**Breath**

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*Listen, are you breathing just a little, and calling it a life?*

Mary Oliver in Have you ever tried to enter the long black branches

Not breathing!

Holding my breath

Waiting and hoping

Wishing and avoiding

Closing myself off

Like I do in a scary movie

Can you tell by the music

Whether it is safe to look again?

Does a friend nudge

To confirm “It’s OK to look now?”

Hands try to cover eyes and ears

Still in this seventh month

Of pandemic’s social distancing

Of mask-wearing

Of shopping furtively behind a store

Along with the semi trucks

At the loading docks

The deal is made, now I wait, trust

That what I have asked for

Will be annonymously deposited

In the rear of my vehicle.

Discreet payment, too, behind-the-scenes

Electronic receipt.

No, not breathing

Not really breathing

Inhales are shallow

Exhalations incomplete

Like hanging on

To some secret thread

That connects to past

Days of free movement and relaxed pleasure

So suddenly snatched away.

At the start I was blind

To the harsh realities

Life upended

Irreparable reconfiguring

Of every social encounter

Now faced with hidden

Smiles or frowns

With inner trepidation

And distrust

Who carries Covid-19

Invisibly and unknowing?

In whose careless act

Does my health and wellbeing

Rest? On whom

Do I depend for words

Of truth and hope

Of understanding and compassion?

Try to breathe more deeply

Sit under the maple or the linden

Admire their rootedness

Their ability to weather storms

Their stately posture

Proud crowns, thick protective bark.

Watch their autumnal willlingness

To let go, to change with the time

When draining and drying

Become gold and ruby, honeyed sweetness

On the way to browning

Releasing what no longer serves them.

Shinrin Yoku – forest bathing

I walk among the trees

Try to enter the black branches

See the Earth from new vantage points

Feel the inner strength

Rising and receding

Growth and Rest

Action and Contemplation

Balance of sadness and joy

Waiting and moving on

Through a new experience

An unexpected journey

A crooked path ahead

And uphill.