

INTENTION OF LOVE

A Poetry Anthology

BONUS SECTION:

"The 5 Principles for
Self-Love Practice"

By Dr. Darcy Lord,
Self-Love Expert

Foreword
by
James Crews

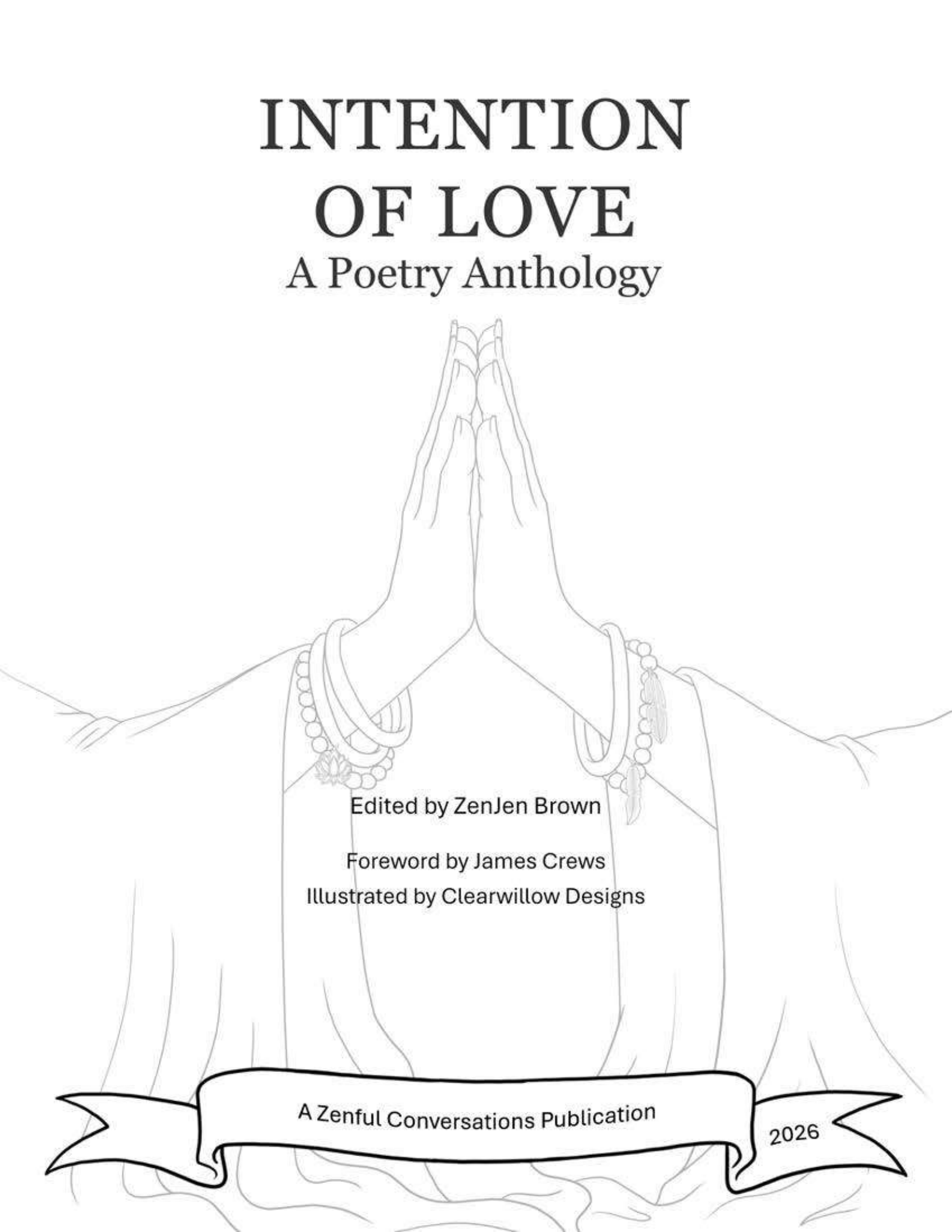


Edited by ZenJen Brown

Illustrated by Clearwillow Designs

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A Zenful Conversations Publication

2026

Special Thanks

A special thanks to Clear Willow Designs, aka Carra Leigh, the freelance artist who has been creating artwork and supporting my projects for over fifteen years, and I truly wouldn't be able to do any of this without her.

Clear Willow offers artwork that is customized to her client's wants and needs. From logos to illustrations for fiction and personal gifts, each project is handled with care and attention to detail.

Her artistry, support, and steady presence helped make this book possible. All original artwork on the front and back covers, as well as within these pages, was created with love by Clear Willow Designs.

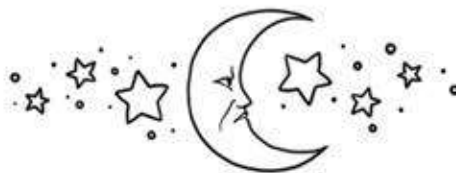
A sincere thank you to you, Carra!

Fun fact: Carra and I share the same birthday!

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Thank you for honoring the integrity and ownership of every writer's work, and for helping us share this offering with care.

Table of Contents

Pg. 1

1. A Sacred Pause by ZenJen Brown	1
2. Because by Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer	2
3. Everything Hangs on Love by Tammy Iralu	4
4. Wonderlust by Morag Elizabeth Humble	6
5. Pockets of Warmth by Stacy Strawn	8
6. Today's Agenda by Dennise Gackstetter	11
7. Fill My Cup by Michelle Bentcliff	13
8. Bow to Waves by Gianina Nold	14
9. Skywatcher by Debora Tremont	17
10. Love in Plain Sight by Marjorie Moorhead	18
11. Embracing Our Differences by Stella Graham-Landau	19
12. A Moment of We by Julia Thie	20
13. Miracle of Love in a Time of Deep Division by Brenda Wildrick	21
14. Intention of Love - The Struggle by Cheryl Anderson	23
15. For Love For Forgiveness by Wanda Wilson	24
16. Cake by Ellen Rowland	26
17. You Can Have Any Word That You Want by Liezel Graham	28
18. I Want to Live Like An Ear by Celeste Boudreaux	30
19. Will You Wear An Earring by Lynn White	32
20. What It's All About by Belle Schmidt	34
21. Sowing and Reaping by Natalie Simmons	35
22. How Much I Would Have Loved You by May Garner	37
23. I Didn't Know I Was Ready by Peter Reed	38
24. Landscape of My Heart by Bethany Taulbee	40
25. You Will Know by Rebecca Surmont	41
26. True Intimacy by Lori Zavada	42
27. Passion Has No Currency by Linda Mundell	43
28. Advice From A Mailbox by Becky Ventura	45
29. Pistachios by Lisa Breger	46
30. Things To Love by Carol Alena Aronoff	47
31. The Reminders by Karen Hoffman	49
32. There Is No Path by Jo-Anne Rowley	50
33. The Business of Love by Amy Segerstrom	51

Table of Contents

Pg. 2

34. The Courage to Touch by Darlene Dunn	53
35. My Prayers by Carolyn Chilton Casas	55
36. Railway Carriages: The Heart Connection by Mary Ray Goehring	57
37. At My Mom and Dad's House by Paula Gordon Lepp	59
38. Allow by Rachel Burdick Vinkey	60
39. Over Decades... by Suzanne S. Austin-Hill	61
40. Sacred by James Crews	62
41. Merci. My Mother Was An Angel by Linda Ohlson Graham	64
42. Coming Home After 1945 by Swann	65
43. Comfort by Joanne Draper	67
44. An Unspoken Compass by Grace Marie Chapman	68
45. Valentine's Day by Therese L. Broderick	69
46. My Future Dust Makes Plans by Laura Tate	70
47. When My Warm Flesh by Melinda Coppola	72
48. Legacy by Judy Bousquin	75
49. Prayers of Love by the Hours by PattiJoy Posan	76
50. Fused by Gloria Heffernan	78
51. The Love That Never Dies by C.L. McReynolds	80
52. All We Love by Lynn Kincanon	82
53. Loving-Kindness by Moudi Sbeity	84
54. Love's Attention by Carol Frischman	86
55. Remembering by Melissa Ireland	87
56. Begin Again by Joanna Zarkadas	88
57. Crow Spirit by Joanne Snyder	89
58. On Being Alone by Julie Barton	90
59. Say Your Life by Phyllis Cole-Dai	92
60. How To Remember You're Alive by Ash Kilback	94
61. Begin Again by Laura Coleman	96
62. It Could Be by Julia Fehrebacher	97

**BONUS SECTION: The 5 Principles for Self-Love Practice by
Dr. Darcy Lord, Self-Love Expert**





foreword

by James Crews

Love Poems Are Everywhere

The oldest love poem ever found, known as “Love Song for Shu-Sin,” was written 4,000 years ago, carved in a tablet of clay about the size of a cell phone. Visitors flock each year to the Mesopotamia wing of the Istanbul Museum of the Ancient Orient just to marvel at this small piece of history, to lay eyes on Sumerian cuneiform preserved across the millennia. But we don’t need to travel any further than our own homes, our own hectic, imperfect daily lives, to find examples of love poems just as potent as the one on this tablet. The notes my husband and I leave on the counter for each other are tiny love poems, as are the last greeting cards my mother ever sent to me, written in ballpoint, in her shaky scrawl. I still have the last grocery list my father ever made for me thirty years ago just before he died, written on the back of an old envelope with his usual misspellings: “Hamberger, Pickels, Spaggetti noodles.” It is one of my most prized possessions. We believe our love for each other, and our love of the world, requires everlasting symbols of devotion, things that can last the test of time. Yet consider all the tender gestures that have stayed with you over the years offered by family, friends, and strangers alike. I remember, in the surreal moments after my father’s sudden death, when he was finally gone, one of the doctors on duty pulling me aside, and with his strong Irish accent, offering to sit down and talk if I needed to. “We knew this was coming,” I said, already trying on my mask of bravery. “It’s always painful to lose someone, no matter what,” the doctor said, and I have carried the permission of his words with me for decades like one of the finest love poems ever spoken.

As every one of the poems in this aptly named collection reveals, it is not the extravagance of the gift or gesture that gives it staying power, but instead the intention of love with which it is offered. Editor ZenJen Brown, from the very start, invites us in this anthology to come as we are and rest in the sacrament of a love that, as Debora Tremont puts it in “Skywatcher,” “underlies everything,” perhaps even the faces of our perceived enemies. As we read through the poems gathered here with a wide-open heart, we are encouraged to pause and reflect after each piece, asking ourselves how we might integrate these countless insights into our own lives. Mostly, the poems in *Intention of Love* point to just how much we need each other—for support, growth, guidance, and a greater clarity. In the poem, “Love in Plain Sight,” Marjorie Moorhead asks: “Are we stepping into a dark cave? If so, let’s step in together./You be my candle; I’ll be yours.” It’s clear we have entered a period of great transition and uncertainty, and while this fraught time may be marked by the darkness of terror and fear, I also find daily sources of light when I choose to see with the eyes of the heart. Like the poets gathered here, I find love poems everywhere I look, whenever I choose to turn toward the “pockets of warmth,” as Stacy Strawn describes them so well. Let’s be a candle for each other as we walk through our days together, keeping our own flames lit. Let’s reshape and re-dream this world with the deeper intention of love that costs nothing to generate, and nothing to give.



Introduction

by ZenJen Brown

Hi everyone!

Welcome to *INTENTION OF LOVE*!

I'm so happy to share this anthology with you!

This collection is offered with deep love and honest intention, the same way I try to live my life.

My hope is that you feel the presence of every heart in these pages... the sense of community and love we share... and the strength of these voices, reminding us that we're all in this together.

Every poem that was submitted is included here. No voice was left out. I spent time with each piece... really sitting with them... meditating with them... and in the end... everything that was offered found its place.

You'll find honesty here. Open, human expression. Some pieces might ask something of you... some invite reflection... some may stir emotion... some may feel tender... others may just sit quietly beside you.

There's no need to rush. No need to understand everything. You don't have to do anything with any of it. Let your own heart guide the experience... and pause when you need to.

My poem opens this anthology... *A SACRED PAUSE*. Before anything else, this felt like the place to start. Softly, with the breath.

At the end, there is a bonus section! *Dr. Darcy Lord* has generously shared *The 5 Principles for Self-Love Practice*. It feels like a beautiful way to gently close this collection.

It has been an honor to hold these words... to care for them along the way... and now, to pass them on to you.

From my heart to yours... thank you for your trust.

In peace, love & community,

ZenJen Brown xoxo

A Sacred Pause ZenJen Brown

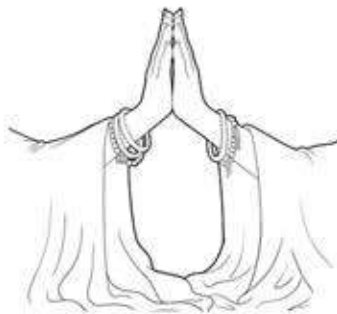
Come as you are.
Take a rest.

Close your eyes.
Find a soft breath.

Breathe in love,
exhale peace.

Take a sacred pause.
Let yourself be.

Hold this moment of stillness.



“There is a voice that doesn’t use words. Listen.”

- Rumi

Because Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer

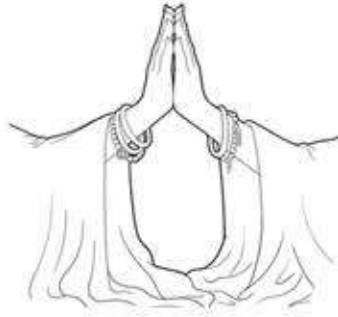
So I can't save the world —
can't save even myself,
can't wrap my arms around
every frightened child, can't
foster peace among nations,
can't bring love to all who
feel unlovable.

So I practice opening my heart
right here in this room and being gentle
with my insufficiency. I practice
walking down the street heart first.
And if it is insufficient to share love,
I will practice loving anyway.
I want to converse about truth,
about trust. I want to invite compassion
into every interaction.

One willing heart can't stop a war.
One willing heart can't feed all the hungry.
And sometimes, daunted by a task too big,
I tell myself what's the use of trying?
But today, the invitation is clear:
to be ridiculously courageous in love.
To open the heart like a lilac in May,
knowing freeze is possible
and opening anyway.
To take love seriously.
To give love wildly.
To race up to the world
as if I were a puppy,
adoring and unjaded,
stumbling on my own exuberance.
To feel the shock of indifference,
of anger, of cruelty, of fear,
and stay open. To love as if it matters,
as if the world depends on it.

Because Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer

continued



Perhaps, like me, you sometimes read the news and feel discouraged, despondent, and utterly inadequate and impotent to help create change. I wrote this poem for myself as a peptalk, to help me come alive and to remind myself how I most want to show up in the world. Basically, it's a love manifesto.

Write your own love manifesto—what are your intentions, your motives, your promises you want to make to yourself and to the world? How do you want to show up? Perhaps start with what you can't do and move toward what you can do—what do you have to bring to the aching world?

Everything Hangs on Love



Tammy Iralu

Everything hangs on love
like the door on its hinge.
Everything rests on love
like the water strider
on the pond ripples.

Like a carpenter planing
a plank of wood,
love makes the rough way
smooth.

Like the sun at daybreak
shining on the battlefield,
love never gives up.

The sky is most beautiful
as it tackles the dark—
when light bends,
curving like the arc
of red-tailed hawk's wing.
Daybreak or day's end,
the horizon pools
with color oozing like fruit
ripening on the branch.

Though the shadow
falls on the tree,
when the shade
lifts her wing,
the leaf is still green,
and tender, and ready
to breathe, and
bear light.

"Everything Hangs on Love" by Tammy Iralu.

Previously appeared on her personal blog at www.terimuso.com.

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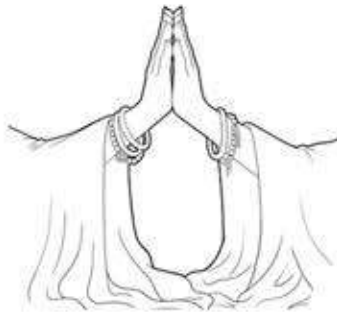
Everything Hangs on Love Tammy Iralu

continued

A few years ago, I was visiting family in Nagaland, India. My niece had embroidered several verses from 1 Corinthians 13 and framed them. In these verses, the apostle Paul, author of 1 Corinthians, writes that “without love, I am nothing.” He also writes that love always protects, trusts, hopes, perseveres, and that love never fails. I realized that I had not reflected on 1 Corinthians 13 in a while! After reflecting, I made my own list of metaphors for love. In this poem, I order the metaphors from small things—a hinge, a pond—to large things—the sun, and light.

By choosing to do “small things with great love,” as Mother Teresa encourages, I can be a small hinge that opens to love and connection. Relationships between nations, between family members, break down. But love perseveres and trusts and works for the good of all.

Another meaningful metaphor for love is found in the Tao Te Ching. In this text from ancient China, love is compared to water, a natural force that nourishes all and flows around all obstacles.



Make a list of metaphors that convey the transformative power of love, or list moments when you experienced a deep sense of love. Next, choose the metaphors, or moments, that speak to you most deeply and arrange them in an order or sequence. Move toward a turning point or closing image that opens to the possibility of connection through love.

Wonderlust Morag Elizabeth Humble

Let me today hold on to wonder,
to find the first shoots of spring
emerging from the dirt and crouch
down low beside them, stroking
them gently one by one, feeling
their faint furriness. Let me love
each one like I was three again.
And then let me be amazed
by the line of ants marching
along the sidewalk at the edge
of the grass, heading towards
that spill from the neighbor's
green bin that smells of moldy
bread and stale coffee and
things that make my nose crinkle.
Let me look up from the ants only
When I hear the honk of the geese
passing overhead or the conk-la-reee
of the redwing blackbirds flitting
among the reeds and the cattails
around the pond across the road,
and as I watch them let me skip
and hop and wonder what it would
feel like to fly, to let go of my human
body and lift off from the path, from
all that is heavy and unfeathered.
Let me fill a pocket with treasures
from the day – a small smooth
speckled pebble, a magnolia petal
so soft and fragrant, a sequin
lost from something fancy – and
let me lay them out one by one
on the window ledge before bedtime,
kissing each one like I was three again
and thanking them for finding me.

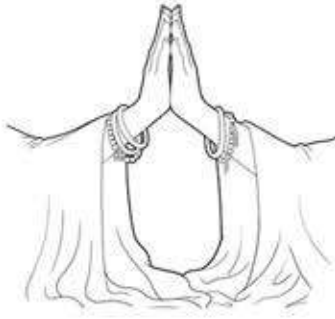
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Wonderlust Morag Elizabeth Humble

continued

And then let me dream dreams
of wonder, and wonder what
wonders tomorrow will bring.



Take a few moments to think about a time when you were filled with wonder. Write something to try to recreate the experience, using as many senses as you can.

Pockets of Warmth Stacy Strawn

Sound of a voice from my youth
Tender and high key
Whisper of sunshine
Mid December and my torso exposed
Spot of blue and red wavelengths
Little prism portal
Imagination that stirs
Hope and manic energy
To birth
To begin again
To pour love into some inanimate thing
Sound of the birds as the sky burns
bright orange
Fire and light
Light and the reaching through
Heart shaped shape of grass under melting snow
Heart shaped shell and stone
Watercolor from your hand
Poem read aloud
Comedy skit
Shelf of toys
Ones you built
Intricate puzzles of creation
Piecing together strength after loss
Blooms in tiny custard jars
Reused glass
To hold beauty and honor the dead
Books to read
This winter I said
Scholarships
Poetry and self help
Gifts of green from afar
Paint layered
Resin freezing nature in pendants

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Pockets of Warmth Stacy Strawn

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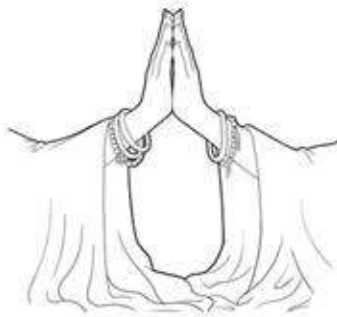
Window view
To you
Close
So close
I don't even have to walk or travel or cry
Part the curtains and be with you
Aurora we stumbled upon
After years of want
Home cooked food
All my meals in bed
My own shower
My own dress
Black and green
To cloak my grief
The tattoos of you I wrap around my core
Thread from a geshle
Connections to humans across the globe
Moments of still quiet
Smell of a rose
Soft pink
Like her middle name
Grounding on the vast mother
The whole
Accepting the unity
Numinous
As I peer through evergreen to moose
Mysterious love
Hand beading a bracelet
Sending cards
Telephoning into the beyond
Through slowing
Poem and handmade love

Pockets of Warmth Stacy Strawn

continued

My poem “Pockets of Warmth”, is a reflection on the ordinary and numinous moments in daily life and nature where I am able to feel into my human heart, to acknowledge all the specific sensual moments that allow me to feel the emotion of love in my body. I pondered things that allowed me to sense into my body grounding, connecting, feeling of awe, feeling what it is for a heart to be opening, and the warmth of being embodied.

The most awe inspiring have been times where I have peeked into wild nature and felt privy to its potent energy. In the example of the moose, I hiked miles and miles in solitude in a vast wilderness area of southwest Colorado. Instead of summiting a peak, or chasing a certain end point or view, I found a slow pace and walked with eyes and heart open through the wild land. Silent. Watching. Listening. I came across two moose grazing. I bowed to watch in awe. In this moment I felt a profound connection and love.



Reflect back on one or many things or moments that have served to open your heart.

When have you dropped into such slow mindfulness that the entire universe opened in front of you, you were able to experience the numinous, and see into some infinite bliss larger than the individual story of you? What helps you feel love in your body?

Today's Agenda Dennise Gackstetter

I found it in the back pocket
of an old pair of jeans
into which I no longer can wrestle myself,
no matter how hard I try.
The gap between button and buttonhole
reminiscent of the years
since I last wore those pants
and the new knowledge
there will be no simple closure.

Carefully I opened
the casually folded paper,
which revealed a list
of all the important things
to do that day,
words scrawled in purple ink
between torn edges—
 bank deposit
 grocery-berries, yogurt, batteries, cat food
 pay bills
 post office

Here in my hand
a small written history,
so essential, so incomplete.

I wonder about the in-between items not listed—
 notice the dappled light dancing across the parking lot tarmac
 smile at the man behind you as you wait together in line
 smile at the cashier as she reaches for the berries
 put the Love stamp on the envelope and mail the letter to Mom.

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Today's Agenda Dennise Gackstetter

continued

I wonder how usual become exceptional,
how ordinary becomes divine.

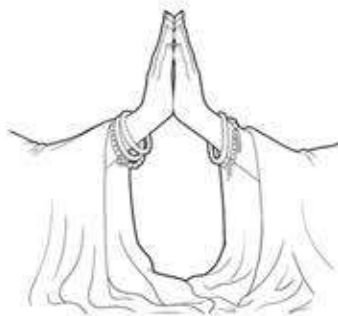
Notice.

Smile.

Love.

These are items on today's agenda.

I'm always delighted to find random scraps of paper with notes or lists on them. I think of them as communications from the divine asking me to examine their possibility or meaning. I often find poems waiting within the words.



What ordinary items are on your agenda today? How might the divine be hidden in that list?

Fill My Cup Michelle Bentcliff

“Inside our hearts there may be only one question: how well did I love?
Did I choose to see the wonder of each day?” – Richard Brendan

My recent milestone birthday
triggered trickles of sand in the glass —
Like the waning moon, it brought reflection
for what I want to fill my cup in this final phase —

Moments of awe witnessing whales breach,
Colors of love splashed across the sky,
Morning birdsong louder than life,
Sounds of owls hooting good night.

Let me bathe elephants — gaze
into their eyes to see their soul.
Feel the power of presence
observing each miracle of nature.

Fill my cup with gratitude for family focused on love,
Camaraderie with our cherished friends,
Connection to caring communities,
Kindling kindness to create ripples of joy.

To know I touch hearts, make a difference, inspire people.
To love and be loved is my greatest wish for the rest of this life.



Think of a time you experienced something so deeply you'll always
remember it. Write about the sensory details, how it made you feel,
any lingering impact.

What can we do to help heal the world?
Peace in presence is passed on, gratitude lightens our heart, kindness
and love radiate ripples. Find comfort and joy where we can.

Bow to Waves Gianina Nold

have you ever had a dream so
beautiful to imagine

hi hello
happy to be in this
wave adventure

a quiet beach with no more than six
people in the water
waves look fierce

hard to swim for a second
hard to land on foot

this water holds nothing easy

I love you
and that Waimanalo rock
with the gigantic amber stud on the beach

I love you
and me as a child jumping waves on my feet
leaping and pressing hard into the sea sand

embracing waves
and the big job they hold

surviving waves do tricks
make hearts pound

they have arms and fire
no one sees this

look up be calm
watch the struggle of the universe
listen to the next electric breeze in the air

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Bow to Waves Gianina Nold

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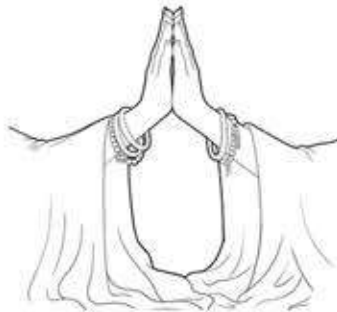
hear my mind play around
finally forgetting ugly news

waves smile like
half-moons and bananas
cactus too
unspoken in this loud world

in this ceremony I float on my back
dream I'm skydiving

toes point to shore

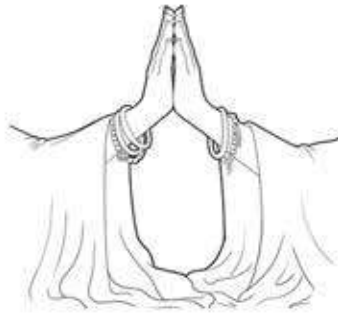
a little gray bird stares at the waves
always preferring one breath



Bow to Waves Gianina Nold

continued

Bow to Waves grew from a memory of swimming in Waimanalo, feeling both small and alive in the ocean's vastness. Writing it was an attempt to capture the sacredness of presence, the body in motion, and love that extends beyond people—love for nature, memory, and being itself. I wanted the lines to move like waves: sometimes quiet, sometimes crashing, always alive. The playful imagery—half-moons, bananas, cactus—reflects the unexpected ways joy and wonder appear when we pay attention.



Think of a place or moment where you felt fully alive, even if just for second. Explore who or what you loved in that moment, beyond people: the world, your younger self, a rock, a wave, or the air you breathed.

Start with any of this lines:

This is where loves learns to...

Have you ever had a dream...

Waves smile like...

In this ceremony, I...

Skywatcher Debora Tremont

I am a skywatcher
a cloud diviner,
like an ancient seer
searching the skies for evidence
seeing words of meaning or stark prediction
scribed by images of air and water.

Today the air is chilly, bright
skies are brilliant blue
cloud-scratch a mere implication
of angels' wings, poised
for possible descent into our lives.

Could they clarify our need for peace,
startle us into a love that underlies everything,
call us to somehow love enemies
into friends?



Mary Oliver's three-part imperative, Pay attention. Be astonished. Write about it. has deeply influenced my daily writing practice of nearly five years. Oliver reminds me to be aware in the moment, wherever I might be. Recently, I wrote the beginning of this poem while on the porch of a restaurant, waiting for a friend. I was thinking about the unrest in our country and the world, and when I looked up to watch the clouds, the answer started to unfold.

Watch the everyday events around you, like the pattern of clouds in the sky. Let the clouds tell you where to go next.

Love in Plain Sight



Marjorie Moorhead

Are we entering a dark cave? If so, let's step in together.
You be my candle; I'll be yours. We will generate warmth,
follow light we make for each other.
Let any darkness bring us closer.

Snow, a cold blanket, can sparkle once fallen.
It just needs to be open, in conversation with sun
or a full moon and stars.
Let love be revealed. Let's welcome the magical,
have faith in mystery. Not be diminished by misery—
it is just a segment of this journey.

Start with incantation; like a bird, sing it sweetly:
I want to find the love in front of me.

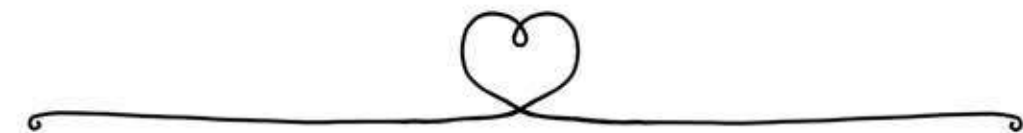


This poem was originally written as a new year's wish, heading into 2025. Sadly, it must have felt like we were entering a dark cave. The poem tries to deal with that by encouraging loving relationship, one where we can get through darkness together and be open to love, "the magical", mystery... We are stronger together, and there is love in front of us.

When have you been feeling low, or frightened, but then notice a glimmer of hope/light? What brought that into view, and how might those gifted glimpses be strengthened?

embracing our differences stella graham-landau

i am drawn to our differences
the melody of the words we use
whole worlds of citizens on a street corner
different palates
different celebrations
different names for those we love
different clothes different colors
different permissions to express who we are
you make my world larger
showing me alternate ways to navigate life
expanding my mind
stretching my margins
to make room for nuance
the shape of our eyes and our lips
the shade of our skin
the texture of our hair
how we are much alike
quick to hug
quick to hold one another's hand
when we meet
wanting smiles to greet us
and quietness to surround us
as we pause together
to marvel at the sunset
exploding once again
on the horizon that we share



"What stands in the way of my allowing others to enter my life? Am I scared? Am I exhausted? Am I grieving? Perhaps I've fallen into routines that I'm not aware are keeping me apart. What will help me turn this corner? What might I discover if I take a step toward others?"



You stand on your side,
bright badges on display.
The polite picket fence is now barbed,
wires twisted with sharp opinions.

Baffled by these new decorations
I come closer to understand, to offer my listening,
holding a bouquet of daisies I picked on my way here.

Glaring disbelief, or maybe pity for me, crosses your pursed lips.
Your covered eyes do not land upon me.
I feel my threat within your air.

We are passing this moment in a lifetime of wonder.
These flowers will not last, and neither will we be here again.

Beyond our banners and bumperstickers, holding this moment.
This timeless We, beyond our obvious differences.
In this - there is nothing to forgive.

I smile without satire or prejudice,
without the need for you to see me,
placing two blossoms in the lock on your gate.



Describe a moment or situation when you felt great empathy
(or the lack of it).

What types of fences have you experienced?

Who would you be if there was no time? Is there an essential quality or
metaphor for this feeling?

Miracle of Love in a Time of Deep Division Brenda Wildrick

*If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love,
I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 1 Corinthians 13:1*

As the year of the snake slithers off to make space
for the fire horse, I receive the word, unlock,
and I receive a vision.

I see two rooms.
Horrible noises emanate from each room –
shouting, wailing, cursing, screaming,
shattering, crushing.

Between the two rooms is a land called “Our Common Ground”.
It was once a lush meadow full of flowers, picnics, and music.
But poisonous lies have been sown into it.
Nothing grows here now except sharp barbs.

A fierce wind blows over the land. The sound of the wind
is like a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.
There is no love. The people do not venture out,
but stay stuck in their rooms like prisoners.

Deep within each room, there is singing.
The people gather around the singing
and warm themselves by its light.
Within the singing, there is love.

But when people step away from the love,
when they gather in the doorways of each room,
they shout at those in the OTHER room –
You are full of hate! You are evil!

Continued on next page

Miracle of Love in a Time of Deep Division Brenda Wildrick

continued

The people know that deep within their own room,
there is singing, warmth and love,
but very few know that within the OTHER room,
there is also singing, warmth, and love.

In the tumultuous year of the fire horse,
this is the message I share –
we must unlock love, set it free to fill up each room,
and let it spill out upon Our Common Ground.

We, the people, have the key to unlock love,
the key to set ourselves free. When we are free,
we will work together to expose the poisonous lies,
we will root them out, we will purify the ground,

we will plant good seeds. Then the singing
will burst forth from deep inside the rooms, and love
will embrace all those willing to receive it.



A blessing for reclaiming our shared reality –
May we all seek truth
May we all recognize truth
May we all receive truth . . .
even if it proves us wrong.

Find a poem with words that appeal to you. Choose some words from the poem that catch your attention, maybe 10 to 15, and write them down the right margin of your page in no particular order. Without deciding what your poem is even going to be about, free write to the end words you wrote down. Enjoy the surprise of what expresses itself through you!

Intention of Love - The Struggle Cheryl Anderson

It allows for courageous acts,
and empowers one's soul with confidence.

In the battle field of opposition,
it allows us to defend the weak.

It forces one's foes to respect us, whether the love is born within the child in us,
or acquired through conscious actions.

Emotional Wounds may appear after time even for the strongest worriers,
yet we carry on with resilience and good intension as we must.

As an act of self-preservation when the smoke settles and exhaustion sets in,
we remove our armor slowly for a brief pause.

If our love is strong,
necessity commands we pick up the sword another day.

However, as we lift our heads from the pillow damaged with deep wounds within,
we suddenly realize that this has now become our place in the world.

Remaining vigilant for the rest of our lives with the knowledge,
that intentions of love for all against evil, has now become our divine mandate.

For Love For Forgiveness Wanda Wilson

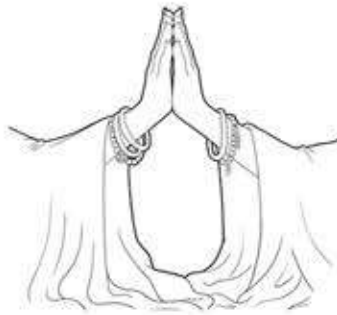
This is for love for forgiveness
of the smallest black ants
for the lack of gratitude in the sun
for the bright lofty rhythms
of my own two feet scuffing these dirt trails
combing boulders
ledges in the high places
of wind and water
carved sentinels glancing
at my old boots
keeping pace with the quiet birds
as heat slides early into my canyon
away from my ungovernable woes
together like the nopal hearts
of beaver-tail cactus
pinging my mediastinum into rapid sighs
as epiphany pipes burst
their fulfillments along these
14 million year old melted rocks
as their left over gravelly
moraines remind me I continue to morn
the icy rapture of glaciers
now this cathedral of monoliths and mesas
expand my passions
as golden brittlebrush ignites
the hills the air
into unexpected honey
and I wonder how wild
can much wilder get
will I sketch bewildered into the ecstasy
of the tiniest buckwheat floret
blooming fierce beneath
this overwhelming sky in

Continued on next page

For Love For Forgiveness Wanda Wilson

continued

their fancy petalled red and white
shining from the late winter rain
and I wonder
if I carry this with me
like the infamous pluck of these smallest black ants
if I glow loud enough with pollen
will absolution find me
as I drift miles in love
with these desert sweets



I was walking on a 4 mile hike in what's called Monolith Trail in Cerbat Mts. I was so happy and felt love all around me and felt all my sadness and discontent forgiven & fall away. The Spring blooms were beginning and the bees were lovely. Everywhere the air was filled with the honey from yellow Brittlebush. Ah!

Cake Ellen Rowland

A stupid argument and I take it out
on the egg shells, seize them
in the palm of my hand and crush,
tearing the delicate inner lining.

Take it out on the baking chocolate
still in its wrapper. The recipe calls for
finely chopped. I slam the bar instead
again and again against the counter's edge,

crush the beaters into the side of the bowl
and whip, whip, whip a well of furious flour.
Rip the baking paper across the metal teeth
and begin the slow rise of regret, begin to fear
the cake will be infused with my ire—

yolks curdled, sugar grained, butter gone bad.
Like the daggered ice crystals that form when
still in water state, are told they are ugly and hated,
worthless and unloved, I worry I have sullied
the crumb, bittered the icing, muddied each layer.

So before I take the first bite, I say, *I'm sorry.*
Forgive me. I love you. Both our mouths are full.
It is so, so good.

Cake Ellen Rowland

continued

In the 1990s Masaru Emoto, a Japanese businessman and researcher, put forth the claim that water responds to human emotions, words, and intentions on a molecular level. His experiments involved exposing various samples of water to words like “love” or “hate,” labelling the sample with positive or negative messages, playing classical music or blasting heavy metal, directing prayers and positive intentions towards specific samples of water, then freezing them and examining the crystals they formed in ice state.

The samples that received intentions of love and gratitude formed beautifully intricate, symmetrically patterned crystals, while the water exposed to anger, aggressivity, or negative thoughts took on deformities, sharp edges, and chaotic angles. His research supports the idea that intentions, thoughts, and actions of love can indeed have a positive or negative impact on our surroundings, our creations, our relationships, and ourselves. I took this idea, outlined in his book, *The Hidden Messages in Water*, and applied it to the simple act of baking and sharing a cake “with love.” Love as an intentional ingredient.

If our feelings can influence the molecular structure of water, they can impact others in powerful ways. And since the human body is 60% water and 71% of the earth’s surface is covered in water, the ice crystal images open up big questions about how we interact with each other, the natural world, and ourselves from a place of love.



you can have any word that you want liezel graham

if you are going to use your own words
to speak about yourself, please
choose the softest ones that you can find.
make sure they are gentle, with room inside
where you can breathe.
words that give you space to move about in.
words that you might grow into.
and it's ok if they don't fit you, yet.
pick the ones that hang a little higher up on the tree.
words that make you stretch always smell like grace
and kindness—the ones that taste the sweetest.
if you are going to use your own words
to speak to yourself, please
remember to use all the words that you are hungry for
—the words that you have always wanted to hear.
use all the words that nobody ever gives you.
let me tell you a secret:
you are allowed to use any word that you want, claim
any word for yourself—you really are!
you may use words like lovely, and clever, kind, and
happy, wanted and valuable, and even the word beautiful.
you may stick them all over your life.
and do you know what else?
you are even allowed to string them together
—hang them around your own neck like a treasure
for everyone to see.
i love you, and
i am doing the best that i can, and
i am worthy of love.
you are allowed to own any word
that has ever been spoken by any tongue, human or angel.
this can be a dangerous thing to do, though.
so, are you ready?

Continued on next page

you can have any word that you want liezel graham

continued

choose well tender-hearted body.
be careful which ones you pick up to carry home
in your pocket.
and if you find words in your heart
that others have left there without your permission
—words that don't fit you, words that force you
to keep your eyes to the ground
and not look?
words that smell like fear and shame?
you are allowed to throw them away, you are allowed
to forget them.
you do not have to keep every adjective
that follows you home.
they do not teach you this in school, or in church, or even
in the house where you are born
into your life.
over and over, you are allowed to say, no.
look for words that are ripe with hope, words
that feel warm in your hands.
rub them gently into your skin
until everything about you glows with love.
until your whole body is a song.
until your life shines with pure joy.
you may keep any word that you want.
you may throw away any word that you don't want.
can you believe that?
but first, you have to choose.

I Want to Live Like an Ear Celeste Boudreaux

How would it be to live like an ear,
as if my entire purpose was to listen?
Listening to the person in front of me,
hanging on their words as if they are
the last other human left alive on the earth,
as if my survival depends on their very next utterance,
as if these are their final words before the shroud?

My other ear will be listening to the Divine.
What wisdom does Sophia have to impart?
What voice will she use? Will it be the cardinal's song,
the distant playground delight of children,
the green shush of the pear tree's fluttering hands,
the music of the chimes dancing in the sunlight?
Let me listen closely to discern layers in their message.

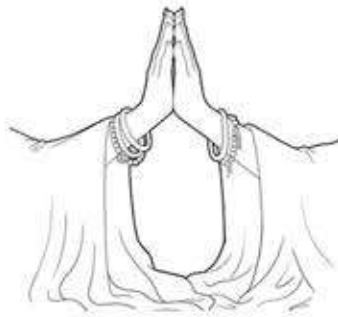
Now I see that I will need an extra ear
to be attuned to my heart,
for she also has her song:
sometimes a boom-ticka-clank of disquiet,
a squeezing squeak of dread,
sometimes a moaning dirge of sorrow,
a sigh of weary discouragement.
Let me place a hand on my heart
to comfort, to assure: "I hear you. I am listening."
For then a warmth steals in beneath that hand,
the constriction eases, and the hearing
of my other ears suddenly clears, like a radio
finding the perfect landing on a dial.

So now let me be content
with just these and no more:
a hand,
a heart,
and a trio of ears.

I Want to Live Like an Ear Celeste Boudreaux

continued

Write your own poem starting with: "I want to start living like a [blank]."
Could be anything: an object, an animal or other natural creature, a
kind of person, whatever. What makes you want to live differently?



Will You Wear An Earring



Lynn White

Will you wear an earring
for me
clasp it to your flesh
never mind the bruise
never mind the pain.
Will you wear this earring
and give me a lip-sticky kiss.

Will you wear my earring
make a little hole
in your skin
in your ear
pierce it
then
carefully thread it through
and give me a lip-sticky kiss
then let me see
the writings
and pictures
on your skin.

Will you wear this earring
or will you keep you keep your skin
pristine
clear as a baby's
unpierced
unbruised
unblemished
aged like fine wine
naturally.

Will You Wear An Earring



Lynn White

continued

I wrote the poem musing about all the people of all ages, shapes and genders who favour multiple piercings and tattoos in UK (but not so much in southern Europe). I was pondering changing ideas make-up and beauty over time and linking this to relationships and changes there. What does this poem stir in you?



What It's All About Belle Schmidt

We love, we argue, sometimes in anger, but
always grateful for the art of

communication. It's all about
expression, making ourselves clear

and understood, but also
taking time to meditate,

to be mindful, and to express
thankfulness. I listen to you,

you listen to me. We open each day
with a new sun, a new smile and

loving laughter, healing laughter.
I'm still me, you are you: We celebrate

uniqueness. No need for champagne.
Stop the rush of work, brush schedules

aside, put the world's agenda on hold.
be bold, follow your own road,

or build a road, if there isn't one.



Brown-eyed Susans bend
along roadside ditch for miles
we pass — no notice

There's Always Tomorrow.

Sowing and Reaping



Natalie Simmons

We fell in love and
In my heart, I dug a small hole and
Planted an acorn for you.

In your heart,
You ploughed a whole field and
Planted spinach.

And over the years
I watered my sapling and it grew
Into a towering, robust Oak.
And you continued to reap and plant spinach.
And I do love spinach.

But you grew tired,
Perhaps from the hard work of tending your field,
Or perhaps you did not like the shade my Oak cast.
Perhaps you wanted someone
Who could trade with you:
Carrots for spinach
Or some such similar crop.

So you bulldozed my Oak.
You toppled it.
And when it fell,
It splintered beyond repair;
Its great roots upended, stand exposed.

This cannot be undone.
You cannot right the Oak.
It will never grow again.
We will never enjoy its noble splendour, its generous shade.

Continued on the next page



continued

But you can move ahead unaffected,
Because what you planted was shallow,
Labour-intensive,
But easily reproduced.

I grieve my Oak.



Like many women my age, I found myself the unwitting recipient of a divorce at age 50 after 25 years of marriage. To say it turned my world upside down, is an understatement. Poetry, especially that of Mary Oliver, John O'Donahue and many others along the way, has helped me to process, to survive and to heal. This poem is a reflection on why this experience was so earth-shattering for me and yet the other person seemed to walk away with barely a backward glance. It explores whether love is transactional or unconditionally giving.

Gardens and nature are always rich metaphors for our life experiences. How would you express your experience or expectations of your relationships?

How Much I Would Have Loved You May Garner

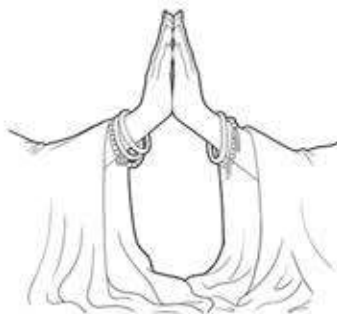
You have no idea how much I would have loved you.

How much I would have loved you so much sooner if you would have found me at a different time, under different circumstances. Then, perhaps I wouldn't have wound up in a different set of arms first, the same ones that strangled the heart out of me, ripping it into pulp, washing it in acid, before replacing it.

How much I would have loved you if you stumbled across me before I changed, before I turned into the creature I despise. Maybe you would have caught me in time, reminding me I did not need to change, to morph, to shape shift into flesh that didn't belong to me.

How much I would have loved you in the darkest days of my youth, knowing I wasn't alone, that there was someone else who understood completely, utterly, fully.

Perhaps then, I wouldn't have felt so alone after all.



I Didn't Know I Was Ready Peter Reed

She blew out the candle...
and left me in the dark...

to ponder the immensity of love in my heart

That's what grieving can do
that's what mourning can bring...

And with the stars, as before
I used to feel so at home

Now a reminder of being so alone

The cold distance between them
Between her soul and mine

The resounding silence among them
echoing her never answering back

With all that now sits in the dark,
to feel and allow what has broken us apart...

She blew out the candle,
I didn't know I was ready.

She Left Like A Season

She left like a season
of summer turning to fall....
These warm spring breezes
like she never left at all...

I Didn't Know I Was Ready Peter Reed

continued

The heart knows no time and sometimes may never feel ready for what opens our way.

And what is revealed, connects us to what was inevitable...

to the immensity of what the heart can hold,

and to what may be necessary for our soul's evolution.

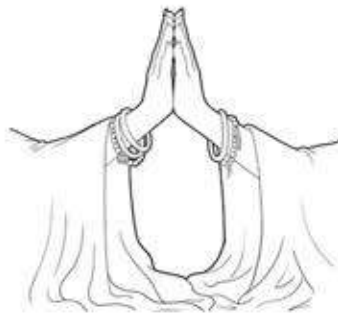
I invite one to feel what arises inside when we are least expecting, to stay present... with how it moves in the body, without words, without a story, without commentary.

Just listen, move, cry, laugh, and let it be.

There is release and freedom in any pure feeling or emotion.

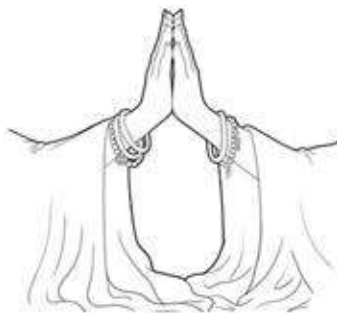
Then if words come, they may form something beautiful... a line, a poem, a story, a chapter.

Writing in and of itself can tell us what we need to know and be healing for us.



Landscape of My Heart Bethany Taulbee

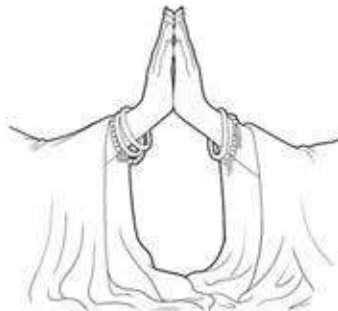
The landscape of my heart has changed
The arrangement of my former self
ReArrAnGeD
My river of resentment has started to run *dry*
The warmth of my inner sun no longer passes me by
The cold winds of the past begin to turn to a present *breeze*
My soul takes a stroll down memory lane
Without F-a-l-l-ing to my knees
A *RAIN* of forgiveness brought life to my parched heart
A RE-C-O-N-N-E-C-T-I-O-N to self
A brand NEW start!
A LETTING-GO storm HIT my complacent sea
STIRRing up the waters of my bitterness to be revealed to me
My hardened stone self, cracked O-P-E-N as *deeply* I felt
Compassion *flooded* my being, as I allowed my anger to *melt*
The landscape of my heart has changed
My *LOVE* grown W-I-D-E as a mountain range
My ocean of capacity found a way to dive *deep*
Reconnection is a divine gift
I'll gratefully keep



And now I ask you, how has your journey changed the landscape of your heart?

You Will Know Rebecca Surmont

You will know when
you have given
 and taken
have loved
 and lost
have won
 and burned
have fought
 and fainted
When you have wailed until
 ribs hurt and the
 heart aches to smile,
that there is an interior ocean
and the shores are merely illusion.

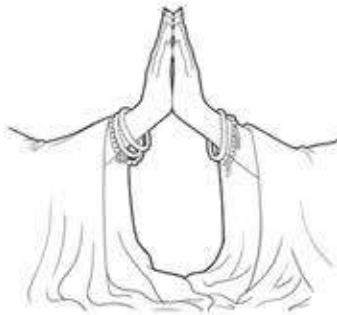


Intentions can be a powerful drive that brings one to action, and it is important to keep that drive despite what external evidence may show us about the ranges of human behavior. Humans are not rational, in love or other emotions, but an intention can keep one centered on a premise out of which to take action. Therefore, it is vital we remain clear on our intentions, especially to love.

When have you held an intention to love and were met with an even greater opportunity?

True Intimacy Lori Zavada

is a flash point that triggers a sit-down—
a kitchen-floor conversation with a friend
that lasts well beyond midnight.
Every word passing between you
is an emotional disrobing of fear and regret,
and the protective armor you are wearing
to survive this life, loosens and falls away.
No clothes come off,
but you've never been more naked
with another human being in your life,
and the taking turns of listening
and being heard goes on forever,
stirring a universe inside you.



Think back to a time when you felt truly heard by someone. Consider how you also heard them. Write about the circumstances surrounding that warm exchange starting with, Taking turns to listen...

Passion Has No Currency Linda Mundell

He sits back in the lawn chair of woven plastic fibers
as the roses in the garden shares their familiar sweet scent with the air
around him.

His eye lids close slightly as he draws in a deeper breath to examine the
texture and flavor of his morning among the roses.

Slowly his eyes open alertly scanning each bunch, each bud relishing
the petals, colors, and shapes.

He smiles slightly thinking to himself.

This garden is my passion.

She walks purposefully through the gate; her breath is sharp with anticipation.
It's a long walk, she has little time, they are waiting for her.

She arrives at the fence.

The apes, with their brown and tan faces, all smiles and giggles, showing
their teeth and gums.

They bounce and jump in happy dances to see her and to hear the sound
of the metal retaining gate open.

Breakfast is served!

Bunches of greens, bananas, and apples. She smiles and feels her heart warm.

These apes are my passion

She wakes early, thoughts swirling in her head.

The quiet solitude of night, with its busy dream-visions beckon her to awaken.

She comes to her desk in the corner of the still darkened room.

There she writes her daily words.

The relentless chatter in her minds yearns to be put on the page.

She relaxes her body into the chair and the familiar sensation of comfort
and relief washes through her as she writes her morning rituals in the calm
amber glow of almost daylight.

It is a soft and sweet feeling that grows inside her chest.

She pauses her pen, for just a moment on the paper, then she begins.

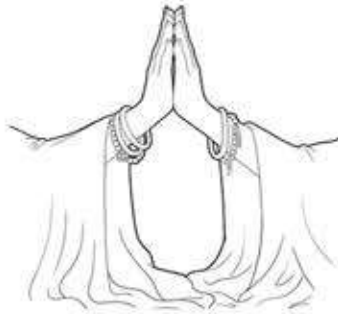
Writing is my passion.

Continued on next page

Passion Has No Currency Linda Mundell

continued

Need I go on or do you see?
To each their own is the way it must be. No grand overture to be found or made.
Passion's unique in every way.
Passion has not a set in stone, it comes from deep within the soul.
This is where it's built and owned.
Passion has no currency



This poem is part of a new series of poetry, soon to be released by Grace of the Sea. It is inspired by two very dear people. The first, my husband Bob of 50+ years, the other a close and best friend from high school; she's now a volunteer for Save the Chimps in Fort Pierce, Florida.

Advice From A Mailbox Becky Ventura

Discover daily things that you don't know
News delivered in a shroud of blue
Step out each day, walk through ice & snow.

Red flag up; in your letters go
Ask for what you want, don't make do
Discover daily things that you don't know.

Routine is simply part of our life's flow
Listen to the wind, it speaks to you
Step out each day, walk through ice & snow.

Birds chatter from afar, a jay or crow
Take a wide stance, get a bigger view
Discover daily things that you don't know.

You can practice patience, but please know
There's good trouble disobeying rules
Step out each day, walk through ice & snow.

Poets say bliss co-exists with woe
Dance with beauty now surrounding you
Discover daily things that you don't know
Step out each day, walk through ice & snow.



Write a poem about an everyday activity using villanelle form, or using some form of repetition. Elevate the ordinary activity, connecting it to spirit.

When have you held an intention to love and were met with an even greater opportunity?



I love you pistachio ice-cream
the way you taste on a hot day—
even if pistachio is hard to spell
and I never actually devoured a cup

or a cone or if I did
it was the chocolate sprinkles I was after
when I walked into the parlor
two chalk boards

listing so many flavors.
I chose you my nutty dessert
or thought of a bowl of you,
not cold, but roasted and salty

splitting my nails as I cracked you open
and that's the cold truth about love,
something opens, something breaks
yet there was a time

I wouldn't touch you
let alone lick as you melted
down green as a sapling's
spring buds or dished

like the fluffed-up wings
of a dancing swan pair
my pistachio, my dervish.
What could be sweeter?



How and where does love speak to you. Does it call you by your name?
What simple actions or objects draw you to love?



Love the golden starfruit,
the overripe, the bruised
and fallen, the pigs that
plunder leavings, uproot
everything you've planted.

Love the well- half-filled,
eager for any gift of rain
and the sugar beets whose
leaves praise sun yet hide
their heads, shy of discovery.

Love the promises like seeds
lying dormant in frozen soil,
some wild and crazy, others
obscure, not knowing which
will wither, which will bloom.

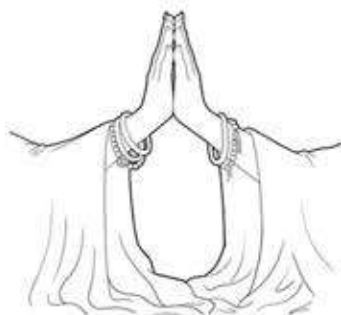
Love the uncertainty,
the hollow place, despair,
the days of too much sleep
without dreams, the full
moon calling us to waken.

Love the tears of empathy,
dark shadow days when doubt
stalks grieving pewter clouds,
days of purification, death-
days you'd rather not recall.

Love what you wish to bring
closer, the beauty of a moon-
flower, heart of firefly, a kindness
of ravens, the transparency
of glasswing moths.



Open your heart and reflect on how you love the world when judgement has vanished.



The Reminders



Karen Hoffman

Inspired by Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer's *The Question*

I have a bracelet
inscribed with the quote:
Is this the path of love?

I have a tattoo -
a sun rising,
a field of flowers,
a trail running through.
Flesh inscribed with the quote:
Is this the path of love?

Excessive, you may think.
Indulgent? NO.

I need the reminders,
I need to ask,
I need to check
over and over,
again and again.

Because.
Yes.
I do forget.

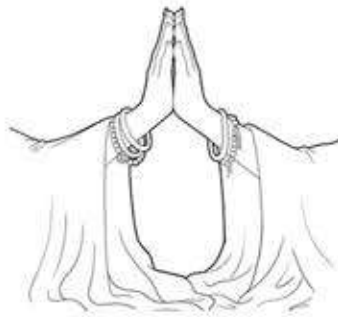


It's hard to navigate through life on a daily basis with an intention of love. We are all embroiled one way or another based on our current times. LOVE escapes me at times; other times, it is easier than breathing. As a completely fallible human being, this poem shows the measures I've taken to remind myself that LOVE is really the way to go. What steps have you taken to stay on the path? Do you forget, as I do, or do you feel like you're making it happen every day? Think about how you show up daily, and whether you, too, have to be reminded. Write whatever you feel in the moment.

THE REMINDERS by Karen Hoffman.
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There Is No Path Jo-Anne Rowley

There is no path
for love to disappear.
Love lives on in song
and psalm and serenade
and in each morning sunrise.
Love lives long
in every living beating heart.
Love lives in you.



Recently I had pneumonia and laid in bed all day, restless and weak. Babe, my sweet companion, an 80lb. muscular Pit Bull rescue, laid alongside me 24/7, guarding, protecting and occasionally licking my hand. I felt safe. I felt loved, and knew I would recover. Seems love can rise from any seed in the Universe, human or otherwise.

Write about a time when love appeared when most needed, though from an unexpected or unusual source.

The Business of Love Amy Segerstrom

We are here on earth
To love
To spin love, stretch love, spread love
When our fingertips grow callused
May it be the work of love
When our bones ache and our hearts break
May it be from the rough and tumble play of love
When our gut laughs and brain farts
May it be from the pressure of love
When we are called to choose
May we pick love
When we feast
May it be a banquet of love
When we swim
May it be in an ocean of love
When we thunder, storm, and shake
May the earth quake
With love
When we question
May the answer always be love
When we make love
May it be love on the mountaintop love
When we birth
May the babes with whom we are blessed
Embody love
When we die
May our last gasp of breath
Breathe love
When we begin again
Love, love, love
Forever
No end to time
No end to love
Love

The Business of Love Amy Segerstrom

continued

“In the poem “The Seed Cracked Open,” Sufi poet, Hafiz, asks the question “What love mischief can we do for the world today?” I love the playful spin love acquires with this question. It’s a bit edgy but in a good way. I hope my poem inspires you to reflect on your own “love mischief” on behalf of the world today.



The Courage to Touch Darlene Dunn

The active ingredient in our hands is Touch

Touch to release feelings.

Touch to move forward.

Touch to soothe.

Touch to heal.

Touch to release.

Touch to connect

in ways words cannot

Touch is the beginning of movement

toward someone

toward something

Touch decides

what to hold,

what to keep close

Touch allows all things

to move toward completeness.

And yet—

Fear blocks Touch

Notice the next time

you want to touch something unknown,

something separated from you.

Notice how fear rises

and stops your movement—

how it asks you to pull back.

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The Courage to Touch Darlene Dunn

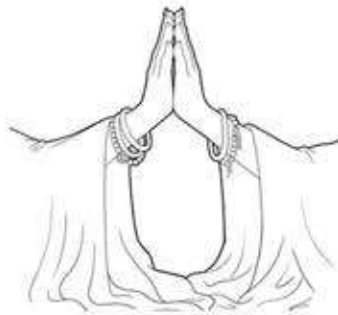
continued

But breathe.

Touch through the fear.
Touch through the pause

For touch is the moment
that begins the movement—
activating the essential ingredient
of our hands:

Touch.





I still ask for friends and family
to be held in the light, for
our sacred source
to walk arm and arm
with them so they know
they are not alone
when their paths get hard.

I still ask for guidance,
to be shown the best way forward
for all concerned.

I still ask for protection
for the plants and trees,
birds, and other animals
with which we share the land,
for fires to quench, tsunamis to calm,
earthquakes and volcanoes
to vent on empty spaces.

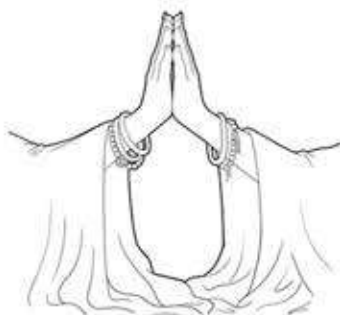
I still ask my heart to focus
on the seeds of good
sprouting within each person.

I still ask for peace to reign
among the peoples of this planet.

But mostly, I tend to pause
wherever I am,
whatever I am doing,
and as my lungs fill
with the amazement of air,
I look around in gratitude
and simply whisper, thank you.



When you are worried or fearful, do you ask for help?



Pretend you have a magic ball and write about what you would ask or give gratitude for.

Railway Carriages: the heart connection Mary Ray Goehring

After Railway Carriages by Vincent van Gogh 1888
For J.R. Goehring

At 3, if he was a good boy, we drove
to the switching station in Batavia
where there usually stood several trains,
some moving. We called it the six track and
watched, from the car,
along the side of the road.

When we needed to cross railroad tracks
during our ordinary journeys
to school, doctors, groceries,
it was extra excitement when
the signal lights flashed
and the red and white gates went down.
We'd listen for the engine's long low
doppler voice coming and going. Listen
for the exact moment it was here
right in front of us.

Now he's 41, a working man,
we see each other when we can. But
I still think of him whenever I see a train.
Still listen
for the exact moment that voice,
his voice,
is here with me.

Railway Carriages: the heart connection Mary Ray Goehring

continued

A train crossing our busy lives can be annoying. We have to wait for it to pass, one car after another. But in this poem, my son's enjoyment at seeing the train made me change my attitude. Who or what has helped you find enjoyment with a normally mundane thing?



Because, like on a train, we are constantly rushing forward never stopping long enough to pay attention to what is right in front of us, what makes you stop and enjoy what is right in front of you?

At My Mom and Dad's House Paula Gordon Lepp

When the sun sets in the heart of the Mississippi Delta you can watch the descent, notice how shadows dapple the stubbled cotton fields, turning and elongating each passing minute, watch the sun hang in the trees lining the horizon, gilding whatever clouds happen to be passing by, then quickly drop until the last slender crescent of light is swallowed by the earth.

We took our 18 month old out to see the sunset. When I put her down, she began tottling across the field toward the sun, crying, opening and closing her little hands, trying to scoop up the fading light. We did not expect this reaction, this gulping, breathless crying, this hiccuping heartbreak.

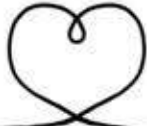
I picked her up, placing her soft belly against my chest, ran my thumbs under her eyes to wipe away small jewels of tears, then I turned us both to face the opposite way where a waxing gibbous moon was rising on its own horizon, climbing up through the tree tops until it popped free, its silver light bathing us all.

I felt my daughter relax into wonder. "Nu-nu", she sighed, then reached out for the light. Nu-nu. Moon. Bright new word. For the rest of our visit, every evening we went outside to watch sunset then moonrise, three generations standing together under a sky turning gold as treasure, red as love, and, as the night grew darker, witnessing what all is bathed in brilliance when seen and given the chance.



Think about a time you were with family or friends, doing an ordinary activity, when you were suddenly filled with an overwhelming sense of love. Use multiple senses to describe this moment. What did you see? What did you hear? What did you feel? Did this experience change how you meet the ordinary?

Allow



Rachel Burdick Vinkey

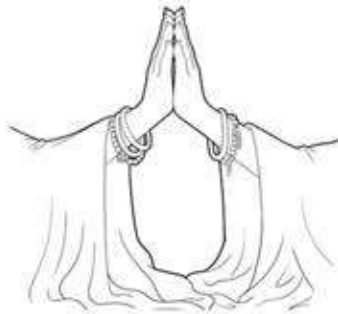
Allow
the poet
in the mother

allow
the mother
in the poet

ache
and
push
and
pull

Words as quilts
words are flesh

This moment
its slanting
its love



Consider ways that you offer the deepest part of yourself. Meditate on the beauty and difficulty of that. Try to write from there...

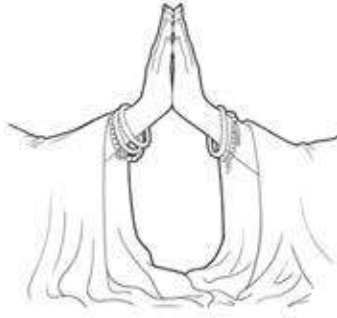
Over Decades... Suzanne S. Austin-Hill

the future
would be shaped by her advice -
unsought, unwanted
dismissed, disparaged

yet

these important words,
resounded, rebounded
permeated, demonstrated

fervently and faithfully
a mother's love



Be sure to savor every moment of angels' labor in straining hymns while
their wings whisper the enormity of His love.

Write a quatrain where all the words in the first line begin with L, in the
second line O, in the third line V, and in last line, E.

(BONUS – ABAB rhyme scheme)

Sacred James Crews

When I say the word sacred,
I mean the dry, chapped skin
of my mother's hand that I held
as often as I could the last week
she was alive. I mean her smile
as soon as she saw me walking,
masked, into her hospital room
and said the two words that will
follow me to my own final days:
My baby. I mean the chills that
gather at the back of my neck
when I say those words out loud,
and feel the love interlaced with
each letter, each sound, her voice
filled with childlike delight
at seeing her own child again.



Sacred James Crews

continued

I remember moving in a perpetual state of both anticipatory grief and amazement during the final days of my mother's life. I spent a week with her, showing up early each morning at the hospital and staying by her bedside for as long as I could. We told stories, watched a marathon of Hallmark Christmas movies together, and I fed her whenever her hand shook too much to bring the fork or spoon to her mouth. I did not know she was dying at the time, though the signs might be clear now in hindsight. I only sensed that what we were sharing was sacred, no matter how hard or sad those days also felt. I will never forget the comfort flowing both ways between us as I held her hand, feeling the dryness and rubbing in lotion a few times. I'll also never forget the words she uttered the first morning I stepped into her room, having flown in the night before. "My baby," she said, smiling, having recognized me in spite of the mask I wore. It was impossible for me not to feel the larger presence of something holy, something awesome—in the truest sense of that word—that I might venture to call God. Others may prefer another term, and though my own spiritual practice is a mix of meditation, prayer, writing, walks in nature, and wisdom drawn from all traditions, I find I also crave a name for that transcendent feeling that followed me through those days. As Mirabai Starr writes in *Ordinary Mysticism*, "God is our code word for everything that is wondrous and mysterious and hidden at the heart of our deepest heartache and most childlike delight." I find the same feeling when I can drop into any present moment with loving attention seamlessly woven with whatever or whomever is before me. And when I hear again those two words my mother said to me—My baby—spoken with childlike wonder at seeing her own child, I know I will carry them with me for the rest of my life.



When you hear the word, "sacred," what images or memories stir for you? You might borrow my first line to spark some writing of your own: "When I say the word sacred . . ." See what specific details spring to mind, and allow yourself to be surprised.

Merci. My Mother Was An Angel Linda Ohlson Graham

My mother was an angel
With wings of grace and beauty ...
Tolerance and strength
Gentleness and kindness
Wisdom and humor
'Care packages for years'
were some of her attributes.
She allowed me to be my own person ...
and didn't judge me ...
'I've taught you the difference between right and wrong ...
you have to make your own decisions.'
gave me freedom I took advantage of.
When I reflect
on dynamics
of someone
who
supported me
loved me
gave me **GREATEST** joy ...
laughed with so hard I had to pull the car off the road ...

Even encouraged me to travel with a gentle man
who was Wild and Crazy
who I then sailed
thousands of miles with ...

I breathe
with **DEEPEST**
gratitude.



Reflect upon your relationship with your mother - and compose a poem.

Coming Home After 1945 Swann

I don't know
what may have been encased
in his memory, his body, his brain

I don't know
if he came back
with more inside of him
than what was taken
from his body, his psyche

I don't know
what sounds reverberated
through his body, his mind
what sharp fragments of horror
kept on shredding the life in him
and blossomed into
that fire of pain and anger
the smoke in his aura
clouds of despair, worry, desperation of
unknown proportions leaping
from day to night to day
without sunrise on the horizon

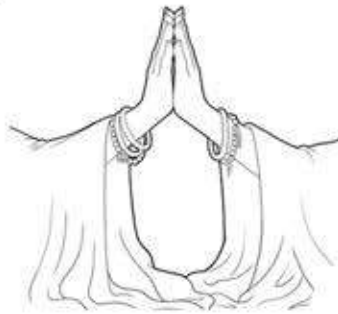
I don't know
which of his wartime actions
had rooted in his being
his youth and innocence
taken hostage forever
in a dark submarine in deep water

Continued on next page

Coming Home After 1945 Swann

continued

but I know
his sensitive being
lived in a slender body
neither made for war
whatever damage came about in my life
I now have compassion for him
a tender love
I have forgiven
because the deep inner intention for his life
was love, always love



What does this poem trigger in you?

Write down some words that stand out, name the uppermost emotion in yourself, maybe you remember a situation:

Did someone come home to you burdened by the past, by a recent event in life, with PTSD? What did you experience in the encounter?

Possible first lines:

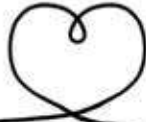
When I saw her/him first...

When s/he came in/back/home, my heart...

After her/his...life became...

Focus on yourself, how did you react/respond. What happened to the emotion in you that you wrote down? What was the development, the progression of your feeling, the relationship in the situation?

Take some of the ideas and let your writing explore what is happening in you.



I must have cried out in the night,
Disturbed by some bad dream
And coming into consciousness,
Saw my father sitting beside my bed

He didn't speak, just sat there,
And I could see the burning ember
From his lit cigarette — the smoke from it,
Which I usually waved away in disgust,

Was sweet incense to me in that moment
Small girl in a big bed — I closed my eyes
And drifted back to sleep, comforted
By his quiet presence beside me



Over the years, my relationship with my father was complicated, but when I was a little girl I adored him. This is one of my treasured memories of how he took care of me.

Think of someone close to you with whom you've had a complicated relationship. If you can, think of an incident or encounter with that person that gave you comfort when you needed it most.

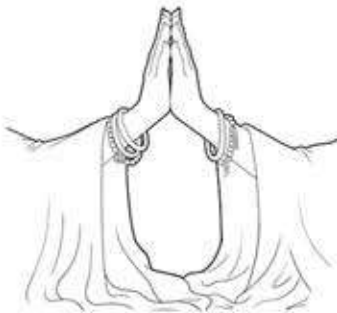
An Unspoken Compass Grace Marie Chapman

The wonders of my mind
A glimpse into the fluttering eye
Moments captured in time
Inspiration becoming clear
The untold stories are near
Memories start to unravel
And happiness triumphs above
A burning candle in my sight
A shining moon above me every night
Whispers of love in the wind
Brushing by as painful memories begin to rescind
He is always by my side
Smiling down with immense pride
Bound in grace, my next chapter begins to take place.



Valentine's Day Therese L Broderick

Sorting through a stiff old binder
I find a love letter, four paragraphs of
my father's cursive, steadfast as the nun
who taught him upper and lower case,
how any pencil guided by an earnest hand
might genuflect to a ghostly blue line.
He was dying that February at the end
of a century, on oxygen, but remembered
to put in writing her "blitheful spirit,
undaunted courage, inordinate kindness,
unfailing wisdom." And she, rest in peace,
preserved his gift softly creased, so that I
might someday discover the sorrows
of their devotion, searching documents for
something else entirely, long expired.



What facts or secrets did you discover about your parent(s) after their death(s)? About ways they cared for each other or for you?

What are the necessary sorrows of loving devotion?

Look through your files of family documents, photo albums, or scrapbooks. Write about any item that grabs your attention.

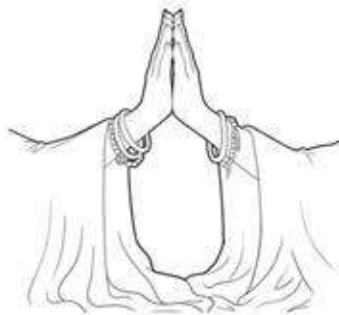
My Future Dust Makes Plans Laura Tate

In response to the poem, "Thank You," by Ross Gay

When you say
All you love will turn to dust
I have no argument.
My father's dust has settled inside a black box
on a shelf at my sister's house.
Now his dust stands watch over faces inside metal frames.
Within my dreams live all the dead I have loved.
They wear bright colors, like that red shirt
my father wore in the photo of him laughing
one lemonade summer afternoon.
The other people in that photo are also dead.
Now they give advice,
like my father reminding me to check tire pressure
and fill up my gas tank before a long trip.
My future dust is making plans.
It wants to wear bright colors
inside someone's dream, to give advice
and share opinions, like the best way
to chop an onion, how to thread a needle
or mend the heel of a sock,
when to speak and when to say no words.
My dust will hold a sign that says
We All Turn to Dust Someday.
It will carry stupid jokes
and chocolate covered almonds
inside pants pockets,
along with coins for restless hands.
Yes, everyone we love will turn to dust,
but let it happen gently, like the whisper
that has yet to leave your lips.
Let the dust of everything
be soft
beneath tender feet.

My Future Dust Makes Plans Laura Tate

I've thought a lot about how it is possible to stay connected to loved ones after they've left this world. My father often appears in my dreams and I am grateful that when this happens, he looks healthy and happy. (His final years with Alzheimers were brutal unfortunately.) The photo described in my poem is imprinted in my brain: my father, wearing a bright red cotton shirt, sits at a large table chatting with his cousin and his cousin's wife, both who were dear to me, and who also show up in my dreams. There's a pitcher of lemonade and a loaf homemade bread on top of a white tablecloth. They were happily chatting and laughing on a warm summer afternoon. I'd like to think they whisper encouraging words from wherever they are, and that when I'm gone, my children and grandchildren will still feel my love.



Who shows up inside your dreams? What do you think they want to tell you? How does the love keep flowing even after we leave this earth?

When My Warm Flesh Melinda Coppola

When my warm flesh

transmutes to ashes
and I'm scattered—
half in New Hampshire forest
in thanks for the pine-needed floor,
half in Cape Cod waters
to enrich the mollusks mud flats—
please gather these things:

my journals,
on the first shelf
under the window in the study—
the ones I don't want read.

From the upper drawer
in our shared bureau,
take the opossum earrings
you gave me the second spring
I spent swooning over
their nocturnal visits to our deck.

Grab a lip balm—
the honey kind I was addicted to,
told you to apply hourly
If I were ever in a coma
or lost use of my hands.

Find the driftwood
with the heart-shaped middle
not officially for sale, yet gifted
to me by a woman at a craft fair
because I was the first to notice it.

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When My Warm Flesh Melinda Coppola

continued

Bury these things somewhere beautiful
we never got to see together,
maybe where water and land kiss,
or in the armpit of a wild rock formation
in the Utah desert you loved
and said I would gush poetry over
when we finally made it there one day.

One day didn't come.
It never does,
and we couldn't admit
our bucket lists, too long,
would be half full
when we died.

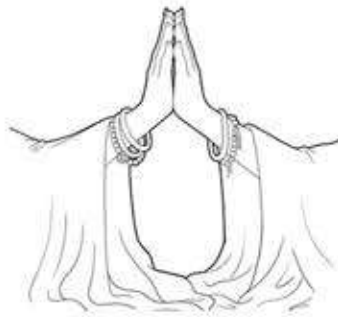
Oh, Love,
the fruit of our sweet life
rounded my belly in my dusk years.
Take great care with our daughter,
and know I was sated,

that even the grueling days
held verse—
stanzas so ripe
I was often drunk on them.

When My Warm Flesh Melinda Coppola

continued

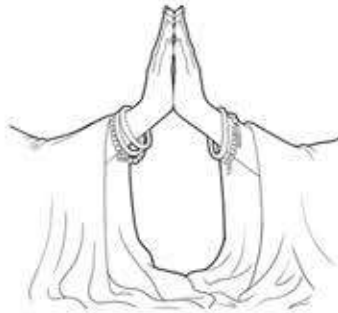
When I consider my eventual demise, I mostly think of what I want to leave behind. I like to imagine warm memories of big love and small kindnesses, snippets of compassionate conversation that live on in the hearts of those I have touched. I also envision (perhaps aspirationally) armloads of art and poetry, offered freely to the wind without regard to how and where they land.



What bits of yourself would you like to leave behind when you go? How are your days reflecting that, and/or how are you perhaps hiding your light from others?

Legacy Judy Bousquin

Legacy of love
nourishing and nurturing
feeds generations.



What is your legacy of love that nourishes and nurtures those you hold dear?

How do you envision your love legacy being received by those in generations to come?

Prayers of Love by the Hours (Haiku) PattiJoy Posan

Night
darkness without fear
holds the world like a secret
the unseen draws near

Dawn
Light filters through curtain
Comforter begs me to stay
Mystery wakes me

Mid Morning
Coffee soothes
Peanuts spread on banana
Guiding what unfolds

Noon
Dishes wait in sink
Warm water blesses my hands
Light shines with a bow

Late Afternoon
Pots on stove bubbling
Sacred meal of beans and rice
Spirit leans closer

Evening
Twilight quiet breath
Heart is open to memories
Deep, Old, and Holy

Night
Darkness without fear
Secrets in our dreams
The unseen is near

Prayers of Love by the Hours (Haiku) PattiJoy Posan

continued

Sadhguru wrote, "A mind at rest is the temple of creation."
The Prayers of Love were written as they came to me as I followed the hours of the day.
As these Haiku's flowed through me I felt the intention of devotion and gentleness - while holding the warmth of love.



I love Rumi. I have above my typewriter "Let yourself become living poetry".

"I have been a seeker and I still am, but stopped asking books and the stars. I started listening to the teaching of my soul." Rumi

How might this quote by Rumi speak to The Intention of Love?



I could not hear the blood
entering my vein
one drop at a time all night long.

Four pints. Four donors.
Four faces I would never see.
Hands I would never touch.

I could not hear their voices—
the languages they spoke,
the prayers they prayed.

I did not know what car they drove,
or who they voted for or why.
But I knew I would die without them.

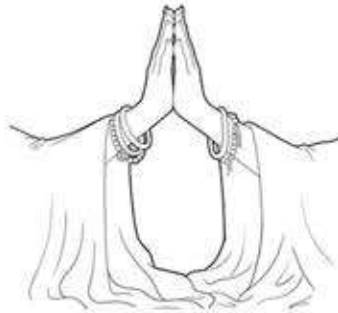
I knew the rupture in my body
would only be healed
because four strangers said yes.

And now, I cannot look
at the woman in the grocery store,
or the man who cut me off in traffic,

or the people in line at the voting booth,
without wondering,
Did you save my life?



What does it mean to be connected to others? Recall or imagine a time when you experienced a moment of connection with a stranger or a person with whom you have some fundamental differences. How can we be present to each other's humanity despite our differences? Write a poem or journal entry in which you imagine yourself "fused" within a community of mutual dependence and trust. How might this viewpoint effect your interactions with people you might not usually engage? It may seem out of reach in these times of polarization and injustice, but perhaps that makes the need all the more pressing.



The Love That Never Dies C.L. McReynolds

Watching your chest rise and fall,
Waiting and counting the seconds between each breath.
Waiting for the eventual, inevitable cease.
You sleep and perchance even to dream,
As we wait for the final sleep to overtake you.
We wait...
Between cups of coffee, between kisses,
Between shared memories and tears.
Snatches of time to steal a shower or a smoke,
A plate of sausages and eggs cooked by a loving brother,
The pulsing beat of the oxygen machine in the next room.
Conversation filters in and out. Even occasional laughter.
Eggs in a basket. Anticipation and appreciation.
The love of a family that never fades.
The gift of being surrounded by those you love when your time to
travel comes at last.

The Love That Never Dies C.L. Reynolds

continued

"During the darkest moments, there is a light to be found in togetherness and community. Solidarity within the solemnity. Grace within the grief. It lies in half drunk mugs of coffee and pieces of cobbler delivered by a kind and loving hand. Find yours and let your light shine."



All We Love Lynn Kincanon

In Colorado one season does not ease into the next.
Summer does not follow Spring
but brutally pushes it out of the way
leaving spring blooms spent too soon.
Neither does it cede to autumn until too late
to wear my cute woolen sweaters
and press all the vibrant leaves into my book of life.

Winter does not care one hoot for autumn
often arriving too early like an anxious suitor
and leaving abruptly like a cad
after already taking advantage, spoiling everything.
And just when you thought it was over
it arrives back like a bull, and dumps a load of snow
a top your tulips and daffodils so longingly awaited.
Yet, how often winter is a bust here!
Leaving scant snow in its wake, disappointing
all who love the season for its crystalline beauty.

Colorado is a coyote. Climate change a fear
all we love will soon be flint,
all we came here for, ravaged by the sands.
These tumultuous winds bringing swift alternations
to an already beleaguered landscape.
Seasons like this one, 2026, will herald
one unfamiliar world after another.
Snow globes will be the thing
we remember winter by.

Now, each snowy day a celebration.
Each crocus a precious jewel.



Each year that follows, the climate change only gets more drastic. The earth is crying out to save it and we don't listen, we don't hear. Can you take a line of this poem as your poem's epigraph and begin your own chant for the earth's survival, honor something you love that you know will be lost in the years ahead. Use 5 of the words in this poem that attract you for your own.





Don't give up so easily
now that your prayers and recitations haven't
miraculously changed the whole of your life.
A single drop of water daily crashing against
the same surface eventually smoothes the hard
edges of rock, and in due time, impresses a
divot, something that can hold the gathering
rain. Keep practicing, wherever you may be,
no matter the conditions. Keep whispering
your hand to your heart—
*may I be happy / may I be healthy / may I be safe
from harm.*

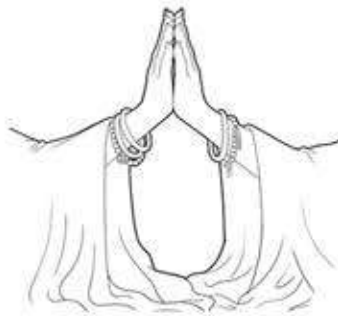
And then
*may you be happy / may you be healthy / may you
be safe from harm.*

And after that the chorus of the sum of us
*may we be happy / may we be healthy / may we be
safe from harm.*

Any prayer will do. For ease and peace. For
comfort. For joy. For fortitude. Let this be a
companion song. Soon what was rock becomes
stone, and what was stone becomes resting spot.
By then your whole life will have changed. And
you, having grown accustomed to this steady
tenderness, will have barely noticed how gently
you've walked through your own door, arriving.



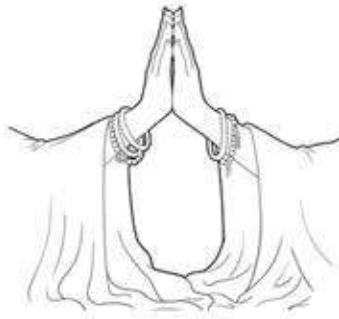
In a culture of urgency and instant manifestation, it becomes a radical act to set down the expectation of immediacy and instead step into steady commitment. This is how habits change after all, small steps taken every day. This is also how a flesh wound heals, in increment steps that slowly tend toward healing. So what of our hearts, our souls? Loving-kindness prayers may seem ineffective at first, but with persistent dedication they begin to show their mark on our hearts, smoothing the hardened places in us one prayer after another.



Reflect on your path. What is one small act you've done everyday that has brought you to where you stand now? Where do you see yourself in the future, and how might you get there? You may choose to begin with the prompt don't give up so easily. This could be a letter to your past self or an encouragement from your future self.

Love's Attention Carol Frischman

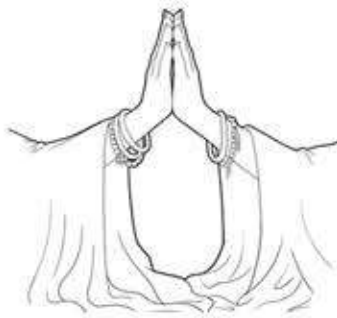
Sweet song from heart beats
Listen sweet ones—me, love, us
Guiding star lightens



Impromptu— this is my call (my haiku) out to you...now listen to your heart and respond however you choose to show up....

Remembering Melissa Ireland

I can go nowhere
or be no one,
without the orchestra of the universe
gracefully blooming melodies
into that infinite space that I am.
Seeing the stars
and knowing they are part of
the life in my DNA sends a magical tingling
to my fingers and toes,
and the colors of the rainbow decorate my spine,
the clouds are my adventures,
and the moon and I glow together
in the night, hearing each other's dreams.
Sometimes, raindrops, masquerading as tears,
gather beneath my eyelids to greet the beauty of the day,
and the wind breathes joy through my dancing limbs.
And the artist in each of us, can be heard whispering,
"we were made to be free in this infinite space".





When this world
Becomes a distant memory
And the differences
We thought defined us
Drift away and disappear
Like clouds in dazzling sunshine

When all our walls
Gently crumble
And vanish before our eyes
When no barriers exist
To keep us apart

When we see only
The purest essence
Of who we are
Maybe then
We can begin again
In love



Crow Spirit Joanne Snyder

Two crows flew in together and perched on the elm tree.
Piercing glowing eyes looking at me
I lovingly watched the crows intimacy and listened to their love notes.
The clucks, clucks coo, coos .
I had never realized they make more of a sound than the raucous caw, caw!
Will this year bring more loving sounds than a raucous, violent caw?
Will I speak more gently and lovingly to all of it including to myself!?



How does nature give you loving attention and inspiration?

On Being Alone Julie Barton

"Knowing how to be solitary is central to the art of loving. When we can be alone, we can be with others without using them as a means of escape."

~ Bell Hooks

It is possible I have forgotten
how to truly be alone. I have
been surrounded for so long that
I am unsure how to be without
another heart pumping
in the same vicinity.
It is possible I have used others
to escape while believing all along
that I'd be fine, happy even, if
everyone was gone. Turns out,
when I am alone and try to sit,
still and quiet, I freeze, ruminate,
unsure what to do without someone
asking for help or attention or love.
Turns out I need to remember how to
tend to myself. It is possible
I need to remember how to love me.

On Being Alone Julie Barton

continued

I wrote this poem two weeks into being an empty nester. My youngest daughter had just left for college across the country, and it's fair to say my heart was aching. Thing is, for years, I'd always thought, As soon as they leave, I'll have time to... you name it: write, rest, travel, etcetera. Turns out I missed them more than I wanted to do those other things, and it's not that easy adjusting from life with kids at home to life with an empty house. After 21 years of parenting two daughters, I realized that I'd forgotten how to truly be by myself, and it's still taking me a while to find my footing. This has been a year of just remembering to be patient with myself.



Write about something that you were so excited for—but it didn't turn out anything like you'd expected. Name the feeling in your body. Lean into the humility of your discovery. Let yourself be vulnerable.

Say Your Life Phyllis Cole-Dai

*in honor of the Buddhist monks
who walked for peace from Texas to Washington, DC*

Say your life is a poem
this day a stanza
this hour a line
this moment a word

Say you choose
to compose yourself
upon paper
the color of heaven
where it meets the ground

Say your body is the pen
your spirit the ink
your breathing the space
around the marks you make

Say your feet are the nib
just passing through
without pressing the point

Say the poem of you
is peace
written in ink
the color of fire
across the turning pages of the land

Say the poem is showing up
never giving up
the offering of flowers

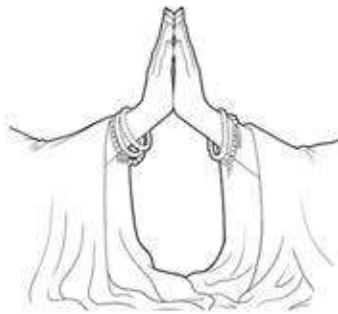
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Say Your Life Phyllis Cole-Dai

continued

Say the poem of you
walks thousands of miles
millions of steps
crosses every border on the map

Say the poem you are
flies home again
without ever having left



How To Remember You're Alive Ash Kilback

Love, come here.

Let's take a walk. I want to show you
what you've been missing while you've
been too busy to slow down to watch
the sky open its curtains to the first
song of morning.

Love, look around.

There is so much to see with patient
and curious eyes. The flowers will bloom
from the branches soon, the humming of bees
too, please lift your chin, tilt your gaze
towards beauty.

Love, take off your shoes.

Feel the grass between your toes, stand on
this green carpet of earth as the wind twirls
around your feet, sink your heels in the dirt,
call every lost part of yourself back home.

Love, get quiet.

Listen to the water flowing down the river.
Watch as it grows wide, then narrow, and wide
again. Welcoming every unexpected turn it
makes, not worrying where it will lead. Trust
your life is carrying you the same.

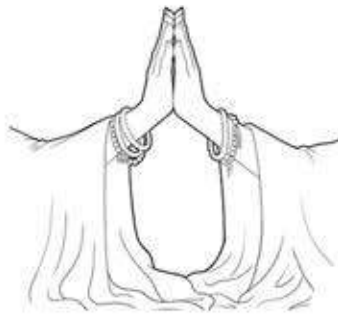
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How To Remember You're Alive Ash Kilback

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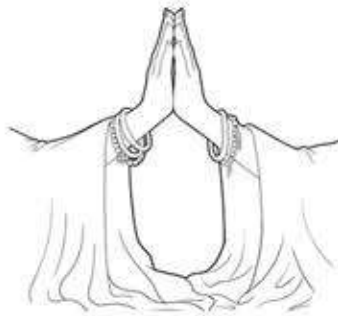
Love, come here.

Let's sit beneath the trees. Send our thoughts
up to the passing clouds and stay inside
this moment for as long as we can, the world
is always in a hurry, but we are more alive
than ever when we're not.



Begin Again Laura Coleman

To begin again,
What a beautiful gift we are given,
This choosing to be free.
To begin again each sunrise,
To release it all at dusk,
To bow to the breath,
To embrace the struggle,
To love, to love, to love
All of it - as it is.



It Could Be Julia Fehrenbacher

a smile or a poem. Or new day light
that finds you through an open
window. Or, perhaps, remembering
that tomorrow was never promised.

It could be the scent
of baking bread, the first chill
of autumn that has you reaching
for your favorite wool sweater. Or maybe
it's the noticing of how easily
red maple becomes and lets go.

It could be taking today off
to be still, to un-know,
to notice. To practice loosening
your troubled grip
because grace can never
be gripped or grabbed.

It could be choosing
softness in a world grown hard
because you're tired of hurting
and being hurt and mercy
is the best kind of medicine.

It could be an invitation to gather
around the listening table
where every color is beautiful, where
there is no blame,
no shame, no them—no other.

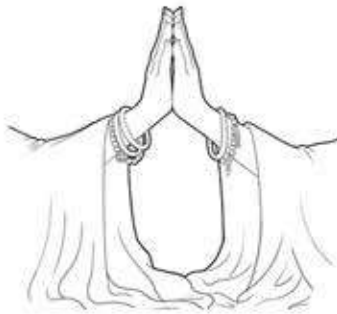
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It Could Be Julia Fehrenbacher

continued

It could be
It could be any of these things
or no thing at all, that remind you that, really,
only a few things matter—

Food. Trees. Words. Love. Mostly love.



If you feel called, choose a line (or even a single word) that especially speaks to you from my above poem.

Grab your notebook and a free-flowing, yummy pen, set your timer for 10 minutes (or whatever time feels best) and write yourself wildly free!



In addition to her beloved Zenful Conversations community, podcast, and publication, ZenJen Brown is an internationally certified C-IAYT Yoga Therapist, meditation instructor, energy Reiki Master, and Teacher of Presence. She loves poetry, and anyone who puts their heart on the page. ZenJen creates warm, accessible spaces for healing, writing, and reflection. Her work is rooted in love, simplicity, and the belief that we walk each other home.

“There is a voice that doesn’t
use words. Listen.”
- Rumi



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