

Prayer in a cloud of ginger tea

by [Karen An-Hwei Lee](#) in the [December 16, 2020](#) issue

With a prayer, I lower my face in a cloud of ginger tea,
inhaling the promise of its sinus-clearing, herbal fire.

I'm learning the names of trees in this quiet township
past those days of girlhood greenery drifting sideways,

maple, elm, oak, cottonwood, then the nameless ones
autumnal, where the weight of all things sway together

to savor a moment of peace. In a crisis, let us be still
in the presence of sweet revelation, of the blessed

fragments of creation, for new voices tender as plums,
for psalms written in tongues other than our own

migrating to this place as a refuge even in this season,
for face coverings and the brassy, clean spice of roots

dug out of the earth, dutifully washed with our hands,
sliced and boiled for tea to cleanse the palate of salt,

a healing salve for the soul with its million crises.
I've said nothing about the illness of the universe

ravaging the soul and the body, nor the loneliness
plaguing the days of sheltering in place, the ache

of quarantine and solo lockdown, yet in this cloud
of ginger steam, I am made whole by the promise

of God's breath as a heavenly balm against hunger,
an unseen harvest festival bereft of a noisy crowd,

its fierce absence as a famine of human feeling.
We aspire to virus-free air with doses of mercy

so the long shadow of illness may lighten soon.
The twin blessings of our health and families
are spoons holding an ounce of uncooked rice,
a girl's handmade maraca tossed high in a tree—
a prayer yet to be answered, swaying in the arms
of Jesus who traces everything while silence rises
with the fall moon, a faithful musical instrument
unshaken in syncopation to the winds of change.