

You want to nurture what you love

Beloved person,

Sometimes it just happens. I look out the window, see the soft light shining through the leaves, hear a blackbird singing somewhere and suddenly there it is: that tranquil wonderment. That deep realisation that I may be a part of something unbelievably large and wondrous. Of life itself. Of this living earth which breathes, moves, grows and which includes so much more than I can comprehend.

Our earth itself is such a wonder: what colour, what rhythm. What a richness of life: from the smallest insect to the person next to me. Everything carries its own secret, has its own place in the whole. It is not self-evident that we may be here with each other, in connection with all that lives. It is a gift. That realisation makes me silent and grateful.

That gratitude changes something in me. Because you want to nurture what you love. From out of wonderment grows caring. From out of gratitude arises responsibility. Ever more people recognise this: we still sometimes see the earth as a possession, as a source of resources that we can use as we see fit. But the realisation is growing that the earth does not belong to us. It is entrusted to us; not to pillage but to live together in connectedness and with respect.

Inside our religious-humanistic belief we speak about 'the shared life'. A life in which we do not exist separately, but are woven together with each other, with those who will come after us and with the earth. We are not spectators, but participants. Not rulers, but guardians. Not isolated individuals, but links in a wondrous chain of life.

Maybe this time asks us to look at things in a new way. A view that does not possess, but which connects. That does not judge, but which embraces. Abraham Joshua Heschel spoke about radical wonderment: living with open senses and a receptive soul, sensing the mystery that surrounds us.¹ In that spirit you could say: the earth is not silent. It whispers secrets that touch our soul. What an invitation to listen, to be silent. To not respond with haste or greed, but with respect and dedication.

Whoever is amazed, whoever is thankful, wants to carefully handle whatever is given to them. André Lascaris saw creation as a mission.² He meant to say that religion or spirituality is not about escaping the world but rather being dedicated to it. To what is vulnerable, to life and each other. That may sound grand, but it starts small in the choices we make. In what we eat, how we travel, what we buy or not. In how we separate rubbish and share stories. In the attention with which we live. And in the questions we dare to ask.

What have I been given? And what can I give back? What does the earth, this living community of people, animals and plants ask of me today?

I believe that our communities are places that can feed that wonderment. Through discussions, through our rituals, sometimes through silence. Let us bring expression to the connection with each other, with the earth and with everything that lives, not only in words but also in how we live, celebrate, feel and act.

Sometimes it all feels overwhelming, all those big questions about climate, nature and the future. And yet... I believe in the power of hope. Not by passively waiting, but as active conviction. Hope creates space for other choices, for new stories. Stories which express wonderment and gratitude, that attest to loving responsibility. Let us help each other to keep telling those stories.

Because yes: this world is precious. Fragile. And wonderfully beautiful.
And we may protect it together with open eyes, open hands and an open heart.

With a warm-hearted greeting, in wonderment and gratitude,

Daniël Broertjes

With thanks to Erik-Jan Willekers for his input to this Weekly Letter



¹ Abraham Joshua Heschel, Jewish-American theologian, in *In the light of his countenance* (*In het licht van zijn aangezicht*) (2011) (freely translated)

² André Lascaris, theologian, in *More than myself* (*Meer dan ikzelf*) (2005) (freely translated)