

Poems on Faith

Some lines on my spiritual perception of the world.

Oh God At the Last Trump

I. What is it that my soul

What is it that my soul desires?

Is it the seed, the wheat, the bread?

The seed dies, the wheat is ground,

the bread is chosen to be broken.

What is it that my soul desires,

the longing of my blood that suffers hate?

My soul has looked for you,

it has wandered narrow ways

and arid places seeking you.

I have searched the heaven and the hills

for signs which you would not reveal.

Oh, when will you come to sate my longing?

II. Can we find the things

Can we find the things that have been lost?

Can we say to the God that we seek:

Where do you hide?

Why have you gone away?

Did you think we would not note your absence?

You who made the world and what is in it —

earth, sea, sky, tree, man, woman, all mammals

— where were you when ocean spewed its waves,

when it swallowed one I loved where were you?

When I looked for love to help me swim

why were you not my float, my life preserver?

When the rich made money and overran the poor,

when the projects soured where were you?

When I looked for love to help the 'hood,

why were you not my grant, my public works?

Where were you when Doshas life drained out,

when Desean stole his first Intrepid where were you?

When I looked for love to invite them in,

why were you not my door, my furnished house?

Where were you when Seven sold his drugs,

when Fox could find no job where were you?

When I looked for love to bring them work,

why were you not my HR desk, their resume?

Here is a list, God, we say, here

are the things your absence has cost us.

We know the world is empty, broken.

Why do you make us heal ourselves?

You've left us to the whims of fate

and we resent this. Come on, soothe

our hurt and seal our souls for you.

III. Sometimes the world

Sometimes the world flames

sometimes I flame,

and I look up to the sky

full of fire

and kiss the hand that made me,

the hand that I bite and

that feeds me and that I love.

IV. This is the world I know

This is the world I know

this is not the world I know:

hell and heaven,

fire and ice;

the lines of the compass,

the dusty winds —

(four points to the possible,

celebration of earth for our feet to find,

celebration of sky for our wings);

the tug of Paradise;

the world above,

the world below,

and me strung up between.

Perhaps I overdramatize.

We wake and live the best we know.

No, we wake and live.

This is how I feel

this is not how I feel,

a peaceful man but now in pieces,

parts of me parceled out to fate:

those winds, the compass points;

the earth, the sky; the tug of dust

from which I came and which

will take me back in turn.

Celebrate the turn of the needle,

align with the magnetic pole.

This is salvation this

is how it's done.

V. I have seen my God

I have seen my God in the faces of the poor;
I have seen his form imprinted in the valleys
below the mountains which my feet have scaled.
I have felt his eyes alight behind the sun that sets
over open ocean; I have seen the ocean bow to him.
I have heard his voice drift down the subway steps
from battered lips that trumpet tunes for change.
I have smelled him in the soil, freshly turned,
of a soybean field and on a tall tomato stalk.
The smokes of burning rubbish heaps have shaped
him as they climbed; his music flows from mountain
streams and from the slicks of city rivers.
I have seen his lightning strike along the line
of hills that's north of town; I have watched
his cloudbursts cleanse a quiet canyon floor.
I have felt him within mosques and inside temples,
atop cathedrals and in the open woods.
I have sensed his spirit in a desert and on
a crowded city corner I have known his touch
and known his voice; I believe.

VI. At times I have betrayed

At times I have betrayed

the universal hope within me borne,

claimless to the human

I would claim; at others

lived with little thought; knew

the path yet went a wayward way.

I have seen the legless man

who begs for bread and looked aside;

I have looked into the orphan's life

and lived my own.

I have quoted without question

lines of solely human doctrine.

I have heard the wealthy damn the weak

and swallowed my retort.

Have I been a rebel? No;

I cannot claim so pure a debt.

This credit only will I sign:

that when it came to payback time

I swiped my self.

VI. Oh God, at the last trump

Oh God, at the last trump take me, too,

your everlasting mercy scalding

me.

I would not be

a stranger in your house:

Send me up in whirlwind spire,

burn me in the pyre

that purifies but destroyeth not.

Say

that my wood and hay will leave

some base of precious stones.

Tell Moses let me through;

stay with me and be my lord.

The Arc of the Fall

Mansehra, Pakistan

This morning as I walked
I saw a curious sight: bricks
thrown by unseen hands
from a pile on the ground
to a pile on the roof, or what
perhaps would be a second floor,
of a half-built building,
each brick rising with grace
into the blue air at the top
of the compound wall, tumbling
slightly in a shortened parabola,
one after the other, to land
with a clink on the concrete above.

His body hidden behind a wall,
I had to imagine the hands
of the thrower, their clarity
of purpose, their sure goodwill
as they chose a brick, weighed

it, then lofted it high
with practiced ease.

I feel like that brick
sometimes, thrown by unseen hand –
of God, perhaps, or of my will –
to a higher plane, landing amongst
other bricks chipped from the arc
of the fall, and who can know
whether the wall we build
will be straight or crooked,
will last or crumble.

Digging Up the Body

I had a body buried in my backyard.

A gravedigger told me so. He came at dead

of night, whistling at my window. We

crept downhill into the creek's floodplain,

past the ruined shed and underneath

the tall pear tree. I slipped on rotten fruit.

His spade, I saw, was worn from much use.

The digging point was gone, the handle loose

where it joined the shovel head. Around

his neck there hung a leather thong. I heard

an eighteen wheeler hit the highway's ruts,

the distant, haunting whistle of a train.

I sensed, rather than saw, a low, bright

planet in the sky. And then, beneath

an arched mulberry tree, in grasses late-

summer high, he marked a spot and dug.

Spurred by strange anticipation, I dropped

to knees and helped with hands as best I could.

It was a deep grave, and our hands turned dirt

for what seemed a parade of nights, though really it

took only an hour or two. He slowed, then,

and ordered me out of the hole. With utmost care,

he uncovered a tiny body, an infant,

wrapped in cloth and delivered it up

to me. Unwinding the linen strips, I saw

a boy, uncircumcised and of uncertain

race, and I did not find a belly button.

"How long has this been buried here?" I asked

the gravedigger. "Thirty years and more,"

he said. Then he took the leather thong

and draped it round the child's neck, revealing

a locket which, when opened, held two strands

of hair. "Eat," he said to me. I did,

and though they tasted separately of honey

together they were bitter. I heard an owl

hoot against the darkness. Then he gave

some cock-and-bull story, a rural lass,

a city lad, their secret, ill-fated love.

But I preferred to think that this must be,

in some sense, my unborn body by some miracle

preserved whole, and here I was, giving

myself some sort of rebirth.

When I Get Over

When I get over I will see

my mother I

will see Ms. Kate

I did not know her

in this night but we

will hug when I

get over.

In the morning I'll

get over I

will cross that River

Jordan go through

water woods and fire

get my crown when I

get over.

Angel wings will carry

me whirlwind lift

to safer shores

where I'll meet Ms.

Kate, my mother, there to part

no nevermore when I

get over.

I will meet my shining

Jesus jump into

those arms of joy he'll

say couldn't you have come

a little sooner then

we'll laugh when I

get over.

Won't you meet me

in that sunset

we will lap

the outer walls stroll

those streets till

past our bedtime

when I get over.