

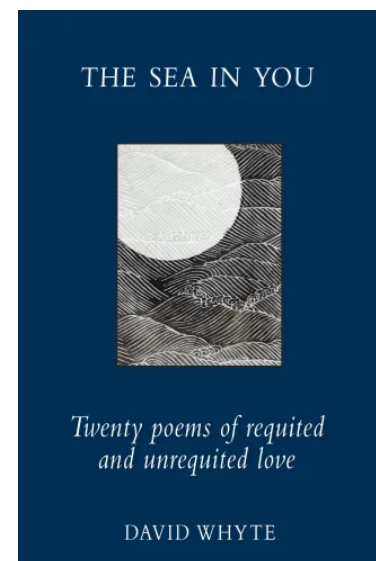


The Truelove: Poet and Philosopher David Whyte on Reaching Beyond Our Limiting Beliefs About the Love We Deserve

“if you wanted to drown you could, but you don’t because finally after all this struggle and all these years you simply don’t want to any more, you’ve simply had enough of drowning and you want to live and you want to love”

BY MARIA POPOVA

Few things limit us more profoundly than our own beliefs about what we deserve, and few things liberate us more powerfully than daring to broaden our locus of possibility and self-permission for happiness. The stories we tell ourselves about what we are worthy or unworthy of — from the small luxuries of naps and watermelon to the grandest luxury of a passionate creative calling or a large and possible love — are the stories that shape our lives. Bruce Lee knew this when he admonished that “you will never get any more out of life than you expect,” James Baldwin knew it when he admonished that “you’ve got to tell the world how to treat you [because] if the world tells you how you are going to be treated, you are in trouble,” and Viktor Frankl embodied this in his impassioned insistence on saying “yes” to life.



The more vulnerable-making the endeavor, the more reflexive the limitation and the more redemptive the liberation.

That difficult, delicate, triumphal pivot from self-limitation to self-liberation in the most vulnerable-making of human undertakings — love — is what poet and philosopher David Whyte, who thinks deeply about these questions of courage and love, maps out in his stunning poem “The Truelove,” found in his book ***The Sea in You: Twenty Poems of Requited and Unrequited Love*** ([public library](#)) and read here, by David’s kind assent to my invitation, in his sonorous Irish-tinted English voice, in his singular style of echoing lines to let them reverberate more richly:

[brainpicker](#)

David Whyte reads his poem "The Truelove"

THE TRUELOVE

by David Whyte

There is a faith in loving fiercely
the one who is rightfully yours,
especially if you have
waited years and especially
if part of you never believed
you could deserve this
loved and beckoning hand
held out to you this way.

I am thinking of faith now
and the testaments of loneliness
and what we feel we are
worthy of in this world.

Years ago in the Hebrides,
I remember an old man
who walked every morning
on the grey stones
to the shore of baying seals,
who would press his hat
to his chest in the blustering
salt wind and say his prayer

to the turbulent Jesus
hidden in the water,

and I think of the story
of the storm and everyone
waking and seeing
the distant
yet familiar figure
far across the water
calling to them

and how we are all
preparing for that
abrupt waking,
and that calling,
and that moment
we have to say yes,
except it will
not come so grandly
so Biblically
but more subtly
and intimately in the face
of the one you know
you have to love

so that when
we finally step out of the boat
toward them, we find
everything holds
us, and everything confirms
our courage, and if you wanted
to drown you could,
but you don't
because finally
after all this struggle
and all these years
you simply don't want to
any more
you've simply had enough
of drowning
and you want to live and you

want to love and you will
walk across any territory
and any darkness
however fluid and however
dangerous to take the
one hand you know
belongs in yours.

“The Truelove” appears in the short, splendid course of poem-anchored contemplative practices David guides for neuroscientist and philosopher Sam Harris’s *Waking Up* meditation toolkit, in which he reads each poem, offers an intimate tour of the landscape of experience from which it arose, and reflects on the broader existential quickenings it invites.

Couple this generous gift of a poem with “Sometimes” — David’s perspectival poem about living into the questions of our becoming, also part of *Waking Up* — then revisit the Noble-winning Polish poet Wisława Szymborska on great love and James Baldwin, who believed that poet are “the only people who know the truth about us” — on love and the illusion of choice.

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