

Daily Meditation 11-15-22

In Praise of Praise

Good morning.

Today we begin a series, if you will, in our daily meditations around Praise...praise.

Rabbi Heschel says praise precedes faith. Maybe we should back up from a lot of our faith preoccupations, and get back to praise, and then return to faith.

I closed my essay today with an allusion to Mary Oliver, who called herself a praise poet. And she talks about prayer as paying attention. Paying attention is, it seems to me, the opposite of taking for granted. And as I point out in the essay, taking for granted is the opposite of praise.

So let me share with you just a few of her wonderful teachings about praise, and not taking for granted, and paying attention. And I draw these from her book *Devotions: the Selected Poems of Mary Oliver*. She put her poems together in this one volume shortly before she died. So these, I think it's safe to say, were her favorite poems, at the end of her life, if you look back on her vocation.

So on page 173, she has a wonderful poem, not long, called "Mindful." Now that word alone is important, isn't it? To be mindful, is to not take for granted, as Thich Nhat Hanh says, to be mindful of every step we take, and every breath we breathe in and breathe out.

This is Mary Oliver's poem called "Mindful."

*Every day
I see or hear
Something
that more or less*

*kills me
with delight,
that leaves me
like a needle*

*in the haystack
of light.
It was what I was born for-
to look, to listen,*

*to lose myself
inside this soft world –*

*to instruct myself
over and over
in joy --*

...To instruct myself over and over in joy...

...and acclamation --

...acclamation, that's praise, isn't it?

*Nor am I talking
about the exceptional,*

*the fearful, the dreadful,
the very extravagant –
but of the ordinary,
the common, the very drab,*

*the daily presentations.
Oh, good scholar,
I say to myself,
how can you help*

*but grow wise
with such teachings
as these -
the untrimmable light*

of the world --

...the untrimmable light of the world...

*...the ocean's shine,
the prayers that are made
out of grass?*

...the prayers that are made out of grass. Grass is certainly a daily presentation, isn't it, in most places, and common, and ordinary, and not very extravagant.

Another poem that speaks to the same celebration of praise is on page 14, called "The Gift."

*Be still, my soul, and steadfast.
Earth and heaven both are still watching*

*though time is draining from the clock
and your walk, that was confident and quick,
has become slow.*

*So, be slow if you must, but let
the heart still play its true part.
Love still as once you loved, deeply
and without patience. Let God and the world
know you are grateful --*

...Let God and the world know you are grateful...

...That the gift has been given.

...that the gift has been given. Gratitude. Gifts. Those are synonyms for praise, aren't they?

And one more poem, I will not read all of it, but parts of it. It is called "Evidence," on page 80.

*Where do I live? If I had no address, as many people
do not, I could nevertheless say that I lived in the
same town as the lilies of the field, and the still
waters.*

*Spring, and all through the neighborhood now there are
strong men tending flowers.
Beauty without purpose is beauty without virtue. But
all beautiful things, inherently, have this function –
to excite the viewers toward sublime thought. Glory
to the world, that good teacher.*

Glory to the world, that good teacher... Mary Oliver, praise poet, on praise and praising.

Thank you. See you tomorrow.