

Open in case of emergency, *New Poems*, by Jason Espada, 2017

67 poems, 119 pages.

Preface

If there's no urgency to your living, and nothing moving in you to get out of misery and to help others to do the same, then sleep on, and dream on. Some few will listen, and it is for those that I write.

Being born here, dear sisters and brothers, we are at once heirs to wonder and gnarled histories, effecting how we see and walk. I for one am haunted by the wretched, fading from my view. I struggle navigating the holiday season, this time when we turn over the rock that is consumerism, and see it in all its garish extreme.

But I say, If not for the seed of hope, evident to all those not cowed by fear, we wouldn't have the light by which to write, or to read.

What I wish to say is that suffering is not all there is, and to the last we will attempt to describe the world as it could be.

November 25th, 2017

The following poems were written between 2015 and 2017.

Waking up in a burning house

Out of night's troubled dream,
I wake and hear cries,
shouting,
and people running down the hallway

I gather myself and listen -
Our house is on fire.

I count who is here,
every one of them,
all my family,
and throw open doors

Some sleep heavily, and will need to be carried,
some are so fixed on their games
their toys need to be slapped from their hands,

some are curled up under the table, wailing,
others are drunk

most are our children

What choice do I have?
I'm not leaving anyone behind

resting's not an option,
or panic

the floorboards are falling away, and soon,
if we don't find a way out,
this place we call home and all of us will be gone

fools and derelicts,
those with matches still in their hands,
the deranged and the distracted
have nothing to give us now

the pompous hear nothing, see less

If you ask me my name, where I'm from,
or what right I have to raise the alarm
I'll tell you there's no time for that

look at the floor beneath your feet
see the smoke,
hear the tearing apart of the walls

there's safety,
but also confusion, dense sleep,
and arrogance

others sound a pure, clear bell

If you want to talk about how this all happened,
or what can be done,
we'll have to do it
with one or both of us in motion

A prayer for degenerate times

{The five degenerations: lifespan, views, emotions, time, and beings}

Wars, and the threat of wars
that would end life on earth;

epidemics, and new diseases appearing

famines,
the increasing rate of species extinction,
and environmental destruction;

Look on these if you have the courage,
and if you can bear to:

fire, flood, earthquakes

food and medicines deteriorating,
and causing even more illness,
and addiction

lifespan, and views, emotions,
and the environments in which we live in this time,
people becoming more and more difficult to reach,
their minds more difficult to tame

people losing the ability to practice,
the motivation, and the understanding,
despite all the wise and holy beings who have come before
and left us their teachings

extreme views these days,
more and more are taken as normal,

racism, materialism, hedonism,
and fanaticism

false teachers proliferating,
divisions between genuine students,
and between students and their teachers
relationships are harder to form and are easily broken -

such are these times
and I call out
where are we to turn to now?

There is a tradition I heard of,
and have felt to be true
that said
when times get really bad,
and when it seems that nothing works,
then these particular practices -
tantra and the revelations known as terma -
would become effective
that said
when the conditions became truly dire
they would work to change the conditions,
and liberate beings from their suffering

We need you now
to stop the terrible flood of suffering
to end the great dangers we face
so whatever prayers you have made, or embodied
may they be effective now

Guru Rinpoche, not many have heard of you,
and even fewer believe
in the compassionate pledges you made

when you saw what was to come

While we can still hear you,
and receive the blessings you intend,
O all you great compassionate ones
extend your hand and your power
While there is still time
make your blessings known to us

Why I live by the edge of the river

Darkness approaches,
and with it a cold wind
You struggle to hold the rope,
and listen for the sound of help

This is why I live by the edge of the river
to wrap my arms around you,
and keep you from the dark currents

I was one almost taken,
and would have been
if not for someone reaching out,
so now all that's left
is the will to see you safe
and with your kin,
given the food set out for you

Everyone reached
goes on in some way
feeding our greater family
pulling ashore those who can be taken hold of
and venturing out farther still
to wild places,
to bring them all home

There are so many ways to save a life

You can
let your friend know you are thinking of them

You can
cut a few flowers from the garden
and give them away

You can
open your window, and play a song,
so someone walking by can hear it

You can
let yourself dream for all of our sake

You can buy ice cream for the local kids,
and relish their satisfied look
because saving ourselves is also what we must do

Alright, I'm broken open tonight,
on account of a madman
plowing into a crowd in Nice,
and the shooting in Baton Rouge,
and the one in St. Paul,
and the one in Dallas,
and this is the best I can do right now,
but there's something to what I say,
if you care to look -

Instead of studying war, and retaliation,
barricading ourselves with thoughts of the enemy
we can stand exposed
like the lions that came before us

There are so many ways to save someone's life
and if you are awake,
it's all you aim to do