

## **“A Letter from the World”**

*“Here is the world; beautiful and terrible things will happen.*

*Be not afraid.*

*Because this is what we are about:*

*We hold hope for each other when hope is hard to find.*

*We plant seeds that will one day grow.*

*We are prophets of a future not our own.*

*We cannot do everything,*

*But we can do something.*

*So forget your perfect offering.*

*There is a crack in everything.*

*That is how the light gets in.”*

Because our bodies are more than just the things that carry our brains  
Around from one errand to the next, or one meeting or class to the next,  
And because our bodies are, rather, the vessels that carry all our hopes and  
hurts,

And can lead us in who we most desire to be in the world,

A request here on this Sunday morning to move your shoulders back,

Open your chest, notice the tightness in the brow or your neck

Or your jaw that has held all the week’s news,

or the worry you haven’t told anyone about,

And breathe, just breathe in and out, reminded as you do so that

That the first word the Hebrews ever gave for the holy wasn’t God or

Old man in sky or judge, but rather simply *Ruah*,

Hebrew meaning wind, air, breath,

Moving in and out and through our bodies,  
This one life we're living that we don't have to earn or prove  
Or drape conditions around,  
No matter what anyone says.

This week, this Sunday before our most religious without all the hoopla  
Holiday of Thanksgiving,  
as I put my shoulders back, and released my brow,  
And tried my best to get out of my own tunnel vision to have  
Instead a wider a vision,  
a vision wider than my own often too narrow, suburban,  
5 mile radius to work, kid- drop-off,  
Market Basket, Target, errand-filled life,  
all to the background of NPR that reminds me of the beauty and terror  
everywhere,  
I imagined, thanks to Kushner, a letter written to us from the World.  
So here it is, our sermon:

Dear Bi-peds, dear human beings who seem to do a lot more *doing*  
Than *being* from my vantage,

Some perspective first:

I know it seems like you have been here forever,  
And I know how some of you like to quote scriptures that say  
You have dominion over me, a mistranslation, by-the-way,  
Of the Hebrew, which actually meant to say – *caretaker, steward,*  
*Gardner* –

Some perspective: I have been here, so says the carbon dating,  
for something like 4.54 billion years,  
give or take a million here or a million there.  
And you, you have moved in like the distant cousin does  
Over the holidays and acts like you own the place,  
Eating all the leftovers in the fridge,  
kicking the dog when you think no one is looking,  
constantly turning up the thermometer,  
How long have you been here?  
Your ancestors have only been around for 6 million years,  
And the modern version of you only 200,000 years,  
And civilization as you know it only 6,000 years,  
And industrialization, that great liberator for you,  
But that great liability for me,  
Only less than 200 years,  
All of which is barely equivalent to a Saturday morning  
In terms my life, barely the time it takes me to read the sports page.

So you're new, you're so brand new, like a baby in my arms,  
So beautiful, so tender, so dependent as a baby is,  
And so much work, so messy, so noisy, so constant, as a  
Baby is,  
You who rest in my arms in all manner of shapes and sizes,  
Bald and shaggy, lean and short, round and long,  
Black and brown and cream, white and dark and ginger-freckled,  
All pigments on your skin changing in response to how close or far  
You are from the sun,

And which you, in your infancy, have given such weight, such authority,  
 Deciding who's in, who's out, who belongs, who doesn't  
 There in the cradle of my arms, all of you in the same cradle,  
 But it needs to be said, not always with equal attention, equal resources,  
 Equal sharing.  
 So no wonder some of you are angry.

But I get ahead of myself, me who watches you more closely than you  
 realize, me who sees things you see, but with a wider vision,  
 And therefore has some things to ask you, and wonder about with you,  
 You are gathered here in the morning light of your one wild and precious  
 and short life that you didn't create, but that you do have the freedom  
 To use...use for good or for hurt and in all that vast space between.

So in no particular this is what I wonder...:

I wonder if you saw the image this week of the rose someone put  
 In the bullet hole in the window glass of the Paris café, with a sign  
 Attached that asked: "*In the name of what?*"

I wonder if you know who said these words:

*What actions are most excellent? To gladden the heart of a human being.*

*To feed the hungry.*

*To help the afflicted.*

*To lighten the sorrow of the sorrowful.*

*To remove the wrongs of the injured.*

Do you know? *The Prophet Muhammad.*

I wonder why more of your news articles these last weeks  
 Was about the blank color red of your Starbucks Coffee Cups  
 And whether or not that was being Anti-Christmas  
 Rather than about Beirut, where Isis attacked before Paris,  
 Because isn't the answer to the question: *What Would Jesus Do?*  
 Be: *Are you kidding me? I died on the cross for this??*

And I wonder, says the world:  
 Is the Statue of Liberty, the one that says: *bring me your tired,*  
*Your poor, your yearning masses to be free*  
 Now tipped on her side, blocking the New York Harbor,  
 So that no one who is Muslim or Syrian can get in?  
 Did you mean that poem only to refer to Christians,  
 Only for Jesus-followers, who was himself,  
 A foreigner?

And I wonder:  
 When you fall down on the ground, which is my skin,  
 Which is the curve of my body, and pray,  
 Do you also pray for your world leaders?  
 These people who live, in turns of humility and hubris,  
 In this great tension of keeping people safe,  
 While also protecting freedom, all of you in the cradle of my arms,  
 But some of you intending to do great harm.  
 I mean: have you seen how gray President Obama's hair has become?

And I wonder, leaving politicians aside,  
If you saw one of your children doing a walking handstand  
At dance the other night, her six-year-old body  
Scattering across the floor with her bent legs  
Dangling above her head,  
While her friends cheered and applauded  
Because this was her 30<sup>th</sup> attempt and now she  
Has finally nailed it.  
Never mind my giant, beautiful, terrible world for a moment.  
Did you see that?

Or did you miss it, you who stare into screens while walking,  
Texting while strolling, asking the telephone pole you just  
Crashed into: *Hey, watch where you're going!*  
You whose face at night is illumined in the blue light of  
Some pretty terrific distractions,  
Because TV is pretty great these days,  
But just wondering, just wondering if you think you might be  
Missing something, what might you be missing?,  
When all the people in your family are plugged into earbuds  
Of their separate desires, all the people, you say, connected, connected,  
Connected,  
*But connected to what?* is my question.  
*Connected to whom?*

Yeah, it's easy for me to judge, I know,  
This landscape of mine that you have touched,

And tilled and tilled,  
but also moved, and paved, and scraped,  
some parts of me all but unrecognizable.  
I mean, have you been to Vegas?  
I am a desert there, friends, or at least I was –  
The desert a place beyond all your rightdoing and wrongdoing,  
As Hafiz says,  
Where ideas and language and even the phrase ‘each other’  
Doesn’t make sense anymore.

I suspect you long for such a place,  
Such a landscape, where you are all stripped down to the core of you,  
Just your soul, your soul meeting your soul, and your soul meeting  
Your soul,  
No prisoners taken, no walls saying who’s in and who’s out,  
No engines, no fires, no automatic guns,  
Those with vests of bombs shedding them for ugly, but beautiful  
Holiday sweaters,  
Stems of flowers sticking through bullet holes,  
No language, no words,  
no Thanksgiving dinner family dysfunction,  
Destruction left for another day,  
All of you, all of us, in the cradle of my arms,  
Some sleeping, some sitting up curious, some crying,  
Some wiping the tears, some laughing, some playing,  
But all of us in the cradle together.

Paradise is a word some of you have given for such a place,  
Heaven is another,  
And the biggest mistake some of you have made is to think  
That it is somewhere else besides this one world and your one life.  
Not for nothing does your minister say the goal  
*Is not get more people into heaven, but more heaven into people.*  
Which is a nice turn of phrase, but means nothing  
If you don't act in the world as though your fate is all caught  
Up with the fate of the person next to you in the pews,  
and our fate all caught up together, world and people and all living things,  
all of us dependent on the other now,  
all of us in the cradle together.  
Which is frightening, because it means we need to lean on each other.  
And freeing, because it means we need to lean on each other.

Which is why I give you this final thing,  
Given to us through the eyes of one of our poets, yes it was Mary Oliver,  
Who last winter saw something from her window.  
What are those? Are those ducks? Are those black ducks?  
Yes, black ducks,  
And they were shrugged up against the shore in an early winter storm.  
It was snowing hard, from the east,  
And the sea was churning and raging,  
And then came some sanderlings, these little white peep-sized birds  
Five inches long with beaks like a thin wire,  
Who flew in, snowflakes on their backs,  
And settled in a row behind the ducks,

Whose backs were also covered with snow –  
So close they were all but touching, the birds all but under  
The roof of the duck's tails,  
So that the wind, pretty much, blew over the top of them.

They stayed that way, motionless, for maybe an hour,  
Then the sanderlings, each a handful of feathers,  
Shifted, and were blown away  
Out over the water,  
Which was still raging.  
But somehow they came back,  
And again the ducks, like a feathered hedge,  
Let them crouch there, and live.

If someone you didn't know told you this,  
As we are hearing this now, would you believe it?  
Because belief isn't always easy.  
But this much we are asked to do, if nothing else:  
To live with our eyes open.

I know, says the poet, that what everyone wants is a miracle.  
This wasn't a miracle.  
Unless, of course, kindness –  
As now again some rare person has suggested,  
Is a miracle.  
Which it surely is.

May you, says the world to us, go and do likewise.

Amen.