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DAIAN:

*The Climbing Rose Vine*

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*When vines entangle you, it is impossible to move.  
When thorns prick your skin, nothing eases the pain.  
When help is not available, how will you free yourself?  
When the whole universe laughs, are you laughing too?*

**KOAN**

One day Daian was carefully pruning the climbing red rose vine that he had trained to grow vertically up the water drain in the front of his house. As he stood on tiptoes on an old stump, the stump came apart right under him. The vines and thorns grabbed his legs and arms and held him there. He could not move. As he was suspended in the vines, he laughed and laughed, and asked, "Where was I before, so that I know where I am now?"

**REFLECTION**

How do you know when you are fully present?

Sometimes you may be lost in thoughts or feelings. At other times you may feel present, but when you look closely you see that you are unaware of many things right before you. When the stump collapsed underneath him, Daian wondered, "Where was I before so that I know where I am now?" After all, had he not been present while carefully pruning the rose vine? Thinking you are present is not the same as being present—being totally present as red roses, thorns, and rotted stumps.

It's useful to know the foundation on which you stand. Given that everything is ever-changing, is there any solid ground anywhere? People anchor themselves to various things: a retirement savings account, being surrounded by family, having a house to call home. A spiritual practitioner knows, however, that as much comfort as such circumstances may bring, none of these are truly secure because everything is in constant flux. That which you think is solid is, in fact, decaying as you read these words.

When entangled vines wrap themselves around you and the thorns of life stick into you, what foundation can you rely on? What are you counting on? A friend of mine used his breath as his foundation, but when he developed a pulmonary illness, breathing was no longer reliable. Another person grounded his wellbeing in healthy living, but when he was diagnosed with a heart condition he became disillusioned. My father relied on the stability of a lifelong marriage, but after his wife, my mother, died, he ended his life. Is there any spiritual practice that will give you enough resilience so that no matter how much you are held down by entangling vines and pricked by thorns, you will find the resources to endure?

The big life transitions shock us into the present moment, much like when Daian fell into the climbing rose vine. How about

in the ongoing everydayness of life when it is easy to fall into a dull complacency without even realizing it? What wakes you up? To plunge into the present, as Daian was plunged into the vines, is to directly experience NOW. You may think that it takes a lot of effort to be present, but it is as easy as falling off a stump. When Daian could not move within the vines, he surrendered to NOW. The present is *as is*. You can never not be in it, and yet you must plunge in!

For Daian, the present was being pricked by thorns and entangled in a vine. He laughed and laughed. *Here I am!* Few experiences in life are as totally selfless as spontaneous, unstoppable laughter. But tell me, what is so damn funny? If you can truly respond to this, your suffering is at an end.

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*What is the laugh that resounds throughout the whole universe?  
Where are you standing now? In a life which is ever changing,  
where do you place your feet?*