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 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.”
Definitions  ..... if Possible

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

DLPFC

The Sergeant Major
Mathematical
Logical/Linear
Humorless
Organized
Impatient
Not Creative
Willful Activities
The Driving Force of Daily Activities

Default Network

Emotional
Disorganized
Associational Thinking
Spontaneous
Creative
Automatic Activities
Active During Sleep,
Day Dreaming, Meditation,
Music, Spiritual Experiences
Brain Activity During Religious State

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

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

Source: Andrew B. Newberg, University of Pennsylvania

SPEAKING IN TONGUES

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

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)

Who is he talking to?
What is he talking about?
How does the paradox work?

Permeability?
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.
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.

Sappho
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 init.
Where else have you heard a sound like this?
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
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.