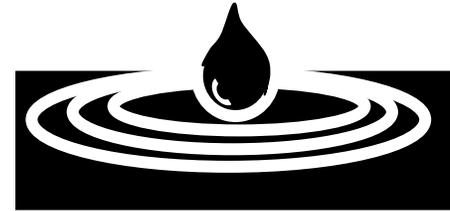


If you think you can understand poems without feeling them in your body, you're apt to treat them as no more than pretty op-ed pieces -- you wind up teaching kids to value "The Road Not Taken" as merely a piece of sage advice about making difficult decisions.

I was about seven or eight years old when I learned Burns's "Scots wha' hae' wi' Wallace bled" from my dad. I had absolutely no idea what the poem was about or even what half the words meant. But I learned something else -- how verse can become a physical presence, in Robert Pinsky's words, which "operates at the borderland of body and mind."

That's an experience that you can only live fully when the poem comes from within rather than from the page in front of you. I like the way the Victorianist Catherine Robson put this: "When we don't learn by heart, the heart does not feel the rhythms of poetry as echoes... of its own incessant beat."

-- excerpted from "By Heart" by Geoffrey Nunberg, "Fresh Air" Commentariy



## SMALL GROUP MINISTRY

FIRST UNITARIAN CHURCH  
OF SAN JOSE

# Learning by Heart

There is a road from the eye to the heart that does not go through the intellect.

-G.K. Chesterton, *essayist and novelist (1874-1936)*

**Preliminaries** Announce upcoming church events; get volunteers to light chalice and do reading.

**Opening /  
Chalice  
Lighting** The bell is full of wind  
Though it does not ring.

- Roberto Juarroz  
Hymnal #487 The bird is full of flight  
though it is still.

The sky is full of clouds  
Though it is alone.

The word is full of voice  
Though no one speaks it.

Everything is full of fleeing  
Though there are no clouds.

**Check-in** Take a minute or two to share briefly the high and low points in your life since we last met.

**Reading** *Reading on the back*

**Sitting in Silence**

**Sharing/ Deep  
Listening**

*Share your poem and / or something about the experience of learning by heart.*

**Discussion**

This is a time to supportively respond to something another person said or to relate additional thoughts that may have occurred as others shared.

**Singing**  
Hymnal #352

Find a stillness,  
hold a stillness,  
let the stillness carry me.  
Find the silence, hold the silence,  
let the silence carry me.  
In the spirit, by the spirit,  
with the spirit giving power,  
I will find true harmony.

**Extinguishing the  
Chalice**

- from "Spiritual  
Literacy"

*(Join hands or link arms and read together.)*

We are here," Thich Nhat Hanh says, "to awaken from the illusion of our separateness." Our deepest sense of community, comes in mystical moments when we feel at one with all the creation. The setting maybe quite ordinary, the experience, extraordinary.