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NERUDA
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For Neruda

(On his Centenary, 12 July 2004)

For you my friend,
Wine and cheese, salt and earth
Things you held dear to your end
Only mattered if they had love-

Love, that great ingredient you said
That forms the essence of life and living
Love which moulds and shapes and bends and breaks
More than just the human body

To be a good citizen, you said
One had to love, people, country and nature
To be a good citizen you said
Was to surrender to the heart with its beating rhythms
Earth with its engulfing convulsions
Sky with its overarching horizons
And, yes, love with its fierce loyalties.

Your friend the postman told you
Poetry belongs not to those who write it
But to those who need it -
And you agreed as they held your pulse in their hands
Reading the lyrics of your songs celebrating freedom
Freedom which makes all living things beautiful

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I came to you through peace which sang in the halls
And from the depths of your anguished heart.
You agonized over the world's craziness
As you pleaded for mercy, forgiveness, love

Neruda, my old teacher, your wisdom lives
In those very veins which once proved cynical
Now as we move searchingly and afraid
Wanting your rich faith and the haunting magic
Of language which you weaved with such brilliance.

-Kirpal Singh, July 2004.