

Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?

As the rays of sunshine hit my fingertips, the voice of my Buddhist mother echoes through the roof of my head: “Do not let selfishness get the better of you. One can be selfish in their own time”.

I sit alone, wondering whether atheism is a rainbow I can't quite reach, as Buddhism feels like a treasure I've only heard about in the tales of rain.

Religion, this uninvited guest, had long made itself at home, while I couldn't ever remember welcoming it into my dome. They say that no answer is still an answer, but how was I supposed to answer at all, when my identity came tucked with your surname and genome, inside a crib that wasn't yet my own?

I used to feel as if religion was something abstract, no way to reach it but is always attached to my hips. However, I was far from realising that being Buddhist was deeply linked to my soul, personality and even poems.

“Forgive me, Mother, for my ignorance.” The most selfish acts I dared to show were on my mom's deathbed, or so I thought. After a soul dreading tumor removal surgery, no one's pupil could focus on her eyes full of disappointment...not pain, not worry but a deep disappointment in herself. My mother believes in her shaman intuition, given it has never once failed us, our belief in her spirits was a must. However, this was the only occasion she failed to recognise the signs, even with her deep knowledge in human health that used to translate her intuitions.

Buddhism has always been a guest of traditional Mongolian Shamanism and made its stay long enough to share a mix with us, Mongolians. My family was born from the mix, as my great-grandfather was a buddhist monk, who adopted a shaman's daughter.

During her stay at the hospital I had a hard time accepting the most powerful woman I knew had her confidence shattered, I did not dare set foot in her room's direction. Those days I stood as her caretaker were burdening, as if our conversations hung heavy in the air, each vowel stretching in suffocating stillness. As a young girl, seeking for my mother's comfort was a given, however, a hospital is not a place of home for anyone, be it a guest or faculty. The future of me remained in those busy corridors, tears and smiles from patients replacing the comfort these places lack.

Now, my mother sits across from me, explaining how the bedridden days, in its own way, did her a favor, her voice healthy and passionate. This new experience gave her much insight to how she should strengthen her moral duties and shamanic obligations, and in turn it shaped my own “to-be” responsibility.

At first, I dismissed her teachings, believing that after being a virtue follower for two-thirds of her life, she had grown detached from social reality. At times, she felt as if living in a surreal world, forgetting the emotional and financial hardships we endured. Yet, facing another winter with my mom by my side, a season I thought might mark the first anniversary of a devastating news, her words landed with more precision and blows to my beliefs than I had imagined.

The night is young. I sit beside my mom, facing the palm-sized gods' sculpture in her office, unable to pull the cord of my wandering thoughts. Once, I wished to be an atheist over a Buddhist who understood none of the teachings. Now, having reflected from a distance,

questioning inherited beliefs was not about rejection but about understanding. In those quiet breaths, I realized that not all choices are better, and not all inherited beliefs are worse, they simply shape my life, one step at a time.