



Musings With My Mentor

He was the youngest person I ever knew.

His fundamental belief in the fairy tale and a land called *Zero* were the filaments of his fabric of *beginnings*.

beginnings,
beginnings,
beginnings,
beginnings I love beginnings were frequently the words that started one of his talks.

I first met Lou Kahn at the University of Pennsylvania School of Architecture in 1953. His words removed the filter between my brain and my mouth.

Clarity, dumbness and the existent will of each situation took root in my life.

I think about Lou Kahn every day, even when I don't think about him. Because if I paused and thought about it, I'd realize why am I obsessed with clarity, why am I obsessed with my jag about ignorance? Is it my shtick, my stage show, my way of peeling off from the crowd? Or is it, as I've come to learn, who I am, which is based on the centering of being dumb that Lou Kahn gave me.

Why do I do any of this? Why do I do this book? *Why* is a child's word, *why* is the word that children ask, why, why, why, why why? *Why Daddy? Why Momma? Why is anything the way it is?*

I've never been to a shrink and don't intend to see one, so no one's putting words in my mouth. Why am I doing this book when I don't have to? No one's asked me to do this book, or any other book I've done, or any conferences. I've never been asked to do anything.

I think everyone wants to feel wanted. I don't feel wanted, and I don't feel like I'm preaching to get anybody to walk behind me.

I don't think Lou Kahn wanted anyone to walk behind him. Lou was my mentor, he still is my mentor. Lou's been dead for many years; he died when he was 73. I'm 82. He did very few buildings. There are certainly numerous cases of poets and painters and architects who are deeply appreciated who died young. So this is not rare.

But the prominent architects today in the world, had they died in their early 70s, would not have what we call a body of work. And some of the top biologists and physicists are the same, though **Einstein** died at 76, which is remarkable because I still think of Einstein as my elder. We have these notions in our heads about prophetic people who every once in awhile pop up.

Why does this strange little man have such an affect on me? Let's forget he had a profound affect on many others, which I know he did, I'm not reserving myself for the one who he most affected. Many people who were around him, at a quiet moment, just say his name.

The night of his funeral (Louis I. Kahn, 1901 - 1974) there was a party, a gathering at the library at the University of Pennsylvania where he taught, in the apse of an incredible building by **Frank Furness**, who influenced **Louis Sullivan** in Chicago who in turn influenced **Frank Lloyd Wright**. Many of his former students were there and many were angry at Lou for dying – how could he do that to us?

It's such a small world.

FRANK FURNESS

Frank Furness' contribution to the University of Pennsylvania was the University Library (now the Fisher Fine Arts Library) built by his firm of Furness, Evans and Company. At the time of its commission, it was promoted as the finest collegiate library in the world; the cornerstone was laid in 1888 and the building was dedicated in 1891. For a time this library fell out of favor and was almost demolished, but it is now recognized as a masterpiece of Philadelphia's finest Victorian architect.

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LOUIS SULLIVAN

In 1896, architect Louis Sullivan wrote, *It is the pervading law of all things organic and inorganic, of all things physical and metaphysical, of all things human, and all things super-human, of all true manifestations of the head, of the heart, of the soul, that the life is recognizable in its expression, that form ever follows function. This is the law. The term form follows function would become one of the prevailing tenets of modern architects.*

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Wonder is the beginning of wisdom. ”

SOCRATES

A digression: I was going down the street on a trolley in Philadelphia once towards the Schuylkill River and saw workers wrecking a beautiful Frank Furness church. I thought *Oh, shit!* so I jumped out of the trolley and went up to the head of the job and yelled, *Stop!* And he said *Whaddya mean stop, kid?* I was maybe 18, or 19, a freshman. Half the building was gone, so I said, *That half, that grill in that window, will you save it for me?* It was huge and beautiful, about 7 x 14 feet and weighing a ton and a half, but I said, *Will you save it for me? I'll get a truck to pick it up tomorrow, will you do that for me?*

I was so passionate about it but didn't know how I'd do it. So as soon as I got to a phone, I called my Poppa. I said, *This is not understandable, what I'm about to ask, but could you send a truck with some men to this address tomorrow and get this grill and put it on one of the docks at the cigar factory where you work?*

Papa so often did what I asked. It remained there for maybe 20, 30 years. Years later, there was a huge retrospective at the Philadelphia Museum of Art on Frank Furness. So I called them and said *I have a grill from his church, would you like to have that in your collection and exhibit? You just have to pick it up.*

They did. They valued it at \$25,000 or \$30,000, which was a lot of money then. My father got a tax write-off and gave me \$5,000 from it. And it's in their collection now.

That story's interesting because I act on what I think about at the moment. If I think of any idea, I try to act on it. My life is just moments. I've never told that story before. Why do I tell this story in a piece about Lou Kahn? Because as a teacher, he made me more of myself, he gave me the centering principles that allowed me to act, to be more me. I don't think I do anything in the style of Lou Kahn. He doesn't affect my paintings, he doesn't affect my graphic work.

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To find yourself, think for yourself. ”

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SOCRATES

I do think of things and wonder what Lou would have thought and it would have been interesting, but it doesn't affect how I would do it because it was the principles that affected them, that it should be good and not just look good. He never said that but those principles came from his being.

I don't have any friend or acquaintance I like fully. I like slices of people. He had a lot of slices that I loved and were important to me. That would've gone for Gandhi, too.

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Education is the kindling of a flame not the filling of a vessel. ”

SOCRATES

It's the flaws that make gold not look like plastic. It's not the perfection.

\$25,000 and \$30,000 in 1961 had the same buying power as \$198,427 and \$238,112, respectively, in 2016.

If I see a stone not perfectly made in the Pantheon, I don't love the Pantheon less. I know it was built by men who were flawed, which is what we are. And what we can celebrate.

Lou sat and had a conversation with the person sitting across from him, which was necessary for him, and a piece of yellow trash tracing paper, and a conversation with some mythical idea of anthropomorphizing what the building wanted to be, of its existence will, why is it there, what's it telling me. Does the concert hall want to a violin sitting in a violin case and the space between the violin and the case is the lobby, and it surrounds?

Are parking garages around the city really harbors? The brick wanting to be an arch is overused but he thought of each piece of material in that way, of what it was telling him, what the building was telling him what the sun thought as it struck a building, the existent will of an object or performance.

I remember a building since torn down on Vine Street in Philadelphia, a small building that had been a union headquarters, a little square building that was not impressive except it was beautifully detailed. He was figuring out how you bend stainless steel to make a beautiful window. He cared about that very much, as he cared about the railings of a stair and the toilets in a building. He was obsessed with the toilets, the stalls being off the floor so you could mop between them. He was obsessed with that, and that there was always a bit of natural light in the toilet. He thought there should be light in every room; even in a closet, there should be light.

This building was torn down but I remember when it was going up. He was always in debt but spent a considerable amount of money building a model of the foundations of the building, of how they would look if they were ever torn down. The foundation should be correct, and of course that was his attachment with the past and the ruins he had seen in his trips to Italy and Greece.

Who would think of doing that? But once you think of it you can't get it out of your mind. When you peel back an idea what do you find? When I peel back understanding I see conversation. When I peel back conversation I see this panoply of conversation with animate and inanimate objects, conversation certainly with another person, an imagined conversation you have on the phone when the other person is there, and also a conversation with a desk and a chair and a room and an idea. And a conversation about a path somebody takes in walking. And does it tell me anything?

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The art and science of asking questions is the source of all knowledge. ”

THOMAS BERGER

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Goethe died in 1832. As you know, Goethe was very active in science. In fact, he did some very good work in plant morphology and mineralogy. But he was quite bitter at the way in which many scientists refused to grant him a hearing because he was a poet and therefore, they felt, he couldn't be serious.

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STEPHEN JAY GOULD

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If I don't make it, I'll be very sad that there are things I didn't do, but I'm happy that I've done what I have. ”

STEPHEN JAY GOULD

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Music is liquid architecture; Architecture is frozen music.

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JOHANNE WOLFGANG VON GOETHE

PARTIAL LIST OF MY GUIDES & MENTORS

471 BC - 399 BC
SOCRATES

1415 - 1492
PIERO DELLA FRANCESCA

1872-1940
PAUL KLEE

1901-1974
LOUIS I KAHN

1907-1978
CHARLES EAMES

1912 - 1991
SCHUYLER VAN RENSSELAER
CAMMANN

1908-2006
FRANK STANTON

1940-
GEOFFREY WEST

1941-2002
STEVEN JAY GOULD

In the center of town the streets should become buildings. This should be interplayed with a sense of movement which does not tax local streets for non-local traffic. There should be a system of viaducts which encase an area which can reclaim the local streets for their own use, and it should be made so this viaduct has a ground floor of shops and usable area.

LOU KAHN at the 1962 International Design Conference in Aspen, talking about a traffic study he won a grant for to study traffic movement in Philadelphia.

On the back cover of this book is a photograph that seems totally out of place. Don't turn the book over now, but you'll see it at the end. It's a non sequitur, it's the Piazza San Marco. It has nothing to do with anything else in the book except my memory of when I first saw it in June after my 20th birthday in March that year. I was so excited about seeing it. And I went through the archway of the colonnade directly across the far end, the wide end with the church, and it said to me *I'm nothing. And I'm beautiful as shit. I am amazing. And I'm nothing. Don't plant grass on me! No trees! No grass!*

I've been in search of these nothings for a long time. I find many numbers of spaces between things, of silence. I once drove Lou (because he never learned to drive) to Princeton for a series of 4 lectures, and then back to Philly. As I look back, I didn't know why he asked me and not others to drive. I was silent, and it was OK to be silent.

He gave a series of lectures on silence and light and colors in shadows, which show up in his colored drawings he made in Europe, and there's always purples and reds and greens in the shadows. I didn't understand then what he was talking about them, the silence and light, I was confused, I didn't understand and it took me decades to figure it out.

And I don't know if I can explain it to another person now, but I can feel it now. I was mystified then.

When I speak, I don't use any notes. Lou used no notes when he spoke, but I never thought of the connection, ever. I never thought until recently that he just got up and had a conversation with the audience, which was in essence a conversation with himself, about what he was thinking about that day, of what was churning in his mind and give that speech and then give it a month later with modifications, not because he was calling it in but because he was still thinking about it and hadn't worked it out yet and wanted to improve on it.

He really didn't care about the audience; he cared about doing good work and making that speech better and the emergence of an idea, and for him to understand it better because I don't think he understood it either.

It is good to feel approval out of the un-measurable
of commonality - ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~spontaneous~~ ^{spontaneous} of human agreement.

one can sense ~~silence as the~~ ^{silence as the} ~~birth~~ ^{birth} of desire to be to express

The Pyramids seem to say "Let me tell ~~you~~ of the
desire ~~that~~ motivating being and the meeting with
Nature in order to be

one can sense ~~the~~ ^{Nature as light and all material} ~~material~~ as spent light.

The mountains the streams the atmosphere and we all of
spent light.

Silence moves to light
light moves to silence



Silence to light
light to silence
These paths ~~do not~~ meet
The threshold of their meeting

is ^{the} ~~the~~ ^{threshold} of in operation
is ^{the} ~~the~~ ^{threshold} of in operation
The longest ^{is} ~~is~~ ^{the} ~~the~~ ^{longest} ^{path} ^{of} ~~of~~ ^{silence} ^{sustaining} ^{the} ~~the~~ ^{desire} ^{to} ~~to~~ ^{express}
before crossing the path of light is ^{the} ~~the~~ ^{general} ^{of} ~~of~~ ^{prety}
The ~~longest~~ ^{longest} ^{path} ^{of} ~~of~~ ^{silence} ^{sustaining} ^{the} ~~the~~ ^{desire} ^{to} ~~to~~ ^{express}
parting from silence to feel ^{the} ~~the~~ ^{total} ^{harmony} ^{of} ~~of~~ ^{all} ^{presences}
to come to silence to come to silence alluring light to take its longest path
to silence is ^{the} ~~the~~ ^{discovery} ⁱⁿ ~~in~~ ^{science}
Yet a Newton ^{needed} ~~needed~~ ^{but} ~~but~~ ^a ~~a~~ ^{hint} ^{from} ~~from~~ ^{Nature}, ^{the} ~~the~~ ^{approach} ^{of} ~~of~~ ^{all} ^{presences},
He ~~was~~ ^{lets} ~~lets~~ ^{not} ~~not ^{so} ~~so~~ ^{of} ~~of~~ ^{desire}, ^{he} ~~he~~ ^{yet} ~~yet~~ ^{not} ~~not ^{said} ^{he} ~~he~~ ^{yet} ~~yet~~ ^{not} ~~not ^{made} ^{the} ~~the~~ ^{point}
He ~~is~~ ^{is} ~~is~~ ^{approaching} ^{his} ~~his~~ ^{knowings} ^{on} ~~on~~ ^{favor} ^{of} ~~of~~ ^{silence} ^{order} ^{out} ~~out~~ ^{of} ~~of~~ ^{knowledge}
to sense ^{law} ~~law~~ ^{as} ~~as~~ ^{only} ^a ~~a~~ ^{part} ^{of} ~~of~~ ^{order}~~~~~~

A sample from Lou's notebooks. He had a conversation with the word and the page as he did with his drawings as he did with materials and the building and the space and the place itself.