

How long will you keep pounding
on an open door begging for
someone to open it?

-Rabia Basri



Inside this Issue

1. Doorways: A Riddle
2. Etymology: Hope

Doorways: A Riddle



“Every wall is a door,” says Ralph Waldo Emerson. There is no reason why we shouldn’t walk through every door while we wait. Questions are placed before us everyday, most of these questions about what to do with our time. Money is generally the context for these questions, but what if the question is really how we spend our time?

Money is something that is earned, or stolen, but time is relative and given to each of us. It is this relativity that makes life seem so ambiguous and often times terrible. With so many options in contemporary society and resources available everywhere, the question isn’t what should I do, but when should I start. Distractions come to us almost infinitely, that putting one’s hands to the plough proves harder than anticipated.

Here is something to contemplate: Whatever you think you can do, or believe you can do, begin it; for action has magic and grace in it? Sound familiar?

There are so many people in the world with beautiful talents, often right before their very eyes, and yet we often look everywhere but there. Why do we do this? I can speak to this likely better than anyone. I have been a fast-food worker, worked in factories, managed Starbucks, been a carpenter, painter, and a stone mason. I managed receiving departments for Barnes and Noble, and parked cars as a valet in this wonderful community we live. Every job gave me something to believe in and taught me something I took with me. Maybe it was a person, maybe it was a skill, but there was always beauty there, hidden in the dark.

What I am asking is, “What has your current job taught you? Are you content with your job? Do you do it because it is comfortable and changing seems too complicated? Has your imagination bullied you, and you have begun to think there is no possible way you could ever start something else, maybe something that has been within you all along?” Tell me, is there a reason you stay doing what you don’t feel connected to, or that isn’t meaningful to you? If any of these questions are true, you are human. It has become a part of our culture to believe there is no hope in the midst of complexities.

I know that you can be anything you want to be. Time has a funny way, maybe even whimsical way, to aid you in what you want. There is grace in the midst of time. Time offers the smallest actions to help us start along the way, yet not to those who never begin. The journey will be filled with many monsters, most of them inside oneself, and there will be failure, but it is worth every second.

Etymology: Hope

St. Paul bids “hope, even against hope.” Goodness, what does that even mean? I have read numerous etymology of hope, but none even come close to his ethic of hope. In our culture hope is an ideology, but not yet existential. What drives hope? How is hope incarnate in our lives? I found this to be one word that has worked itself to the formless due to our misunderstanding.

The etymologies are as esoteric as St. Paul’s statement. We find a range from Old English *hopa* (hope, expectation) to Proto-Indo-European **kēwp-*, **kwēp-* (to smoke, boil). Extra-Germanic cognates include Latin *cupio* (to desire, crave) and possibly Latin *vapor* (vapor; smoke).

Nouns include one definition “uncountable?” in Old English, *hoop* in Northern England and Scotland (hollow; a valley, especially the upper end of a narrow mountain valley when it is nearly encircled by smooth, green slopes; a comb). Lastly, found when I was exploring, is Icelandic *hóp* (a small bay or inlet). With the word having an almost dark sense, let us descend to Hermes underworld and find our way home.

Jacques Ellul in his work *Hope in the Time of Abandonment* explores with a heart surgeon’s precision the existential nature of hope. He asks at the outset of the work, “When do we hope?” This, he says, is the most important context for de-mythologizing the formless and giving it wings. He continues, is it not when we are “in the valley, without anyway out?” Do we not hope when we are stuck with only two thoughts that keep haunting us, but can never see the third option? How many times has this hope descended upon us, but we call it despair. What does this cloaked word mean?

Hope is a state of being he concludes, a state where it feels you are trapped, maybe even of your supposed own doing. Maybe its when this stasis of hope descends, which existentially feels like despair, that you should just remain in despair. Maybe its when we “despair against despair” that we are really in trouble. Maybe its when we despair in our minds and then set this state in with our actions? Next time you think your stuck, just despair once, then wait for the fire to consume it.

Ekphrasis: A Beginning

As a writer I often find myself somewhere in the written word. I write so I can understand. Contrary to the outsider’s reasoning that one writes after understanding, rather writing is how we understand; another of life’s many riddles. I had a teacher at IU who observed my perfectionist tendencies, “Tim, nothing is ever done, it is just due.” She healed me of a writer’s pitfall.

How is it that writing is the hardest thing in the world to do, but where one should always begin any deep intellectual study? Constance Weaver, a pedagogical theorist from Western Michigan, has a simple formula built upon new science of learning that “good readers make good writers make good speakers.” Mastering one before the other is essential to her algorithm.

An ekphrastic challenge is one way that aids against the daemon we know as writer’s block. Ekphrasis is a Greek word that means in translation “to describe a work of art.” It is simply an exercise in writing. Explore this painting by Andrew Wyeth? What does it mean to you?



Andrew Wyeth, 1986, Watercolor on Paper