

Keep Me Green: Meeting the Sacred in Nature



(Image: Joe Prekop)

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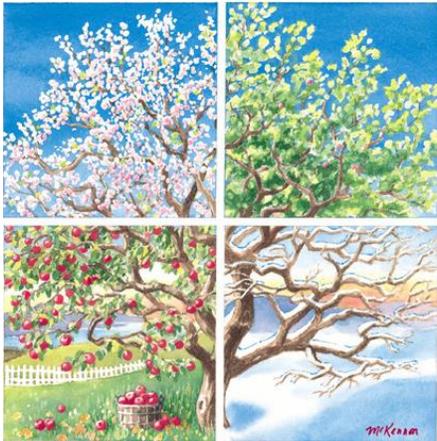
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Materials developed by Kim Langley, M.Ed. for WordSPA ministry

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Ten thousand flowers in spring, the moon in autumn,
a cool breeze in summer, snow in winter.
If your mind isn't clouded by unnecessary things,
this is the best season of your life.

By Wu Men (Hui-k'ai) (1183 – 1260). Translated by Stephen Mitchell.



(Image: Source unavailable)

May Song

For whatever is let go
there's a taker.
The living discovers itself

where no preparation
was made for it,
where its only privilege

is to live if it can.
The window flies from the dark
of the subway mouth

into the sunlight
stained with the green
of the spring weeds

that crowd the improbable
black earth
of the embankment,

their stout leaves

(Image: www.vetiver.org)



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like the tongues and bodies
of a herd, feeding

on the new heat,
drinking at the seepage
of the stones:

the freehold of life,
triumphant
even in the waste

of those who possess it.
But it is itself the possessor,
we know at last,
seeing it send out weeds
to take back
whatever is left.

Proprietor, pasturing foliage
on the rubble,
making use

of the useless—a beauty
we have less than not
deserved.

By Wendell Berry, from *New Collected Poems*. © Counterpoint Press, 2012.

Jailbreak

It's time to break out -
Jailbreak time.
Time to punch our way out of
the dark winter prison.
Lilacs are doing it
in sudden explosions of soft purple,
And the jasmine vines, and ranunculus, too.
There is no jailer powerful enough
to hold Spring contained.
Let that be a lesson.
Stop holding back the blossoming!
Quit shutting eyes and gritting teeth,
curling fingers into fists, hunching shoulders.
Lose your determination to remain unchanged.
All the forces of nature



(Image: www.soilutions.co.uk)

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want you to open,
Their gentle nudge carries behind it
the force of a flash flood.
Why make a cell your home
when the door is unlocked
and the garden is waiting for you?

By Maya Spector (<http://www.barryandmayaspector.com>).

Praying

It doesn't have to be
the blue iris, it could be
weeds in a vacant lot, or a few
small stones; just
pay attention, then patch

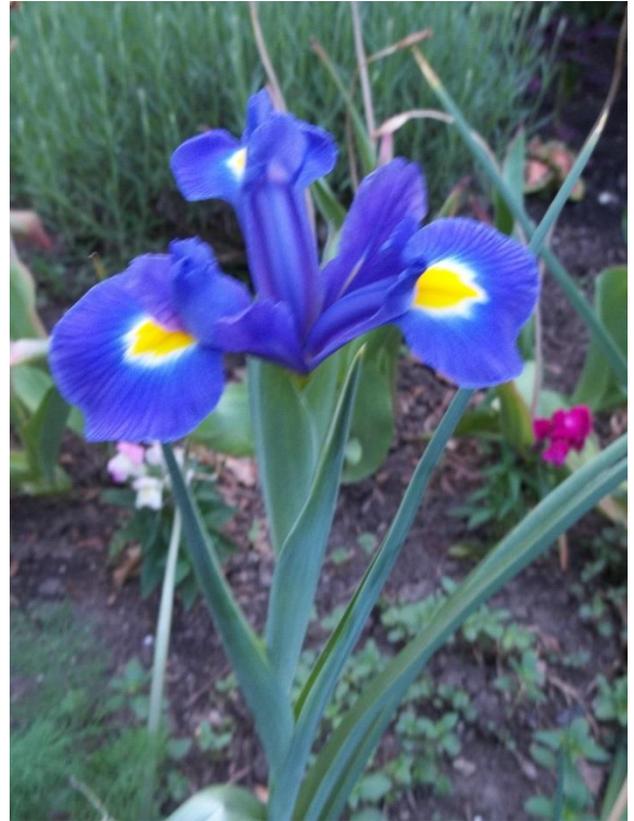
a few words together and don't try
to make them elaborate, this isn't
a contest but the doorway

into thanks, and a silence in which
another voice may speak.

By Mary Oliver, from *Thirst*.
© Beacon Press, 2006.

A Thing of Beauty

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever:
Its loveliness increases; it will never
Pass into nothingness; but still will keep
A bower quiet for us, and a sleep
Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing.
Therefore, on every morrow, are we wreathing
A flowery band to bind us to the earth,
Spite of despondence, of the inhuman dearth
Of noble natures, of the gloomy days,
Of all the unhealthy and o'er-darkn'd ways
Made for our searching: yes, in spite of all,
Some shape of beauty moves away the pall
From our dark spirits. Such the sun, the moon,
Trees old and young, sprouting a shady boon



(Image: Mary Carol Lucie)

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For simple sheep; and such are daffodils
With the green world they live in; and clear rills
That for themselves a cooling covert make
'Gainst the hot season; the mid-forest brake,
Rich with a sprinkling of fair musk-rose blooms:
And such too is the grandeur of the dooms
We have imagined for the mighty dead;
An endless fountain of immortal drink,
Pouring unto us from the heaven's brink.

By John Keats, excerpted from *Endymion*. (First published 1818, now public domain)



(Image: Source unavailable)

Spring

Somewhere
a black bear
has just risen from sleep
and is staring

down the mountain.
All night
in the brisk and shallow restlessness
of early spring

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I think of her,
her four black fists
flicking the gravel,
her tongue

like a red fire
touching the grass,
the cold water.
There is only one question:

how to love this world.
I think of her
rising
like a black and leafy ledge

to sharpen her claws against
the silence
of the trees.
Whatever else

my life is
with its poems
and its music
and its cities,

it is also this dazzling darkness
coming
down the mountain,
breathing and tasting;

all day I think of her –
her white teeth,
her wordlessness,
her perfect love.

By Mary Oliver, from *House of Light*. © Beacon Press, 1990.

Interpretive version of Matthew 6:6

When you want to lay yourself open for the divine,
like a snare that is hollowed out to its depth,
like a canopy that projects a shadow
from the divine heat and light
into your soul,

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then go into your inner place physically,
or to that story or symbol that reminds you of the sacred.

Close the door of your awareness to
the public person you think yourself to be.
Pray to the parent of creation, with your inner sense,
the outer senses turned within.
Veiling yourself, the mystery may be unveiled through you.

By opening yourself to the flow of the sacred,
somewhere, resounding in some inner form,
the swell of the divine ocean can move through you.

The breathing life of all reveals itself
in the way you live your life.

By Neil Douglas-Klotz, from *The Hidden Gospel*. © Quest Books, 2001.

Thirty Six

All this talk of saving souls.
Souls weren't made to save,
like Sunday clothes that
give out at the seams.

They're made for wear; they
come with lifetime guarantees.
Don't save your soul.
Pour it out like rain on
cracked, parched earth.

Give your soul away, or
pass it like a candle flame.
Sing it out, or
laugh it up the wind.

Souls were made for hearing
breaking hearts, for puzzling dreams,
remembering August flowers,
forgetting hurts.

These men who talk of saving souls!
They have the look of bullies
who blow out candles before
you sing happy birthday,



(Image: Kim Langley)

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and want the world to be
in alphabetical order.

I will spend my soul,
playing it out like sticky string
into the world,
so I can catch every
last thing I touch.

By Linda M. Underwood, from *Exaltation*. © UU Association of Congregations, 1997.

The Poet with His Face in His Hands

You want to cry aloud for your
mistakes. But to tell the truth the world
doesn't need anymore of that sound.

So if you're going to do it and can't
stop yourself, if your pretty mouth can't
hold it in, at least go by yourself across

the forty fields and the forty dark inclines
of rocks and water to the place where
the falls are flinging out their white sheets

like crazy, and there is a cave behind all that
jubilation and water fun and you can
stand there, under it, and roar all you

want and nothing will be disturbed; you can
drip with despair all afternoon and still,
on a green branch, its wings just lightly touched

by the passing foil of the water, the thrush,
puffing out its spotted breast, will sing
of the perfect, stone-hard beauty of everything.

By Mary Oliver, from *New and Selected Poems Volume Two*. © Beacon Press, 2005.



(Image: www.thousandwonders.net)

(Image: Source unavailable)



The Seven Of Pentacles

Under a sky the color of pea soup
she is looking at her work growing away there
actively, thickly like grapevines or pole beans
as things grow in the real world, slowly enough.
If you tend them properly, if you mulch, if you water,
if you provide birds that eat insects a home and winter food,
if the sun shines and you pick off caterpillars,
if the praying mantis comes and the ladybugs and the bees,
then the plants flourish, but at their own internal clock.

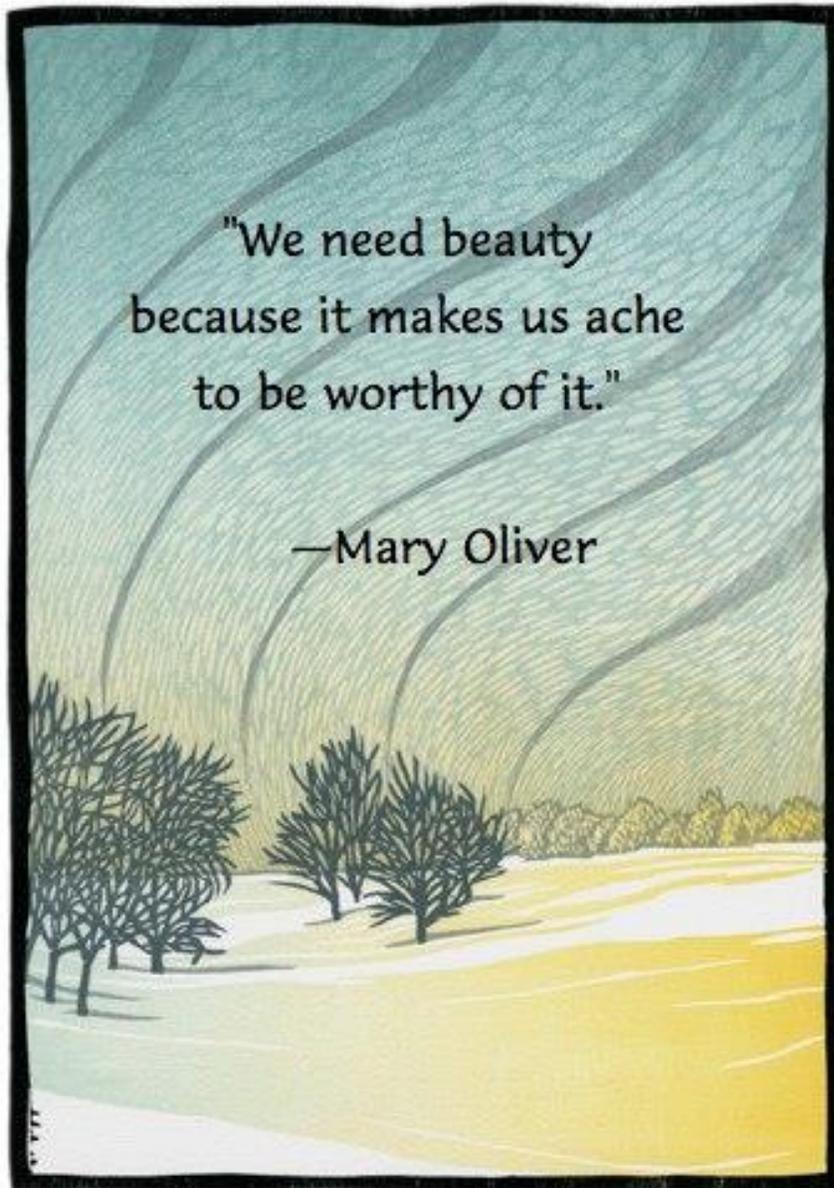
Connections are made slowly, sometimes they grow underground.
You cannot tell always by looking what is happening.
More than half the tree is spread out in the soil under your feet.
Penetrate quietly as the earthworm that blows no trumpet.
Fight persistently as the creeper that brings down the tree.
Spread like the squash plant that overruns the garden.
Gnaw in the dark and use the sun to make sugar.

Weave real connections, create real nodes, build real houses.
Live a life you can endure: Make love that is loving.
Keep tangling and interweaving and taking more in,
a thicket and bramble wilderness to the outside but to us
interconnected with rabbit runs and burrows and lairs.

Live as if you liked yourself, and it may happen:
reach out, keep reaching out, keep bringing in.
This is how we are going to live for a long time: not always,
for every gardener knows that after the digging, after
the planting,
after the long season of tending and growth, the harvest comes.

By Marge Piercy, from *In Praise of Fertile Land*. © Whit Press, 2006.

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"We need beauty
because it makes us ache
to be worthy of it."

—Mary Oliver

The beautiful woodcut on which I (Parker Palmer) placed Mary Oliver's words is by a Wisconsin artist named Nick Wroblewski, whose website at www.nickwroblewski.com is well worth exploring. This print, called "Frost Descending," can be seen under Gallery/Recent Prints. Created with permission of the artist by Parker Palmer.

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