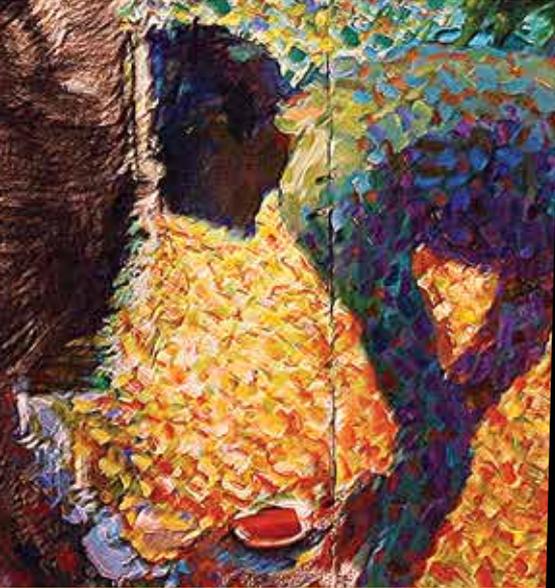




**when the tree withers
and the leaves fall,
what is happening?
body exposed in the
golden wind.**



pacific zen institute
john tarrant
a culture for
transformation

**A student asked, “When the tree withers
and the leaves fall, what is happening?”
Yunmen replied, “Body exposed in the Golden Wind.”**

Autumn comes with golden light and grey battalions; there is harvest with its accounts and weariness; and a space is opened by all parting. We wait for more leaves to fall, for being done now, for the rains, for the storms, and the exciting way they break things, for the real cold. Then there is the true, pure waiting in which we wait without knowing for what, or for whom, or what will be revealed, or if we will recognise it. That waiting is meditation; irreducible presence appears. “Exposed” was a word Yunmen liked, a one-word answer for pretty much any question. If something is stripped from us like the leaves from the apricot tree, something will be revealed as well, a hidden beauty or kindness.

I was teaching in Bhutan and came home to Sonoma County and fires driven by great winds. I came home to those who lost their houses, those who lost their lives, those who drove through the wall of flame in a Prius, and the 911 dispatchers who had no fire engines to send and stayed on the line with the callers until the line went silent. Safes were unharmed but rings and watches inside them melted. Dreams, ancestors, mountain lions fleeing, mice scampering, fire engines roaring about like great animals, we are all in the Golden Wind.

Then silence arrives. The long-awaited rains move in, green, fresh shoots appear. There’s a compassion in merely living, the dare-devil hummingbirds drinking at flowers, the mice being born under the low cypresses, the hawks hunting. That silence and light, that compassion is always with us.

Yunmen, whose name means Cloud Gate, was one of the greatest masters in our tradition. This painting of the Golden Wind is by Jeff Myers, and hangs in the Santa Rosa Creek Zen Center.

