Friends of Silence

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

Dear Friends ~ When I first encountered the term "Threshold Time," I pictured Lucy Pevensie before the wardrobe, poised to encounter an entirely unseen world. My beautiful friend had invited me into her family's Día de los Muertos celebration, where she described the week straddling October and November as a time when the "veil" separating the living and spirit worlds feels thinner, and therefore more permeable. I'd always understood, in theory, that we remain connected to others even after they've died, but my friend's tradition had a grounding effect. I could touch a table laid with warm food – material matter. As if the honored guests had knocked on the front door and hung their coats in the entryway.

The possibility that these two distinct worlds can draw closer to one another exists in many spiritual traditions, of course. It brings to mind a poem Wendell Berry wrote not long before he himself slipped behind that veil:

The loved ones we call the dead
depart from us and for a while
are absent. And then as if
called back by our love, they come
near us again. They enter our dreams...

~ Wendell Berry, lines from "The Loved Ones,"
in The New Yorker Magazine, November 17, 2025

In the often harried and uncertain realm of the living, there is great comfort in knowing we are accompanied by friends and teachers in both worlds. *"For small creatures such as we the vastness is bearable only through love,"* Carl Sagan observed in his novel CONTACT, reckoning with the human need for belonging and connection.



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The architecture of my Anabaptist upbringing was sturdy and unadorned: cinderblock halls painted white and accordion-style vinyl walls that could be snapped together in endless room configurations in the church basement. The closest things we had to anything resembling veils were the red velvet drapes hanging across the bell closet in the choir room. It was a spot that lent itself well to Hide-and-Seek for the handful of kids waiting on their parents after an evening meeting. Whoever was "It" would have followed the muffled giggles and insistent shushes to that closet. They would have pawed at the curtains, determined to discover whoever waited behind the fabric.

Standing as we are in this Threshold Time of early November, we too are like "seekers" leaning in, listening for the voices of our companions that arise from the silence on either side of the thinned veil. It can be an elusive business, Mary Oliver reminds us, but ultimately illuminating and life-giving:

I will sing for the veil that never lifts.
I will sing for the veil that begins, once in a lifetime,
maybe, to lift.
I will sing for the rent in the veil.
I will sing for what is in front of the veil, the
floating light.
I will sing for what is behind the veil –
light, light and more light.
This is the world, and this is the work of the world.

~ Mary Oliver, lines from "Work," in THE LEAF AND THE CLOUD



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We at Friends of Silence are grateful to belong to this contemplative community that connects through words and poetry each month. And this issue is offered in remembrance of the ones each of us has loved and lost, honoring the light they've left shining for us on this side of the veil. ~ Joy

A generous heart is always open, always ready to receive our going and coming. In the midst of such love we need never fear abandonment. This is the most precious gift true love offers — the experience of knowing we always belong.

~ bell hooks in ALL ABOUT LOVE: NEW VISIONS

We are all strangers in a strange land, longing for home, but not quite knowing what or where home is. We glimpse it sometimes in our dreams, or as we turn a corner, and suddenly there is a strange, sweet familiarity that vanishes almost as soon as it comes.

~ Madeleine L'Engle
in THE ROCK THAT IS HIGHER: STORY AS TRUTH



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The core belief of the [Day of the Dead] is so poetic and simple: as long as we remember those who have passed away, as long as we tell their stories, sing their songs, tell their jokes, cook their favorite meals, then they are with us, around us, and in our hearts.

~ Jorge R. Gutierrez in the introduction to THE ART OF THE BOOK OF LIFE

Samhain was considered to be a moment when the veil between this world and the otherworld was at its thinnest...This was a liminal moment in the calendar, a time between two worlds, between two phases of the year, when worshippers were about to cross a boundary but hadn't yet one so. Samhain was a way of marking that ambiguous moment when you didn't know who you were about to become, or what the future would hold. It was a celebration of limbo.

~ Katherine May in WINTERING: THE POWER OF REST AND RETREAT IN DIFFICULT TIMES

[Someone] recently gave me a book that mentions Proteus, the shape-shifting sea god who tells you your fortune if you can clasp to him like a tick. But if you think the most common question asked of Proteus involves either love or death, you're wrong. The most common question is: How do I get home?

~ Jesse Donaldson in ON HOMESICKNESS: A PLEA

O, open your hearts, friends,
that your pain and loneliness
be turned to Love;
And then, we shall rejoice in the Beloved
together!

~ Nan Merrill, from her interpretation of Psalm 34
in PSALMS FOR PRAYING: AN INVITATION TO WHOLENESS

Quiet friend who has come so far,
feel how your breathing makes more space around you.
Let this darkness be a bell tower
and you the bell...
And if the world has ceased to hear you,
say to the silent earth: I flow.
To the rushing water, speak: I am.

~ Rainer Maria Rilke, lines from "Let this Darkness Be a Bell Tower,"
in A YEAR WITH RILKE trans. Joanna Macy and Anita Barrows

Some sounds
use words. I hear
the language of leaves.
It is deep and order
soft and real.

~ Hannah Emerson, lines from "Language of Leaves,"
in THE KISSING OF THE KISSING: POEMS

... the ultimate touchstone [of friendship] is witness, the privilege of having been seen by someone and the equal privilege of being granted the sight of the essence of another, to have walked with them and to have believed in them, and sometimes just to have accompanied them for however brief a span, on a journey impossible to accomplish alone.

~ David Whyte in CONSOLATIONS

People leave traces of themselves where they feel most comfortable, most worthwhile.

~ Haruki Murakami in DANCE DANCE DANCE

Heart weeps.
Head tries to help heart.
Head tells heart how it is, again:
You will lose the ones you love. They will all go. But even the earth will go, someday.
Heart feels better, then.
But the words of head do not remain long in the ears of heart.
Heart is so new to this.
I want them back, says heart.
Head is all heart has.
Help, head. Help heart.

~ Lydia Davis, "Head Heart," in THE COLLECTED STORIES OF LYDIA DAVIS



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