

## A Fully Engaged Life – Dale Biron OLLI 2014 (Poems - Week#2)

### **The Truly Great BY STEPHEN SPENDER**

I think continually of those who were truly great.  
Who, from the womb, remembered the soul's history  
Through corridors of light, where the hours are suns,  
Endless and singing. Whose lovely ambition  
Was that their lips, still touched with fire,  
Should tell of the Spirit, clothed from head to foot in song.  
And who hoarded from the Spring branches  
The desires falling across their bodies like blossoms.

What is precious, is never to forget  
The essential delight of the blood drawn from ageless springs  
Breaking through rocks in worlds before our earth.  
Never to deny its pleasure in the morning simple light  
Nor its grave evening demand for love.  
Never to allow gradually the traffic to smother  
With noise and fog, the flowering of the spirit.

Near the snow, near the sun, in the highest fields,  
See how these names are fêted by the waving grass  
And by the streamers of white cloud  
And whispers of wind in the listening sky.  
The names of those who in their lives fought for life,  
Who wore at their hearts the fire's centre.  
Born of the sun, they travelled a short while toward the sun  
And left the vivid air signed with their honour.

### **A Brief for the Defense**

Jack Gilbert

Sorrow everywhere. Slaughter everywhere. If babies are not starving  
someplace, they are starving somewhere else. With flies in their  
nostrils. But we enjoy our lives because that's what God wants. Otherwise  
the mornings before summer dawn would not be made so fine. The  
Bengal tiger would not be fashioned so miraculously well. The poor  
women at the fountain are laughing together between the suffering they  
have known and the awfulness in their future, smiling and laughing while  
somebody in the village is very sick. There is laughter every day in the  
terrible streets of Calcutta, and the women laugh in the cages of  
Bombay. If we deny our happiness, resist our satisfaction, we lessen the  
importance of their deprivation. We must risk delight. We can do without  
pleasure, but not delight. Not enjoyment. We must have the stubbornness  
to accept our gladness in the ruthless furnace of this world. To make  
injustice the only measure of our attention is to praise the Devil. If the  
locomotive of the Lord runs us down, we should give thanks that the end  
had magnitude. We must admit there will be music despite  
everything. We stand at the prow again of a small ship anchored late at  
night in the tiny port looking over to the sleeping island: the waterfront is  
three shuttered cafés and one naked light burning. To hear the faint  
sound of oars in the silence as a rowboat comes slowly out and then  
goes back is truly worth all the years of sorrow that are to come.

### **Prelude – by Wordsworth)**

And in the meadows and the lower grounds  
Was all the sweetness of a common dawn--  
Dews, vapours, and the melody of birds,  
And labourers going forth to till the fields.  
Ah! need I say, dear Friend! that to the brim  
My heart was full; I made no vows, but vows  
Were then made for me; bond unknown to me  
Was given, that I should be, else sinning greatly,  
A dedicated Spirit. On I walked  
In thankful blessedness, which yet survives.

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**Listen** by W.S. Merwin

with the night falling we are saying thank you  
we are stopping on the bridges to bow for the railings  
we are running out of the glass rooms  
with our mouths full of food to look at the sky  
and say thank you  
we are standing by the water looking out  
in different directions.

back from a series of hospitals back from a mugging  
after funerals we are saying thank you  
after the news of the dead  
whether or not we knew them we are saying thank you  
looking up from tables we are saying thank you  
in a culture up to its chin in shame  
living in the stench it has chosen we are saying thank you

over telephones we are saying thank you  
in doorways and in the backs of cars and in elevators  
remembering wars and the police at the back door  
and the beatings on stairs we are saying thank you  
in the banks that use us we are saying thank you  
with the crooks in office with the rich and fashionable  
unchanged we go on saying thank you thank you

with the animals dying around us  
our lost feelings we are saying thank you  
with the forests falling faster than the minutes  
of our lives we are saying thank you  
with the words going out like cells of a brain  
with the cities growing over us like the earth  
we are saying thank you faster and faster  
with nobody listening we are saying thank you  
we are saying thank you and waving  
dark though it is

But yield who will to their separation,  
My object in living is to unite  
My avocation and my vocation  
As my two eyes make one in sight.  
Only where love and need are one,  
And the work is play for mortal stakes,  
Is the deed ever really done  
For Heaven and the future's sakes.  
(From **Two Tramps in Mudtime** Robert Frost)

For a New Beginning

In out-of-the-way places of the heart,  
Where your thoughts never think to wander,  
This beginning has been quietly forming,  
Waiting until you were ready to emerge.

For a long time it has watched your desire,  
Feeling the emptiness growing inside you,  
Noticing how you willed yourself on,  
Still unable to leave what you had outgrown.

It watched you play with the seduction of safety  
And the gray promises that sameness whispered,  
Heard the waves of turmoil rise and relent,  
Wondered would you always live like this.

Then the delight, when your courage kindled,  
And out you stepped onto new ground,  
Your eyes young again with energy and **dream**,  
A path of plenitude opening before you.

Though your destination is not yet clear  
You can trust the promise of this opening;  
Unfurl yourself into the grace of beginning  
That is at one with your life's desire.

Awaken your spirit to adventure;  
Hold nothing back, learn to find ease in risk;  
Soon you will be home in a new rhythm,  
For your soul senses the world that awaits you.

~ John O'Donohue ~