

Restless Souls

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I have adapted the language of this poem for our time...

Pablo Neruda - Dies Slowly
A Chilean Poet

**The person who becomes the slave of habit,
who follows the same routes every day,
who never changes pace,
who does not risk and change the color of their clothes,
who does not speak and does not experience,
dies slowly.**

**The person who shuns passion,
who prefers black on white,
dotting ones "it's" rather than a bundle of emotions, the kind that make your
eyes glimmer,
that turn a yawn into a smile,
that make the heart pound in the face of mistakes and feelings,
dies slowly.**

**The person who does not turn things topsy-turvy,
who is unhappy at work,
who does not risk certainty for uncertainty,
to thus follow a dream,
those who DO NOT forego sound advice at least once in their lives,
dies slowly.**

**The one who does not travel, who does not read,
who does not listen to music,
who does not find grace in themselves
dies slowly.**

**The person who slowly destroys their own self-esteem,
who does not allow themselves to be helped,
who spends days on end complaining about their own bad luck, about the rain
that never stops, dies slowly.**

**The one who abandons a project before starting it, who fails to ask questions
on subjects they don't know; who don't reply when they are asked something
they DO know,
dies slowly.**

**Let's try and avoid death in small doses,
reminding oneself that being alive requires an effort far greater than the
simple fact of breathing.**

**Only a burning patience will lead
to the attainment of a splendid happiness.**

SERMON:

I don't want die slowly. I want to live a good and hearty as long as I can. But the truth is, we all do die slowly, physically; from the time we are born our bodies begin decaying away. We can slow that process by taking care of ourselves and with some good fortune; but that which comes from the earth must go back to the earth. But the question this poem really raises is how are you living? How are you living? Is each day just another day or are you, as Thoreau put it: "Sucking the marrow out of life?" What's emerging right now inside and outside of you? Are you finding and following your bliss with all the big and little things; are you noticing amidst the ugliness in life the everyday beautiful things we often take for granted? Ultimately, are you seeking to understand and be understood?

If you are living—you are seeking to understand and be understood. And it is in this process of risk and reward that we truly grow our soul.

‘Understanding’ has to do with the evolution of our consciousness (our awareness) and to be ‘understood’ has to do with the evolution of our relationships. The former has to do with the internal quest for knowledge of the self—in relationship to and with the cosmos (understanding why we are here and our purpose) and the latter has to do with being seen and heard and respected and loved. One has to do with curiosity and the other with vulnerability. But both have to do with the evolution of our species and all that plays out in the world today as a result of that evolution.

So first I go to the book of Genesis (the beginning) to lead my message... Most of us have read or heard parts from this book about the creation of humanity. If taken literally it does not make much sense to us. But taken metaphorically, the way the Jewish theologian Martin Buber understood the text, we find another meaning that has everything to do with understanding and being understood.

In the beginning when humans realized they were naked, the old story says that they gained knowledge of good and evil. Go back and read that text and you will see if you look between the lines that this is an allegorical story about humans waking up. Adam and Eve realized they were naked and that represents

(vulnerability and fragility). At some point humans woke up and realized they were frail mortal creatures in a very big, scary world! But also a world full of adventure and learning... Science backs Buber's analysis.

For a long time in our human evolution we went with what nature programmed us to do--like most animals. We were communal creatures and lived in packs. We hunted and gathered. We mostly followed the alphas in the group. But as we began to stand up and our brains began to grow---somewhere in that process we began to be more and more curious about who we were and 'what's out there?' We wanted to understand more and that curiosity continues to grow today. It is a virtue and vice. Our curiosity 'to know' allows us to do many exciting things but we also use this curiosity in ways that harm other beings.

So our ancestors wanted to know and experience more and wanted, as Carl Jung put it, individuation—to be distinguished from other things; not to feel constricted or controlled. It was this anthropological and psychological break—from being collectivist in nature to more individualistic that we began yearning, as a species, to understand and be understood—where freedom—mental, physical and spiritual freedom—became the overriding effort in our evolution. To be curious and to explore and discover then, in my opinion, is the ultimate quest for us and our ancestors where freedom was/is paramount.

This ultimate quest for freedom is why there is so much suffering, war and violence on this planet. There are all of these clashing and colliding realities and interpretations for what being free means; others trying to use their power to subdue people to live within their dream of what the world should be. But as history has shown, you cannot control another human being for long before they will fight and even die to be free. Their children, and their children's-children will die in that quest for freedom.

Freedom is so important because it means you have the space to emerge; but community too is important because we are stronger together. There is tension at the heart of this matter—there always will be. Group-think vs individual needs and desires—a very difficult thing to navigate individually and collectively.

But the point is that if I am to understand who I am, I must grapple and be honest with the fact that I want to understand and be understood. In all of us there is this restlessness. We are all restless souls wanting to live a meaningful, good life. And that's why the poem I read is paradoxical. Trying to live the life you want to live over and against trying to be a good father or mother or family member or citizen or human being creates a lot of grey areas where it's hard to decide what to do. See I shared that poem because it is true we must go against the grain and throw caution to the wind, and live our dreams and all that good stuff. But that is not always possible given certain realities; not possible for some folks given their

economic situation or geographical location; or where they are on Maslow's hierarchy.

So how do we subdue that restless soul that gnaws at us and haunts us as we sleep?

WE DON'T. We recognize that that voice will always be with us no matter our age or stage in life. We realize that we are a product of the cosmos that is always creating and expanding. Always giving birth and saying goodbye. We are IT and IT is us, and therefore this restlessness is a part of being an alive and AWAKE human being. There will be music left un-played when we take our last breath. We can't do it all in one lifetime. Thank goodness for reincarnation—in my humble opinion...

So...**we do what we can do**—make a difference where we can. Follow our goals and dreams as long as we have the heart too; and be willing to let them go when the fire goes out-- with no regrets. Because it really is the journey not the destination that makes for a life! The journey of understanding and being understood that makes for a good life.

In my own evolution as a human being I am discovering that sometimes my idea, concept, feelings cannot always be at the center of the universe. I have to let go sometimes and follow. My social contract with humanity—with my faith— informs me that there are times to lead, times to follow and times to get out of the

way. Wisdom knows the difference. Look to that God of your understanding—seek your higher ‘S’ self and meditate on the decision you must make. And trust it. Then move on with faith, hope and love.

We are people of curiosity and vulnerability. People who want to understand and be understood. Because I know this, I must travel lightly and with humility on this earth. I can see the ‘tangled web we have weaved’ over time in this long WAKING UP process. So we must walk humbly on this planet knowing that we are very complex and conflicted creatures. We must live and lean into this ambiguity knowing that every person we see has that same desire to be heard, seen, understood, and loved—that every person, save those who are mentally deficient, wants to be free to explore and grow their soul. This restlessness should call within you compassion and patience knowing that each of us acts out of this complexity. That every bad thing that happens cannot be easily labeled and filed away.

It is my belief then that teaching this more sensitive and elastic way of seeing the world is a way to slow down our actions and reactions. Maya Angelou said we must “think more, read more and listen more.” Maybe we could pause and reflect before deciding the fate of other peoples or nations.

Perhaps if we could see and express our own vulnerabilities and curiosities, safely, get that stuff out—then we would not project our pain as much or have the need to force our dreams or realities on others by any means necessary. And believe it or not, this is my version of humans living as a beloved community which I see as a time of exploration and expression without ridicule or harassment. When we are able to work together for the common good but still able to individuate without the need for narcissism. Beloved community—heaven on earth is certainly a hoped for theme in our religion. And we are a long, long ways away from it. But not if you look at it from another point of view. For me, every time we are living and acting as our best-self—and with people who share that same reality—we are experiencing Beloved Community; a foretaste of glory divine! Not tomorrow or 100 years from now, but today. Rumi says ‘be here now’. Be beloved community today, in this moment with your thoughts, intentions, words and deeds. Every time you have that moment of clarity and peace you are in Beloved Community whether with your lover, co-worker, or congregant. When, just for a moment that restlessness is subdued and you feel one with the moment trusting the process and progress of things; every time you understand and are understood you are in beloved community. You are free to emerge and be who you are. Or as Gibran puts it: “you can rise and expand and seek God unencumbered.”

We've all felt this... We've all had a moment. What do you want to do when you get that realization? You want to sing or shout or dance or cry with joy; you feel good inside and know that everything's gonna be alright. The world may be topsy-turvy and we are forced as a species to look at a lot of the ugliness inside but even amidst this darkness, "a still small voice" reminds you that it will be okay; that "Weeping lasts for a night but joy comes in the morning."

I wish for you moments of BC (beloved community); that you will have a BC moment....That in this time of summer heat—your heart will, as John Wesley puts it "be strangely warmed" and you will find spaces and places to be/feel your true authentic self; places to give back; space to participate and work so that others have their full endowment of freedom.

And that's why I know that the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda was right when said these paradoxical words, as I close: **"Only a burning patience will lead to the attainment of a splendid happiness."** May it be so. Amen.