

Dear Mortals.

Distinguished Guest of Honour Ms Sim Ann, and all distinguished speakers and all fellow friends and Singaporeans. A very warm welcome to all of you. I am the creative director of TVQS The Very Quiet Studio... and the convenor for this interfaith forum on A Smooth Departure.

We have a very tight program today. So I shall cut my speech to the very essential of the why, how and what of TVQS.

The Very Quiet Studio was named as a state of mind not really a place. But this quietude is a happy place, not an unhappy nor a dead one. Hence, mental health, resilience or wellness, whatever the trend is in naming this mental thing, TVQS is simply focusing on works related with cultivating this MIND. And why should we care about our mind? Because we need it. If we were to lose it, I cannot imagine what could happen next than what is already happening now in the world.

Nowadays, many agree that we need mindfulness, some “awareness of being aware”. TVQS is not entirely about mindfulness or about building this awareness. It is more about bringing people from different backgrounds together, to accept our shared cultural heritage, and to understand ourselves better, intrinsically. TVQS serves as a creative platform for arts and culture, heritage and philosophies, stories and life, related with and around Asia. Asians live and breathe and grow up among many cultural treasures but we seldom take ownership of this heritage, and engage with our culture except as consumers. Yet we all know Asian culture offers deep resources for spirituality and creativity, which those with genuine interest and the right methods can tap into, and sometimes the results get repackaged and rebranded, and we might not even recognize that these are really our own treasures.

Hence you can now know that TVQS is not a social work nor a health related program. But why this concern with mental health? I would say that mental health is not purely a medical concern anymore. It requires multi layered multi disciplinary multi religious multi racial efforts, and most crucial of all, self-cultivation. A whole village is not enough, because caring for our mind is our personal duty too.

Our concept of “A Smooth Departure” comes from the understanding that our mental state is most vulnerable at sickness ending in death. Though Singapore is so rich in cultural diversity, we hardly pay attention to how other religions work to give their devotees A Smooth Departure. With our own experience in Singapore – living just next door to different ethnic neighbours, working within systems that tend to put aside our religion differences to preserve our hard earned harmony, will we one day be desensitized instead to what we may ultimately need to call upon at departure – our spiritual needs?

Even more representative of the TVQS mission are original arts and heritage related

creations such as our Sound Sanna project. The Story Kasina CD which you may have seen outside is the first work. I brought this to the 6th Parliament of World Religions in the US and to a conference in Bangkok to showcase and promote ancient Asian stories. This work came about with special friends like Dr Sri Ghanavenothan, the late pianist Mdm Elaine Wu who performed here on this stage at an earlier Older but Wiser forum in 2017 and artist friends from different countries, who also concur that we should not miss out on our own Asian heritage and arts.

In a moment you will see a TVQS performance which draws on ancient Asian philosophy – the concept of the five elements: Earth, Water, Fire, Wind, and Space, found in both Buddhist and Hindu thought. Today's performance is the Wind Element, one part of a larger Five Elements Movement, which is really a contemplation on impermanence: We draw on Impermanence to heal our mind, and we draw on Impermanence to forgive and grow too. How could mental resilience not be based on this infinite concept of impermanence? I shall stop now.

Let us welcome Dr Sri Ghanavenothan Retnam, Ms Ruby Jayaseelan, Ms Kalpana Sivan, and Mr Yang Fan in The Wind Element.