

## The Twelve *Nidānas*

## ALSO BY GAIL SHER

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The Twelve *Nidānas*

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*For Brendan*

**N O T E**

*Nidāna* (Pali/Sanskrit): “cause, foundation, source, origin.”  
The twelve *nidānas* are an application of the Buddhist concept of dependent origination. They identify the origin of suffering to be ignorance.

I

A man's hand in the midst of him, a simple  
expression of earth, the junction of red earth in  
lieu of something indeterminable in the person.

The anthem of his hand, the flesh of his dark hand,  
as in the blood of someone you know.

The attention of a leaf presses itself outwards.  
How many lights pierce through the clouds  
achieving themselves in its bit of space.

A tattoo of leaves touches his head lightly, like an  
angel's hand anointing his crown, passing on the  
light of him.

A man may be carrying the images of an angel's body, the division of light being the tilt of an angel's body.

He is wanting the complete light, the sense of arising trapped in the angel's body.

A concentration toward okay between what is presented to one, some subtlety coming to one.

Like an absence that one carries, light vanishes light, innocuous space beyond what one recalls.

The shadows of two people make a darkness in a field indistinguishable from the two people.

As how a silhouette of space, imaging the angel's dark form, as if his hand in pledge behind the eyesocket were internalized.

His image of him, whether his angel is dark, a dark dark angel as a transparency on his desire.

A filigree of space tips alluringly upwards as if it were imaging his own guts and belly.

Maybe he were a queen then. Maybe so many queens in a reality that is fed queens.

The city is an outbreath, a dark fabric of sky, as if sky were the angel's eyes.

A cat gets up, walks slowly over to sky, intuiting a sky that simply dissolves into a cat's body.

In the congregate of moving, dawn dissolves to sky, what holds between his feeling and a cityscape of sky.

## II

The sky bleeds dark and lucent from its writing. A calf is clearly struggling.

The absorption of a star, a linguistic signal, allows the sky to dangle there.

Elements are like memory and function as a support. Earth is easy, though it moves to the ground and vanishes.

Her mind pours light on a stalk-still bird and it *stays* still, then moves to the ground and vanishes.

Something in the calf holds hostage as a fight, like war in its family that has descended in its body.

She *sees* calf, the procession of a body. It is a baby engrossed in a footprint so its head is down.

Leaving one guessing. *Is this real? Is this a fact?*  
Repetition is and is part of the calf. (I am feeling its feeling deep in my armpit.)

Repetitive, *not* an irreducible spacing, is easily closed off, like dreaming or forgetting that in fact you *are* a calf.

If she promises to be her eyes, the extension into space, not the calf but the contiguous motion of its body.

Because the partial mind of seeing (the invisible-inclusive eye) binds what's unavailable to what you see.

Touch without touch, action without action. a feather-light eye touches the world back, like her death or above zero (if she were a lamb climbing out of her eyes).

I seal space, closing my eyes lightly, touching things lightly, because my eyes touch and are touched and this has become onerous.

What if seeing and touching were not simultaneous, that having seen, the product of your seeing does not come back to you?

If time boycotts time *and* falls to clear seeing, its ersatz life exposed?

Pairs of eyes peer through the dark, not seeing *something* but just the consciousness, *knowing* knowing seeing.

Like you could skip seeing and just *be* seeing because the past of an eye comes from everywhere.

### III

I walk through trees, a series of squat willows, and see the space between the willows as time.

Because it's not the space, it's the emptiness of mind (whose energy is grounded to its darkest possible color).

Taking birth beneath a tree, I want to feel my longing for the tree, my deep thought of you in its disentangled precision of stillness.

One bends, taking its time, a full earth of time.  
*How do I wander into its leaf?*

Merely touching earth, gently touching the awareness of earth, like the beginning of day in earth.

Leaves stretch to sun, the full breath of sun, but I am left gasping.

My reference point is fading. The underleaf is blank. But blank itself catches me in a kind of double-take.

A gap exists but she refuses to see it, which is a third sort of fudging, like the darkly yellow on the leaf's bottom.

*That yellow cala lily, earth and earth-consecutive-  
with-darkness, a coincidence of blood and dark and  
color, such a yellow, heavy and unknown.*

Indexed to light, this card of light folds around the  
sleeve of your body.

We take shelter in abyss, which looks like a color,  
magenta calligraphed in a cala lily's cup, deep in the  
cup, its fire.

Color filters light is not the net color that the cala  
lily *tells* by way of its earth sign.

#### IV

Night is her skin, its pleats the quiet fold of her.  
Background and foreground are the memory of a  
skin wearing dynasties of her.

A bird touches night and her skin moves as if it  
were tied to this.

As if a mass accumulates in a narrative of space.  
*Now* preserves as a robin opening out of its  
capacity in me.

I want to pet it. I want to cry. The intimacy of a  
word *before* it is a word, so that it's *now*, in the  
interval, wears its own full body.

How many tiers live in a word and the hues of the tiers in the space of the word's awareness.

*I*, the word, in the space of my form, imaging my form, like a lion in its death throes.

*I swallow you and emergence in a word.* (The word's shape is how death looks like this image.)

A cold press of wind through a word's tired body could be hell or a word separate from its word.

To feel into a word, which may be neutral, but may be like an animal who *gets* the word, as if the word were a *lesion* in its body.

The lesion could be freedom because a word has no location, like a break in the hills. (Mostly our words are skeletons of themselves.)

One senses the transparent quality of its body, an unchangeable power that runs alongside its body.

I am a word. I am the ultimate fearless word, beauty or sky so that there is nothing in the way.

A word lands on her cheeks. *Unspeakable* is the word. *Unspeakable* is the crutch, the *cane* of the word, the transparency of the word that relates to her as a body.

As how several letters cast a sense of time, like a painting casts depth, which is the image of death in a room.

Then the dream of the word amalgamates. First there's sky, then the full comportment of a body. Sky-swaddled words catch the light of death.

I want to believe each word, like pray to the word, because you want to believe in its denial, forgiveness, everything.

A word lay in snow. If you lift the snow and suspend your idea of the possible, it's like space linking space to all constellations of that word.

The sheer resplendence of a word, as how the daughter of a word, a whole lineage pouring out from its god-father.

A child picks up a word. It's the enjoyment of the word, the shape of all commodious expressions that the mind living in that word carries.

In a tapestry of texts, I am in the moment of one, as if I had gone to sleep.

V

I juxtapose pink with weather, seeing color emerge from shape. Pink constellates to a pig's body.

Pink's trajectory, inclusive of pig, breeds pink into a legacy, but the real pink transmits its pinkness to the pig.

The pig looks pink because it's lost track of the *possibility* of being made vivid. (*A rose is a rose is a rose* brilliantly demonstrates the part of a rose that's impossible.)

It burns a background to itself. A tenderness comes out. *That's* the leap, the already-known, like a rose seed.

Yes is a style. I grow an extra bone. *Here is my bone*, which makes me happy.

Its yes is and always has existed.

But if I misuse it, if now, seeing my bone, I make use of it in a negative sense, which is vivid, even shocking because I carry my own style in them.

You are involved with a style of being, relating your experience with a perception of your experience, e.g., crazy-shell pink, but pink reduces itself to nothing.

I am a limb braced on a trapeze, but I am an ostrich  
dreaming with my eyes shut.

If the pink is “swimmy” (it almost makes me cry—I  
could dwell on something that could happen).

The forefather of a dream may be jealous and  
hoard the dream. (I am again that bird, rosy  
plumage taut, ribs holding my scrawny body, which  
is an extremely crowded situation.)

What swims around the dream comes back. Me  
and my projections are put into a bag and I push as  
hard as I can.

I am trying to fit into one particular bag, which becomes my limbs, a confabulation of infinity.

Essence doesn't flee. Essence stays with being. Time puffs itself into a thing, like saturation, which can resemble a pink color.

As how the consumption of time will alleviate time's stoppage to the degree that the person *feels* time's stoppage.

*How* is style, toggling illusory and dream, instead of coming across the material of a dream, offering it space because terror needs space.

## VI

A teller's face recedes. Silver bars entrap his shoulder, tie and shirt collar. If you search for his face, but it's the *no-search* that finds his face.

*How much does it cost to find his face?* (Now I am a slim finder of his face.)

He passes me money. His hand does not touch the bills that I receive because relinquishing receiving, I just take the money.

The transaction questions presence. If I arrive on both sides of receiving, everything disappears.

One face of *no* face moving casually like a normal face. (Though the man is naked, his face seems even more naked.)

Because energy needs a context of definite, specific events. *If you are handless, there is still the environment of hands, like a throat of hands about to swallow your body.*

His shirtsleeve is hiked exposing a man's wrist, vulnerable, droopy, as if the man's energy floods into his hand, skipping the wrist, which could be the wrist of a different man.

The flesh is white. Cold light yields a sting of hours, time defined, no long upright.

The essence of its white is like a king wearing a hand. (That the king is wearing a hand depends on the viewpoint of the person.)

A symbol of white spreads across the palm, a legacy of wind, like air that is yours.

Something begins, is loosely held in one's body, casting a sense of depth (as if its symbol *is* one's body).

A glove on my cupped hand cradles my lung, anchoring to the extreme, up and up to the hand that is so extreme.

It's how image and matter falter. Mother and child  
meet but the mother's mind does not meet.

You can see this in her hand, ring finger lax, then  
the laxing itself takes on existence.

First sky, the fatty mound of a thumb, then figures  
topped by shapes inferred to have existence  
because sky undeniably has existence.

A person's hand is how sky looks like this body,  
which is so sad but is not her hand.

## VII

A woman's mind is young. It kneels like a child at bedtime. At the breathline of her wash she makes a path.

As if a host is sketching the scene in white, the choicelessness of white, which is why it is so alive.

One two three child-of-her-skin hang from the edges, yes, and in them is the color yes.

In her skin there is washing and the taste of white as in the climax of living now.

About the logic of white, as soon as you *say* white,  
*whose living experience can only come from space*, she  
adds passively.

The painter paints white as a form of disappearance  
sourced from the white that is her.

So that nothing is derived, like the five kinds of  
eyes or a woman's clothes that can only be cleaned  
by fire.

The washerwoman looks down. *Down* is a color as  
she sits with her body because how many of us sit,  
actually *sit down* in our own body.

Someone leaves. A panel of white looks like a cap  
and she is confused.

It could be a bird with a beach plastered on it, the  
only spot the deepest bottom of her pupil.

If I throw whiteness on the bird, like a piece of  
paper can be a bird.

I touch white out but its geometry blurs, without  
guile (in its own nature) between what is so  
fervent.

## VIII

I wake before dawn and feel the emptiness of blue  
in my body.

The country smells blue and little sprouts push  
from the earth.

Blue light through hills absorbs into space,  
dismantling wind, coloring distant swallows.

Blue may be light but boiled down to the earth of  
light so that even its image rides on a tiger.

The quivering of earth vanishes with night.

Blue is a response in its flimsy filmy costume. *Such sweet blue, the nalo of blueness*, I mimic.

As if a cloud, like Dombipa, in a practicum of itself, throws the skull of itself to the place of its future self. The ground where it lands becomes frozen in the wake of how much blue is possible.

A lizard-imitating-a-stone, a flower in natural connate sky, as if blue, sprung with the blue of sky, confabulates through beings to the absolute blue of sky.

As if sound were blue and what sound touches also  
(inevitably) releases the sound of blue's body.

*I live in this ground*, a person says, who keeps the  
mountain close.

Release is not *into*. His body along with a dimple in  
the meadow, in plentitude of them and what  
follows from blue's generosity.

I hear its song in the flakes falling downward but its  
echo is up and the time of the song even higher up.

The sound of a mountain is soft, like a flock  
gathering inward. (The continual motion of the  
flock even down to its belly.)

Each relaxed posture would be all the positive  
postures that the flock would be able to express.

Sun kneads light into a sound of relating to light,  
tonsure-snow in sky as it washes over the vastness.

I feel susceptible to snow as if I *am* snow, sun rising  
over snow, refusing to go to sleep now.

## IX

A man has himself crafted in day, as if his  
monasticism lay *into* precise day.

He stumbles upon himself, sniff sniff in day, which is  
not particularly intelligent, but which is following  
his body's refusal.

*I won't be day*, he says. *No!* for him is moving  
ahead, as if a man is sculpted to the precise mind of  
who he will turn out to be.

As if his man precedes his infant and the sound of  
that cry is so very stunning.

The man in the shape of a bird, his perch against  
sky, is a large space inside me.

Like a bean grows and *there* is sky (the imprimatur  
of sky) leaving only the action.

If he weren't sky, 'cause the elements are really  
deities, if he weren't a rim of sky hungering for a  
space to be.

Seeing beyond the man, flashing back but still  
beyond the man, seeing a bird whose profile  
appears to be part of the sky.

When a man is a bird, the left of him shutters and  
he hides a little.

Then the conviction of *no*, its dead-on precision of  
place. *No* is accurate, its discipline is accurate, the  
precision of reverent so solid and solemn.

*No-sky* shatters the *upaya* of mortality, what forms  
in one's mind, like lace on a tree.

Will the man topple? He hovers on a ledge. A  
thick sinuous rope hugs the caliber of who he will  
be there.

X

Devotees mingle among bolts and bolts of fabric as if in this course they are studying water as all elements, but not sex. Ears are exclusive of sex.

She lays in a room worrying if her water is enough. Exclusive looks like branches of a tree.

She becomes the fabric wildly and coils and how many bolts will fill the bottom of her underworld.

Joy abides in the flooding of the fields, in the bones of her voice (having metabolized her voice).

The person says no, he doesn't want sex with her,  
which she feels in her ears, water on people's  
doorsteps.

Seeing the water hearing, as if *that's* the *that* of the  
first stage.

A ritual vase holds the cup of your essential water,  
which is your dead poured slowly but sounding like  
a roar because you're dead.

As if one's mind, replete with death's form, like  
when can an animal convene if everything violet  
embodies a just-broken crucifix.

A consort of energy maps intelligence onto place,  
like death is a place and she dances on the place.

The place is dead yet searches in itself for a feeling.

Dancing on a corpse, holding the mace of a baby's  
body (what prevails between dead and the clean air  
of its body).

Jumpstarting dead, regarding oneself as dead.  
Watching myself leap right into her.

## XI

A carousel of birds raises a curtain with its beak  
and I pop out. (It's a charm on my mother's charm  
bracelet.)

Rhinestones on her sweater are flecks of light  
shaped like birds whose fingers touch the bottom  
of the sea.

An imprint of the bird remains in the sea. *All  
animals and beings are the size of the sea*, she is  
telling me.

*Lightly, lightly, like froth on sea, we lay our footprints  
out over the land.*

As if a bird becomes a bird first inside its own belly.  
The ease of its float, so hospitable and safe. Such  
nakedness stalks the nothingness of space.

The flight exists and *then* the bird. First, if he is  
perched, as if a wrong thing will be completed in  
him. (The grip is what's completed, that it has  
already happened.)

Like the gait of a bird whose shape scatters. I *see*  
the songs instead of hearing them suddenly.

One sings. One sings. Thus he is above himself,  
explicating what may slip away.

The logic of a bird is the same as winter sky. Look straight into its eyes and it becomes invisible.

What's this math that makes a double bird but the bird is there anyway pecking at the icicles.

I live in a cave and you can't inherit it. Birds make my cave legible.

Its snow runs wild (which is how the bird can remain quite healthy).

Were it a bird or cloud in the shape of a bird, a  
place in sky repelling its illusion in space.

Were I snow falling on birds' wings, am I in its  
song, esoteric.

Aloneness is there despite the bird trembling. You  
can feel it in its space, what he cannot sing to you.

The bird and I are brothers. Our song is the same.  
Throw a spearhead and it's the same. It will *always*  
become a flower.

## XII

A tendency to real occurrence turns into space. A person is space. He is white, having been consumed by fire ravenously.

His eyes lay on his face, like the words of his face (*what would be taken from me manually in abutment to my suicide*).

The awareness is itself but also the source. Its seriality in space follows death along the trail of its body.

That space between *I* and willing to die, that streak of *I*, like the nature of the real person habituated to *I*, but not definite, slightly fishy.

If she thinks about the man or remembers thinking him into experience, a shift occurs, invisible yet definitive, who she is, which is so real.

Because his skin is night now. A skin of wanting peering at a body, a locale.

He separates from time as his swishy body folds, not physically (he is still groping) but the grope looks like a river.

He gropes like a person in the slow motion of a dream, more and more till it is no longer slow, but some preternatural sub-slow, a mirror image of slow's interior.

The man's death appears violent because the man himself is violent, but it is just death.

Being a natural pause between death and its appearance.

I no longer wish for omission, a map of space swallowed by some organic, mechanical process.

The line between impression and breath, awareness and space, digs into space, mixing mind with space.



*The Twelve Nidānas*

is set in Minion, a typeface designed by Robert Slimbach in the spirit of the humanist typefaces of fifteenth-century Venice. Minion was originally issued in digital form by Adobe Systems in 1989. In 1991, Slimbach received the Charles Peignot Award from the *Association Typographique Internationale* for excellence in type design.