



THE WISDOM OF THE BODY

HILDEGARD VON BINGEN (Germany, 1098-1179)

Spirit of fire, Paraclete*, our Comforter,

You're the Live in alive, the Be in every creature's being, the Breathe in every breath on earth.

Doctor of the desperate, Healer of everyone broken past hope, Medicine for all wounds,

Fire of love, Joy of hearts, fragrant Strength, sparkling Fountain, Protector, Penetrator,

in You we contemplate how God goes looking for those who are lost

and reconciles those who are at odds with Him. Break our chains! You bring people together.

You curl clouds, whirl winds, send rain on rocks, sing in creeks, and turn the lush earth green.

You teach those who listen, breathing joy and wisdom into them.

We praise You for these gifts, Light-giver, Sound of joy, Wonder of being alive, Hope of every person,

And our strongest Good. *Paraclete=Holy Spirit, advocate (Symphonia 28, Sequence for the Holy Spirit)

Mary, whatever's small and unnoticed is like you... growing, the greenest twig stirring in the rainy gusts that were all those questions asked by those who lived before your time and spent their lives looking for God's son to come.

The sunshine warmed you, and when the time was ripe, you blossomed, smelling like balsam, and the fragrance of your Bloom renewed the spices' dry perfume.

The earth rejoiced when your body grew spelt**. The sky celebrated by giving the grass dew, and the birds built nests in your wheat, and the food of the Eucharist was made for all humanity.

We feast on it, full of joy.

Kind lady, no wonder you're always happy. Eve scorned these things but we praise our God on high!

**spelt=wheat (Symphonia 19, Song to the Virgin)

I've always had visions, even in childhood, but I kept silent. Later, I told these to only a very few in my monastic family. I've mostly kept them hidden until now, when God decided I should speak out. I did not see these visions when I was asleep or dreaming, nor was I hallucinating. I didn't see them with my physical eyes, nor did I hear them with the ears on the sides of my face. They never came from simple seeing or hearing. No, I was fully awake, and I saw them with my mind. I heard them through my inner ears. This was God's will. I may be hard for you to understand, but it's true. When I reached the age of accountability, a divine voice sang out to me:

I am the living Light, I make the darkness day and have chosen you to see great wonders, though I've humbled you on earth. You're often depressed and timid, and you're very insecure. But you're conscientious, you feel guilty, and chronic physical pain has thoroughly scarred you. But the deep mysteries of God have saturated you, too, as has humility. So now you must give others an intelligible account of what you see with your inner eye and what you hear with your inner ear.

Your testimony will help them. They'll no longer refuse to adore God.

That voice made me—a heartbroken, fragile creature—begin to write, though my hand was shaking and I was traumatized by more illness than I could ever begin to name. As I started this task. I looked to the living Light, asking, 'But what should I write down?' and that Brightness commanded, 'Be simple. Be pure. Write down what you see and hear.' Butcher, 52-3

I looked to the East and saw the One-who-shines-so-bright-that-I-can-never-see-Him-clearly, but I was able to see that up close to His breast, He was holding something that looked like a dirty lump, the size of a human heart, decorated around the edge with gems and pearls. This is our gentle Father hugging humanity to Himself. That's why no one can reject anyone—because the Son of the Father is God incarnate who Himself accepted the human form.

Butcher, 68

God made sure to give us everything we need to thrive, and He also gave us much power, because nature nourishes us in so many ways. The relationships between us and creation must be symbiotic, because humanity can't live without the nature that God made....

A warm breakfast is important. The first thing a person eats in the morning should include something made from flour, because dry foods make a body strong, as do fruits... Flour must be made from wheat without sifting the bran, or the result will be a loaf of anemic bread. Of all the grains that can be made into flour or porridge, spelt is the best, because it's hot, healthy and nourishing. It warms the blood, sticks to the backbone, and is easy on the digestive tract, too. It will strengthen you and make you happy. Also, if someone is sick, you can boil spelt and mix it with egg and lard to make a tasty, potent medicine.

The apple tree has a hot, moist nature, and is a very good medicine. If someone has a migraine, a sick liver or spleen, or indigestion, they should gather the tender roots of the apple tree and put them in a jar of olive oil. Then place this mixture out in the sun, to heat up. Drinking this regularly before bed will lessen headaches and other pains. Apples themselves are easy to digest and grow with the dew. They're fine to eat raw, unless a person is sick. When cooked or dried, apples are good for anyone.

People panic when they feel their body is in danger—everything pulls in on itself and gets smaller. Everything contracts—the heart, the liver, and the blood vessels. This constriction releases a fog that hovers over the heart and darkens it. The person's blood sours. This is how a person becomes sad. The depressed person finds that tears rise like smoke and sting their eyes. These tears dehydrate the blood, reducing a person's flesh. Such tears of sadness can make a person sick, just as rotten food can. They dim the eyes. Tears of joy, however, are gentler on the body. They sad soul musn't forget who made the world and who made the human pilgrims on it. We must cry from the joy of knowing that God loves us. Tears of joy are never injurious.

When I began to try my righteousness, I found it a hard path to walk, though, for I started questioning myself again. I said, This is useless. I wanted to fly high above the clouds. I dreamed dreams that were too big for me. I wanted to start things I couldn't possibly finish, and then I felt sad. When I attempted these things, I just felt sadder. So the result was I sat and did nothing. I was neither living on the hilltop of holiness nor in the valley of good deeds. My self-doubt makes me miserable. I feel oppressed by all things. I grow desperate. Then I hear the Devil's voice, and my problems worsen. Terror panics me. I blame. I speak evil words. I afflict my body and soul. I abuse God's purity, healing, and greatness. I believe that everything good is evil and will injure me. This is huge, unhappy struggle for me....How does this happen? The old serpent is cunning and good at manipulation. He knows just what to say to make me choose stubbornness and error. I forget to respect God. In sin, saying, Who's God? I don't know God! The Devil's poison arrow is the evil robbing me of my spiritual joy. I don't want to celebrate people or God. I doubt everything when I feel this way, including my salvation....

When anger tries to burn up the temple of my body, I'll look to God's goodness, which anger never touched. I'll look to God whom anger never touched, and I'll become sweeter than the breeze whose gentleness moistens the earth. I'll look to the God of peace, because then I'll have spiritual joy as the virtues begin to show themselves in me, strengthening me with their vibrant greenness. I'll look to God whom anger never touched, and –because I look to Him—I'll experience God's calm goodness. And when hatred tries to diminish who I am, I'll look to the kindness of God's Son and to His pain.... I'll look to God who gave me life. Instead of building an inner tower of vanity, I'll become a sturdy, secure stone in God's foundation.

Butcher, 58-9

JOSEPHINE BAHKITA (Sudan & Italy, 1869-1947)

The whole of my life has been God's gift.

Seeing the sun, the moon and the stars, I said to myself, 'Who could be the Master of these beautiful things?' I felt a great desire to see him, to know him and to pay him homage....

I was approximately nine years old when I, one early morning, walked around the fields, a bit far away from home, with a companion. Suddenly, we saw two strangers appear from behind a fence. One of them told my companion: 'Let the small girl go into the forest for me to pick me some fruits. Meanwhile, you continue on your walk. We'll catch up with you soon'. His objective was to fool my friend so that she wouldn't give the alarm while they were capturing me. I, of course, did not suspect anything and hurried to obey, which my mother had accustomed me to do. Once we were in the forest, I saw two persons behind me. One of them briskly grabbed me with one hand, while the other one pulled out a knife from his belt and held it to my side. He told me "If you cry, you'll die! Follow us!" with a lordly voice...

One day I unwittingly made a mistake that incensed the master's son. He became furious, snatched me violently from my hiding place, and began to strike me ferociously with the lash and his feet. Finally he left me half dead, completely unconscious. Some slaves carried me away and lay me on a straw mat, where I remained for over a month. A woman skilled in this cruel art [tattooing] came to the general's house...our mistress stood behind us, whip in hand. The woman had a dish of white flour, a dish of salt and a razor... When she had made her patterns; the woman took the razor and made incisions along the lines. Salt was poured into each of the wounds... My face was spared, but 6 patterns were designed on my breasts, and 60 more on my belly and arms. I thought I would die, especially when salt was poured in the wounds...it was by a miracle of God I didn't die. He had destined me for better things....

I received the Sacrament of Baptism with such joy that only angels could describe...

O Lord, if I could fly to my people and tell them of your Goodness at the top of my voice: oh, how many souls would be won!

Love the Lord and pray for those who do not know Him. What a grace it is to know God!

I have given everything to my Master: He will take care of me... The best thing for us is not what we consider best, but what the Lord wants of us!

In God's will, there is great peace.

It is an act of justice for the rich to help the poor.

The Lord has loved me so much: we must love everyone... we must be compassionate!

If we had no hope in the Lord, what would we do in this world?

If I were to meet those slave raiders that abducted me and those who tortured me, I'd kneel down to them to kiss their hands, because, if it had not have been for them, I would not have become a Christian and religious woman.

When a person loves another dearly, he desires strongly to be close to the other: therefore, why be afraid to die? Death brings us to God!

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