

Love Like This

poems by Michael Robbins

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Foreword

Sharing the fruits of ones inner life is a delicate process. When a poem first arrives in my consciousness, I feel it gestating as a felt sense in my body for a couple of days before I sit down to write it. Sometimes the labor is hard and the poem miscarries or has to cook a little longer before it is ready. Sometimes the birth is easy and the poem comes out fully formed, with a clear voice and a startling shape. Once a poem is born, I live with it and cultivate it until it is ready to be shared. This process can take a while. After a poem is shared, it begins to live in the mind stream of my community of friends and family. Based on the feedback I get, I may work on it some more, or throw it back in the fire. If a poem is well received, my confidence in its capacity to hold a creative charge grows. These poems are born of that gradual process of ripening.

Most of these poems are about 'big' themes. They are about the journey of love as it plays out in our relationships with each other and with God, birth and death, healing, the process of growing older, spirituality and sex. Some of them are very directive and may be experienced as provocative or confrontational. There are also several poems that were written for friends and family. As such, these poems span the spectrum from the intensely personal, to the mystical and philosophical. My hope is that each of them has the capacity to open your awareness and to evoke a state of productive reflection around a particular theme.

If you feel moved to share your responses I would love to hear them. All creative work belongs to that magical space between people that we call our culture. This space is enriched by dialogue. If you wish to contact me, you can e-mail me at michaelrobbins@rcn.com.

I hope that you enjoy these pages and that they have something relevant to say to you. They are a gift from my heart to yours.

Michael Robbins
January, 2005

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Gratitudes

Every book is a product of many minds coming together. This one is no exception. I would like to thank Iku Oseki for her endless patience and good humor while I burned the midnight oil editing and writing, Sandra Robbins for her careful reading of the text and for her editorial suggestions, Robert Gerzon, Bob Fox and Tom Yeomans for their generosity in writing short reviews to grace the back cover, Emily Scott for her wonderful design skills and help with the final layout of the poems, my many friends and family members who read a first draft and offered feedback and encouragement, especially Steve Weinstein, Jai Keller, Samvedam Randles, Michael Jaro, Sharri Johnson, Lisa Kennedy, Fred and Judy Nenner, Ann Reilly, Richard Numeroff, Mark and Holly Johnson, Kat Mitchell, Melissa Robbins-Monius, Laura Robbins-Milne, Arthur Robbins, Nina Klebanoff, Rich Armstrong, Elaine Pratt, Fran Carter, Susan Cassano, and many others too numerous to mention, my clients who have taught me so much about the depth of the human heart and mind, the SCT community and Yvonne Agazarian for providing a learning laboratory inside of which I could hone much of the wisdom represented in these poems, Pir Vilayat Khan and the Sufi community for giving the spiritual longings of my Being their first home, Master Mantak Chia and the community of the Universal Healing Tao for so many clear directions and meditative exercises to transform my body, heart and mind, Peter Wayne and the Friday morning Qi Gong group for all of their good Ch'i, and the countless fellow travelers who have shared their life experiences with me. These poems could not have been written without the loving support of each you. I value you each deeply and send you great basketfuls of Loving-Kindness.

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*I would like to dedicate this book to Iku and Miwa
for creating the circle of kindness, clarity and wisdom
that has given birth to these poems,*

*and to my parents, Arthur and Sandra
whose determination to making the world a better place
has helped me to formulate my core values in life.*

We Are Crossing a Boundary Now

an invocation

We are crossing a boundary now.
Leave behind your familiar maps
and time honored interpretations,
pack them neatly and check them at the door.
They will be kept safe for you until you return,
though you may not want them anymore.

We are crossing a boundary now.
The constructs of the past and the future are slowly fading away.
Surrender your war stories, your tragedies, romances
and catastrophizing into the flame of the Present.
Dear friends who have responded to the invitation,
the ceremony has begun,
the bride and groom are at the altar,
let us not keep the guests waiting.

We are crossing a boundary now.
We have reached the edge of the Unknown,
the mystery from which all Creativity bubbles forth
like an effervescent spring of possibilities.
Make sure you have brought your curiosity along!

We are crossing a boundary now.
The threshold where the
Everywhere and Always
meets the Here and Now.
We ask that the energies of Self and Essence
guide us on our journey
and that we have the courage
to not hold back on our explorations.
We seek the wisdom to see through illusions,
to dissolve the fears
that we have told ourselves that we must hold onto
year after year after year.
The discrimination to know the difference between
the paper tigers and the real ones.

How many of those tigers have long ago
snuck back into the primordial ooze?
Leaving us quaking superstitiously,
our bodies still believing they were there?
They're not even alive anymore!
Their bones have long ago turned to dust!

Open your eyes!
Dare to become present!
Embrace yourself!
All of you!
Nothing that is real is forbidden!

We are crossing a boundary now.
Into the Sacred Circle.
Into the cauldron of each other.
The fire is hot — Pay attention!

Listen to the instrument of your body.
The life force is flowing through it.
Find resonance with each other —
Join on that!
Trust the current —
it knows where to go.
The adventure is calling,
the journey has begun,
let's go!

Promises

He felt strong
that morning
like there was sunshine
streaming
through his veins
like his heart
was pumping light
and he could
hold poisonous
serpents
in his bare hands
and hunt
crocodiles
and drink
the sunlight
of foreign
countries
through his skin
while smelling
the salty air
and eating fried
octopus
and flirting
with the
waitress
whose eyes
sparkle with
promises
she will
never
keep.

This Heat

If there is no heat in your soul,
I don't want you.
If you cannot dance
like that Spanish Dancer
with every pore of your skin
breathing fire,
then how will you ever produce
enough Light to find your way Home?
Before you can know anything Real,
the passion in the core of your Being
must be rubbed so raw
that it bursts into flames.

This heat is not just about Love.
It is also about Rage.
For there is so much in this world
that it is right and necessary
to rebel against.

This heat will burn away all masks.
Yours and Others.

Do not run from this scorching.
Nothing can protect you from it.

Find that Spanish dancer
whose eyes are flashing tongues of fire,
whose heart is fierce
with the absolute knowing of what she wants
and what she will not tolerate.
Gaze out at the world
from inside of her burning.
Maybe then you will be of some use.
Maybe then God will recognize you
and call you to dine with Him.

Do you think
the Prophets were meek and sexless?
Not a chance!
They were towering infernos!
When they walked the streets
even the stones melted
beneath them!

Them

If
You listen
to everything
They
say
you may
wake up
to discover
a brick in your throat
the size of a fist
and that
Courage
has left you.

If
You listen to
Them
you may end up
with a
Trojan Horse
in your living room
that your
dearest friend
delivered
with the
best of intentions
and have to
battle
Greek warriors
all night long.

If
You listen to
Them
you
may find
a shit storm

stuck between
your ears
for days
and be unable
to write
a single line
or even draw
a stick
figure.

The Disciple of Love

1.

Unity

All my art is a way of feeling
the body of my Beloved.
Her roundness
the hardness of her bones
her soft crevices
the pink of her inside
the cascade of flesh
flowering into rainbows
of ecstatic knowing
the soft landing of our ending
our resting into each other
going everywhere
and nowhere
achieving nothing
and everything
spilling over with tears
and laughter
and the water of brooks
and rivers
and oceans
and the thunderous rain
of storm clouds releasing
great peeling sheets of gray water
inside of which
the question of our differences
makes no sense
and there is only
this joyful and horrible
outpouring of loves knowing itself
and our continuous
birthing and dying
dissolving and finding form
only to die
again and again

and this moving that
cleanses our hearts
of every last vestige
of who we think we are.

2.

Courage

And what of separateness?
The abyss that is also part of loves knowing?
For how can we truly know each other
unless we are in part apart?
Unless we bump
up against that terrifying Space
and grieve it and celebrate it
even as we step
like frightened rabbits
onto a fresh bed of untouched snow
our feet daring to disturb
the glorious blankness
of the Space that separates us?
In that moment
when I touch the soft belly
of my Beloved
I recoil from
the awful recognition
that she is indeed Other
and I know
that the most essential emotion
is Courage
that I am nothing
without Courage
and that nothing
will ever exist without Courage
and that the truth
behind all creative acts
is the Courage to leap forward
out of womb like silence
and fall into Space
with no guarantee

of ever finding Her.
I know that this leap
is the greatest action
I can ever take
the greatest test of my Faith
and the moment
when I truly emulate God
and discover myself
as God.

3.

Faith

To truly know You
I must sacrifice everything.
The choice to love
is the most terrifying act of Faith.
I think of Abraham and Isaac
and suddenly
I understand why God
asked Abraham to sacrifice his son
to prove the power of his Faith
and to demonstrate
his deep and unwavering loyalty
to a Love
that was greater than anything
he could ever understand.

In Faith
I fall with him
into the blackness
of that instant
when he held the knife
over Isaac's throat
and am horrified
at the ruthless wisdom
of this awful test
of Love
and ache with
his conflict
of giving up his only son

this image of himself
 that he was so identified with
 that he had collapsed the Space
 around him
 until he no longer
 knew the other
 as Other.
 This boy
 that perhaps he thought
 was a perfect mirror
 of all his hopes and fears.
 This boy
 that he thought he knew
more deeply than he knew himself.
 I understand
 that this knife
was meant to crack this mirror
 and to shatter the illusion
 that he or I
 could ever truly fathom
the mysteries of our Beloved
 and that the knife
was meant to set Isaac free
 from the possessiveness
 of the Old Man's love
 that it was never
 meant to kill Isaac
 only Abraham's Illusion
 that he could ever really
 know or control
 the Space
 when Love enters.
 And in a flash
 I know again
that all gravity must fail me
 if my Faith
is to mean anything at all
 and that I must be willing
 to be forever cut loose
 from the safe harbor of
 who I think I am

and depend only on that Love-Space
as my refuge and strength.
I quake with terror
because I know
that my Faith is so small
and my rebellion so mighty
and I despair
of ever finding my way
to the soft belly of my Beloved
and weep
great sobbing tears
at the impossibility of Love
and at how Love betrays itself
in its promises
and the cruel price of Love.

4.

Mercy

Then I remember
that the Angel
stayed Abraham's hand.
I wonder was this because
his inner work was complete?
Was this because
Abraham had truly
and forever and absolutely
broken the glass of his Vanity?
Or was it that God
realized that Abraham was weak
and had Mercy?
Though I know that I will never
comprehend the mind of God
I choose to see Him as Merciful.
I imagine Abraham
as deeply and eternally humbled
as he is thrown back again
into knowing the depth of his rebellion
and the work that he had to do
to truly become a disciple of Love

and I know again
how I resist Love's Voice
and the Space
and how hopelessly frightened
I am of ever finding my way
to You
or of truly having the Courage
to love You
with all my heart
and body
and soul.
In that instant
I know
with piercing honesty
that I am refusing Love
with every breath
and every ounce of me.
For to truly let Love in
will mean both death and birth
neither of which
I will ever be able to control.
I imagine that God
in His infinite mercy
knows this
and loves me anyway
and in front of this Merciful God
I am overflowing
with Gratitude.

They Are Coming To Eat Us

The Bushmen in the Kalahari
call us the Line people.
They call themselves the Circle people.

We live inside the Idea
that Time and Space are
made out of Lines and Edges,
that it is impossible
for a thought to heal a heart,
or cross an ocean,
that you can't talk to trees,
that rocks are dead things,
and that each action we take
is not simultaneously felt
by our ancestors
and our children.

They don't believe this.
They live in a world of
great spinning wheels
of feeling and light.
They track their food
on luminous lines of intention.
When they are thirsty
they put their ear to the ground
so that Mother Earth
can whisper to them
where a spring is hidden.
In their world
old men transform
into playful youths in an instant,
and if you walk
far enough towards the horizon
you always arrive
at the same place.
In their world,
if you are sick,

you have to shake
your belly
and rock your bones
until your sickness
is driven out
by the joyful recognition
that the Line
of your life is
already broken,
that in fact,
it has never existed,
and that you have
always been
a Circle.

We have created Monsters
out of Lines and Edges.
These Children of ours
have no sense of humor.
They are coming to eat us.
Yes, we will surely
pay the piper for our madness,
and the Bushmen in the Kalahari
will be shaking with laughter.

Submission

In every life
there is something of a submission.

Like the gold
beneath the blacksmiths hammer
we must be heated up
and beaten into something beautiful.

For there is always
some cold recess of the heart
that has been withheld from
Love's fire.

The Chase

My belly opens
when I watch my dog
prowl the woods,
deep in his instinctual trance,
brimful of natural wisdom,
stalking a squirrel.

Even though the gray little fella
always gets away,
he never tires of the game.
Every muscle relaxed and poised
ready for the final dash
which the squirrel senses
just before he leaps.

Who has choreographed
this incredible dance,
this clicking of genetic codes into place
which I feel in
my belly and brain
as I watch?

The Iris

She sat
her long legs
draped
like the petals
of an Iris
not yet open
filled with
expectancy
anticipating
the warmth
of the Sun
while her lover
waited patiently
for her to finish
reading her book
his dark eyes
smoldering
like blackened logs
hiding fire
deep within them
waiting for
her to stir him
knowing that
she must come
to him
when she
is ready
that you
cannot force
a flower
to open
as he
enjoys the
tension
building
in his belly
that lets him know

that he still
wants her
that there is still
a fire hiding
inside
of him
after all
these years
that can still
burst into flame
and longing
for her flower
to open
under the warm
glow of his heat
and anticipate
her craving that
his light
enter her
and wait
for the moment
to ripen
like those Irises
waiting
for the
Sun.

Dionysis

Round
voluptuous worlds
of wet loving
tongue and thigh
bringing forth openness
and revelations
of words and sound
tumbling like waves
of sensations
in soft belly
fire
gently warming
life force upwards
lingering in
gently staying away
from the crest
of the wave
building slowly
fighting
to stay close
to shore
losing the current
and finding it again
noise and silence
blood rushing
in ears
throat open
clothes lying
helter skelter
the footprints
of our rush
to worship
at the altar
of an ecstatic
God.

Wild Flowers

There —
against the
fine white sand
of the slope
if he let his eyes
become soft
he saw
the outline
of her spirit
and gazed into
that Timeless place
where souls touch
and luminous threads
are formed
like the fragrance
of wildflowers
so subtle
that you could
almost miss it —
not the heavy odor
of cut flowers
that assault you
and demand
your attention
like the heavy perfume
of a bordello
clawing and pulling
you down
into a soft bed
of need.
No
this space was
like wildflowers
like mountain vistas
like watercolors
dissolving
in a lake

until he was
totally commingled
with her
without any demand
or conditions —
a gift
which she gave
unconsciously
which he
could almost have
missed
like the
fragrance of
wild
flowers.

We Trade Turns Wearing His Horns

There comes a time in everyone's life,
when the truth that you know,
I mean really Know,
will be in direct conflict
with the truth that They are telling you,
you Ought to know.

And you will be cornered
with the horns of a Great Demon
aimed at a vulnerable spot, deep in your gut.

This beast roams the whole world.
He is ruthless.
Do not underestimate the moment when he catches you.
For your soul hangs in the balance of that small window in time.

Many Great Ones have crumpled under his gaze.

It's hard to know what to do at that moment.

Some mutter the old line
about rendering unto Caesar what is Caesar's.

Some give up in despair.

Others join that fellow on the cross.

I have no idea how to advise you when this beast comes looking for you.

Call me paranoid.
Send me to a Healer!
I have been searching the planet
for someone developed enough
to stare down this Demon!
If you find him, tell him his services are greatly needed!

When this Demon has you in a corner,
none of us can truly know what or who
we would be willing to betray.

I could cry for centuries about this.

Remember the Jews who cooperated with the Nazis?
Who sent their brothers and sisters to the gas chambers?
Once you have looked into the eyes of this brute,
it is impossible to condemn them.

This beast lives inside of each of us.
We trade turns wearing his horns.

I hate that truth.

Awake!

Hey you!
That's right, You!
Mr. Giant,
sleeping in there!
When you awake,
all the worlds will shudder
with joy and awe!
When you shake off the fears
and confusions
that have bound your mind and heart
for centuries,
the angels will dance!
Listen to the song of the birds!
It is the cry of your Beloved
longing for you!
Waken from your slumber!
Do it quickly!
There is not a moment to lose!

One Hundred Percent

In a lovers quarrel
don't take fifty percent responsibility.
That kind of love is for lawyers and courtrooms.
It is good if you want to divide up your assets.
You know where that kind of thinking ends.

When you quarrel,
take one hundred percent responsibility.
Banish all your Yes-Buts
and really listen to your lover's point of view.
This is the path of the lover.
If you do this, your unhappiness will vanish
like snow on warm water.

Remember,
in the eyes of the heart,
it is never about how much you are loved.
What matters,
is how much you love.

Nothing at All

some reflections after 45 years

1.

I have been walking around a prayer wheel
for forty five years now.
Sometimes I think that I can hear a drum beat coming from its core,
and start to dance this crazy Shaman's jig.
As the night wears on, I grow wilder,
'till at midnight I become totally insane,
and just for a moment
I think that I know who I am.

In the clear light of morning
I recognize even that state as a limitation
and know that I haven't the vaguest idea.

2.

I have been thickening the soup of my Chi
with the flour of compassion,
and painting,
and dancing,
and writing,
and lovemaking,
and the extraordinary, ordinary miracle
of making a living and raising a family.

Each year,
I add
a cup of water
from the River of Loss.

At that moment,
I either fall into an unspeakable ecstasy
or collapse into a puddle of grief.

It all depends on what I am paying attention to at the time.

3.

I have been hiding a magical, luminous child
in a secret room in my house
and feeding him
this "Chi soup".
If he gets strong enough,
I am hoping that someday
he will be able to cross the River of Loss and survive.

What an arrogant fool I am!

4.

For forty five years,
I have been trying to gain entry
into that great secret fellowship
that meets in the deepest stillness of the night
to share in the body of bliss
that is revealed
when all the dreams of the world
have finally
become
quiet.

5.

For forty five years,
I have been grieving
how I can murder the space between us
and how ruthlessly
my fear kicks my Beloved
out of the house
and makes our holy communion
so absolutely,
utterly
impossible.

6.

When I really feel the pain of this,
I wake up in the middle of the night sobbing.

How can I live with a mind that is so filled with cruelty?

7.

When I cry like this,
some other part of me whispers,

“God must be very close,
if you can feel so crushed by His absence.”

8.

For forty five years,
I have been letting go into the dance,
while standing terrified in the corner
with my fingers in my ears blocking out the music.

I have been letting go of my attachment to being the dancer,
while prancing about the room like a peacock
shouting “Look at me!”

I have been praying
for moments when there is only elegance and grace happening,
while stumbling around like a drunk in the dark.

9.

For forty five years,
I have been waiting for a Great Teacher
to come and blow away my deepest fears
with an enormous belly laugh.

I have been reaching for a kiss
that will cost me everything.

And I have been thirsting for a drink
from a wine glass
that is filled with
Nothing At All.

Japanese Garden

There is a stillness
inside a Japanese Garden
that holds all the chaos
of the world
in a single,
slow,
clear
breath.

This Work

This work is about your Soul.
Nothing more.
Nothing less.
It is not about getting rich,
or finding the perfect lover,
or becoming incredibly healthy.

Your body is an alchemical oven.
To bake bread you need a recipe.
Teachers are good for this,
but don't get hung up on their person.
They have the same task as you.
The only difference is that they have been cooking longer.

Keep your kitchen clean.
You wouldn't feed your child from a filthy pot, would you?
It is the same with your Soul.
Surround yourself with things of beauty.
Nourish your inner life with prayer and meditation.
If you do these things your Soul will grow naturally.

Observe your mind.
Each thought is a choice.
Out of these choices you create your reality.
This is the house of your Spirit.

On the evening when you are expecting your Beloved,
you clean your room,
put out flowers
and light candles.
Why would you do any less for your Soul?

If you live each moment
expecting this Divine Guest,
your mind and heart will be like a great vista
waiting for the Sun.

A Prayer to The Great Breath

O Great Breath,
carrier of the Holy Spirit throughout time,
bearer of the whispering voices of all life,
we come to you as little children
recognizing that we are but grains of sand
in your infinite ocean.

We bring to you our hopes and fears,
our sadness, joy, rage and our longing for healing.
We ask that you wash over us with endless mercy.

We seek to connect with your wisdom
and your deep acceptance of our struggles.

We ask for the courage to surrender,
to go deeper.

We enter your Sacred Time with humility,
and as we let go of each veil,
we allow whatever is, to be.

Mother Earth, Father Sky, Sun, Wind and Rain,
We ask your blessing on this journey.

When We Finally Stopped Grieving

When we finally stopped grieving
the life we thought we should have lived,
and accepted the life that we had lived,
we looked around the room
through the vanishing veil of our tears,
and saw each other,
and ourselves,
as if for the first time.
It was then that we knew,
with the certainty
of a sledgehammer breaking a wall,
that if we didn't stop the runaway train
of our longings,
— the could have beens, should have beens, might have beens —
that we were in grave danger
of missing the whole show.
And that there was no point in grieving
what we had already missed.
It was then,
with sudden clarity and utter amazement,
that we emerged from the shadows,
and discovered
that we were actually fascinated
with something far more
miraculous
and ordinary.
And from somewhere
deep down,
we began to laugh,
with great compassion
and quiet tenderness,
at our
foolishness.

It is True

It is true,
there are times
that you must create
in a white heat
having no idea
where it will take you
and trust some deeper Intelligence
that is so far beneath the surface
that it bubbles up
like lava from one of those
cracks in the ocean's floor
where the earth's plates have opened
and Her burning touches the cold depths
and there is only the passionate roar
of the elements battling.

Yes, it is true,
there are times
when you must become that lava
when the pressure inside you
is so great
that you must give it form
or drown
defeated by the ocean
before you
ever reach the surface
before you
become one of those
frozen corpses
that only thinks
it is alive.

Yes, it is true,
this is how those
beautiful blue gems
of islands
in the Pacific

were created
those harbors of refuge
on which
the gentlest of people
make their home
and on which
you may find
the soft skin of your lover
and the flashing light
of her eyes.

Yes, it is true,
that if you do not do this
you may never find her
that you could be
lost forever
drifting
without a face
beneath the waves
without
a beautiful blue gem
to find
safe harbor in
without ever
touching her
soft skin
or seeing
her smiling
eyes.

This Fire

The Teacher
offers you a rope of fire.
Climb it if you can.
Do not fret if it burns you.
It is meant to do that.
This pain will cleanse you of all deceit
and burn away everything that is not essential.

This rope leads to the Nothingness
that is more valuable than all the world's Somethingness.

In deepest sleep we return there for nourishment.
We know it already.
Our problem
is that we forget it as soon as we awaken.
We eat from this place
like one of those fishing birds with a ring around its neck.
The food has no chance of reaching our core.

Don't think the Teacher owns his Teachings.
That's ridiculous!
The Teachings own him.

This fire
is a strand of the Beloved's hair
dangling in space.
The One who is lusting after all of us.

She doesn't give a damn about your accomplishments,
or how rich you are,
or if you go to church,
or meditate.

She is only interested in the Real you.

And don't try to fool Her,
or She will burn you good.

Grab a hold of Her hair
and climb it like your life depends on it!
Find the lake of fire that lives in Her eyes
and throw yourself in!

Don't do this only once,
do it every day!

For each day,
the dust of the world gathers
and must be burned off.

Link arms in this burning!
Circle the earth with this fire!
It will burn away everything that is not essential,
and leave us gazing at each other
from within the Presence.

What If?

What if,
everything we believe
is just a bedtime story
that is told to children
to soothe them against the terrors of the night?

What if,
there is no invisible world,
no individual soul,
no karma,
nothing we can do to earn merit or demerit?

What if,
there is only this body,
and the mystery of loving this
extraordinary,
ordinary woman
who sleeps next to me night after night?

What if,
there is only the choice between love and fear,
creativity and stagnation,
again and again,
and the awesome courage
it takes
to stand on two strong legs
and feel it all?

At Least These Ten Things: a prescription

You are going to hate this.
None of us like being told what to do.
I break these vows daily.
Maybe you should just turn the page.
You will probably tell me this is not even a poem.

It is the worst illusion
to think that you
can have the relationship that you want.
This is a set up for failure and disappointment.
The only thing you can have
is the relationship you can make.

This means at least these ten things.
Probably more.
But who's counting.

First, take responsibility for your own life and happiness.
If you are unhappy or unsuccessful, it is not your lover's fault.

Second, your relationship is about bearing your aloneness, together.
Your most intimate moments will be when you are together, alone.
That's a Zen Koan for you!

Third, give up blaming, complaining or shaming
your lover into doing it your way.
If you don't, there will soon be a closet full of resentment
in the middle of your house which will make the air impossible to breathe.

Fourth, learn the art of listening.
Both to the words and even more importantly
to the tone and the energy.
This is not easy.

Fifth, decide that you would rather be in relationship
than be right.

Sixth, learn to forgive.
Both your lover and yourself.
Not once, but like the man said, seventy times seven.

Seventh, give up “yes...butting” your lover.
This is just a polite way of not really listening!
If you have a difference, be straight about it!

Eighth, remember your relationship is built on your loving,
not on how much you are loved.

Ninth, choose your battles carefully.
99% percent of them are foolish and unnecessary.

Tenth, shield the joyous, passionate and mysterious spark
that brought you together in the first place
from the plagues of judgment, contempt, criticism and fear.
These will put out the fires of love quicker than a flash flood in May.

Creeping Threats

There is something inside a person
that must not die.
If it does,
a person becomes a hollow shell,
condemned to wander the earth
until he finds something to light the fire that went out.
Some say it is a kind of wildness,
a spontaneous directness.
Others call it the Soul
or God
or Creative Inspiration.
I have no idea what to call it,
only that it is more precious than gold.

There are so many things that
can kill this something
that is deeper than life itself.

The worst of them do it slowly.
Mediocrity,
repetition,
pettiness,
the rat race of ambition,
the fear of looking foolish,
working too hard,
trying to be good.

These things are even more dangerous
than tragic loss or trauma,
which strangely,
sometimes cracks us into the Openness.
Funny how that works.

It is Absolutely Essential

To live your life well,
there is something absolutely essential that you must know.
You can't learn It in books or from teachers.
Or by being good,
or bad.

Maybe you will learn It
when your father is in the I.C.U. on a ventilator,
hanging by a thread,
and you have to hold his hand for hours,
and tell him that you love him,
and how much he means to you.
And you have to do this both silently and out loud,
over and over again,
until that thread thickens,
and the color begins to return to that frail hand,
that you once thought was so magical and omnipotent.

Maybe you'll find It in your lovers arms
one night when you've become so intimate with her
that for a moment,
her body and yours give up every secret,
every withhold,
every shred of fear,
in a great gasp,
and you fall together
into Infinite Space.

Maybe you will discover It at dawn,
on the top of a mountain,
at the moment when the sun crests over the next ridge,
and its light strikes you with such sudden force
that you fall down,
trembling with awe.

Or maybe It will find you,
when a patrolman stops you on the highway,

and in front of your family, frisks you down,
threatens to take you to jail,
and reduces you to a shivering mass of humiliated flesh,
for no reason
except that you were at the wrong place at the wrong time.

You won't get It by getting A's in school.
Or earning a Doctorate.
Or playing spiritual games.

Nor will you get It
by flunking out
and visiting the depths of hopelessness.
Or doing drugs.

Whatever It is, It is essential.
Without It, your life will never touch
the foundation stone at the bottom of the well.

It has something to do with how helpless
and how powerful you are.
With how magnificent and meaningless your life is.
With how alone and dependent you are.
And with how totally compassionate and totally cruel the world is.

It may come upon you suddenly
or creep in like a mist.
Certainly it can never be communicated in words.

Once you get It,
you will see yourself
and your loved ones with different eyes.
You will care so much more,
and so much less.

I don't know whether to pray that It finds you soon,
or hope that you are forever protected from It.

But I do know for sure,
that to really fathom
what this whole crazy show is all about,
It is absolutely essential.

You can never own this knowledge.

It owns you.

Take Me Home to Jesus

I saw a singer yesterday
who was 82 years old,
who said that things were
just starting to feel right in his Soul,
that he was just beginning
to know the real meaning of Praise,
that he was finally so deep
in the River of Love,
that he knew he was going home to Jesus.
He wept with Joy as he said this.
And as that river filled his body
he couldn't help but start singing.

His words came from some place
so filled with rapture,
that they seemed to cause
little earthquakes of Love all over the room.
His smile was so big
that his face wasn't large enough
to hold his Gratitude.
People had no choice but to tap their feet,
sway their hips
and sing.

The more we sang,
the stronger the river became,
until it took us over
into blessed Surrender.

I looked at my wife and my daughter and my friends,
and there was light streaming from their eyes
and tears of tenderness on their cheeks.

A woman, whose brother had committed suicide,
laughed and closed her eyes like she was making love.

A fellow, whose son was a soldier
in an unjust and dangerous war,
jiggled his great girth.

And a little girl who had never seen her father
got up and danced.

It did not matter
if we were Jewish,
or Muslim,
or Buddhist.

We knew,
that we too, were just starting
to get the meaning of Praise.
We knew,
that we were catching the current of that river
that would take us home to Jesus.

We knew,
that we were laughing in the face of death
and getting clear about something
greater than our pain and sorrow,
as we stepped behind this old black man,
whose voice came up from the depths
and washed our souls,
whose eyes were shining with Praise,
who was so deep in the River of Love,
that he could show us the water
that would carry us home to Jesus.

The Inevitable

Don't you know
that one day you will awaken
to find the bed that you are lying on
is really a magic carpet
that is blown about by the Creator's breath?
That your molecules
are literally buzzing with Magnificence?
And that everywhere you look
there are the footprints of Presence?
And that all of this is
Inevitable,
and that the only thing that stops you
from realizing this right now
is your Fear?
And that when you look at the sky,
at any time of day or night,
there is such awesome Creativity smiling down at you,
that the only thing which keeps you
from weeping rivers of Gratitude,
is your blind refusal to look past
the prison of who you think you are?

Home

“What does a human life mean?”
my father asks,
just before his operation.
“A stone thrown in a pond
makes ripples out into Infinity,
but in the end the pond returns to Stillness.
That is how it is with everyone,
even the greatest of us.”
he answers himself.
And we sit stunned and silent,
noticing both the tragedy
and the ecstatic beauty of this.

It all depends on what we are paying attention to.

“What do you consider your Home?”
The question resounds in us,
this time more like a boulder thrown in the water.
And we sit stunned and silent,
noticing at once just how small
and how great
the Soul is.
How we are both Waves and Stillness.
The directness of his question,
creates a deafening quiet in the room.

It all depends on what we are paying attention to —

as we contemplate what it will be like
to give up our names,
with such relief and such rebellion,
and what it will be like
to drop into the stillness of the Buddha’s smile,
and feel the awful,
awesome, conflict,
of our journey
Home.

The River

1.

Each day, you tell me about the failures of your loving
or the failures of others loving you,
and how the River continues to elude you,
and that you are coming to think its very existence is a myth.

I listen to your despair and provoke you
into questioning the most cherished tenets
of who you think you are.

I feel heartened when you enter the fray with me,
defending your right to your unhappiness
and when we can wrestle each other to the ground.

I relish the times when I catch you off guard
and you smile at me with that peculiar mischievous smile
that lets me know you haven't died inside your prison.

I smile back, and for a moment,
we both realize that this is just a great game,
a shadow play, that hides a more serious purpose.

I laugh, before I throw you to the floor one more time,
your defenses weakened, I know your faith in the reality
of the tangle you are stuck in is tenuous now,
and that in a moment, or a week or a year,
you will look at me and remember that you are Love.

And that soon, the River will break out from the earth beneath your feet
where it has been sleeping. Its mad roar will shock you Awake
and you will have no choice but to remember your Joy.

I will watch, as the waters catch you and wash away the fears
that you have been carrying since you were a child.

Soon, the waters from behind your eyes will also break,
and you will look up at me with tears of unspeakable gratitude.

2.

But I will be gone. My mission accomplished.
Though I will always love you, from behind the trees and inside the rocks
and especially from inside the rushing waters of your creativity.
As you forge a life you only dreamed was possible
and find a love you didn't dare hope could exist,
when we first faced off with each other.
You, thinking you were so helpless,
investing the last pennies of your faith in me,
the Grand Wizard, hoping I might find a way
to finally break the spell that the evil Witch had cast,
and I, all dressed in white, charging to your aid.

But it was all a hoax. You know that now.
I am no Wizard and you are far from helpless.
And hiding behind the Witch
is just another reflection of your Beloved.

3.

As I leave you, I look forward to catching a glimpse of your shape,
as you learn the wild dance that the wind and the moon will teach you.

I imagine receiving postcards sent from some distant shore
where you have landed with your new love.

I ache with a peculiar nostalgia when you write
that you can hear the River all the time now
and that you cannot even imagine being alone in Her presence.

I miss you, even though I have barely left you.
I already remember, with some fondness,
the days when we wrestled with each other
and you hated me for challenging you so forcefully.

From the center of my ache,
I imagine meeting you again when I am an old man,
your eyes bright with idealism and your recent success,
as you introduce me to your son, and tell me with such quiet pride,
how you and he sit by the River for hours

and how you are teaching him to listen to Her secrets,
and that She is telling him things that you and I had never dreamed of.

4.

I look at him with such awe, this Godchild of mine, my faith strong,
my heart filled with the knowing that the River's voice will not be lost.
And in that moment I turn to you, with tears of unspeakable gratitude.

But you are gone.

Though I know that you will always love me,
from behind the trees and from inside the rocks
and especially from within the rushing waters of my creativity.

I bless you, for I know that I may not hear from you again.

Which is as it should be.

5.

Suddenly I notice that I am no longer sitting on the banks of the River,
that I am deep in the heart of Her current. I am frightened.

Then, as I surrender, I break out sobbing,
for I can hear the roar of the surf, and smell the salty air of the ocean
and know that I am almost home.

After the Storm

After the storm,
my belly finally quiet,
I look at you,
your face streaked with mud,
our house,
blown away
by the wind,
and through my tears
I remember who I used to be,
and who you used to be,
and deeper
than the grief of our Loss,
I hear the Call
to be who I Am
and to see you
as who You Are.

Suddenly,
I am filled with gratitude
as I look at the sky
where our house used to be
and there are only
the stars.

The Commander's Tent

Last night
I went to the Commander's tent
and he welcomed me
with such gentle eyes,
and touched my face tenderly with his hand.
He spoke to me,
in those firm tones that he can use,
saying that he had been walking
through the city,
and on every corner
he saw minds filled with hatred and fear.

And he wept,
great huge sobs of grief,
his body heaving,
his head buried deep in my chest,
like a small child.

Then he grew stern
and looked into my eyes with such a penetrating glance
that I had to look away.
I felt my core shake with the power of his love.
In that moment I knew what I must do.
He did not have to tell me
that things had come to a critical pass.
So I left him.

And all that day,
and the next, and the next,
I walked.
Waging Peace,
with each breath,
with each thought, and glance,
with each word,
and especially in what I left unspoken.

As I walked,
I began to notice that I was not alone,
for he had touched many that night.

Arm in arm, we walk,
our numbers grow stronger each day.

Waging Peace.

Holy Peace.

With every breath,
with every thought,
with the songs we sing,
with our prayers,
with our laughter,
with our smiling eyes,
and with our tears.

The Lover

1.

Sometimes in the middle of the night,
the noise of the world grows so quiet
I can almost hear you breathing.

As if you were just next door.

And I grow frightened
that the wall between us has become so thin
that you will easily tear a hole in it
when you turn in your sleep.

That the light
that will pour in
will blind me
and shatter the illusion
of who I think I am.

And in my dazed state,
I will not notice
when you rouse from slumber
and climb through the hole,
your eyes blazing with lust for me,
your naked body
luminous with longing.

I will be caught off guard,
when with trembling hands,
you pull back my bedcovers
and slowly peel away my nightshirt
and begin to kiss me,
slowly at first,
and then with the fever of a lover
who has waited for lifetimes.

I will not notice
until I am deep inside of you,

wrapped in ecstasy,
and there is no beginning
and no end
to you or me.

And especially, I will not notice
the moment that you leave me,
creeping back through the hole in the wall,
leaving me ravished and satisfied
in a tangle of bed sheets.

Or the moment
when my heart breaks open,
like a flower bursting,
and I realize with such certainty
that all of this has already happened,
and that perhaps
you have been visiting me for years.

2.

At dawn,
I do not know what has come over me.
Lost and confused,
I try to convince myself
that I have only had a strange dream.
But my heart has no patience for this nonsense,
for I am blind with loving you
and unable to find my way back into my life.

I forget
where I have left the key to my office
and cannot find my clothes again.

I wander naked through the house
repeating your name
over and over again
like some holy mantra.

My family thinks I am insane,
and the doctors examine me and consult with experts

to find a cure,
and the best chefs parade their delicacies
to see if they can help me regain my appetite.

But I am no longer interested
in anything they have to offer,
having tasted the nectar of your lips
and drunk the ripe fruit of your sex,
I am forever spoiled.

3.

It will take me months
or lifetimes
to recover
from this dreaming,
impossible, possibility of a reality
that is more real to me than my own hands.

Only Time can help me,
and though I hate the ticking,
linear motion of the second hand
I know it is my only hope.

As the best craftsmen
slowly repair the gaping hole
behind my bed,
carefully replacing the clock on the wall,
my family implores me to focus on it
and fall back into step with everyone else,
and to forget all about you.

I have given them my solemn promise,
but I know that it is totally impossible,
for the world is hollow and empty without you.
I can't help remembering the glow
of your naked body
and the endless light
that pours from the wells of your eyes.

I know,
with such tragic and wonderful certainty,
that a piece of my soul
has fallen forever into the womb of you.

4.

Soon, I will escape
to wander the earth again,
searching in synagogues and mosques and cathedrals
and brothels and barrooms and studios,
and especially in that space between sleep and wakefulness,
for some scent of your hair,
or the reflected light from your wild eyes
or the haunting music of your voice.

5.

Sometimes
in the middle of the night,
when my heart is really quiet,
I hear you breathing again
behind the wall
and I wonder,
If perhaps you never really left me.
Dearest
Beloved.

The Fall

1.

Fragility

We human beings
are not very strong.
Or fast.

We have no fur to protect us from the elements.
And after we are born,
we are absolutely helpless
for a very, very long time.

One human being,
out in the wild,
would be hard pressed
to protect and feed himself.

To be sure,
It is possible,
but it wouldn't be much of a life.
There would be no time for art or music.
There would be no one to tell a joke too,
or snuggle up with at night.
And if he got too sick,
unless he was really smart,
he would probably die.
It might be possible.
But it wouldn't be much of a life.

To live,
I mean really live,
human beings need each other.
It is not an option,
a luxury that we can take or leave.
Without being held,
a baby will die,
even if he has food and shelter.
An adult will become dry and bitter,
which is another kind of death.
This is a wonderful and horrible truth.

2.

Listen

Every time we split the Sacred Hoop
into Us and Them,
we do so at our own peril.

The Jew needs the Arab.
The Protestant, the Catholic.
The White, the Black.

Our bones know this.

Listen to them.

Every time a child starves to death
anywhere in the world,
our bellies cry out in pain.

Listen.

And each time a young man dies in battle,
some of our idealism,
our youthful hopes and dreams,
drown in an ocean of tears.

Listen.

If you really let yourself fall,
you can't fake it,
that's right, really let go,
you will realize this Truth —

None of us are getting out of here alone.

Until the Sacred Hoop is mended,
our Souls are trapped,
for we are cells in one Great Being,
and Our Body is sick with Hatred and Fear.

3.

Connect

Each of us,
at one time or another,
has to carry someone else across a great expanse.

If you don't know this,
then you are still living in the clouds
in some metaphysical fantasy world.

Come, bring your pain to the Great Council.
Sit in a Circle together.
This will not change the fact of your suffering,
or bring back your loved ones.
That is not the point.

Our streets are filled with the voices of the ungrieved dead,
and this is not just the crying of our ancestors,
it is also the ancient songs of Kindness
and the visions of Tenderness
that we have forgotten.

Fall into each others arms and wail over these losses!
Fall into each others eyes and join your tears into a Great River!
This water will feed your Soul.
It will not change the reality of your loss. That is impossible.
But it just might hold it in an accepting and compassionate embrace.

If we can do that,
the Sacred Hoop will grow stronger.
The Hatred and Fear in Our Body will grow weaker.
And when we look at each other,
it will be that much harder to contemplate doing each other harm.

Fall down onto this good earth.
Do it now!

What the Physicist Knows

Between each electron
and proton
there is a space
as vast as the space
between the planets.

So vast
that we could say
that the universe
is virtually
Empty.

Be that
Space.

There Are No Other Prayers

Hearts hardened with bitterness
shatter like brittle ice.
If you listen deep enough,
you will know
that all of your losses
are God knocking.
When God comes like this,
pray that you break open,
rather than simply break.
When God visits you like this,
there are no other prayers.

Who are you Working For?

Hey You!

Yes, You!

Staring at that computer screen and typing,

Hating every minute of it.

Who do you think you're working for?

Really?

Do you honestly think you're working for that nit wit
in the big office down the hall?

Or is it your Fathers approval?

Your Mothers love?

Or those two F's,

Fame and Fortune?

When it's all over,

do you really think any of that is going to matter?

Your true boss weighs your success

in quantum's of Love, Joy and Wisdom.

He's only interested in questions like —

How deeply can you love?

Are you following your heart's longing?

Are you waking up each morning with a song on your lips?

Don't look in the clouds for His office,

or on some metaphysical plane.

He resides inside your own heart.

When you get to His final review

there will be no secrets,

only Ruthless Compassion.

Don't think this happens only when you die.

This examination happens every day.

So center yourself at each fork in the road

and choose wisely.

Remember that these choices are in how you think and feel,
as well as in your words and deeds.

A teacher of mine once said,

"If you wouldn't be happy dying,

doing what you are doing right now,

then perhaps you shouldn't be doing it."

That was a wise man.

Ashes

There comes a time
when everything that you think is true
must be thrown into the fire.
Yes, even that most cherished belief,
and that one too.

In the morning,
when you sift through the ashes,
somewhere in that charred heap,
there will be a pearl.

Mexican Wisdom

In Mexico they say
that death comes before life.
These old curmudgeons have it right.

They are not just talking about your physical body.
They are referring to all acts that carry vitality.
Before you do anything meaningful,
it is good to take a long drink from this well.
This water will clear your head
and cleanse your eyes of cobwebs.

Most of the time
we drink from a poisoned well
whose water has been laced
with desperation and fear.
This brew will kill your spirit and make you do crazy things.
It will make it impossible
for you to speak of anything that is Real.

Most of us are lying drunkards our whole life.
We couldn't speak an Authentic Word
if the fate of the entire universe depended on it.
We wouldn't know a real Mexican
if he hit us in the gut.
We only want the Disneyland version of his Truth.

In Mexico they say
that death comes before life.
These old curmudgeons have it right.

My True Love

My true love
has no breasts
or genitals
or flashing eyes.
These are merely the handmaidens
that serve Her.

She is not to be found
in breathing practices
or chakras
or yogas.
These are only ladders
that sometimes help one
to climb up to Her abode.

Nor is She in the trees
or the oceans
or mountains
or out in the stars.
These are only decorations
She has hung about Her room.

She does not live in temples
or mosques
or churches.
These are only the cups
into which She sometimes
pours the wine from Her vineyard.

She is not in holy books
or sacred texts
or in this poem.
These are merely treasure maps.

You must always remember that the map is not the territory.

She has nothing to do with Karma or morality.
There is nothing you can do to earn Her favor or lose it.

These are only stories told by human beings to control others
and to shield the spiritually immature
from Her true wildness.

Jesus, Mohammed, Abraham, Buddha,
and so many holy men and women
are all Her lovers.
And yet none of them
can claim that She belongs to them.

They are not fools.

Those who have known Her
have been blasted open by Her breath
and repeat Her many secret love names eternally
with utter devotion and adoration.
Though if you ask them to describe Her
they will not be able to give you a straight answer.

Her real Name, none of them can say.
For to do so is impossible in this body.

The Wise Ones know
that we are always once removed
from Her by some veil or other
for She lives in a world
beyond language, image, thought or sensation.
These protections are vital to us.

Only the greatest of Her lovers
aspire to gaze directly at Her face.
The rest of us are either hypocrites or in training
simultaneously hoping for and dreading
the moment when She finally drops Her robes.

For to truly see Her
is to risk insanity and death.

Only a fool
rushes forward
when She beckons.

The White Hole

All our lives we are hurtling at the speed of thought
towards a great white hole
into which we will one day disappear
like Alice through the looking glass.

Souls come and go on this great caravan.
When they come,
they either move the train forward or drag it down.
We are all learning about this.

There are so many that are sleeping through the ride
that have to be nudged and irritated into consciousness.
They have no idea about the danger they are in,
or the danger that their dullness puts us all in.
For we are cells in one body,
and there is not much time to move out of harms way.
Each time we enter we forget this.
Our consciousness narrows and we start to think only of ourselves.

Practice passing through the doorway many times before you die.
Each time, you will get clearer about who you really are.
Practice until your mere presence can ignite a fellow traveler into Radiance
— until your Remembering is an effortless river.

Beyond the threshold,
on either side of the forest we are lost in,
it is Luminous.
In between,
there are ten thousand darknesses
to be overcome.

How far down the Rabbit Hole Do You want to Go?

1.

Friend,
there is a Mystery
inside the Mystery
of this River of Mysteries
we are standing in.

The One who observes the Mystery cannot be found.

And yet is Everywhere.

There is no I,
and there is nothing but this I —
which circles around an Eye
that springs from a brain
that cannot tell the difference
between what it has dreamt
and what is real,
which is always only a tiny sliver
of what is REAL,
which it has chosen to believe,
even though it suffocates the Spirit.

Are we really that frightened of going down the rabbit hole?

2.

One day,
you will peer over that edge
into a glorious and terrifying Space,
and you will realize,
that we have made all of this up!

When you finally stop telling yourself stories
about yourself and about your world,

the ideas that you have inherited
from your father and mother,
from your teachers and rabbis and priests
and therapists and coaches and politicians
will shatter into ten thousand pieces!

You will discover,
with quaking awe,
that your ideas about right and wrong,
good and evil,
God and the Devil,
are simply the mumbling
of frightened men and women
who are running
from the Edge of the Unknown.
These Dualities have their place,
but don't think they have anything
to do with the Sacred.

3.

There is no God!

Not in the way They
would have you believe.

There is no God,
apart from you,
that sits in judgment
and throws you into heaven if you are good
and hell if you are bad.
This God has been woven out of the fabric of our fears,
our need to control our Love
and our loved ones,
and out of our terror that we will be left alone,
like small children in the dark,
with nothing.
This God was borne out of humanity's
terror of that Nothing.
This God is the demon child
of our fear of Freedom

and our flight from the Openness
of the Love Space.

4.

Take a breath!
Take it right now!
You have just stepped onto a magic carpet
that can take you
right down into the fabric of Intentions
that holds all the universes together!
Ride it and smash the illusion
that you are a solid thing
that exists only inside of this bag of skin!

Do you think that this page
and these words
can really be destroyed?

These words are merely a window
into something that I could never begin to describe.

Look deeply!
Look in between the electrons and the protons,
into the Space that holds the Fire of this Thought.
Let It awaken your brain and stir your loins!
Enter Its burning!
Maybe then you will understand
what the mystics were pointing to
when they said
God, Yahweh, Shiva,
Zoroaster, Great Spirit,
Beloved.

The Terrorist

Friend,
Jesus is horrified at how we have used his words to harm each other.
His brother, Mohammed weeps oceans of tears for our suffering.
Abraham is so angry he can hardly speak.

You cannot kill a terrorist!
A terrorist is merely the fruit of a tree
whose roots are deep
in human ignorance,
poverty,
the fear of difference,
greed,
and selfishness.

The seeds of this tree are in our own backyards.
In the children which we fathered in our youth and then forgot.
In the old people that we have turned our backs on.
In the strangers whose pain and hunger we have ignored.
In the brothers and sisters we have cheated out of their inheritance.

How do you fight ignorance, hatred and fear?
Not with guns and bombs!
Use your common sense!
This kind of medicine only strengthens the disease!

Yes, I admit it.
I am frightened.
I am frightened about the cost of our shortsightedness.
I am frightened about the price we will pay
for our greed and violence.

New Years Day in Japan

The north wind blows.
Leaves come together
and then fly apart.
Like my family.

The Place of Whispers

1.

She gently took him aside,
into a corner of the room,
into the shadows of soft lights,
into the place of whispers,
and told him a secret
that her grandmothers' grandmother
had asked her to keep sacred
and which she did not know
if she had heard
or dreamed,
but she knew
was True.

Then he looked at her,
stunned,
and suddenly felt as if
his body had turned to gossamer
and the very substance
of his flesh had thinned out
and become transparent.

And if this first Truth hadn't been enough,
she uttered a second,
which she said an Angel had told her,
so it was as if it had come from God directly.

This one was fatal,
seeping into
his blood like a poison
until it found its way to his heart,
until Time stopped,
and he realized that it was impossible
to go forward or back,
and he fell straight down
into a black abyss
and knew

that his life was a dream
and that the reality
he once thought was so solid
was a lie,
that there was no difference
between the night world and the day,
and that his very existence
as a separate being
was an Illusion,
and even deeper then that
into mysteries
for which there could
never be any words.

Then she gently
folded him into her arms
and took him inside of her
and suddenly he realized
that she was not human at all,
but something totally beyond
anything that he could imagine,
and that her beauty
would shatter him
and make it impossible
for him to find himself again.
And for an eternal moment,
his mind exploded.

He knew that he hadn't the vaguest idea
how to hold Her Beauty
and that Her Radiance
would kill him.

So gathering his courage,
he struggled,
though this too
caused him ten thousand deaths,
and swam away from Her Radiance
and fought to know himself,
and find himself in Time again,
and declared to Her again and again,

mostly so that he could believe it,
that he did not want Her Love-Death,
though every cell cried out simultaneously
that he was a liar and a coward,
and he felt that his heart was breaking.

Then he realized
that She probably did not have a heart,
not in the way
he had thought of hearts before,
that She was simply a gaping
and hungry doorway
that sucked him vacuum like
into the Radiance behind Her,
that She was simply a Space
inside of which
Time had collapsed.

The thought made him nauseous,
and he swam faster away from Her,
away from the soft shadows
and the enchanting whispers,
back towards the crisp clear light
in the center of the room,
back to that male world
of his father and grandfather
back to a world
that was organized with lines and edges,
back into a world
in which it was possible
for him to make a choice.

Though perhaps this was not back at all,
for it was not clear
from where the circle of him had sprung.

While another part of him
filled with disappointment
at how prosaic and drab
he suddenly appeared to himself.

But at least, he sighed,
he could breathe here.
At least
he had an existence
that he could understand.

2.

As I watched
so secure in my seat,
I wondered if his leap
was merely an illusion
that She allowed
in the endless patience
of Her knowledge
that She held
the winning hand
and wondered
which world held the Truth
and questioned
if in the end we were
all destined to return
to the Place of Whispers,
or if this whole thing
was some
Freudian nightmare
that had nothing
to do with
the Sacred at all.

But mainly I was relieved,
to be secure in my chair.
Relieved, that I could be
that blessed third,
that neutral pole
in the center of their tension,
that somehow made
the horrifying beauty,
and impossibility
of their struggle
bearable.

This River That We Are Standing In

If I really listen closely to this River that we are standing in,
I know there are no secrets.
Your greatness and your failings
are immediately clear to me, and mine to you.
Your anxieties are no different than mine,
and our hopes and longings are woven of the same stuff.

When I wash my eyes with this water,
I see that no one is here for long,
that we all are facing the same darkness,
and that this world is filled with awesome beauty and terrible horrors.
I will never live long enough to see all of it, or heal what must be healed.

When I am really Awake, my days are filled with apprehension.
I live on the edge and am forever dissatisfied.
This searching is life's hunger for itself coming through me.
These tears are life's longing to touch itself,
and its grief at its separation from itself.

When I open the pores of my skin, I am surrounded by a radiant chaos
that is destroying and recreating me each instant.
I am held together by a strange coincidence of intentions.
My molecules rearrange themselves
with each changing thought and feeling
and I reincarnate thousands of times in a single day.

I know I truly don't know anything about this world,
or the River that we are standing in,
or the secrets it has been whispering to me for millennia.

If I actually feel each breath as it enters my body,
I haven't the vaguest idea who I am,
and you are an unfathomable mystery that I will never understand.

I live at the fork between Astonishment and Despair.

On Growing Down

I am growing down,
grieving the loss
of the angelic realms
making my slow descent,
watching the veils of forgetting fall
between me
and that place
where feelings and thoughts
are communicated wordlessly,
where lying is impossible,
and fear unimaginable.

Remember that?

My hands filled
with paint brushes,
and great lumps of clay,
and the energies
of human beings.
Trying to reveal
the beauty
that is waiting
to come through,
and become
an open doorway,
a Space,
in which, just maybe
the Numinous
will happen.

What else can I do with my longing?

I am growing down
into the wonderful and tedious business
of caring about you,
and caring about me,
and caring about our world.
In the little things.

Resisting it mightily,
the nitty gritty
of managing my finances,
my marriage,
a 'serious' career,
the pain of letting go of the women
I won't make love with.

I'll always rebel
against the reality
that I can't
have it all.

I am fashioning a container
that's large enough
to hold me,
a cauldron
that's strong enough
to take my heat
and cook my juices
until they are
sweet and clear.

I am walking in a magnificent
and colorful circle
back to that great and
infinitely pregnant Void,
 meditating on the line
 between wisdom and insanity,
 trying to let go
 of all of my stories,
 and just really
 be there.

Watching my center shift
 from Me,
 to You,
 to We,
 to It,
 to All That Is,
 and back again.

I am
imagining
what it will be like
to dissolve into the sparkle
of my daughter's eyes
and become the echo
of her laughter.

I am
pouring myself,
into a glass that
will ultimately
shatter.

I am
searching
for the glass blower's
breath.

Love Like This

Don't dance only at weddings and Bar Mitzvahs.

Dance when you take out the garbage
and when you drop your kid at school.

Dance while you do the dishes
and while you are waiting for the bus.
You never know when God will come
to reclaim what you have borrowed.

This could all be gone in an instant!
And when you open your heart in love,
don't just crack the door an inch
like your expecting a thief,
let the door swing wide open
in great, arm flapping, breath stopping,
coyote barking at the moon, love!

Otherwise the gatekeeper at your beloved's heart
might not even know you're there!

Open those tight fists!

Don't you know you're not taking anything with you
when you leave here?

Even your bones will soon be food for the birds!

Give to your friends like a King,
for we are all royalty in this place.

Make sure your parents know you love them!

Whatever their mistakes may have been.

If you want your children to forgive yours,
you better set a good example now!

And don't miss the little opportunities for kindness
that are thrown in front of you.

A single act of kindness might save a whole universe
from extinction.

Each day, get down on your knees and bless the ground,
for this is the carpet of God's house.

The sun and the sky and the trees are miracles.

If you cannot weep with gratitude when you see them,
you have never really seen them.

For Family and Friends

It Can't be Measured

For Iku, after 25 years

You stand beside me so easily,
like the breath of the forest
refreshing each cell of me.
I am so grateful for this.

After 25 years
of chopping wood and carrying water together,
there is this Space,
that's more than either you or me alone.
So much more!

Sometimes I wonder what has kept us hanging in.
Certainly you cannot measure it.
I think we've learned at least that much!
This measuring mind of ours
is the short road to hell!

It's something much more than you can count,
this marriage of ours,
this deep resting into each others smiling eyes,
this forgiveness of our differences,
this togetherness that holds our aloneness.

Yes — you are right —
it is so much deeper than sex,
this sweet nectar of you and me.
Though I hope that we will make love
until we are ninety nine!

But for sure you cannot measure it or hold it in your hand.

Maybe it's that you remind me again and again
that it's about loving,
not about how much I am loved.

Maybe it's all in that simple word

Yes,
and Yes again,
and to that also, Yes!
My dearest.

The truth is that it's much more mysterious than I will ever figure out.

What I do know,
is that I am less and less interested in changing you.
Thank God!

And that when all of my gyrations,
and rebellions,
and crusades to make the world a better place are over,
that I hope that I will still see you standing next to me,
simple and steady in your graciousness
and your common sense.

And that when I am standing at the threshold of Radiance,
that you will hold my hand,
and gently soothe me as I let go,
just a little more,
and a little more.
Just like you have already been doing
in so many little ways
all these years.

And that when whatever this thing that we call 'us'
has dissolved,
like sugar,
back into the ocean of All That Is,
that perhaps a little spring of sweetness
will appear somewhere,
so that someday,
a weary traveler who is despairing
may stop and drink,
and remember,
that Love is possible.

Winter Solstice Child

A Blessing for Miwa on her Thirteen Birthday

A quiet song escaped from the Goddess's lips thirteen years ago.
And as it slowly made its way down to earth
it whispered in our ears,
"Remember that life is good and beautiful,
that it's all about loving and learning,
Stay centered in this
and your days will be like a cup
that's filled to the brim with kindness."
And since that day
Its melody has hovered in the air,
a smiling presence that is never insistent,
for the song has no need to prove its power or its Truth,
having come from the lips of a Goddess.

A gentle dance
began at the Mystic Center of Things
thirteen years ago.
A dance that celebrated the return of the sun's warmth,
for it began on the very morning that the days began to lengthen.
The dance forever reminds us of springtime's return,
that in darkness there is always a light that is hidden,
a fire that will never die.
Its movements have always been peaceful and strong and sure,
each gesture disciplined and beautifully organized,
unconsciously awakening the seeds of loving kindness
inside of each heart that witnesses it.
Its magic is its innocence and lack of guile.
Like the gentle whispering of the song,
it calls us to remember
from whence we came,
and where we are now,
and where we are going.
But only if we want to.
For it has nothing to prove,
having arisen from the Center of Things.

Miwa, you are this song and this dance.
You are a river that has sprung from the lake of our love for each other.
We will forever be connected and forever separate.
Your eyes will see things that we have only dreamt of,
and your wisdom will help to shape a world that we can only imagine.

Go forth with courage, grace and confidence.
Our Blessings will always be with you.
You can count on that.

Old Crones

On my Mother's 70th Birthday

Old crones
have learned how to shift their focus
from the glass
to the light that shines through the glass,
so when they momentarily lose their bearings in this world,
forgetting where they parked the car
or what they ate for breakfast,
we must forgive them.

For they are focused on the essences of things
and often lose the particulars.

Really sublime old crones,
know that age is just a number,
that this body is simply an altar at which we worship,
and that the world is a stage
on which to express the love of the Great Mother for her children.
They know that the greatest gift they have to give
is to simply,
unapologetically,
be themselves.

Old crones
look at the fires of loss and rejoice!
For as each veil is burned away,
they know that they are getting closer
to that Holy Flame which burns eternally
in the cauldron of life's creativity.
It is this fire which we see reflected in their eyes
that so terrifies and delights us.

Mother,
you are a really sublime old crone.
May you dance into your eighth decade
with great wisdom and grace,
may the hearts and minds of the Masters, Saints and Prophets
whisper great truths in your ears,

and may you continue to loosen the ancient threads of fear
that hold you back
from the deepest realizations of inner peace.
Remember that each day is a rebirth,
and that every loss
can also be a break into the openness
of a creative celebration.

Dance on Old Man *On My Father's 70th Birthday*

So who do you think you are, turning 70!?
What right do you have to age,
to get creaky knees and blood pressure problems?
All this physical body stuff!
Time and all that nonsense.
It's really quite an affront
to the immortality of our spirits.

I'll always see you with a whimsical,
playful and provocative twinkle in your eye,
poking your fingers into all sorts of trouble.
Always reaching just below the surface of things.
How could such an instinctive shaman,
such a trickster, turn 70!
I guess Time is the ultimate trickster,
it always catches us unawares.
We blink our eyes a couple of times and
Poof!
The joke's on us.

What a rich life you lead!
Look at the circle of people who love you!
I know that sometimes it's hard to let the affection in —
that your early wounds are deep,
that it has always been easier for you to give than to receive,
that it's hard to fully crack your protective shell.
But maybe that's the other trick that Time plays on us,
whether we like it or not, it softens us,
and makes us look in the mirror more clearly.

Dad, when I look at you,
I see a man who has loved fiercely all his life,
who has not compromised his ideals,
a passionately committed father and husband,
a wise old fool,
and underneath that gruff exterior,
a truly kind and gentle human being.

I only hope that when I am 70,
I can look into the mirror of my own heart,
and see some of those qualities shining back at me.

I am one of the arrows shot from the bow of your heart.
I will always feel your wind at my back.
The rhythm of your spirit will always be in my dancing feet
and the twinkle in my eye
will always reflect the love that you have given me.

Dance on old man,
young heart,
immortal spirit.
This body is not forever,
but the impression that your love has made
on the soft wax of so many souls
is eternal.

Sibling Rivalry

For Melissa and Laura

I am sorry for that accident of fate
that had me born first.
For my selfishness
in pushing you out of the way
on that great line of souls
waiting for incarnation.
For staking my claim
with strong little fists
and hearty yells
and taking up
as much space as I could,
and making it so hard
for you to get in
with Mom and Dad.
For getting my paintings
up on the fridge
before you,
and later filling their walls.
For fracturing your finger
when I was seven
and throwing your ice cream
out the 11th floor window.
For scaring you by
breaking a frying pan on the ceiling
in my violent teenage search
for my own space.
For my comments about your friend's weight.
For not knowing
how to talk about our different
ideas of how sugar affects children's behavior.
And for all the little and big things
that I can't remember,
but I am certain that I did.

A Celebration Of Friendship

For M. on his 50th Birthday

Soul Friend,
Wisdom Heart,
you and I are a battle ground
on which Buddha's Clear Mind
has died and been reborn ten thousand times.

Perhaps your bones would like to speak the stories of your years.
Perhaps they could beat upon the drum of our hearts
and wake us from our deep sleep
so that we could smell the fragrance of that cosmic soup that is you
and get drunk on it.

Maybe then we could dance that wild jig
that can only come when we've surrendered
the dullness of our beings into the scorching heat
of All that Is.

Maybe then our bellies would be soft enough
to find the movements that would celebrate you.

Maybe then we could all weep together
at our separation from God
and from each other
and honor you with a river of ecstatic tears.

Maybe then we could all embrace you
and melt into a profound acknowledgment
of this awesome together/alone path
that we have walked to get here.

Dear friend,
I am listening to your heart,
I am drinking the wine of you,
I am loosening the stones of my being
so that the river of you may flow into me
and back to you
so that in the end, we may all sit
in a great, luminous circle
and celebrate you.

A Blessing Way

For M & M on the Birth of Their Son

Soon,
before you know it,
a thousand doors will open,
like the crocuses which have suddenly appeared,
bursting in blazes of color
on the dark earth.

When those small eyes open
and struggle to come into focus,
the colorful threads of a thousand dreams
will suddenly cohere
and fly forth into the future,
touching more life
than you or I will ever know.

He will carry
your clear light and your confusions
in the beat of his heart
and the exhalation of his breath
in a deeper way
than he may ever understand.

He will teach you
with a firmer hand
than the wisest guru
the lessons of self sacrifice
and the joys of gentle love.

He will challenge you
to cleanse your hearts
of fears that have lain dormant and waiting
for a teacher as wild and kind as he,
and instruct you in the fine art
of brushing away the cobwebs in your minds,
by asking questions
(the most profound ones will have no words)
that will shake your beings

right down to the bedrock of the mystery
which holds us all
in its ruthlessly tender embrace.

Dearest friends,
Are you ready?
Is he?
Are we?
There is no turning back now.
The Call has already been answered.

Hold him close in the safety of your love,
celebrate his joys and his tears,
nurture his innate wisdom
and support his steps toward autonomy
and freedom.
Help him to ground in the authority
of his own knowing
and the compassion of his heart.
And when the time comes,
send him out into the World,
in peace.

For in the end,
like all of our children,
he belongs to the future
and will leave you behind.

His wisdom will exceed yours
for he has been shot like an arrow
from the bow of your Knowing and your Love.

May he light up the sky of tomorrow
with hope,
loving kindness
and freedom.

Amen.

**For Yvonne,
Mentor Extraordinaire,
A Toast!**

So, old eagle eyes,
You have been circling us protectively,
dive bombing our defenses,
challenging us to test our wings,
for quite a few years now.
The tribe has grown
in strength and competence under your guidance.
Thank you.

Your ruthless pursuit of truth
has steadily worn away
so much dishonesty and self deception,
ours and yours.

I would like to think that we are not the only ones
that are being transformed by this journey.
I don't think that I am wrong.

You have so steadily loved us into BEING,
revealing our inner wisdom and AUTHORITY
and REALITY.

How can we thank you?
How can I?

I want you to know how much I love and respect you
(yes, I know you already know that!)
But it's not just for the grace and clarity
with which you have articulated your ideas,
for they will have to stand on their own,
and bear the test of time.
More importantly it's for the resonance I feel with your spirit,
for the dancing light in your eyes,
the unwavering curiosity of your heart
for your generosity and your humor,

for the sureness of your mastery and how this has allowed
you to be humble enough to also learn from us,
and for how I feel respected and honored and welcomed by you.

I love you
for the little human exchanges we have had around the edges,
for the gusto with which you eat your dinner,
for your dedication in learning Tai Chi,
for the way your voice sings
and cuts through the atmosphere like Fred Astaire,
for your intuitive and raunchy sensuality,
and for your masterful leadership.
(God, you're brilliant — but you know that!)

So, Teacher, Friend, Soul Sister,
may the light of your Being reach out in ever widening circles,
may the penetrating twinkle of your eyes live on in me and all of us,
and may the elegance of your ideas stand the test of time.

The imprint
of your relentless dedication to Truth and Freedom
will ring down through the halls of eternity.

I extend to you a deep and humble bow,
and join with a great chorus in saying a resounding,
WELL DONE!

Love Warriors

*For S. & L.,
on the Occasion of Their Marriage
and Move to the West Coast*

Hey Love Warriors,
so you have been around the block,
taken your hits,
got your scars to show for it
and earned your stripes.
Are you ready?

Hey Love Warriors,
it takes time to mature a heart,
to relax those fists
and truly give up the stubborn conviction
that it's better to be right
than to be in a relationship,
to really accept
the bittersweet fact
that we are different.

Hey Love Warriors,
so you've really gone and done it,
taken the leap,
risked it all
and jumped
into the bright light
of each other's eyes.

Now you are living in
that Space,
that profound Together-Alone state,
that commitment to each other,
that only ripens
when we take full responsibility
for ourselves.

Hey Love Warriors,
so you finally have discovered
who the real miracle workers are,
found your ruby red slippers,
clicked them three times
and are on your way Home.

Don't forget to write,
know that we will always remember you,
that a piece of us is in your back pocket,
that we have telephone numbers and e-mail
and that we
are Love Warriors too.

Hey Love Warriors,
dry those tears,
this loss is only the latest illusion on our path,
a strange mirage
that Time and Space
would have us think is Real.

Know that this circle can never be broken,
that it is not held together by our bodies,
that these eyes see through walls and across deserts,
and that our hearts have been joined
by the fires of the joy we have shared.

We will miss you.
We love you.
The wind of our prayers fills your sails
for your journey.
The Sun, the Moon and the Stars
bear witness to your commitment to each other
and our commitment to you.

Don't forget that the Big Love
always holds you in its ruthlessly tender embrace.

Go with the beauty of this buzzing in your beings.

Go with the kindness of this circle of friends
surrounding your souls.

Go with the wisdom of the Angels
guiding your feet.

Be Healthy.
Be Happy.
Be Love!

