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#19: Introduction to Penney's Peirce's Poetry book

### **arrow of truth lands in the lake, a mouth makes a joyful sound**

Poems on the Path to Spirit

## **Writing a Poem as a Sacred Act**

The urge to keep a journal and write poems seized me early. Inspired by several years when my family lived on a farm in Kansas, I penned this preteen masterpiece: "The most beautiful time in Kansas, I think/Is when the sky turns shades of blue, gray, and pink/This is the time when the breezes are few/And this is the time when the insects are, too." Luckily, keeping on does refine one's sensibilities and craft. Yet even in this juvenile rhyme, there's a seed of the reverence I've always felt for nature, for the way it becomes the Teacher if we can really be quiet and listen.

I carry a journal on airplanes and hikes, to mountaintops, beaches, and foreign countries. A poem is such a good way to distill the essence of a confusing or inspiring experience by blending actual detail with feeling to find the core spiritual message. After the last line mysteriously appears, as though from some inner master, I often feel sublimely wide-eyed, relieved, and wiser.

There have been times when a poem pressured me insistently, practically screaming at me to pull the car over and get a pen and paper from my purse. Then it would explode out in a rhythm all its own like a frilly belch or series of comical hiccups. At other times, I'd hear a phrase that felt like a first line, though I had no idea what the poem might be about. Sometimes a round bulge in my solar plexus would rise slowly to my chest, exciting me, and I'd know there was something that wanted to be said. If I could listen closely, and feel for the rhythm, the opening line would slide out, like a baby from the birth canal, setting the tone for the rest to flow upon.

Writing a poem is such a fascinating and magical thing. So often the words aren't there at first. It's just a mood that captures the whole body, and the mood is like a blueprint that patterns the mind and filters the words. If I stay in it, merged and a servant, the pattern picks the particular flow of sounds. The first thought is often only one plain garment that wraps itself around the meaning the poem seeks to reveal. The whole costume comes into view only because I start to dress myself—the lacy blouse leads to the short socks and black flats, to the purple slacks, to the long scarf, to the rakish beret. Et, voila! Zee outfit!

Looking back through my collection of poetic punctuation marks, I see they describe many human moments of walking the path toward spiritual fulfillment. The Path certainly has its ups, downs, and sudden turns, yet it also follows inherently orderly principles. My intention here is to place kernels of observation in a vaguely natural order, to create a flow that might parallel your process of walking The Path, so you might draw some small inspiration or

comfort from the fact that there are many of us who try to perceive clearly, act from higher motives, develop the courage to face and understand subconscious fears as they emerge from the underworld, and still keep our feet planted in the rich soil of this incredible planet. In observing what goes on in myself, I always find it to be a close version of what other people are experiencing, so my hope is that as you read the poems, you'll feel it might just as easily be you talking.

I am mostly fascinated with what is simple, ordinary, childlike, and at the same time profound. What creates a living state of awareness, a contagious mood, the timeless pause? I'm not so motivated to write a great poem structurally, as I am in catalyzing "real moments" and turning on the heart's lightswitch. I'm also interested in the differences in the way men and women perceive the path to spirit. Culturally, we seem to have accepted a predominantly male priesthood's ideas of abstinence, detachment, and overcoming the sinful body and emotions with mental discipline as the only truths about how to reach heaven.

As a woman, I've always felt that the earth has great dignity, wisdom, and light and is far from an evil force or a place of suffering. All actions—be they sane, insane, compassionate, or selfish—exist within the body of the Great Knower/Lover. To reject part of our totality is to miss the wide road to enlightenment. I believe human emotion and the capacity to feel is our saving grace; it is what differentiates us from the minerals, plants, animals—even the angelic realm—and makes humanity such an important cosmic experiment. To feel passion and know the inner fire allows us to evolve consciously and intentionally. And thus, we can drive the evolution of the physical plane and accelerate the flow of consciousness through heightened yearning. To accept everything about our humanness and love it with the compassion of the Great Mother, is to enter into a union with Spirit that gives much greater enlightenment than can be attained by moral dictates. We must learn to trust the natural laws inherent in our cells, in the mechanism of perception itself, and fall into the formless order, as the fast-flying arrow of Truth ironically lands in the all-enveloping, deep, dark lake of Joy.

I wrote the title for this volume of poems years ago, as a brief little haiku-like line, after throwing the I Ching one day. I received hexagram 58, Tui, The Joyous, Lake, as the answer to my question. The hexagram is composed of two identical trigrams: above: The Joyous, Lake, and below: The Joyous, Lake. The description says it is characterized by "the smiling lake," and "joy is indicated by the fact that there are two strong lines within, expressing themselves through the medium of gentleness." It goes on to say that, "Truth and strength must dwell in the heart, while gentleness reveals itself in social intercourse. In this way one assumes the right attitude toward God and man achieves something." The image is described: "A lake evaporates upward and thus gradually dries up; but when two lakes are joined they do not dry up so readily, for one replenishes the other. It is the same in the field of knowledge. Knowledge should be a refreshing and vitalizing force."

Truth is something that really does not have to be regulated and monitored; it is encoded in the inner blueprint of our etheric body, organizing us from the inside in intricate harmony. We can relax about saving ourselves, we are already saved. We can relax about drowning in the void of the black lake; a huge part of us is always "dead," existing in the ecstatic nonphysical realms where diamond light is more evident than emptiness.

What characterizes our planet is its feminine, watery nature. We are creatures born of water, capable of breathing water as we gestate. We think we leave the liquid state at birth, yet we are really liquid light; our consciousness flows. Our hearts melt. Our fears evaporate. Our soul can feel parched. Our minds freeze up without poetry and prayer and devotion and awe. In these days, we are returning to Her and the knowledge of a fluid—not solid—world.

The journey into spirit, as I experience it, is not through the air, flying over the flooded rivers and streams, nor into the far reaches of outer space. It's not about collecting more information, even of the highest ilk. To evolve we must dive. First into the waters of our own emotions, and into those of humanity as a whole, then down into matter itself. We must learn to breathe matter, to condense ourselves into stone, losing our sight, where eventually, if we wait attentively, a new spacious world of liquid light appears, which has been present all along. Then, enveloped in a greater freedom, we can hear the original Word, and on that spiral of sound, wind ourselves back out to our Home place where every ephemeral dream is dissolved and the one real thing is remembered.

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