

It Is Enough

To know that the atoms
of my body
will remain

to think of them rising
through the roots of a great oak
to live in
leaves, branches, twigs

perhaps to feed the
crimson peony
the blue iris
the broccoli

or rest on water
freeze and thaw
with the seasons

some atoms might become a
bit of fluff on the wing
of a chickadee
to feel the breeze
know the support of air

and some might drift
up and up into space
star dust returning from
whence it came

it is enough to know that
as long as there is a universe
I am a part of it.

~ Anne Alexander Bingham

What Is Dying?

I am standing upon the seashore. A ship at my side spreads her white sails to the morning breeze, and starts for the blue ocean. She is an object of beauty and strength, and I stand and

watch her until she hangs like a speck of white cloud just where the sea and sky come down to meet and mingle with each other.

Then someone at my side says: "There! She's gone!"

Gone where? Gone from my sight - that is all. She is just as large in mast and hull and spar as she was when she left my side, and just as able to bear her load of living freight to the place of her destination. Her diminished size is in me, and not in her.

And just at that moment when someone at my side says: "There! She's gone!" there are other eyes that are watching for her coming; and other voices ready to take up the glad shout: "There she comes!"

And that is "dying."

~ Rev. Luther F. Beecher

Have you ever seen

have you ever seen
a seed fallen to earth
not rise with a new life
why should you doubt the rise
of a seed named human

when for the last time
you close your mouth
your words and soul
will belong to the world of
no place no time

~ Rumi

Sonnet 73

That time of year thou mayst in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.
In me thou see'st the twilight of such day
As after sunset fadeth in the west;

Which by and by black night doth take away,
Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.
In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire,
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
As the deathbed whereon it must expire,
Consumed with that which it was nourished by.
This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more strong,
To love that well which thou must leave ere long.

~ William Shakespeare

Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night

Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,
Because their words had forked no lightning they
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

And you, my father, there on the sad height,
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

~ Dylan Thomas

Adrift

Everything is beautiful and I am so sad.
This is how the heart makes a duet of
wonder and grief. The light spraying
through the lace of the fern is as delicate
as the fibers of memory forming their web
around the knot in my throat. The breeze
makes the birds move from branch to branch
as this ache makes me look for those I've lost
in the next room, in the next song, in the laugh
of the next stranger. In the very center, under
it all, what we have that no one can take
away and all that we've lost face each other.
It is there that I'm adrift, feeling punctured
by a holiness that exists inside everything.
I am so sad and everything is beautiful.

~ Mark Nepo

Three Elegiac Poems (the third)

III.

He goes free of the earth.
The sun of his last day sets
clear in the sweetness of his liberty.

The earth recovers from his dying,
the hallow of his life remaining
in all his death leaves.

Radiances know him. Grown lighter
than breath, he is set free
in our remembering. Grown brighter

than vision, he goes dark
into the life of the hill
that holds his peace.

He's hidden among all that is,
and cannot be lost.

~ Wendell Berry

Learning from Trees

If we could,
like the trees,
practice dying,
do it every year
just as something we do—
like going on vacation
or celebrating birthdays,
it would become
as easy a part of us
as our hair or clothing.

Someone would show us how
to lie down and fade away
as if in deepest meditation,
and we would learn
about the fine dark emptiness,
both knowing it and not knowing it,
and coming back would be irrelevant.

Whatever it is the trees know
when they stand undone,
surprisingly intricate,
we need to know also
so we can allow
that last thing
to happen to us
as if it were only
any ordinary thing,

leaves and lives
falling away,
the spirit, complex,
waiting in the fine darkness

to learn which way
it will go.

~ Grace Butcher

Life After Death

These things I know:

How the living go on living
and how the dead go on living with them
so that in a forest
even a dead tree casts a shadow
and the leaves fall one by one
and the branches break in the wind
and the bark peels off slowly
and the trunk cracks
and the rain seeps in through the cracks

and the trunk falls to the ground
and the moss covers it
and in the spring the rabbits find it
and build their nest
inside the dead tree
so that nothing is wasted in nature
or in love.

~ Laura Gilpin

Grief will come to you.

Grief will come to you.
Grip and cling all you want,
It makes no difference.

Catastrophe? It's just waiting to happen.
Loss? You can be certain of it.

Flow and swirl of the world.
Carried along as if by a dark current.

All you can do is keep swimming;
All you can do is keep singing.

~ Gregory Orr

Haunted

We are looking for your laugh.
Trying to find the path back to it
between drooping trees.
Listening for your rustle
under bamboo,
brush of fig leaves,
feeling your step
on the porch,
natty lantana blossom
poked into your buttonhole.
We see your raised face
at both sides of a day.
How was it, you lived around
the edge of everything we did,
seasons of ailing & growing,
mountains of laundry & mail?
I am looking for you first & last
in the dark places,
when I turn my face away
from headlines at dawn,
dropping the rolled news to the floor.
Your rumble of calm
poured into me.
There was the saving grace
of care, from day one, the watching
and being watched
from every corner of the yard.

~ Naomi Shihab Nye

Wearing a hat of stars

Wearing a hat of stars
Riding the moon, crossing the sky,
Blowing the trumpet of sadness and happiness
I always remember you.

~ Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche

Before you know what kindness really is

Before you know what kindness really is
you must lose things,
feel the future dissolve in a moment
like salt in a weakened broth.
What you held in your hand,
what you counted and carefully saved,
all this must go so you know
how desolate the landscape can be
between the regions of kindness.
How you ride and ride
thinking the bus will never stop,
the passengers eating maize and chicken
will stare out the window forever.

Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness,
you must travel where the Indian in a white poncho
lies dead by the side of the road.
You must see how this could be you,
how he too was someone
who journeyed through the night
with plans and the simple breath
that kept him alive.

Before you know kindness
as the deepest thing inside,
you must know sorrow
as the other deepest thing.
You must wake up with sorrow.
You must speak to it till your voice
catches the thread of all sorrows
and you see the size of the cloth.
Then it is only kindness
that makes sense anymore,

only kindness that ties your shoes
and sends you out into the day
to mail letters and purchase bread,
only kindness that raises its head
from the crowd of the world to say
it is I you have been looking for,
and then goes with you every where
like a shadow or a friend

~ Naomi Shihab Nye

Individual human existence

An individual human existence should be like a river: small at first, narrowly contained within its banks, and rushing passionately past rocks and over waterfalls. Gradually the river grows wider, the banks recede, the waters flow more quietly, and in the end, without any visible break, they become merged in the sea, and painlessly lose their individual being.

~ Bertrand Russell

A butterfly

A butterfly lights beside us like a sunbeam
and for a brief moment its glory
and beauty belong to our world,
but then it flies on again,
and though we wish it could have stayed,
we feel so lucky to have seen it.

~ Jenn Toner

Love is not changed by Death

Love is not changed by Death,
And nothing is lost and all in the end is harvest.

~ Edith Sitwell

Not that I want to be a god or a hero

Not that I want to be a god or a hero. Just to change into a tree, grow for ages, not hurt anyone.

~ Czesław Miłosz

Grief

I had my own notion of grief.
I thought it was the sad time
That followed the death of someone you love.
And you had to push through it
To get to the other side.
But I'm learning there is no other side.
There is no pushing through.
But rather,
There is absorption.
Adjustment.
Acceptance.
And grief is not something you complete
But rather, you endure.
Grief is not a task to finish
And move on,
But an element of yourself –
An alteration of your being.
A new way of seeing.
A new dimension of self.

~ Gwen Flowers

Sorrow

Sometimes it's so large
we begin to be pulled under,

So large we believe we will drown
unless the plug is pulled

and it begins to drain away
through unseen pipes that usher it

out of the sad house
and below the neglected lawn

beneath the wide street and traffic,
beyond the traffic light

and the elementary school on the other side.
Underground it slowly, steadily dissipates

into the neighborhood beyond the playground
with its innocents at recess.

For so many years I was one of them.
From the top of the slide

I could spot our beige split-level
and even its flagstone walkway.

I could sometimes make out the silhouette
of my mother retrieving letters

from our mailbox
or out on the front lawn positioning

the oscillating sprinkler.
How good her timing was then,

not leaving it in one place too long
or letting the water wet the sidewalk,

never allowing it to drown
the things she planted.

~ Andrea Hollander Budy

Earth teach me quiet

Earth teach me quiet
as the grasses are still with new light.

Earth teach me suffering
as old stones suffer with memory.

Earth teach me humility
as blossoms are humble with beginning.

Earth teach me caring
as mothers nurture their young.

Earth teach me courage
as the tree that stands alone.

Earth teach me limitation
as the ant that crawls on the ground.

Earth teach me freedom
as the eagle that soars in the sky.

Earth teach me acceptance
as the leaves that die each fall.

Earth teach me renewal
as the seed that rises in the spring.

Earth teach me to forget myself
as melted snow forgets its life.

Earth teach me to remember kindness
as dry fields weep with rain.

~ Ute Prayer

Time Party

Life is a party.
People arrive
and are introduced.
Things happen.
Conversations begin.
Future contact is planned.
Alliances form.
Some people dance.

Some are too shy
to engage.
Some mingle with everyone.
Some take refuge in one
or two intimate encounters.
Some tune out with toxic
substances, publicly partaking
in slow suicide.
Some play the fool.
Some take care of others.
Outside, weather happens.
The world continues
with its own silence
and noise. Children are born
and begin their own party.
Later, some of them
will come to this one.
Inside, the party goes on.
Some people
have a good time.
Some people
have a bad time.
Some leave early.
Some wait for the dawn.
Sooner or later,
everyone goes home.

~ Alla Renée Bozarth

Remember

Remember the sky that you were born under,
know each of the star's stories.
Remember the moon, know who she is.
Remember the sun's birth at dawn, that is the
strongest point of time. Remember sundown
and the giving away to night.
Remember your birth, how your mother struggled
to give you form and breath. You are evidence of
her life, and her mother's, and hers.
Remember your father. He is your life, also.
Remember the earth whose skin you are:

red earth, black earth, yellow earth, white earth
brown earth, we are earth.
Remember the plants, trees, animal life who all have their
tribes, their families, their histories, too. Talk to them,
listen to them. They are alive poems.
Remember the wind. Remember her voice. She knows the
origin of this universe.
Remember you are all people and all people
are you.
Remember you are this universe and this
universe is you.
Remember all is in motion, is growing, is you.
Remember language comes from this.
Remember the dance language is, that life is.
Remember.

~ Joy Harjo

A difficult life is not less

A difficult life is not less
worth living than a gentle one.
Joy is simply easier to carry
than sorrow, and your heart
could lift a city from how long
you've spent holding what's been
nearly impossible to hold.

This world needs those
who know how to do that.
Those who could find a tunnel
that has no light at the end of it,
and hold it up like a telescope
to know the darkness
also contains truths that could
bring the light to its knees.

Grief astronomer, adjust the lens,
look close, tell us what you see.

~ Andrea Gibson

The Way It Is

Over and over we break
open, we break and
we break and we open.
For a while, we try to fix
the vessel—as if
to be broken is bad.
As if with glue and tape
and a steady hand we
might bring things to perfect
again. As if they were ever
perfect. As if to be broken is not
also perfect. As if to be open
is not the path toward joy.
The vase that's been shattered
and cracked will never
hold water. Eventually
it will leak. And at some
point, perhaps, we decide
that we're done with picking
our flowers anyway, and no
longer need a place to contain them
We watch them grow just
as wildflowers do—unfenced,
unmanaged, blossoming only
when they're ready—and mygod,
how beautiful they are amidst
the mounting pile of shards.

~ Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer

For What Binds Us

There are names for what binds us:
strong forces, weak forces.
Look around, you can see them:
the skin that forms in a half-empty cup,
nails rusting into the places they join,
joints dovetailed on their own weight.

The way things stay so solidly
wherever they've been set down—
and gravity, scientists say, is weak.

And see how the flesh grows back
across a wound, with a great vehemence,
more strong
than the simple, untested surface before.
There's a name for it on horses,
when it comes back darker and raised: proud flesh,

as all flesh,
is proud of its wounds, wears them
as honors given out after battle,
small triumphs pinned to the chest—

And when two people have loved each other
see how it is like a
scar between their bodies,
stronger, darker, and proud;
how the black cord makes of them a single fabric
that nothing can tear or mend.

~ Jane Hirshfield
