

Spell to Be Said Against Hatred by Maria Popova

“When we come to it,” Maya Angelou beckoned in her stunning cosmic vision for humanity, “when the curtain falls on the minstrel show of hate...” Then, she bent the mind in language to remind us, and only then will we have risen to our cosmic destiny — a destiny built on the discipline of never forgetting, never daring let ourselves forget, our shared cosmic belonging. “For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you. Remember?” But we do forget, and so the minstrel show of hate remains with us; the curtain falls, only to rise again, as if to affirm Zadie Smith’s poignant observation that “progress is never permanent, will always be threatened, must be redoubled, restated and reimagined if it is to survive.”

It is especially in times of uncertainty, in tremulous times of fear and loss, that the curtain rises and the minstrel show resumes — a show of hate that can be as vicious and pointed as the murderous violence human beings are capable of directing at one another, or as ambient and slow-seething as the deadly disregard for the universe of non-human lives with which we share this fragile, irreplaceable planet. “We don’t know where we belong,” Annie Dillard wrote in her gorgeous meditation on our search for meaning, “but in times of sorrow it doesn’t seem to be here, here with these silly pansies and witless mountains, here with sponges and hard-eyed birds. In times of sorrow the innocence of the other creatures — from whom and with whom we evolved — seems a mockery.”

How to end the mockery and the minstrel show is what poet Jane Hirshfield — one of the most unboastfully courageous voices of our time, an ordained Buddhist, a more-than-humanitarian: a planetarian — explores in “Spell to Be Said against Hatred,” a miniature masterwork of quiet, surefooted insistence and persistence. Included in the anthology *Dear America: Letters of Hope, Habitat, Defiance, and Democracy* (public library) alongside contributions by Jericho Brown, Ellen Bass, Naomi Shihab Nye, and Robin Wall Kimmerer, it is inhaled into life here by musician, activist, fellow more-than-humanitarian, and my darling friend Amanda Palmer.

brainpicker · Amanda Palmer reads “Spell to Be Said against Hatred” by Jane Hirshfield

SPELL TO BE SAID AGAINST HATRED
by Jane Hirshfield

Until each breath refuses they, those, them.

Until the Dramatis Personae of the book’s first page says, “Each one is you.”

Until hope bows to its hopelessness only as one self bows to another. Until cruelty bends to its work and sees suddenly: I.

Until anger and insult know themselves burnable legs of a useless table.

Until the unsurprised unbidden knees find themselves bending. Until fear bows to its object as a bird's shadow bows to its bird. Until the ache of the solitude inside the hands, the ribs, the ankles. Until the sound the mouse makes inside the mouth of the cat. Until the inaudible acids bathing the coral.

Until what feels no one's weighing is no longer weightless.

Until what feels no one's earning is no longer taken.

Until grief, pity, confusion, laughter, longing know themselves mirrors.

Until by we we mean I, them, you, the muskrat, the tiger, the hunger.

Until by I we mean as a dog barks, sounding and vanishing and sounding and vanishing completely.

Until by until we mean I, we, you, them, the muskrat, the tiger, the hunger, the lonely barking of the dog before it is answered.

"Spell to Be Said against Hatred" was originally published in Hirshfield's altogether soul-resuscitating collection *Ledger* (public library), which also gave us the wonderful "Today, Another Universe." Complement it with Marie Howe's kindred-spirited poem "Singularity" and a soulful reading of Hirshfield's splendid succor for resilience, "The Weighing," then revisit Amanda's enchanting readings of "When I Am Among the Trees" by Mary Oliver, "Einstein's Mother" by former U.S. Poet Laureate Tracy K. Smith, "Life While-You-Wait" by Polish Nobel laureate Wisława Szymborska, "Humanity i love you" by E.E. Cummings, "Hubble Photographs: After Sappho" by Adrienne Rich, and "Questionnaire" by Wendell Berry.