

# *The True Joy in Life*

- George Bernard Shaw  
From Man and Superman,  
Dedicatory letter

This is the true joy in life, the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one; the being a force of nature instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy.

I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community and as long as I live it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can.

I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work the more I live. I rejoice in life for its own sake. Life is no "brief candle" to me. It is a sort of splendid torch, which I have got hold of for the moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations.

# *The Wild Geese*

- Mary Oliver

You do not have to be good.  
You do not have to walk on your knees  
for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.  
You only have to let the soft animal of your body  
love what it loves.  
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.  
Meanwhile the world goes on.  
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain  
are moving across the landscapes,  
over the prairies and the deep trees,  
the mountains and the rivers.  
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,  
are heading home again.  
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,  
the world offers itself to your imagination,  
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting –  
over and over announcing your place  
in the family of things.

# *Listening*

- William Stringfellow

Listening  
is a rare happening  
among human beings.  
You cannot listen to  
the word another is speaking  
if you are preoccupied with  
your appearance or  
with impressing the other  
or if you are trying to decide  
what you are going to say  
when the other stops talking  
or are debating about whether  
what is being said is true  
or relevant  
or agreeable.  
Such matters have their place  
but only after listening to  
the word as the word  
is being uttered.  
Listening is a primitive act of love in which  
a person gives himself to  
another's word  
making himself accessible  
and vulnerable to that word.

When I was a young man, I wanted to change the world. I found it was difficult to change the world, so I tried to change my nation. When I found that I couldn't change the nation, I began to focus on my town. I couldn't change the town, and as an older man, I tried to change my family.

Now, as an old man, I realize the only thing I can change is myself, and suddenly, I realize that if long ago I had changed myself, I could have made an impact on my family. My family and I could have made an impact on our town. Their impact could have changed the nation and I could indeed have changed the world.

-Unknown Monk, A.D. 1100

## *Head vs. Heart*

-Alan Catanese

There's no doubt about it – my mind is a great gift. But I am equally aware that the three pounds of gray matter wobbling around on top of my neck can often be more of a problem than a solution.

Because of its lofty perch, my head seems certain that it was meant to be in charge of my life. However, the truth is that my head spends much of its time manufacturing problems, fears and desires that are not real. Like a hamster in its exercise wheel, my mind will run and run, without ever getting anywhere in its repeated attempts to “figure things out.”

Several floors below, my heart sits patiently biding its time, knowing that sooner or later my brain will have worked itself into a froth that results in confusion and paralysis. In those moments, my heart steps in and gently places the truth of the situation before my weary mind, a truth it has known all along. If only my head would have stopped jabbering long enough to ask.

Because while my head wonders, my heart knows.

When you are inspired by some great purpose,  
Some extraordinary project,  
All of your thoughts break their bonds:  
Your mind transcends limitations, your consciousness expands in every  
direction,  
and you find yourself in a new, great and wonderful world.  
Dormant forces, faculties and talents become alive,  
and you discover yourself to be a greater person by far  
than you ever dreamed yourself to be.

Patanjali --Indian Philosopher

## *Invisible Work*

-- Alison Luterman (The Largest Possible Life)

I think all the time about invisible work.  
About the young mother on Welfare  
I interviewed years ago,  
who said, "It's hard.  
You bring him to the park,  
run rings around yourself keeping him safe,  
cut hot dogs into bite-sized pieces for dinner,  
and there's no one  
to say what a good job you're doing,  
how you were patient and loving  
for the thousandth time even though you had a headache."  
I thought of the invisible work that stitches up the world day and night,  
the slow, unglamorous work of healing,  
the way worms in the garden  
tunnel ceaselessly so the earth can breathe  
and bees ransack this world into being.

There are mothers  
for everything, and the sea  
is a mother too,  
whispering and whispering to us  
long after we have stopped listening.  
I stopped and let myself lean  
a moment, against the blue  
shoulder of the air. The work  
of my heart  
is the work of the world's heart.

# *Until One Is Committed*

-W.H. Murray

Until one is committed  
there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back,  
always ineffectiveness.  
Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation),  
there is one elementary truth,  
the ignorance of which kills countless ideas  
and splendid plans:  
that the moment one definitely commits oneself,  
then Providence moves too.  
All sorts of things occur to help one  
that would never otherwise have occurred.  
A whole stream of events issues from the decision,  
raising in one's favor all manner  
of unforeseen incidents and meetings  
and material assistance,  
which no man could have dreamt  
would have come his way.

I have learned a deep respect  
for one of Goethe's couplets:  
"Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it.  
Boldness has genius, power and magic in it."

# *For a New Beginning*

-John O'Donohue

In out-of-the-way places of the heart,  
Where your thoughts never think to wander,  
This beginning has been quietly forming,  
Waiting until you were ready to emerge.

For a long time it has watched your desire,  
Feeling the emptiness growing inside you,  
Noticing how you willed yourself on,  
Still unable to leave what you had outgrown.

It watched you play with the seduction of safety  
And the gray promises that sameness whispered,  
Heard the waves of turmoil rise and relent,  
Wondered would you always live like this.

Then the delight, when your courage kindled,  
And out you stepped onto new ground,  
Your eyes young again with energy and dream,  
A path of plentitude opening before you.

Though your destination is not yet clear  
You can trust the promise of this opening;  
Unfurl yourself into the grace of beginning  
That is at one with your life's desire.

Awaken your spirit to adventure;  
Hold nothing back, learn to find ease in risk;  
Soon you will be home in a new rhythm,  
For your soul senses the world that awaits you.

# *Instructions To Myself*

-Sue Silvermarie

First you have to stop complaining.  
When you hear the grievance coming in your mind,  
that big wind that's about  
to fill your sail and send you flying--  
Haul in. Say hello. Let it spin by.

Then you have to find out what's right  
about what's wrong. What's curious or strange,  
what to note on your card of thanks.  
"What good is this" will occur to you  
sooner or later if you are on the lookout.

Another thing. Taking offense is a trap.  
Falling into it will sink your chances  
to be happy for sure. Practice bouncing it off  
with the ones who don't even mean it.  
Then when someone means to offend  
you can stay perfectly happy.

Make it your path to be happy.  
Don't wait for the rainbow, yell YES to the sun  
so its white light breaks through the prism of your body.  
Happiness invites you, too, to its lavish table.  
Come as you are, without thinking,  
the way a baby smiles.