

FRANKLIN AVE

LAKE ST

MARSHALL AVE

Mississippi River

FORD PARKWAY

river running
SARA PUOTINEN

Running

a 100 tanka sequence

sara puotinen

table of contents

Ritual	tankas 1-15
Habit	tankas 16-29
Sanctuary	tankas 30-37
Inspiration	tankas 38-48
Prayer	tankas 49-61
Congregation	tankas 62-82
Offering	tankas 83-97
god	tankas 98-100

ritual

a morning routine
spring two thousand seventeen
wake up at 6 feed
dog self smell brew drink coffee
lace up shoes go outside run

RITUALS ROUTINES HABITS

Ritual. Routine.

What's the difference between them?

Are habits mundane
always? Can't they be sacred
sometimes—spiritual acts?

What is it they need
to be transformed? A doctrine?
Some theology?
Hymns about souls rejoicing
Kingdoms conquering reigning?

Chants about fathers
& sons? Uncomfortable pews?
Rising too early
on a Sunday morning? Yes.
Early mornings are sacred.

And the refusal
to stay in bed the act of
being upright and
alive outside by the gorge—
these are sacred practices.

MORNING MEDITATIONS for Craig Arnold

Waking when nothing
is possible before joy
in its many forms
has saved me Coming downstairs
walking into the kitchen

Opening the tin
lid sounding like cymbals struck
against each other
metallic sharp in silence
like a cold winter morning

Tipping rich brown scoops
into the filter without
care sometimes spilling
several darkly fragrant grounds
on the smooth dark countertop

Pouring some water
into a cheap coffee pot
until it is filled
and then a long breath in and
a brew who knew this habit

not the point repeat
performance ending with nose
a deep inhale with
no substance each morning so
necessary so needed

After the coffee
is finished before my run
has started I sit
with my shoes and carefully
untie the knotted laces

I stare at their bright
blue colored intensity
blinding dazzling
like the sky on a cloudless
afternoon in the summer

I slide each foot in,
first right then left making sure
my socks don't bunch up
and the tongues are straight even
never at a lean in line

I tie the laces
into two big, loopy knots
I tuck them under
and only then do I run
more than fun a ritual

reverent practical
a sacred preparation
for body spirit
moments of attention so
necessary so needed

habit

Habit a practice

but also calling's costume

Mary Oliver's

garment worn much more than clothes

the structure of body life

ATTIRE (summer)

Black shorts with white trim. Not black as coal, they've faded in the sun. Drawstring gone too was pretty bright blue. Elastic is all that's left.

Green headphones for when I listen to music and when I listen to music it's often to a Justin: Bieber Timberlake.

My kids don't like me to admit this "Justin" fact—too embarrassing!—but I can't help myself. I like Barry Manilow too.

Quick-drying tank top either in blue or black. Blue if it's hot because it's lighter (color not weight) and absorbs less heat than black.

White ankle socks with an orange x on the heel and mismatched trim one foot yellow one foot pink. Bright blue running shoes with bright orange stripes.

And a worn out Twins baseball cap barely still green that's never seen wind strong enough to blow it off my sweaty pony-tailed head.

ATTIRE (winter)

Bundled up to run: two pairs of black running tights, one long sleeved green shirt, three jackets—one that's bright pink, two pairs of gloves, one black cap.

Pair of sunglasses, a buff—which is like a scarf but better because it's also a headband—and green or blue headphones, tucked in my pink hood, playlist playing.

Feeling not quite there in cold air and cloudless sky running with Barry wearing too many layers—too hot on a snow-packed path.

SOCK-A-KNEES (Running Shoes)

My cheap Sauconys. Bottom of the line basics. If you find a sale they're thirty nine ninety nine which I always do online.

6 years. 6 versions. 6 colors. White and gray and white and green hot pink bright orange teal bright electric blue. Up next—dark gray with mint stripes.

APPLE WATCH

Red Green & Blue rings
three goals to achieve when met
three rings to admire
unbroken and infinite
when missed incomplete staring
at me longing to
be like the others filled whole
connected one of
three pretty perfect circles
together happy complete

sanctuary

for Wendell Berry

Places are never
unsacred they are either
made sacred by attention
or desecrated through its
absence.

RUNNING ROUTE

Every run begins
by leaving the house, turning
left then left again,
walking a block then running
all the way to the river.
Reaching it, there's a
choice: right, the falls left, downtown.
Mostly I choose left
and run towards the welcoming
oaks and the floodplain forest.
The oaks welcome me
in hushed, solemn rustlings.
Discarded acorns
on path running feet crunching
a noisy processional.
The floodplain forest
in the gorge sits below. I
run above counting the leaves
and attending to the view
of river almost hidden.
Past the lake street bridge
halfway to Hill a railroad
trestle spans the gorge
not used much for crossing trains
just holding bright blue yarn bombs.
At the top of the
Hill there's so much to see—two
Bridges the River
Downtown. But at the bottom

all you can see is the top.

No matter where I

run one thing remains the same

the Mississippi

always there always beside

me always flowing downstream.

inspiration

Before it was used
to refer to breath it had
theological
meaning: divine influence
taking in of the sacred

WINTER RUNNING IS THE BEST

brr welcome back cold
and burning lungs and double
gloves and icicles
in my hair and clear crisp breaths
and long slow dream-like running

the first breath always
hurts sharp icy too pure too
fresh too cold but soon
it travels through nose and mouth
enters lungs and warms slightly

SUMMER RUNNING IS THE WORST

the humidity
hovers just above with thick
persistence trapped by
oak trees on path hazy air
clouds vision wet air clogs lungs

muggy buggy &
heavy not quite air but soup
hard to inhale or
exhale no inspiration
just jagged and labored breaths

IN AND OUT

Air enters lungs as

chest rises so does heart head

a vast expansive feeling

open Joy empty Love a desire to Exhale

Embrace the whole world

not with arms stretching wide in a big bear hug

but with feet flying faster

and lungs breathing in and out

DIVINE INSPIRATION

mundane run routine
focused on form pace
breathing then Awareness life beyond breaks through
hear more feel more am more less
at same time

sudden ecstasy not outside or inside but
Beside self shadow river mom joy delight awe grief longing enduring love

I feel electric
amplifying sounds
lighting up paths
nothing but pure energy electrons
moving through the universe

this lasts a minute? maybe more maybe less
but it's worth it
fleeting flashes of the infinite
pure attention without will

prayer

for Jamie Quatro

pure attention is
prayer before words before thoughts
before anything
but noticing a bird's song
or a rain-heavy blossom.

for Thomas Gardner

run without a watch
don't track thoughts let run
distill down to breath
rhythm attention—an oak
leaf suspended in a web.

pure attention is
not noticing everything
it's noticing just
enough to have a thought or
lose a thought or write a poem

hear without headphones
listen without music sounds
all around in the gorge on
the path near the river by
the trees under the tall bridge

gorge voices travel
from river to woods to path
location hard to
pinpoint purpose uncertain
it could be the rowing team

is that a bird or
a squirrel in the dry brush?
is that a car or
the wind whooshing from behind?
the shapes of sound shift strangely

closer to the gorge
some scampering overhead
thumping & cracking
tiny feet making big noise
keeping busy preparing

uneven breaths mix with
striking feet on leaf-filled path
a soft wind settles
on Tree two crows argue with
a passing car by Big Bridge

the honk of a goose
mingles with the honk
of a car both impatient
traveling swiftly wanting
to get where they're going fast

today the air is
light calm gentle everything
is—the sky the trees the path
the river even the cars
sunday drivers on friday

illuminated
by sun in one perfect spot
circle of white on
surface invitation to
dive into river? too cold!

start bottom of hill
climb facing bright sun blinding
glare fogged up glasses
focused effort on the path
but above the path floating

grayish blue blueish
gray dark brown light brown tan cream
red orange yellow gold
light green bright green glowing green
white the colors of the gorge

congregation

for Frédéric Gros

not alone on path

everything talks greets demands

to be noticed trees

wind bikes birds rustling murmurs

responding to your presence

Today I heard the
birds and when other runners
said "good morning" I
said "good morning" too. 20
times I said it—what a crowd!

Good morning Shadow.
Who are you today? Friend? Foe?
Will you help me run
leading me up the big hill
or will you linger behind?

Above on the bluff
I spot the Sun shimmering
on the water. It's
always just ahead leading
me to the end of my run.

An encounter: two
runners meet traveling same
direction beside
each other then divided
by grass trees paths pace distance.

The footsteps echo
haunting hunting hovering
just behind gaining.
Trying not to notice not
to care is impossible.

Saw Shadow again.
She was moving all around—
sometimes up ahead
sometimes beside sometimes down
in the gorge running alone.

On the path. No cars
allowed just bikes skiers on
skates and city plows
that clear off the snow after
it falls and while I'm running.

On the other side
of the road a group of kids
sing a popular
song that I can't quite remember.
Running by I feel their joy.

Today Shadow is
not my friend. Sun directly
above has convinced her
to make me miserable.
She tugs hard at my heels.

After I run up
and down a steep hill Left Thigh
reminds me that she
hates steep hills. We argue first
then agree to disagree.

A woman walking
by the creek in a coat and
cap looks too hot to
me. Running by in my shorts
do I look too cold to her?

I don't see the geese
but I know that they're around
somewhere. Evidence
of their existence is all
over the path underfoot.

My shadow leads me
today. I like watching her run.
Sometimes I marvel
at her form, other times I
pretend that she is my mom.

A single black glove
in the middle of the path.
Who does it belong
to? How did they drop it? Why
is it here? Is it lonely?

A gray car speeds by
ignoring the four way stop.
As I lament its
escape from consequences
a police car passes. Yes!

Last week a runner
was killed right here on a spot
I run by a lot
hit by Distracted Driver
while running in the crosswalk.

I thought I saw my
mom running towards me. I
let myself believe
it was her. Alive. But it
wasn't. She's dead—8 years now.

Muted Wind, softened
by hood, covering cold ears.
Roars become whispers
Sneaky Wind, making me think
it left. Still here just hiding.

Thoughtful Wind, clearing
piles of leaves from running path
as I come closer.
Teasing Wind, messing with me
and my hood. Why won't it stop?

Helpful Wind, getting
me to run faster, freer.
Pushing at my back.
Shape-shifting Wind, always in
new forms and making new sounds.

offering

for Wendell Berry

Take silence's gift
take the little words that come
like prayers prayed back to
the one who prays make a poem
that does not disturb silence

for Mary Oliver

an alleluia
on the page that's what
these poems are not trying to
explain anything just here
breathing and offering thanks

When I end my run I leave the gorge and walk home. I sit down and write about what I remember—sights sounds textures feelings thoughts.

Late January/4 miles. Alone. Not quite but almost lost in a dreamlike state when everything shifts unfocused and fuzzy.

Mid February/57 degrees. Warm! No pain! Joy! Almost ignoring puddle-covered paths & squishy soaked socks.

Early March/5 miles. Quiet but not calm. Active. Noisy. Birds. Cars. Feet. A graceless runner running by, swinging arms awkwardly.

Late April/10 miles. Beautiful. Sunny. No wind. Such joy in running more than an hour with no pain or doubt on paths I love.

Late May/6 miles. Felt like I could almost outrun the cars today—fast free—out here in the world not back there in a car.

Early June/9 miles. Running at Lake Nokomis. Bright shining water that's too cold to swim in but just right for running around.

Late July/8 miles. Thick and heavy air. Mid-run improvisation—make-shift bandaid created for blistered toes out of napkin.

Early August/4 miles. A quick glimpse of river glittering brightly in early sun, only small flashes filtered through thick trees.

All of September/injured. No miles of running. Some miles of swimming and biking instead. Not as much moving but still writing.

Late October/3 miles. Seeing St. Paul across the gorge. Almost bare branches mixed with neon orange leaves. Crisp, cold air. Winter soon!

Mid November/4 miles/ windy. A few orange and gold leaves stubbornly cling to branches, refusing to believe winter's coming.

Early December/7 miles. Chanted in six-eight time to steady my rhythm and distract me from the effort of climbing a long steep beautiful hill.

god

today I saw god
near the end of my long run
a verb not a noun
the act of being upright
performed by Daily Walker

since starting to run
and to write while running this
walker has been here
faithfully walking moving
being outside near the gorge

today I noticed
and said "good morning" instead
of just running by
an act of pure attention
performed beside the river