

## **Clearing**

by Martha Postlethwaite

Do not try to serve  
the whole world  
or do anything grandiose.  
Instead, create  
a clearing  
in the dense forest  
of your life  
and wait there  
patiently,  
until the song  
that is yours alone to sing  
falls into your open cupped hands  
and you recognize and greet it.  
Only then will you know  
how to give yourself  
to the world  
so worthy of rescue.

## **Prospective Immigrants Please Note**

Either you will  
go through this door  
or you will not go through.

If you go through  
there is always the risk  
of remembering your name.

Things look at you doubly  
and you must look back  
and let them happen.

If you do not go through  
it is possible  
to live worthily

to maintain your attitudes  
to hold your position  
to die bravely

but much will blind you,  
much will evade you,  
at what cost who knows?

The door itself  
makes no promises.  
It is only a door.

Adrienne Rich

SWEET DARKNESS

David Whyte

When your eyes are tired  
the world is tired also.

When your vision has gone  
no part of the world can find you.

Time to go into the dark  
where the night has eyes  
to recognize its own.

There you can be sure  
you are not beyond love.

The dark will be your womb  
tonight.

The night will give you a horizon  
further than you can see.

You must learn one thing.  
The world was made to be free in.

Give up all the other worlds  
except the one to which you belong.

Sometimes it takes darkness and the sweet  
confinement of your aloneness  
to learn

anything or anyone  
that does not bring you alive

is too small for you.

In the very earliest time  
When both people and animals lived on earth  
A person could become an animal if he wanted to  
and an animal could become a human being.  
Sometimes they were people  
and sometimes animals  
and there was no difference.  
All spoke the same language  
That was the time when words were like magic.  
The human mind had mysterious powers.  
A word spoken by chance might have strange consequences.  
It would suddenly come alive  
and what people wanted to happen could happen--  
all you had to do was say it.  
Nobody could explain this:  
That's the way it was.

*Nalungiaq, Inuit woman interviewed by ethnologist Knud Rasmussen in the early twentieth century.*

<http://www.globalonenessproject.org/library/articles/lessons-old-language>

## SOMETIMES

Sometimes, when a bird cries out,  
Or the wind sweeps through a tree,  
Or a dog howls in a far off farm,  
I hold still and listen a long time.

My soul turns and goes back to the place  
Where, a thousand forgotten years ago,  
The bird and the blowing wind  
Were like me, and were my brothers.

My soul turns into a tree,  
And an animal, and a cloud bank.  
Then changed and odd it comes home  
And asks me questions. What should I reply?

Herman Hesse (Rbt Bly)

"Ask Me"

William Stafford

Some time when the river is ice ask me  
mistakes I have made. Ask me whether  
what I have done is my life. Others  
have come in their slow way into  
my thought, and some have tried to help  
or to hurt: ask me what difference  
their strongest love or hate has made.

I will listen to what you say.  
You and I can turn and look  
at the silent river and wait. We know  
the current is there, hidden; and there  
are comings and goings from miles away  
that hold the stillness exactly before us.  
What the river says, that is what I say.

*Don't Go back to sleep...Rumi*

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.

## All the True Vows

David Whyte

All the true vows  
are secret vows  
the ones we speak out loud  
are the ones we break.

There is only one life  
you can call your own  
and a thousand others  
you can call by any name you want.

Hold to the truth you make  
every day with your own body,  
don't turn your face away.

Hold to your own truth  
at the center of the image  
you were born with.

Those who do not understand  
their destiny will never understand  
the friends they have made  
nor the work they have chosen

nor the one life that waits  
beyond all the others.

By the lake in the wood  
in the shadows  
you can  
whisper that truth  
to the quiet reflection  
you see in the water.

Whatever you hear from  
the water, remember,

it wants you to carry  
the sound of its truth on your lips.

Remember,  
in this place  
no one can hear you

and out of the silence  
you can make a promise  
it will kill you to break,

that way you'll find  
what is real and what is not.

I know what I am saying.  
Time almost forsook me  
and I looked again.

Seeing my reflection  
I broke a promise  
and spoke  
for the first time  
after all these years

in my own voice,

before it was too late  
to turn my face again.



## FOR THE CHILDREN

The rising hills, the slopes,  
of statistics  
lie before us,  
the steep climb  
of everything, going up,  
up, as we all  
go down.

In the next century  
or the one beyond that,  
they say,  
are valleys, pastures,  
we can meet there in peace  
if we make it.

To climb these coming crests  
one word to you, to  
you and your children:

*stay together*  
*learn the flowers*  
*go light*

Gary Snyder

## What To Remember When Waking

In that first  
hardly noticed  
moment  
to 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 open  
and lovely  
white page  
on the waiting desk?

~ David Whyte ~

*(The House of Belonging)*

## The Return

by Geneen Marie Haugen

Some day, if you are lucky,  
you'll return from a thunderous journey  
trailing snake scales, wing fragments  
and the musk of Earth and moon.

Eyes will examine you for signs  
of damage, or change  
and you, too, will wonder  
if your skin shows traces

of fur, or leaves,  
if thrushes have built a nest  
of your hair, if Andromeda  
burns from your eyes.

Do not be surprised by prickly questions  
from those who barely inhabit  
their own fleeting lives, who barely taste  
their own possibility, who barely dream.

If your hands are empty, treasureless,  
if your toes have not grown claws,  
if your obedient voice has not  
become a wild cry, a howl,

you will reassure them. We warned you,  
they might declare, there is nothing else,  
no point, no meaning, no mystery at all,  
just this frantic waiting to die.

And yet, they tremble, mute,  
afraid you've returned without sweet  
elixir for unspeakable thirst, without  
a fluent dance or holy language

to teach them, without a compass  
bearing to a forgotten border where  
no one crosses without weeping  
for the terrible beauty of galaxies

and granite and bone. They tremble,  
hoping your lips hold a secret,  
that the song your body now sings  
will redeem them, yet they fear

your secret is dangerous, shattering,  
and once it flies from your astonished  
mouth, they-like you-must disintegrate  
before unfolding tremulous wings.

## **Mysteries, Yes**

Truly, we live with mysteries too marvelous  
to be understood.

How grass can be nourishing in the  
mouths of the lambs.

How rivers and stones are forever  
in allegiance with gravity  
while we ourselves dream of rising.

How two hands touch and the bonds will  
never be broken.

How people come, from delight or the  
scars of damage,  
to the comfort of a poem.

Let me keep my distance, always, from those  
who think they have the answers.

Let me keep company always with those who say  
“Look!” and laugh in astonishment,  
and bow their heads.

Mary Oliver

from **Evidence**

## Lost

Stand still. The trees ahead and bushes beside you  
Are not lost. Wherever 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 a 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

(as heard on "Poetry and the Imagination," David Whyte, side A)

<http://www.breakoutofthebox.com/table6.htm> -- listing of many other poems

## The Way It Is

There's a thread you follow. It goes among  
things that change. But it doesn't change.  
People wonder about what you are pursuing.  
You have to explain about the thread.  
But it is hard for others to see.  
While you hold it you can't get lost.  
Tragedies happen; people get hurt  
or die; and you suffer and get old.  
Nothing you do can stop time's unfolding.  
You don't ever let go of the thread.

William Stafford