



OCTAL

To Sherry

Octal is book eight of Decapoiema. Decapoiema is a series of 10 works of poetry, each based on one of the elemental numerals 0-9.



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

The beauty of binary systems is their ability to produce marvelously complex systems from the barest simplicity. The smallest bits of data, zero and one, on and off, are the atoms of this age of information. This book calls forth the world in binary form.

The Yin/Yang pairs herein are binary mates. Light & Dark, Heaven & Earth, Young & Old, Being & Nothing, Male & Female, Mind & Body, Soft & Hard and Logic & Intuition. These are but a few of nature's pairings. They surround us, they charge us, they hold us.

Borrowing from computing, I present these pairs as groups of eight, eight bits forming a byte. Using poetry as my programming language, I hope to reflect what I see the world doing. That is, constantly alternating between sides of trillions of binary pairs. Viewing the world from this perspective, it's not much of a stretch to see the universe as a collective of quantum computing. Once we see this, the universe presents itself with endless wonder and mystery. For lack of a better word, the universe itself becomes God.

Each of the eight chapters consists of eight two part poems. Each poem has eight lines and each line has eight syllables. The constraint of eight syllables helped me to focus on just seeing one byte at a time. Powers of two are represented throughout the book. From the 2 line couplet to the 16 poem parts per chapter. From the 512 total lines to the 4096 total syllables.

Light/Dark

Light/Dark 1

0

Light visits us when we tell of
Night's drain, the bleed of wet shadows.

Darkness, inside nature's thin walls
Dusts the skin of new folded hands.

0 0 0 0 0 0 1

1

Close your eyes tighter than the crack
That forms where wishes come to rest.

Bare your arms lighter than the sound
Of a nightingale in the barn.

0 0 0 0 0 1 0

Light/Dark 2

0

Before the birth of light, I was.

Though not I, and you, though not you.

It was, so we now have been told

A thing of no space, of no time.

0 0 0 0 0 0 1 1

1

This is all they can assure us,

These priests who posit, then confirm

God in a particle, the all

As each generation must say.

0 0 0 0 0 1 0 0

Light/Dark 3

0

Before the birth of light, I loved.

Though not the love held in a heart.

It was, as others give a hint,

A thing that will not hold a name.

0 0 0 0 0 1 0 1

1

This is all. They nod 'til we know.

These priests who wait, who fall away.

God is but each generation's

Placeholder for every last love.

0 0 0 0 0 1 1 0

Light/Dark 4

0

Clear calls illumine our sun with pierced

Edges, our shadow becomes love.

Love becomes shadow, our edges

Pierced with sun, our illumine calls clear.

0 0 0 0 0 1 1 1

1

Sky floating lazy, softly bounds.

Light itself melts and returns calm.

Calm returns and melts itself. Light

Bounds softly, lazy floating sky.

0 0 0 0 1 0 0 0

Light/Dark 5

0

To shine beneath the crescent moon

At dawn, Venus parts her bright hair.

Across the longing dark she comes

Without a veil, without a lie.

0 0 0 0 1 0 0 1

1

She comes to waken light itself.

In golden vaults that have no door.

We turn away at our expense

As if her morn were not our own.

0 0 0 0 1 0 1 0

Light/Dark 6

0

Draw your shade across my canyon.

The afternoon stings in my throat.

A sere wind reaches even here.

Where moss still finds shade in summer.

0 0 0 0 1 0 1 1

1

Your shade carries me to the night.

To sleep I mark with a blood brush.

The rocks, my bed, retain something.

A shadow of igneous heat.

0 0 0 0 1 1 0 0

Light/Dark 7

0

Light star of glimmer. Gentle glow

Of wisp's lit moon. Soft sings darkness.

Darkness sings soft. Moon lit wisps of

Glow. Gentle glimmer of starlight.

0 0 0 0 1 1 0 1

1

Day and night entwining, vibrate

Earth and sky. Hope softly breezes.

Breezes softly hope. Sky and earth

Vibrate, entwining night and day.

0 0 0 0 1 1 1 0

Light/Dark 8

0

Shorelines wander to drift safety's
coast. To try light, taste sighs, touched flight.

Flight touched sighs taste light. Try to coast

Safety's drift to wander shorelines.

0 0 0 0 1 1 1 1

1

Dawn, one measures gently. Grace for
Care takes all our midnights to home.

Home to midnights, our all takes care.

For grace gently measures one dawn.

0 0 0 1 0 0 0 0

Heaven/Earth

Heaven/Earth 1

0

Blade and frond unfurl. Leaf and moss

Drape calm hues. Their greens softly cry.

Cry softly greens. Their hues calm, drape

Moss and leaf, unfurl frond and blade

0 0 0 1 0 0 0 1

1

Steps longer, no hard way. Our dreams

Blue and gold leave singing star's when.

When stars' singing leave gold and blue

Dreams, our way hard, no longer steps.

0 0 0 1 0 0 1 0

Heaven/Earth 2

0

Breath crystalline with hoping. Frost

Descends and now stops, waiting light.

Light waiting stops now and descends.

Frost hoping with crystalline breath.

0 0 0 1 0 0 1 1

1

Mist risen brings sighs, glistening.

With dampened fear, our steadfast rains.

Rains steadfast, our fear dampened with

Glistening sighs, brings risen mist.

0 0 0 1 0 1 0 0

Heaven/Earth 3

0

Barren ghostly arc, its reach our

Reminding. Down, deep rooted time.

Time rooted deep down. Reminding

Our reach, its arc ghostly, barren.

0 0 0 1 0 1 0 1

1

Heaven of dreams, it feared nothing.

Death's dark run cries and tears the earth.

Earth, the tears and cries run dark deaths.

Nothing feared, it dreams of heaven.

0 0 0 1 0 1 1 0

Heaven/Earth 4

0

Why else to rise upon the heights

Then to break bonds of wretchedness.

The mind invents colors not found.

It seeks a thing for the spaces.

0 0 0 1 0 1 1 1

1

Sit instead, lie down on your back.

Feel the bed of the ancient ones.

Know that letting go of the full

Carries you to soothing water.

0 0 0 1 1 0 0 0

Heaven/Earth 5

0

When you flew, your arms did not care

If they fell into exhaustion.

They knew that the sun was their home

That the sky held colors unseen.

0 0 0 1 1 0 0 1

1

They knew that once they lost their touch

With harder things, their skin would sing.

The dust of woe would fall like mist

And earth like a sweet remembrance.

0 0 0 1 1 0 1 0

Heaven/Earth 6

0

A passageway lined with silk light

Led us to this place, this waiting.

Transfigured, point to line to plane

Without a frame to hold, we cry.

0 0 0 1 1 0 1 1

1

At first we drift and drink and dream.

We think our bones are cast by gods

With jaded hands. It may be so,

But only so we remember.

0 0 0 1 1 1 0 0

Heaven/Earth 7

0

The first siege came in hunting days
When the moon set the wolf to heel.

The next when plantings waited rain
And thirst made the jump to our kind.

0 0 0 1 1 1 0 1

1

A storm at the gates, then a pause.
Thinking we could outlast a god.

Wanting too hard for any sign
Of a crack where hope might bleed through.

0 0 0 1 1 1 1 0

Heaven/Earth 8

0

Still they come, now they have the curse
Of words, marks that begat our mind.

Sounds in our head, unlike the wind
Or thunder, or water, or stone.

0 0 0 1 1 1 1 1

1

This whimpering becomes our sword
And our ladder to breach the walls.

We no longer wield what is pure
And no more can we see the sky.

0 0 1 0 0 0 0 0

Young/Old

Young/Old 1

0

Did you dream last night old raven?

Of nest and cracks and feather mat.

You were a rocket then, so primed,

So waiting for the explosion.

0 0 1 0 0 0 0 1

1

A gram shift was all that it took

To shake you out of your death dive.

To spring as though shot with fire

To the loft that death never sees.

0 0 1 0 0 0 1 0

Young/Old 2

0

From the womb there has been a beat
Carried in liquid, our first form.

Until we breathe air, then the beat
Fades into more hidden spaces.

0 0 1 0 0 0 1 1

1

It is what we seek when we leap
Without protection. It is held

In the bodies of two lovers.

They never were long for this earth.

0 0 1 0 0 1 0 0

Young/Old 3

0

They told you that you would fade out
But not like this, without passion.

You held her tightly to your breast
Hoping that heart beat was enough.

0 0 1 0 0 1 0 1

1

Now she is the one who enters.
Who bends and leans into your breath.

If such a kiss were for your lips

Then you could learn to love the fade.

0 0 1 0 0 1 1 0

Young/Old 4

0

Newborn eyes see shadows and light.

I once thought in light and shadow.

Edges of forms bled out, staining

My eyes and the air between us.

0 0 1 0 0 1 1 1

1

Now I wish to have the pale eyes

Of old Monet, his cataracts

Breaking down his garden into

Every color of newborn light.

0 0 1 0 1 0 0 0

Young/Old 5

0

The arc of space-time. One degree

Bend in ten million galaxies.

Therefore of course, it softly marks

Our cosmos; a light chalk circle.

0 0 1 0 1 0 0 1

1

Our dying days never fleeing

From our birth but falling closer.

Like the dawn of time crying out

As its child returns from the night.

0 0 1 1 1 0 1 0

Young/Old 6

0

His first impulse when the blows ceased,

When the white torment finally died

And her care was left in his hands

Was to dig the ground and plant seeds.

0 0 1 0 1 0 1 1

1

The ground was far too poor for this.

Leeched of hope, screamed dry, ghost dust now.

But he was poor no more, and so

He went, by row, dropping his seeds.

0 0 1 0 1 1 0 0

Young/Old 7

0

All that I have ever tasted

Are bits of imagination.

My world, my table, my setting.

It is all I have been given.

0 0 1 0 1 1 0 1

1

But what if? What would I find if

I could fire a lightning spark.

Splitting atoms in the heart of

A far distant supernova.

0 0 1 0 1 1 1 0

Young/Old 8

0

What new strange quanta would emerge?

The first birth of a new mapping.

But that is not my universe.

The one where strings no longer play.

0 0 1 0 1 1 1 1

1

The one where there is a beauty

As different from mine as the dark.

Where a thing like love will rise up

Above the map, just like in us.

0 0 1 1 0 0 0 0

Being/Nothing

Being/Nothing 1

0

Late afternoon, points of insects

Dart among ferns without a sigh.

They live less than an ache, their mass

Missed by hard terrestrial scales.

0 0 1 1 0 0 0 1

1

Faster than thought I am awake.

Then the slow painful crawl begins.

Before this night falls I shall stand

Before all foes, but now I bow.

0 0 1 1 0 0 1 0

Being/Nothing 2

0

The hole that sits beneath the heart.

Has it always been there waiting?

Waiting to rise on this day or

Another. Waiting for its time.

0 0 1 1 0 0 1 1

1

Do not try to fill it. It waits

Not for such things. It only knows

Empty. It's only the no thing.

A blank limner of the story.

0 0 1 1 0 1 0 0

Being/Nothing 3

0

The mere occupation of space

Is what gives water tenderness

As it rides the back of the stone.

An ebb and flow of a heartbeat.

0 0 1 1 0 1 0 1

1

To the left sits another rock.

A wedge of pain in the river.

The scabs of moss make it worthy.

The water yields with compassion.

0 0 1 1 0 1 1 0

Being/Nothing 4

0

At their darkest, hours remind

Us all of their ever presence.

They are a wave to ride, a storm

In our midst from which no one flees.

0 0 1 1 0 1 1 1

1

They stretch as long as we let them.

Unable to fly, they wither.

Release them from this leaden chain.

Watch them dissolve, they leave no trace.

0 0 1 1 1 0 0 0

Being/Nothing 5

0

At dawn, you and I were empty

And we didn't care, didn't want.

The space within, the space between

Became our passion draped garden.

0 0 1 1 1 0 0 1

1

Show me a place where things abound

And I will show you the near edge.

The blade of being we all hold.

The brace of faraway breathing.

0 0 1 1 1 0 1 0

Being/Nothing 6

0

An old coin falls from the cold hand

Of a farmer fresh from the field.

It remembers less its commerce,

And more the feel of hard worked skin.

0 0 1 1 1 0 1 1

1

There is no warmth in the pockets

Of those who sleep without longing.

Who scatter coins like instruments

Fashioned from their own fading will.

0 0 1 1 1 1 0 0

Being/Nothing 7

0

Air listens for a lover's cry

And fire watches for despair.

Water tastes the sweat of our birth.

Earth breathes in the scent of dying.

0 0 1 1 1 1 0 1

1

Without them we are faintly writ.

An ashen smear on rice paper.

Fading, decaying on the ledge

Then waiting to be swept away.

0 0 1 1 1 1 1 0

Being/Nothing 8

0

What then feels us against its skin?

The cosmos or some other mind.

Pressing up against our border.

Probing until a single nerve

0 0 1 1 1 1 1 1

1

Reveals itself as not for pain

Or pleasure or freezing or flame.

But the first capture of longing.

The first grasp of a giver's hand.

0 1 0 0 0 0 0 0

Male/Female

Male/Female 1

0

It never is the break that brings

Me to the other fairer shore

But swells and bends and shadows long

That draw the line with circled hand.

0 1 0 0 0 0 1

1

Believe my arc, I want to say.

Do not oppose but find the point

Where piece fits place in moonlit vale.

Where palm fits nape in dawn's first mark.

0 1 0 0 0 0 1 0

Male/Female 2

0

She shines down on his bare shoulders

With ever diminishing strength.

Depositing a silt of light

On his banks where holy ones dipped.

0 1 0 0 0 0 1 1

1

He rose up to her light, his arms

Lifted like a storm bent cedar.

Casting up spores of earth. White flakes

Of skin where he once held fire.

0 1 0 0 0 1 0 0

Male/Female 3

0

Who among us has not dared to

Glimpse beneath their own heart's bedsheets?

Do not think it dark. Do not strain

To fold the corners into line.

0 1 0 0 0 1 0 1

1

Without your breaking you would not

Even know how to say your name.

Without a stoic's clean resolve

You would not have the strength to love.

0 1 0 0 0 1 1 0

Male/Female 4

0

Hard by an ache and forgetting

I sit in space so long alone.

My arms pain where they bend. A point

Worn raw like icy river stones.

0 1 0 0 0 1 1 1

1

Who can remember such tossing?

Or words that came or how or why.

Her heartbeat whispers, "I will try."

She lays her hands upon my back.

0 1 0 0 1 0 0 0

Male/Female 5

0

The first drift is prone to breaking.

The archetype no longer bound

By original sin or grace

Or things external or bestowed.

0 1 0 0 1 0 0 1

1

Now comes a softness predating

Our senses. Warm, almost liquid.

It smoothes our edge, pricks our surface.

Against, upon, entwined, inside.

0 1 0 0 1 0 1 0

Male/Female 6

0

Gray is not a contradiction

To be resolved, to be easy.

It lays itself on broken lines.

We are all parted on the side.

0 1 0 0 1 0 1 1

1

Not to say it does not matter.

It matters more than mortals know.

Find that place on your side of time.

On the shore of your own lost sea.

0 1 0 0 1 1 0 0

Male/Female 7

0

The sun extends neural tendrils

Into the moon, into its core.

The light we see is pale. Content

To reflect, wary to enter.

0 1 0 0 1 1 0 1

1

The moon's craters are incense bowls

Left there by monstrous collisions.

Their dust floats over like exhales

That linger behind the thunder.

0 1 0 0 1 1 1 0

Male/Female 8

0

Moon dust eventually yields

To the pull that comes to us all.

Each speck a spark ignited clean.

Feeding flames to the birthing star.

0 1 0 0 1 1 1 1

1

So light now returns and never

Do they feel a line between them.

They are entwined, are encoded,

Are embraced in the arms of light.

0 1 0 1 0 0 0 0

Mind/Body

Mind/Body 1

0

An elk stepped carefully into

The vapors, its nostrils a font.

The eye froze where the scent arose.

Thinking, "I must not run", it ran.

0 1 0 1 0 0 0 1

1

Once the break, I called, knowing that

I could no longer break the still.

A shudder rose on my bare neck.

One last blast of fully alive.

0 1 0 1 0 0 1 0

Mind/Body 2

0

To tire on the way to Rome

Meant that you knew not the empire.

The same today is said to us

Of this land stretched out to the west.

0 1 0 1 0 0 1 1

1

Do not be afraid, is the cry

Of those who would hide in their mind.

Do not be afraid is the way

Of those who let go of it all.

0 1 0 1 0 1 0 0

Mind/Body 3

0

In sleep, the mind and the body

Go to each other in secret.

They lay gifts upon each other's

Doorstep and wait for their return.

0 1 0 1 0 1 0 1

1

When tired of the wait, they leave.

They pass each other on the road.

If only they could make it home

Before the stirrings of the dawn.

0 1 0 1 0 1 1 0

Mind/Body 4

0

One sense remembered and returned

To infancy. It lay in bed

The night's perfume as its blanket.

A face buried in swaddling cloth.

0 1 0 1 0 1 1 1

1

"Feel me full" was the thought brought back

For flesh and fear and bone and breath.

For you are not just your longing.

You are every last one of these.

0 1 0 1 1 0 0 0

Mind/Body 5

0

The skin of a thought has its own

Hair follicles. They contract when

Words run out and the thought must swim

In the pool of its own making.

0 1 0 1 1 0 0 1

1

This is where I find you startled.

Cold and hungry, dressed in sorrow.

Removing your fear soaked garments

I press my thought skin against yours.

0 1 0 1 1 0 1 0

Mind/Body 6

0

Blood is a current for riding

By the mind on a raft of thought.

Imagine a loom weaving threads

Of neurons, crafting its own boat.

0 1 0 1 1 0 1 1

1

Adrift on the ebbing heart tide.

Exploring every body cove.

The mind no longer rules, it rests.

Now a brother to every cell.

0 1 0 1 1 1 0 0

Mind/Body 7

0

Think with your flesh and feel bright light

Enter your pores or through a cut.

Just a sweet sting, like a tugged hair

Or a small splinter pulling free.

0 1 0 1 1 1 0 1

1

When every hand is sanitized

Where is nature's astringency?

Will the memory of bitters die?

Who then will feel the sting of sleet?

0 1 0 1 1 1 1 0

Mind/Body 8

0

Feel with your thoughts and thus conjure.

Feel dragons inside and beyond.

Feel more, feel your ancestors cry.

Feel everything yet to become.

0 1 0 1 1 1 1 1

1

Feel shouts from the dark mouth of doom.

Feel moans from the bowels of terror.

Feel tears on your acid burned skin.

Feel love where demons fear to tread.

0 1 1 0 0 0 0 0

Soft/Hard

Soft/Hard 1

0

You, who called me once, long before

Words like longing had ever formed.

I beg you not speak with that tone

Crushing my hand like manna bread.

0 1 1 0 0 0 1

1

Inhale before you speak. Stop, slow,

Wait for the water to enter.

Water that softens with each pass

Water that once was your own call.

0 1 1 0 0 0 1 0

Soft/Hard 2

0

Their heads rest on pillows of stone

And so their nights take them places

Where pain is never so subtle

And longing is hidden no more.

0 1 1 0 0 0 1 1

1

But in that dark there may be found

A point, a tender prick, a wound

That drains the bile from every sore

And dresses them with mosslike gauze.

0 1 1 0 0 1 0 0

Soft/Hard 3

0

A cloud becomes the cold measure

Of everything you desire.

A search for a place where a song

Can condense into wild torrents.

0 1 1 0 0 1 0 1

1

The arroyo flashes with a

Thunder so hard it can't echo.

Beyond the range of beasts and men

Its vibrations drift off to sleep.

0 1 1 0 0 1 1 0

Soft/Hard 4

0

Between weariness and folly

Patient waiting sets like mortar.

An unhurried bed of wet mud

Calling stones to find their own place.

0 1 1 0 0 1 1 1

1

When soft, we tire of the road.

When hard, we jar and break our bones.

The road itself is neither one

The road holds still, in settled dust.

0 1 1 0 1 0 0 0

Soft/Hard 5

0

Rails follow the patterns of men

Or so they think, and so they say.

The mountain speaks, exposing shale.

Slates to sketch these broken chalk plans.

0 1 1 0 1 0 0 1

1

Now we have forgotten it all.

How black the air painted the walls.

How many bodies we gave up

And thus we say, "We must have won."

0 1 1 0 1 0 1 0

Soft/Hard 6

0

A mountain cat screams on the ridge.

A banshee lament for its prey.

Silence as the cat's jaw clamps down

Crushing the wind stuck in the throat.

0 1 1 0 1 0 1 1

1

What else are we to do but wail?

For the weak, for the silent ones.

When even death's cry is taken,

Give them a headstone to be heard.

0 1 1 0 1 1 0 0

Soft/Hard 7

0

Anger in the sky, hard thunder

Cyclone fury lays down the law.

All the way into the black hole

In the heart of our galaxy.

0 1 1 0 1 1 0 1

1

Anger you say? Destruction and

Pain, even annihilation.

But why would the sky or the star

Want for its own children to fear?

0 1 1 0 1 1 1 0

Soft/Hard 8

0

If grace exists, there may be ways.

Multitudes in fact, for knowing.

For hearing the storm with wide arms.

For reaching high and long and hard.

0 1 1 0 1 1 1 1

1

Until the tremors settle to

A shiver of recognition.

A soft purr, not quite a whimper.

A night song meant to lull us off.

0 1 1 1 0 0 0 0

Logic/Intuition

Logic/Intuition 1

0

Falling snow. Hear those words and you

Think of that day. But maybe not.

Maybe not anything. Maybe

Only a light dusting of thought.

0 1 1 1 0 0 0 1

1

A soft layer of memory

Of how light it can be to fall.

Step in it now. Think of the cold.

Feel the edges of each crystal.

0 1 1 1 0 0 1 0

Logic/Intuition 2

0

Bend their will until a golden

Crown becomes their proof of knowing.

But I will soften their instincts

Until they wear them like pale silk.

0 1 1 1 0 0 1 1

1

Think not that I care for the dark.

For care is a pit in itself.

Yet the dark does remain, as much

Myself as each hair on my head.

0 1 1 1 0 1 0 0

Logic/Intuition 3

0

Compute with the stars, you may find

That totals are more than the sum.

You may see shining specks of light

Hidden among their specks of dust.

0 1 1 1 0 1 0 1

1

Calculate how much force it takes

To wrest a heart from its moorings.

You may learn that the ocean tides

Hide deep beneath returning waves.

0 1 1 1 0 1 1 0

Logic/Intuition 4

0

Persuade me, was the tree's challenge,

By any means of human form.

Analytics, rhetorical

Flourish. Signs, wonders, charlatans.

0 1 1 1 0 1 1 1

1

Of what do I persuade? Stature,

Worth, wisdom unique to my kind?

Of nothing, save that I am of

The tribe that can be persuaded.

0 1 1 1 1 0 0 0

Logic/Intuition 5

0

Structure descends from the mountains.

Where we gazed in our infancy.

Our first were piles of things, these stacks

Of each other's fears and longings.

0 1 1 1 1 0 0 1

1

Then we got a little crazy

Throwing lines and arcs at the sun.

In chaos comes a reduction,

A soothing evaporation.

0 1 1 1 1 0 1 0

Logic/Intuition 6

0

When did kingdoms enter your world?

Worshipping iron and fire.

You know it was not in the womb

Where every cell took its own form.

0 1 1 1 1 0 1 1

1

There are many organs of truth

For the different casts and sources.

And many bowls for collection

For each of our long begging days.

0 1 1 1 1 1 0 0

Logic/Intuition 7

0

It only took hundreds of years

But physicists now believe in

Entanglement. One particle

Bound deep and pure to another.

0 1 1 1 1 1 0 1

1

They can say things to each other.

They can affect each other's spin.

They can instantaneously

Know the essence of the other.

0 1 1 1 1 1 1 0

Logic/Intuition 8

0

They have a drifting name for it.

It's quantum teleportation.

We who live in air and water

Know this. It falls as compassion.

0 1 1 1 1 1 1 1

1

That taste of feeling one morning.

The sense of space unhinged from time.

All we hear is "hold me." All we

Are belongs to this hidden cord.

1 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
