

29.

Instructions Prompt

Let your poem be didactic, give instructions. But to be a poem, of course, it must also have image and metaphor — paint pictures, play with sound, not just be preachy blather.

Instructions

Give up the world; give up self; finally, give up God.
Find god in rhododendrons and rocks,
passers-by, your cat.
Pare your beliefs, your absolutes.
Make it simple; make it clean.
No carry-on luggage allowed.
Examine all you have
with a loving and critical eye, then
throw away some more.
Repeat. Repeat.
Keep this and only this:
 what your heart beats loudly for
 what feels heavy and full in your gut.
There will only be one or two
things you will keep,
and they will fit lightly
in your pocket.

Sheri Hostetler
in *Poetry of Presence: An Anthology of Mindfulness Poems*,
edited by Phyllis Cole-Dai & Ruby R. Wilson

Instructions On Not Giving Up

More than the fuchsia funnels breaking out
of the crabapple tree, more than the neighbor's
almost obscene display of cherry limbs shoving
their cotton candy-colored blossoms to the slate
sky of spring rains, it's the greening of the trees
that really gets to me. When all the shock of white
and taffy, the world's baubles and trinkets, leave
the pavement strewn with the confetti of aftermath,
the leaves come. Patient, plodding, a green skin

growing over whatever winter did to us, a return
to the strange idea of continuous living despite
the mess of us, the hurt, the empty. Fine then,
I'll take it, the tree seems to say, a new slick leaf
unfurling like a fist, I'll take it all.

Ada Limón
in *The Carrying*

Entrance

(After Rilke)

Whoever you are: step out of doors tonight,
Out of the room that lets you feel secure.
Infinity is open to your sight.

Whoever you are.

With eyes that have forgotten how to see
From viewing things already too well-known,
Lift up into the dark a huge, black tree
And put it in the heavens: tall, alone.
And you have made the world and all you see.
It ripens like the words still in your mouth.
And when at last you comprehend its truth,
Then close your eyes and gently set it free.

Dana Gioia
in *Interrogations at Noon*

This is what you should do:
Love the earth and sun and animals,
despise riches, give alms to everyone that asks,
stand up for the stupid and crazy,
devote your income and labor to others, hate tyrants,
argue not concerning God,
have patience and indulgence toward the people...
reexamine all you have been told in school or church or in any book,
dismiss what insults your very soul,
and your flesh shall become a great poem.

Walt Whitman
(Excerpt from Preface to
1855 edition, *Leaves of Grass*)

Waking Instructions

Crawl Ashore
to the damp beginning of day.

Forget before and after.

Allow yourself
to be spelled differently.

It will feel like falling.

It has waiting attached.

Emma Mellon
Anthologized in *what have you lost?*
Poems selected by Naomi Shihab Nye

Instructions for living a life:

Pay attention.

Be astonished.

Tell about it.

Mary Oliver