

## Letter at Sinhala and Tamil New Year

This evening standing by the lagoon I watch young friends sharing the same shadow glide, silent, to the other shore. Between its mangroved islands maroon evening light still pools and crabs scuttle. It is still. The words '*all shall be well*'<sup>†</sup> resonate with crickets chirps and roar with unseen waves. Ancient Pali chanting filtering through sacred leaves echoes from distant crackling speakers. The *adhan* rises moving across the town's night. The muezzins' voices begin and end their order-less order as a single voice in the present quietness. The first star glimmers above the rhythmic undulations of silent prayer and its quiet folding and unfolding of cloth on cloth.

Diamonds of fire dart across the water. Grey smoky clouds hold the falling sun briefly before the dulled absence of twilight. At times it seems that everything here is burning; as flowers tumbling into the tongues of flame at a temple puja. Handfuls of blossoms, some fall to the floor others become one with the live fire, I jolted in horror as the first hibiscus petals dried and blackened and burned.

The night darkens. Two war-damaged temples, still languishing, stand modestly opposite two repaired and repainted churches. The skyline's shadow is studded with their bell towers. The bells toll at appointed hours reminding us to pray and gather, their timbres differ, their nature is the same<sup>†</sup>. A neatly written note arrived from the priest in answer to my question as to the late evening bell's meaning, it read; '*We remember the dead from our houses*'. The island's faiths have arrived on the

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<sup>†</sup> Julian of Norwich *Revelations of Divine Love* (1999) (first published 1393) Penguin Classics London

<sup>†</sup> paraphrase from pg 175 Thich Nhat Hanh *Going Home* (1999) Rider London

ceaseless ebb and flow of the ocean for thousands of years. Tonight bronze waves rage over the dunes, familiar contours are erased, it pours into the lagoon.

