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Jalal Al-Din Rumi (1207 – 1273)

Who Says Words with my Mouth

All day I think about it, then at night I say it.
Where did I come from, and what am I supposed to be doing?
I have no idea.
My soul is from elsewhere, I'm sure of that,
and I intend to end up there.

This drunkenness began in some other tavern.
When I get back around to that place,
I'll be completely sober. Meanwhile,
I'm like a bird from another continent, sitting in this aviary.

The day is coming when I fly off,
but who is it now in my ear, who hears my voice?
Who says words with my mouth?

Who looks out with my eyes? What is the soul?
I cannot stop asking.
If I could taste one sip of an answer,
I could break out of this prison for drunks.
I didn't come here of my own accord, and I can't leave that way.
Whoever brought me here will have to take me back.

This poetry. I never know what I'm going to say.
I don't plan it.
When I'm outside the saying of it,
I get very quiet and rarely speak at all.

translated from the Persian by John Coyne and Coleman Barks

from *Americans' Favorite Poems: The Favorite Poem Anthology*. Robert Pinsky, ed. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000.

Oodgeroo Noonuccal (1920 – 1993)

God's One Mistake

It repenteth me that I have made man. — Genesis, 6

I who am ignorant and know so little,
So little of life and less of God,
This I do know
That happiness is intended and could be,
That all wild simple things have life fulfilled
Save man,
That all on earth have natural happiness
Save man.
Without books or schools, lore or philosophy
In my own heart I know
That hate is wrong,
Injustice evil.
Pain there must be and tears,
Sorrow and death, but not
Intolerance, unkindness, cruelty,
Unless men choose
The mean and base, which Nature never made,
But we alone.
And sometimes I will think that God looks down
With loving smile, saying,
'Poor child, poor child, maybe I was wrong
In planning for you reason and free will
To fashion your own life in your own way.
For all the rest
I settled and appointed as for children
Their simple days, but you
I gave the Godlike gift to choose,
Who were not wise — for see how you have chosen,
Poor child, alone among them all now
Unhappy on the earth.'

from *The Penguin Book of Spiritual Verse: 110 Poets on the Divine*. Kaveh Akbar, ed. New York: Penguin Books, 2023.

Oodgeroo Noonuccal (also known as Kath Walker) was an Aboriginal Australian political activist for aboriginal rights, artist, educator, and author of many books. [We Are Going](#) (1964) was the first book to be published by an Aboriginal woman. She was the first Aboriginal Australian to publish a book of poetry.

Mirza Ghalib (1797 – 1869)

For the Raindrop

For the raindrop, joy is in entering the river—
Unbearable pain becomes its own cure.

Travel far enough into sorrow, tears turn to sighing;
in this way we learn how water can die into air.

When, after heavy rain, the storm clouds disperse,
is it not that they've wept themselves clear to the end?

If you want to know the miracle, how wind can polish a mirror,
Look: the shining glass grows green in spring.

It's the rose's unfolding, Ghalib, that creates the desire to see—
In every color and circumstance, may the eyes be open for what comes.

Translated from the Urdu by Jane Hirshfield

from thevalueofsparrows.wordpress.com

He was one of the great poets of the Mughal Empire (1526 – 1720), which encompassed most of the Indian subcontinent. He wrote in Urdu and Persian.

Adélia Prado

Dysrhythmia

Old people spit with absolutely no finesse
and bicycles bully traffic on the sidewalk.
The unknown poet waits for criticism
and reads his verses three times a day
like a monk with his book of hours.
The brush got old and no longer bushes.
Right now what's important
is to untangle the hair.
We give birth to life between our legs
and go on talking about it till the end,
few of us understanding:
it's the soul that's erotic.
If I want, I put on a Bach aria
so I can feel forgiving and calm.
What I understand of God is His wrath;
there's no other way to say it.
The ball thumping against the wall annoys me,
but the kids laugh, contented.
I've seen hundreds of afternoons like today.
No agony, just an anxious impatience:
something is going to happen.
Destiny doesn't exist.
It's God we need, and fast.

translated from the Portuguese by Ellen Doré Watson

from *The Penguin Book of Spiritual Verse: 110 Poets on the Divine*. Kaveh Akbar, ed. New York: Penguin Books, 2023.

She is Brazilian.

Kim Nam-Jo

Foreign Flags

There I first glimpsed
such desolate loneliness.

Above the soaring towers of the old castle
at Heidelberg
a flag is waving
like a boat being rowed
like a windmill turning in the wind
waving on and on
until the threads grow thin
then casting away that body like a corpse
they raise a new flag

I wonder
what it's like to be up there all alone
in the sky with the drifting clouds,
what it's like
to be shaking all over, looking down
on the mutability of people and things?

There I first glimpsed
such adult prayer.

translated from the Korean by Brother Anthony of Taize
from *The Penguin Book of Spiritual Verse: 110 Poets on the Divine*. Kaveh Akbar, ed. New York: Penguin Books,
2023.

She is Catholic and South Korean.

Wisława Szymborska

Astonishment

Why after all this one and not the rest?
Why this specific self, not in a nest,
but a house? Sewn up not in scales, but skin?
Not topped off by a leaf, but by a face?
Why on earth now, on Tuesday of all days,
and why on earth, pinned down by this star's pin?
In spite of years of my not being here?
In spite of seas of all these dates and fates,
these cells, celestials and coelenterates?
What is it really that made me appear
neither an inch nor half a globe too far,
neither a minute nor aeons too early?
What made me fill myself with me so squarely?
Why am I staring now into the dark
and muttering this unending monologue
just like the growling thing we call a dog?

translated from Polish by Clare Cavanagh and Stanislaw Baranczak

from *The Penguin Book of Spiritual Verse: 110 Poets on the Divine*. Kaveh Akbar, ed. New York: Penguin Books, 2023.

Black Elk (1863 – 1950)

Everything the Power of the World does is done in a circle

Everything the Power of the World does
is done in a circle. The sky is round,
and I have heard that the earth is round
like a ball, and so are all the stars.
The wind, in its greatest power, whirls.

Birds make their nests in circles,
for theirs is the same religion as ours.

The sun comes forth and goes down again
in a circle. The moon does the same,
and both are round. Even the seasons
form a great circle in their changing,
and always come back again to where they were.

The life of man is a circle from childhood to childhood,
and so it is in everything where power moves.

from the Sioux, as told through John G. Neihardt

from Americans' Favorite Poems: The Favorite Poem Anthology. Robert Pinsky, ed. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000.

Ojibwa Prayer

Grandfather,
Look at our brokenness.

We know that in all creation
Only the human family
Has strayed from the Sacred Way.

We know that we are the ones
Who are divided,
And we are the ones
Who must come back together
To walk the Sacred Way.

Grandfather,
Sacred One,
Teach us love, compassion, and honor
That we may heal the earth
And heal each other.

from *Giving Sorrow Words: Poems of Strength and Solace*. Karen vanMeenen, Charles
Rossiter, eds. Pembroke Pines, Florida: National Association for Poetry Therapy Foundation,
2002.

Kobayashi Issa (1763 – 1828) 3 haiku

All the time I pray to Buddha
I keep on
 killing mosquitoes.

Even with insects –
some can sing,
 some can't.

The snow is melting
and the village is flooded
 with children.

translated from Japanese by Robert Hass
from *The Penguin Book of Spiritual Verse: 110 Poets on the Divine*. Kaveh Akbar, ed. New York: Penguin Books,
2023.

Max Ehrmann

A Prayer

Let me do my work each day; and if the darkened hours of despair overcome me, may I not forget the strength that comforted me in the desolation of other times. May I still remember the bright hours that found me walking over the silent hills of my childhood, or dreaming on the margin of the quiet river, when a light glowed within me, and I promised my early God to have courage amid the tempests of the changing years. Spare me from bitterness and from the sharp passions of unguarded moments. May I not forget that poverty and riches are of the spirit. Though the world know me not, may my thoughts and actions be such as shall keep me friendly with myself. Lift my eyes from the earth, and let me not forget the uses of the stars. Forbid that I should judge others, lest I condemn myself. Let me not follow the clamor of the world, but walk calmly in my path. Give me a few friends who will love me for what I am; and keep ever burning before my vagrant steps the kindly light of hope. And though age and infirmity overtake me, and I come not within sight of the castle of my dreams, teach me still to be thankful for life, and for time's olden memories that are good and sweet; and may the evening's twilight find me gentle still.

from www.ayearofbeinghere.com