

Something Breaks Free

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Sometimes, when we are forced into something and feel imprisoned by a coldly impersonal, external force, we may burn up in rage at it or go into depression. And yet sometimes, just sometimes if we are fortunate, the experience of being compelled liberates us into new and surprising views of reality. We encounter something unexpected, a hidden grace that could not otherwise have been able to find us.

As in meditation, there are times when we sit in a desert, dry and endlessly distracted by our anxieties or losses. An empty desolation stretches as far as we can feel in every direction. Better, we think, to do something useful or self-indulgent. The solitude is not the open space in which we feel connected to a greater whole but aloneness, constriction, abandonment or the feeling of being forgotten. The spectre of affliction haunts our soul.

Then from an inner point, without location, an invisible ray of light touches and restores our shriveled soul to life and hope. Not that all our wishes are fulfilled, in fact none of them may be, and the pain or loss may still be only too present. But a joy emerges that opens a pathway to the source of being, our being.

After meditation: "Sojourns in the Parallel World" by Denise Levertov in *THE LIFE AROUND US: Selected Poems on Nature* (New York: New Directions, 1997), pp. 75-6.

We live our lives of human passions,
cruelties, dreams, concepts,
crimes and the exercise of virtue
in and beside a world devoid
of our preoccupations, free
from apprehension—though affected,
certainly, by our actions. A world
parallel to our own though overlapping.
We call it 'Nature'; only reluctantly
admitting ourselves to be 'Nature' too.
Whenever we lose track of our own obsessions,
our self-concerns, because we drift for a minute,
an hour even, of pure (almost pure)
response to that insouciant life:
cloud, bird, fox, the flow of light, the dancing
pilgrimage of water, vast stillness
of spellbound ephemerae on a lit windowpane,
animal voices, mineral hum, wind
conversing with rain, ocean with rock, stuttering
of fire to coal—then something tethered
in us, hobbled like a donkey on its patch
of gnawed grass and thistles, breaks free.
No one discovers
just where we've been, when we're caught up again
into our own sphere (where we must
return, indeed, to evolve our destinies)

–but we have changed, a little.

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