

Aranya

By Andrea Spark, OBC Lay Minister

Pulling off Interstate 5 about an hour south of Stockton, we parked in a gas station parking lot next to a mobile produce stand, the Mexican family talking and joking among friends while travelers like us chose what they wanted to take home. Boxes of luscious, rounded colors were set out in neat rows, their brown, wood bottoms tilted up from the truck bed while behind the pick up sat its covered trailer, its shuttered sides propped up now to show persimmons, lemons, and pomegranates laid out with great care: riches given by this huge, fertile valley resting between distant mountains.

My senses are filled with these smells, and colors and shapes; the sounds of traffic, children laughing, cars starting, people's voices loud and soft that swirl around me and the fruit stand, and I am standing again on the Buddha Mound at Pine Mountain Temple. Prayer flags are flying in the wind behind his seated form, their colors faded from the high desert sun; the only sounds come from the wind wrapping around me and the prayer flags, joyfully sending out messages from that silent seated figure with the benevolent smile in front of me.

Which is present, which is past? On the mound or by the fruit stand? Round fresh colors quietly resting in brown rectangles becoming prayer flags tethering to a line behind Buddha, blowing like mad in ceaseless movement, their colors barely present. Am I parked on asphalt vibrating with passing trucks, or standing in front of a Buddha surrounded by rocks and bushes and those other Buddhas who wait patiently in hidden canyons? All is intermixed; for a moment there are no boundaries between any of it and everything is moving. Then there is no sound, no movement, no wind, no names.

I stand on the Buddha mound as I sit in the car waiting for Pam to bring our plastic bags of fruit. Both places, neither place. Buddha mound sits quietly within my Heart as past and present disappear. No separation, only silence.

Aranya (Sanskrit)

Definition: "A quiet place in a forest or other wilderness, and by extension, a place where spiritual practitioners dwell." From Part IV of the Surangama Sutra, "The Coming Into Being of the World of Illusion"; BTTS: Surangama Sutra: A New Translation; pub. 2009.