



17.

## Idolatry

- This is the first mandala that I have not had an easy relationship with, and I can't quite say why.
- I set out to make an eight-pointed star, consisting of two squares, and subsequently discovered that this is the Hindu Star of Lakshmi, representing the eight forms of wealth.
- I enjoyed the challenge of painting the interlocking squares, but as an image it lacked spiritual flow, and lay neglected and unfinished for several weeks.
- By chance, a quaker friend who sometimes attaches one of my mandala images to his eloquent writing on climate change and so much more, asked me if I had ever 'mandala-ed *idolatry*'? Instantly, I knew I had found my title!
- The image completed itself with a few final brushstrokes and sits more comfortably now.

Feb - May 2020



18.

## Forest Bathing

- As we moved into coronavirus lockdown, I became aware that while my relationships with people were likely to feel a little thinner, my connection to the natural world around me had never been as intense, enriching and immediate.
- The lockdown coincided with the fullness of spring in exceptional weather; fat buds on trees, joyful birdsong, blue sky glimpsed through filigree branches.
- It was the trees that particularly captured my attention. I am a latecomer to trees. My lifelong passion for deserts, their aridity, space and fierce light has led me to seek places with vast horizons. Until now.
- In those early weeks of lockdown, with each experience heightened by unfamiliarity, I came to see the canopy of trees I walked under daily as a source of constancy in the face of uncertainty, a source of protection, and a symbol of endurance and hope.
- The Japanese honour the practice of simply being in nature, connecting with it through all our senses, while it enhances our physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing. They call it shinrin-yoku: forest bathing.

May 2020





19.

## Wildflower or Weed?

- Angela's poem about her shifting relationship with the dandelions growing in her garden started me thinking about the random value we assign to different plants, and our inclination to label those we don't like as weeds. While some of us delight in uncultivated daisies and forget-me-nots, few people are enchanted by a profusion of golden-headed dandelions.
- With what authority do we decree that it is a wildflower if we welcome it and a weed if we don't?
- In creating our precious planet, (let's call the creator God), did God set out to design weeds?
- And do we extend the same spurious judgement to the value we place on particular groups of people?

June 2020

# Dandelions

by Angela

The dandelion seed  
has germinated  
while my back was turned  
and I am surprised  
how beautiful its flower is  
as I pull it out of the earth  
and put it in the barrow.  
Next day, I pass by  
and the dandelion is there  
again, young leaves showing  
roots, spreading and growing already.  
I pick it out  
and throw it carelessly  
into the bin,  
cursing. The yellow  
garish sunshine  
bursts out in  
splendour from its centre  
as I get rid of it.  
Next week, the same  
dandelion.  
This time I cry as I pull it naked from  
the ground  
where it hurts no-one  
and I question it.  
“Dear Dandelion,  
why do you keep returning?”  
It never answers, has read gardening  
books  
which state categorically  
‘A Dandelion is a weed’  
and it knows its own fate.  
I go away, on holiday.  
On my return,  
the garden is jam-packed  
full of bright over-cheerful dandelions,  
waving in the autumn breeze.

They greet me as  
gloriously as the dead  
of every poppy day, so glad to see me  
again.  
This time I haven't the heart to  
rip them out of their  
resting-places, so  
I go indoors to fetch my camera, a  
birthday present from God  
and fate and a reward  
for being disabled. I take pictures,  
one lying on my back,  
looking up at the dandelions,  
another one, standing up  
looking down,  
and finally face-to-face  
with a fragile loving  
beauty that defies  
popular misconceptions.  
Come November the 5<sup>th</sup>,  
the dandelions  
are still wonderfully  
alive, if a little cold.  
I take my gardening books to the local  
community centre  
bonfire and burn them.  
The dandelions die off  
of their own accord,  
slowly and naturally,  
in the winter snow.  
But what an autumn  
that was; dandelion tea,  
drunk on dandelion wine,  
rabbit food galore for Perky,  
and first-prize  
in a photography competition.

