

Poetry and meditation

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At the outset, I might posit for clarification that the word “meditation” implies a duality, suggesting a subject that meditates upon an object, while my own practice of so-called meditation involves an experience of non-duality, of just being here now. I thus prefer the noun “sitting” and the verb “to sit.” However, for the purposes of this text, I will conform to the conventions of the seminar and use the word meditation.

Like the late American poet and Zen master Philip Whalen, I would say, “My writing is the manifestation of my mind moving.” Meditation is a practice / posture wherein I can experience directly the impermanent nature and interconnection of all beings and things because I am not interfering with how things are or with the endless, inexorable flow of the whole of life. It thus involves a “dwelling” in “non-dwelling,” seeking to not fix my attention on any one thing but rather to be attentive to it all. The poem is an attempt to express in words that experience of things-as-they-are-here-and-now. Meditation helps me cultivate the “negative capability” of Keats, the possibility of remaining in uncertainty, mystery, doubt, so as to better experience and express just what is, without grasping for reason, explanation, logic. Meditation and poetry both open the doors to the silence of the sacred and the unknown. Both are ways of living, arts of living, manifestations of the two faces of reality: meditation is non-dual, silent, without form, a “perfect” unity before words and language, where all is equal; poetry is dual, concrete, a written / spoken expression with an “imperfect” diversity of different words and language. Thus the challenge. Thus the beauty. And thus the celebration: “Ring the bells that still can ring / Forget your perfect offering,” the poet and Zen monk Leonard Cohen sings in his song “Anthem.” “There is a crack in everything / That’s how the light gets in.”