

## **The Outside is Easier**

The outside is easier

the world outside  
the mechanics of life  
the observations of nature  
the vantage of a witness  
the play on a stage, if well scripted,  
well-acted  
all of this can make sense

and our senses make things real:  
point at that, describe  
touch this texture, familiarize  
smell this scent, beware  
taste this sweetness, enjoy  
hear that sound, run fast...

as we mature  
so do our interpretations  
and our grasp of cause and effect,  
our conditioning by the seasons,  
and our lessons from the laws of life.  
dwellers of the jungles, deserts, mountains, or cities  
their survivors have learned what it takes  
to wake up to the next dawn

it's not easier to accept, maybe,  
the outside place  
the banal cruelties,  
the blatant injustices,  
the crushing defeats of the righteous ones,  
but it's easier to orient to  
because it is as it is  
and eventually, everything is lit up by the dawn

the inside is harder

inside, there are these:  
wispy recollections of familial sagas  
subtle reminiscences from previous incarnations  
mysteries of the heart, unplumbed  
the dreamtime, unrecognized  
the self, misunderstood  
confusions, ever flowering

inside we may ride on a ship  
upside down in the water  
the keel in the air, the mast points to the bottom  
how do we breathe in this medium?  
how does a friend dance on the deck,  
not floating away?  
how is the boat propelled  
without wind in the sails?  
it all works  
but nobody knows why

what is that subtle sound  
deep in the inner silence?  
like chasing an echo with an unlocatable source  
it can be an invitation to madness  
or to a wisdom born of conceding defeat,  
a surrender to a power from an ultra-low frequency  
(how can it be called a higher power?)

as Master Tzu said, darkness within darkness  
is the gateway to understanding.  
this place, deep inside, though not scary,  
is far from any glimmer

the light of the outside,  
it's far easier to see by,  
but it's only half the story

**Mine to Keep, the Keeper of Me**

these things are not mine to keep,  
when at death  
my body-mind  
is vacated  
of life-force:

sight  
smell  
taste  
hearing  
touch  
thinking

not mine to keep:  
mind's containment of the senses  
mind's memory of sense experiences  
mind's projection of time  
mind's entitlement to embodiment  
mind's pretense of soul

not mine to keep:  
family  
friends  
pets  
clothing  
furniture  
cars  
plants, garden, trees  
the roles that I play

not mine to keep:  
art  
music  
beauty  
creating  
building  
making  
destroying  
imagining

Not Mine to Keep – for Sixfold May 2022 Poetry Contest

not mine to keep:

joy

sorrow

pain

suffering

elation

stagnation

blame

hope

not mine to keep:

concepts of freedom

concepts of death

concepts of love

concepts of immortality

concepts of legacy

what *is* mine to keep is the Keeper of me:

impermanence

no-self

consciousness

the peace that passeth all understanding

and that which is most intimate

the Keeper of me is also the air that I breathe

as I write this,

and the choice to love everything,

especially those things I cannot keep,

for as long as I breathe

## Breakdown

the breakdown was bound to happen  
you can't go on asking the big inner questions  
without ramifications

inquiry by its nature deconstructs  
not in an act of violence or assertion of power  
not in tearing down a wall that no longer serves  
not in the demolition of an old building  
not in the draining of a pond or a lake to "reclaim" the land

asking about truth and illusion and honesty and God and what am I...  
these are not posed in the spirit of renewing a philosophy of life  
they are more about letting die what needs to die, by no longer nourishing it

a person cannot serve two masters it has been said  
when you choose one, the other will be resentful  
energy will be unleashed, havoc may be wreaked  
things will get busted up  
but frankly, these busted things no longer matter  
they belong to house of the old master  
the old master who has been left behind

breakdown is done as a rite of sacrifice  
though no fire may be present, and nothing physically is offered  
some things, like karma, and certain chemical bonds, fire can't undo  
some things must be broken down by falling apart

strange how those bonds can come apart without a chemical reaction  
they were only chemical bonds in the eyes of the beholder  
in transcendence, we see they are subatomic relationships  
deeply entwined, encoded by lifecycles of confusion and transgressions

we must now learn new modes of being in the house of the new master  
and this may be quite tricky, as we're not used to looking in this direction  
for leadership, loving mentoring, and a code of ethics without external authority

the new direction is in the mirror, into the eyes, beyond the irises  
seeing through what is looked at  
seeing that the unseen is the prime mover of everything  
and that the new master is the master of nothing at all, except silence

## **My Guide**

### I. Interplay

Like a novice ballroom dancer  
I follow the lead of my partner,  
as she's more experienced.  
By my will, I participate freely,  
but I surrender to her tutelage.

As time passes and I grow  
in competence  
I practice taking the lead,  
which she freely allows,  
and with her gentle corrections  
I find the flow towards mastery.

Nearing mastery,  
I lead more often  
but not in the way  
I had imagined at the start.  
There is no leader now  
only the flow - interplay.

This is how I learn from my Guide  
in any subject, in any art.  
The key is to be present, to listen.  
To internalize the guidance.

When I groove to a beat while driving,  
or practice yoga in my room,  
or run swiftly on a hillside path,  
it may seem a solo effort.  
But my Guide is always there.  
It's always interplay.

Sometimes there are three of us:  
one visible, me; two not, the others.  
Joining in the play with me and my Guide  
may be a power plant's medicine,  
or an animal spirit's voice,  
or a nudge from the elements, like brother wind.  
Don't be fooled, three can be company.

II. A poet's confession

When consumed in any art  
poetic descriptions are superfluous,  
I know with a smile.  
There is only One.

And deeper yet, there is no-thing,  
as One is truly that which has no name,  
just a mysterious hum,  
which can take a lifetime to hear.

### **From the Stars and Back**

gazing up into the deep winter midnight  
it's the darkest of backdrops  
featuring star-shine's most pronounced contrast  
the heavenly bodies twinkle with authority  
streaming light beams from a time eons before our birth

we are tempted since childhood to reach up and connect  
how is it we can feel intimate  
with these unthinkably distant denizens  
of our glimmering galaxy?

our nearest star neighbor, Proxima Centauri  
is over four light years away, that's over 25 trillion miles  
a trillion is a million million!  
you can hear it now, should we attempt a trip someday,  
manned or not... are we there yet?

but still, there is the bold star-shine of the Centauri Group  
asserting its place in the celestial canopy,  
implying our galactic neighborhood feels comfortably close  
despite the crazy awesome sprawl of the spirals

the elements which burst forth from supernovas  
are like seeds cast by the winds of space, far and wide  
they generate new formations and potentials  
suggesting recipes for the ovens of manifestation

turns out it's not so Quixotic to spin up space travel fantasies  
for we are searching for contact  
not with aliens  
but with the spirits of our ancestors

we are seeking meaning in knowing - said Jung  
finding our bliss - said Campbell  
striving for a way for the universe to understand itself – said Sagan  
we are acting out a Zen circle of destiny

inspired and enthused  
with this longing we're infused  
we are truly in the world but not of it  
nor are our fellow terrestrials, animate or not

made of star stuff, we are, all of us  
everywhere