

With Your Arms Open

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To see reality as it is, or at least to free oneself progressively of its filters, is a major act of faith. It expresses the trusting face of faith because our attachment to the beliefs and rituals of our tradition can become a false and falsifying security. And so, many deeply religious people feel an aversion or antipathy to meditation because it seems to (and indeed does) undermine the secure boundaries that protect our world view and our sense of being superiorly different from others.

A way of faith, however, is not a dogged adherence to one point of view and to the belief systems and ritual traditions that express it. That would make it just ideology or sectarianism, not faith. Faith is a transformational journey that demands that we move in, through and beyond our frameworks of belief and external observances—not betraying or rejecting them but not being entrapped by their forms of expression either. St Paul spoke of the way of salvation as beginning and ending in faith. Faith is thus an open-endedness, from the very beginning of the human journey. There is, of course, value in a framework, a system and tradition. [But] if we are stably centered in these, the process of change unfolds and our perspective of truth is continuously enlarged.

After meditation: “Where Does the Temple Begin, Where Does it End?” by Mary Oliver in *devotions* (New York: Penguin, 2017), pp. 186-87.

WHERE DOES THE TEMPLE BEGIN, WHERE DOES IT END?

There are things you can't reach. But
you can reach out to them, and all day long.

The wind, the bird flying away. The idea of God.

And it can keep you as busy as anything else, and happier.

The snake slides away; the fish jumps, like a little lily,
out of the water and back in; the goldfinches sing
from the unreachable top of the tree.

I look; morning to night I am never done with looking.

Looking I mean not just standing around, but standing around
as though with your arms open.

And thinking: maybe something will come, some
shining coil of wind,
or a few leaves from any old tree—

they are all in this too.

And now I will tell you the truth.
Everything in the world
comes.

At least, closer.

And, cordially.

Like the nibbling, tinsel-eyed fish; the unlooping snake;
Like goldfinches, little dolls of gold
fluttering around the corner of the sky
of God, the blue air.