



Creative Wordshops

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re-story, re-create and re-
imagine your life and work

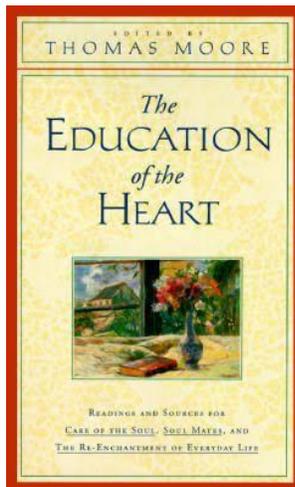
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(courtesy Dominic Haarhoff)

See blog for this letter, ongoing opportunities and 'what's on.'

Dear seeker of words and images

*So absolute, it is
no other than
happiness itself, a breathing
too quiet to hear.
(Denise Levertov)*

The Education of the Heart



In Thomas Moore's book (1996) he pays tribute to the sources that he drew from in *Care of the Soul*, *Soul Mates* and *The Re-Enchantment of Everyday Life*.

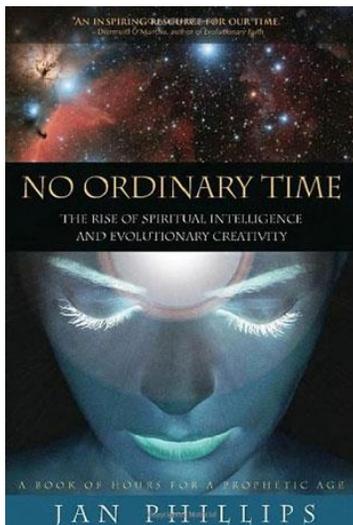
In this letter I wish to pay tribute to four wellsprings, flowing from an underground stream that I draw from to quench my living water thirst. They speak, as mystic do, of abundant life beyond the illusion of borders. These books/poems/stories have been resonating in the world for years before I stumbled upon them.

In *Field Notes on the Compassionate Life, a Search for the Soul of Kindness*, (2005) Marc Barasch refers to a Buddhist meditation, *tonglen*, - an imaginative exercise. We breathe in another's suffering and breathe out loving-kindness. When a Tibetan master, Chogyam Trungpa, spoke of this discipline, a yoga student asked, "Is it not better to breathe in love and breathe out negative impurities?" Trungpa's response was immediate. "You'd be a polluting factory, taking in those good resources and spewing out your gray clouds." When Barasch practices this meditation, "my borders seem more porous... I find the technique radically simple and simply radical; an imaginative leap into otherness."

I shared some of this in a 2010 newsletter when we wore a younger person's clothes. Years ago I also read Ken Wilber's, *No Boundary: Eastern and Western Approaches to Personal Growth* (2001) : "THE ULTIMATE METAPHYSICAL SECRET, if we dare state it so simply, is that there are no boundaries in the universe. Boundaries are illusions, products not of reality but of the way we map and edit reality. And while it is fine to map out the territory, it is fatal to confuse the two." Wilbur reminds us that the boundaries we set up create a battle zone, wherever they be - between the brain and unconscious, me and you, us and them. Race, faith, gender and species exclusions. As in this story:

A person dies on the same day as her dog. They find themselves on a road paved with gold leading to shut pearly gates. They are both thirsty. The gatekeeper tells her, "You may slake your thirst, but the dog may not enter." "What place is this?" she asks. "This is heaven." "We will walk on." They do. The road deteriorates as they come to a dilapidated open gate looking like it has never been closed. "Welcome both of you" says a voice, "slake your thirst." After drinking their fill the woman asks, "What place is this?" "This is heaven." She looks confused. "Down the road they say that is heaven." "Oh, you mean those pearly gates? No, that is hell." The woman asks, "But aren't you scared of the competition?" "Not at all" smiles their host, "they do our screening for us."

The third linking arrives from my current reading as another response to the paradox of I and other.



This from <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/view/21190/no-ordinary-time>:

In the late Middle Ages, the Church created the *Book of Hours* for 'ordinary' men and women. By ritualizing meditation, the intent was to make holy the hours of the day. Each 24-hours is divided into eight periods that bring together the inner and the outer worlds.... In this out-of-the-box imaginative work, Phillips blends creativity, mysticism, consciousness raising, and spiritual practice into startling and illuminating new configurations. She has retooled the *Book of Hours* for " to co-create new sacraments and ceremonies that celebrate the Divine dwelling within us." Jan Phillips writes:

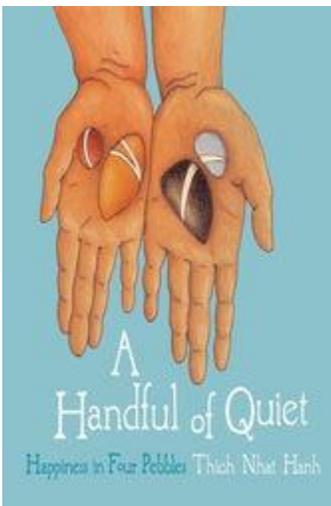
We are the myth-makers and co-creators of the 21st century, the prophets and writers of new sacred texts.... There is no Geppetto God out there pulling strings. We are the vessels of the Divine, agents of Supreme Intelligence, neural cells of

our home planet, and it is our job now to call God home, to tend to the kingdom that is all around us, and to create stories and cultures of hope and compassion.

As in this story: Someone knocks on God's door. "Who's there?" "It is I." "Go away." The person thinks awhile then knocks once more. "Who's there?" "It is us." "Enter." And in similar insight here is Angelus Silesius (1624-77) mystic, priest physician:

*God, whose love and joy
are present everywhere,
can't come to visit you
unless you aren't there.*

Here's a fourth - Thich Nhat Hahn's poem in response to a rape he witnessed on the Gulf of Siam. "Out of suffering, I wrote *Please Call Me by My True Names*, because I have many names, and when you call me by any of them, I have to say, "Yes." Here is part of the poem:



The rhythm of my heart is the birth and death
of all that is alive.

I am the mayfly metamorphosing
on the surface of the river.
And I am the bird
that swoops down to swallow the mayfly.

I am the frog swimming happily
in the clear water of a pond.
And I am the grass-snake
that silently feeds itself on the frog.

I am the child in Uganda, all skin and bones,
my legs as thin as bamboo sticks.
And I am the arms merchant,
selling deadly weapons to Uganda.

I am the twelve-year-old girl,
refugee on a small boat,
who throws herself into the ocean
after being raped by a sea pirate.
And I am the pirate,

my heart not yet capable
of seeing and loving.

I am a member of the politburo,
with plenty of power in my hands.
And I am the man who has to pay
his "debt of blood" to my people
dying slowly in a forced-labor camp.

Please call me by my true names,
so I can wake up,
and so the door of my heart
can be left open,
the door of compassion.

So how on earth (deliberate use) do we inhabit such a place of grace? How do we break the victim-persecutor pattern of the other? How do we restore balances? How can we find our way into this embracing?

Perhaps through reading such texts and writing for this evokes ritual, a form of *tonglen*. Breathing in chaos and confusion, holding what seems to be irreconcilable, infusing this into words. Writing then becomes a radical conscious act that allows in the world and allows our participation in it. What Barasch calls his mental screen saver - "tonglen in the morning, tonglen in the evening, tonglen at supper time" - perhaps needs to become part of our writing practice.

What might also help us to break the self-induced illusion is to place our story in a different time, place and space. Like the elderly woman on her first flight looking down over the earth exclaiming "There are no borders." Going back, back, soaring out to our stardust cell heritage. Re-imagining medieval concepts and maps such as the book of the hours with its ritual reminders. Through reading and writing create the conditions for us to slip into the realm of the mystics.

Dorian