

How to Get Saved by a Poem

By Kim Rosen

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Have you ever experienced a lightning bolt of energy when you finally express something that has been locked within you? That's what happens when your entire being aligns with the truth of the words you speak. The great visionary Hildegard of Bingen once said, "When the inner and the outer are wedded, revelation occurs." Kim Rosen reveals what that experience was like for her, and how you can achieve it, too.

Poetry can be a powerful medicine to wed your inner life with your outer words and actions. Reading or speaking a poem you love can ignite tremendous healing and power. It doesn't matter if you choose a mystical poem by the 12th-century poet, Rumi—*This longing / you express is the return message*—or a poem of outrage by modern poet and activist Audre Lorde—*There are so many roots to the tree of anger / that sometimes the branches shatter*. The sheer ring of truth can wake you up to the present moment, fill your voice with the truth of your innermost wisdom and lead to inspired action in the world.

In the aha! moment that occurs when the mind bursts open—at a breathtaking metaphor or an insight or a chiming among the words—all levels of being human come into alignment. You feel a sudden integration of body, mind, heart and soul. The fragmentation that many experience in the multitasking onrush of modern life cannot withstand a good poem.

For many years, I was afraid of poetry. I felt as though it was a secret language that belonged to an elitist club, which I had not been invited to join. Though I loved poetry as a child, my experience in high school had stifled my spark. Analyzing the dactylic hexameters of *The Odyssey* or the rhyme scheme of a Shakespearean sonnet did not exactly seem particularly relevant as I made my first forays into puberty!

Twenty-five years later, in the midst of a suicidal depression, poetry poured back into my life, touching me in a way no spiritual or psychological teaching had been able to—literally saving me. The healing did not come through writing poems or even through reading them. It came when I discovered that taking a poem I loved deeply into my life and speaking it aloud caused a profound integration of every aspect of me—physical, emotional, mental and spiritual. I felt a wholeness I had never before experienced. I felt like I was flying. I was speaking the truth, and

the truth was setting me free.

For the first time, I had found the voice of my soul.

How poetry can change your life, too

The poems became like prayers or mantras to me: I read them over and over, I spoke them aloud, I even learned many of them by heart. They infused not only my heart and mind with inspiration, but they literally affected my biochemistry, changing my brain waves and freeing my consciousness from the cage of its habitual thought patterns.

In honor of National Poetry Month, I invite you to find a poem you love and take it into your heart and your body. Develop a vibrant relationship with it. Become intimate with it and allow it to guide you into intimacy with yourself. Receive the poem's gifts as it illuminates undiscovered realms within you. And give the poem the gift of a home in your particular humanness. If you do this, that poem can become a teacher that is always with you, touching and changing every moment of your life.

How do you find a poem you love? Perhaps you and I are similar, and the poems I love will also speak to you. In the back of the book *Saved by a Poem: The Transformative Power of Words*, there is a list of fifty of my favorite poems. There are also several wonderful anthologies listed in the resource section.

But even if we're different, and your soul needs to give voice to a whole other genre of poetry, you need to find only one poem for the journey to begin. Perhaps you heard a poem that touched you at a wedding or a funeral or a rally. Hunt it down. Google is a fantastic resource: Just type in a line from a poem and the author, and you may find what you are looking for instantly. The Poetry Foundation has a wonderful "Poetry Tool" on the front page of its website that will help you find poems on any theme. If you like spiritual poetry, take a luxurious stroll through Poetry-Chaikhana.com or Panhala.net.

You need only one poem. Don't turn the page once you've read it. Read it again. Read it out loud to yourself and feel how the phrasing and rhythm of the poem affect the breath and physical pulsations of your body. Read it like a prayer before you go to sleep and upon waking. Notice how it changes the texture of your nights and mornings. Write it out and carry it around in your pocket to read again and again—on the bus or in line at the supermarket. Read it to a friend and watch the connection deepen between you instantly. Notice how those words change the texture of your life, bringing aliveness and passion to every moment.

*Kim Rosen, MFA, is the author of *Saved by a Poem: The Transformative Power of Words*, and is the co-creator of four CDs of spoken poetry and music. Combining her devotion to poetry with her background as a spiritual teacher and therapist, she gives performances, lectures and workshops in the United States and abroad.*