

When I am Awake—Journaling Exercise

“To him whose elastic and vigorous thought keeps pace with the sun, the day is a perpetual morning. It matters not what the clocks say or the attitudes and labors of men. Morning is when I am awake and there is a dawn in me. Moral reform is the effort to throw off sleep. Why is it that men give so poor an account of their day if they have not been slumbering? They are not such poor calculators. If they had not been overcome with drowsiness, they would have performed something. The millions are awake enough for physical labor; but only one in a million is awake enough for effective intellectual exertion, only one in a hundred millions to a poetic or divine life. To be awake is to be alive. I have never yet met a man who was quite awake. How could I have looked him in the face?”

We must learn to reawaken and keep ourselves awake, not by mechanical aids, but by an infinite expectation of the dawn, which does not forsake us in our soundest sleep. I know of no more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability of man to elevate his life by a conscious endeavor.”

Henry David Thoreau—*Walden*

Journal Prompt: From reading this passage, what do you think Thoreau means when he talks about being “awake?” He says he has “never yet met a man who was quite awake.” Why do you think he questions whether he could look that person in the face? Do you think you know anyone who is truly awake, in the sense that Thoreau describes?

What are the “mechanical aids” to which Thoreau refers? Why do you think he wants people to keep themselves awake without the use of such things?

Think about a time when you felt most awake—or alive. Who was there? Did nature play a role in that feeling/experience? In that moment, what mattered most to you? How would you have to change your life to live with more of those “awake” moments?

(Remember, the questions are to give you a jumping off point and are not intended to function as a questionnaire. Answer the ones you feel are relevant and feel free to explore topics and questions not provided here as you write.)



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