; a body of water. As a drop of water going from the river into the ocean.

All rivers flow into the sea, but does the sea turn back their waters? The currents of hardship pour into the sea of the Lotus Sutra and rush against its votary. The river is not rejected by the ocean; nor does the votary reject suffering. Were it not for the flowing rivers, there would be no sea.

As a drop of water, going from the river into the ocean. I try to imagine the challenges he faced; to picture the kinds of dreams that filled his nights when he wasn't paddling across the currents. Watery dreams of sunlight and tributaries, drifting in and out of consciousness, a body of half-sleep.

The works that have materialized (installations, videos, photographs) following this performative journey, this continental drift, contain and evoke that which does not dissolve completely.

And so what you see here are the traces. The journey itself can only ever be lived by the person who lived it, by one person at a time. Deep waters filling our collective unconscious, we're alone on our journey: Patrick's journey, your journey, and mine.

¹ Rebecca Solnit, *A Field Guide To Getting Lost*, p. 4

² Solnit, p. 5

³ Nichiren Daishonin, *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, Vol. 1*, p. 33

100 copies of this take-away broadside RISograph were produced for Patrick Beaulieu's *MEANDER a continental drift* shown in November/December 2015 at Pacific Sky Exhibitions, Eugene OR. This text by Victoria Stanton was written on the occasion of Mr. Beaulieu's project a visual presentation of his 30 day journey by kayak as he crisscrossed meanders that took him from the source of a river in southern Quebec, to the Atlantic Ocean at the mouth of the Hudson River in New York.