

The quotes on impermanence are taken from Chapter 5 of *Contemplating Reality*, by Andy Karr. The two poems are taken from the anthology *A year with Rumi*, translated by Coleman Barks.

## TWO KINDS OF IMPERMANENCE

“The gross form of impermanence is called the impermanence of the continuum. This describes the way everything that appears to exist – people, houses, trees, automobiles – ages and disintegrates. This is called the impermanence of the continuum because the things that are aging seem to form a continuous series of instances that blend into one another.”

“The other form of impermanence is subtle impermanence. This describes the fact that all phenomena change from moment to moment. When we get out our microscope, we see that nothing lasts a second moment. All is change.”

## CONTEMPLATION OF SUBTLE IMPERMANENCE 1

Try this exercise while you perform a routine activity in the morning. The example uses showering, but you could substitute brushing your teeth, or even sitting on the toilet – try different activities on different days.

“Think about the many different moments of experience that we take to be the body.

When I shower, I close my eyes to keep the water out. Looking microscopically at the details of my experience in the shower, there are many tactile sensations: hand on soap, hands washing feet, hot water on back, rubbing hands on face, hands on tiles, hands washing shoulder, and so on. When I finish washing and turn off the water, I open my eyes, and the details shift to visible forms: seeing a forearm, hand wiping off excess water, seeing tiles, hand picking up towel, drying torso. When I get out of the shower and stand in front of the mirror, the visible forms become reflection of face, reflection of chest, and so forth. Each one of these lasts only a moment, and then it is gone. When it is gone, it is completely gone. I can find similar experiences, but each of the moments of experience is unique.”

## CONTEMPLATION OF SUBTLE IMPERMANENCE 2

Try this exercise during part of your meditation session, after a few minutes of shamatha. Watch the sequence of thoughts, feelings, and sensations, paying particular attention to their rapid succession.

“We think the mind is one thing, one stream of consciousness that is unbroken from the time we were born until now, but when we look for such a continuum, we can’t find it. When we look at each of the experiences that make up that continuum, the same thing happens. If we look at a thought, for instance, that thought seems to be one thing, but you can divide the thought into a part that is past, a part that is present, and a part that is yet to come. Each of these parts can also be divided into smaller parts.

We can see that thoughts are also made up of lots of moments. The whole thought is just a concept that is superimposed on all these moments. Surprisingly, it is very hard to see our thoughts because they are obscured by thought!”

#### **A POEM TO CONTEMPLATE IF YOU'RE EXCITED ABOUT NOT-SELF**

As you start to walk out on the way,  
the way appears.

As you cease to be,  
true life begins.

As you grow smaller,  
this world cannot contain you.

You will be shown a being  
that has no *you* in it.

#### **A POEM TO CONTEMPLATE IF YOU'RE FED UP WITH NOT-SELF**

Today, like every other day, we wake up empty  
and frightened. Don't open the door to the study  
and begin reading. Take down a musical instrument.

Let the beauty we love be what we do.  
There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground.