

# the churning of the sea of milk

mary heebner

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in deep geologic time earth was stark and life was cradled in the sea. in hindu cosmogony, the origin of life on earth also sprang forth from the watery depths. at the center of the universe sacred mt. mandara rose from a primordial ocean. the mountain-temple of angkor wat was designed to epitomize this vision of the universe.

five lotus-shaped towers crown angkor wat—*sanskrit for temple of the sacred city*—it is surrounded by a water-filled moat and is the largest of all the religious structures in the world. every possible surface is adorned with script and image carved in stone that transmit visual stories of things past, present and to come.

### *the churning of the sea of milk*

is a **myth** found in hinduism's epic tales, the **puranas**. it is depicted everywhere in the angkor complex, including a 70 meter long bas-relief mural on the eastern gallery of the great temple. the mural is among the over 600 meters of reliefs created throughout angkor. the myth summons the eternal **struggle** between the forces of good and evil, light and darkness. it begins with a tale of loss.

12 precious things, among them amritsa, the elixir of immortality, have been lost beneath the ocean and lord vishnu has devised a way to retrieve them.

*is a tug of war between gods & demons,*

in the center of the cosmic sea, the holy mountain serves as the churning stick around which a rope, in the form of a great naga, or serpent, is wound, then tugged, head to tail, by 92 demons and 88 demigods, who join forces and pull with all their might in order to rotate this holy pillar and churn the sea of milk into a buttery froth. the churning releases the precious treasures and it also releases a deadly poison. it is a celestial tug of war that lasts 1000 years. the churning stick penetrates the milky sea. as it rotates it stirs the waters, giving rise to a seminal fluid that carries within it the seeds of immortality.

*we become immortal through acts of creation.  
creation comes in many forms.*

*a tug of war between darkness & light.*

as a solar calendar  
92 demons mark 92 days  
between the winter solstice  
and the following spring equinox;  
88 demigods, one for each day between  
spring equinox and summer solstice.  
picture the sea of milk as the milky way.  
imagine the earth is pulled by dual forces  
that rotate it towards darkness and  
then back again towards the light;  
towards darkness, and again  
towards the light,  
*evermore.*

*the entire angkor complex has measurements  
that may be read as a clock*

*in the tug of war between gods & demons,*

*darkness & light...comes the making.*

in the churning of the sea of milk  
mural dozens of fishes are pictured as torn  
to shreds by swimming too close to the  
fearsome churning stick.

most of our lived moments, like the fishes,  
are torn asunder simply through time, and  
the passions and perils of living. so much  
is lost; most history is lost, beneath the  
opaque and milky waters of time.

some moments survive the chancy journey  
up to the surface, battered by the churning,  
partly broken, but making it to the light—  
imperfect fragments rising to the surface  
on the currents of longing. these are all we  
have. from this detritus of gathered moments  
comes the making—creation anew.

*From a handful of parts we make it work.* look to the  
mural—*some of the fishes survive the churning*

dancing particles of foam produced  
by the sheer velocity of the churning, float  
above this struggle.

these are the apsaras.

sometimes amid an inner wrestling and  
churning, we are graced with an **insight**,  
as blithe and **ephemeral** as foam.

savor the lightness of being  
that comes with dreams.

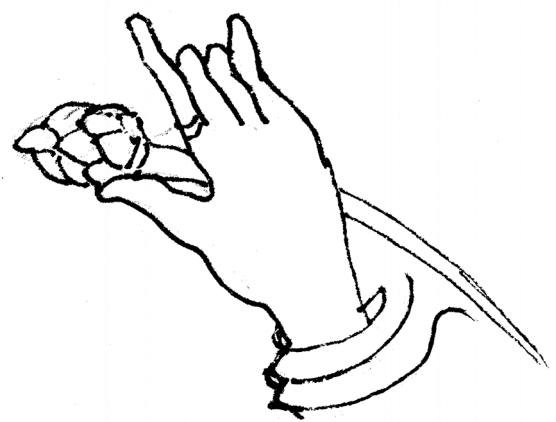
savor the dearness  
of the **vanishing** moment.

beauty resides here.

nimble apsaras rise above the fray.  
their dance seems nothing less than

that flash of inspiration,  
the evanescent idea,  
illusive imagination embodied.

they are the **aha!** that feeds the soul,  
the joyfully burst bubble  
that lets the **light** come in.



apsara

