

We Are So Both and Oneful Br. David Steindl-Rast

Maybe I'll read you a poem at the end, to sum it up in a poem, and it's the poem that ends with this line, "i am through you so i." But first I'll read you another poem, so that we listen to the next poem correctly. The poem that I'll read first is called "Introduction to Poetry," and it is by Billy Collins. It is spoken through the mouth of a teacher of poetry, which he is. So he says, about his students:

<http://1.usa.gov/introtopoetry> (full text)

"or press an ear against its hive" – like you press an ear against a bee hive, and you hear all these sounds.

"They begin beating it with a hose
to find out what it really means."

Now, we don't want to know what it *really means*. We want to *feel* what it really means: not up here (taps forehead). So allow yourself – as if you were walking inside the poem and feeling for a light switch – just go into it, and feel your way into this one: because this one, by ee cummings, who is very whimsical, doesn't allow yourself to say what it really means. But it *really* helps you to feel what it really is. And it is a love poem that is, at the same time, a prayer. Just like there's a very famous poem by Rilke, which I can share with you another time, that is also originally a love poem and then was incorporated into his books of the Hours of Prayer, in the *Stundenbuch*. So this one is also a love poem which is at the same time a prayer...because this *relationship* (gestures back and forth from himself to others gathered) – every relationship, and the deeper it goes, the more so – is ultimately aimed at the Ultimate or God. So he says:

<http://bit.ly/iamsogladandvery>

"i am so glad and very" -- ...not "very this or that"; just "very": every respect.

"merely my fourth" – a fourth (pinches fingers together to indicate a tiny bit) of me – "will cure"

"the laziest self of weary" – a quarter of me will cure the laziest self of its weariness

"the hugest sea of shore" – the hugest sea of its shore: *very*.

"so far your nearness reaches

a lucky fifth of you" – Now he has gone from a fourth to a fifth.

"turns people into eachs" – "People" is just faceless. "Eachs" is "each, each, each."

“and cowards into grow” – *That’s aliveness.*

It was “i am”, “your nearness” and now it comes “our”:

“our can'ts” – (shrugs shoulders) I can't – “were born to happen”

“our mosts have died in more

our twentieth” – a fourth, a fifth, now twentieth – “will open

wide a wide open door”

Now comes we: There’s that relationship.

“we are so both and oneful

night cannot be so sky

sky cannot be so sunful

i am through you so i”

Perfect, huh? I’ll read it once more, just the whole thing through. It’s called “#49” of a book that’s called *50 Poems* by ee cummings.

Transcribed from a video clip used in the Online Retreat “Trusting in Life with Br. David Steindl-Rast.” The talk was given by Br. David Steindl-Rast during an Alaska cruise on August 15, 2011. Copyright © 2011 by A Network for Grateful Living.