

IN SILENCE

Be still.
Listen to the stones of the wall.
Be silent, they try
to speak your

name.
Listen
to the living walls.

Who are you?
Who
are you? Whose
silence are you?

Who (be quiet)
are you (as these stones
are quiet). Do not
think of what you are
still less of
what you may one day be.

Rather
be what you are (but who?)
be the unthinkable one
you do not know.

O be still, while
you are still alive,
and all things live around you

speaking (I do not hear)
to your own being,
speaking by the unknown
that is in you and in themselves.

I will try, like them
to be my own silence:
and this is difficult. The whole
world is secretly on fire. The stones
burn, even the stones they burn me.
How can a man be still or
listen to all things burning?
How can he dare to sit with them
when all their silence is on fire?ⁱ

Thomas Merton

SACRED VISION

Black Elk's Vision as a Boy on Harney Peak

Then I was standing on the highest mountain of them all, and round about beneath me was the whole hoop of the world. And while I stood there I saw more than I can tell and I understood more than I saw; for I was seeing in a sacred manner the shapes of all things in the spirit, and the shape of all shapes as they must live together like one being.

And I saw the sacred hoop of my people was one of many hoops that made one circle, wide as daylight and as starlight, and in the center grew one mighty flowering tree to shelter all the children of one mother and one father, and I saw that it was holy.

Black Elk's Prayer as a Old Man Returning to Harney Peak

Here at the center of the world where you took me when I was young and taught me: here, old I stand, and the tree is withered, Grandfather, my Grandfather!

Again, perhaps for the last time on this Earth, I recall the great vision you sent me. It may be that some root of the Sacred Tree still lives. Nourish it then, that it may leaf and bloom and fill with singing birds! Hear me. that they may once again go back to the Sacred Hoop, and the Good Red Road, the shielding tree.

In sorrow, I am sending a feeble voice, O six powers of the world. Hear me in my sorrow, for I may never call again. O make my people live."ⁱⁱ

THE WEB OF BEING

There are companions on the path who not human beings. Yes, that's right, full companions in prayer and community who are not human!

This is not the stuff of romantic images of nature, animism, anthropomorphism or the like. It is a very simple truth that is practical, experiential, and scientific. Science reminds us of the web of life and the interdependence of all creation.

Our ancestors, who lived more directly in contact with nature than many of us do in the current age, tell us that we are related to other beings. The mystical paths of the major spiritual traditions of the world tell us this is true.

Faith acknowledges that wisdom and compassion are the woven bonds of sacred relationship drawing us to surrender the ego and limited perspectives of the figuring mind. The mind divides and calculates separating this from that. Wisdom and compassion draw us into themselves in unity.

Earth is not symbolically our mother. Our cells are made of the very stuff of the earth and the earth is of the cosmos, and so on into sacred mystery. We share this with all creation. Within this deep interrelationship, all things of the worlds inspire feelings of respect and gratitude.

This profound sense of presence and mutuality, a listening heart, and actions that promote the life of all are the highest form of respect and love. In the Long Chant (see below) we welcome and invite the entire created universe to pray with us. We include in our awareness the elements of the physical world and all creatures. We invite the ancestors to bring their wisdom from all the directions, cultures and understandings. We sit with them in the great circle of life, reminded of the mystery of life, and filled with awe and wonder.

The natural world of which we are a part communicates constantly with us through our senses. Being present to that communication allows for rebalancing and healing. "Things" teach, just as our own bodies teach. When we listen and are aware of our fellow creatures the experience of wisdom and interdependence is profound. This union of life creating beauty is a great mystery as we experience the presence of God within and among us. When we enter this presence even in the world of apparent separation, we may experience separation in a new way, appreciating the beauty of each part of the whole. We ourselves are a part of the whole.

All of creation is speaking and sharing wisdom. When we listen we know this. Feelings of loneliness become difficult to maintain in the presence of the communicating universe. Today people wonder why they are unhealthy or feel isolated and sad. The life of wonder and awe, the real life relationship is surrounds and invites us. Do we know what birds live near us or wonder if animals are suffering in the winter? Can we smell the change in the air before a storm or see the imbalance of an overgrowth of insects on a tree? When we become sick do we wonder if our sickness is the sickness of another being who needs prayer? The effect of not listening and tending the world is the deadening boredom for us, and devastation for the world around us.

Folk of the path are aware of our need to listen and respond to the earth we live upon, desert, plains, mountains, forests, or city. To seek in our own neighborhood the places that speak, or the land that has been silenced. Each needs tending to be what it fully is, a giver of life. What it is tells of itself is our story as well.

When we live a life of listening and responding to the non-human world nothing remains the same because union is shining out of everything, every being. We are different. Life is different on all levels. Everything is blessed in this prayer from the tiniest newly born creature to the most ancient of days. The very grains and crumbs of life are shown to be the dwelling place of God within and among us. The cells of our bodies become alive with remembrance of who they really are in a universe of interpenetrating beauty.

In a world charged with mutuality and communion the veil is lifted; as if coming out of a trance, we are charged with life. By participating in this prayer for all our relations we are changed, the world is changed, for everything is restored to right relationship, recreated and renewed.

If a person should sit in this mystery in a good way even their enemies will become their relations, and that person will become a real human being. The person who listens to all our relations and prays for the wellbeing of all our relations comes to know the true meaning of prayer. We are connected in the sacred circle with each other in the universal love within and among us. We are not alone. When this prayer is prayed all become more alive in the Spirit. Fear goes away. Wisdom comes to us to lead us and show us how to walk.

This wheel of life where all things are included is multi-dimensional. All our relations and our ancestors accompany us in time that is not linear, but spiraling in and out, renewing itself through greater and lesser cycles. The daily round of these cycles offers invitations and doorways to wisdom and silence. The land itself awakens sacred stories whose manifesting energies, even past and future, converge in the now. The plants where you live are leafing or losing their leaves. A bear looks up from an Alaskan river's edge. Jesus is washing feet in Jerusalem. Right now Siddhartha is riding the ferry across an Indian river; and on Harney Peak Black Elk is raising his voice in prayer.

Our dead are with us. Their wisdom is our wisdom. The questions that their lives pose are our questions. The ancestors of all beings on the land you live tell their stories as well. To tend the ancestors is helpful.

Respecting the ancestors, seeking their wisdom is not hocus-pocus. It is not uncommon for ordinary people to have personal moving experiences of the presence of their ancestors, or other beings such as angels or saints. Just ask and see how even the most practical and concrete of people will share amazing stories of wisdom given in a dream, or the felt sense of a comforting ancestor at a crucial time. Many spiritual traditions speak of the realms of the ancestors, that great cloud of witnesses, and of other beings. Companions on the path make offerings of respect by retelling the old stories, praying for the ancestors and their wellbeing, and seeking their guidance, protection and assistance.

The cosmos is our community, temple and holy place. The land we stand on is its manifestation. We pray with our fellow creatures consciously as brothers and sisters of creation. These companions join us in prayer and we join with them. We bare each other's burdens. We share co-responsibility for the wellbeing of all.

All things reflect the interrelationship with sacred mystery, its wisdom and compassion, even the most difficult. We are called into conscious awareness of our relationships within the web of being, to share the joy, triumphs, and pleasure, the misery, suffering, fear or despair of all beings. We are called into presence and to listen and to respond to the needs and wisdom of the animate, inanimate, and spiritual worlds of the ancestors and other beings.

In gratitude and respect, compassion and understanding for all creation we become living medicine wheels in union with the great unseen source when we enter our prayer consciously in union and companionship with all beings from the tiniest newly born creature to the ancient of days. In this manner we become true human beings and true persons of the spirit serving the divine creator of the manifold beauty of existence.

COMING INTO THE SILENCE

Sit quietly breathing letting the sound of your breath be a wave in which you receive the breath of the universe as you inhale; and in the exhale give back to the universe your own breath. This ocean of life is weaving you every day, and you are weaving it. Ride that wave into the quiet connection with all beings and their breathing in the silence. Receive their blessing. Offer yours to them.

SOUND

If you are given a song now is the time to sing it.

CONTEMPLATIONS

Gratitude

The ultimate joy in life is to be filled with gratitude for all of Creation and to know my place and purpose in this life.
Then I feel secure, bathed in the endless flow of Grace.
Enduring from generation to generation.ⁱⁱⁱ

Nierika

There is a doorway within our minds that usually remains hidden and secret until the time of death. The Huichol word for it is nierika. Nierika is a cosmic portway or interface between so-called ordinary and non-ordinary realities. It is a passageway and at the same time a barrier between the worlds^{iv} - Prem Dass

In the Deepest Ground of Our Being

We must begin by frankly admitting that the first place in which to go looking for the world is not outside us but in ourselves. We are the world. In the deepest ground of our being we remain in metaphysical contact with the whole of that creation in which we are only small parts. Through our senses and our minds, our loves, needs, and desires, we are implicated, without possibility of evasion, in this world of matter and of men, of things and of persons, which not only affect us and change our lives but are also affected and changed by us...The question, then, is not to speculate about how we are to contact the world – as if we were somehow in outer space – but how to validate our relationship, give it a fully honest and human significance, and make it truly productive and worthwhile for our world.^v - Thomas Merton

Centering Yourself in the Presence of God and the Cosmos

Ancient man always wanted to be related to the cosmos. God the supreme was there and God was present in all the parts of space and so you centered yourself in the presence of God and the whole creation. We have lost all that. We have lost all this sense of solidarity, with the whole of creation. We are members of this whole. And of course today we are very conscious of the ecological problems; how we are destroying the world because we are not seeing it as sacred. We think we can do anything we like with it. You can burn it and destroy it, cut down the forests and so on. It is a neutral matter, you can just get on with it, but that is totally contrary to all the ancient world. You couldn't cut down a tree without worshipping, and the spirit of the tree

remained. When you cut it down, you worshipped, and asked him to forgive you for cutting down his tree. You were in touch with the sacred.^{vi} - Dom Bede Griffiths

Outstanding

I am reminded...of the concept of kami in Japanese Shinto. For kami, although often translated as “gods” and “goddesses,” means nothing so simple or personalized. The best translation of the word is “outstanding.” It describes those moments and places and myths and beings in which divine presence makes itself felt. The blossoming of cherry trees, a sharp outcropping of rock, the sun bursting forth through clouds: these are kami because they remind us of the order - the divinity - into which we are born.^{vii} ~Patricia Monaghan

The Articulate Wind

Dusk came on over Roundstone Bog, that day. Hours passed, but I could not make myself leave the silent land. Feelings rushed through me like the sighing wind: remembered losses, stinging anger at feeling those losses again, confused guilt, panic at not knowing how to balance contradictions, piercing sorrow at the fragility of beauty. But even as those feelings surged through me, I felt something else as well, a kind of joy that is not separate from pain and that cannot exist in isolation from it, a great tearing hunger to live in this world as fully as I could, until I heard the wailing of the fairy woman at my death.

The hoodie crows called. The articulate wind sang in my ears. I stood on the granite bones of the bog. Above the Atlantic, the sun set in a blaze of red and gold, clouds streaming out like flame-colored hair against the encroaching night.^{viii} ~Patricia Monaghan

Send Out Your Love

When you do ceremonies, sending out your love in the five directions - the north, south east, west and the center - brings life force into you..... We will have to gather together and with the ceremonies, begin to tune ourselves with the environment, bringing it back into balance again. The ocean is telling me that if it doesn't soon come into balance, terrible destruction will come in the form of fire ... so I ask you to go to the sea and make offerings. Take a candle, chocolate and money. Offer these things to Tatei Haramara, Our Mother of the Sea",,,,,You must study these things I am saying ... You have your own way of learning ... But you have seen the flower of my vision on my face, and you must know that it is important to think of these things each day and each night. Then one day the sea will give you heart; the Fire will give you heart; the Sun will give you heart... I will check you by lifting up the nierika (doorway to the other world), like a mirror, and I will see what you have done, how you have gone in the world.^{ix} - Don Jose Matsuwa

STORY

- What questions do the lives of your ancestors ask that play out in your life today?
- What wisdom do they offer? How far did they get with discovering answers? What have you learned from their mistakes and triumphs? What answers does your life bring to the questions?
- Tell a story of a time the natural world with all its many beings has communicated with you. Where was it? How did you perceive it? Intuition? Gut knowing? A small voice? What role did your senses play in this?

ACTIVITY

- Walk about in the natural world being aware of its textures, smells, shape, sounds. See what you are drawn to – the play of light, a stone, a flower, a twig. Touch it - its texture, size shape. See it deeply, its shape, colors and grains. Look at your natural companion with full intention of discovering all you can about it. Imagine how it was created, what it is created from, where it came from originally, how it evolved to its present state. Listen for the teaching it has for you. Tell your companion whatever you would like to tell it. Thank it for revealing itself to you. Respectfully return it to the place you found it.
- Each day this week select a different companion from the natural world, small, large, far off, close up, and repeat the lesson. Some things will be too big to hold in your hand, like a mountain or tree or the moose eating your cabbage, that's okay, have fun with this.
- Sing out the Long Antiphonal Chant (below) with friends or by yourself.

Long Antiphonal Chant (Response at the asterisk)

Great silence, *may we hear you this day.

Great humming sound, *may we feel you this day.

Great hidden source, *illuminate our hearts and way today.

May we know all creation, *as our deepest relations.

May we honor all creation, *as the manifestation of the unseen source.

May we honor ourselves, *as a manifestation of the unseen source.

May we honor all peoples, *as the manifestation of the unseen source.

May we honor all children, *as the manifestation of the unseen source.

May we honor all elders, *as the manifestation of the unseen source.

May we honor the ancestors, *as the manifestation of the unseen source.

Great silence, *may we hear you this day.

Great humming sound, *may we feel you this day.

Great seed and hidden source, *illuminate our hearts and way today.

May we honor all directions, north, east, south, west,
above, below, within, without and center, *as the manifestation of the unseen source.
May we honor the air, the clouds, wind, sky, *as the manifestation of the unseen
source.

May we honor the earth, mountains, metal and rocks, *as the manifestation of the
unseen source.

May we honor the tree, grass and flower growing beings, *as the manifestation of the
unseen source.

May we honor rivers, oceans, rain, and all water, *as the manifestation of the unseen
source.

May we honor fire, flame, heat and desire, *as the manifestation of the unseen source.

May we honor sun, moon, planets, stars, universes, and galaxies, *as manifestations of
the unseen source.

Great silence, *may we hear you this day.

Great humming sound, *may we feel you this day.

Great seed and hidden source, *illuminate our hearts and way today.

May we honor four legged nations, *as the manifestation of the unseen source.

May we honor birds and flying nations, *as the manifestation of the unseen source.

May we honor the swimming nations, *as the manifestation of the unseen source.

May we honor the crawling nations, *as the manifestation of the unseen source.

Great silence, *may we hear you this day.

Great humming sound, *may we feel you this day.

Great seed and hidden source, *illuminate our hearts and way this day.

May we honor all faiths, *as the manifestation of the unseen source.

May we honor all love, *as the manifestation of the unseen source.

May we live in deep peace, *with the manifestations of the unseen source.

May we know all creation, *as our deepest relations.

May we honor all creation, *as the manifestation of the unseen source.

May we honor ourselves, *as a manifestation of the unseen source.

Great silence, *may we hear you this day.

Great humming sound, *may we feel you this day.

Great seed and hidden source, *illuminate our hearts and way today.

Praise be God for God is every all and every all is One.

BLESSING

Creatures without feet have my love,
And likewise those that have two feet,
And those that have four feet I love,
And those, too, that have many feet.
May those without feet harm me not,
And those with two feet cause no hurt;
May those with four feet harm me not,
Nor those who many feet possess.
Let creatures all, all things that live,
All beings of whatever kind,
See nothing that will bode them ill!
May naught of evil come to them!

- The Culla-Vagga (v. 6)

May all beings be free of suffering.
May all beings from the least to the greatest abide in deep peace.
May all beings be filled with joy.
May all beings from the most recently born to the most ancient abide in deep peace.

ⁱ Merton, Thomas. "In Silence," from *The COLLECTED POEMS OF THOMAS MERTON*, copyright ©1957 by The Abbey of Gethsemani. Reprinted by permission of New Directions Publishing Corp. NY.

ⁱⁱ Black Elk, Nicholas and John Gneisenau Neihardt, Alexis N. Petri, Lori Utecht. *Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux*. University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, NE 2004.

ⁱⁱⁱ KOL HANESHAMAH: LIMOT HOL (Daily Prayer Book). Reconstructionist Jewish Federation, 2nd edition. Reconstructionist Press, Elkins Park, Pennsylvania 2002.

^{iv} Halifax, Joan. *Shamanic Voices: A Survey of Visionary Narratives*. Penguin. New York 1991.

^v Merton, Thomas. *Love and Living*. Harvest Books. New York 2002.

^{vi} Griffiths, Bede. *Return to the Centre: of a talk given in Perth Australia in 1992*. Recorded and transcribed by Doug Conlan.

^{vii} Monaghan, Patricia. *The Red-Haired Girl From the Bog: The Landscape of Celtic Myth and Spirit*. New World Library. Novato, CA 2003.

^{viii} Monaghan, Patricia. *The Red-Haired Girl From the Bog: The Landscape of Celtic Myth and Spirit*. New World Library. Novato, CA 2003.

^{ix} Halifax, Joan. *Shamanic Voices: A Survey of Visionary Narratives*. Penguin. New York 1991.