

You own nothing

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One of the most important lessons that meditation has to teach us is detachment. Detachment is not dissociation from yourself, turning away from your problems or life situation. It is not denial of friendship or affection, or even of passion. It is, in essence,

detachment from self-preoccupation, from the mind-set that puts self at the center of all creation. [. . .] In meditation we let go of our desire to control, to possess, to dominate. We seek to be who we are. Being who we are, we are open to the God who is. It is in that openness that we are filled with wonder, power and energy—the energy to be and to be in love. [. . .]

To be detached from our possessions is to be free from them, to not be possessed by them. We must learn a detachment not only from our [material possessions] but from our thoughts, feelings, desires, and even our self-consciousness. This not only seems to our modern minds to be an impossibility, but it even seems to be a scandal that anybody should seriously propose this. But it is exactly the truth. [. . .] To meditate is to lose yourself, to become absorbed in God, to be utterly lost in the generous immensity that we call God.

After meditation: “The Moment” by Margaret Atwood in EATING FIRE (London: Virago, 1998), via www.poetryarchive.org.

The Moment

The moment when, after many years
of hard work and a long voyage
you stand in the centre of your room,
house, half-acre, square mile, island, country,
knowing at last how you got there,
and say, I own this,

is the same moment when the trees unloose
their soft arms from around you,
the birds take back their language,
the cliffs fissure and collapse,
the air moves back from you like a wave
and you can't breathe.

No, they whisper. You own nothing.
You were a visitor, time after time
climbing the hill, planting the flag, proclaiming.
We never belonged to you.
You never found us.
It was always the other way round.

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