

Write to the Heart of Motherhood  
*connecting to our true voice in the middle of our messy lives*

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Week 3. POEMS



~ TO LIVE WITH AND/ OR LEARN BY HEART ~

Greetings, lovely!

Here five more poems to add to your collection, for you to peruse and enjoy, and – if any of them speak to you, to live with and/or learn by heart.

I will keep adding five poems each week to this bank, so you'll have 30 total by the end of the course. I've tried to choose a range of topics, but all with lengths that are workable to learn by heart. Of course, choose any poems you like outside this list too! And feel free to post those you love in our Facebook group. Enjoy!

**THREE TIMES MY LIFE HAS OPENED**

*Jane Hirshfield*

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, into 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.

### **LOVE AFTER LOVE**

*Derek Walcott*

The time will come

when, with elation

you will greet yourself arriving

at your own door, in your own mirror  
and each will smile at the other's welcome,

and say, sit here. Eat.

You will love again the stranger who was your self.

Give wine. Give bread. Give back your heart  
to itself, to the stranger who has loved you

all your life, whom you ignored

for another, who knows you by heart.  
Take down the love letters from the bookshelf,  
  
the photographs, the desperate notes,  
peel your own image from the mirror.  
Sit. Feast on your life.

### **BATHING THE NEW BORN**

*Sharon Olds*

I love with an almost fearful love  
to remember the first baths I gave him,  
our second child, so I knew what to do,  
I laid the little torso along  
my left forearm, nape of the neck  
in the crook of my elbow, hips nearly as  
small as a least tern's tail  
against my wrist, thigh held loosely  
in the loop of thumb and forefinger, the  
sign that means exactly right. I'd soap him,  
the violet, cold feet, the scrotum  
wrinkled as a waved whelk, the chest,  
hands, clavicles, throat, gummy  
furze of the scalp. When I got him too soapy he'd  
slide in my grip like an armful of buttered  
noodles, but I'd hold him not too tight,  
I felt that I was good for him,

I'd tell him about his wonderful body  
and the wonderful soap, and he'd look up at me,  
one week old, his eyes still wide  
and apprehensive. I love that time  
when you croon and croon to them, you can see  
the calm slowly entering them, you can  
sense it in your clasping hand,  
the loose spine relaxing against  
the muscle of your forearm, you feel the fear  
leaving their bodies, he lay in the blue  
oval plastic baby tub and  
looked at me in wonder and began to  
move his silky limbs at will in the water.

### **CHANGE THE LIGHTING**

*Brooke McNamara*

If you can't change yourself, after all  
the efforts, change the light  
by which you read your story.  
Exchange overhead for something softer -  
a lamp, a candle, a vine of shining  
holiday lights – and feel yourself  
become hugged by the fabric of shadows.  
You see the darkness here has wisdom too.  
You see these objects around become related  
by the pregnant emptiness that holds them,

and you. Let this light reveal the rapture  
of being just this. Then, further still, try  
moonlight, or no light, until, at last,  
this open, sourceless incandescence  
which you are  
no matter who you think you are  
will follow you from the inside  
wherever you may go, however  
you may change, or not.

### **SELF PORTRAIT**

*David Whyte*

It doesn't interest me if there is one God  
or many gods.  
I want to know if you belong or feel abandoned.  
If you know despair or can see it in others.  
I want to know  
if you are prepared to live in the world  
with its harsh need  
to change you. If you can look back  
with firm eyes  
saying this is where I stand. I want to know  
if you know  
how to melt into that fierce heat of living  
falling toward  
the center of your longing. I want to know

if you are willing  
to live, day by day, with the consequence of love  
and the bitter  
unwanted passion of your sure defeat.  
I have heard, in *that* fierce embrace, even  
the gods speak of God.