

BEING TRUE TO LIFE: POETIC PATHS TO PERSONAL GROWTH.

David Richo

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The pleasure of reading and writing poetry helps me God-ward.
Thomas Merton

Poetry is the sound an event makes when it lands in meaning.
David Richo

This engaging volume invites the reader to encounter the mystery of life through reading and writing poetry. In this invitation, author David Richo draws heavily on his background in Zen Buddhism, Christianity and Jungian analysis.

To the reader's surprise, Richo leaves the reading of poetry to the last chapter, albeit an enlightening section. He starts us off with writing poetry-- something for all of us, not just a talented few. He asserts that we each have a poet within and that working with poetry can be transformative. Over the past 10 years, I have been learning this lesson.

Having chosen to study math and science early in life, it was a great surprise when I felt drawn to learning to write poetry 10 years ago. This interest in poetry was associated with a vision problem hampering my usual professional writing – the appeal of a small number of words at a time - as well as five years of journaling and a midlife desire to deepen spiritual practice. Nowadays I work at writing poetry regularly. I have been heartened by the way this practice has attuned me to the 'here and now' while at the same time leading me inward. My gratitude and humility are never greater than when my words seem to flow from the sacred place beyond (or deepest within) me.

Richo tells us that "to write poetry is to see more deeply". The practice of poetry can give us perspective; lead us to see our personal experience in light of the universal and the sacred; draw us closer to our earth; and integrate body and mind as we seek to be mindful through all our senses. Poetry offers a pathway to "universal meanings; it combines personal and universal self-discovery". Writing poetry highlights the spiritual tension between allowing grace and making the effort.

With his own successive drafts, he takes us through the creative process of

carving the raw stone of our original inspiration to discover its hidden truth and thereby producing a poem backspace. After describing this process for a poem which turned out to be more about his father than he knew himself, he comments, “It was a spiritual practice to put this poem together, because I began in mindfulness and moved through imagination into lovingkindness”. In the process of writing this poem about a film scene, the author fully re-experienced childhood emotions of abandonment and came to forgiveness and a grace-filled sense of letting go.

Poetry can be healing and transformative as it makes experience legible and links us with universal symbols, images, architects, and myths of the collective unconscious. Poetry practice can mirror the phases of the heroic journey, a developmental theme central to all cultures. Writing a poem involves leaving the home of everyday life – setting off with mindfulness, imagination, openness – to experience something new, passing through struggles, and returning home with gifts.

Being True to Life makes use of a rich set of poems and quotations to link poetry to spiritual practice. Exercises, visualizations, and descriptions of spiritual activities such as meditation offer specific instruction and motivation for writing and reading poetry.

*As we read and write poetry, we find out how far
we, too, can stretch, rotate, twirl and reshape ourselves.
We find our range of movement, our capacity to pause,
and our depth of silence.*

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