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Six from the Book of Silences

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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
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.
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.
Take no shit, said Linji.
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.
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 Zīchún

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.
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.