

Friends of Silence

Vol. XXXIX, No. 7

July/August 2026

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

Dear friends ~ Sometimes when he is feverish and sick, my son wakes crying because he feels "too big for everything." He'll tell us his arms are heavy and huge, and his body has ballooned beyond the edges of his bed. So we pull him into a hug and whisper reminders that he is actually quite small: *Feel how you fit into our arms? You wouldn't even reach the ceiling on your tiptoes. And see how high the trees outside tower above the house?* As his sense of self shrinks back into proportion, my son's breath slows and his body relaxes. His smallness, it turns out, comforts him.

I hope the words gathered in this newsletter offer a similar relief, along with Pádraig O'Tuama's encouragement to *"Look at the solar system. Look at the universe. Look at stars. We are nothing. That's not rubbish; that is the everything."* May the vastness of the world we inhabit leave you gasping in awe, and assure you of your place in it. ~ Joy



*The joy of dewdrops
in the grass as they
turn back to vapor*

~ Koraku (1837) in *JAPANESE DEATH POEMS*

Wonder, the mental state of openness, questioning, curiosity, and embracing mystery, arises out of experiences of awe. In our studies, people who find more everyday awe show evidence of living with wonder. They are more open to new ideas. To what is unknown. To what language can't describe. To the absurd. To seeking new knowledge. To experience itself, for example of sound, or color, or bodily sensation, or the directions thought might take during dreams or meditation. To the strengths and virtues of other people. It should not surprise that people who feel even five minutes a day of everyday awe are more curious about art, music, poetry, new scientific discoveries, philosophy, and questions about life and death. They feel more comfortable with mysteries, with that which cannot be explained.

~ Dacher Keltner in *AWE: THE NEW SCIENCE OF EVERYDAY WONDER AND HOW IT CAN TRANSFORM YOUR LIFE*

I think that what happens with awe is the self is so reduced, so minimalized, is basically evaporated, if only for the snap of the finger, that for once you can see that thing clearly.

... the part that I worry about is that most people live on the level of the self and not the level of the soul, which is the costume of personality over the soul. It's what the self is... It's the performance of personhood, not the essence of personhood.

And today most people lead with identities and opinions, which I think are the least interesting, least true parts of people, because they're the most mutable and the least anchored in what you call the soul.

~ Maria Popova from "How to Write Something Truly Wise" podcast interview with David Perel

On the brow of the hill, behind a silent chapel,
two windmills spin new soundscapes over
the land, cart-wheeling alleluias.

Cloistered granite holds an orchestration
of birds, and eerie whirr, tremulous sounds
of curlew and lapwing. The wind

through the metal gate is a speaking in tongues
with the broken feed-hoop tuning in:
other-worldly, intimately insistent.

All this music to attend to, to slip into:
an old organ droning, an uproarious lullaby.
Up over da hill, arms turn, the heart lifts.

~ Christine De Luca, "Soundscapes," in *A YEAR OF SCOTTISH POEMS*

I came to love you too late, Oh Beauty, so ancient and so new...
What did I know? You were inside me, and I was out of my
body and mind, looking for you... You called to me and cried
to me; you broke the bowl of my deafness; you uncovered your
beams, and threw them at me...

~ St. Augustine from "I came to love you too late"

in *THE SOUL IS HERE FOR ITS OWN JOY*

The spirit is so near that you can't see it!
But reach for it...Don't be a jar
Full of water, whose rim is always dry.
Don't be the rider who gallops all night
And never sees the horse that is beneath him.

~ Rumi from "The Jar With the Dry Rim"

in *WHEN GRAPES TURN TO WINE: VERSIONS OF RUMI*



I wish you all good things. Live your life. Live your life. Live your life.

~ Maurice Sendak

After hours in the penetrating rain, I am suddenly damp and chilled and the path back to the cabin is a temptation. I could so easily retreat to tea and dry clothes, but I cannot pull myself away. However alluring the thought of warmth, there is no substitute for standing in the rain to waken every sense—senses that are muted within four walls, where my attention would be on me instead of all that is more than me. Inside looking out, I could not bear the loneliness of being dry in a wet world. Here in the rainforest, I don't want to just be a bystander to rain, passive and protected; I want to be part of the downpour, to be soaked, along with the dark humus that squishes underfoot. I wish that I could stand like a shaggy cedar with rain seeping into my bark, that water could dissolve the barrier between us. I want to feel what the cedars feel and know what they know.

~ Robin Wall Kimmerer in *BRAIDING SWEETGRASS*

On my way back from Alabama, the birds were on their way wherever. Their bodies, so many strewn in long lines across the sky, looked like the words I wrote as a child before I knew how to write words.

I thought my thoughts would simply announce themselves to the page if I pressed my pencil to it. And still, as I write this poem, I'm waiting to see what I'm going to tell myself. The birds landed in an empty field, gleaning for whatever it was they'd find. The clouds, so whipped by wind, turned the sky a milky blue, pouring down fast and thick as paint as I drove under it. There is so much missing in the world I try to write about: I don't know what kind of birds or what had been planted or what to call a cloud that does that. I'd like to say I don't need to know to love them, but why else did I spend a lifetime looking for my name? I promise myself I will look into it later so for now I look at their bodies, try to remember. For now, a correction: the field was not an empty field. It was so full of birds.

~ Acie Clark, "They were starlings," in *THE HOPPER* magazine, 2024

*On the tidal mud, just before sunset,
Dozens of starfishes
Were creeping. It was
As though the mud were a sky
And enormous, imperfect stars
Moved across it as slowly
As the actual stars cross heaven.
All at once, they stopped,
And as if they had simply
Increased their receptivity
To gravity they sank down
Into the mud; they faded down
Into it and lay still; and by the time
Pink of sunset broke across them
They were as invisible
As the true stars at daybreak.*

~ Galway Kinnell, "Daybreak," in *THREE BOOKS*

...The journey might take you a few hours, a day, a year, a few years, a hundred, a thousand or even more.

Watch your mind. Without training it might run away and leave your heart for the immense human feast set by the thieves of time.

Do not hold regrets...

Cut the ties you have to failure and shame.

Let go the pain you are holding in your mind, your shoulders, your heart, all the way to your feet. Let go the pain of your ancestors to make way for those who are heading in our direction.

Ask for forgiveness.

Call upon the help of those who love you. These helpers take many forms: animal, element, bird, angel, saint, stone, or ancestor.

Call your spirit back. It may be caught in corners and creases of shame, judgment, and human abuse.

You must call in a way that your spirit will want to return.

Speak to it as you would to a beloved child.

Welcome your spirit back from its wandering. It may return in pieces, in tatters. Gather them together. They will be happy to be found after being lost for so long.

Your spirit will need to sleep awhile after it is bathed and given clean clothes.

Now you can have a party. Invite everyone you know who loves and supports you.

Keep room for those who have no place else to go.

Make a giveaway, and remember, keep the speeches short.

Then, you must do this: help the next person find their way through the dark.

~ Joy Harjo from "For Calling the Spirit Back from Wandering the Earth in Its Human Feet" in *CONFLICT RESOLUTION FOR HOLY BEINGS: POEMS*