

6.

## Paradox Poetry

**Write a poem that somehow includes or celebrates a paradox.**

“A paradox is a statement or proposition that seems self-contradictory or absurd but in reality expresses a possible truth.” I think some very important wisdom can hide behind paradox.

G. K. Chesterton defined of paradox as “truth standing on her head to attract attention.”

There is the paradox of what we call misfortune, that very often what we resist bestows on our lives the greatest, most unexpected blessings. (paraphrased from Ram Dass in [Still Here.](#) )

It is all holy paradox. Here and not here.

All the deepest truths / are behind the blue / door of paradox. (Grace)

Never forget you can whirl / while you are sitting still. (Grace)

There are no rules.  
The rules are always changing.

Go through the door of paradox  
into the inexpressible,  
always fluid truths  
beyond what meets the senses.

John O'Donohue in *Beauty: the invisible embrace*:

“The mind tends to see things in a singularly simple, divided way: there is good and bad, ugly and beautiful. The imagination, in contrast, extends great hospitality to whatever is awkward, paradoxical or contradictory....The imagination is both fascinated and stimulated by the presences that cluster within a contradiction. The imagination is always more loyal to the deeper unity of everything. It has patience with contradiction because there it glimpses new possibilities. And the imagination is the great friend of possibility.”

Some paradoxes:

In seeking happiness, one does not find happiness.

The existence of evil seems to be incompatible with the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect god. (Problem of evil — Epicurean paradox)

We learn from history that we do not learn from history.  
Hegel (paraphrased)

Hot water can, under certain conditions, freeze faster than cold water, even though it must pass the lower temperature on the way to freezing. (Mpemba paradox)

Should one tolerate intolerance, if intolerance would destroy the possibility of tolerance?

The fiercest paradox:

The world is perfect. The world stinks.

Both are true. Now what are you going to do?

Ram Dass

The next few quotes are from a UU sermon “The Wisdom of Paradox” by Rev. Dr Ed Piper, UU Fellowship of Waynesboro Dec 5, 2010:

Jung called the balancing of opposites a spiritual challenge: “Oddly enough the paradox is one of our most valued spiritual possessions, while uniformity of meaning is a sign of weakness. Hence a religion becomes inwardly impoverished when it loses or cuts down its paradoxes; but their multiplication enriches because only the paradox comes anywhere near to comprehending the fullness of life.”

Among the world’s wisdom traditions, none expresses paradox more eloquently than **Taoism**. The *Tao Te Ching* is loaded with passages that express paradox. Here is one example:

Fullness and emptiness give birth to each other.

Difficult and easy complete each other.

Long and short shape each other.

Tones and voice harmonize with each other.

Front and back follow each other.

Therefore wherever the sage is, he dwells among affairs by not-doing.

He teaches without words.

The ten-thousand things arise, but he doesn't impel them.

He gives birth, but he doesn't possess.

He acts, but he doesn't rely on what he has done.

The moment is dear to us, precisely because it is so fugitive, and it is somewhat of a paradox that poets should spend a lifetime hunting for the magic that will make the moment stay.

Art is the chalice into which we pour the wine of transcendence. What is imagination but a reflection of our yearning to belong to eternity as well as to time?

Stanley Kunitz

I want a word that means

*okay and not okay,*

more than that: a word that means

*devastated and stunned with joy.*

I want the word that says

*I feel it all all at once.*

The heart is not like a songbird

singing only one note at a time,

more like a Tuvan throat singer

able to sing both a drone

and simultaneously

two or three harmonics high above it—

a sound, the Tuvans say,

that gives the impression

of wind swirling among rocks.

The heart understands swirl,

how the churning of opposite feelings

weaves through us like an insistent breeze

leads us wordlessly deeper into ourselves,

blesses us with paradox

so we might walk more openly

into this world so rife with devastation,

this world so ripe with joy.

Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer

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