

OF THE VERITABLE OCEAN

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I trace the jagged residue
with my feet
The sand
presses grains to skin
and I press back so the sand
feels wanted

Waves fall
like the word *what*—
What what
is happening
to me?

And *how*
how how will all
my creatures go?
Who by oil, who
by bomb
Who by storm
Who by dry land by famine
Who by *what*
what water

I feel the people
wade and wallow
into my open throat
I cough a question
and swallow it back
Which one of you
can hear me?
Water pools around my feet
singing *you you*—
but *who*?

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REFLECTION: POETRY IN RESPONSE TO CLIMATE CRISIS

I wrote this poem in 2013, which feels so far away I can't remember which ocean I was standing at when the poem arrived. But I remember the sensation that inspired the poem: "I trace the jagged residue / with my feet." I was standing at the shore and looking at the jagged line in the sand left by a receding wave, tracing it with my toes. This physical act became an invitation to contemplate my relationship to the earth at that moment. The next lines enact this relationship: "The sand / presses grains to skin / and I press back so the sand / feels wanted" and from there I was led to a place of grief for the climate crisis and other human-caused disasters. The refrain "who by oil, who by bomb" arose naturally in my mind, evoking the terrifying [Unetaneh Tokef](#) prayer of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Unetaneh Tokef is a stark reminder of what is beyond our control: who will live, who will die, and how. And yet, we "press back" against our fate, through prayer and action. By the end of the poem it is the ocean that speaks, asking, "Which one of you / can hear me?" We all stand called to listen and respond.

WRITING EXERCISE: LISTENING TO THE EARTH'S CALL

Go to a natural area alone, whether a beach, forest, lake, mountain, or other location. Explore the surroundings slowly and mindfully with all your senses, looking, listening, touching, until something feels like it is calling to you. It might be the texture of tree bark, the sound of waves, the movement of an insect, the play of light among leaves. Stay with this object/experience/sensation until a sound, image, or word arrives to you. Follow its lead. What is the earth trying to say to you and through you? You might also choose to incorporate the Unetaneh Tokef refrain if this feels right.

