

# Friends of Silence

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“Is there enough Silence for the Word to be heard?”

Dear Friends ~ We talk so much about the stress, anxiety, and turmoil of these times and the difficulty of “living in the world but not of it” while that very world pounds on our minds and batters our spirits. Contemplative practices are often done behind closed doors, holding the clamor at bay for a few moments. In The Lord of the Rings,

Bilbo said, “It’s a dangerous business, Frodo, going out your front door...” But sometimes it’s the very act of moving, of going out the door and setting off on a walk that heals, centers, reminds us to be grateful, and brings balance back into our lives.

Whether you practice walking meditation, saunter through the woods, or climb mountains one intense step after another, walking has the potential to integrate body, mind, and spirit. It is a simple gift best not taken for granted. “...there’s no knowing where you might be swept off to.”



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I have met with but one or two persons in the course of my life who understood the art of Walking, that is, of taking walks, — who has a genius, so to speak, for *sauntering*: which word is beautifully derived “from idle people who roved about the country, in the Middle Ages, and asked charity, under pretence of going *à la Sainte Terre*,” to the Holy Land, till the children exclaimed, “There goes a Sainter-Terrer,” a Saunterer, — a Holy Lander...

Of course it is of no use to direct our steps to the woods, if they do not carry us thither. I am alarmed when it happens that I have walked a mile into the woods bodily, without getting there in spirit... The thought of some work will run in my head, and I am not where my body is — I

am out of my senses. In my walks I would fain return to my senses... ~ Henry David Thoreau in *WALKING*

I walk the wooded path behind my home and create little towers at this curve and then the next. I think what my heart is leaning into, the real purpose of creating these stacks of stones, is to remind me of my true journey, my real walk in this world, which has little to do with tangles of modern communication, wormholes of busy, and our culture’s call to do more and more... So each day I build another cairn to remind myself of a truer path, allowing my eyes to swing from side to side, looking for signs.

~ Carrie Newcomer in *A PERMEABLE LIFE: POEMS & ESSAYS*

O Great, Holy Spirit, I take this step into the day you have given...I hold all those I will meet today, in my journeying and in my work. I try to walk gently on this earth. Let me walk gently through the lives of my work companions and friends. Though they make way for my passing, may they spring back, neither broken nor bruised.

~ from the Plains tribes, “The Way of Three Steps”, recorded by Jose Hobday in *WOMAN PRAYERS* by Mary Ford-Grabowsky

It is possible to enjoy every step we make, not only during walking meditation, but at any time, whenever you need to move from one place to another, no matter how short the distance is. ~ from *HOW TO WALK*

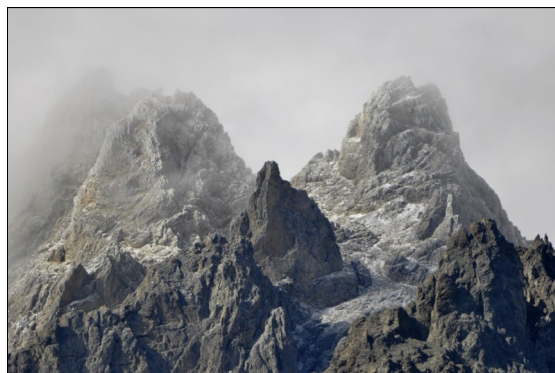


You who move the world  
Now move likewise me -  
Lifting me up high  
From earthly depths to you

I dance a song of silence  
To music of the spheres -  
And as I set my foot  
At heaven's very brink  
I feel Your smile  
Touch me with joy.

~ Bernard Wosien in *JOURNEY  
OF A DANCER*

In climbing where the danger is great, all attention has to be given the ground step by step, leaving nothing for beauty by the way. But this care, so keenly and narrowly concentrated, is not without advantages. One is thoroughly aroused. Compared with the alertness of the senses and corresponding precision and power of the muscles on such occasions, one may be said to sleep all the rest of the year. The mind and body remain awake for some time after the dangerous ground is past, so that arriving on the summit with the grand outlook—all the world spread below—one is able to see it better, and brings to the feast a far keener vision, and reaps richer harvest than would have been possible ere the presence of danger summoned him to life. ~ John Muir



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Grandfather says this: in life there is sadness as well as joy, losing as well as winning, falling as well as standing. I do not say this to make you despair, but to teach you that life is a journey sometimes walked in light and sometimes walked in shadow.

~from *KEEP GOING* by Joseph M. Marshall III

Walking is a profound tool of healing. When spirits droop and footsteps falter, walking awakens the healing powers of the human spirit, literally, with chemicals that change the way you feel... Whether the wound is physical, emotional, professional, or spiritual, a walk can ease the grip of hard times, delivering an antidote to despair. But each step requires an act of faith... When I catch my thoughts plowing through fears and doubts or unanswered questions as I walk, I've developed the habit of responding politely but firmly... *Thank you, but not now. Right now, I am here and I am walking.* Then I return to awareness of my breath or my footsteps. It's a practice that allows me to acknowledge my lively thought processes and then choose to redirect my focus.

~ from *HEALING WALKS FOR HARD TIMES* by Carolyn Scott Kortge

I sat and thought about inventing "staggering meditation." I decided that I would go for a walk, and rather than take my "stick" along as a necessary evil and out of anxiety over falling, I would "invite" my cane to be my helper... For so many years, because of my anger, I deprived myself of support I needed to be fully mobile... I have come to an awareness that my companion is a gift that helps connect me not only with the ground, but also with the many others who for a variety of reasons cannot walk easily, but who also stagger. When I am connected with these brothers and sisters, I no longer feel separated or left out. Rather than a reminder of a terrible past, I have uncovered a deep root of present meaning in the "tree" that I hug in my hand.

~ from "Staggering Meditation" by Vietnam vet  
Alan Cutter, in *A JOYFUL PATH*  
by Thich Nhat Hanh and friends

After the sitting  
Stand and bow to the Presence  
Slowly walk away.

~ Fr. John W. Groff, Jr.

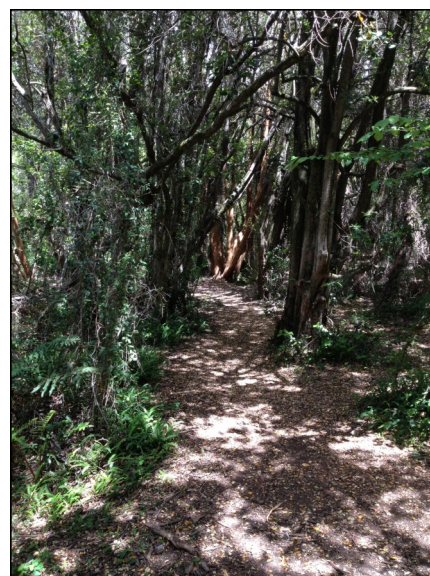
...So we saunter toward the Holy Land, till one day the sun shall shine more brightly than ever... shall perchance shine into our minds and hearts, and light up our whole lives

~ Henry David Thoreau in *WALKING*

with a great awakening light, as warm and serene and golden as on a bank-side in autumn.

I taught myself  
to live simply and wisely  
To look at the sky  
and pray to God  
and to wander long  
before evening  
to tire my  
superfluous worries.

~ Anna Akhmatova



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