

# Friends of Silence

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“Is there enough Silence for the Word to be heard?”

Dear Friends ~ Here is how you play “Hippo Toss”, a game designed for two players:

1. Commandeer the lime green squeaking hippo from the dog’s toy basket.
2. Stand opposite your opponent (in my case, it’s my nine-year-old son, the mind behind “Hippo Toss”).
3. Chuck your latex hippopotamus into the air, willing it to land—sturdy—on four feet.
4. If the hippo lands upright, congratulations! You’ve earned a point. If the hippo bumps onto its back, I’m sorry to say you’ve lost a point. The first player to accumulate ten points wins. Best of luck!



Joy Houck Bauer

“Hippo Toss” is still in the beta stages, which means each time we face off my son carefully considers unforeseen nuances and hones the rules accordingly: Does it count if the hippo bounces off your leg? What if it rolls on its side? From sports to board games, for years he’s absorbed what makes a game challenging, fair, enjoyable. Now I watch as he shifts from consumer to creator, leaning into the human inclination to add something new to the world.

“Beware, my body and my soul, beware above all of crossing your arms and assuming the sterile attitude of the spectator, for life is not a spectacle...” author Aimé Césaire implores. Each of us is a physical being, brimming with experience and ideas, and these bodies become our literal tools of participation and invention—whether penning words on a page or considering the intricacies of how a bug-eyed toy does or doesn’t land standing up.

Intermingled with morning birdsong, I can hear the distinct “squonk” of the hippo from our front yard. I know it will be delicious to run barefoot in the springtime grass, chasing that hippopotamus and tallying points, so I’m headed out to join my youngest. I’ll leave you in good company: the catalyzing voices of artists and contemplatives who remind us to follow those life-giving creative impulses. To “*experience becoming...*” ~ Joy



**And yet, I know artists whose medium is Life itself, and who express the inexpressible without brush, pencil, chisel, or guitar. They neither paint nor dance. Their medium is Being. Whatever their hand touches has increased Life. They SEE and don’t have to draw. They are the artists of being alive.**

~ Frederick Franck in *THE ZEN OF SEEING*

I have come to believe that unless we are making something, we cannot know the depth of God’s being and God’s grace permeating our lives and God’s creation.

~ Makoto Fujimura in *ART AND FAITH: A THEOLOGY OF MAKING*

Our spiritual traditions have carried virtues across time. They are tools for the art of living. They are pieces of intelligence about human behavior that neuroscience is now exploring with new words and images: what we practice, we become. What’s true of playing the piano or throwing a ball

**Compose. (No ideas  
but in things) Invent!**

~ William Carlos Williams from

“A Sort Of A Song” in *THE WEDGE*

also holds for our capacity to move through the world mindlessly and destructively or generously and gracefully. I’ve come to think of virtues and rituals as spiritual technologies for being our best selves in flesh and blood, time and space. There are superstar virtues that come most readily to mind and can be the work of a day or a lifetime—love, compassion, forgiveness. And there are gentle shifts of mind and habit that make those possible, working patiently through the raw materials of our lives.

~ Krista Tippett in *BECOMING WISE:*

*AN INQUIRY INTO THE MYSTERY AND ART OF LIVING*



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**The man who has many answers  
is often found  
in the theaters of information  
where he offers, graciously,  
his deep findings.  
While the man who has only questions,  
to comfort himself, makes music.**

~ Mary Oliver, “The Man Who Has Many Answers”  
in *A THOUSAND MORNINGS: POEMS*



**The spring is back. The earth is like a child who's learnt a heap of poems off by heart: so many of them, and how hard she toiled! But she wins prizes now; she has them pat.**

**At school, her teacher was a strict old man, although we liked the whiteness of his beard. Now, when we ask her please to give a name to colours green or blue, she knows the word!**

**Earth, you're in luck; today's a holiday. We children want to catch you; come and play. Whoever laughs the most will win the game.**

**Her teacher's lessons, wearisome and long, are printed in each root, each stiff, straight stem. And listen now: she's turned them into song!**

*~ Rainer Maria Rilke, "Sonnets to Orpheus Part One: XXI", as translated by John Richmond*

*There are always two poems—  
the one you want to write  
and the other that must write itself.*

*~ M. NourbeSe Philip  
in ZONG!*

Education is...a drawing out of one's own genius, nature, and heart. The manifestation of one's essence, the unfolding of one's capacities, the revelation of one's heretofore hidden possibilities... From another side, study amplifies the speech and song of the world so that it's more palpably present.

Education in the soul leads to the enchantment of the world and the attunement of self.

*~ Thomas Moore in MEDITATIONS*

Because of the routines we follow, we often forget that life is an ongoing adventure...and the sooner we realize that, the quicker we will be able to treat life as art: to bring all our energies to each encounter, to remain flexible enough to notice and admit when what we expected to happen did not happen. We need to remember that we are created creative...

*~ Maya Angelou in WOULD'N'T TAKE NOTHING FOR MY JOURNEY NOW*

It does not cost much. It is pleasant: one of those almost hypnotic businesses, like a dance from some ancient ceremony. It leaves you filled with peace, and the house filled with one of the world's sweetest smells. But it takes a lot of time. If you can find that, the rest is easy. If you cannot rightly find it, make it, for probably there is no chiropractic treatment, no Yoga exercise, no hour of meditation in a music-throbbing chapel, that will leave you emptier of bad thoughts than this homely ceremony of making bread.

*~ M.F.K. Fisher in HOW TO COOK A WOLF*



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**An awake heart is like a sky that pours light.**

*~ Hafiz*

Practice any art, music, singing, dancing, acting, drawing, painting, sculpting, poetry, fiction, essays, reportage, no matter how well or badly, not to get money and fame, but to experience becoming, to find out what's inside you, to make your soul grow.

Seriously! I mean starting right now, do art and do it for the rest of your lives...

Here's an assignment for tonight... Write a six line poem, about anything, but rhymed... But don't tell anybody what you're doing...

Tear it up into teeny-weeny pieces, and discard them into widely separated trash receptacles. You will find that you have already been gloriously rewarded for your poem. You have experienced becoming, learned a lot more about what's inside you, and you have made your soul grow.

*~ Kurt Vonnegut in MORE LETTERS OF NOTE*

**Let us sing to the Creator of the cosmos,  
to the divine power of love!  
When we look at the wondrous display  
of the heavens,  
at the Earth with its infinite  
variety of life,  
Who are we that You love us, that You  
rejoice in our being;  
that You trust us to care for creation  
in all its splendor,  
inviting us to become co-creators  
with You?  
Let us celebrate the mystery of life!  
Let us commit our lives to  
the Divine Plan!**

*~ Nan Merrill from  
MEDITATIONS AND MANDALAS*