

## On Commitment

“Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of initiative and creation, there is one elementary truth the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then providence moves too.

All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favour all manner of unforeseen incidents, meetings and material assistance which no man could have dreamed would have come his way.

Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it. Begin it now.”

— *William Hutchison Murray*”

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## The Summer Day

Who made the world?

Who made the swan, and the black bear?

Who made the grasshopper?

This grasshopper, I mean-

the one who has flung herself out of the grass,

the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,

who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down-

who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.

Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.

Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.

I don't know exactly what a prayer is.

I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down

into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,

how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,

which is what I have been doing all day.

Tell me, what else should I have done?

Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?

Tell me, what is it you plan to do

with your one wild and precious life?

—*Mary Oliver*

## ***The Journey***

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.

-- *Mary Oliver*

### **Wild Geese**

You do not have to be good.  
You do not have to walk on your knees  
For a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.  
You only have to let the soft animal of your body  
love what it loves.  
Tell me about your despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.  
Meanwhile the world goes on.  
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain  
are moving across the landscapes,  
over the prairies and the deep trees,  
the mountains and the rivers.  
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,  
are heading home again.  
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,  
the world offers itself to your imagination,  
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting —  
over and over announcing your place  
in the family of things.

-- *Mary Oliver*

“You do not need to leave your room. Remain sitting at your table and listen. Do not even listen, simply wait, be quiet, still and solitary. The world will freely offer itself to you to be unmasked, it has no choice, it will roll in ecstasy at your feet.”

— *Franz Kafka*

### **Little Gidding**

We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.  
Through the unknown, unremembered gate  
When the last of earth left to discover  
Is that which was the beginning;  
At the source of the longest river  
The voice of the hidden waterfall  
And the children in the apple-tree  
Not known, because not looked for  
But heard, half-heard, in the stillness  
Between two waves of the sea.  
Quick now, here, now, always--  
A condition of complete simplicity  
(Costing not less than everything)  
And all shall be well and  
All manner of thing shall be well  
When the tongues of flames are in-folded  
Into the crowned knot of fire  
And the fire and the rose are one.

-- *TS Eliot, from "Four Quartets"*

## THE HOUSE OF BELONGING

I awoke  
this morning  
in the gold light  
turning this way  
and that  
thinking for  
a moment  
it was one  
day  
like any other.  
But  
the veil had gone  
from my  
darkened heart  
and  
I thought  
it must have been the quiet  
candlelight  
that filled my room,  
it must have been  
the first  
easy rhythm  
with which I breathed  
myself to sleep,  
it must have been  
the prayer I said  
speaking to the otherness  
of the night.  
And  
I thought  
this is the good day  
you could  
meet your love,  
this is the black day  
someone close  
to you could die.  
This is the day  
you realize

how easily the thread  
is broken  
between this world  
and the next  
and I found myself  
sitting up  
in the quiet pathway  
of light,  
the tawny  
close-grained cedar  
burning round  
me like fire  
and all the angels of this house  
heaven ascending  
through the first  
roof of light  
the sun has made.  
This is the bright home  
in which I live,  
this is where  
I ask  
my friends  
to come,  
this is where I want  
to love all the things  
it has taken me so long  
to learn to love.  
This is the temple  
of my adult aloneness  
and I belong  
to that aloneness  
as I belong to my life.  
There is no house  
like the house of belonging.  
- David Whyte ©1996

### **We Who Are Your Closest Friends**

we who are  
your closest friends  
feel the time  
has come to tell you  
that every Thursday  
we have been meeting  
as a group  
to devise ways  
to keep you  
in perpetual uncertainty  
frustration  
discontent and  
torture  
by neither loving you  
as much as you want  
nor cutting you adrift

your analyst is  
in on it  
plus your boyfriend  
and your ex-husband  
and we have pledged  
to disappoint you  
as long as you need us

in announcing our  
association  
we realize we have  
placed in your hands  
a possible antidote  
against uncertainty  
indeed against ourselves  
but since our Thursday nights  
have brought us  
to a community of purpose  
rare in itself  
with you as  
the natural center  
we feel hopeful you  
will continue to make  
unreasonable  
demands for affection  
if not as a consequence  
of your  
disastrous personality

then for the good of the collective  
-- *Phillip Lopate, 1943*

### **The Five Remembrances**

1. I am subject to aging. There is no way to avoid aging.
2. I am subject to ill health. There is no way to avoid illness.
3. I am going to die. There is no way to avoid death.
4. Everyone and everything that I love will change, and I will be separated from them.
5. My only true possessions are my actions, and I cannot escape their consequences.

### **The Cookie Thief**

*by Valerie Cox*

A woman was waiting at an airport one night, with several long hours before her flight. She hunted for a book in the airport shops, bought a bag of cookies and found a place to drop.

She was engrossed in her book but happened to see, that the man sitting beside her, as bold as could be, grabbed a cookie or two from the bag in between, which she tried to ignore to avoid a scene.

So she munched the cookies and watched the clock, as the gutsy cookie thief diminished her stock. She was getting more irritated as the minutes ticked by, thinking, "If I wasn't so nice, I would blacken his eye."

With each cookie she took, he took one too, when only one was left, she wondered what he would do. With a smile on his face, and a nervous laugh, he took the last cookie and broke it in half.

He offered her half, as he ate the other, she snatched it from him and thought... oooh, brother. This guy has some nerve and he's also rude, why he didn't even show any gratitude!

She had never known when she had been so galled, and sighed with relief when her flight was called. She gathered her belongings and headed to the gate, refusing to look back at the thieving ingrate.

She boarded the plane, and sank in her seat, then she sought her book, which was almost complete. As she reached in her baggage, she gasped with surprise, there was her bag of cookies, in front of her eyes.

If mine are here, she moaned in despair, the others were his, and he tried to share. Too late to apologize, she realized with grief, that she was the rude one, the ingrate, the thief.

### **My life is not this steeply sloping hour**

My life is not this steeply sloping hour,  
in which you see me hurrying.  
Much stands behind me; I stand before it like a tree;  
I am only one of my many mouths,  
and at that, the one that will be still the soonest.

I am the rest between two notes,  
which are somehow always in discord  
because Death's note wants to climb over—  
but in the dark interval, reconciled,  
they stay there trembling.  
And the song goes on, beautiful."

— *Rainer Maria Rilke, The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke*

"We have no reason to harbor any mistrust against our world, for it is not against us. If it has terrors, they are our terrors; if it has abysses, these abysses belong to us; if there are dangers, we must try to love them. And if only we arrange our life in accordance with the principle which tells us that we must always trust in the

difficult, then what now appears to us as the most alien will become our most intimate and trusted experience. How could we forget those ancient myths that stand at the beginning of all races, the myths about dragons that at the last moment are transformed into princesses? Perhaps all the dragons in our lives are princesses who are only waiting to see us act, just once, with beauty and courage. Perhaps everything that frightens us is, in its deepest essence, something helpless that wants our love.”

— *Rainer Maria Rilke, Letters to a Young Poet*

“Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books that are now written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.”

— *Rainer Maria Rilke, Letters to a Young Poet*

### **Everything Is Waiting For You**

--by *David Whyte (Apr 09, 2018)*

Your great mistake is to act the drama  
as if you were alone. As if life  
were a progressive and cunning crime  
with no witness to the tiny hidden  
transgressions. To feel abandoned is to deny  
the intimacy of your surroundings. Surely,  
even you, at times, have felt the grand array;  
the swelling presence, and the chorus, crowding  
out your solo voice. You must note  
the way the soap dish enables you,  
or the window latch grants you freedom.  
Alertness is the hidden discipline of familiarity.  
The stairs are your mentor of things  
to come, the doors have always been there  
to frighten you and invite you,  
and the tiny speaker in the phone  
is your dream-ladder to divinity.

Put down the weight of your aloneness and ease into the  
conversation. The kettle is singing  
even as it pours you a drink, the cooking pots  
have left their arrogant aloofness and  
seen the good in you at last. All the birds  
and creatures of the world are unutterably  
themselves. Everything is waiting for you.

The range of what we think and do is limited by what we fail to notice. And because we fail to notice that we fail to notice, there is little we can do to change; until we notice how failing to notice shapes our thoughts and deeds. — *R. D. Laing*

### **CHICKPEA TO COOK by Rumi**

A chickpea leaps almost over the rim of the pot  
where it's being boiled.

'Why are you doing this to me?'

The cook knocks him down with the ladle.

'Don't you try to jump out.

You think I'm torturing you.

I'm giving you flavour,

so you can mix with spices and rice

and be the lovely vitality of a human being.

Remember when you drank rain in the garden.

That was for this.'

Grace first. Sexual pleasure,

then a boiling new life begins,

and the Friend has something good to eat.

Eventually the chickpea

will say to the cook,

'Boil me some more.

Hit me with the skimming spoon.

I can't do this by myself.

I'm like an elephant that dreams of gardens

back in Hindustan and doesn't pay attention

to his driver. You're my cook, my driver,

my way to existence. I love your cooking.'

The cook says,

'I was once like you,

fresh from the ground. Then I boiled in time,

and boiled in the body, two fierce boilings.

My animal soul grew powerful.

I controlled it with practices,

and boiled some more, and boiled

once beyond that,

and became your teacher.'

Me from Myself—to banish—

Had I Art—

Impregnable my Fortress

Unto All Heart—

But since Myself—assault Me—

How have I peace

Except by subjugating

Consciousness?

And since We're mutual Monarch

How this be

Except by Abdication—

Me—of Me?



-- *Emily Dickinson*

Be strong then, and enter into your own body; there you have a solid place for your feet. Think about it carefully! Don't go off somewhere else! ...just throw away all thoughts of imaginary things, and stand firm in that which you are. – *Kabir*

### **Oceans**

I have a feeling that my boat  
has struck, down there in the depths,  
against a great thing.  
And nothing  
happens! Nothing...Silence...Waves...

- Nothing happens? Or has everything happened,  
and are we standing now, quietly, in the new life?

-- *Juan Ramón Jiménez*

### **The Wind, One Brilliant Day**

The wind, one brilliant day, called  
to my soul with an odor of jasmine.

'In return for the odor of my jasmine,  
I'd like all the odor of your roses.'

'I have no roses; all the flowers  
in my garden are dead.'

'Well then, I'll take the withered petals  
and the yellow leaves and the waters of the fountain.'

the wind left. And I wept. And I said to myself:  
'What have you done with the garden that was entrusted to you?'

-- *Antonio Machado*

### **THE WELL OF GRIEF**

Those who will not slip beneath  
the still surface on the well of grief,  
turning down through its black water  
to the place we cannot breathe,  
will never know the source from which we drink,  
the secret water, cold and clear,  
nor find in the darkness glimmering,  
the small round coins,  
thrown by those who wished for something else.

-- *David Whyte*

### **The Lanyard - Billy Collins**

The other day I was ricocheting slowly  
off the blue walls of this room,  
moving as if underwater from typewriter to piano,  
from bookshelf to an envelope lying on the floor,  
when I found myself in the L section of the dictionary  
where my eyes fell upon the word *lanyard*.

No cookie nibbled by a French novelist  
could send one into the past more suddenly-  
a past where I sat at a workbench at a camp  
by a deep Adirondack lake  
learning how to braid long thin plastic strips  
into a lanyard, a gift for my mother.

I had never seen anyone use a lanyard  
or wear one, if that's what you did with them,  
but that did not keep me from crossing  
strand over strand again and again  
until I had made a boxy  
red and white lanyard for my mother.

She gave me life and milk from her breasts,  
and I gave her a lanyard.  
She nursed me in many a sick room,  
lifted spoons of medicine to my lips,  
laid cold face-clothes on my forehead,  
and then led me out into the air light

and taught me to walk and swim,  
and I, in turn, presented her with a lanyard.  
Here are thousands of meals, she said,  
and here is clothing and a good education.  
And here is your lanyard, I replied,  
which I made with a little help from a counselor.

Here is a breathing body and a beating heart,  
strong legs, bones and teeth,  
and two clear eyes to read the world, she whispered,  
and here, I said, is the lanyard I made at camp.  
And here, I wish to say to her now,  
is a smaller gift - not the worn truth

that you can never repay your mother,  
but the rueful admission that when she took  
the two-toned lanyard from my hand,  
I was as sure as a boy could be  
that this useless, worthless thing I wove  
out of boredom would be enough to make us even.

**IF I HAD MY LIFE TO LIVE OVER AGAIN**

If I had my life to live over again,  
I'd dare to make more mistakes next time.  
I'd relax.  
I'd limber up.  
I'd be sillier than I've been this trip.  
I would take fewer things seriously.  
I would take more chances,  
I would eat more ice cream and less beans.  
I would, perhaps, have more actual troubles but fewer imaginary ones.  
you see, I'm one of those people who was sensible and sane,  
hour after hour,  
day after day.

Oh, I've had my moments.  
If I had to do it over again,  
I'd have more of them.  
In fact, I'd try to have nothing else- just moments,  
one after another, instead of living so many years ahead of each day.  
I've been one of those persons who never goes anywhere without a thermometer, a hot-water bottle, a  
raincoat, and a parachute.  
If I could do it again, I would travel lighter than I have.

If I had to live my life over,  
I would start barefoot earlier in the spring  
and stay that way later in the fall.  
I would go to more dances,  
I would ride more merry-go-rounds,  
I would pick more daisies.

– *Nadine Stair, 85 years old*

The five hindrances are:

1. Sensory desire (*kāma**cchanda*): the particular type of wanting that seeks for happiness through the five senses of sight, sound, smell, taste and physical feeling.
2. Ill-will (*vyāpāda*; also spelled *byāpāda*): all kinds of thought related to wanting to reject; feelings of hostility, resentment, hatred and bitterness.
3. Sloth-and-torpor (*thīna*-*middha*): heaviness of body and dullness of mind which drag one down into disabling inertia and thick depression.
4. Restlessness-and-worry (*uddhacca*-*kukkucca*): the inability to calm the mind.
5. Doubt (*vicikicchā*): lack of conviction or trust.

### **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.*

### **I said to the wanting-creature inside me**

I said to the wanting-creature inside me:  
What is this river you want to cross?  
There are no travelers on the river-road, and no road.  
Do you see anyone moving about on that bank, or nesting?

There is no river at all, and no boat, and no boatman.  
There is no tow rope either, and no one to pull it.  
There is no ground, no sky, no time, no bank, no ford!

And there is no body, and no mind!  
Do you believe there is some place that will make the  
soul less thirsty?  
In that great absence you will find nothing.

Be strong then, and enter into your own body;  
there you have a solid place for your feet.  
Think about it carefully!  
Don't go off somewhere else!

Kabir says this: just throw away all thoughts of  
imaginary things,  
and stand firm in that which you are.  
-- *Kabir*

It costs so much to be a full human being that there are very few who have the enlightenment, or the courage, to pay the price...One has to abandon altogether the search for security, and reach out to the risk of living with both arms. One has to embrace the world like a lover. One has to accept pain as a condition of existence. One has to count doubt and darkness as the cost of knowing. One needs a will stubborn in conflict, but apt always total acceptance of every consequence of living and dying."

~*Morris L. West*

## **Allow**

*By Danna Faulds*

There is no controlling life.  
Try corralling a lightning bolt,  
containing a tornado. Dam a  
stream and it will create a new  
channel. Resist, and the tide  
will sweep you off your feet.  
Allow, and grace will carry  
you to higher ground. The only  
safety lies in letting it all in –  
the wild and the weak; fear,  
fantasies, failures and success.  
When loss rips off the doors of  
the heart, or sadness veils your  
vision with despair, practice  
becomes simply bearing the truth.  
In the choice to let go of your  
known way of being, the whole  
world is revealed to your new eyes.

## **Self Portrait**

*by David Whyte*

It doesn't interest me if there is one God or many gods.  
I want to know if you belong or feel abandoned.  
If you know despair or can see it in others.  
I want to know if you are prepared to live in the world with its harsh need to change you. If you can look back  
with firm eyes saying this is where I stand.  
I want to know if you know how to melt into that fierce heat of living falling toward the center of your  
longing.  
I want to know if you are willing to live, day by day, with the consequence of love and the bitter unwanted  
passion of sure defeat.  
I have been told, in *that* fierce embrace, even the gods speak of God.

## **"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*

## **Tear Down This House!**

Tear down this house. A hundred thousand new houses can be built from the transparent yellow gemstone buried underneath it. The only way to get to that treasure is to do the work of demolishing and then digging under the foundation.

With that value in hand all the new construction will be done without effort.

And anyway, sooner or later this house will fall on its own. The jewel treasure will be uncovered but it won't be yours then. The buried wealth is your pay for doing the demolition, the pick and shovel work.. If you wait and just let it happen, you'll bite your hand and say "I didn't do as I knew I should have."

This is a rented house. You don't own the deed. You have a lease and you've make your living sewing patches on torn clothing. Yet only a few feet underneath are two veins of pure red and bright gold gemstone. Take the pickaxe and pry the foundation.

You've got to quit this seamstress work. What does the "patch-sewing" mean, you ask? Eating and drinking. The heavy cloak of the body is always getting torn. You patch it with food and other restless ego satisfactions.

Rip up one board from the shop floor and look into the basement. You'll see two glints in the dirt.

--- *Rumi, 1250*

### **"Enough"**

Enough. These few words are enough.

If not these words, this breath.

If not this breath, this sitting here.

This opening to life

we have refused

again and again

until now.

Until now.

---- *David Whyte*

"We can make our minds so like still water that beings gather about us that they may see, it may be, their own images, and so live for a moment with a clearer, perhaps even with a fiercer life because of our quiet."

— *William Butler Yeats, The Celtic Twilight: Faerie and Folklore*

## Kindness

Before you know what kindness really is  
you must lose things,  
feel the future dissolve in a moment  
like salt in a weakened broth.  
What you held in your hand,  
what you counted and carefully saved,  
all this must go so you know  
how desolate the landscape can be  
between the regions of kindness.  
How you ride and ride  
thinking the bus will never stop,  
the passengers eating maize and chicken  
will stare out the window forever.

Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness,  
you must travel where the Indian in a white poncho  
lies dead by the side of the road.  
You must see how this could be you,  
how he too was someone  
who journeyed through the night with plans  
and the simple breath that kept him alive.

Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside,  
you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.  
You must wake up with sorrow.  
You must speak to it till your voice  
catches the thread of all sorrows  
and you see the size of the cloth.

Then it is only kindness that makes sense anymore,  
only kindness that ties your shoes  
and sends you out into the day to mail letters and  
purchase bread,  
only kindness that raises its head  
from the crowd of the world to say  
it is I you have been looking for,  
and then goes with you every where  
like a shadow or a friend.

-- Naomi Shihab Nye

### ***Shoulders***

A man crosses the street in rain,  
stepping gently, looking two times north and south,  
because his son is asleep on his shoulder.

No car must splash him.  
No car drive too near to his shadow.

This man carries the world's most sensitive cargo  
but he's not marked.  
Nowhere does his jacket say FRAGILE,  
HANDLE WITH CARE.

His ear fills up with breathing.  
He hears the hum of a boy's dream  
deep inside him.

We're not going to be able  
to live in this world  
if we're not willing to do what he's doing  
with one another.

The road will only be wide.  
The rain will never stop falling.

-- *Naomi Shihab Nye, 1952*

There is some kiss we want  
with our whole lives,  
the touch of Spirit on the body.  
Seawater begs the pearl  
to break its shell.  
And the lily, how passionately  
it needs some wild Darling!  
At night, I open the window  
and ask the moon to come  
and press its face into mine.  
Breathe into me.  
Close the language-door,  
and open the love-window.  
The moon won't use the door,  
only the window.

-- *Rumi*



### **The Guest House**

This being human is a guest house.  
Every morning a new arrival.  
A joy, a depression, a meanness,  
some momentary awareness comes  
as an unexpected visitor.  
Welcome and entertain them all!  
Even if they are a crowd of sorrows,  
who violently sweep your house  
empty of its furniture,  
still, treat each guest honorably.  
He may be clearing you out  
for some new delight.  
The dark thought, the shame, the malice.  
meet them at the door laughing and invite them in.  
Be grateful for whatever comes.  
because each has been sent  
as a guide from beyond.

— *Jellaludin Rumi, translation by Coleman Barks*

### **Love After Love**

*By 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 yourself.  
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 own image from the mirror.  
Sit. Feast on your life.

### **Compassion**

Have compassion for everyone you meet,  
even if they don't want it. What seems conceit,  
bad manners, or cynicism is always a sign  
of things no ears have heard, no eyes have seen.  
You do not know what wars are going on  
down there where the spirit meets the bone.

-- *Miller Williams*