



Why I Sit, by Paul Fleischman

This morning, the first thing I did was to sit for an hour. I have done that regularly for twenty years, and have spent many evenings, days and weeks doing the same. I would like to know myself. It is remarkable that while ordinarily we spend most of our lives studying, contemplating, observing and manipulating the world around us, the structured gaze of the thoughtful mind is so rarely turned inwards. This avoidance must measure some anxiety, reluctance or fear. Most of our lives are spent in externally oriented functions that distract from self-observation. This relentless, obsessive drive persists independently of survival needs such as food and warmth, and even of pleasure. Second to second, we couple ourselves to sights, tastes, words, motions or electronic stimuli, until we fall dead. It is striking how many ordinary activities, from smoking a pipe to watching sunsets, veer towards, but ultimately avoid, sustained attention to the reality of our own life. [...] Sitting helps me overcome my deepest fears. I become freer to live from my heart and to face the consequences, but also to reap the rewards of this authenticity. Much of what I called pain was really loneliness and fear. It passes, dissolves, with that observation. The vibrations of my body are humming the song that can be heard only when dawn and dusk are simultaneous, instantaneous, continuous. I feel that a burst of stern effort is a small price to pay to hear this inner music- fertile music from the heart of life itself. I sit to anchor and organise my life around my heart and mind, and to radiate out to others what I find. Though I shake in strong winds, I return to this basic way of living. The easy, soothing comfort and deep relaxation that accompany intense awareness in stillness, peel my life like an onion to deeper layers of truth, which in turn are scoured and soothed until the next layer opens. I sit to discipline my life by what is clear, simple, self-fulfilling and universal in my heart. There is no end to this job. I have failed to really live many days of my life, but I dive again and again into the plain guidance of self-containment and loving receipt. I sit to find and express simple human love and common decency. --Paul Fleischman