

I Am No Different From the Earth

我與大地並無二別

A Talk by Abigail Setera at the Buddha Hall of the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas on January 26, 2024
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My name is Abigail. I want to talk about my experience during one of the contemplative exercise immersions (CEI) at DRBU. During the week of CEI, the school pauses academics to introduce students to a contemplative spiritual practice. That semester, it was bowing in repentance at the Wonderful Words Hall.

It was during the fall of 2021, my second year in the MA program. We immersed ourselves in bowing for three days, which was one of the most transformative experiences I ever had. During that semester, I cared for the elderly Dharma Masters at the Tower of Blessings. I took my classes online for their health and safety, while the rest of DRBU returned to in-person courses.

It could have been better since a big part of learning at DRBU involved interacting with students and professors outside of the classroom. Even though we were on the same campus, it was as if we were miles apart. Fortunately,

我是親倫（阿比蓋爾），我想談談自己參與法大「觀照修行週」的體驗。在「觀照修行週」期間，學校會暫停專業課程，讓學生進行攝心修行。我參與的那學期是在妙語堂拜懺。

2021年秋天，我攻讀碩士學位的第二年。我們進行三天沉浸式禮拜修行，這是我有過最具自我突破的經歷之一。那學期，我負責在福居樓照顧年邁的法師們。顧及她們的健康和安全，我選擇線上課程，而法大的其他學生們已返校上課。

對我而言，線上課程並不理想，因為法大的教學非常側重課堂外師生的互動。雖然我們同在一個校園，但卻彷彿相隔千里。幸運的是，老師們在規劃即將舉行的「觀照修行週」，也考量到我的情況，讓我能夠實際參與，獲得更全面的體驗；此外

the faculty was kind enough to accommodate me for the upcoming CEI so that I could participate in person. That way, I would have a more holistic experience and connect with the instructors and my cohort without a screen barrier.

Due to Covid precautions, I had to be apart from the group. They set a bowing and meditation cushion outside the door. Initially, it felt isolating, but honestly, I was very blessed. Bowing and meditating in nature is quite different from doing it indoors. Outside the entrance of Wonderful Words Hall, two trees bowed and meditated alongside me. I am grateful for those two trees for giving me company during the CEI. In a short period, we became good Dharma friends!

The transformative part of my experience was connecting with nature in a way I never imagined. In the morning, while everyone gathered to do three steps and one bow in the Buddha Hall courtyard, I went to the field next to the mountain gate with a few Dharma Masters who were also not part of the DRBU bubble but were partaking in the CEI. We bowed on the gravel path down to the property's edge. It was painful at first. The rocks dug into my hands and knees, so I had to go down slowly and gently. This made me more mindful of how I bowed, which was different from how I usually do in the Buddha Hall with these nice cushions. Since I am young, I bow quickly and don't overthink it. But with the gravel path, the rocks were sharp, so I had to be more careful, which made me more mindful of the sensations in my body and not think so much.

Before we began the practice, our teachers instructed us on what to do. When we did three steps and one bow, we were taught, with each step, to take homage to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha and return to our inherent nature. When we bowed, we recited Samantabhadra's verse of repentance to plant seeds. When we stood up, we recited Namo Guanyin Bodhisattva to reconnect to the world. I did my best to be as sincere and mindful as possible when I recited the verse of repentance, "*All the bad deeds I have done in the past, based on beginningless greed, anger, and delusion, created by body, speech, and mind, I now repent and vow to reform them all.*" Initially, it was difficult to remember all the words and bow simultaneously, especially in English. I'm used to bowing quickly, forcing me to slow down even

也能夠在沒有屏幕的情況下，與老師和同學們互動。

由於新冠病毒預防措施，我不得不和同學們保持距離。他們在（妙語堂）門外放置一個可以禮拜和打坐的拜墊。起初，我感覺很孤單，但說實話，我很幸運。在大自然中禮拜和打坐，與在室內進行迥然不同。妙語堂門外，有兩棵樹與我一同禮拜、打坐。感謝這兩棵樹在「觀照修行週」陪伴我，我們很快就成為好法友！

我最具蛻變性的經歷是，我以從未料想過的方式與大自然連結。早上，當大家聚在佛殿庭院裡三步一拜時，我和幾位專程來參加「觀照修行週」的校外法師們一起聚集在山門旁的路邊進行三步一拜。我們在社區邊緣的碎石路上拜。起初非常辛苦，因為手和膝蓋會壓到路上的石頭，所以不得不慢慢地、輕輕地拜。這讓我更加注意自己如何禮拜，這與平常在佛殿裡有那些舒適拜墊的禮拜方式大不相同。因為我年紀輕，拜的速度快，就沒多留意。但由於碎石路上的石頭很尖銳，所以我必須加倍小心，這讓我更留意身體的感覺，無法打太多妄想。

在我們開始練習之前，老師們教導我們該如何練習。當我們三步一拜時，每一步都要禮敬佛、法、僧，回歸我們的自性。當我們俯首頂禮時，我們會念誦普賢菩薩的懺悔偈，種下善的種子。當我們起身時，我們念南無觀世音菩薩，重新與世界接軌。當我念誦懺悔偈時，我盡力保持真誠和正念：「往昔所造諸惡業，皆由無始貪瞋癡，從身語意之所生，一切我今皆懺悔。」一開始，很難在禮佛的同時誦懺悔偈，尤其是用英語。我總是拜得很快，這使我不得不放慢速度，認真思考要說的偈頌。用中文念偈頌會比較流暢，可惜我的中文不太溜，所以對我來說意義不大。

維荷文博士告訴我們，如果我們想不出特定事件，不用刻意去回想過去所犯下的過失或是任何令我們感到慚愧的事情。只要專注於這段偈頌，如果有什麼念頭浮現，先觀察它們，然後放下。這個建議減輕不少壓

more and contemplate the words. Reciting this in Chinese would be smoother, but since my Chinese is not that good, it would not be as meaningful to me.

Dr. Verhoeven told us that we do not have to recall a specific moment of wrongdoing that we are ashamed of if we cannot come up with something. Just focus on the verse; if things arise, observe them and let them go. This took some pressure off as we do not have to force ourselves to produce a memory. It would be unnatural to do so. Sometimes, without us realizing it, shame and ignorance can bury things deep within us, and we forget the many ways that we have hurt ourselves or others. From this CEI, I learned that bowing makes us vulnerable. It allows us to be open and honest with ourselves because it is all we see when our head touches the ground. The rest of the world disappears, and you are face-to-face with yourself.

Dr. Verhoeven stressed the word “returning,” going back to our original nature. Repentance brings us back to that. He taught us a shorter alternative to the repentance verse: “*Thank you; I’m sorry; I’m coming home.*” I think this gets to the heart of repentance. Through expressing gratitude, we realize we have lost our way and promise to return to our true nature. Gratitude gives us the space to be vulnerable with ourselves. One of the non-Buddhist students shared that this phrase clicked with him because he had lost two homes to forest fires at that time; one was his childhood home. Although he didn’t quite understand the phrase, he kept repeating it, and the thought of “I’m coming home” soothed the ache in his heart. There was comfort, knowing that we could come home no matter where we were or what happened. A home is where we are safe, secure, and cared for or loved. It can take a long time to feel safe with ourselves because there are many things that we do or have done that are difficult to admit, even to ourselves. With each bow, we can be more honest, and with each step, we can slowly return home.

When my head touched the ground during the bowing practice, it was like seeing a whole different world. Looking at the little rocks up close was like seeing the world through a macro lens. In photography, these particular lenses allow you



力，因為我們不必強迫自己去回憶，那樣做是不自然的。有時，在無意識的情況下，羞愧和無明會將某些東西埋藏在我們內心深處，使我們忘記我們傷害自己或他人的諸多行徑。從這次的「觀照修行週」中，我了解到禮拜會讓我們學會謙卑，讓我們能夠真誠面對自己。當我們的頭貼向地面時，我們看到的就是地面，除此之外的世界都屏除了，讓我們能面對自我。

維荷文博士強調「回歸」，也就是回到我們的自性，懺悔幫助我們回歸。他還教我們一首替代懺悔偈的短偈：「謝謝你，對不起，我要回家。」我認為這是懺悔的核心，透過表達感激之情，讓我們意識到自己迷失方向，提醒我們回歸自性。感恩讓我們變得謙卑。一位非佛教徒學生說，這句短偈讓他感觸良多，因為當時他在森林大火中失去兩個住所，其中一處是他兒時的家。雖然不太明白這個短偈，但他還是不斷地複誦，「我要回家」的念頭撫平他心中的傷痛。因為我們知道，無論身在何處或發生什麼事情，我們都能夠回家。家是一個讓我們感到安全、被關心或被愛的地方。我們可能需要很長時間才能夠有安全感，因為我們很難直接面對自己所作或難以承認的種種行徑。隨著每一次的禮拜懺悔，我們變得更誠實，每一步都能幫助

We do not have to recall a specific moment of wrongdoing that we are ashamed of if we cannot come up with something. Just focus on the verse; if things arise, observe them and let them go. This took some pressure off as we do not have to force ourselves to produce a memory. It would be unnatural to do so. Sometimes, without us realizing it, shame and ignorance can bury things deep within us, and we forget the many ways that we have hurt ourselves or others.

如果我們想不出特定事件，不用刻意去回想過去所犯下的過失或是任何令我們感到慚愧的事情。只要專注於這段偈頌，如果有什麼念頭浮現，先觀察它們，然後放下。這個建議減輕不少壓力，因為我們不必強迫自己去回憶，那樣做是不自然的。有時，在無意識的情況下，羞愧和無明會將某些東西埋藏在我們內心深處，使我們忘記我們傷害自己或他人的諸多行徑。

to capture something up close where you can see all the minute details. Everything small becomes big. I saw little bugs waking up and scurrying around, tiny blades of grass peeking through the gravel, and all the edges and variations of colors on the gray rocks. That semester, we had a class on the *Shurangama Sutra*. Looking at the stones reminded me of one of the twenty-five sages (Bodhisattva Dharaṇimdhara) who realized that the particles of the Earth were no different than the particles that made up his body and that the inherent nature of those particles was such that they could never come into contact with one another. Although the gravel on the ground was larger than the particles from a distance, they formed a long path. However, upon closer inspection, I pondered how they do not touch each other.

Unfortunately, I have not yet awakened, so while I can intellectually understand that I am no different from the Earth, I have not yet actualized this inconceivable state. But I will share two experiences that helped me see that we are not as separate as we think.

On the second day, when I bowed to the repentance verse, a thought came telling me that the Earth heard me and would remember my vow. It was a little scary, not because of the Earth, but because I didn't believe I could ever fulfill this vow to change my bad habits. It sounded impossible. I repeated these words in my head, hoping that it would bring about some change. I thought I was saying these words to myself, but the ground was my witness. It made me realize that although I did not fully understand the verse, it does not mean that it can be taken casually. The Earth is impartial; it will not judge my actions, but it will remember that I vowed to change my ways, and the Earth has

我們慢慢回歸。

三步一拜時，當我的頭貼近地面，就像看到了一個完全不同的世界。近距離觀察這些小碎石就像透過微距（放大）鏡頭看世界。在攝影中，有些特殊的鏡頭可以近距離拍攝物件，任何小細節都會被變大。我看到小蟲子醒來四處亂竄，小草從石礫中探出頭，灰色小石礫的所有邊緣和顏色變化。那學期，我們學《楞嚴經》，看著小石礫，我想起二十五位聖者中的一位（持地菩薩），他認識到大地的微塵與構成他身體的微塵沒有不同，而那些微塵自性永遠不會相互觸摩。雖然地上的碎石比微塵大，從遠處看，它們構成一條長長的路，但由近看，我想它們實際上沒有相互接觸。

可惜的是，我還沒有證得這種



a very long memory. With that thought, I took this practice more seriously.

On the third day, when I bowed, there was one moment when I felt as if I had become part of the field like I was an extension of the ground in the same way the grass was. I might be able to stand and move around, but I will always be rooted to the ground. Looking at the world from my height for so long made me forget that I am connected to this Earth. At that moment, I felt gratitude towards the Earth.

The most profound part of this experience was realizing that the Earth is supporting my feet. It carries me with every step I take and catches me when I fall. We always look down at the ground and don't think much about it. We take it for granted that we have something solid to walk on. With paved roads, sidewalks, and interior flooring, there is a layer of separation between us and the ground, and it makes us forget that what we rely on underneath our feet is alive and holding us up. This reminded me to be more mindful of my steps, to try to be light on my feet and not stomp carelessly.

Bowing outdoors made me feel more connected to the Earth and helped me see how much it has done for us. Although it is not a living being in the usual sense, it is alive. The Earth is patient, enduring, and equanimous. It hears all of the vows we made, and as long as we are in this world, it will continue supporting us on our journey. My connection with nature feels stronger in CTTB, but developing that connection can happen anywhere, like in the redwood forests, where the trees are hundreds of years old. By being in touch with nature on the outside, it will be easier to return to our nature within because they are not different from each other. Despite all the harm humans have caused to nature and each other, nature stays impartial, yet it wants to support us in doing good. To repay the Earth's kindness, we must transform our bad habits and continue to be diligent in our practice.

That is what I learned and experienced from my first in-person CEI. Amitufo. ❀

不可思議的境界，但我猜想，我與大地並無二別。我想分享兩個經歷，幫助我印證我和大地並不像想像的那麼分離。

第二天，當我念誦懺悔偈禮佛時，一個念頭告訴我，大地聽見了，並且記得我發的願。這有點可怕，不是大地可怕，而是不相信自己能夠履行改掉所有壞習慣的願，這聽起來很難做到。我在心裡重複著偈頌，希望能出現一些轉機，我以為這些話是對自己說的，但大地是我的見證者。這讓我意識到，雖然我沒有完全理解這段偈頌，但這不表示自己可以任意解讀。大地是公正的，它不會評論我的作為，但會記住我發願要改變，大地會一直記得。有了這個想法，我更認真地看待這個練習。

第三天，當我禮拜時，有那麼一刻，我感覺自己彷彿成為大地的一部分，我像是大地的延伸，就像草一樣。我也許可以站立和走動，但我將永遠扎根於地面。長久以來，從我的高度看世界，讓我忘記了我與這片土地是相連的；那一刻，我對大地充滿感激之情。

這次經歷中印象最深刻的是意識到大地正支撐我的雙足。我邁出的每一步，它都如影隨形；跌倒時，接住我。我們總是低頭看著地面，沒有多想。我們理所當然地認為我們有堅實的路面讓我們可以行走。鋪好的道路、人行道和室內地板，在我們和地面之間有所分隔，也讓我們忘了我們踩在腳下的地面是有生命的，是支撐我們的。這提醒我要更注意自己的步伐，腳步要輕，不要隨意跺腳。

在戶外禮拜讓我更能感覺與大地的連結，幫助我看到大地如何守護我們。雖然它不是字面上的生物，但大地是有生命的，是有耐心、持久和平靜的。它聽見我們所發的願，只要我們還在這個世界上，就會繼續支持我們的旅程。在萬佛城裡，我與大自然的連結更緊密，但這種連結的發展可以在任何地方發生，例如紅杉森林，那裡的樹木已有數百年的歷史。透過接觸戶外的大自然，使我們更容易回歸到自性，因為最終，我們並無不同。儘管人類對大自然造成種種傷害，但大地依然保持公正，支持我們為善。為了報答大地的恩德，我們必須改掉惡習，繼續精進修行。

這就是我初次實際參與「觀照修行週」的體悟，阿彌陀佛。❀