

Dear Friends, Angels, Devas and Deities, and comrades

Good Evening, special guest speaker Ms Chee Waiyee and all kind guest speakers & Moderator, Singapore Kindness Movement, Buddhist Fellowship and all our sponsors, and audience - Thank you for your support, trust and interest in The Very Quiet Studio 2<sup>nd</sup> forum on Grief Separation.

I am the creative director of TVQS and the convenor for this 2<sup>nd</sup> interfaith forum today, on a topic which we probably cannot ever escape, Separation, and experiencing Grief from Separation.

TVQS The Very Quiet Studio was founded in 2007 because of a documentary I shot in 2006. On Boxing Day 2004, the Asia Tsunami devastated many areas, and in 2006 Bhante Dhammaratana from Singapore led Singaporeans to Sri Lanka for tsunami relief work. I followed him and filmed this documentary of their work in person. Not many of you have watched it or even know of its existence. But during the shoot, I came across people of different religions who suffered immensely due to that unfortunate natural calamity. There is no difference in how we suffer grief of separation, is it not? And that applies for animals as well.

The changes that came to the world at this turn of the millennium were deeply felt by everyone. Nature turned violent. So did we. Nature turned unpredictable, so did we. Nature turned crazy, so did we. Or could it be the other way around, that it is us who failed more than Nature did? The Very Quiet Studio then was thinking how faiths of the world can heal it back. But before we know it, things have actually got worse since 2001. 10 October is World Mental Health Day and almost no-one has been spared from some kind mental suffering here or there... or at some point in life. How could we not care?

The idea of TVQS is that it is better to use Arts and Heritage to transcend what religion, politics and education cannot do or have not done, which might sound arrogant or wishful to some. So it is better sometimes to just be very quiet. But Arts and Heritage should not be ripped off from spirituality, forces of reality nor contemplation, nor should they be inaccessible, found only in the museum. Hence one of the first projects of TVQS was to work on ancient stories and philosophies, and give these sunken treasures a lift above the ocean by taking them to the digital platform, and inventing a new genre 'audiocinema' to normalize their existence. I am referring to TVQS project "Sound Sanna", of which the Story Kasina CD you might have seen outside is the first creation. Story Kasina involved several well-known musicians in our region, like Imee Ooi, the late pianist Mdm Elaine Wu Yili, and Dr. Sri Ghanavenothan Retnam. They not only contributed their music, they themselves personified a good mind, arising from their genuine, humble pursuit & journey in heritage and arts -- and I found them right here, locally.

The "Older But Wiser" forum series – another TVQS project – speaks for itself. Indeed wisdom is not necessarily proportional to age. But how important it is to have both at the right time. Older but Wiser is a platform for collaboration with speakers who also have the same kindness or share of wisdom in life that we can meet here, regardless of their religion or cultural backgrounds. TVQS has also created a shared platform with other artists, such as our past photography and painting exhibition and original performance works like the 5 Elements Movement, which some of you saw a part of this afternoon. TVQS 5 Elements Movement performance draws on ancient Asian philosophy – the concept of the five elements: Earth, Water, Fire, Wind, and Space, found in both Buddhist and Hindu thought. The 5 elements represent characteristics of our material world, which is everchanging, and invite us to contemplate impermanence: We draw on Impermanence to heal our mind, and we draw on Impermanence to be allowed to die too. How could mental resilience not be based on this infinite concept of impermanence?

It is never quite the form of art that OBW pursues - be it photography, painting, dance, singing or drama, but rather, how we might understand truth, experience some degree of wholesomeness, and enjoy beauty through some work of art, and through its practitioners, even though the work or the artist could appear fairly simple and unsophisticated. The form is not the message, the artists are not the focus. Yet from these forms and through their owners, we can nurture and heal our minds, that always seek for an equilibrium.

There will always be people who throw stones at our' efforts based on their own sometimes inaccurate perceptions. Reaching out often feels like hearing the sound of one hand clapping. Yet if we allow the unkindness to go on, we become the wall of contact for one hand slapping. TVQS is not a social work agency with a mental health cause, but it is taking on creative works to shine a light on those underlying causes – maybe psychological, maybe naturally found in our uncultivated and unenlightened states of mind – that can bring ourselves unnecessary grief.

I hope you may never have to grieve over any separation – but if you do, or are still grieving, may this forum and our speakers' insights bring you wisdom and peace, and compassion in acknowledging, how every other being would feel when they have to leave or be separated.