

THE WINTER OF LISTENING

No one but me by the fire,
my hands burning
red in the palms while
the night wind carries
everything away outside.

All this petty worry
while the great cloak
of the sky grows dark
and intense
round every living thing.

What is precious
inside us does not
care to be known
by the mind
in ways that diminish
its presence.

What we strive for
in perfection
is not what turns us
into the lit angel
we desire,

what disturbs
and then nourishes
has everything
we need.

What we hate
in ourselves
is what we cannot know
in ourselves but
what is true to the
pattern
does not need
to be explained.

Inside everyone
is a great shout of joy
waiting to be born.

Even with summer
so far off
I feel it grown in me
now and ready
to arrive in the world.

All those years
listening to those
who had nothing to say.

All those years
Forgetting how easily
you can belong
to everything
simply by listening.

And the slow
difficulty
of remembering
how everything
is born from an opposite
and miraculous
otherness.

Silence and winter
has led me to that
otherness.

So let this winter
of listening be enough
for the new life
I must call my own.

Every sound has a home
from which it has come
to us and a door
through which it is
going again
out into the world
to make another home.

We speak only with the
voices of those

we can hear ourselves
and the body has a voice
only for that portion
of the body of the world
it has learned to
perceive.

It becomes a world itself
by listening hard
for the way it belongs.

There it can
Learn how it must be
and what it must do.

And here
in the tumult
of the night
I hear the walnut
above the child's swing
swaying its dark limbs
in the wind
and the rain now
come to beat against
my window
and somewhere
in this cold night
of wind and stars
the first whispered
opening
of those hidden
and invisible springs
that uncoil
in the still summer air
each yet
to be imagined
rose.

David Whyte

WHAT TO REMEMBER WHEN WAKING

In that first
hardly noticed moment
in which you wake,
coming back to this life
from the other
more secret,
moveable
and frighteningly
honest world
where everything began,
there is a small opening
into the new day
which closes
the moment you begin
your plans.

What you can plan
is too small for you to
live.

What you can live
wholeheartedly
will make plans enough
for the vitality
hidden in your sleep.

To be human
is to become visible
while carrying
what is hidden
as a gift to others.

To remember
the other world
in this world
is to live in your
true inheritance.

You are not
a troubled guest
on this earth,

you are not
an accident
amidst other accidents
you were invited
from another and greater
night
than the one
from which
you have just emerged.

Now, looking through
the slanting light
of the morning
window toward
the mountain
presence
of everything
that can be,
what urgency
calls you to your
one love? What shape
waits in the seed
of you to grow
and spread
its branches
against a future sky?

Is it waiting
in the fertile sea?
In the trees
beyond the house?
In the life
you can imagine
for yourself?
In the lovely
white page
on the waiting desk?

David Whyte

THE PEACE OF WILD THINGS

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.

I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

Wendell Berry

NOTICE

This evening, the sturdy Levis
I wore every day for a year
which seemed to the end in perfect condition,
suddenly tore.
How or why I don't know,
but there it was—a big rip at the crotch.
A month ago my friend Nick
walked off a racquetball court,
showered,
got into his street clothes,
& halfway home collapsed & died.
Take heed you who read this &
drop to your knees now & again
like the poet Christopher Smart
& kiss the earth & be joyful
& make much of your time
& be kindly to everyone,
even to those who do not deserve it.
For although you may not believe it will happen,
you too will one day be gone.
I, whose Levis ripped at the crotch
for no reason,
assure you that such is the case.
Pass it on.

Steve Kowit

LOST

Stand still. The trees ahead and the bushes beside you
Are not lost. Where ever you are is called Here,
And you must treat it as a powerful stranger,
Must ask permission to know it and be known.
The forest breathes. Listen. It answers,
I have made this place around you.
If you leave it, you may come back again, saying Here.
No two trees are the same to Raven.
No two branches are the same to Wren.
If what a tree or bush does is lost on you,
You are surely lost. Stand still. The forest knows
Where you are. You must let it find you.

David Wagoner

WHEN DEATH COMES

When death comes
like the hungry bear in autumn;
when death comes and takes all the bright coins from his purse
to buy me, and snaps the purse shut;
when death comes
like the measles-pox;
when death comes
like an iceberg between the shoulder blades,

I want to step through the door full of curiosity, wondering:
what is it going to be like, that cottage of darkness?
And therefore I look upon everything
as a brotherhood and a sisterhood,
and I look upon time as no more than an idea,
and I consider eternity as another possibility,
and I think of each life as a flower, as common
as a field daisy, and as singular,
and each name a comfortable music in the mouth,
tending, as all music does, toward silence,
and each body a lion of courage, and something
precious to the earth.

When it's over I want to say: all my life
I was a bride married to amazement.
I was the bridegroom, taking the world into my arms.
When it's over, I don't want to wonder
if I have made of my life something particular, and real.
I don't want to find myself sighing and frightened,
or full of argument.
I don't want to end up simply having visited this world.

Mary Oliver

WENN ICH GEWACHSEN WARE IRGENDWO

If I had grown in some generous place -
if my hours had opened in ease -
I would make you a lavish banquet.
My hands wouldn't clutch at you like this,
so needy and tight.

Then I'd have dared to squander you,
you Limitless Now.
I'd have tossed you into the ringing air
like a ball that someone leaps for and catches
with hands outstretched.

I would have painted you: not on the wall
but in one broad sweep across heaven.
I'd have portrayed you brashly:

as mountain, as fire, as a wind
howling from the desert's vastness.

Rainer Maria Rilke

DON'T GO BACK TO SLEEP

The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you.
Don't go back to sleep.
You must ask for what you really want.
Don't go back to sleep.
People are going back and forth across the doorsill
where the two worlds touch.
The door is round and open.
Don't go back to sleep.

RUMI

(adapted from Quatrain #91)

THE VELVETEEN RABBIT

'What is REAL?' asked the Rabbit one day. 'Does it mean having that buzz inside of you, and a stick-out handle?'

"REAL isn't how you were made," said the Skin Horse. 'It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long time, not just to play with, but really loves, then you become REAL.

'Does it hurt?' asked the Rabbit.

'Sometimes,' said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. 'When you are REAL, you don't mind being hurt.'

Does it happen all at once like being wound up,' he asked, 'bit by bit?'

'It doesn't happen all at once.' said the Skin Horse, 'You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't often happen to people who break easily, or have sharp edges or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are REAL, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are REAL, you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand... Once you are REAL. you can't become unreal again. It lasts for always.'

Margery William

BLACK STAR YEARNING

Black-star yearning, old heart grinder,
nothing to do but to sweat you out,
tear up the list of urgencies,
fold the long legs of the day.
Evening again. A school of starlings
swirls the sky like a dreamed explosion
and wildflowers flare my speeding windshield
briefly, yes, but unspeakably blue.
O, star-meat! O, incarnate source,
shatter my iron parentheses!
though I often stall, like the undropped shoe
I'm still held in y own friendly hands.
Blessed are those whose work is presence:
dogs by the sea so joyful they're teachers...
donkeys who move like little mothers...
people so strong they risk being kind.
The air provides: it feeds the breath.
There is no sun that lacks for light.
Blind blossoms can't see their colors glow.
In unwillable ways we are beautiful.

Barry Spacks
from Regarding Women, Cherry Grove Collections, 2004

**EXCERPTS FROM TALK GIVEN BY MRS. HOWARTH MOVEMENTS SEMINAR
APRIL 23, 1978**

The theme is responsibility — responsibility for what and to whom? We probably answer, “To the work.” And what is the work? ...The aim of the work is to increase consciousness.

What are the movements?...They seem to be a very special language, for one always senses the existence of a law underneath the form. This language is precise and a very exact one. Every movement has its right place, duration and weight. Combinations and sequences are mathematically calculated. Every detail has a sense. And what does this mean? This language comes from a place where there was real knowledge.

Now, I’m talking to you as instructors. What is your responsibility towards the pupils, and let’s speak particularly of beginners? They come into your class having had a certain preparation in their groups. They may have some preconceived ideas about what is going to take place, and I think most of them may probably be considering, a little concerned about how they will show themselves on the outside. Yet they wish very much to learn about themselves, to know themselves better. And our responsibility is to give them opportunities to do so.

But, I am not the Teacher with a capital “T,” I am still a student. Any richness of personality that I have may be helpful — probably not. I am simply a clean, clear channel through which the movements are passed. I know something because I have worked. I have studied. I’ve had my corns stepped on, I haven’t resented it. I’ve used the experience and the pain to find out why I had corns in the first place and to do something about it. And, because I’ve worked, because I’ve had experiences, because I was dedicated to the work and had given my time and energy to it, I have a certain self-respect — I respect my searching and striving and so I respect these people.

And now, also, let us be practical. In a few years, two, three or four, many of those people who have given much of their lives to try to keep Mr. Gurdjieff’s movements from becoming distorted, will have died, and that obligation will pass over to you. This cannot be escaped. Once you have come into the work, once you have instructed people in this work, you cannot escape this responsibility. You will still need to have, as we have had, a certain kind of — fellowship. Some of you need to form a nucleus, to develop agreement, sharing your inner understanding, sharing your material, supporting one another, still being yourselves, giving your own answers, but from the same point of view.

Now please listen to me, I make an appeal to you. Try to come together really...And there shouldn’t be any “ifs.” This is your responsibility.