

How to be a Poet (to remind myself)

Wendell Berry

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Make a place to sit down.

Sit down. Be quiet.

You must depend upon
affection, reading, knowledge,
skill—more of each
than you have—inspiration,
work, growing older, patience,
for patience joins time
to eternity. Any readers
who like your poems,
doubt their judgment.

ii

Breathe with unconditional breath
the unconditioned air.
Shun electric wire.
Communicate slowly. Live
a three-dimensional life;
stay away from screens.
Stay away from anything
that obscures the place it is in.
There are no unsacred places;
there are only sacred places
and desecrated places.

Accept what comes from silence.

Make the best you can of it.

Of the little words that come
out of the silence, like prayers
prayed back to the one who prays,
make a poem that does not disturb
the silence from which it came.

A Ritual To Read To Each Other

William Stafford

If you don't know the kind of person I am
and I don't know the kind of person you are
a pattern that others made may prevail in the world
and following the wrong god home we may miss our star.

For there is many a small betrayal in the mind,
a shrug that lets the fragile sequence break
sending with shouts the horrible errors of childhood
storming out to play through the broken dyke.

And as elephants parade holding each elephant's tail,
but if one wanders the circus won't find the park,
I call it cruel and maybe the root of all cruelty
to know what occurs but not recognize the fact.

And so I appeal to a voice, to something shadowy,
a remote important region in all who talk:
though we could fool each other, we should consider--
lest the parade of our mutual life get lost in the dark.

For it is important that awake people be awake,
or a breaking line may discourage them back to sleep;
the signals we give--yes or no, or maybe--
should be clear: the darkness around us is deep.

The Journey

Mary Oliver

One day you finally knew
what you had to do, and began,
though the voices around you
kept shouting
their bad advice --
though the whole house
began to tremble
and you felt the old tug at your ankles.
"Mend my life!"
each voice cried.
But you didn't stop.
You knew what you had to do,
though the wind pried
with its stiff fingers
at the very foundations,
though their melancholy
was terrible.
It was already late
enough, and a wild night,
and the road full of fallen
branches and stones.
But little by little,
as you left their voices behind,
the stars began to burn
through the sheets of clouds,
and there was a new voice
which you slowly
recognized as your own,
that kept you company
as you strode deeper and deeper
into the world,
determined to do
the only thing you could do --
determined to save
the only life you could save.

Love After Love

Derek Walcott

The time will come

When, with elation

You will greet yourself arriving

At your own door, in your own mirror,

And each will smile at the other's welcome.

And say, sit here. Eat.

You will love again the stranger who was your self.

Give wine. Give bread. Give back your heart

To itself, to the stranger who has loved you

All your life, whom you ignored

For another, who knows you by heart.

Take down the love letters from the bookshelf,

The photographs, the desperate notes,

Peel your image from the mirror.

Sit. Feast on your life.

I don't want to live a small life

Mary Oliver

I don't want to live a small life. Open your eyes,
open your hands. I have just come
from the berry fields, the sun
kissing me with its golden mouth all the way
(open your hands) and the wind-winged clouds
following along thinking perhaps I might
feed them, but no I carry these heart-shapes
only to you. Look how many how small
but so sweet and maybe the last gift
I will ever bring anyone in this
world of hope and risk, so do.
Look at me. Open your life, open your hands.

The Layers

Stanley Kunitz

I have walked through many lives,
some of them my own,
and I am not who I was,
though some principle of being
abides, from which I struggle
not to stray.
When I look behind,

as I am compelled to look
before I can gather strength
to proceed on my journey,
I see the milestones dwindling
toward the horizon
and the slow fires trailing
from the abandoned camp-sites,
over which scavenger angels
wheel on heavy wings.

Oh, I have made myself a tribe
out of my true affections,
and my tribe is scattered!

How shall the heart be reconciled
to its feast of losses?

In a rising wind
the manic dust of my friends,
those who fell along the way,
bitterly stings my face,

Yet I turn, I turn,
exulting somewhat,
with my will intact to go
wherever I need to go,
and every stone on the road
precious to me.

In my darkest night,
when the moon was covered

and I roamed through wreckage,

a nimbus-clouded voice

directed me:

"Live in the layers,

not on the litter."

Though I lack the art

to decipher it,

no doubt the next chapter

in my book of transformations

is already written.

I am not done with my changes.

Reflections

from the Centering Prayer Retreat participants:

- I felt a renewal of my spirit
- I received an "IV" of rest
- The image of "laughing monks," the strange grace I experienced, along with wholeness and joy
- The gift of consent (of life and death) given by Bernie and Nicky
- Being cocooned in love
- Celebrating a wedding anniversary in silence
- "Everything that happens to you is God's message to you in order to grow"
- "If you want God to laugh, tell him/her/them your plans"
- Feeling HEARTENED, even with few moments of peace during the retreat
- Experiencing openings, gratitude, deep space, like dancing trees
- Retreat has given me the gift of pondering
- Feeling like a kid again, experiencing spacious margins in my life
- Having a roller-coaster week: down in the depths, but having moments of great peace
- Receiving the gift of hospitality; not being compelled to "do," but to "receive"
- When the bell rings for Centering Prayer, my body knows it's in a different place
- The gift of repetition and "watch-less" time. Melting into Centering Prayer. Enjoying beauty and trust in God
- "Love is always there, if you can just see it"
- "Slipping into community"
- The gift of touch through massage