

Friends of Silence

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“Is there enough Silence for the Word to be heard?”

Dear Friends ~ This morning unfolded early and briskly: A sick child woke before dawn. Our family’s lovable rascal of a pet dog got himself stranded in the chicken yard and had to be rescued from the domineering hens. I waded through the texts and emails that accumulated on my phone overnight, gave my mom a call, and packed the not-sick child off to her day’s activities. In a brief quiet pause, I intend to write this letter, yet I’m distracted immediately by the laundry pile that seems to raise its expectant eyebrows at me from across the room.

My wise friend, Katie, recently invited me to use a centering writing exercise; this hectic morning I give it a try. “Write a haiku,” Katie urged, “that begins with the line ‘I am looking at’”. So I draw a breath...meet that laundry’s eye...and feel unexpectedly overcome by the marvel of the colorful cotton chaos:

*I am looking at
A heap of the clothes we wear
Striped socks and plaid shirts*



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“Spirituality is seeded, germinates, sprouts and blossoms in the mundane. It is to be found and nurtured in the smallest of daily activities,” Thomas Moore writes. Which makes me think Katie is on to something—with her reminder that setting aside the lenses of routine and categories draws our attention to the overwhelming wonder of the world as it is. Now I’m curious what it is you see in this moment—so I’m passing along her invitation to pen your own “I am looking at” haiku. Enjoy the wonder of the mundane, friends! ~ Joy



speechless before these budding green spring leaves in blazing sunlight

~ Basho in *NARROW ROAD TO THE INTERIOR*



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Yes, awe arises during the extraordinary: when viewing the Grand Canyon, touching the hand of a rock star like Iggy Pop, or experiencing the sacred during meditation or prayer. More frequently, though, people report feeling awe in response to more mundane things: when seeing the leaves of a Ginkgo tree change from green to yellow, in beholding the night sky when camping near a river, in seeing a stranger give their food to a homeless person, in seeing their child laugh just like their brother.

~ Dacher Keltner in *HOW AWE MAKES US MORE HUMAN*

In the point of rest at the center of our being, we encounter a world where all things are at rest in the same way. Then a tree becomes a mystery, a cloud a revelation, each [person] a cosmos of whose riches we can only catch glimpses. The life of simplicity is simple, but it opens to us a book in which we never get beyond the first syllable.

~ Dag Hammarskjöld in *MARKINGS*

Every day you have choices. You can do things that wound your soul, like being dominated by the work ethic or compulsively seeking more money and possessions, or you can be around people who give you pleasure and do things that satisfy a desire deep inside you. Make this soul care a way of life, and you may discover what the Greeks called eudaimonia—a good spirit, or, in the deepest sense, happiness.

~ Thomas Moore in *CARE OF THE SOUL*

Oh, God of dust and rainbows, help us see.
That without dust the rainbow would not be.

~ Langston Hughes from

“Two Somewhat Different Epigrams”

in *THE POEMS: 1951-1967*

Happiness is in the quiet, ordinary things. A table, a chair, a book with a paperknife stuck between the pages. And the petal falling from the rose, and the light flickering as we sit silent.

~ Virginia Woolf in

THE WAVES

Of all ridiculous things the most ridiculous seems to me, to be busy — to be a man who is brisk about his food and his work.

~ Søren Kierkegaard from EITHER/OR: A FRAGMENT OF LIFE

Because of the routines we follow, we often forget that life is an ongoing adventure...and the sooner we realize that, the quicker we will be able to treat life as art; to bring all our energies to each encounter, to remain flexible enough to notice and admit when what we expected to happen did not. We need to remember that we are created creative and can invent new scenarios as frequently as they are needed.

~ Maya Angelou in WOULD'N'T TAKE NOTHING FOR MY JOURNEY NOW

Each morning we awaken to the light and the invitation to a new day in the world of time; each night we surrender to the dark to be taken to play in the world of dreams where time is no more. At birth we were awakened and emerged to become visible in the world. At death we will surrender again to the dark to become invisible. Awakening and surrender: they frame each day and each life; between them the journey where anything can happen, the beauty and the frailty.

~ John O'Donohue in BEAUTY



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Accustom yourself every morning to look for a moment at the sky and suddenly you will be aware of the air around you, the scent of morning freshness that is bestowed on you between sleep and labor. You will find every day that the gable of every house has its own particular look, its own special lighting. Pay it some heed if you will have for the rest of the day a remnant of satisfaction and a touch of coexistence with nature. Gradually and without effort the eye trains itself to transmit many small delights, to contemplate nature and the city streets, to appreciate the inexhaustible fun of daily life.

~ Herman Hesse from "On Little Joys" in MY BELIEF

When things are taking their ordinary course, it is hard to remember what matters. There are so many things you would never think to tell anyone. And I believe they may be the things that mean most to you...

~ Marilynne Robinson in GILEAD

It's a subtle thing, freedom. It takes effort; it takes attention and focus to not act something like an automaton. Although we do have freedom, we exercise it only when we strive for awareness...

~ Gabor Maté in IN THE REALM OF HUNGRY GHOSTS



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What a large volume of adventures may be grasped within the span of [her] little life by [she] who interests [her] heart in everything.

~ Laurence Sterne in A SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY THROUGH FRANCE AND ITALY

The more stuff you love the happier you will be.

~ Ross Gay in THE BOOK OF DELIGHTS

Earth's crammed with heaven.
And every common bush afire with God

~ Elizabeth Barrett Browning from "Aurora Leigh" in THE OXFORD BOOK OF ENGLISH MYSTICAL VERSE

Rumi said, There is no proof of the soul. But isn't the return of spring and how it springs up in our hearts a pretty good hint?

~ Mary Oliver from "Whistling Swans" in DEVOTIONS



Joy Houck Bauer