



Center for Mindfulness
in Medicine, Health Care, and Society

Selected Poems and Readings
for
Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction in Mind-Body
Medicine:
A 7-Day Residential Training/Retreat

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I am not I

I am not I.

I am this one
Walking beside me whom I do not see,
Whom at times I manage to visit,
And whom at other times I forget;
The one who remains silent when I talk,
The one who forgives, sweet, when I hate,
The one who takes a walk where I am not,
The one who will remain standing when I die.

- Juan Ramon Jimenez

Selected Poems of Lorca & Jimenez, Translated by Robert Bly,
Beacon Press, 1973

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 we are standing now, quietly, in the new life?

-Juan Ramon Jimenez

Selected Poems of Lorca & Jimenez, Translated by Robert Bly, Beacon Press,
1973

Enough

Enough. These few words are enough.
If not these words, this breath.
If not this breath, this sitting here.

This opening to the life
we have refused
again and again
until now.

Until now

- David Whyte

Where Many Rivers Meet

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

Until one is committed there is always 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:
the moment one definitely commits oneself, then providence moves too.
All sorts of things occur to help that would never otherwise have occurred.
A whole stream of events issues from the decision,
raising to one's favor all manner of unforeseen accidents and meetings
and material assistance which no man could have dreamed
would come his way.
Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it.
Boldness has genius, power and magic in it.

- Goethe

Lost

Stand still. The trees ahead and the 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.

An old Native American elder story rendered into modern English by David Wagoner, in The Heart Aroused - Poetry and the Preservation of the Soul in Corporate America by David Whyte, Currency Doubleday, New York, 1996, p.259.

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, Selected Poems, translation Robert Bly, Harper Row, 1981.

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 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, Dream Work, Grove Atlantic Inc., 1986 & New and Selected Poems, Beacon Press, 1992.

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're 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 whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

Say I Am You: Poetry Interspersed with Stories of Rumi and Shams, Translated
by John Moyne and Coleman Barks, Maypop, 1994.

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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
resting?
There is no river at all, and no boat, and no boatman.
There is no towrope 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.

The Kabir Book: Forty Four of the Ecstatic Poems of Kabir, Translation by Robert
Bly. Beacon Press, Boston, 1993.

Two Kinds Of Intelligence

There are two kinds of intelligence: One acquired, as a child in school memorizes facts and concepts from books and from what the teacher says, collecting information from the traditional sciences as well as from the new sciences.

With such intelligence you rise in the world. You get ranked ahead or behind others in regard to your competence in retaining information. You stroll with this intelligence in and out of fields of knowledge, getting always more marks on your preserving tablets.

There is another kind of tablet, one already completed and preserved inside you. A spring overflowing its springbox. A freshness in the center of the chest. This other intelligence does not turn yellow or stagnate. It's fluid, and it doesn't move from outside to inside through the conduits of plumbing-learning.

This second knowing is a fountainhead from within you, moving out.

The Esesential Rumi, Translation by Coleman Barks with John Moyne, Harper, San Francisco, 1995.

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 House of Light, Beacon Press, Boston, 1990.

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 everywhere
like a shadow or a friend.

Naomi Shihab Nye, Words Under the Words, Eighth Mountain Press, 1995.

Love After Love

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 have 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.

Derek Walcott, Collected Poems 1948-1984, New York, Farrar Straus Giroux,
1986.

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 only if we could arrange our lives in accordance with the principle that tells us that we must always trust in the difficult, then what now appears to us to be 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 only princesses waiting for us to act, just once, with beauty and courage. Perhaps everything that frightens us is, in its deepest essence, something helpless that wants our love.

So you must not be frightened if a sadness rises before you larger than any you've ever seen, if an anxiety like light and cloud shadows moves over your hands and everything that you do. You must realize that something has happened to you. Life has not forgotten you, that it holds you in its hands and will not let you fall. Why do you want to shut out of your life any uneasiness, any miseries, or any depressions? For after all, you do not know what work these conditions are doing inside you.

- Rainer Maria Rilke

[* In this poem the “Dark One” refers to Krishna – a god in the Hindu faith]

Why Mira Can't Go Back to Her Old House

The colors of the Dark One have penetrated Mira's body; all
the other colors washed out.

Making love with the Dark One and eating little, those are
my pearls and my carnelians.

Meditation beads and the forehead streak, those are my
scarves and rings.

That's enough feminine wiles for me. My teacher taught me
this.

Approve me or disapprove me: I praise the Mountain Energy
night and day.

I take the path that ecstatic human beings have taken for
centuries.

I don't steal money, I don't hit anyone. What will you charge
me with?

I have felt the swaying of the elephant's shoulders; and now
you want me to climb on a jackass? Try to be serious.

Mirabi: Versions Translated from the Rajastani by Robert Bly
in: The Soul is Here for Its Own Joy : Sacred Poems From
Many Cultures, 1995 edited by Robert Bly

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, remembered 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 flame are in-folded
Into the crowned knot of fire
And the fire and the rose are one.

Excerpted from "Little Gidding" in Four Quartets, copyright 1943 by T. S. Eliot
and renewed in 1971 by Esme Valerie Eloit, Harcourt Brace & Company, New
York, 1971, p.59.

To go into the dark...

To go into the dark with a light
is to know the light.
To know the dark, go dark,
go without sight.
And find
that the dark too
blooms and sings
and is traveled by dark feet and dark wings.

-- Wendell Berry

Birdwings

Your grief for what you've lost lifts a mirror
Up to where you're bravely working.

Expecting the worst, you look, and instead,
Here's the joyful face you been waiting to see.

Your hand opens and closes and opens and closes.
If it were always a fist or always stretched open,
You would be paralyzed.

Your deepest presence is in every small
Contracting and expanding,
The two as beautifully balanced and coordinated
As birdwings.

-- Rumi

Hokusai says look carefully.
He says pay attention, notice.
He says keep looking, stay curious.
He says there is no end to seeing.
He says look forward to getting old
He says keep changing, you just get more who you really are.
He says get stuck, accept it, repeat yourself as long as it's interesting.
He says keep doing what you love.
He says keep praying.
He says every one of us is a child, every one of us is ancient, every one of us
has a body.
He says every one of us is frightened.
He says every one of us has to find a way to live with fear.
He says everything is alive –shells, buildings, people, fish, mountains, trees.
Wood is alive.
Water is alive.
Everything has its own life.
Everything lives inside us.
He says live with the world inside you.
He says it doesn't matter if you draw, or write books.
It doesn't matter if you saw wood, or catch fish.
It doesn't matter if you sit at home and stare at the ants on your verandah
or the shadows of the trees and grasses in your garden.
It matters that you care.
It matters that you feel.
It matters that you notice.
It matters that life lives through you.
Contentment is life living through you.
Joy is life living through you.
Satisfaction and strength is life living through you.
Peace is life living through you.
He says don't be afraid,
Don't be afraid.
Look, feel, let life take you by the hand.
Let life live through you.

-- Roger Keyes

“The Law that Marries all Things”

1.

The cloud is free only
to go with the wind.

The rain is free
only in falling.

The water is free only
in its gathering together,
in its downward courses,
in its rising into air.

2.

In law is rest
if you love the law,
if you enter, singing, into it
as water in its descent.

3.

Or song is truest law,
and you must enter singing;
it has no other entrance.

It is the great chorus
of parts. The only outlawry
is in division

4.

Whatever is singing
is found, awaiting the return
of whatever is lost.

5.

Meet us in the air
over the water,
sing the swallows.

Meet me, meet me,
the redbird sings,
here here here here.

--Wendell Berry

Mindful

Every day

I see or I hear
something
that more or less

kills me

with delight,
that leaves me
like a needle

in the haystack
of light.

It is what I was born for—
to look, to listen,

to lose myself

inside this soft world—
to instruct myself
over and over

in joy,

and acclamation.
Nor am I talking
about the exceptional,

the fearful, the dreadful,
the very extravagant—
but of the ordinary.

the common, the very drab,

the daily presentations.

Oh, good scholar,
I say to myself,
how can you help

but grow wise

with such teachings
as these—
the untrimmable light

of the world

the ocean's shine,
the prayers that are made
out of grass?

- Mary Oliver
In: Why I Wake Early

The breeze at dawn...

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 moving back and forth across the doorsill where the two worlds touch.
The door is round and open.
Don't go back to sleep.

-- Rumi (tran. Coleman Barks)