



Drinking From the Well of Origin: An Exploration of Poetry

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Welcome & Chalice Lighting:

Life is a gift for which we are grateful. We gather in community to celebrate the glories and the mysteries of this great gift.

~Marjorie Montgomery, *Singing the Living Tradition*, reading #452

Personal Check In: Briefly share something from your life since we met last and how you are feeling now.

Opening words

The poet wants **to drink from the well of origin**; to write the poem that has not yet been written. In order to enter this level of originality, the poet must reach beyond the chorus of chattering voices that people the surface of a culture. Furthermore, the poet must reach deeper inward; go deeper than the private hoard of voices down to the root-voice. It is here that individuality has the taste of danger, vitality and vulnerability. Here the creative has the necessity of inevitability; this is the threshold where imagination engages raw, unformed experience. This is the sense you have when you read a true poem. You know it could not be other than it is. Its self and its form are one.

by John O'Donahue (excerpt from *Beauty*)

Questions for Sharing and Discussion

The questions for this session are listed after each offering (or poem) below.

Readings – see below

Sharing and discussion- Please respond to a question of your choosing from one of the offerings below. As we respond to questions, remember that this is a time to speak without interruption and for deep listening. Deep listening means no interrupting, no fixing, no saving, no advising, and no setting each other straight. After each person has shared once, respond to another question or to something another person said or shared.

Closing reading

"I came to poetry with no particular qualifications," James Dickey recounted in Howard Nemerov's *Poets on Poetry*. "I had begun to suspect, however, that there is a poet—or a kind of poet—buried in every human being like Ariel* in his tree, and that the people whom we are pleased to call poets are only those who have felt the need and contrived the means to release this spirit from its prison."

***Ariel** is a spirit who appears in William Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*. Ariel is bound to serve the magician Prospero, who rescued him from the tree in which he was imprisoned by Sycorax, the witch who previously inhabited the island.

Announcements/Plans

Check out: As we close today, how are you feeling now?

Extinguish the Chalice

Readings

Offering 1

Kei Miller's poem "Book of Genesis" asks us to imagine a God who makes things spring into life specifically for us. Just as the poet of Genesis proclaims, "Let there be," Miller wonders what freedom and flourishing we'd find in imagining a "Let" pronounced not for the person others say we should be, but for the person we are.

Suppose there was a book full of only the word,
let – from whose clipped sound all things begin: fir
and firmament, feather, the first whale – and suppose
we could scroll through its pages every day
to find and pronounce a Let meant only for us –
we would stumble through the streets with open books,
eyes crossed from too much reading; we would speak
in auto-rhyme, the world would echo itself – and still
we'd continue in rounds, saying let and let and let
until even silent dreams had been allowed.

1. **How can you begin to let yourself flourish today, just as you are?**

Offering 2

Emily Dickinson's poem "1383" honors the friendships that endure across time, circumstance, and even misunderstanding. Akin to fire, the connections in these friendships may be strong enough to burn or hurt us, but Dickinson acknowledges that their light continues to draw us in regardless.

Long Years apart — can make no
Breach a second cannot fill —
The absence of the Witch does not
Invalidate the spell —

The embers of a Thousand Years
Uncovered by the Hand
That fondled them when they were Fire
Will stir and understand —

~Number 1383 of Emily Dickinson's poems in Johnson's arrangements.

2. **Think about a friendship that has remained steady for you across the years, even as both of you have changed. Why do you think your relationship has endured?**

Offering 3

Patrick Kavanagh's poem "The One" is about seeing beauty in the ordinary places of home. One of Ireland's most famous poets, Kavanagh grew up in rural County Monaghan and moved to Dublin as a young man. This poem revisits the boglands of his home, which he once hated but came to love.

The One
Green, blue, yellow and red-
God is down in the swamps and marshes

Sensational as April and almost incredible the flowering of our catharsis.
A humble scene in a backward place
Where no one important ever looked
The raving flowers looked up in the face
Of the One and the Endless, the Mind that has balked
The profoundest of mortals. A primrose, a violet,
A violent wild iris- but mostly anonymous performers
Yet an important occasion as the Muse at her toilet
Prepared to inform the local farmers
That beautiful, beautiful, beautiful God
Was breathing His love by a cut-away bog.

3. Think about where you are from. How has your understanding of it changed over time?

Offering 4

Joy Harjo was chosen as the 23rd U.S. Poet Laureate in 2019. Her poem, "Praise the Rain", makes space to appreciate all the nuances of our lives. Echoing Rumi's poem "The Guest House," she asks us to be present to this moment — the crazy or the sad, the beginning or the end — to greet it all with the powerful word: "Praise."

Praise the rain; the seagull dive
The curl of plant, the raven talk—
Praise the hurt, the house slack
The stand of trees, the dignity—
Praise the dark, the moon cradle
The sky fall, the bear sleep—
Praise the mist, the warrior name
The earth eclipse, the fired leap—
Praise the backwards, upward sky
The baby cry, the spirit food—
Praise canoe, the fish rush
The hole for frog, the upside-down—

Praise the day, the cloud cup
The mind flat, forget it all—

Praise crazy. Praise sad.
Praise the path on which we're led.
Praise the roads on earth and water.
Praise the eater and the eaten.
Praise beginnings; praise the end.
Praise the song and praise the singer.

Praise the rain; it brings more rain.
Praise the rain; it brings more rain.

4. What can you praise today?

Offering 5

The Guest House by Jellaludin Rumi. This poem expresses many things but its' core message is also one of the core message of mindfulness meditation - to be with whatever life brings to us. Whether it comes in the form of a joy or a great difficulty Rumi encourages us to open ourselves to whatever life brings us - internally or externally.

But whatever life throws at us, our attitude and commitment to greet it without fear or loathing, and with whatever subtle faith we can muster, allows us to become wiser, kind, and more compassionate to self and others.

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.
A joy, a depression, a meanness,

some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.
Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they are a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.
The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing and invite them in.
Be grateful for whatever comes.
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

5. How could you, today, greet life with less resistance? More yes?

Offering 6

Lemn Sissay's poem "Some Things I Like" celebrates what we might consider discardable — like cold tea, ash trays, and even people. Raising a joyous toast to the forgotten and the forgettable, Sissay recognizes the power we give to what we pay attention to and invites us to look anew at all that has been undervalued.

"I like wrecks, I like ex-junkies, I like flunks and ex-flunkies, I like the way the career-less career, I like flat beer, I like people who tell half stories and forget the rest, I like people who make doodles in important written tests, I like being late. I like fate. I like the way teeth grate, I like laceless shoes cordless blues, I like the one-bar blues, I like buttonless coats and leaky boats, I like rubbish tips and bitten lips, I like yesterday's toast, I like cold tea, I like reality, I like ashtrays, I write and like crap plays.

I like curtains that don't quite shut, I like bread knives that don't quite cut, I like rips in blue jeans, I like people who can't say what they mean, I like spiders with no legs, pencils with no lead, Ants with no heads, worms that are half dead. I like holes, I like coffee cold. I like creases in neat folds. I like signs that just don't know where they're going, I like angry poems, I like the way you can't pin down the sea. See."

6. What is something you like that others may not value in the same way?

*On Being, Poetry Unbound podcasts, <https://onbeing.org/series/poetry-unbound/>

<https://writersmakeworlds.com/kei-miller/> , <https://www.lemnsissay.com/>

<https://poets.org/poet/emily-dickinson>, <https://www.johnodohue.com/>

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/patrick-kavanagh>,

<https://www.joyharjo.com/> , <https://poets.org/poet/james-dickey>