

# Friends of Silence

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*"Is there enough Silence for the Word to be heard?"*

Dear Friends ~ Purportedly the beginning of something new, a whole breathless yet-to-be-lived year, January is moored in bleak mid-winter. The wonder of Solstice, of Christmas, have faded in the rearview; the promise of Equinox and Easter are far off. January is stuck trying to be something spirited in the gray-sky, sodden-snow middle, the dark borderland between one thing and another.

But hold on. Mystics and poets say that the darker, in-between places are where transformative, sometimes surprising, things happen: thresholds are liminal, vital spaces. In her poem, "Marginal", Maggie Anderson writes, "This is where I live, at the edge of this ploughed field...I prefer it here...This life is not easy, but wings mix up with leaves here...and I can poise myself and hold for a long time, profoundly..." The old god Janus, the month's namesake, was the custodian of transitions and passages, his two faces on an edge, looking to the ancient ways and future possibilities.

Silence is the air of such a place; it's how we breathe in liminal spaces. Jesuit theologian Walter Burghardt described contemplation as a "long, loving look at the real". Inhaling, exhaling in Silence, we know ourselves loved, belonging, wild as all Earth's inhabitants are wild, and holy. Grief mixes up with joy here. Like Janus, we can look around fearlessly; indeed, in all the sacred directions, and know ourselves held, profoundly.

I bring you poets, storytellers, soul criers singing about the "wildness of reaching an edge", as I once heard David Whyte describe it; about how we pray, love, live, and thrive in such a place, in this time. May you take the adventure, plunge into the alchemy, breathe, and be profoundly held in Silence, Love, and Spirit. ~ Lindsay



*O Holy Spirit, you are the mighty way in which everything that is in the heavens, on the earth, and under the earth is penetrated with connectedness, is penetrated with possibility, so that all may be sustained by you.*

~ Hildegard of Bingen in *O IGNIS SPIRITUS PARACLETI*

It is not easy, in these lives haunted by loneliness and loss, menaced by war and heartbreak, witness to genocides and commonplace cruelties, to live in gratitude. And yet it may be the only thing that saves us from mere survival. In these blamethirsty times, to praise is an act of courage and resistance. To insist on what is beautiful without turning away from the broken. To bless what is simply for being, knowing that none of it had to be.

~ Maria Popova, from *The Marginalian* newsletter, November 29, 2025

I have an interest in the word "you" — the address that intimates use for each other, that yearning we might have, that sense of addressing self, other, Other, the void, the past, the unknown, the deeply known. That word allows me spaciousness without definition, and I like it, so I regularly repeat the word "you", in Irish, with the in and out of breath, until I've forgotten who is

*...this is the passing of all shining things  
no lingering no backward-  
wondering be unto  
us O  
soul, but straight  
glad feet fearruining  
and glorygirded  
faces  
lead us  
into the  
serious  
steep  
darkness*

~ E. E. Cummings.

[the glory is fallen out of] in *AMORES (V)*

*Teach me to be love  
as You are Love;  
Lead me through each fear:  
Hold my hand as I walk through  
valleys of illusion each day,  
That I may know your Peace.  
I believe that I shall know the  
Realm of Heaven,  
of Love, here on Earth!*

~ Nan Merrill, from her interpretation  
of "Psalm 27" in *PSALMS FOR PRAYING*

ispeaking and who is being addressed. ("The eye with which I see God / is the eye with which I see myself", my bewildering friend Meister Eckhart says.)

Is this a prayer? Sure. Is it a prayer? Why not? Is it a prayer? No. Is it? Yes. Too many years of theological study have immunized me from any interest in definitions that ask the impossible of the intellect. I'm interested in practices and signposts to the present. And breath is such a signpost, such a practice, and such an infinity.

~ Padraig O'Tuama, "On Breath" from his email, *Poetry Unbound*



Birds for leaves, and leaves for birds.  
The tawny yellow mulberry leaves  
are always goldfinches tumbling  
across the lawn like extreme elation.  
The last of the maroon crabapple  
ovates are song sparrows that tremble  
all at once. And today, just when I  
could not stand myself any longer,  
a group of field sparrows, that were  
actually field sparrows, flew up into  
the bare branches of the hackberry  
and I almost collapsed: leaves  
reattaching themselves to the tree  
like a strong spell for reversal. What  
else did I expect? What good  
is accuracy amidst the perpetual  
scattering that unspools the world.

~ Ada Limôn, "It's the Season I Often Mistake,"  
in *THE HURTING KIND*

... one day we have to walk our questions, our yearnings, our longings. We have to set out into those mysteries, even with the uncertainty. Especially with the uncertainty. Make it magnificent. We take the adventure. Not naively but knowing this is what a grown-up does. We embark. Let your children see you do it. Set sail, take the wing, commit to the stomp. Evoke a playful boldness that makes even angels swoon. There's likely something tremendous waiting.

~ Martin Shaw from "Navigating the Mysteries," in *Emergence Magazine*

Humanity—in fact, the entire Earth community—currently exists in such dire circumstances that the most significant, viable, and potent solutions will seem like impossible dreams to most everyone (at first). But this is apparently the way it has always been in our universe. At the greatest moments of transformations—what Thomas Berry calls "moments of grace"—the "impossible" happens....

If you consider the data on such things as current wars, environmental destruction, political-economic corruption, social/racial divisions, and widespread psychological breakdowns, there seems to be little hope for humanity and, by extension, most other members of the biosphere. But if, alternatively, you look at the fact of miracles—moments of grace—throughout the known history of the universe, it will dawn on you that there is and always has been an intelligence or imagination at work much greater than our conscious minds. Given that we cannot rule out moments of grace acting through us in this century and the next, we have no alternative but to proceed as if we ourselves, collectively, can in fact make the difference...

~ Bill Plotkin, from the *Soulcraft Musings* newsletter, December 27, 2024

What do we do with suffering? As far as I can see, we have two choices — we either transform our suffering into something else, or we hold on to it, and eventually pass it on.

In order to transform our pain, we must acknowledge that all people suffer. By understanding that suffering is the universal unifying force, we can see people more compassionately, and this goes some way toward helping us forgive the world and ourselves. By acting compassionately, we reduce the world's net suffering and defiantly rehabilitate the world. It is an alchemical act that transforms pain into beauty. This is good. This is beautiful.

To not transform our suffering and instead transmit our pain to others,... compounds the world's suffering. Most sin is simply one person's suffering passed on to another. This is not good. This is not beautiful.

The utility of suffering, then, is the opportunity it affords us to become better human beings. It is the engine of our redemption.

~ Nick Cave in *THE RED HAND FILES*

What if we reframed "living with uncertainty" to "navigating mystery"? There's more energy in that phrase... But to navigate mystery is not the same thing as living with uncertainty ...Navigating mystery humbles us, reminds us with every step that we don't know everything, are not, in fact, the masters of all.

As humans we've long been forged on the anvil of mysteries: Why are we here? Why do we die? What is love? We are tuned like a cello to vibrate with such questions.



*Awake at night  
while others sleep  
I watch meteors fall  
in glittering array,  
inscrutable patterns.  
Multiple fiery tails  
each minute*

*brush the cold black  
sky, sweep the cave  
of my heart.*

*I cannot decipher the  
hieroglyph of meteors,  
except one passage  
repeated, descending:*

*In zero g, space fragments  
drift, invisible to human eyes.  
But mesmerized by gravity,  
meteors burst through  
Earth's atmosphere and blaze  
a firetrail across the sky:*

*It takes unbearable friction  
and the annihilating fall  
to ignite their glory light*

~ Geneen Marie Haugen,  
"Winter: Geminid Shower"  
in the online journal, *Aeon*