

What would that be like?

Beloved person,

*What would it be like to live in a country,
where it always seems to be at war
and you are no longer safe?
I think I would be very scared.*

*What would it be like to live in a country
where everything is so different
and you don't know the language either?
I think I would be very scared*

*What would it be like to enter a classroom,
where every child is a stranger to you
and not one knows who you are?
I think I would be very scared.¹*

In our highly 'egocentric' society, sometimes also with many 'egocentric' opinions, this song and this letter invite you to perceive life from a different perspective. I notice that with the question 'What would that be like?' the starting point of my feeling, thinking, and experiencing is very different than if I start with: 'Well, my opinion is...', 'They should really...' or: 'I really don't understand that people...'. It's as if something inside me shifts with that question. As if a movement goes out towards the other. As if space arises within me. As if it is not my 'ego' speaking, but the human within me, the love in me that tries to understand. Perhaps hospitality, this month's theme, therefore, also begins from within, and in me. In the space that arises within me when I try to empathise, when my judgment momentarily falls silent, and when 'my soul listens'.²

When I experience that space, I notice that it does not remain just a feeling, but that it influences how I see, live, and what I do. For me, that means: *wanting to see every person as equal and constantly search for what connects us.*³ It is the fundamental recognition that the other is part of the same infinite, indivisible whole. It makes me want to keep pushing myself to practice that perspective. Not because it is always easy or because the 'I' should not exist. But because we are connected. We inhabit this Earth together, and so we actually have no other choice. It is one world or no world.

Inner hospitality requires that I make space within myself. Because how can another person feel welcome with me, if I am already filled within with my own beliefs, my own images, my own certainties and assumptions about that other person? This requires courage, because the unknown can make me insecure, sometimes even afraid, and then I retreat into the safe and familiar. But if I find the courage to make space within myself, then that inner hospitality will also become visible. Then I do not just walk past the other person, but I notice him or her. Then I see a human being. And then, hopefully, my hospitality will be visible in how I greet another person, how I listen, and perhaps even in how I let someone into my life...

In these days of celebration and commemoration (in the Netherlands), we are reminded of what happens when inner hospitality disappears. When people no longer see each other as equals. When the 'I' and the 'we' close themselves off to the other. With fear, lack of freedom, and exclusion as a result.

And we still see it happening before our eyes today. Because commemorating is not only looking back, but also an invitation to look differently in the present. To be vigilant for every form of dehumanisation. To not go along with a world in which the 'I' and the 'I think' set the tone, but to continue searching for what connects us.

*What would it be like to come to you
and say: don't be afraid,
it's good that you are here.
What would that be like?*

With a warm-hearted greeting, gladly your brother,

Marten van der Wal



Attention for the baptism promise

¹ MariAnne Hummel, 'Hoe zou het zijn?' ('What would that be like?'), Youth choir no.5 (freely translated)

² Dick Riemers, 'If the soul listens...', Weekly Letter no.15, 2005

³ See: The foundation of our belief