



The Society of  
**CLASSICAL POETS**



**A Psalm of Life**

*What the heart of the young man said to  
the Psalmist*

By Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Tell me not, in mournful numbers,  
Life is but an empty dream!  
For the soul is dead that slumbers,  
And things are not what they seem.

Life is real! Life is earnest!  
And the grave is not its goal;  
Dust thou art, to dust returnest,  
Was not spoken of the soul.

Not enjoyment, and not sorrow,  
Is our destined end or way;  
But to act, that each to-morrow  
Find us farther than to-day.

Art is long, and Time is fleeting,  
And our hearts, though stout and brave,  
Still, like muffled drums, are beating  
Funeral marches to the grave.

In the world's broad field of battle,  
In the bivouac<sup>1</sup> of Life,  
Be not like dumb, driven cattle!  
Be a hero in the strife!

Trust no Future, howe'er pleasant!  
Let the dead Past bury its dead!  
Act,—act in the living Present!  
Heart within, and God o'erhead!

Lives of great men all remind us  
We can make our lives sublime,<sup>2</sup>  
And, departing, leave behind us  
Footprints on the sands of time;—

Footprints, that perhaps another,  
Sailing o'er life's solemn main,  
A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,  
Seeing, shall take heart again.

Let us, then, be up and doing,  
With a heart for any fate;  
Still achieving, still pursuing,  
Learn to labor and to wait.

*Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882) is regarded as the greatest American poet. At the time he wrote, before movies, television, and radio, he was extremely popular and his poetry was a source of national interest and entertainment. He used European styles but often wrote on uniquely American subjects. In past generations, students were required to study his poems in school and children often grew up listening to his rhymes.*

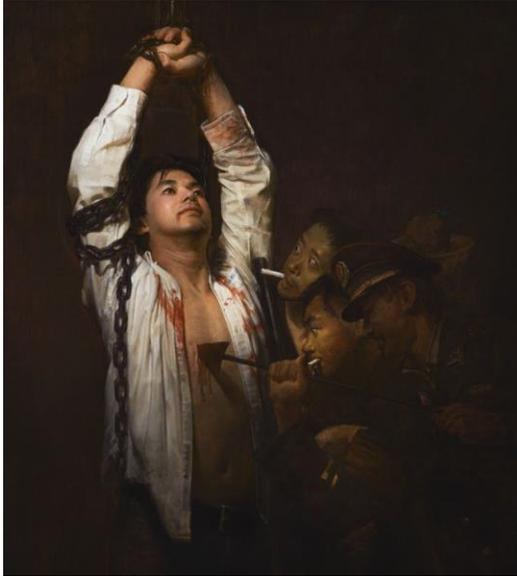
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<sup>1</sup> A usually temporary encampment under little or no shelter

<sup>2</sup> Of high spiritual, moral, or intellectual worth.

## Contemporary Historical Background: Persecution of Falun Gong

While Falun Gong is practiced openly in the 70-plus countries where it is found, today in its homeland of China it is subject to well-documented egregious human rights violations. The scale and scope of abuses taking place make this possibly the largest religious persecution in the world today.



"Imprisoned Dafa Practitioner" by Yuan Li (en.falunart.org)

## A Psalm of Christmas

*What the heart of the young activist said to the psalmist*

By Evan Mantyk

Tell me not in boring numbers  
About today's economy,  
For our consciences grow numb-er  
And become our own enemy.

Money's not real! It's an idea!  
It's a value agreed to give;  
It's a home, clothes, and a meal  
It's a means, not an end, to live!

Not an end after won elections  
Not an end after more degrees!  
But to awaken populations!  
And find something greater to be!

Money is built on more ideas  
Like on what it means to live well;  
Does it involve clean air and trees?  
Or does it make someone's life hell?

Do we care that our Christmas lights  
Are made by prisoners of faith,  
Tortured and deprived of the rights  
We value, or so we sayeth?

What about discrimination  
That occurs outside our borders  
In a trading "partner" nation  
From which our shelves are mail ordered?

The Falun Gong practitioner  
Is the world's silent elephant  
Crucified with modern horror  
That we all knowingly permit.

We can't not buy "Made in China"  
But we can speak loud our brave minds  
And let ring a meaningful change  
That makes our lives a bit sublime.

Let us then speak out loud and strong  
With words of both truth and cheer:  
"Merry Christmas, free Falun Gong,  
And have a prosperous New Year!"

*Evan Mantyk is a poet living in New York.*

## Questions

1. What are the similarities between the two poems in terms of structure?
2. What are the similarities between the two poems in terms of content?
3. How does the contemporary historical context change your perception of the second poem? Would it be the same without?
4. Which poem can you relate to more? Why?

