

What the Buddha Never Taught: A Rock Opera

by martin t. adam

(based on the book by Tim Ward)

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Characters in order of appearance

The Buddha - The Buddha

Tim - Philosophy student. Canadian

Jim - Medical student. American

Yenaviro - Monk. Nepali

Ajahn Mahaka (a.k.a the Ajahn, the Abbot) - American

Palmer - Yogi. Icelandic.

Chapman - Ex-lawyer. Texan

Snuk - Senior monk. German

Zoom - Surfer. Californian

Percy - Nervous type, older. British

Herbie - Excited kid. New Zealander

Dukkhita - Villager. Thai

Satya - Ghost, Dukkhita's mother

Cop - Thai

ACT I

Pre show: *Monks sweep auditorium. Faint sitar. Jungle sounds – frogs, monkeys, rain. The smell of incense and clove cigarettes.*

A gong sounds. Jungle sounds/music fade.

Scene 1:

The monks sweep towards the stage.

Song 1: What the Buddha Never Taught

*WESTERN MONK CHOIR
What the Buddha Taught
What the Buddha Never Taught
What the Buddha Taught
What the Buddha Never Taught
What the Buddha Taught
and did not teach*

*Buddham saranam gacchami
Dhammam saranam gacchami
Sangham saranam gacchami*

*What the seeker sought
What the seeker never sought
What the seeker sought
What the seeker never sought
What the seeker sought
and did not seek*

The monks exit through scrim. Three remain, take an edge.

Projection: (Indian music under)

Slide 1: INDIA CIRCA 500 BCE

Slide 2: *The Buddha, in meditation.*

Slide 3: *He holds up a lotus flower.*

Slide 4: 2500 YEARS LATER

Slide 5: well, actually... September 13th, 2007 SOMEWHERE IN N.E. THAILAND,

The monks swiftly move the scrim aside. Full lights on... The Wat!

BAND LEADER

One, two, three, four...

The Band strikes up a raucous overture!

Music ceases.

Blackout.

Scene 2 ARRIVAL

Lights slowly up. Night. Sound of pounding rain. Through it, sound of tuk tuk coming near fast. A skid, engine cuts out.

Tim stumbles in, looks around, turns back. Engine starts.

TIM
Wait!

Sound of tuk tuk racing off into the distance.

Come back! How do you know this is the right place? (Beat) Really?

Tuk tuk sound fades. Tim moves into the wat.

Hello? Hello? Anyone here? Hello?

He pulls back curtain... Brightly lit skeleton!

Argh!

A monk, previously in shadow, speaks from near skeleton.

YENAVIRO
(very soft spoken)
Yes.

TIM
Jesus!

Monk raises a candle beside his face.

YENAVIRO
Do not be frightened.

TIM
But it's a real skeleton, isn't it?

YENAVIRO

Yes... It is a reminder.

TIM

A reminder?

YENAVIRO

Yes. All things pass.

TIM

Okay, okay...Are you the Abbot?

YENAVIRO

No. The Ajahn is away.

TIM

Oh. I'm sorry I'm late. We sorta got lost on the way. Maybe on purpose. Anyway, not easy finding a wat in the dark. Not to mention the rain... I wrote to say I was coming today. I know it's tonight not today, but I wrote to say I was... Anyway... I want to ordain as a monk. This is the right wat? Wat Miwahrichat, right? You do admit westerners here? I sent an e-mail from Bangkok. Three days ago. This e-mail address...here, you see? I'm Tim.

YENAVIRO

No e-mail.

TIM

No e-mail!!?

YENAVIRO

Ajahn Mahaka will return in the morning. Now it is late. There is a blanket for sleeping. There is cocoa for the morning, or instant coffee if you will like it.

TIM

Thank you.

YENAVIRO

Yes.

TIM

Of course. Well, good night then. Thank you for your help... What did you say your name was?

YENAVIRO

Yenanviro

Yenaviro gives Tim candle, exits. Tim lays out his blanket, preparing for sleep.

Looks like it's just you and me tonight, Skully. G'night.

He picks up a book, What the Buddha Taught, lying bedside.

What's this?

Tim nods off.

Dream/Night Terror sequence: JIM enters walks past TIM's bed. Tim rises and follows Jim.

TIM

No, wait. Listen to this: "According to Buddhism, our ideas of God and Soul are false and empty."

JIM

Uh-huh.

TIM

"Though highly developed as theories, they are all the same extremely subtle mental projections, garbed in an intricate metaphysical and philosophical phraseology."

JIM

You don't say.

TIM

"These ideas are so deep-rooted in man, and so near and dear to him, that he does not wish to hear, nor does he want to understand, any teaching against them."

Jim turns to face Tim, stopping him in his tracks.

JIM

Not believing in God isn't the same as saying that nothing's sacred, Tim.

TIM

Isn't it?

Jim vanishes. Tim wakes up with a start.

Hello, anyone there?

Wind blowing. Tim shivers, goes back to sleep.

Blackout**Scene 3 FIRST MORNING**

Morning noises. Cockerel crows. Lights fade up into dawn state.

Monks enter, sweep etc.

Enter The Ajahn and Snuk.

{Musical accompaniment: Indian drone/sitar fade in with the Ajahn's entrance}.

The Ajahn sits centre stage on cushion. Snuk stands to one side, shakes Tim. He wakes up in a dazed shock.

SNUK

Ajahn, this is the farang who has arrived last night... There is another one. He is waiting since one hour.

AJAHN

Another? Bring him. I will see them together.... I have been expecting you. You arrived early. Please sit.

Snuk exits. Tim sits, feet pointed towards the Ajahn. He eyes the skeleton.

Do not let the bones disturb you.

TIM

How did he...?

AJAHN

She. Suicide.

TIM

Oh... How sad.

AJAHN

Terminal cancer... Her suffering...was great. She shot herself with a hunting rifle.

TIM

I see... but, uh, suicide? I mean, I didn't think Buddhists approved of suicide.

AJAHN

We don't. We don't. We received your letter last week. You write very well in Thai.

TIM

Thai? Me? There must be some confu-

Snuk enters with Jim, who carefully places a suitcase at the door, smoothly bows three times before the Ajahn, and rises.

Snuk bends and whispers in Ajahn's ear.

TIM (to Jim)

Wait! I know you!

JIM

Don't think so. I just arrived.

TIM

But I've seen you before, I know... oh, oh wait! Wow! I think you were in my dream last night.

JIM (raises an eyebrow)

Really? Dreaming about me, huh?

Tim turns away, embarrassed.

TIM

Never mind. (mutters) Weird.

Snuk rises. Ajahn turns back.

AJAHN

Please sit.

Jim sits beside Tim, legs folded to one side beneath.

What is your name?

JIM

Jim.

AJAHN

Another Jim?

Pause.

TIM

I'm Tim, not Jim.

AJAHN

You didn't write a letter informing us of your arrival?

TIM

I wrote an e-mail, but not in Thai. That must have been him... Jim.

JIM

I wrote you a letter in Thai.

AJAHN

Ah... I see. Some confusion, it seems. Yes, well, you're both here now aren't you? Welcome. You are here. That means you are serious about learning the way of the Buddha. You are considering ordination?

Jim nods, Tim lights up.

TIM

Yes!

AJAHN

A monk's life isn't for everyone. There are 227 rules to memorize and follow. This is the way of the Buddha. However... here at Wat Miwahrichat we do allow another option. You may begin as a pakhao.

TIM

Pak-how?

AJAHN

A trainee, similar to a novice. There are fewer rules, you wear white robes.

JIM

I would like to begin as a pakhao.

TIM

Same here.

AJAHN

Alright, good. There's a robes-giving ceremony scheduled in two weeks' time. Until then, you will be classed as a layman. You may wear your own clothes. As such, you will only need to follow five simple rules.

TIM

The five precepts, right?

AJAHN

Yes. They are the foundation. Without the precepts, spiritual progress is

impossible... But first, you must take refuge in the three jewels: the Buddha, his Dharma, and the community of monks -- the Sangha. Repeat after me:

Jim is blank throughout, Tim already knows the lines.

AJAHN, line by line, repeated by TIM and JIM

Buddham saranam gacchami

Dhammam saranam gacchami

Sangham saranam gacchami

AJAHN

Alright, good.

TIM

What about the five precepts?

AJAHN

The Venerable Snuk will lead you through the rules of training.

Song 2: Five Simple Rules

SNUK

You say you want enlightenment,

yes, all you want is truth

You're tired of the world of lies

and all your misspent youth

But what would you say

if I told you

It's as easy as ABC...DE

If you want to make your connection

just cultivate morality...

Snuk hands them a sheet of paper each.

SNUK

There are five simple rules

five simple tools

You can build a better day

Just five simple rules

But it ain't Sunday school

and you don't even have to pray

Don't kill, be chill

Be real, don't steal,

(Don't even take the chance)

Don't debauch your deal

(whatever you may feel)

*Don't lie, or gossip or rant
And one more thing
that'll give you wings
Don't take no intoxicants.*

TIM AND JIM

(reading)

I undertake the precept to abstain from the taking of life.

I undertake the precept not to take that which is not given.

I undertake the precept to abstain from sensual misconduct.

I undertake the precept to abstain from false speech.

I undertake the precept to abstain from intoxicants that cause heedlessness.

Snuk resumes his position, standing at attention beside the Ajahn.

AJAHN

Alright, good. Follow the rules and you'll go far. Stay mindful of all you do, whether sitting, standing, walking, or lying down. Do this and you will succeed.

TIM

When will we learn to meditate?

AJAHN

All in good time. Today, settle in. Tomorrow the bell will ring for group chanting at 3:00 AM. Breakfast is at 8:00. This is the only meal.

TIM

Are there snacks?

AJAHN

Solid food is not permitted after 12 noon. We're very busy in the monastery at the moment, preparing for Vesak, the Buddha's Birthday.

TIM

The Buddha's Birthday?!

AJAHN

You will have extra chores. It's a national holiday. I will give a special Dharma talk to honor the day... Now then, any other questions?

TIM

Is your lecture about meditation?

AJAHN

No. The discourse is on the Buddha's four noble truths --delivered in Thai.

TIM

I guess I'll just have to skip it then.

AJAHN

Attendance is compulsory at all Dharma talks. Jim, you might be able to follow along.

JIM

Certainly.

TIM

One other question, just curious... You're not Thai yourself...?

AJAHN

No. American, like you.

TIM.

I'm Canadian, actually.

AJAHN

Nationality is not important. My teacher and predecessor here was the famous Thai meditation master, Ajahn Sampajanna. Now, then...

The Ajahn gets up to leave.

TIM

I'm from Vancouver...

SNUK

Time to move to your kutis.

TIM

...British Columbia

AJAHN

Venerable Snuk can show you the way.

SNUK

You will leave your passports and other valuables for safe-keeping...

TIM

(to Snuk)

What...

(to the Ajahn)

Why...?

AJAHN

Address your questions to the venerable Snuk, or any other... junior monk.

Jim rises, Tim follows suit. Tim copies Jim, with a slight delay, in bowing three times to the Ajahn -- who has departed, followed by Snuk.

TIM

Gee... I wonder what's eating the Abbot?

JIM

A little tip, next time don't point your feet in his direction. It's considered rude in Thai culture.

TIM

But he's not even Thai!

JIM

He's the head of a Thai monastery; that means respect.

TIM

Respect? Didn't you just see the way he just looked down on us. Give me a break, the guy's a power-tripper.

JIM

A break? There's no break. You decided to come here. Play by the rules. What are you, a tourist?

TIM

I'm not here on holiday if that's what you mean.

JIM

No, you backpacker types never are, are you? Looking for something a little different, right? A new experience? Something exotic, maybe?

Tim begins to pack up his stuff.

TIM

Scoff if you want to, I'm here to learn how to meditate. The Buddha taught the way to enlightenment. For me, it's that simple...

JIM

Enlightenment!?!??

TIM

Yes, enlightenment. Why are you here, if I might ask?

JIM
Failed marriage.

Tim stops packing.

TIM
Sorry... that's not much of a reason to become a monk.

JIM
Nope. I know it. Truth is, I've no intention of becoming yet another enlightened western pseudo-monk. Just need a bit of time somewhere...to come to my senses...do the pakhaio thing for a while and then... Out of here.

TIM
You're using this place.

JIM
In this country a monastery is the way to go. Better than the beach scene, anyway. Free rent, people leave you alone.

Tim resumes packing. Jim pulls out a pack of cigarettes, lights up.

Cigarette? Last chance.

TIM
No. Have you been in Thailand a while then?

JIM
Two years.

TIM
Two years?!!

JIM
Interning, in Bangkok.

Tim stops packing.

TIM
M.D.? Really?

JIM
Haven't finished up quite yet...

TIM
Wow, the noble profession.

JIM

No big deal. Specializing in tropical diseases. Why I came to Thailand. You study?

TIM

Honors in Philosophy. I'm taking a year off before grad school, traveling.

JIM

Grad school? Thought you were destined for monkhood!

Tim succeeds zipping up. Snuk enters. Jim puts out his cigarette.

SNUK

Your kutis are ready. Please carry all belongings. Items for safety may be given now.

TIM

I'll hang on to my things, thanks.

Jim hands a wallet to Snuk. They exit, Snuk in the lead.

JIM

Nice backpack, Tim.

TIM

Thanks. Brand new. My old one got torn up on the baggage carousel in Kathmandu. One of the straps got caught between the rollers. Stuff was flying everywhere, spinning around, people were shouting...it was nuts...

(quietly)

What's a kuti?

JIM

A hut on stilts. In the jungle.

TIM

Cool! I think I'll get up early to meditate.

Lights fade to black. Night sounds.

Scene 4 BREAKFAST LINE-UP

Lights fade up. Dawn.

Monks line up for breakfast.

Tim is meditating in bed. An enormous spider descends onto his neck. He shouts, jumps up, and repeatedly stomps on it. A bell rings. He runs out. Tim joins Jim, standing slightly apart.

TIM

Hey, Jim, I think I stepped on a Tarantula or something back in my kuti. It was huge.

Snuk overhears, walks towards Tim and Jim.

JIM

Probably a Huntsman Spider. Big, but less lethal than the Tarantulas around here. Unless you have an allergy...Where were you this morning? Didn't see you at the group meditation.

TIM

Meditation? I thought it was chanting. I...slept through the bell... Maybe tomorrow you could bang on my door? That 3:00 AM wake-up call is pretty brutal.

JIM

Sure. Still...it's odd you didn't hear us... It was a regular Buddhist Tabernacle Choir in there.

TIM

But...that spider...

(leaning in, whispering)

I... I killed it. Shouldn't I tell someone or something?

JIM

You're not a monk yet!

Enter Palmer, Chapman and Zoom from behind.

PALMER

Confession is the antidote for loneliness.

TIM

What?

CHAPMAN

Don't y'all listen to him. Palmer is always saying things, aren't ya kid?

Hi, I'm Chapman. That kid there is Herbie.

HERBIE

Hi!

TIM
I'm Tim.

ZOOM
(holds out hand) Zoom! Peace, dude!

Tim shakes hand. Zoom does elaborate hand jive.

Snuk angles in.

SNUK
You are Jim?

TIM
Tim! I'm Tim actually. He's Jim.

SNUK
You have killed a spider?

TIM
Um... I'm not sure it actually died. I mean, well, I think...

SNUK
At this wat, you must not kill or hurt anything. There are many spiders and scorpions. If you do not bother them they will not bother you.

PALMER
If you meet the Buddha on the road, don't kill him.

SNUK
Also, you must speak only the truth. This requires that you refrain from speaking falsely. You must carefully follow each of the five precepts.

Tim swats a mosquito.

SNUK
Do not kill mosquitoes.

TIM
Sorry. It's a habit. In Canada...

SNUK
You are here now. Even in Canada do not.

JIM

What about Dengue fever, Snuk?

SNUK

If that is your karma, that is your karma. I have resided at this monastery since five rains retreats. I have never known Dengue to exist here.

JIM

Dengue's around.

ZOOM

I had Dengue once!

SNUK

You had a bad cold Zoom. Also...be mindful where you are walking. Please do not step on ants.

TIM

Ants?

SNUK

Yes. There are large colonies of ants. But they will only bite if they feel threatened. That is the true law of the jungle, the true Dharma.

JIM

Man, whatever are you talking about?

SNUK

Did you ever know the story of the Buddha and the wild elephant?

JIM

Nope, can't say I've heard that one.

SNUK

You should do some more reading then. The Buddha had a cousin, a real bad-ass, power-hungry guy. A splitter. He wanted to kill the Buddha and take over the Sangha. He released a crazy wild elephant and when the Buddha was walking on the road, the elephant charged at the Buddha.

JIM

Well, what happened?

SNUK

The Buddha sent out waves of love for the poor, angry creature. Metta. He held up his hand,
(gestures, palm open)

sending out the good vibrations saying "Voah there, tusker, voah! I am just like you...a friend." And the elephant knelt down in front of the Buddha.

Palmer puts his hands together in the Anjali pose, bowing his head in reverence. Tim and Jim stare at him.

JIM

Sounds like a real Indian cowboy, your Buddha.

CHAPMAN

Yee-haw!

SNUK

Yes, Chapman, that is a correct analogy. A cowboy knows how to tame wild horses. He speaks without words. It is a kind of telepathy, you can say. He knows the horse...and the horse knows him. We are all brothers and sisters.

TIM

Even the ants and spiders?

SNUK

Yes. If you love living beings, they will know, and will not harm you.

ZOOM

It's a different way of being, man.

Zoom and company begin to move, in rhythm. Tim and Jim look on.

Song 3: Ants and Spiders

SNUK

*Ants and Spiders
Mosquitos and snakes
Better watch out now
Don't retaliate
You know it's bad karma
You've got to let go
of bodily attachment
It's the old ego*

ZOOM

*Innuendo, insult,
all that bragging so fake
Better watch out now
Don't participate*

*You know it's bad karma
You've got to let go
of vocal attachment
It's the old ego*

*Ants and Spiders!
You better watch out!*

*HERBIE
False advertising,
sex, greed, and hate
Better watch out now
Let 'em dissipate
You know it's bad karma
You've got to let go
of mental attachment
It's the old ego*

The Ajahn arrives. Everyone straightens up. They enter the dining area, in order of seniority. Out of habit, Tim swats a mosquito, immediately disappointing himself. He looks around. No one has seen.

Everyone exits except Tim. Percy enters, sweeping. Tim joins him.

TIM
Hello. Need a hand? I'm new here. Tim.

PERCY
Hello Tim. My name's Percy.

TIM
You sound English. Where are you from?

PERCY
Lewisham. It's in London.

The pair sweep in silence.

TIM
Why did you come to Wat Miwahrichat, Percy?

Percy stops sweeping.

PERCY
I thought it would be a good place to learn about Buddhism. I'm frightfully keen

on meditation, you see?

TIM

Me too. What kind of meditation do you practice?

PERCY

I... I stay aware of everything I do... And breathing. I like to do that one sometimes.

TIM

Uh-huh...

Awkward silence.

There's a lot of leaves over there by the cisterns.

PERCY

No! No, not there.

TIM

Why not?

PERCY

I... I'm planning on those ones later.... They're mine.

TIM

Yours? Percy, do leaves belong to anyone?

PERCY

I mean...the Ajahn asked me to do those ones, behind the cisterns.

TIM

Really?

Percy freezes. Tim resumes sweeping. Percy nervously hums the melody line of "The Secret".

OK....no worries. I'll just do this patch here... So the Buddha's birthday is coming up, huh? Should be interesting.

PERCY

Oh, yes. Vesak is lots of fun. Last year the entire village came.

TIM

You were here last year?

PERCY
Oh yes.

Pause.

TIM
But...if you don't mind me asking... If you've been here a year, why haven't you ordained yet?

PERCY
I... I'm still thinking about it.

TIM
Really? Why the delay? If you're going to live at a monastery don't you think you may as well ordain? At least as a pakhao...

PERCY
Do you think so?

TIM
Well, yes actually...I do. Why would you want to stay here otherwise? Is it allowed?

PERCY
Oh dear...

TIM
It's okay, Percy... Becoming a monk is a very big step. You have to be ready. Sometimes a person needs a bit of time for a big decision.

PERCY
Yes. That's what I think too... Herbie told me, you know.

TIM
Told you what? Herbie?

PERCY
And the others. They said you and Jim decided to ordain.

TIM
Well, we'll see about that. We'll start out as pakhaos like everyone else. That makes sense to us...and actually it might work for you too. You know there's a robes-giving ceremony scheduled next week?

PERCY
Yes. I know.

TIM
You should think about it.

Percy pulls out a handkerchief, wipes his brow.

PERCY
I suppose that should do for today.

TIM
There are still those leaves over by the cisterns.

PERCY
No! Those are mine. I'm doing them later.

TIM
Well, then... How about we go for a cup of cocoa over at the canteen?

PERCY
No, thank you. I'm going to lie down. You go.

TIM
OK, then... see you later, Percy, I guess...

PERCY
Yes, later on.

Percy exits. Tim puts down broom by kuti/reading room, spots a bright red cup on a table.

TIM
Cool cup!

Tim picks up the cup and exits.

Scene 5 MAKING COCOA

(NB: Time has passed. Different t-shirts etc.)

Enter Zoom and others.

Zoom is giving Jim a tutorial, working with a kettle, pots, and ingredients on a table. He is fabulously talented, like Tom Cruise in Cocktail – juggles, tosses etc.

Herbie watches intently, squatting Thai-style to one side. Snuk and Chapman are sitting quietly to one side.

Tim enters. He is holding the red cup.

ZOOM

The trick is to balance the sugar just right. Isn't that right, Herb? You don't want it too bitter. That's not so bad for coffee, but cocoa has to be sweet or you just can't drink it. Maybe just one little spoonful more.

(dumping in a ladle-full)

Voila!

Zoom pours cocoa; everyone drinks together. Snuk approaches Tim.

SNUK

Jim, this cup is for the reading room only.

TIM

It's Tim, actually.

SNUK

This cup is not to be moved from the reading room. Who brought it here?

TIM

Jim, maybe?

JIM

Nope, not me.

SNUK

Do not take what is not given to you. When you have finished, please leave this cup on the table. I will return it to its proper place.

JIM

The reading room?

SNUK

Yes.

TIM

Hey, did anyone notice that Percy seemed a bit...low this morning? Is he sick or something?

CHAPMAN

Nah, he's just a little depressed. Gets like that sometimes. Nervous type.

TIM

Depressed, Chapman? About what?

CHAPMAN

Well, you could say he's a bit "spooked". Thinks this place is haunted.

TIM

Haunted?

CHAPMAN

We had a suicide here last year.

TIM

I heard about that.

CHAPMAN

Fella says he's seen the ghost.

ZOOM

Twice. Over by the cisterns.

TIM

Oh, the cisterns! So that's why he... But ghosts? You're kidding.

CHAPMAN

No. Truth is, the locals hereabouts think it's Percy's who's the peepah.

HERBIE

What's a peepah?

CHAPMAN

It's because he's always lurking around, staring at things in that quirky way of his.

ZOOM

They're real you know.

HERBIE

What's a peepah?

ZOOM

I heard some villagers this morning, decorating the courtyard. An old woman

said Percy was a peepah.

JIM

Is that a fact? Weren't they speaking Thai? Do you speak Thai?

ZOOM

I catch the drift. She was quaking, bro.

HERBIE

What's a peepah?!!

CHAPMAN

A peepah, Herbie, is a kind of forest sprite, a spirit. Locals say they live in the jungle 'round here.

TIM

Percy a peepah? For Heaven's sake. And what's with all the ghosts? I thought Buddhism was about using your powers of reason.

JIM

Think again. It's full of all kinds of spooky stuff.

(Singing to "Ants and Spiders" melody)

Ghosts and goblins, gods and ghouls...

TIM

That's not what I read.

JIM

Wake-up time, little Buddha. Those books you're always reading were written by monks, and written for westerners.

TIM

So?

JIM

So it's not what your average Thai villager knows as his religion. Isn't that right Herbie? Lots of ghosts.

Herbie grins. The monk listens attentively. Tim finishes his cup and places it in front of Snuk, who takes note.

ZOOM

It could be true. How'd you know there's no ghosts? You can't prove it. Gotta stay open-minded.

JIM

Not so open-minded your brains fall out, Zoom.

Everyone laughs, including Zoom. Palmer guffaws loudly.

TIM

The main thing is to meditate. To follow the path. Right?

ZOOM

You're already on the path Dude, even if you don't know it.

Palmer hands Zoom the bowl of chocolates; he offers it to Tim.

TIM

I thought we weren't supposed to eat solid food after noon.

ZOOM

Chocolate is actually a hardened liquid. It's okay.

TIM

No thanks.

SNUK

The path is set out by the Buddha. It is very clear.

JIM

Not to this cowboy. What the Buddha taught? It's ancient history.

SNUK

This is why we follow the rules. Rules do not change. Follow the system. Then everything is clear.

PALMER

(between bites)

Even though we don't know what we are doing we never make a mistake.

Palmer takes another piece of chocolate.

SNUK

The path is a narrow path, but many people have walked on it -- from all countries. The Buddha has shown us the way. The Middle Way. You begin by avoiding extremes. Do not waste time chasing pleasures or hurting yourself with bad actions. The fact is: you will die. Cultivate awareness in everything you do, even when you are falling asleep.

JIM

Snooze your way to awakening. Sounds tricky.

Jim lies down, feigning sleep.

SNUK

It is not tricky. It is simple. But you must take the first step.

TIM

What's that?

SNUK

You are here, are you not?

TIM

I guess we are.

Tim gives Jim a shake and he sits up.

Song 4: Tim and Jim Begin

*WESTERN MONK CHOIR
Tim and Jim on the path so slim
Tim and Jim again
Walking away, turning in
Tim and Jim begin*

*Setting out on the path (Looks grim)
The edge is razor thin
Straight down the middle
'tween pleasure and death
Tim and Jim begin*

*TIM
What makes me me?
What makes you you?*

*JIM
Ain't got no shoe size
We ain't got no shoes*

*TIM
We're hot on the trail*

JIM
But cold on the clues

TIM
Our dogs are barking

JIM
We're singing the blues

WESTERN MONK CHOIR
Tim and Jim on the path so slim
Tim and Jim again
Walking away, turning in
Tim and Jim begin

Some call it a calling
Some say it's a whim
Some say it's appalling
Some call it a sin
But what's there to lose
when you just can't win?
Tim and Jim begin

JIM
What makes you me?
TIM
What makes me you?
TIM/JIM
Your/My eyes are brown
My/Your eyes are blue

TIM
We follow the teachings

JIM
We follow the rules

TIM
We're walking the tight-rope

JIM
We're paying our dues

WESTERN MONK CHOIR
Oh, chant me a mantra,
sing you a hymn

*Within or without you
like George would sing
The Buddha is smiling,
the Cheshire Cat grins
Tim and Jim begin*

Tim has the red cup in hand again. Snuk takes it from him. For a moment they are both holding it. Single light narrows down to them. Snuk takes it.

Blackout.

Scene 6 PREPARING FOR THE PARTY

Time has passed. (New shirts etc.)

Tim and Jim are dusting the skeleton. In the background, the other monks are putting up festive Birthday decorations and a welcome banner, setting up tables etc.

TIM

Shot herself with a hunting rifle, the Ajahn said.

JIM

A hunting rifle? Don't think so. The bullet entered from the side of the head.

TIM

What do you mean?

JIM

Look. There's the entry point. And there's the exit wound.

TIM

So?

JIM

So... if this was a suicide, it was a handgun, not a rifle -- otherwise she couldn't have reached around to pull the trigger. The barrel would be too long.

TIM

What are you, a forensic scientist?

JIM

I've seen enough... Bangkok city morgue.

TIM
Oh...

JIM
What isn't clear is how a Thai villager gets ahold of a pistol way out here. We're pretty remote. No one would have one, except the police. On the other hand, some farmers do keep rifles around for predators...

TIM
Well, then. She must have had a rifle. The Ajahn said she had a rifle.

JIM
Right. But if that's what she had, someone else would have had to pull the trigger.

Tim and Jim look at each other. Long pause.

TIM
Shouldn't we do something? Tell someone...

JIM
Ooooh... I don't think so, Tim. This happened over a year ago. We're outsiders here -- it's not our business. We'd never get to the bottom of it anyway.

TIM
But the police...shouldn't we tell the police?

JIM
The police? Get real.

TIM
But what should we do?

JIM
Do? Nothing -- I'd say.

TIM
But that's not right. You can't just let a murderer roam around free.

JIM
Who said anything about murder? We don't know what happened.

TIM
But isn't that the job of the police, to find out?

JIM

You're not in Canada anymore, Dorothy.

Long pause.

TIM

Well, I guess the Buddha would say that karma will sort it all out.

JIM

Don't believe it. There's no justice in this world. Murderers go unpunished all the time. And good people suffer the most.

TIM

That's what I like about you Jim. You're so cheerful.

Well, looks like it's all ready.

The area is colourfully decorated. A line of monks and pakhaos is served food by villagers. Monks avert their eyes from the women. Dukkhitā is among them, beaming with joy. Zoom is already seated, gorging himself. Jim sits, observing. Tim is in line behind Chapman, followed by Herbie. The Ajahn sits on a high chair, untouchable. Snuk oversees the proceedings. Tim shuffles along the line until he stands before Dukkhitā. Looking up, he is momentarily tongue-tied.

DUKKHITA

What do you like?

TIM

Yes, please. What's that?

DUKKHITA

Papaya?

Tim nods. Dukkhitā smiles and serves Tim. He moves along the line and sits down. Dukkhitā continues to serve and talk animatedly with others.

SNUK

OK. OK. You lay disciples sit over there.

Herbie slips in among the others.

SNUK

Herbie! In the corner.

The Ajahn nods in approval. A few villagers whisper to one another, giggling. Herbie quickly walks off to sit in a corner with his food. Zoom sits beside Tim.

TIM

Hi Zoom. What gives with Herbie being told to sit in the corner?

PERCY

It's not fair. They pick on him.

CHAPMAN

Come now Percy, you know the rules.

(to Tim)

It's based on his confession this morning.

TIM

Confession? You have confession here?

ZOOM

Yeah, for sure. Herbie's always confessing. Has difficulty keeping his right hand out of trouble's way, if you know what I mean. Third precept.

TIM

How humiliating.

Tim glowers at the Ajahn, then glances at Dukkhitā. Snuk watches Tim. Chapman sits down beside Tim.

CHAPMAN

(to Zoom)

Well, we don't see it that way now do we Zoom? It's just a little method to keep those ol' desires in check...

TIM

Well, everyone seems to be having a good chuckle about it. It's not right.

PALMER

If you climb a lonely tree, there's only one way down -- and that's the way you came.

JIM

What planet are you from Palmer?

CHAPMAN

Tibet isn't it, my boy? That's where you were before landing on our little planet here in Thailand. Wandering in the mountains.

JIM

Tibet? Oho! What wisdom from your travels then? Any secret teachings for us? Do tell.

PALMER

I keep nothing in my pockets but my hands.

CHAPMAN

You don't even have pockets, kid!

Everyone laughs, including Palmer. Tim again looks over at Dukkhita. Snuk marks it. Jim attempts to draw Tim's attention away.

JIM

Hey Tim, isn't that a drumstick on your plate? I thought the Buddha said we're all supposed to evolve into vegetarians.

TIM

(snapping out of it)

Uh...I know. They just served it to me.

ZOOM

(between mouthfuls)

Don't worry about it. We all get some. They mix it into the rice-balls too. It's a birthday treat!

TIM

I guess they don't do birthday cakes around here.

Tim puts down his plate.

SNUK

(to Jim, more than Tim)

The Buddha did not teach for us to be vegetarian people. This is not necessary. The meat is not killed for us. The animal is dead already.

TIM

So that makes it ok?

CHAPMAN

Well, sure... As long as you didn't kill it yourself. And as long as you don't see or hear that it was killed for you... and don't even suspect that it might have been killed for you...then no problema. Now, you eat on up, yuh hear?

ZOOM

(mouth full)
It's just stuff. We can eat it.

He takes a large bite.

But we should be grateful.

TIM
(staring at his plate)
To the animal?

ZOOM
To the person who gave it to you.

TIM
That he killed it?

ZOOM
No! That he gave it!

TIM
But wouldn't me being grateful encourage that same behavior in the future?

CHAPMAN
Splitting hairs, my boy. If someone gave it to you with a good heart, then you can accept it...and say thank you.

JIM
Unless he killed it for you!

SNUK
Correct!

TIM
But Zoom just said this was made especially for us. A birthday treat.

CHAPMAN
Yes, but the animal was not killed specifically for you, Tim.

JIM
You talk like a lawyer, Chapman.

CHAPMAN
Actually I was one. In Houston. Worked for Exxon. I'm here to atone for my sins.

Everyone laughs.

TIM

Well, what about meat bought in the supermarket?

CHAPMAN

Was it killed specifically for you?

TIM

Specifically? No more than this meat was.

CHAPMAN

Then according to the Buddha -- it's ok to eat it.

TIM

Wow! I can't believe that. Those poor creatures are tortured, slaughtered on an assembly line. There is NO WAY the Buddha would approve of modern industrialized meat production. It would be...immoral.

SNUK

This is a good question for Ajahn Mahaka. There must be an answer about this in the scriptures.

JIM

Slow down. Those supermarket animals aren't killed for us personally, they're killed for the anonymous modern consumer. I mean... in ancient India they didn't even have refrigerators. Meat had to be eaten right away -- it would have been easy to know if an animal had been killed specifically for you.

TIM

So...

JIM

You won't find an answer in your holy books.

CHAPMAN

There's no precedent.

TIM

...we have to figure out what the Buddha would have taught if he was alive today.

JIM

Exactly. Take marshmallows.

Herbie, sullenly eating alone to this point, bursts in.

HERBIE

Marshmallows?! Did you guys get marshmallows?

CHAPMAN

Shhh... Herbie.

Everyone looks at Herbie.

TIM

Marshmallows?

JIM

Yeah, marshmallows. Even though marshmallows didn't exist back then, I'm sure they'd get the Buddha's OK... I mean, unless you see, hear or suspect that the cow that was killed for the bones that were used for the gelatin in the marshmallow that you're eating was killed specifically for you.

TIM

I'm confused. Did the Buddha want us to remain ignorant? The cows are obviously being killed for me, as a consumer.

JIM

So marshmallows are out?

HERBIE

What about vegan marshmallows?!

JIM

Boy, this religion of yours is going to make a lot of kids unhappy.

HERBIE

Those exist! They're made out of seaweed. I had them once at a campout...
(drifting, homesick)
Lake Wanaka... Mmmm....

{Musical accompaniment: Begin Intro to "Marshmallows"}.

ZOOM

You guys are nuts. The Buddha didn't make any rules about marshmallows, because they didn't exist back then. End of story.

Song 5: Marshmallows (What's the Spirit?)

CHAPMAN

Sitting round the campfire

HERBIE

My marshmallow got burnt

CHAPMAN

*Like a Brahmin makes his sacrifice
Is there nothing we have learnt?*

TIM

*There's a little bit of gelatin
in our yoghurt now*

JIM

*Even the Buddha could not anticipate
what would happen to the cow*

WESTERN MONK CHOIR

*Marshmallows! Marshmallows!
Who can say how the Dharma goes
Stick to the book
or follow your nose?
Don't eat none of those marshmallows*

TIM

*The flesh all wrapped in plastic,
The supermarket aisles*

JIM

*The strains of sleepy muzak,
the "Have a nice day" smiles*

WESTERN MONK CHOIR

Marshmallows! Marshmallows! etc...

CHAPMAN

We all know the cow is holy

HERBIE

but so too the pig and hen

SNUK

The Buddha loved the animals

EVERYONE

Just as he loved all men

The party is cleared away fast, and the monks sit on cushions before the Ajahn who is giving a Dharma-talk. His students' backs are to the audience. Snuk sits to one side.

The red cup gets passed down the line to Tim behind their backs.

{Musical accompaniment: Indian drone, the Ajahn's talk becoming a back beat}.

AJAHN

We can read the scriptures on this point. They tell us how the Buddha surveyed the entire world with the power of his incomparable psychic eye, searching for suitable students. "I saw beings with little dust in their eyes and those with much, those with keen faculties and those with dull faculties, those with good qualities and those with bad qualities, easy to teach and hard to teach."

Tim puts up his hand. The Ajahn carries on. Tim continues waving, irritated, fidgeting. Jim scribbles in a notebook, Tim looking over his shoulder. Herbie is whispering, disturbing others, flicking paper balls at Zoom. Zoom, with headphones, is tripping out.

AJHAN

"In a pond of red, white, and blue lotuses, some lotuses are born and grow in the water and thrive immersed in the water without rising out of it. Some other lotuses are born and grow in the water but rest on the surface. And some other lotuses rise out of the water and stand clear..." We must learn to be like these last lotuses, rising above the muck of ordinary worldly life, leaving this behind to reach the peace of nirvana. Like the Buddha's first disciples --.

Jim raises his hand. Ignoring Tim, the Ajahn replies to Jim. Tim is slighted.

AJAHN

Yes. A question at the back there.

JIM

How can we really know anything about the Buddha's first disciples? It was so long ago.

AJAHN

A good question. This is clearly explained in the scriptures. In fact, the Buddha's first thought after becoming enlightened was to find his own former teachers and teach them the Dharma. And there is a lesson for us here. We would do well to emulate such an attitude of gratitude.

TIM (to Jim, whispered)

Attitude of gratitude?

AJAHN

Unfortunately, the Buddha quickly perceived that his old gurus had died. So he approached five old friends, fellow seekers from the early days of his spiritual quest. Those five became his first students. And upon hearing his teaching all five instantly became enlightened.

Herbie falls asleep and falls over. Zoom stifles a laugh.

AJAHN

Enough then. You will begin your work period earlier than scheduled for today.

He exits. Everyone grabs brooms etc., exits.

Song 6: Behind the Cisterns (Instrumental)

It is hot. The group is working. Jim and Snuk haul pails on bamboo poles slung over their shoulders. Tim is scrubbing a cistern. The Ajahn sits at a table with a parasol, removed but close enough to view the others. He is writing in a journal and sipping iced water, whose cubes clink around in his glass. Tim glares in his direction. Chapman is practicing walking meditation stage left. Jim and Snuk place their buckets outside the monks' toilet. Snuk looks into one of the cisterns.

SNUK

You could tip this cistern over, before we fill it up again.

Jim looks into the cistern.

JIM

Why would we do that? It's almost full. Only two buckets more should fill it completely.

SNUK

Maybe you want to.

JIM

Whatever for? Talk about a make-work project. You do it, if you want.

Pause.

SNUK

I cannot do this.

JIM

I don't understand, Snuk.

SNUK

The water in there is...old.

JIM

Old?

SNUK

It is standing for a long time. It may have mosquito larvae. Someone has to pour the water out because monks can't use water with mosquito larvae.

JIM

Oh...now I get it. You want me to do it for you because monks aren't supposed to kill. Is that it? You want me to dump it?

SNUK

I cannot tell you that.

JIM

But I've taken the precepts too. Rule # 1 is no killing, isn't it?

SNUK

Technically, you do not know that there are actually larvae there... Even if there are some larvae, you will not actually be killing. They will die after...naturally.

JIM

Hmmm... Snuk, technically I don't see why it's actually any better for me to sully my karma than for you to sully yours just because you're a monk.

SNUK

You will be helping. That is good karma. Good karma for you -- and good karma for me... It is the intention that counts.

JIM

Right. Don't look.

Jim tips the cistern.

JIM

There you go, all larvaed out for you. Fill er up! Happy merit-making!

Jim walks away, leaving Snuk standing alone holding a bucket. Snuk dumps his bucket into the cistern, then sullenly exits.

This is bullshit.

Chapman overhears, adjusts his direction towards Jim and Tim.

TIM

Here, help me with this ladder.

They erect a very rickety bamboo ladder on to a tall cistern. Tim climbs up the ladder. Jim starts handing him buckets of water, which Tim dumps in, spilling half on himself and on Jim. They proceed to get tangled up between the handoff of buckets, taking turns climbing up and holding the ladder, dumping and spilling as they go. Slapstick throughout.

JIM

Any larvae in there?

TIM

No.

JIM

First they tell you not to kill, then they say you can kill as long as they don't tell you to kill, if it spares monks from having to kill. So much for equality.

TIM

Well, at least we're equal in one sense.

JIM

Oh? And what sense would that be?

TIM

Karma. We all get our karma. May as well help each other out.

JIM

That's what Herman Hesse over there just told me. Nice theory. The reality is we end up doing all the dirty work for the monks.

TIM

But...we have to "play by the rules", right? You said so yourself.

JIM

Yeah, yeah, I know. But look at this place, Tim. It's a farangi freak-show. A bunch of losers and dropouts. What a joke... Pathetic, really...

(looking around, mumbling)

Full of silence and tranquility, signifying nothing...

Jim stops working, at the top of the ladder.

Hey, what do you say we head into Udon-town? I know a place with air-con. We could go for a beer... Ice cold...

TIM

You know we can't do that.

JIM

And you know you want one... Right and wrong, Tim... They're just in your head.

TIM

But we gave our word.

JIM

Worse, we made a vow. Tim --

Jim sticks his head into the cistern, which echoes loudly.

There are no absolutes.

He removes his head from the cistern, smiles.

Empty.

TIM

I wouldn't be so sure.

Jim stares down at Tim, reassessing. Tim stares back, momentarily letting go of the ladder, which slips out from under Jim. He hangs onto the edge of the cistern as Tim quickly moves below taking him on his shoulders. The two struggle to keep their balance. Chapman appears just as they are regaining their form. They come to a stop facing him, Jim still on Tim.

CHAPMAN

Friends. There is another way.

Tim and Jim freeze.

The Buddha called it Dharma. Dharma. The law of the universe.

Jim jumps off Tim's shoulders. Chapman picks up the ladder, leans it against the cistern. Tim and Jim start back to work, with Chapman pitching in.

TIM

Law of the universe? I didn't think Buddhists believed in God.

CHAPMAN

Not God. Dharma. Universal law.

TIM

...Well... Someone had to make the law...

JIM

That's pretty audacious Tim. Are you telling these Buddhists they believe in God, but don't know it?

TIM

I guess I am...

Dukkhita appears at a distance, humming the melody line from "The Secret". Tim has seen her. She carries a jug of water, which she leaves at a table where Percy, Herbie, and Palmer are taking a break. She exits.

TIM

Maybe I am. I don't know. Uh...

Tim, Jim, and Chapman join the others. Tim dips the red cup into the jug and takes a long, deep drink -- gazing off in the direction of Dukkhita.

HERBIE

Ahhh... Nothing like water!

PERCY

Can't live without it.

HERBIE

The source of life itself.

PERCY

Replenishing to a body in need.

HERBIE

Wouldn't you say?

TIM

Who is she, Chapman?

CHAPMAN

She?

Chapman follows the line of Tim's sight.

PALMER

O housebuilder...you are seen!

CHAPMAN

Dukkhita. From the village. Comes around to help out sometimes. Prays. Over in the temple...

HERBIE

You already met her mother.

TIM

Her mother, Herbie? I don't think so.

CHAPMAN

You must have, son. When you arrived.

HERBIE

She's always hanging around in the reading room... Hee, hee, hee.

TIM

Huh?

CHAPMAN

The skeleton, boy. The skeleton.

TIM

What?!!!

Herbie giggles.

CHAPMAN

Her name was Satya.

In the distance, the Ajahn looks up from his papers.

TIM

Satya, that's the Thai word for truth!

PERCY

Sanskrit.

TIM

Sanskrit... uh... What actually happened there anyway?

CHAPMAN

Well, Satya really was a big part of life at the wat -- for the longest time. Did the books, kept things straight, ran the office. Truth is, she took care of us monks... Her illness came out of the blue. It was all so sudden, so...

PERCY

Strange.

TIM

What do you mean, strange?

CHAPMAN

She was radiant. Right to the end, utterly radiant. Never seen anything like it. So full of love. She kept working, right through her pain, but...When it happened, it happened fast. It was the end of the day... There were a few of us there. She walked up to us and bowed. She was completely at peace.

HERBIE:

We didn't know she intended to...

PERCY

End it.

Jim is listening intently.

TIM

Wow.

CHAPMAN

Ajahn Mahaka talked with her a while, then she walked off again. Into the forest... It was dusk... Later, we heard a shot. Ajahn found her body in the morning.

TIM

Jesus.

CHAPMAN

The strange thing is...

HERBIE

They never found...

HERBIE and PERCY

...the gun.

The Ajahn approaches. Percy looks down and away. Herbie drops his bucket, which clangs and clatters in the silence. Tim and Jim exchange glances.

PERCY

(whispering to Tim)

They were very close.

Zoom enters, wearing nothing but a beach-towel.

ZOOM

Let's hit the sauna boys!

They exit, leaving Percy.

Lights change to night, moonlight.

Song 7: The Ghosts of Wat Miwahrichat

PERCY

*They call me a peepah, I don't know why
I'm very fond of people, even though I'm kind of shy
They say I'm strange, I'm spooky, but that's a bloody stupid joke
I'm a proper English gentleman, just an ordinary bloke*

*There's nothing to be done, the weather looks like rain,
I'm coming down with something, and they tell me don't complain
But there's no decent tea here and the biscuits are all stale
How can you blame me if I look a little pale?*

Percy tap dances with a broom. Ghosts emerge from the jungle, joining in.

GHOST CHORUS-LINE AND PERCY

*And the ghosts of Wat Miwahrichat
they'll get you every time
The ghosts of Wat Miwahrichat
they'll give you quite a fright
When your kuti door
opens up at night
Be sure that there are
none in sight
Don't step outside,
don't you dare take flight
The ghosts of Wat Miwahrichat
they'll get you every time.*

Percy breaks away from the ghosts.

PERCY

*I've always valued honesty,
in the honorable British way
And you know I hate hypocrisy,
it causes me dismay
I can't repress what I know
or I'm sure to fade away
I'm paralyzed in a puzzle
too perilous to play!*

*There's nothing to be done, the weather looks like rain,
I'm coming down with something, still the Englishman remains
There's no decent tea here and the biscuits are all stale
How can you blame me if I look a little pale?*

Percy exits.

Scene 7 SHELVING BOOKS

Lights up. Day. Time has passed.

Tim and Dukkhitā are alone in the reading room. Tim shelves books. Dukkhitā tidies up. The red cup is on a table. Tim takes an occasional sip from it in a weirdly debonair kind of way.

TIM

...so, anyway, that's why my mother always told me to be careful not to wash vegetables and read philosophy at the same time. If you can believe it!

DUKKHITA

You are very funny, Khun Jim.

TIM

I'm Tim, actually. Tim. Jim is the other one.

DUKKHITA

Other one?

TIM

The shorter one. The American. I'm Canadian. We arrived at the same time.

Dukkhitā does not reply.

Anyway...where do we keep these brochures...?

Dukkhita takes the brochures, begins to dust the skeleton. She hums the melody line of "The Secret" as she works.

DUKKHITA

I go to Cincinnati one time. To stay with my Auntie. She got married to an American. I come home again because my mother got sick.

Tim looks at the skeleton.

TIM

I'm sorry.

DUKKHITA

It's okay. She got cancer. It was really so bad... You have to tham jai.

TIM

Tham jai?

DUKKHITA

Make your heart.

Song 8: Make Your Heart

DUKKHITA

*My mother always told me, you must learn to make your heart,
when change falls hard upon you, you must rise to play your part
The lotus grows up in the mud, there's light in the darkest hour
The answer's there inside you when the sweet has turned to sour*

TIM

*Make your heart, make your heart
Make your heart, make your heart*

DUKKHITA

*When change falls hard upon you
You must learn to make your heart
The answer's there inside you
You must learn to make your heart*

TIM AND DUKKHITA

Learn to make your heart, learn to make your heart

*When change falls hard upon you
You must learn to make your heart
The answer's there inside you
You must learn to make your heart*

DUKKHITA

*The lotus grows up in the mud, there's light in the darkest hour
The answer's there inside you when the sweet has turned to sour
In the forest of our choices there will always be great harm
but love will bind your wounds there like a magic healing balm*

TIM and DUKKHITA

*Make your heart, make your heart
Make your heart, make your heart
When change falls hard upon you
You must learn to make your heart
The answer's there inside you
You must learn to make your heart*

TIM

Uh... I, um... So how did her skeleton end up here?

DUKKHITA

My mother will not go to hospital. There are many unhappy spirits in hospital. This is her place to be happy.

TIM

I see... But why did they hang up her skeleton?

DUKKHITA

It is not permitted to burn suicides, like everybody else. We bury her. Later we find a letter. She asks to hang up her bones in the wat. So we dig her up again.

TIM

Well, I'm pleased to meet her.

DUKKHITA

Will you be staying here for a long time, Khun Tim?

TIM

I'm planning to...become a monk... I don't know... I mean...Tomorrow's the tobes-giving ceremony and everything...

DUKKHITA

Monk? Are you ready to be monk, Khun Tim?

TIM

A pakhao, I mean. I'll decide about becoming a monk later...

DUKKHITA

Well, I hope you like it here. See you.

Dukkhita exits.

TIM

See you, Dukkhita.

Jim enters.

JIM

Snuk's looking for you. Apparently the red cup is missing again.

TIM

Thanks. It's in my kuti.

JIM

Isn't that it right there?

TIM

Oh yeah.

JIM

Saw your girlfriend on the way in.

TIM

Oh, give me a break.

JIM

Just drop it before it gets started, Tim. You don't know anything about the women here. You ready for marriage? Because that's what they want you know, marriage.

Tim stares at Jim.

JIM

What are you doing? In a monastery?

TIM

Tham jai.

JIM

Really? We should just get out of here. Before it's too late.

They exit. Tim lies down in his kuti.

Behind the skeleton, Satya's ghost floats out from the jungle, hovers over the sleeping Tim.

Song 9: Satya's Song

SATYA

*Behold the wayward traveler, so very far away
Come to seek the Buddha, to find the Buddha's way
Radiant is my daughter, but who can set who free?
Who are you? Who are you? Where lies your destiny?*

*Something is not right here, restless are the trees
Mother Earth is trembling, troubled is the breeze,
The rains are falling too hard, the rice is growing thin
Demons in high places, the people bow to them*

*Come to seek the Buddha, to find the Buddha's way
Who are you? Who are you? What is your part to play?*

TIM

(muttering, in a dream)

*Something is not right
Trouble in the trees
Mother, oh dear mother
The people bow to him*

*Something to be done
Radiant... the rain
Who? Who? oh Buddha,
Something to be done...*

SATYA

*Come to seek the Buddha, to find the Buddha's way
Who are you? Who are you? What is your part to play?*

Satya floats back into the jungle.

INTERMISSION

Song 10: Bardo

ACT II

Scene 1 PAKHAOS

Song 11: Tim and Jim Begin Again (Instrumental)

Palmer drums. The monks dance with brooms. Tim and Jim enter, they are in robes. Segues into...

Scene 2. GROUP SWEEPING

The group is at work sweeping leaves. They pick up piles in the centre, moving them to the sides of the path. Leaves blow back from where they are piled; it's very slow going. Everyone is sweating in the heat. Tim is bored.

TIM

I don't know, Jim. I'm beginning to think I agree with you. This whole monastic thing may turn out to be another dead end. I feel like I'm drifting away. What are we doing here anyway, sweeping up the jungles of Thailand? It's absurd.

Palmer strikes a yoga posture.

PALMER

There are lessons everywhere, if you know how to look. When you sweep leaves you are sweeping your own mind.

TIM

You know, Palmer, I'm getting a bit tired of your maxim making. It's not even Buddhism. You're just making things up.

Palmer shifts to a more complex pose.

PALMER

Possibility is the mother of invention.

TIM

Uh-huh... Actually, I've heard that one before. And it's necessity, not possibility.

Palmer shifts to a third pose.

PALMER

No. Necessity is the father of invention. Possibility is the mother.

Palmer breaks posture.

Song 12: Blowing in The Mind

PALMER

*I see the leaves a-blowing
Blowing through the vines
Like answers to Man's questions
that time has left behind
No philosopher has the last word
No actor the last line
All our thoughts
are just like leaves
Blowing in the mind*

HERBIE

Look! Your pile of leaves is getting blown away, they're blowing away!!!

CHAPMAN

Now Herbie, you know it's not the leaves that are blowing -- it's the wind.

HERBIE

No, no, it's the leaves! Look, oh dear...

CHAPMAN

It's the wind, kiddo!

HERBIE

What? Oh, I see... No, I still think it's the leaves that are blowing, they're blowing away...

CHAPMAN

It's the wind that's doing the blowing, Herbie. It's blowing the leaves away...

HERBIE

That can't be right. There's no one called "the wind" blowing on the leaves, huffing and puffing. The wind and the leaves blowing are the same thing. It seems like there are two, but really there's only one! The windy leaves are just moving around, all windy-leavey like, that's all...

CHAPMAN

You're a crazy kid, Herbie.

PALMER

*Not the leaves, not the wind,
not even the movement*

*Like magic it's the mind that moves,
the meaning that is meant.*

*WESTERN MONK CHOIR
The question at hand
arises in the mind
The answer is never far behind*

SNUK

Yes. We must learn to watch the mind.

TIM

Watch the mind?! We have to act, do something!

*Yenaviro stops sweeping; he looks towards and beyond the group, which freezes,
motionless, when he speaks.*

YENAVIRO

Mind is the forerunner of all things, mind is their chief.
If with an impure mind a person speaks or acts,
sorrow follows him
just as the wheel follows the foot of the ox that draws the cart.

HERBIE

Really?

YENAVIRO

Mind is the forerunner of all things, mind is their chief.
If with a pure mind a person speaks or acts,
happiness follows him
just as his never-departing shadow.

HERBIE

Wow!

Everyone resumes sweeping.

*WESTERN MONK CHOIR
The question at hand
arises in the mind
The answer is never far behind*

JIM

Sounds like nonsense to me.

TIM

(having an epiphany)

It may be nonsense, Jim, but maybe not. Maybe the true Dharma is...different.
 Maybe you just have to give it a go...

JIM
 Okay...

JIM
I see un-leaves un-blowing
un-blowing through un-vines
Like un-answers to un-questions
that un-time has left behind

JIM and PALMER
No philosopher
No last un-word
No actor's last un-line
All un-thoughts are just un-leaves
un-blowing in un-mind

EVERYONE
The question at hand
arises in the mind
The answer is never far behind

The question at hand
is not so hard to find
The answer is blowing in the mind

JIM
 I think we might be losing it Tim.

TIM
 You may be right.

ZOOM
 Yo, Tim! It's time for your interview with the Ajahn.

TIM
 Oh yeah. I'm coming. *(to Jim)* Wish me luck!

Scene 3 THE INTERVIEW

Tim enters, bows at the feet of the Ajahn.

{Musical Accompaniment : Indian drone/Sitar for the Ajahn in Guru mode, melody line of "The Secret"}.

AJAHN

Please sit. Jim. Welcome.

TIM

Tim.

AJAHN

Tim? I have Jim marked down for today. Some confusion, it seems.

TIM

It's alright.

AJAHN

It's because you arrived at the same time. And you do look remarkably similar.

TIM

Especially since our haircuts!

AJAHN

Consider it a lesson in humility.

TIM

Do you really think life is like that -- supplying lessons we need to learn?

AJAHN

Yes, sometimes.

TIM

Some people say there's a reason for everything that happens?

AJAHN

It's a healthy way to look at things -- if you so choose.

The Ajahn gestures towards a tray with tea and coffee.

Please....

Tim produces the red cup; he pours himself a coffee, adding milk and lots of sugar.

TIM

So, it's our choice how we take things?

AJAHN

Of course. The Buddha never denied free choice...

TIM

But hold on -- what about karma? It's all predetermined, isn't it?

AJAHN

No, not quite. Your actions do have consequences, of course. You reap as you sow, as the proverb says. That's the law of karma. You can choose your actions, but you can't choose their results. There's a natural order in the way things unfold, Tim. But it's also true that there exists a certain...randomness in our experience. Earthquakes, viruses, and so on.

TIM

So, we're not responsible for everything that happens to us, but we are responsible for everything we do.

AJAHN

That's it. The workings of karma are unfathomable to an unenlightened mind...

TIM

But then how can you tell if karma's actually true? Couldn't everything just be random?

AJAHN

The scriptures are very clear on this point. Karma is basic.

TIM

But didn't the Buddha also say to trust your own experience?

AJAHN

Yes.

TIM

Well, in my experience bad things often seem to happen to good people and good things to bad people. There doesn't seem to be any rhyme or reason to it... What about your skeleton?

{Musical accompaniment stops cold}.

Dukkhita's mother. Satya.

Pause

TIM

Did she deserve to suffer like she did?

AJAHN

We... can't know... about another person's past lives...

TIM

Past lives? I have no memories of past lives. Do you?

AJAHN

I... On this point I trust what I read in the scriptures.

{Musical accompaniment: Drone and sitar fade back in}.

Your question, actually, isn't about past lives, but whether enlightenment is possible.

TIM

I don't follow you.

AJAHN

If you truly had faith in the Buddha, then you'd accept what he says about karma and rebirth. Enlightened beings can't be mistaken about such important matters.

TIM

I'm not so sure...

AJAHN

It's good to question things, Tim, but the Buddha also advises us not to waste our time worrying about questions we can't answer. Better to practice!

TIM

I guess. But...

AJAHN

Good! Now if there's nothing else you would like to discuss...

The Ajahn rises, begins to water a plant.

TIM

I'm curious. What did you do before you came here? Before you took on robes.

AJAHN

Actually, that's.... I was a musician.

TIM

A musician! Really? What did you play?

AJAHN

Guitar, mainly.

TIM

What kind of stuff?

AJAHN

I wrote my own material. Rock, jazz... some fusion...

{Musical accompaniment: Sitar starts to rock out. Melody line of "Cheap Guitar"}.

TIM

Cool!!!

AJAHN

It wasn't cool. It was ego.

TIM

Really? You must have got something out of it.

AJAHN

Ego. Self-indulgence.

TIM

It doesn't have to be, does it? What about self-expression? What about art?

AJAHN

Vanity. All of it.

TIM

I disagree with that. Playing an instrument, art... That's how we discover ourselves.

AJAHN

It is how we distract ourselves...enchant ourselves.

{Musical accompaniment stops cold}.

TIM

Creativity is a gift!

AJAHN

These activities are not part of the path taught by the Buddha.

TIM

Well, that's a shame. If you have a talent you should explore it, share it with the world.

Pause

TIM

But why deny your creative side? Look at your life here, you're completely overworked. You know...you could just go in to Udon-town and pick up a cheap guitar. It would give you an outlet, a way to relax...

AJAHN

Cheap guitar? Cheap guitar?! I am a senior monk, the head of this monastery. I have taken vows to uphold the Buddha's teachings, the lineage of my teachers. Cheap guitar. Really Tim, you surprise me.

TIM

I only meant that in your spare time...

AJAHN

Spare time?! There is no such thing as spare time. Now... I believe it is time for you to leave, and join the others sweeping leaves... Snuk!

The Ajahn rings a little hand bell.

TIM

Sorry, if I offended...

The Ajahn rings the bell again. Snuk enters.

AJAHN

Please send in the next interviewee.

TIM

I apologize if I've overstepped my bounds.

AJAHN

In time you will understand, Tim... All in good time. Now, if you please...

Tim gets up, bows three times and backs away. He is flustered, humiliated. He picks up the red cup on the way out.

Scene 4 FINDING THE PATH

Tim and Jim are walking. It is raining gently.

TIM

You know Jim, I don't think these Buddhists quite get it. We have to make the world a better place. Like Gandhi -- or Mother Teresa.

JIM

Come on Tim, those religious types are just getting on the fast track to Heaven.

TIM

Isn't there such a thing as charity, Jim? Love?

JIM

It's all self-interest.

TIM

That's the best you have to offer? You can't just give up on humanity. We've made some real progress.

JIM

You're kidding, right?

TIM

No, seriously. Look at medicine... You're a doctor. Child mortality has gone way down. That's a fact. Or take human rights.... Equality. The world's heading in the right direction. We must be.

JIM

Progress? You want progress? Open your eyes. We're razing our forests, roasting ourselves alive... Unleashing pandemics...Not to mention nuclear weapons, terrorism... Do you want a list? Humanity. Don't get me started.

TIM

OK, OK. Forget progress then... But don't you see? You're still assuming that a standard of moral goodness actually exists in the universe. That's the basis for your judgement. You can't avoid it.

JIM

People kill for such ideas, Tim. Religion's no solution. It just makes things worse.

TIM

It's either God or nothing, some would say.

JIM

Nothing then... And there's nothing you can do about anything anyway. We're doomed. Even our choices are fixed.

TIM

How can you say that? We can choose as we like.

JIM

In fact, to me there's only one real choice. The most personal choice there is.

TIM

You don't mean... Not like Satya....That's a false choice.

JIM

Tell that to Hamlet. Or Socrates, for that matter.

TIM

Are you saying... You don't have a personal stake... I mean, you don't mean..?.

JIM

I know what you're asking, Tim... First time the gun misfired, of all the cartridges in America. Second time the train was late.

TIM

Really?

Jim is silent.

Jim... OK. I'm here if you need me, OK?. Really. Whenever. Just a hoot away -- in the kuti next door. Right?

JIM

Yeah, yeah... OK.

TIM

Remember, life is bigger than any of our limited perspectives. There are more things in Heaven and Earth, right? You can put your faith in that thought, if nothing else.

JIM

Faith? I knew it. You're a closet believer!

Tim and Jim continue to walk throughout the song. They come across Yenaviro along the way. He is engaged in walking meditation but pauses to speak.

Song 13: The Secret

TIM

*I've got a secret
I'd rather not say
I can't quite believe it
but it's true that I...
Well, you've probably guessed it
'round here it's taboo
It's my little secret
but I'll share it with you*

*I believe in God (3 X)
somehow*

JIM

*Well, I've got a secret
the truth can be hard
But we have to be fearless
and speak honest words
I'd rather not keep it
it's so hard to bear
I'll just have to speak it
but you'd better beware...*

*Life's absurd (3 X)
It all just ends one day*

TIM/JIM

I believe in God / Life's absurd...(3 X)

YENAVIRO

*There is a secret
No words can say
Look deep through this sorrow
and listen, and pray
The answer will come to you
as a shape-shifting cloud
a floating soap-bubble
an imagined sky-flower
And when you see clearly
when you drop all your views
You'll walk down the middle*

of eternal truths

Yenaviro exits. Zoom enters.