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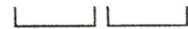
leonard cohen and silence -- 1/5/15

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To: Chuck Madden

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Today's selection -- from *The Art of Stillness* by Pico Iyer. Leonard Cohen, legendary singer-songwriter, musician, poet, and novelist perhaps best known for his song "Hallelujah," has more recently had occasion to explore a more monastic life:

"I'd come up here in order to write about [Leonard Cohen's] near-silent, anonymous life on the mountain, but for the moment I lost all sense of where I was. I could hardly believe that this rabbinical-seeming gentleman in wire-rimmed glasses and wool cap was in truth the singer and poet who'd been renowned for thirty years as an international heartthrob, a constant traveler, and an Armani-clad man of the world.

"Leonard Cohen had come to this Old World redoubt to make a life -- an art -- out of stillness. And he was working on simplifying himself as fiercely as he might on the verses of one of his songs, which he spends more than ten years polishing to perfection. The week I was visiting, he was essentially spending seven days and nights in a bare meditation hall, sitting stock-still. His name in the monastery, Jikan, referred to the silence between two thoughts. ...

"Sitting still, he said with unexpected passion, was 'the real deep entertainment' he had found in his sixty-one years on the planet. 'Real profound and voluptuous and delicious entertainment. The real feast that is available within this activity.' ...

"'What else would I be doing?' he asked. 'Would I be starting a new marriage with a young woman and raising another family? Finding new drugs, buying more expensive wine? I don't know. This seems to me the most luxurious and sumptuous response to the emptiness of my own existence.'

"Typically lofty and pitiless words; living on such close terms with silence clearly hadn't diminished his gift for golden sentences. But the words carried weight when coming from one who seemed to have tasted all the pleasures that the world has to offer.

"Being in this remote place of stillness had nothing to do with piety or purity, he assured me; it was simply the most practical way he'd found of working through the confusion and terror that had long been his bedfellows. ...

"Nothing touches it,' Cohen said, as the light came into the cabin, of sitting still. Then he remembered himself, perhaps, and gave me a crinkly, crooked smile. 'Except if you're courtin',' he added. 'If you're young, the hormonal thrust has its own excitement.'

"Going nowhere, as Cohen described it, was the grand adventure that makes sense of everywhere else.

"Sitting still as a way of falling in love with the world and everything in it; I'd seldom thought of it like that. Going nowhere as a way of cutting through the noise and finding fresh time and energy to share with others; I'd sometimes moved toward the idea, but it had never come home to me so powerfully as in the example of this man who seemed to have everything, yet found his happiness, his freedom, in giving everything up. ..."

"The idea has been around as long as humans have been, of course; the poets of East Asia, the philosophers of ancient Greece and Rome, regularly made stillness the center of their lives. But has the need for being in one place ever been as vital as it is right now? After a thirty-year study of time diaries, two sociologists found that Americans were actually working fewer hours than we did in the 1960s, but we *feel* as if we're working more. We have the sense, too often, of running at top speed and never being able to catch up.

"With machines coming to seem part of our nervous systems, while increasing their speed every season, we've lost our Sundays, our weekends, our nights off -- our holy days, as some would have it; our bosses, junk mailers, our parents can find us wherever we are, at any time of day or night. More and more of us feel like emergency-room physicians, permanently on call, required to heal ourselves but unable to find the prescription for all the clutter on our desk. ...

"Not many years ago, it was access to information and movement that seemed our greatest luxury; nowadays it's often freedom from information, the chance to sit still, that feels like the ultimate prize. Stillness is not just an indulgence for those with enough resources -- it's a necessity for anyone who wishes to gather less visible resources. Going nowhere, as Cohen had shown me, is not about austerity so much as about coming closer to one's senses."

### **The Art of Stillness: Adventures in Going Nowhere**

Author: Pico Iyer

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# The Happiness List

Suzy Welch

Three years ago, Jack and I attended a beautiful New Year's Eve party. The host's home was decorated with dozens of twinkling lanterns, waiters swished around topping off glasses, and a jazz band filled the air with sparkly music. Around 10 PM, a bell tinkled for dinner, and we were swept into a grand tent lit by candelabra and festooned with flowers. If there was ever a moment to think "Ain't life grand?" it had arrived.

But then a strange thing happened. As soon as we sat down with our friends - there were eight of us at our table - instead of the oohing and aahing you might expect one couple shushed us.

"It's crazy, I'm telling you. We've been trying to make a list since last week," exclaimed the wife. "And we can't come up with a dozen people who are really happy." She grabbed a piece of notebook paper out of her shiny evening purse and held it up for all of us to see. It was indeed a list of names, all but two or three scribbled out. "We've been dying to see you guys tonight because we can't believe this," her husband added to explain. "Can any of you name a dozen people who qualify?"

"As *happy*?" Jack asked, incredulous.

"Yes - just that," the wife replied, shaking her head as if she couldn't believe the answer herself. "I dare you. Name twelve people who are actually living the life they want. Come on."

At her invitation, each couple around the table entered into a sidebar conference. Jack's and my list came quickly, but just as quickly, we crossed names off it for one reason or another.

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The two other couples at the table threw out a few names for consideration, but most were dismissed.

"Too bitter."

"Hates his wife."

"Living the picture."

.....

In the middle of all this, the soup was served, but none of us seemed to notice. We were engrossed - stymied - by the task of compiling our happiness lists.

And so it went for yet another half hour or more, each couple struggling to come up with a list of a dozen certifiably contented people

So here's the kicker. By the end of the evening, we'd collectively come up with eleven names. Eleven happy people - out of the hundreds of people we knew from our varied walks of life.

"What a disturbing piece of data," one of our friends summarized as dessert came out and, incongruously, the dance floor started to fill with happy-looking people