The Spirit

What is poetry of the spirit?
First A Little Sampler.
The soul like the moon
is new, and always new again.

And I have seen the ocean
continuously creating.

Since I scoured my mind
and my body, I too, Lalla,
am new, each moment new.

My teacher told me one thing
*Live in the soul.*

When that was so,
I began to go naked,
and dance.

Lalla
Born in Kashmir, married at age 12, neglected by her husband, treated harshly by the mother-in-law, left to become a disciple on the Shiva-worship tradition of oneness between God and the phenomenal world.

Wandered the countryside naked dancing and reciting poetry in passionate mystical experience.

Ridicule and the swatches of cloth.
Everything is plundered, betrayed, sold,
Death’s great black wing scrapes the air,’
Misery gnaws to the bone.
Why then do we not despair?

By day, from the surrounding woods,
cherries blow summer into down;
at night the deep transparent skies
glitter with new galaxies.

And the miraculous comes so close
to the ruined, dirty houses—
something not known to anyone at all,
but wild in our breast for centuries.

Anna Akhmatova.
Anna Akhmatova

b. Odessa, Ukraine 1889.
Father shamed her for becoming a poet so she took the last name of a grandmother.
Became a cult figure of the intelligentsia of St. Petersburg with the publication of her book, *Evening*. After the revolution her books were burned so her followers memorized her poems so to reproduce and publish them once again when the political situation softened.
I am not I

I am not I.
   I am this one
Walking beside me whom I do not see,
Whom at times I manage to visit,
And whom at other times I forget;
The one who remains silent when I talk,
The one who forgives, sweet, when I hate,
The one who takes a walk where I am not,
The one who will remain standing when I die.

Juan Ramon Jimenez
Juan Ramon Jimenez

The Jar with the Dry Rim

The mind is an ocean . . . and so many worlds
Are rolling there, mysterious, dimly seen!
And our bodies? Our body is a cup, floating
On the ocean; soon it will fill, and sink. . . .
Not even one bubble will show where it went down.

The spirit is so near that you can’t see it!
But reach for it . . . Don’t be a jar
Full of water, whose rim is always dry.
Don’t be the rider who gallops all night
And never sees the horse that is beneath him.

Rumi
Born in Balkh, (now) Afghanistan, 1207, fled the Mongol Invasion, landed in Konya, Turkey. Followed the line of his ancestors and became a teacher, theologian, and jurist. Had a life awakening when he met the wandering Dervish, Shams of Tabriz, thereafter he longed for the close spiritual presence he saw in Shams. He would wander during the day thinking and meditating and then in the evening recite his astonishing poetry to a large audience. His followers wrote them down.
The Coming of Light

Even this late it happens:
the coming of love, the coming of light.
You wake and the candles are lit as if by themselves,
stars gather, dreams pour into your pillows,
sending up warm bouquets of air.
Even this late the bones of the body shine
and tomorrow’s dust flares into breath.

Mark Strand
Known for his surreal imagery, and the recurring theme of absence and negation, his later collections investigate ideas of the self with pointed, often urbane wit. Named the U.S. Poet Laureate in 1990. In 1999 he was awarded the prestigious Pulitzer Prize for Poetry for his collection *Blizzard of One*.

“Believe me, the idea that I would someday become a poet would have come as a complete shock to everyone in my family.”
The root of “spirit” is the Latin *spirare*, to breathe. Whatever lives on the breath, then, must have its spiritual dimension— including all poems, even the most unlikely. A useful exercise of soul would be to open any doorstop-sized anthology at random a dozen times and find in each of the resulting pages its spiritual dimension. If the poems are worth the cost of their ink, it can be done.  
—Jane Hirshfield

The Persian Mystics believe that the soul resides in the body. . .

. . . but the spirit wants to leave.
“For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”

Hebrews 4:12.

Soul

“A breathing creature”
The animate life: senses, desires, affections, appetites
Attuned to the earth
Interchangeable with “life”
The essence of our being

Spirit

“Breath or Wind”
The part that connects or refuses to connect God, The Universe
Faith resides here
Believers are spiritually “alive”
The Immaterial part of humanity

The two are thought of as connected but separate entities.

For our purposes here, Spirituality includes both.
Where do we Find The Experience?
Today, like every other day, we wake up empty and frightened. Don’t open the door to the study and start reading. Take down a musical instrument.

Let the beauty we love be what we do.
There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground.

—Rumi
What’s Happening?

The DLPFC and the Default Network
Characteristics

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Evidence for a Religious State

Scientists found notable changes in brain activity when people speak in tongues. The brain scans below show blood flow in the brain (blue lowest, red highest).

Singing Gospel Song

Speaking in Tongues

Frontal lobes Involved in the willful control of behaviors; more activity when singing than when speaking tongues.

Left caudate Involved in motor and emotional control; less activity in those speaking in tongues.

Source: Andrew B. Newberg, University of Pennsylvania
Brain Activity During Sleep
Listening to Music

THE BRAINS REACTION TO MUSIC

The Brain at Rest

The Brain’s Reaction to Music
Three times my life has opened

Three times my life has opened. Once, into darkness and rain. Once, into what the body carries at all times within it and starts to remember each time it enters the act of love. Once, to the fire that holds all. These three were not different. You will recognize what I am saying or you will not. But outside my window all day a maple has stepped from her leaves like a woman in love with winter, dropping the colored silks. Neither are we different in what we know. There is a door. It opens. Then it is closed. But a slip of light stays, like a scrap of unreadable paper left on the floor, or the one red leaf the snow releases in March.

Jane Hirshfield
Jane Hirshfield’s Nine Gates to the Spiritual

- Gate 1: Permeability
- Gate 2: The Great Yes
- Gate 3: Issa’s Cricket
- Gate 4: Horace’s Zen
- Gate 5: Spiritual Residence
- Gate 6: Abundance
- Gate 7: Longing
- Gate 8: Spiritual Dialogue
- Gate 9: Realization
But First... 

A little detour

Having to do with the way poetry apprehends the spiritual...
Physicists interested in Spirituality:

“The fact the religions through the ages have spoken in images, parables, and paradoxes means simply that there are no other ways of grasping the reality to which they refer,” physicist and quantum mechanics pioneer Niels Bohr observed while contemplating the nature of reality five years after he received the Nobel Prize, adding: “But that does not mean that it is not a genuine reality. And splitting this reality into an objective and subjective side won’t get us very far.”

Complementarity

“You can recognize a deep truth by the feature that it’s opposite is also a deep truth.”
When you are here we stay up all night.  
When you are away I cannot sleep

Praise God for these two insomnias
And the difference between them.

Come to the orchard in springtime.  
There is light and wine and lovers among the pomegranate blossoms.

If you do not come, these do not matter.  
If you do come, these do not matter.
Carl Jung and Wolfgang Pauli, the German and Nobel Laureate particle physicist, enjoyed a long correspondence. Out of this collaboration came the invention of synchronicity, a concept that bridged the world of science and the world of the spirit, entwining the two human impulses for finding truth.
“Synchronicity could be understood as an ordering system by means of which similar things coincide, without there being any apparent cause.”

—Carl Jung, six days later
Add this analysis by Maria Popova in Brainpickings:

While there is a long and lamentable history of science – physics in particular – being hijacked for mystical and New Age ideologies, two things make Jung and Pauli’s collaboration notable. First, the analogies between physics and alchemical symbolism were drawn not only by a serious scientist, but by one who would soon receive the Nobel Prize in Physics. Second, the warping of science into pseudoscience and mysticism tends to happen when scientific principles are transposed onto nonscientific domains with a false direct equivalence. Pauli, by contrast, was deliberate in staying at the level of analogy – that is, of conceptual parallels furnishing metaphors for abstract thought that can advance ideas in each of the two disciplines, but with very different concrete application.
Gate 1: Permeability

Although the wind blows terribly here, the moonlight also leaks between the roof planks of this ruined house.

Izumi Shikibu (Japan, 974?-1034?)

The moon in Japanese poetry is always the moon; often it is also the image of Buddhist awakening. This poem reminds that if a house is walled so tightly that it lets in no wind or rain, if a life is walled so tightly that it lets in no pain, grief, anger, or longing, it will also be closed to the entrance of what is most wanted. This can be a life-altering poem transforming one’s relationship to safety, permeability and the mouth of the lion.

(after Hirshfield)
DISSOLVER OF SUGAR

Dissolver of sugar, dissolve me, if this is the time.
Do it gently with a touch of the hand, or a look.
Every morning I wait at dawn. That's when it's happened before. Or do it suddenly like an execution. How else can I get ready for death?
You breathe without a body like a spark. You grieve, and I begin to feel lighter.
You keep me away with your arm, but the keeping away is pulling me in.

Rumi (Persia 9/30/1207 – 12/17/1273)
Let the light of late afternoon shine through chinks in the barn, moving up the bales as the sun moves down.

Let the cricket take up chafing as a woman takes up her needles and her yarn. Let evening come.

Let dew collect on the hoe abandoned in long grass. Let the stars appear and the moon disclose her silver horn.

Let the fox go back to its sandy den. Let the wind die down. Let the shed go black inside. Let evening come.

To the bottle in the ditch, to the scoop in the oats, to air in the lung let evening come.

Let it come, as it will, and don’t be afraid. God does not leave us comfortless, so let evening come.
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- Gate 9: Realization
Leave Crete,
Aphrodite,
and come to this
sacred place
encircled by apple trees,
fragrant with offered smoke.

Here, cold springs
sings softly
amid the branches;
the ground is shady with roses;
from trembling young leaves,
a deep drowsiness pours.

In the meadow,
horses are cropping
the wildflowers of spring,
scented fennel
blows on the breeze.

In this place,
Lady of Cyprus, pour
the nectar that honors you
into our cups,
gold, and raised up for drinking.
Born on Lesbos, 7th Century B.C. Earliest woman poet in Western Literature. Her work was mostly lost in the burning of the great library at Alexandria.

She married and had one daughter, Kleis. Led a group of women poets and celebrated the love of both women and men in her poems.

Underlying her poetry is a belief that also appears in the Sumerian sacred marriage poetry, that the divine shares our enjoyment of sensual pleasure and beauty and manifests itself through and in it.
The flute of interior time is played whether we hear it or not, 
What we mean by “love” is its sound coming in. 
When love hits the farthest edge of excess, it reaches a wisdom. 
And the fragrance of that knowledge! 
It penetrates out thick bodies, 
it goes through walls— 
Its network of notes has a structure as if a million suns were arranged inside. 
This tune has truth in it. 
Where else have you heard a sound like this?
The Indian mystic and poet Kabir is believed to have been born in or near Benares. He grew up in a family of Muslim weavers before becoming a disciple of the Hindu ascetic Ramananda. Kabir is considered both a Sufi and Brahmin saint.

Kabir’s poetry draws on both Hinduism and Islam, though he was critical of certain aspects of both faiths. Some of his verses are included in the compilation of Sikh scriptures known as the Adi Granth. His mystical poems are grounded in the details and earthly particulars of everyday life.
Although there is not one moment without longing, still, how strangely this autumn twilight fills me.

Ono no Komachi
Komachi and Shikibu

Ono no Komachi (834 - ?) and Izumi Shikibu (974-1034) wrote in the one Golden age when women were the predominant geniuses. They served at the Heian court where artistic achievement was valued above all else. How well they accomplished their art figured in their prospects for advancement and as well as one’s prospects as a romantic partner.

Love affairs were commonly accepted, polygamy the norm, and erotic love perennial literary topics. A skillful verse was indispensable to seduction, a morning-after reassurance, a get-well card, or even an official rebuke.

(after Hirshfield)

Interesting how these beliefs echo Sappho’s conviction that the Divine views physical pleasures as an authentic pathway to the spiritual.
The Moment of Becoming Permeable. . .

I didn’t trust it for a moment
but I drank it anyway,
the wine of my own poetry.

It gave me the daring to take hold
of the darkness and tear it down
and cut it into little pieces.

Lalla
Mystic Silence

From each, Love demands a mystic silence.
What do all seek so earnestly? Tis Love.
Love is the subject of their inmost thoughts,
In Love no longer ‘thou’ and ‘I’ exist,
For self has passed away in the Beloved.
Now will I draw aside the veil from Love,
And in the temple of mine inmost soul
Behold the Friend, Incomparable Love.
He who would know the secret of both worlds
Will find that the secret of them both is Love.
What is a Mystic?

A mystic knows without knowledge, without intuition or information, without contemplation or description or revelation. Mystics are not themselves. They do not exist in selves. They move as they are moved, talk as words come, see with sight that enters their eyes. I met a woman once and asked her where love had led her. “Fool, there’s no destination to arrive at. Loved one and lover and love are infinite.”

Attar of Nishapur

Perhaps the ultimate example of permeability: An openness to the invasion of the spirit that approaches occupation.
Attar was born c. 1145 in Nishapur (Modern Iran) and died c. 1220. He was well-educated and practiced the profession of pharmacy.

Venerated in traditional Islam, especially by the Sufis.

He influenced Rumi, Hafez, Jami, and many other later Sufi poets.

His special contribution was his mystical poetry which held widespread influences, but not in his lifetime. He only became widely known much later when his work was rediscovered during the 15th century.

Rumi said of him,

“Attar has traversed the seven cities of love.
We are still at the turn of one street.”
duende
(noun)
Duende

Iberian. Contraction of the phrase, *dueno de casa*, mischievous spirit inhabiting a house.

Four elements can be isolated in Lorca's vision of duende: irrationality, earthiness, a heightened awareness of death, and a dash of the diabolical.

The duende is an earth spirit who helps the artist see the limitations of intelligence, reminding them that "ants could eat him or that a great arsenic lobster could fall suddenly on his head"; who brings the artist face-to-face with death, and who helps them create and communicate memorable, spine-chilling art.

**Brush with Mortality?**

The duende is seen, in Lorca's lecture, as an alternative to style, to mere virtuosity, to God-given grace and charm (what Spaniards call "ángel"), and to the classical, artistic norms dictated by the muse.

Not that the artist simply surrenders to the duende; they have to battle it skillfully, "on the rim of the well", in "hand-to-hand combat". To a higher degree than the muse or the angel, the duende seizes not only the performer but also the audience, creating conditions where art can be understood spontaneously with little, if any, conscious effort.
"The duende, then, is a power, not a work. It is a struggle, not a thought. I have heard an old maestro of the guitar say, 'The duende is not in the throat; the duende climbs up inside you, from the soles of the feet.' Meaning this: it is not a question of ability, but of true, living style, of blood, of the most ancient culture, of spontaneous creation." Lorca, in his lecture, quotes Manuel Torre: "everything that has black sounds in it, has duende." [i.e. emotional 'darkness']

“The duende's arrival always means a radical change in forms. It brings to old planes unknown feelings of freshness, with the quality of something newly created, like a miracle, and it produces an almost religious enthusiasm."

**Black Sounds**

Irrationality  
Awareness of Death  
Earthiness  
The Diabolical
Duende: the conventional definitions (spirit, demon) are insufficient. It's thing that makes a poem a poem, a work of art a work of art. You have to get it. It can't be explained to you. And I am speaking of poetry or art or music that is very good.

I’ve not been convinced that it is a general term, but rather, the word given for a certain kind of, oh, eruption of spirit, or imminence, and perhaps is only Spanish, or even only Roma. It is magnificent in every way.

In lists compiled by linguists and translators, it seems “duende” is a word that many experts regard as the hardest word in Spanish to convey in other languages.

Yes, Lorca is the one who brought it over into poetry. He uses it metaphorically. You can't really translate but poets and sensitive readers of poetry know what it is.

seems versatile and a respected level of power .. like what 'ghost in the machine' wants to be when it grows up

Sort of like the German word, Geist.
Spend an evening with gypsy flamenco and duende will enchant you.......

It’s somewhat like the blues. Lorca recognized this.

If ya gotta ask...

I always have thought of duende as the presence of Death in a work of art - whether literal or metaphorical - that which sharpens our attention on the now, on the ephemeral nature of being, the impermanence of joy, that which makes us feel all that focus in presence deeply.

You can feel it when you get it. Frost said no surprise for poet no surprise for reader. Just substitute duende. It's the presence of depth when your mortality hits you.

Physicists work with procedures that really can't be explained, same with poets. Anything that's out there discovering where there isn't yet language.

So All clear?
Lorca himself distinguishes between three possible sources of poetic inspiration: the angel, the muse, and the duende. The angel, he writes, “dazzles, but he flies high over a man’s head, shedding his grace, and the man effortlessly realizes his work.” The poetry of the angel, we may imagine, is of an unearthly spirituality and beauty. The muse, by contrast, “dictates and sometimes prompts.” Poets who are inspired by the muse “hear voices and do not know where they are coming from.” Muse poetry, Lorca suggests, is the poetry of beautiful forms. He tells us that he has himself seen the muse twice, and that she looked “distant and tired.” But neither the angel nor the muse will satisfy Lorca. The poet must “reject the angel,” he writes, and “give the muse a kick in the pants.” It is the duende that calls him. “The true fight,” he writes, “is with the duende.”
Of the Dark Doves

In the branches of the laurel tree
I saw two dark doves
One was the sun
and one the moon
Little neighbors I said
where is my grave —
In my tail said the sun
On my throat said the moon
And I who was walking
with the land around my waist
saw two snow eagles
and a naked girl
One was the other
and the girl was none
Little eagles I said
where is my grave —
In my tail said the sun
On my throat said the moon

In the branches of the laurel tree
I saw two naked doves
One was the other
and both were none

Lorca
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- Gate 9: Realization
C. P. Cavafy
For some people the day comes
when they have to declare the great Yes
or the great No. It’s clear at once who has the Yes
ready within him; and saying it,

he goes from honor to honor, strong in his conviction.
He who refuses does not repent. Asked again,
he’d still say no. Yet that no—the right no—
drags him down all his life. Great Yes. .
Cavafy is not generally thought of as a spiritual poet. This early poem's precipitating title comes from a story about a pope, as told by Dante, but that is not the reason it is here. Nor can I say I even fully understand the poem—the phrase "the right no" has been, for me, a decades-long riddle and harvest. But Cavafy’s basic proposal, that a person carries within himself or herself a great Yes or great No, requiring declaration—this surely is one gate to the spiritual dimension.

—Hirshfield
Constantine Peter Cavafy

b. 1863 in Alexandria Egypt of Greek Heritage. Poet, journalist and civil servant. His consciously individual style earned him a place among the most important figures not only in Greek poetry but in Western poetry as well. He wrote 154 poems, while dozens more remained incomplete or in sketch form.
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