



The Gift Of Threshold Moments, by Sam Keen

The thrush's song belongs to a family of experiences that usher us into a threshold where sound trails off into silence, time disappears into timelessness, and the known world is engulfed by the great mystery.

The family includes the reverberating echo of a temple bell that dwindles off into the void; the polyphonic chanting of Tibetan monks that merges into an endless communal chorus; the electric interval between the crash of thunder and the flash of lightning; the awful emptiness when the exhalation of a dying person is not followed by an inspiration; the deep sigh and profound calm that comes in meditation when the mind finally stops chattering; the timeless moment, before sleep or after awakening, when we enter a dream world in which it seems perfectly reasonable that we should fly, change gender, or simultaneously be ourselves and our parents.

In these threshold moments, the spirit slips between the synapses of the mind. The normal illusion that there is nothing beyond the tyrannical march of profane time (*_chronos_*) is dispelled, and we have a brief intimation of eternity, an awareness of sacred time(*_kairos_*). In these pregnant voids we come to understand the limit of our comprehension. We gain a tacit knowledge that our modes of experiencing time and the world are nothing more than the mechanisms, categories, and paradigms created by our limited minds.

Like monarch butterflies confined on their migrations to low altitudes, our wings will not carry us into the vast regions of outer space.

The proper name for the experience of unknowing is not mysticism but wisdom. When Socrates was told that the Oracle of Delphi said he was the wisest man in Greece, he replied that it could only mean he knew what he did not know. Wisdom comes from the certain knowledge of our ignorance, and it teaches us that we dwell within a small circle of light surrounded by an immense mystery. According to tradition, the owl--- the symbol of Athena, the goddess of wisdom--- spreads its wings only with the arrival of dusk. Wisdom is the paradoxical art of seeing.

There are no Wood Thrushes in the sparsely wooded area of California where I live now. But there are Great Horned Owls aplenty, and when they begin their low, uncanny hooting just after dusk, I am transported back to an earlier time when I stood quietly at the threshold, listening to the thrush's invitation to evensong, and heard a faint echo of the silent music of the spheres. Over the years, the thrush's shaman song has gradually transformed me into an agnostic. Unknowing. Amazed.

