

A Contemplative, Poetic Sharing

Based on the tradition of

Lectio Divina

** An activity for 4 to 12 people **

Lectio

Begin with silence... read the poem 1, 2 or 3 times in its entirety.

Meditatio

See what words or phrases seem to "rise up" in importance; moving into oratio, and growing out of silence, speak words from the text-- no words of explanation--only give voice with a focus on pitch, cadence, volume--the musical elements of the language. This section will take AS LONG AS IT TAKES... keep a balance between silence and voice, be an active participant without dominating. LISTEN for meanings in the music, insight in the tone. This is poem as improvised symphony.

Oratio

As the voicings taper off, transition into journaling. Open up and capture whatever images, phrases, nuances, melodies—whatever— that you can. See where the lines of the poem, and in particular where the multiple voicings of the poem have taken you.

Contemplatio

Carry the poem, the voices, and the insight along with you. Continue voicing what is helpful, beneficial in your mind— even out loud as you are moved. What could be better than having poetry on one's lips and in one's mind at all times?!

The Music Connection:

The Neanderthals—there's no evidence that they had language. But they must have had a sophisticated form of communication. They were just like humans, they would have had to have told other people how they're feeling, they would have had to look after their children and nurture them. They had to have made plans for group hunting and general movement. So what sort of communications system did they have? Now I came to the conclusion which must have been based on high degrees of musicality because we can see traces of that in our nearest living relatives. This seems to be the only form of communication with that language that would have been complex to allow them to function as a social group, and yet not gone that extra step to modern language. So I think they communicated by using sets of phrases, almost like musical phrases that would have had semantic meanings, phrases such as something that would translate into "Let us share meat," "We'll go hunting" or "How are you feeling?" but would have been expressed in musical tones, different types of pitches, different types of rhythms. They might have used these also to build a sense of group identity, very much how we use music today, especially for caring for infants, you know just like we do today with our youngest children before they got language, we sing to them and move them rhythmically. I'm sure the Neanderthals would have been doing exactly the same.

—from interview with Stephen Mithen on PBS's "The Music Instinct: Science and Song"

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/musicinstinct/video/music-and-evolution/music-and-the-neanderthals-communication/66/>

We are wired for speech; we are wired for spoken language, for expressing and understanding spoken language. That's to say any human being who is exposed to language at a critical stage of development in their second or third year will acquire language without any explicit form of teaching. Chomsky above others has spoken wonderfully about this, but basically exposure to language activates language parts of the brain. However we are not wired for written language in the same way. Written language only goes back five or seven thousand years. There is no built-in circuitry in the brain for written language. But a circuitry is developed through learning to write, a circuitry which may be somewhat different in different people. In other words what is already in the brain is recruited and pressed into a new use when one learns to write. So in this way is music like speech? Or is it like writing? I'm inclined to think, but here only one can speculate, that both of these are involved. I think there are certain aspects of music which do not have any equivalent in speech, in particular the pulse of music, the steady rhythm, and its synchronization with movement. I think there is good reason for supposing for that is built in, and there are anatomical connections, which are strongly and almost exclusively developed in human beings.

—from interview with Oliver Sacks, MD, FRCP on PBS's "The Music Instinct: Science and Song"

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/musicinstinct/video/music-and-the-brain/are-humans-wired-for-music/54/>

What to Remember When Waking

by David Whyte

In that first hardly noticed moment in which you wake,
coming back to this life from the other
more secret, moveable and frighteningly honest world
where everything began,
there is a small opening into the new day
which closes the moment you begin your plans.

What you can plan is too small for you to live.
What you can live wholeheartedly will make plans enough
for the vitality hidden in your sleep.

To be human is to become visible
while carrying what is hidden as a gift to others.
To remember the other world *in* this world
is to live in your true inheritance.

You are not a troubled guest on this earth,
you are not an accident amidst other accidents
you were invited from another and greater night
than the one from which you have just emerged.

Now, looking through the slanting light of the morning window
toward the mountain presence of everything that can be
what urgency calls you to your one love?
What shape waits in the seed of you
to grow and spread its branches
against a future sky?

Is it waiting in the fertile sea?
In the trees beyond the house?
In the life you can imagine for yourself?
In the open and lovely white page on the waiting desk?

Being a Person

by William Stafford

Be a person here. Stand by the river, invoke
the owls. Invoke winter, then spring.
Let any season that wants to come here make its own
call. After that sound goes away, wait.

A slow bubble rises through the earth
and begins to include sky, stars, all space,
even the outracing, expanding thought.
Come back and hear the little sound again.

Suddenly this dream you are having matches
everyone's dream, and the result is the world.
If a different call came there wouldn't be any
world, or you, or the river, or the owls calling

How you stand here is important. How you
listen for the next things to happen. How you breathe.

The Yellow Bowl

by Rachel Contreni Flynn

If light pours like water
into the kitchen where I sway
with my tired children,

if the rug beneath us
is woven with tough flowers,
and the yellow bowl on the table

rests with the sweet heft
of fruit, the sun-warmed plums,
if my body curves over the babies,

and if I am singing,
then loneliness has lost its shape,
and this quiet is only quiet.

Notes