THE GREAT OPENING

These beauteous forms,
Through a long absence, have not been to me
As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:
But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;
And passing even into my purer mind
With tranquil restoration:—feelings too
Of unremembered pleasure: such, perhaps,
As have no slight or trivial influence
On that best portion of a good man's life,
His little, nameless, unremembered, acts
Of kindness and of love. **Nor less, I trust,**
To them I may have owed another gift,
Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood,
In which the burthen of the mystery,
In which the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world,
Is lightened:—that serene and blessed mood,
In which the affections gently lead us on,—
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul:
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.

And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.

--excerpts from Wordsworth, **Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour. July 13, 1798**

RABBI ABRAHAM JOSHUA HESCHEL ON WONDER

The greatest hindrance to knowledge is our adjustment to conventional notions, to mental clichés. Wonder or radical amazement, the state of maladjustment to words and notions, is, therefore, a prerequisite for an authentic awareness of that which is.
Standing eye to eye with being as being, we realize that we are able to look at the world with two faculties-with reason and with wonder…

Spiritually we cannot live by merely reiterating borrowed or inherited knowledge. Inquire of your soul what does it know, what does it take for granted. It will tell you only nothing is taken for granted; each thing is a surprise, being is unbelievable. We are amazed at seeing anything at all; amazed not only at particular values and things but at the unexpectedness of being as such, at the fact that there is being at all.
---Abraham Joshua Heschel, Man Is Not Alone (Harper Torchbook, 1966), pp 11-12.

חִיּוּת CHIYUT/ALIVENESS R. Menachem Nachum of Chernobyl

To the Hasidim, the creation described in Genesis is not a past event, but ongoing. The whole universe, they believed, would instantly disappear if God's will did not sustain it. They taught God is a living presence, an **aliveness** found in every human being, animal, river, rock, and tree.

Among the early masters of Hasidism was Menachem Nachum of Chernobyl (1730-1787). He taught that even if you see the entire world as mere matter so you fall into despair, you should remember that "the Holy One is called 'the life of all life' and that for any creature in the world, whether birds, animals or humans, their aliveness is the Blessed Holy One. That One is the aliveness of all life." So "the remedy for losing all hope is to think, 'Am I not alive?' and Who is this aliveness, if not the Blessed Holy One?" These pious Jews wanted to feel God's presence in everyday life and so like Wordsworth they turned to nature.—Seeing into the Life of Things, p 70

"in all things/ I saw one life and felt that it was joy."—Wordsworth, "The Prelude"

We walked together in a vast and orderly French garden that extended for miles—with topiary on white gravel paths and bright flowers and fountains circled in green. We stopped and looked back along the way we had come. I am not sure what we saw but remember it this way: A slight breeze moved a blue lily on its high stalk. An oriole flew from a branch. A coin dropped on the tile edge of a fountain. We witnessed three separate events, one after the other.

Then a voice which seemed to be coming from everywhere at once spoke: “All these things pass through the spirit like a single wave through water.” ---Seeing into the Life of Things pp. 98-99

Once the Baal Shem Tov saw a Jew working on his wagon during the Sabbath. Instead of reacting to this desecration and scolding the man, he looked inward and asked: Why am I being shown this? At first, he couldn’t find a reason. But then he recalled that when others were denigrating a Torah scholar, he’d remained silent. “According to the Rabbis,” he told his students, “a Torah scholar is on the spiritual level of Shabbat.” Then he understood that “God had made me see it” to make him reflect on his ways.

“The truth is,” he said, “that nothing happens in this world without a purpose, and everything that takes place before your eyes was sent from heaven for you to see, and everything that enters your ears was sent for you to hear.” --Seeing into the Life of Things p. 172.

W.H. AUDEN

“The concern of the Primary Imagination, its only concern, is with sacred beings and sacred events.”

For W.H. Auden, “A sacred being cannot be anticipated, it must be encountered. On encounter the imagination has no option but to respond.... The response of the imagination to such a presence...is a passion of awe.” –Seeing into the Life of Things, pp. 150-151

Auden remarks that the awe that comes in sacred encounter “may vary greatly in intensity and range in tone from joyous wonder to panic dread.”

“The impulse to create a work of art is felt when, in certain persons, the passive awe provoked by sacred beings or events is transformed into a desire to express that awe in a rite of worship or homage, and to be fit homage the rite must be beautiful...In poetry the rite is verbal; it pays homage by naming.” Here poetry is akin to prayer. Seeing into the Life of Things pp.161

SEEING INTO THE LIFE OF THINGS: IMAGINATION AND THE SACRED ENCOUNTER

Available from Bookshop.org https://bit.ly/INDYSITLOT

Or Amazon https://amzn.to/3RkGf6g