

# Friends of Silence

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

Dear Friends ~ This story begins sitting around a campfire one spring night, with a friend and her friend whom I only just met. “You know what’s funny?” she laughed when she introduced us. “This guy lives in your old apartment! He gets all your junk mail now.” *What a great coincidence!* we mused.

Our chatter meandered into the night—the way fireside conversations tend to go. When we veered toward childhood memories, our new visitor and I realized that we also grew up in the exact same town as one another! At precisely the same time! Attended the very same school!

He told me he moved when he was in late elementary school, to a house about a block away from the school. *I* had walked a block to that school every day, too. But...my family had moved away from that neighborhood in late elementary school.

“We lived in the brick house, next to the one with the swimming pool,” he went on.

My eyes widened. “With a Chinese chestnut and a pear tree in the yard?”

We both smiled—bewildered—when he nodded and said, “And the sump pump in the basement...”

I think about this story often. I’m still incredulous at the fact that a stranger eating s’mores in my backyard—two states away from where we grew up—had lived in the house that my parents sold to his three decades ago. (Not to mention that apartment coincidence, too!) But mostly I marvel over the fact that if the conversation had unfolded differently, we would have never known that we were connected in such a personal way.

“*Do you think there is anything not attached by its unbreakable cord to everything else?*” Mary Oliver wrote in her book *UPSTREAM*. Since that night by the fire, I can’t help but wonder what other connections lay undiscovered beneath the surface of our everyday interactions with others. And how might we live differently with the realization that they are there? ~Joy



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**Survival is the second law of life.**

**The first is that we are all one.**

~ Joseph Campbell in *A JOSEPH CAMPBELL COMPANION*

In nature we never see anything isolated, but everything in connection with something else which is before it, beside it, under it and over it.

~ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in

*CONVERSATIONS OF GOETHE WITH JOHANN PETER ECKERMANN*

What seems to be happening at the moment is never the full story of what is really going on. For the honey bee, it is the honey that is important. But the bee is at the same time nature's vehicle for carrying out cross-pollination of the flowers. Interconnectedness is a fundamental principle of nature. Nothing is isolated. Each event connects with others. Things are constantly unfolding on different levels. It's for us to perceive the warp and woof of the Oneness of All as best we can and learn to follow our own threads through the tapestry of life with authenticity and resolve.

~ Jon Kabat-Zinn from *WHEREVER YOU GO, THERE YOU ARE*

**The earth is leaning sideways  
And a song is emerging from the floods  
And fires. Urgent tendrils lift toward the sun.  
You must be friends with silence to hear.  
The songs of the guardians of silence are the most powerful-  
They are the most rare.**

~ Joy Harjo from “*Singing Everything*” in *AN AMERICAN SUNRISE*.



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Love means to learn to look at yourself  
The way one looks at distant things  
For you are only one thing among many.  
And whoever sees that way heals his heart,  
Without knowing it, from various ills.  
A bird and a tree say to him: Friend

~ Czeslaw Milosz from "Love" in  
*NEW AND COLLECTED POEMS 1931-2001*



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We are knee deep in a river, searching for water. We are part of an invisible river, but we are so distracted by outer things and what we imagine they could mean to us that we lose contact with the source of our own Being. When we are caught in desire, in form, in externals, we are pulled out of ourselves into a fantasy world, a desire world. We lose touch with the invisible river, the waters of life, through our identification with unconscious inner processes and with outer demands.

~ Kabir Helminski in *LIVING PRESENCE*

**When you love someone, the best thing you can offer is your presence. How can you love if you are not there?**

~ Thich Nhat Hanh in *NO DEATH, NO FEAR*

We think that by protecting ourselves from suffering, we are being kind to ourselves. The truth is we only become more fearful, more hardened and more alienated. We experience ourselves as being separate from the whole. This separateness becomes like a prison for us—a prison that restricts us to our personal hopes and fears, and to caring only for the people nearest to us. Curiously enough, if we primarily try to shield ourselves from discomfort, we suffer. Yet, when we don't close off, when we let our hearts break, we discover our kinship with all beings.

~ Pema Chodron in *WHEN THINGS FALL APART*



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**Lord, most of what I love  
Mistakes itself for nothing.**

~ Molly McCully Brown from "Transubstantiation"  
in *THE VIRGINIA STATE COLONY  
FOR EPILEPTICS AND FEEBLEMINDED*

What draws Friends together  
Does not conform to Laws of Nature.  
Form doesn't know about spiritual closeness.  
If a grain of barley approaches a grain of wheat,  
An ant must be carrying it. A black ant on black felt.  
You can't see it, but if grains go toward each other,  
It's there.

A hand shifts our birdcages around.  
Some are brought closer. Some move apart.  
Do not try to reason it out. Be conscious  
Of who draws you and who not.

~ Rumi from "The Force of Friendship" in *THE LONGING*

If the world is a temple, then our enemies are sacred, too. The ability to respect the outsider is probably the litmus test of true seeing. It doesn't even stop with human beings and enemies of the least of the brothers and sisters. It moves to frogs and pansies and weeds. EVERYTHING becomes enchanting with true sight...All we can do is to participate.

~ Richard Rohr from *EVERYTHING BELONGS*

To acknowledge our ancestors means we are aware that we did not make ourselves, that the line stretches all the way back, perhaps to God; or to Gods. We remember them because it is an easy thing to forget: that we are not the first to suffer, rebel, fight, love and die.

~ Alice Walker in *HER BLUE BODY EVERYTHING WE KNOW*



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