



ONE-HANDED

BASKET WEAVING

RUMI

Poems on the Theme of Work  
Versions by Coleman Barks

# *One-Handed Basket Weaving*



RUMI

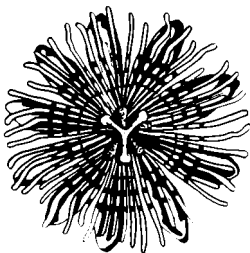
*One-Handed  
Basket Weaving*

POEMS ON  
THE THEME OF WORK

VERSIONS BY

Coleman Barks

MAYPOP Athens, Georgia



# M A Y P O P

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*Cover:* Water coming over the old Puritan Cord millpond dam  
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## **RUMI: One-Handed Basket Weaving**

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*For those who come to the "birdcage,"  
the upstairs, screened-in porch,  
and for the piece of work itself.*

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## Rumi's Life

Persians and Afghanis call Rumi "Jalaluddin Balkhi." His family lived in Balkh (Afghanistan), or rather, as we know from recent scholarship, in the nearby town of Waksh. The name "Rumi" means "from Roman Anatolia." He was not known by that name, of course, until after his family, fleeing the threat of the invading Mongol armies, emigrated to Konya (Turkey), sometime between 1215 and 1220. Rumi was born September 30, 1207.

His father, Bahauddin Walad, was a theologian and jurist, and a mystic of uncertain lineage. His *Maarif*, a collection of notes, diary-like remarks, sermons, and strange accounts of visionary experiences, has shocked most of the conventional scholars who have tried to understand them. He shows a startlingly sensual freedom (I am told) in saying his union with God.

"Go into God, and He will take you into Him, and kiss you and show Himself to you, so that you may not run away. Your whole heart will stay there day and night."

(*Maarif*, 28)<sup>1</sup>

Rumi was instructed in his father's secret inner life by a former student of his father, Burhanuddin Mahaqqiq. Burhan and Rumi also studied Sanai and Attar. It was Sanai who composed the first *mathnawi*, the mystical teaching form that Rumi was later to perfect. At his father's death Rumi took over the position of sheikh in the dervish learning community in Konya. His life seems to have been a fairly normal one for a religious scholar—teaching, meditating, helping the poor—until in late October of 1244 when he met a stranger on the road who put a question to him. We cannot be entirely certain of the question, but it made the

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Anunemarie Schimmel's manuscript to be published in 1992 by Shambhala Press, *I Am Wind, You are Fire: The Life and Works of Jalaluddin Rumi*. As far as I know, the *Maarif* of Rumi's father has not been translated into English, except for small excerpts in Professor Schimmel's work. Many other references in this account of Rumi's life also rely on her indispensable scholarship.

learned professor faint to the ground. It was spoken by the wandering dervish, Shams of Tabriz, and according to the most reliable account he asked who was greater, Muhammed or Bestami, for Bestami had said, "How great is my glory," whereas Muhammed had acknowledged in his prayer to God, "We do not know You as we should."

Rumi was finally able to answer that Muhammed was greater, because Bestami had taken one gulp of the divine and stopped there, whereas for Muhammed the way was always unfolding. There are various versions of this encounter, but whatever the "facts," the two became inseparable. Their Friendship is one of the mysteries. They were together for months without any human needs, translated into a region of pure conversation. This ecstatic connection caused difficulties in the religious community. Rumi's students felt neglected. Sensing the trouble, Shams disappeared as suddenly as he had appeared. Annemarie Schimmel thinks that it was at this first disappearance that Rumi began the transformation into a mystical artist. "He turned into a poet, began to listen to music, and sang, whirling around, hour after hour."

Word came that Shams was in Damascus. Rumi sent his son, Sultan Walad, to Syria to bring his Friend back to Konya. When Rumi and Shams met for the second time, they fell at each other's feet, so that "no one knew who was lover and who the Beloved." Shams stayed in Rumi's home and was married to a young girl who had been brought up in the family. Again the long mystical conversation (sohbet) began, and again the jealousies grew.

On the night of December 5, 1248, as Rumi and Shams were talking, Shams was called from the back door. He went out, never to be seen again. Most likely, he was murdered with the connivance of Rumi's son, Allaedin, but the mystery of the Friend's absence covered Rumi's world. He himself went out searching for Shams. He journeyed again to Damascus, and it was there that he realized,

"Why should I seek? I am the same  
as he. His essence speaks through me.  
I have been looking for myself!"

The union became complete. There was full *fana*, annihilation in the Friend. Shams was writing the poems. The collection of Rumi's odes and quatrains is still called *The Works of Shams of Tabriz*. Who is this Shams? It's difficult to know. Before he met Rumi, he had traveled throughout the Near East searching and praying for someone who could "endure my company."

After Shams' death, and Rumi's merging with him, another companion was found, Saladin Zarkub, the goldsmith. The story has often been told of how Rumi was walking through the goldsmithing bazaar in Konya, and the sound of their hammering started him whirling in ecstasy. He took Saladin by the hand and led him dancing into the street. Saladin then became the Friend that Rumi addressed his poems to, not so fiercely as to Shams, but with a quiet tenderness. When Saladin died, Husam Chelebi, Rumi's scribe and favorite student, assumed this role. Rumi claimed that Husam was the source and the one who understood the vast, secret order of the *Mathnawi*,<sup>1</sup> which shifts so amazingly from theory to folklore to jokes to ecstatic poetry. For the last twelve years of his life Rumi dictated the six volumes of this masterwork to Husam. He died on December 17, 1273.

<sup>1</sup> All poetry here comes from this work. I have used as a source Reynold Nicholson's translation, *The Mathnawi of Jalaluddin Rumi* (8 vols., London: Luzac & Co., 1925-40).



## *One-Handed Basket Weaving*

There was a dervish who lived alone in the mountains,  
who made a vow never to pick fruit from the trees,  
or to shake them down,  
or to ask anyone to pick fruit for him.

“Only what the wind makes fall.”

This was his way  
of giving in to God’s will.

There is a traditional saying from the Prophet  
that a human being is like a feather in the desert  
being blown about wherever the wind takes it.

So for a while in the joy of this surrender  
he woke each dawn with a new direction to follow.

But then came five days with no wind,  
and no pears fell.

He patiently restrained himself,  
until a breeze blew just strong enough  
to lower a bough full of ripe pears  
close to his hand, but not strong enough  
to detach the pears.

He reached out and picked one.

Nearby, a band of thieves were dividing  
what they had stolen.

The authorities surprised them and immediately  
began the punishments: the severing  
of right hands and left feet.

The hermit was seized by mistake  
and his hand cut off,  
but before his foot could be severed also,  
he was recognized.

The prefect came. “Forgive these men.  
They did not know. Forgive us all!”

The sheikh said, "This is not your fault.  
I broke my vow, and the Beloved  
has punished me."

He became known as Sheikh Aqta,  
which means, "The teacher  
whose hand has been cut off."

One day a visitor entered his hut without knocking  
and saw him weaving palm leaf baskets.  
It takes two hands to weave!

"Why have you entered without warning?"

"Out of love for you."

"Then keep this secret which you see  
has been given to me."

But others began to know about this,  
and many came to the hut to watch.

The hand that helped  
when he was weaving palm leaves  
came because he no longer had any fear  
of dismemberment or death.

When those anxious, self-protecting  
imagination leave, the real,  
cooperative work begins.

(III, 1634-1642, 1672-1690, 1704-1720)

## *Awkward Comparison*

This physical world has no two things alike.  
Every comparison is awkwardly rough.

You can put a lion next to a man,  
but the placing is hazardous to both.

Say the body is like this lamp.  
It has to have a wick and oil. Sleep and food.  
If it doesn't get those, it will die,  
and it's always burning those up, trying to die.

But where is the sun in this comparison?  
It rises, and the lamp's light  
mixes with the day.

Oneness,  
which is the reality, cannot be understood  
with lamp and sun images. The blurring  
of a plural into a unity is wrong.

No image can describe  
what of our fathers and mothers,  
our grandfathers and grandmothers, remains.

Language does not touch the One  
who lives in each of us.

(IV, 419-433)



## *Snow and the Voice*

After Bestami died, it happened  
as he said it would, that Bu'l-Hasan  
became the sheikh for the community,  
and every day he would go to Bestami's tomb  
to receive instruction.

Bu'l-Hasan had been told to do this  
in a dream, by Bestami himself.

Every dawn he went and stood facing the grave  
until mid-morning. Either the spirit of Bestami  
would come and talk to him, or in silence  
the questions he had would be answered.

But one day a deep snow had fallen.  
The graves were piled together  
and indistinguishable.

Bu'l-Hasan felt lost.  
Then he heard the sheikh's voice.

“The world is made of snow. It falls and melts  
and falls again. Don't be concerned  
with that. Come toward the sound  
of my voice. Always move  
in this direction.”

And from that day  
Bu'l-Hasan began to experience  
the enlightened state  
which he had only heard  
and read about  
before.

(IV, 1925-1934)

## *Love for Certain Work*

Traveling is as refreshing for some  
as staying at home is for others.

Solitude in a mountain place  
fills with companionship  
for this one,  
and dead-weariness  
for that one.

This person loves  
being in charge of the workings  
of a community.

This one loves  
the ways that heated iron can be shaped  
with a hammer.

Each has been given  
a strong desire for certain work.

A *love* for those motions,  
and all motion is love.

The way sticks and pieces of dead grass and leaves  
shift about in the wind  
and with the directions of rain and puddle-water  
on the ground, those motions  
are all a following  
of the love they've been given.

(III, 1616-1619)

## *The Hoopoe's Talent*

Whenever a pavilion was pitched in the countryside for Solomon, the birds would come to pay their respects and talk with him.

Solomon understood bird-language. There was no confused twittering in his presence. Each species spoke its call distinctly.

Being understood is such a joy!  
When a person is with people that he or she cannot confide in, it's like being tied up.

And I don't mean a cultural kinship. There are Indians and Turks who speak the same language. There are Turks who don't understand each other.

I'm talking of those who are inside the one love together.

So, the birds were asking Solomon questions and telling him their special talents.

They all hoped that they would be asked to stay in Solomon's presence.

It came the turn of the hoopoe.

“My king,

I have only one talent, but I hope it will be helpful to you.”

“Say it.”

“When I fly to the highest point of my ability and look down, I can see then through the earth to the water table.

I can see whether it's muddy with clay, or clear, running through stone.

I can see where the springs are, and where good wells may be dug.”

Solomon replied, "You will make a fine companion for my expeditions into the wilderness!"

The jealous crow couldn't stand it.

He yelled out,

"If hoopoe has such keen eyesight,  
why did she not see the snare  
that caught her once?"

"Good question," said Solomon.  
"What about this, hoopoe?"

"My water-seeing talent  
is a true one. And it's also true  
that I have been blind to things  
that have trapped me. There is a will  
beyond my knowing that causes  
both my blindness and my clairvoyance.  
Crow doesn't acknowledge that."

(I, 1202-1233)

## *Looking into the Creek*

The way the soul is  
with the senses and the intellect  
is like a creek.

When desire-weeds grow thick,  
the intelligence can't flow,  
and soul-creatures stay hidden.

But sometimes your reasonable mind  
runs so strong it clears  
the clogged stream  
as though with God's hand.

No longer weeping and frustrated,  
your being grows as powerful  
as your wantings were before.

Laughing and satisfied, that masterful flowing  
lets soul-creatures appear.

You look down,  
and it's lucid dreaming.

The gates made of light  
swing open. You see in.

(III, 1824-1834)

## *A Just Finishing Candle*

A candle is made to become entirely flame.  
In that annihilating moment  
it has no shadow.

It is nothing but a tongue of light  
describing a refuge.

Look at this  
just-finishing candle stub  
as someone who is finally safe  
from virtue and vice,

the pride and the shame  
we claim from those.

(V, 672-682)

## *This We Have Now*

This we have now  
is not imagination.

This is not  
grief or joy.

Not a judging state,  
or an elation,  
or sadness.

Those come  
and go.

This is the presence  
that doesn't.

It's dawn, Husam,  
here in the splendor of coral,  
inside the Friend, the simple truth  
of what Hallaj said.

What else could human beings want?

When grapes turn to wine,  
they're wanting  
this.

When the night sky pours by,  
it's really a crowd of beggars,  
and they all want some of this!

This  
that we are now  
created the body, cell by cell,  
like bees building a honeycomb.

The human body and the universe  
grew from this, not this  
from the universe and the human body.

(I, 1803-1813)

## *The Man with a Bear*

For the man who saved the bear  
from the dragon's mouth, the bear  
became a sort of a pet.

When he would lie down to rest,  
the bear would stand guard.

A certain friend passed by.  
"Brother, how did this bear  
get connected to you?"

He told the adventure with the dragon,  
and the friend responded,  
"Don't forget  
what your companion is. This friend  
is *not* human! It would be better  
to choose one of your own kind."

"You're just jealous of my unusual helper.  
Look at his sweet devotion. Ignore  
the bearishness!"

But the friend was not convinced.  
"Don't go into the forest  
with a comrade like this!  
Let me go with you."

"I'm tired.  
Leave me alone."

The man began imagining  
motives other than kindness for his friend's concern.  
"He has made a bet with someone  
that he can separate me from my bear." Or,  
"He will attack me when my bear is gone."

He had begun to think like a bear!

So the human friends went different ways,  
the one with his bear into a forest,  
where he fell asleep again.



The bear stood over him  
waving the flies away.

But the flies kept coming back,  
which irritated the bear.

He dislodged a stone from the mountainside  
and raised it over the sleeping man.

When he saw that the flies had returned  
and settled comfortably on the man's face,  
he slammed the stone down, crushing  
to powder the man's face and skull.

Which proves the old saying:

IF YOU'RE FRIENDS  
WITH A BEAR,  
THE FRIENDSHIP  
WILL DESTROY YOU.

WITH THAT ONE,  
IT'S BETTER TO BE  
ENEMIES.

(II, 2010-2035, 2125-2130)

## Night-Thieves

There was a king roaming his country at night.  
He met up with a band of thieves.

“Who are you?”  
they asked.

“I am one of you.”

So they walked together,  
and each of them spoke of the special skill  
that suited him for this night-work.

One said,  
“My genius is in my ears. I can understand  
what a dog is saying when it barks.”

The others laughed,  
“Not much value in that!”

Another thief said,  
“My specialty is in my eyes.  
Whatever I see by night,  
I can recognize also in daylight.”

Another, “My strength  
is in my arm. I can tunnel through any wall!”

Another,  
“My nose. I can sniff the ground and know  
where treasure’s hidden.”

And the last thief revealed,  
“It’s my hand. I can throw a lasso  
around anything.”

Then they asked the king-in-disguise  
what his contribution was.

“It’s this beard.  
Whenever I turn it toward criminals,  
they are freed!”

“Oho! You *are* a good one  
to have with us!”

And they continued on, as it happened,  
toward the palace.

A watchdog barked,  
and the listener-thief interpreted,  
“He’s saying,

‘The king is with us!’”

The sniffer-thief smelt  
the ground. “This is prime land.”

The lassoer  
quickly threw a rope over the wall.

The tunneler  
tunneled into the treasury, and they all  
loaded up with gold embroidery and huge pearls.

The king watched,  
and then slipped quietly away.

The next day the robbery was discovered,  
and the king sent his guards  
to make the arrests.

As the thieves were brought in,  
the one who could recognize night things by day  
said,

“This is the friend  
who went with us last night,  
the beard man!”

This night & day man was a mystic.  
He understood what had happened.

“This king  
embodies the text that says,  
*and He is with you.*

He knows our secrets.  
He played our game with us.

This king is the Witness,  
and in his clear truthfulness  
is the grace we most deeply need.”

(VI, 2816-2825, 2833-2859, 2867-2870)

## *The City of Saba*

Once in the city of Saba  
there was a glut of wealth.

Everyone had *more* than enough.  
Even the bath-stokers wore gold belts.

Huge grape clusters hung down  
on every street and brushed the faces  
of the citizens. No one had to do  
*anything*.

You could balance  
an empty basket on your head and walk  
through any orchard, and it would fill  
by itself with overripe fruit  
dropping into it.

Stray dogs strayed  
in lanes full of thrown-out scraps  
with barely a notice.

The lean desert wolf  
got indigestion from the rich food.

Everyone was fat and satiated  
with all the extra.

There were no robbers.  
There was no energy for crime,  
or for gratitude.

And no one wondered  
about the unseen world. The people of Saba  
felt bored with just the *mention* of prophecy.

They had no desire of any kind. Maybe  
some idle curiosity about miracles,  
but that was it.

This over-richness  
is a subtle disease. Those who have it  
are blind to what's wrong, and deaf  
to anyone who points it out.

The city of Saba  
can not be understood from within itself!

But there is a cure,  
an individual medicine,  
not a social remedy:

Sit quietly, and listen  
for a voice within that will say,

*Be more silent.*

As that happens,

your soul starts to revive.

Give up talking, and your positions of power.

Give up the excessive money.

Turn toward the teachers  
and the prophets who don't live in Saba.

They can help you grow sweet again

and fragrant and wild and fresh

and thankful for any small event.

(III, 2656-2667, 2675-2680, 2726-2732)

## *Story-Water*

A story is like the water  
you heat for your bath.

It takes messages between the fire  
and your skin. It lets them meet,  
and it cleans you!

Very few can sit down  
in the middle of the fire itself  
like a salamander or Abraham.  
We need intermediaries.

A feeling of fullness comes,  
but usually it takes some bread  
to bring it.

Beauty surrounds us,  
but usually we need to be walking  
in a garden to know it.

The body itself is a screen  
to shield and partially reveal  
the light that's blazing  
inside your presence.

Water, stories, the body,  
all the things we do, are mediums  
that hide and show what's hidden.

Study them,  
and enjoy this being washed  
with a secret we sometimes know,  
and then not.

(V, 228-236)

## *One Song*

What is praised is One,  
so the praise is One, too,  
many jugs being emptied  
into a huge basin.

All religions,  
all this singing,  
is one song.

The differences are just  
illusion and vanity.

The sun's light looks a little different  
on this wall than it does on that wall,  
and a lot different on this other one,  
but it's still one light.

We have borrowed these clothes,  
these time and place personalities,  
from a light, and when we praise,  
we're pouring them back in.

(III, 2122-2127)

## *Mary's Hiding*

Before these possessions you love  
slip away, say  
                                  what Mary said  
when she was surprised by Gabriel,  
                                  "I'll hide inside God."

Naked in her room  
she saw a form of beauty  
that could give her new life.

Like the sun coming up,  
or a rose as it opens.

And she leaped, as her habit was,  
out of herself  
                                  into the divine presence.

There was fire in the channel of her breath.  
The light and the majesty came.

I am smoke from that fire,  
and proof of its existence,  
more than any external form.

(III, 3700-3720)



## *Lead On, Husam*

Husam, I feel your pull again,  
drawing this *Mathnawi* God knows where!

Through you, this book is no longer  
made of reflected light. We've gone beyond  
the moon, and now you want to add more!

God must want it, if you want it.  
I used to say of you, "He belongs to God,"  
but now, "God belongs to him,"  
comes as the answer.

Thousands of times the words of this book  
are saying *Thank you, Husam.*  
*Thank you, Husam!*

Such gratitude always brings  
more happiness, just as nearness to God  
comes with genuine humility.

This book doesn't grow longer to be applauded.  
It grows like a vineyard in summer.

I've called you *Radiance*,  
and a *Sword of Light*.

Your presence is the sun, a bright blade  
with more dignity and clarity than moonlight.

People lose the road in that pale fog.  
Then the sun comes up, and they find the way.

Markets never stay open  
with just the moon to light them,  
because it's impossible then  
to tell good coins from bad.

So lead on, Husam,  
my patient and joyful commander.

It's dawn, and this caravan  
is starting out again!

(IV, 1-24)

## *The Dream That Must Be Interpreted*

This place is a dream.  
Only a sleeper considers it real.

Then death comes like dawn,  
and you wake up laughing  
at what you thought was your grief.

But there's a difference with *this* dream.  
Everything cruel and unconscious  
done in the illusion of the present world,  
all that does not fade away at the death-waking.

It stays,  
and it must be *interpreted*.

All the mean laughing,  
all the quick, sexual wanting,  
those torn coats of Joseph,  
they change into powerful wolves  
that you must face.

The retaliation that sometimes comes now,  
the swift, payback hit,  
is just a boy's game  
to what the other will be.

You know about circumcision here.  
It's full castration there!

And this groggy time we live,  
this is what it's like:

A man goes to sleep in the town  
where he has always lived, and he dreams he's living  
in another town.

In the dream, he doesn't remember  
the town he's sleeping in his bed in. He believes  
the reality of the dream-town.

The world is that kind of sleep.

The dust of many crumbled cities  
settles over us like a forgetful doze,  
but we are older than those cities.

We began  
as a mineral. We emerged into plant life  
and into the animal state, and then into being human,  
and always we have forgotten our former states,  
except in early spring when we slightly recall  
being green again.

That's how a young person turns  
toward a teacher. That's how a baby leans  
toward the breast, without knowing the secret  
of its desire, yet turning instinctively.

Humankind is being led along an evolving course,  
through this migration of intelligences,  
and though we seem to be sleeping,  
there is an inner wakefulness  
that directs the dream,

and that will eventually startle us back  
to the truth of who we are.

(IV, 3654-3667, 3628-3652)

## *The King's Falcon*

The king had a noble falcon,  
who wandered away one day,  
and into the tent of an old woman,  
who was making dumpling stew  
for her children.

“Who’s been taking care  
of you?” she asked, quickly tying  
the falcon’s foot.

She clipped  
his magnificent wings and cut  
his fierce talons and fed him straw.

“Someone  
who doesn’t know how to treat falcons,”  
she answered herself,

“but your mother knows!”  
Friend, this kind of talk is a prison.  
Don’t listen!

The king spent all day  
looking for his falcon, and came at last  
to that tent and saw his fine raptor  
standing on a shelf in the smoky steam  
of the old woman’s cooking.

“You left me  
for this?”

The falcon rubbed his wings  
against the king’s hand, feeling wordlessly  
what was almost lost.

This falcon is like one who,  
through grace, gets to sit close to the king,  
and so thinks he’s on the same level  
as the king.

Then he turns his head for a moment,  
and he’s in the old woman’s tent.

Don’t feel *special*  
in the king’s presence.  
Be mannerly and thankful  
and very humble.

A falcon is an image of that part of you  
that belongs with the king.

Once, there was a blind falcon  
who fell in with owls in a wilderness.  
They thought he wanted to take over the ruin  
they were living in. They tore at his feathers.  
“Wait! I have no interest in this place.  
My home is the forearm of the king.”

The owls thought  
this was some kind of bragging trick  
to distract them.

“No! I don’t claim to be *like*  
the king. I am a ragged, blind falcon.  
All I can do is listen for the king’s drum  
and fly toward the sound when I hear it.

I am not of the king’s species or genus,  
but I have taken in some of the king’s light,  
the way air is swept up into a fire,  
the way water becomes plant.

My ego has died into the king’s being.  
I roll in the dust at the feet of his horse.

Don’t let this  
blind-falcon form  
fool you.

I am really a delicious dessert  
that you should taste now, you owls,  
before I hear the drum again,  
because then I’ll be gone.”

(II, 323-341, 1131-1146, 1156-1177)

## *The Level of Words*

God has said,

“The images that come  
with human language  
do not correspond to me,  
but those who love words  
must use them to come near.”

Just remember,

it's like saying of the king,  
“He is not a weaver.”

Is that praise?

Whatever such a statement is,  
words are on *that* level  
of God-knowledge.

(II, 1716-1719)

## *Work in the Invisible*

The Prophets have wondered to themselves,  
“How long  
should we keep pounding this cold iron? How long  
do we have to whisper into an empty cage?”

Every motion of created beings  
comes from the creator.

The first soul pushes,  
and your second soul responds.

So don't be timid.  
Load the ship and set out.

No one knows for certain  
whether the vessel will sink  
or reach the harbor.

Just don't be one of those merchants  
who won't risk the ocean!

This is much more important  
than losing or making money!

This is your connection to God.

Think of the fear and the hope that you have  
about your livelihood. They make you  
go to work diligently every day.

Now consider what the prophets have done.  
Abraham wore fire for an anklet.

Moses spoke to the sea.

David moulded iron.

Solomon rode the wind.

Work in the invisible world  
at least as hard  
as you do in the visible.

Be companions with the prophets  
even though no one here will know that you are,  
not even the helpers of the Qutb, the abdals.

You can't imagine what *profit* will come!  
When one of those generous ones  
invites you into his fire,  
go quickly!

Don't say,

“But will it burn me? Will it hurt?”

(III, 3077-3109)



## *Resurrection Day*

On Resurrection Day

God will say,

“What did you do  
with the strength and the energy  
that your food gave you  
on Earth?

How did you use your eyes?

What did you make with your five senses  
while they were dimming and playing out?

I gave you hands and feet as tools  
for preparing the ground for planting.

Did you, in the health I gave,  
do the plowing?”

You will not be able to stand  
when you hear those questions.

You will bend double with shame,  
and finally acknowledge the glory.

God will then say,

“Lift your head,  
and answer these questions.”

Your head will rise a little  
and then slump again.

“Look at me!  
Tell me what you’ve done.”

You try, but you fall back  
flat as a snake.

“I want every detail!  
Tell me!”

Eventually you’ll be able to get  
to a sitting position.

“Be plain and clear.  
I have given you such gifts. What did you  
do with them?”

Then you will turn to the right  
looking to the prophets for help, as though  
to say,

*I am stuck in the mud of my life.  
Help me out of this!*

And they will answer,  
those kings,

“The time for helping is past.  
The plow stands there in the field.  
You should have used it.”

Then you will turn to the left,  
where your family is,  
and they will say,

“Don’t look at us!  
This conversation is between you  
and your creator!”

Then you will pray the prayer  
that is the essence of every ritual: *God,*  
*I have no hope. I am torn to shreds.*  
*You are my first and my last*  
*and my only refuge.*

Don’t do daily prayers like a bird  
pecking its head up and down.

Prayer is an egg.  
Hatch out  
the total helplessness  
inside.

(III, 2149-2175)

## *The Treasure's Nearness*

A man searching for spiritual treasure  
could not find it, so he was praying.

A voice inside said, "You were given  
the intuition to shoot an arrow,  
and then dig where it landed,

but you shot with all your archery skill!  
You were told to draw the bow  
with only a *fraction* of your ability."

What you are looking for  
is nearer than the big vein  
on your neck! Let the arrow drop.

Don't exhaust yourself like the philosophers,  
who strain to shoot the high arcs  
of their thought-arrows.

The more skill you use, the farther you'll be  
from what your deepest love wants.

(VI, 2347-2351)

## *How It Is with Grapes*

Under the aegis of Solomon  
the deer and the leopard were friends.

The dove rode safely in the hawk's talons.  
Sheep did not panic when a wolf came near.

Solomon is the intelligence  
that connects former enemies.

Don't look for bits of grain like an ant.  
Look for the granary master,  
and you'll have grain and the Presence  
as well. Solomon lives now!

God has said there will never be a time  
without a Solomon. In that consciousness  
there is no guile, and inside it  
your soul-birds sing unanimously.

They don't argue. There were once two tribes  
in the Ansar region, but, it's told,  
when they felt Muhammed's light,  
old grudges disappeared, and they combined.

You know the way it is  
with grapes, and with human beings!

When we're immature, we jostle competitively  
in the bunch. Then we mature and soften.  
Our skins rip open, and we become one juice!

We grow in that way through  
the breath of a heart-master.

Now, some grapes stay stone-hard,  
but the secret of what causes that  
sour tightness must remain hidden.

Most grapes mature.  
Blessings on the love  
that gathers dust-grains  
into the mud of turning pots!

But that's a bad metaphor.  
The unity of the soul  
has no likeness.

Just remember, Solomon lives nearby!  
Don't scout the horizon for his presence.

As a man sleeping in a house  
is not aware of the house, in that same way  
you are not conscious of Solomon,  
even though he's your shelter.

Don't be addicted to subtle discussions,  
tying and untying knots, posing difficulties  
that then you resolve.

Doing that, you're like a bird  
who learns how to loosen the snare  
and then fastens it again,  
to show off his strange, new skill.

Don't forget that the point is to escape!  
Remember how it feels to sail the mountain air  
and smell the sweetness of the high meadows.

(II, 3700-3736)

## *How Intelligence Advises Your Spirit*

In the realm of your consciousness  
there are two kings, and two advisors.

Solomon and Asaf, Pharaoh and Haman.

Sometimes Moses tells your Pharaoh  
something of such tenderness that  
it would make the rocks give milk,

and then your mean-spirited advisor,  
Haman, whose nature it is to hate,  
comments, "Do you listen now  
to men dressed in rags!"

And the glass house of loving language  
gets destroyed by a ballistic stone.

Your Solomon has a different advisor.  
With those two it is *Light upon Light*,  
two perfumes mixing.

The inner king is your spirit.  
The inner advisor, your intelligence.

When that counselor bows to your sensuality,  
the advice is poisonous, but when he looks further  
than just getting what's wanted at the moment,  
then you're connected with Solomon.

Don't think that these are just names!  
They're realities. Explore them.

Every morning Solomon comes to the mosque  
not built by hands and sees a new plant  
growing there. He asks, "Are you a medicine?  
What is your name and your usefulness?"

Each morning the new plant tells him  
its nature. "I am helpful to this condition  
and detrimental to that, and such is  
my name on the unseen tablets."

Solomon relates the information  
to his physicians, and they write it down,  
so the body may be relieved of pain.

Knowledge of medicine, and of astronomy, comes  
in this way from the universal intellect,  
not from the particular mind.

All tools and crafts were given  
by that wider intelligence  
and then modified by the individual mind.

Learn from Solomon.  
Be apprenticed to him.

Master the craft he teaches,  
and then practice it.

(IV, 1240-1261,1285-1300)

## *Questions About Devastation*

A man was breaking up the soil,  
when another man came by, "Why  
are you ruining this land?"

"Don't be a fool! Nothing can grow  
until the ground is turned over and crumbled.

There can be no roses and no orchard  
without first this that looks devastating.

You must lance an ulcer to heal it.  
You must tear down parts of an old building  
to restore it, and so it is with a sensual life  
that has no spirit in it.

To change,  
a person must face the dragon of his appetites  
with another dragon, the life-energy  
of the soul."

When that's not strong,  
the world seems to be full of people  
who have your own fears and wantings.

As one thinks the room is spinning  
when he's whirling around.

When your love contracts in anger,  
the atmosphere itself feels threatening.

But when you're expansive, no matter  
what the weather, you're in an open,  
windy field with friends.

Many people travel to Syria and Iraq  
and meet only hypocrites.

Others go all the way to India  
and see just merchants buying and selling.

Others go to Turkestan and China  
and find those countries filled  
with sneak-thieves and cheats.

We always see the qualities



that are living in us.

A cow may walk from one side of the amazing city  
of Baghdad to the other and notice only  
a watermelon rind and a tuft of hay  
that fell off a wagon.

Don't keep repeatedly doing  
what your animal-soul wants to do.

That's like deciding to be a strip of meat  
nailed and drying on a board in the sun.

Your spirit needs to follow the changes happening  
in the spacious place it knows about.

*There*, the scene is always new,  
a clairvoyant river of picturing,  
more beautiful than any on earth.

This is where the sufis wash.  
Purify your eyes, and see the pure world.  
Your life will fill with radiant forms.

It's a question of cleaning  
and then developing the spiritual senses.

Say you were blindfolded,  
and a lovely woman came by.

You could know her beauty somewhat  
by hearing her speak, but what  
if she didn't say anything!

Muinuddin, there are marvels  
you're not aware of. Don't judge with *your* eyes.  
Look at me through *my* eyes.

See beyond phenomena,  
and these difficult questions will dissolve  
into love within love.

Peace be with you, sir,  
in your position of leadership.

(IV, 2341-2358,2366-2383)

*The "Here I Am" Answer*

The kindness in your look  
is married to the substance  
of your eyes.

Joy lives in the kidneys.  
Grief in the liver.

Intelligence, that bright candle,  
is burning in the matter  
of your brain.

These connections have a purpose,  
but we don't know what it is.

The universal soul touches  
an individual soul and gives it  
a pearl to hide in the chest.

A new Christ lives in you  
from that touch, but no one  
can say why or how.

Every word I say  
is trying to coax a response  
from that.

                  "Lord," I call out,  
and inside my "Lord" comes,  
  "Here I am,"

a "Here I am"  
                                  that can't be heard,  
but it can be tasted and felt  
in every cell of the body.

(II, 1180-1191)

## *Out in the Open Air*

There is a kind of food  
not taken in through the mouth:

Bits of knowing that nourish love.  
The body and the human personality form a cup.  
Every time you meet someone, something is poured in.

When two planets draw near,  
they affect each other.

A man and a woman come together,  
and a new human being appears.

Iron and stone converge,  
and there are sparks.

Rain soaks the ground,  
and fruits get juicy.

Human beings walk into a ripe orchard,  
and a happiness enters their souls.

From that joy  
emerges generosity.

From being out in the open air,  
appetites sharpen.

The blush on our faces  
comes from the sun.

There is a majesty in these connections,  
a grandeur that is an invisible quality.

The sun I mention is Shams.  
I could not live without his light,  
as a fish needs water, as a worker  
must appear in his work, as every being  
pastures on the meadow of the Absolute:

Muhammed's horse, Boraq, Arabian stallions,  
and even donkeys, every creature grazes there,  
whether they know it or not.

Husam, heal the madness of these  
who feel jealous of the sun!  
Put a salve on their eyes,  
and let them see that what they are wanting  
is the extinction of light!

(II, 1089-1128)

## *The Way That Moves As You Move*

Some commentary on the verse,  
*As you start on the Way, the Way appears.*  
*When you cease to be, Real Being comes.*

Zuleikha shut every door,  
but Joseph kept rattling the locks.  
He trusted, and kept moving back and forth,  
and somehow he escaped.

This is the way you slip through  
into your non-spatial home.

Think how you came into this world.  
Can you explain how that was? No?  
The same way you came, you'll leave.

You wander landscapes in your dreams.  
How did you get there?

Close your eyes and surrender,  
and find yourself in the city of God.

But you're still looking for admiration.  
You love how your customers look at you.  
You love to sit at the head of the assembly.

You close your eyes and see people applauding,  
as surely as an owl shuts and sees the forest.

You live in an admiration-world,  
but what do you offer your admirers?

If you had true spiritual gifts to give,  
you wouldn't think of customers.

There was once a man who said, "I am a prophet.  
In fact, I am the edge of prophecy  
moving through time."

People surrounded him and tied him up  
and brought him before the king.

“What right does this man have to say that he lives in the place of revelation?”

The man himself spoke up, “Think how an infant sleeps and grows *unconsciously* into awareness.

Prophets are not like that. They pass, waking, from the source to this up-and-down of the five senses, this left-right, back-and-forth world.”

“Put him on the rack,” they screamed. But the king saw that the man was thin and fragile. He spoke gently. Kindness was his way. He dispersed the crowd, and sat the man down, and asked him where he lived.

“My home is the peace of God, but I have come to this judging place, where no one knows me. I feel like a fish trying to live on sand.”

The king kept trying to joke him out of this state. “But why did you make these claims *today*? Was it something you ate?”

“I don’t care about world-food. I am tasting the God’s honey, but what is that to these people? They’re like mountain rocks. They scoff at me by echoing what I say.

If I brought news of money, or a love-note from a sweetheart, they’d welcome me. But not with this prophecy-talk.

It’s like a blood-soaked bandage stuck to a sore on a donkey’s back. The one who tries to remove it is being helpful, but also, he’s going to get kicked!

No one here wants to be healed. Show me someone who wants what I have!”

The king began to be curious about this man.  
“What is it *exactly* that you who come  
as messengers have to give?”

“What do we not have!

But let’s suppose for a moment that  
my inspiration is not divine.

Still, you would agree, my speaking  
is not *inferior* to the workings of a bee?

The *Qur’an* says, *God has inspired the bee.*  
This universe is filled with honey.

Human beings feed on it and evolve upward  
with the same, but more profound,  
inspiration as the bee.”

So the man defended his claim.  
You have read about the inspired spring.

Drink from there. Be companions with those  
whose lips are wet with that water.

Others, even though they may be your father  
or your mother, they’re your enemies.  
Leave, before they kill you!

The pathless path opens  
whenever you genuinely say,

*There is no Reality but God.*  
*There is only God.*

(V, 1105-1151,1162,1226-1241)

## *The Indian Tree*

A learned man once said,  
just for the sake of saying *something*,  
“There is a tree in India.  
If you eat the fruit of that tree,  
you’ll never grow old, and never die.”

Stories about “The Tree” were passed around,  
and finally a king sent his envoy to India  
to look for it. People laughed at the man.  
They slapped him on the back and called out,

“Sir, I know where your tree is,  
but it’s far in the jungle,  
and you’ll need a ladder!”

He kept traveling, following such directions,  
and feeling foolish, for years.

He was about to return to the king,  
when he met a wise man.

“Great teacher,  
show me some kindness in this search  
for the tree!”

“My son, this is not an actual tree,  
though sometimes it has been called that.  
Sometimes it’s called a ‘sun,’ and sometimes  
an ‘ocean,’ or a ‘cloud.’

All these words  
point to the wisdom which comes through  
a True Human Being, which may have many effects,  
the least of which is eternal life!

In the same way that one person can be a father  
to you and a son to someone else, an uncle  
to another, and a nephew to yet another,  
so what you are looking for  
has many names, and one existence.

Don’t search for one of the names.  
Move beyond any attachment to names!”



Every war, and every conflict between human beings,  
has happened because of this disagreement  
about *names*. It's such an unnecessary foolishness,  
because just beyond the arguing,  
there's a long table of companionship, set,  
and waiting for us to sit down.

(II, 3641-3580)

## *The Indian Parrot*

There was a merchant setting out for India.

He asked each male and female servant  
what they wanted to be brought as a gift.

Each told him a different exotic object:

A piece of silk, a brass figurine,  
a pearl necklace.

Then he asked his beautiful caged parrot,  
the one with such a lovely voice,  
and she said,

“When you see the Indian parrots,  
describe my cage. Say that I need guidance  
here in my separation from them. Ask how  
our friendship can continue with me so confined  
and them flying about freely in the meadow mist.

Tell them that I remember well our mornings  
moving together from tree to tree.

Tell them to drink one cup of ecstatic wine  
in honor of me here in the dregs of my life.

Tell them that the sound of their quarreling  
high in the trees would be sweeter  
to hear than any music.”

This parrot is the spirit-bird in all of us,  
that part that wants to return to freedom,  
and is the freedom. What she wants  
from India is *herself!*

So this parrot gave her message to the merchant,  
and when he reached India, he saw a field  
full of parrots. He stopped  
and called out what she had told him.

One of the nearest parrots shivered  
and stiffened and fell down dead.

The merchant said, “This one is surely kin to my parrot. I shouldn’t have spoken.”

He finished his trading and returned home with the presents for his workers.

When he got to the parrot, she demanded her gift. “What happened when you told my story to the Indian parrots?”

“I’m afraid to say.”

“Master, you must!”

“When I spoke your complaint to the field of chattering parrots, it broke one of their hearts.

She must have been a close companion, or a relative, for when she heard about you she grew quiet and trembled, and died.”

As the caged parrot heard this, she herself quivered and sank to the cage floor.

This merchant was a good man. He grieved deeply for his parrot, murmuring distracted phrases, self-contradictory—cold, then loving—clear, then murky with symbolism.

A drowning man reaches for anything!  
The Friend loves this flailing about  
better than any lying still.

The One who lives inside existence  
stays constantly in motion,  
and whatever you do, that king  
watches through the window.

When the merchant threw the “dead” parrot  
out of the cage, it spread its wings  
and glided to a nearby tree!

The merchant suddenly understood the mystery.

“Sweet singer, what was in the message  
that taught you this trick?”

“She told me that it was the charm  
of my voice that kept me caged.

*Give it up, and be released!”*

The parrot told the merchant one or two more  
spiritual truths. Then a tender goodbye.

“God protect you,” said the merchant

“as you go on your new way.

I hope to follow you!”

(I, 1814-1833, 1845-1848)

## *A Necessary Autumn Inside Each*

You and I have spoken all these words,  
but as for the way we have to go,  
words are no preparation.

There's no getting ready,  
other than grace.  
My faults have stayed hidden.  
One might call that a preparation!  
I have one small drop of knowing in my soul.  
Let it dissolve in your ocean.  
There are so many threats to it.  
Inside each of us, there's continual autumn.  
Our leaves fall and are blown out  
over the water. A crow sits  
in the blackened limbs and talks  
about what's gone.

Then your generosity  
returns: spring, moisture, intelligence,  
the scent of hyacinth and rose and cypress.

Joseph is back!  
And if you don't feel in yourself  
the freshness of Joseph,  
be Jacob!

Weep, and then smile.  
Don't pretend to know something  
you haven't experienced.

There's a necessary dying,  
and then Jesus is breathing again.

Very little grows  
on jagged rock.  
Be ground.

Be crumbled,  
so wildflowers will come up  
where you are.

You've been stony for too many years.  
Try something different.  
Surrender.

(I, 1878-1912)

## *Your Fears of Work*

Again, we hear the rhythm  
between lover and Beloved, that synchrony  
of drums,

                    bales of sugarcane  
being unloaded!

                    The price goes down so far,  
it's almost free. The only work  
is pounding cane.

                    No one leaves here  
with a sour mouth! Climb the minaret,  
and invite everyone to wine and dessert!  
Even a nine-year-old vinegar

  gets a sweet tinge!

Ordinary stones are suddenly

  marbled with ruby!

All eyes feel blessed in this orchard,  
and most amazingly, everyone is saying  
what Hallaj said, *I am God!*

There was once a man  
who rushed terrified into a house,  
his face yellow, his lips blue, and his hands  
trembling like an old man's.

  “What's wrong?”

“Outside! They're rounding up donkeys  
to do some labor!”

  “Why are you upset?”

“They are so fierce in their purpose  
that they might take me too!”

Don't be like this man.

Quit talking about your fears of work  
and of being uncomfortable.

It's time to speak of roses and pomegranates,  
and of the ocean where pearls are made  
of language and vision, and of the invisible ladders,  
which are different for each person, that lead  
to the infinite place where trees

murmur among themselves,

“What a fine stretch  
this is in the air today!”

And nightingales ask  
the just-beginning nubs of fruit that appear  
when the blossoms fall off,

“Give us some of what  
you’re drinking!”

Join that endless joy-talking,  
and forget the other, the worrying that  
you might be taken for a jackass!

(V, 2525-2563)



## *A Sheikh Comes Into a Tavern*

A sheikh comes into a tavern saying,  
“I have been fasting. Give me something to drink.  
Necessity allows me this.”

They brought him a cup, and he said,  
“Look! This is not wine.”

It was fine, golden honey.  
For such a One there are no cups  
full of form. It's all from the source.

Light that shines on dung  
is not part of the dung.

He told one of his students,  
“Get wine from the cellar,”  
and the student went and tasted.  
Each vat was filled with honey.

“Drunkards, what *is* this  
you've been drinking?”

“My sheikh, everything  
has turned to sweetness  
because you came.

Change our souls  
to how you are.”

The whole world is made of dung and blood  
and devil's piss, and yet  
when a selfless one holds it,  
it tastes like sweet springwater.

(II, 3410-3423)

*Feeling Drawn Again to Words*

Husam, the center of my loving,  
something has been boiling in me.

From our friendship the five Books of Husam  
came circulating into the world.

Now I want to bring you the sixth,  
to complete the *Mathmawi*.

Let light go out in six directions,  
so that those who have not done  
the circumambulation may do it  
around this book.

Love has nothing to do with journeys  
through time and space.

Love wants only to feel drawn  
toward the Friend.

After that, secrets  
may be told.

A secret moves toward  
the knower of secrets.

Skeptics don't receive them.  
What do lovers care about  
being accepted or rejected?

There is an eloquence  
beyond these words we use,  
but we throw them into the air,

because, remember how Noah spoke discourses  
for nine hundred years, and only then  
did the ark begin to take form!

(VI, 1-10)

## *Praise to Early-Waking Grievers*

In the Name of God the Most Merciful, and the Most Compassionate.

This is the fourth journey toward home, toward where the great advantages are waiting for us. Reading it, mystics will feel very happy, as a meadow feels when it hears thunder, the good news of rain coming, as tired eyes look forward to sleeping. Joy for the spirit, health for the body. In here is what genuine devotion wants, refreshment, sweet fruit ripe enough for the pickiest picker, medicine, detailed directions on how to get to the Friend. All praise to God. Here is the way to renew connection with your soul, and rest from difficulties. The study of this book will be painful to those who feel separate from God. It will make the others grateful. In the hold of this ship is a cargo not found in the attractiveness of young women. Here is a reward for lovers of God. A full moon and an inheritance you thought you had lost are now returned to you. More hope for the hopeful, lucky finds for foragers, wonderful things thought of to do. Anticipation after depression, expanding after contraction. The sun comes out, and that light is what we give, in this book, to our spiritual descendents. Our gratitude to God holds them to us, and brings more besides. As the Andalusian poet, Adi al-Riga says,

I was sleeping, and being comforted  
by a cool breeze, when suddenly a grey dove  
from a thicket sang and sobbed with longing,  
and reminded me of my own passion.

I had been away from my own soul so long,  
so late-sleeping, but that dove's crying  
woke me and made me cry. *Praise*  
to all early-waking grievors!

Some go first, and others come long afterward. God blesses both and all in the line, and replaces what has been consumed, and provides for those who work the soil of helpfulness, and

blesses Muhammed and Jesus and every other messenger and prophet. Amen, and may the Lord of all created beings bless you.

**(Prose Prayer opening Book II)**

## Green Ears

There was a long drought. Crops dried up.  
The vineyard leaves turned black.

People were gasping and dying like fish  
thrown up on shore and left there.  
But one man was always laughing and smiling.

A group came and asked,  
“Have you no compassion for this suffering?”

He answered, “To your eyes this is a drought.  
To me, it is a form of God’s joy.

Everywhere in this desert I see green corn  
growing waist-high, a sea-wilderness  
of young ears greener than leeks.

I reach to touch them.  
How could I not?

You and your friends are like Pharaoh  
drowning in the Red Sea of your body’s blood.  
Become friends with Moses, and see this other riverwater.”

When you think your father is guilty of an injustice,  
his face looks cruel. Joseph, to his envious brothers,  
seemed dangerous. When you make peace with your father,  
he will look peaceful and friendly. The whole world  
is a form for truth.

When someone does not feel grateful  
to that, the forms appear to be *as he feels*.  
They mirror his anger, his greed, and his fear.  
Make peace with the universe. Take joy in it.

It will turn to gold. Resurrection  
will be *now*. Every moment,  
a new beauty.

And never any boredom!  
Instead this abundant, pouring  
noise of many springs in your ears.

The tree limbs will move like people dancing,  
who suddenly know what the mystical life is.

The leaves snap their fingers like they're hearing music.  
They are! A sliver of a mirror shines out  
from under a felt covering. Think how it will be  
when the whole thing is open to the air and the sunlight!

There are some mysteries that I'm not telling you.  
There's so much doubt everywhere, so many opinions  
that say, "What you announce may be true  
in the future, but not now."

But this form of universal truth that I see  
says,

*This is not a prediction. This is here  
in this instant, cash in the hand!*

This reminds me of the sons of Uzayr,  
who were out on the road looking for their father.  
They had grown old, and their father had miraculously  
grown young! They met him and asked, "Pardon us, sir,  
but have you seen Uzayr? We heard that he's supposed  
to be coming along this road today."

Yes, said Uzayr, "he's right behind me."  
One of the sons replied, "That's good news!"

The other fell on the ground.  
He had recognized his father.

"What do you mean *news!* We're already inside  
the sweetness of his presence."

To your minds there is such a thing as *news*,  
whereas to the inner knowing, it's all  
in the middle of its happening.

To doubters, this is a pain.  
To believers, it's gospel.  
To the lover and the visionary,  
it's life as it's being lived!

The rules of faithfulness  
are just the door and the doorkeeper.

They keep the Presence from being interrupted.

Being unfaithful is like the outside of a fruit peeling.  
It's dry and bitter because it's facing away from the center.  
Being faithful is like the inside of the peeling,  
wet and sweet. But the place for peelings  
is the fire. The real Inside is beyond "sweet"  
and "bitter." It's the source of deliciousness.

This can't be said. I'm drowning in it!

Turn back! And let me cleave a road through water  
like Moses. This much I will say,  
and leave the rest hidden:

your intellect is in fragments, like bits of gold  
scattered over many matters. You must scrape them  
together, so the royal stamp can be pressed into you.

Cohere, and you'll be as lovely as Samarcand  
with its central market, or Damascus. Grain by grain,  
collect the parts. You'll be more magnificent  
than a flat coin. You'll be a cup  
with carvings of the king  
around the outside.

The Friend will become bread and springwater for you,  
a lamp and a helper, your favorite dessert  
and a glass of wine.

Union with that one  
is grace. Gather the pieces,  
so I can show you what is.

That's what talking is for,  
to help us to be One. Many-ness  
is having sixty different emotions.  
Unity is peace, and silence.

I know I ought to be silent,  
but the excitement of this keeps opening  
my mouth as a sneeze or a yawn does.

Muhammed says, *I ask forgiveness seventy times a day,*  
and I do the same. Forgive me. Forgive my talking  
so much. But the way God makes mysteries *manifest*  
quicken and keeps the flow of words in me continual.

A sleeper sleeps while his bedclothes drink in  
the riverwater. The sleeper dreams of running around  
looking for water and pointing in the dream to mirages,  
“Water! There! There!” It’s that *There!*

that keeps him asleep. *In the future, in the distance,*  
those are illusions. Taste the *here* and the *now* of God.

This present-thirst is your real intelligence,  
not the back-and-forth, mercurial brightness.  
Discursiveness dies and gets put in the grave.

This contemplative joy does not.  
Scholarly knowledge is a vertigo,  
an exhausted famousness.  
Listening is better.

Being a teacher is a form of desire,  
a lightning-flash. Can you ride to Wakhsh,  
far up the Oxus River, on a streak of lightning?

Lightning is not guidance.  
Lightning simply tells the clouds to weep.  
Cry a little. The streak-lightning of our minds  
comes so that we’ll weep and long for our real lives.

A child’s intellect says, “I should go to school.”  
But that intellect cannot teach itself.

A sick person’s mind says, “Go to the doctor,”  
but that doesn’t cure the patient.

Some devils were sneaking up close to heaven  
trying to hear the secrets, when a voice came,  
“Get out of here. Go to the world. Listen  
to the prophets!” Enter the house through the door.  
It’s not a long way. You are empty reeds,  
but you can become sugarcane again,  
if you’ll listen to the guide.



When a handful of dirt was taken from the hoofprint  
of Gabriel's horse and thrown inside the golden calf,  
the calf lowed! That's what the guide can do  
for you. The guide can make you *live*.

The guide will take your falcon's hood off.  
Love is the falconer, your king.

Be trained by that. Never say, or think,  
"I am better than...whoever."

That's what Satan thought.  
Sleep in the spirit tree's peaceful shade,  
and never stick your head out from that green.

(IV, 3242-3347)

## *A Marriage at Daybreak*

Do you know, brother, that you are a prince?  
A son of Adam. And that the witch of Kabul,  
who holds you with her color and her perfume,  
is the world?

Say the words, *I take refuge*  
*with the Lord of the Daybreak.*

Avoid the hot breathing that keeps you tied  
to her. She breathes on knots and no one  
can unknot them. That's why the prophets came.

Look for those whose breath is cool.  
When they breathe on knots, they loosen.

The old woman of the world has had you  
in her net for sixty years. Her breathing  
is the breathing of God's anger. But God's mercy  
has more strength. Mercy is prior to wrath.

You must marry your soul.  
That wedding is the way.  
Union with the world is sickness.

But it's *hard* to be separated from these forms!  
You don't have enough patience to give this up?  
But how do you have enough patience  
to do without God?

You can't quit drinking the earth's dark drink?  
But how can you *not* drink from this other fountain?

You get restless, you say, when you don't sip  
the world's fermentation. But if for one second  
you saw the beauty of the clear water of God,  
you'd think this other was embalming fluid.

Nearness to the Beloved is the splendor  
of your life. Marry the Beloved.  
Let the thorn of the ego slide from your foot.

What a relief to be empty!  
Then God can live your life.

When you stay tied to mind and desire, you stumble  
in the mud like a nearsighted donkey.

Keep smelling Joseph's shirt.

Don't be satisfied with borrowed light.

Let your brow and your face illuminate with union.

(IV, 3189-3240)

## *The Many Wines*

God has given us a dark wine so potent that,  
drinking it, we leave the two worlds.

God has put into the form of hashish a power  
to deliver the taster from self-consciousness.

God has made sleep so that  
it erases every thought.

God made Majnun love Layla so much that  
just her dog would cause confusion in him.

There are thousands of wines  
that can take over our minds.

Don't think all ecstasies  
are the same!

Jesus was lost in his love for God.  
His donkey was drunk with barley.

Drink from the presence of saints,  
not from those other jars.

Every object, every being,  
is a jar full of delight.

Be a connoisseur,  
and taste with caution.

Any wine will get you high.  
Judge like a king, and choose the purest,  
the ones unadulterated with fear,  
or some urgency about "what's needed."

Drink the wine that moves you  
as a camel moves when it's been untied,  
and is just ambling about.

(IV,2683-2696)

## *Ants Watching a Pen Writing*

Alexander the Great went toward Qaf Mountain and saw that it was made of pure emerald and that it had become a ring surrounding the world, and he was amazed at the *immensity* of God's creation.

"If you are a *mountain*, what are these others?"

Mt. Qaf replied, "They are my veins. When God wills an earthquake, I throb through one of them. When God says, *Enough!*, I rest. Or it appears that I rest. Actually, I'm always in motion."

Like the quickening energy of a medicinal ointment, like intellect when speech is in rapid exchange, so the Qaf Mountain intelligence flows through this existence.

Once, a tiny ant saw a pen moving on paper and tried to tell the mystery to another ant.

"It was so amazing how that penpoint made beautiful pictures of basil leaves and beds of roses and lilies."

Another ant suggested, "The real artist, though, is the finger. The pen itself is just an instrument."

A third ant said, "But, consider further. Notice there's an arm above whose strength controls the fingers . . . ."

The argument went on, up and up, until the chief ant said,

"Do not regard any accomplishment as proceeding from any material form. All living forms become unconscious in sleep and death. Form is just the clothes of the spirit."

But even that wise ant neglected to say  
what flowed inside *that*. He never mentioned  
the existence of God, without which intelligence  
and love and spirit would be inert.

So Alexander loved listening  
to the wisdom of Qaf Mountain.  
He wanted to hear everything!

“Explain to me about the attributes of God.”

“Those qualities are too terrible  
to put into language.”

“Say then something that can be said  
about the wonder of those.”

“Look at the snow mountains.  
You could travel through them for three hundred years  
and still there would be snow mountains  
in the distance, and snow falling  
to replenish the coldness.

This vast snow-storehouse  
keeps the world cool and safe  
from destructive wantings.

God’s coolness is greater than God’s fire.  
Snow mountain grace is more powerful  
than desire’s tropical heat,  
and prior to it.”

Remember this spiritual truth. It is unqualified,  
and unconditional. Though the *before* and the *after*  
are really one. Punishment and clemency, the same.

Did you know that already?  
Don’t say *yes*,  
or *no*.

And don’t blame a religion  
for your being in-between answers.

A bird can fly in the air only  
after it's born of bird-lust into a bird-body.

Let the stretcher come and take you wherever  
that mercy knows you should go.

If you say *Yes, I knew*, you'll be pretending,  
somewhat. And if you say *No*, that blade of *No*  
will slam shut your window into God and behead you.

Be quiet in your confusion, and bewildered.  
When you're completely empty, within  
that silence, you'll be saying,

*Lead me.*

When you become that helpless,  
God's kindness will act through you.

(IV, 3711-3754)

## *Jonah's Unlit House*

A child was crying with his head against  
his father's coffin. "Why are they taking you  
to such a terrible house? There's no carpet,  
no lamp, no bread, no smell of cooking.

There's no door! No ladder leading up to the roof,  
no neighbors to help out in difficulties.

We used to love to kiss you!  
Why are you going where we can't?"

Juhi and his father were passing by.  
Young Juhi said, "It sounds like they're taking  
the corpse over to our house."

"What do you mean?"

"All those things he said are true of our place."

Like that, sometimes people don't see the signs  
that are so close, even how their homes  
are unlit! The way you're living now is like  
living in a tomb! There's none of God's light,  
and no openness.

Remember that you're alive!

Don't stay in a narrow, choked place.  
Let your Joseph out of prison!

Your Jonah has cooked long enough in the whale!  
Have you forgotten what praise is?

The world is an ocean. The body, a fish.  
Jonah is your soul, which cannot see the dawn,  
until you glorify God like Jonah did.

Then you'll be released. There are spirit-fishes  
all around you, bumping, trying to help,  
but you can't see them.

Listen to their singing. Hear how they praise,  
and be patient. Patience is your way to glory.

(II, 3116-3147)



## *Of Being Woven*

“The Way is full of genuine sacrifice.

The thickets blocking the path are anything  
that keeps you from that, any fear  
that you may be broken to bits like a glass bottle.  
This road demands courage and stamina,

yet it's full of footprints! Who *are*  
these companions? They are rungs  
in your ladder. Use them!

With company you quicken your ascent.

You may be happy enough going along,  
but with others you'll get farther, and faster.

Someone who goes cheerfully by himself  
to the customs house to pay his traveler's tax  
will go even more lightheartedly  
when friends are with him.

Every prophet sought out companions.

A wall standing alone is useless,  
but put three or four walls together,  
and they'll support a roof and keep  
the grain dry and safe.

When ink joins with a pen, then the blank paper  
can say something. Rushes and reeds must be *woven*  
to be useful as a mat. If they weren't interlaced,  
the wind would blow them away.

Like that, God paired up creatures,  
and gave them friendship.”

This is how the fowler and the bird were arguing  
about hermitic living and Islam.

It's a prolonged debate.

Husam, shorten their controversy.

Make the *Mathnawi* more nimble and less lumbering.

Agile sounds are more appealing to the heart's ear.

(VI, 507-513, 517-525)

## *Tracks in the Nightsky*

Tell me, is there any blessing  
that someone's not excluded from?

What do donkeys and cows  
have to do with fancy desserts?

Every soul needs different nourishment,  
but be aware if your food is accidental  
and habitual, or if it's something  
that feeds your real nature.

It may be, like those who eat clay, that human beings  
have forgotten what their original food is.  
They may be feeding their diseases.

Our true food is God's light.  
Animals and what animals eat  
are not right for humans.

But because they are sick and dizzy, pale,  
stumbling and weak, they don't hunt the game  
that leaves its tracks in the nightsky.

Tasting that is done without silverware,  
and without a throat. It comes down  
from the throne of God. This other  
is just dust kicked up from the carpet.

But we receive nourishment  
from everyone we meet. Any association  
is food. Planet comes near planet,  
and both are affected.

Man comes together with woman,  
and there's a new baby! Iron meets stone,  
sparks. Rain enters the ground, and sweet herbs appear.  
When green things and people converge,  
there'll be laughter and dancing,  
and that makes good and generous things begin.

As we move about in the open, our appetites sharpen.  
Flushed faces come from the sun. That rose-red

is the most beautiful color on earth.

Through such runnings-together, the potential world becomes actual. Live in that place of pure being.

Don't worry about having ten days of famousness here.

Revolve with me about the sun that never sets.

Work cannot be separated from the Worker.

(II, 1077-1116)

## *Wealth Without Working*

In the time of David there was a man  
who used to pray out loud,

“Lord, give me wealth  
without working! You created me lazy and slow,  
so let me have my daily bread by being just that.

Pay me for sleeping in the shade! It’s your shade.  
Give me sudden riches with no fatigue on my part.  
Let this prayer be all that I do.”

He prayed this way before a wise teacher,  
or in front of the town simpleton.

It made no difference who was listening.  
He prayed day and night, every day.

People laughed at him, of course.  
“This weak-bearded idiot!”

“Did someone give him  
some hashish?”

“Livelihood comes with effort,  
but this guy says, ‘I will climb up into the sky  
without a ladder.’”

“Oh sir, the messenger has come  
with the news you’ve been waiting for!”

“Could I have  
a little part of what you get from this prayer?”

So it went. But nothing made him stop. He became famous  
for being the one who keeps looking for cheese  
in an empty food pouch. He was a living proverb  
on foolishness.

Then one morning, suddenly,  
a large cow walked into his house. With her horns  
she broke the lock and butted the bolt back  
and came in!

The man quit praying. He bound  
the cow’s legs, cut her throat, and ran  
to get the butcher. There was enough food  
and leather for a long time!

Do that for me, You who make demands like an embryo  
growing inside me. Help me with this long poem!

You're asking for gold. First, give me gold in secret.  
All these images and words have to come from You.

Everyone, and every thing, and every action, glorifies  
You, but sometimes the way one does it  
is not recognized by another.

Human beings rarely understand how inanimate objects  
are doing it, the walls and the doors and the rocks,  
those masters of glorification!

We squabble over the doctrines of the Sunnis  
and the Jabris, and all their seventy-two  
different interpretations. It never ends.

But we don't hear the inanimate objects  
speaking to each other, and to us!

How can we understand the praising  
of what doesn't speak?

Only with the help of the One whose love  
opens into the spirit's telling.

(III, 1450-1464, 1479-1509)

*The Trick About Thawing Grapes*

I speak harshly to free you from meanness,  
as frozen grapes thaw with pouring *cold* water  
on them. That loosens the hardness and bitterness.

With a little scolding, you warm,  
and the sweet grape-blood comes back.

(III, 4193-4196)

## *Turning Toward Kindness*

Anyone who genuinely and constantly with both hands  
looks for something, will find it.

Though you are lame and bent over, keep moving  
toward the Friend. With speech, with silence,  
with sniffing about, stay on the track.

Whenever some kindness comes to you, turn  
that way, toward the source of kindness.

Love-things originate in the ocean.  
Restlessness leads to rest.

(III, 978-981,987-992)

## *The You Pronoun*

In the Name of God, the Merciful and Compassionate.

The start of the second book of the *Mathnawi* has been postponed, and the reason is this: Sometimes God reveals *all* the wisdom of doing a certain action, and the listener becomes so overwhelmed in contemplating that, that he is unable to perform it. Lost in the infinity, with no ability to understand, or *do*, anything.

God then reduces the wisdom portion, and makes a small bridle to fit over the listener's head to lead him by. The size of the bridle is important when you're dealing with a stubborn camel. Too heavy, and he'll lie down and refuse to move. Too slight, and he'll ignore it. The proportion of wisdom to personal advantage is a subtle mixture, like that of clay and water to make bricks. Too little water, and it won't cohere. Too much, and it washes away. God gives attention to an individual's balance, except when giving to those described in the text, *He gives, and they receive without calculating*. But that state cannot be understood without tasting it.

Someone once asked, "What is love?"

"Be lost in me," I said. "You'll know love when that happens."

Love has no calculating in it. That's why it's said to be a quality of God and not of human beings. God loves you is the only possible sentence. The subject becomes the object so totally that it can't be turned around. Who will the "you" pronoun stand for, if you say, "You love God" ?

(Prose Preface to Book II)



## *Emptiness*

Consider the difference  
in our actions and God's actions.

We often ask, "Why did you do that?"  
or "Why did I act like that?"

We *do* act, and yet everything we do  
is God's creative action.

We look back and analyze the events  
of our lives, but there is another way  
of seeing, a backward-and-forward-at-once  
vision, that is not rationally understandable.

Only God can understand it.

Satan made the excuse, *You caused me to fall,*  
whereas Adam said to God, *We did this*  
*to ourselves.* After this repentance,  
God asked Adam, *Since all is within*  
*my foreknowledge, why didn't you*  
*defend yourself with that reason?*

Adam answered, *I was afraid,*  
*and I wanted to be reverent.*

Whoever acts with respect will get respect.  
Whoever brings sweetness will be served almond cake.  
Good women are drawn to be with *good* men.

Honor your friend.  
Or treat him rudely,  
and see what happens!

Love, tell an incident now  
that will clarify this mystery  
of how we act freely, and are yet  
compelled. One hand shakes with palsy.  
Another shakes because you slapped it away.

Both tremblings come from God,  
but you feel guilty for the one,  
and what about the other?

These are intellectual questions.  
The spirit approaches the matter  
differently. Omar once had a friend, a scientist,  
Bu'l-Hakam, who was flawless at solving  
empirical problems, but he could not follow Omar  
into the area of illumination and wonder.

Now I return to the text, "And He is with you,  
wherever you are," but when have I ever left it!

Ignorance is God's prison.  
Knowing is God's palace.

We sleep in God's unconsciousness.  
We wake in God's open hand.

We weep God's rain.  
We laugh God's lightning.

Fighting and peacefulness  
both take place within God.

Who are we then  
in this complicated world-tangle,  
that is really just the single, straight  
line down at the beginning of *ALLAH*?

Nothing.  
We are  
emptiness.

(I, 1480-1514)

## *I Have Five Things To Say*

The wakened lover speaks directly to the Beloved,  
“You are the sky my spirit circles in,  
the love inside love, the resurrection-place.

Let this window be your ear.  
I have lost consciousness many times  
with longing for your listening silence,  
and your life-quickenning smile.

You give attention to the smallest matters,  
my suspicious doubts, and to the greatest.

You know my coins are counterfeit,  
but You accept them anyway,  
my impudence and my pretending!

I have five things to say,  
five fingers to give  
into your grace.

First, when I was apart from You,  
this world did not exist,  
nor any other.

Second, whatever I was looking for  
was always You.

Third, why did I ever learn to count to three?

Fourth, my cornfield is burning!

Fifth, this finger stands for Rabia,  
and this is for someone else.  
Is there a difference?

Are these words or tears?  
Is weeping speech?  
What shall I do, my love?”

So he speaks, and everyone around  
begins to cry with him, laughing crazily,  
moaning in the spreading union  
of lover and Beloved.

This is the true religion. All others  
are thrown-away bandages beside it.

This is the *sema* of slavery and mastery  
dancing together. This is not-being.

Neither words, nor any natural fact  
can express this.

I know these dancers.

Day and night I sing their songs  
in this phenomenal cage.

My soul, don't try to answer now!  
Find a friend, and hide.

But what can stay hidden?

Love's secret is always lifting its head  
out from under the covers,

"Here I am!"

(III, 4694-4734)

## *The Seed Market*

Can you find another market like this?

Where,  
with your one rose  
you can buy hundreds of rose gardens?

Where,  
for one seed  
you get a whole wilderness?

For one weak breath,  
the divine wind?

You've been fearful  
of being absorbed in the ground,  
or drawn up by the air.

Now, your waterbead lets go  
and drops into the ocean,  
where it came from.

It no longer has the form it had,  
but it's still water.  
The essence is the same.

This giving up is not a repenting.  
It's a deep honoring of yourself.

When the ocean comes to you as a lover,  
marry, at once, quickly,  
for God's sake!

Don't postpone it!  
Existence has no better gift.

No amount of searching  
will find this.

A perfect falcon, for no reason,  
has landed on your shoulder,  
and become yours.

(IV, 2611-2625)

## *Birdsong from Inside the Egg*

Sometimes a lover of God may faint  
in the presence. Then the Beloved bends  
and whispers in his ear, "Beggar, spread out  
your robe. I'll fill it with gold.

I've come to protect your consciousness.  
Where has it gone? Come back into awareness!"

This fainting is because  
lovers want *so much*.

A chicken invites a camel into her hen-house,  
and the whole structure is demolished.

A rabbit nestles down  
with its eyes closed  
in the arms of a lion.

There is an *excess*  
in spiritual searching  
that is profound ignorance.

Let that ignorance be our teacher!  
The Friend breathes into one  
who has no breath.

A deep silence revives the listening  
and the speaking of those two  
who meet on the riverbank.

Like the ground turning green in a spring wind.  
Like birdsong beginning inside the egg.

Like this universe coming into existence,  
the lover wakes, and whirls  
in a dancing joy,  
then kneels down  
in praise.

(III, 4664-4693)

## *Body Intelligence*

Your intelligence is always with you,  
overseeing your body, even though  
you may not be aware of its work.

If you start doing something against  
your health, your intelligence  
will eventually scold you.

If it hadn't been so lovingly close by,  
and so constantly monitoring,  
how could it rebuke?

You and your intelligence  
are like the beauty and the precision  
of an astrolabe.

Together, you calculate how near  
existence is to the sun!

Your intelligence is marvelously intimate.  
It's not in front of you or behind,  
or to the left or the right.

Now try, my friend, to describe how near  
is the creator of your intellect!

Intellectual searching will not find  
the way to that king!

The movement of your finger  
is not separate from your finger.

You go to sleep, or you die,  
and there's no intelligent motion.

Then you wake,  
and your fingers  
fill with meanings.

Now consider the jewel-lights  
in your eyes. How do *they* work?

This visible universe has many weathers

and variations.

But uncle, O uncle,  
the universe of the creation-word,  
the divine command to *Be*, that universe  
of qualities is beyond any pointing-to.

More intelligent than intellect,  
and more spiritual than spirit.  
No being is unconnected  
to that reality, and that connection  
cannot be said. *There*, there's  
no separation and no return.

There are guides who can show you the way.  
Use them. But they will not satisfy your longing.

Keep wanting that connection  
with all your pulsing energy.

The throbbing vein  
will take you farther  
than any thinking.

Muhammed said, "*Don't theorize  
about Essence!*" All speculations  
*are* just more layers of covering.  
Human beings love coverings!

They think the designs on the curtains  
are what's being concealed.

Observe the wonders as they occur around you.  
Don't claim them. Feel the artistry  
moving through, and be silent.

Or say, "I cannot praise You  
as You should be praised.

Such words are infinitely  
beyond my understanding."

(IV, 3678-3703,3708-3710)



## *Humble and Active*

The saying, *Whatever God wills, will happen*, does not end, "Therefore be passive."

Rather, it means, *Forget yourself, and get ready to help.*

If you were told that whatever you wished for would come into being, and then if you neglected to do something, there would be no problem, because it would happen, somehow, anyway.

But instead, you are told that whatever God wills, will happen.

Stay alert then, and close by, like a worker waiting to perform whatever needs to be done.

Your attitude has been a reverse interpretation of the text.

The way you distinguish a true commentary from a false is this:

                    Whichever explication makes you feel fiery and hopeful, humble and *active*, that's the true one.

If it makes you lazy, it's not right.

Ask the *Qur'an* about the *Qur'an*.  
Ask the *Bible* about the *Bible*,  
not some burnt-out intellectual.

Or ask someone who has disappeared into the essence within the writing.

There is an oil that's totally saturated with roses.

Smell that, or the roses, whichever.

## *Joy at Sudden Disappointment*

Whatever comes, comes from a need,  
a *sore distress*, a hurting want.

Mary's pain made the baby Jesus.  
Her womb opened its lips  
and spoke the Word.

Every part of you has a secret language.  
Your hands and your feet say what you've done.

And every need brings in what's needed.  
Pain bears its cure like a child.

Having nothing produces provisions.  
Ask a difficult question,  
and the marvelous answer appears.

Build a ship, and there'll be water  
to float it. The tender-throated  
infant cries and milk drips  
from the mother's breast.

Be thirsty for the ultimate water,  
and then be ready for what will  
come pouring from the spring.

A village woman once was walking by Muhammed.  
She thought he was just an ordinary illiterate.  
She didn't believe that he was a prophet.

She was carrying a two-months old baby.  
As she came near Muhammed, the baby turned  
and said, "Peace be with you, Messenger of God."

The mother cried out, surprised and angry,  
"What are you saying,  
and how can you suddenly talk!"

The child replied, "God taught me first,  
and then Gabriel."

  "Who is this Gabriel?  
I don't see anyone."

“He is above your head, mother. Turn around. He has been telling me many things.”

“Do you really see him?”

“Yes.

He is continually delivering me from this degraded state into sublimity.”

Muhammed then asked the child,

“What is your name?”

“Abdul Aziz, the servant of God, but this family thinks I am concerned with world-energies. I am as free of that as the truth of your prophecy is.”

So the little one spoke, and the mother took in a fragrance that let her surrender to that state.

When God gives this knowing, inanimate stones, plants, animals, everything, fills with unfolding significance.

The fish and the birds become protectors. Remember the incident of Muhammed and the eagle.

It happened that as he was listening to this inspired baby, he heard a voice calling him to prayer. He asked for water to perform ablutions. He washed his hands and feet, and just as he reached for his boot,

an eagle snatched it away! The boot turned upsidedown as it lifted, and a poisonous snake dropped out.

The eagle circled and brought the boot back, saying, “My helpless reverence for you made this necessary. Anyone who acts this presumptuously for a legalistic reason should be punished!”

Muhammed thanked the eagle, and said, “What I thought was rudeness was really love. You took away my grief, and I was grieved! God has shown me everything,

but at that moment I was preoccupied within myself.”  
The eagle,

“But Chosen One, any clarity I have  
comes from you!”

This spreading radiance  
of a True Human Being has great importance.

Look carefully around you and recognize  
the luminosity of souls. Sit beside those  
who draw you to that.

Learn from this eagle story  
that when misfortune comes, you must quickly praise.

Others may be saying, *Oh no*, but you  
will be opening out like a rose  
losing itself petal by petal.

Someone once asked a great sheikh  
what sufism was.

“The feeling of joy  
when sudden disappointment comes.”

The eagle carries off Muhammed’s boot  
and saves him from snakebite.

Don’t grieve for what doesn’t come.  
Some things that don’t happen  
keep disasters from happening.

(III, 3204-3265)

## *A Sunrise Ruby*

In the early morning hour,  
just before dawn, lover and Beloved wake  
and take a drink of water.

She asks, "Do you love me or yourself more?  
Really, tell the absolute truth."

He says, "There's nothing left of *me*.  
I'm like a ruby held up to the sunrise.  
Is it still a stone, or a world  
made of redness? It has no resistance  
to sunlight."

This is how Hallaj said, *I am God*,  
and told the truth!

The ruby and the sunrise are one.  
Be courageous and discipline yourself.

Completely become hearing and ear,  
and wear this sun-ruby as an earring.

Work. Keep digging your well.  
Don't think about getting off from work.  
Water is there somewhere.

Submit to a daily practice.  
Your loyalty to that  
is a ring on the door.

Keep knocking, and the joy inside  
will eventually open a window  
and look out to see who's there.

(V, 2020-2049)

*Love is the Whirlpool's Energy*

Being a lover  
and feeling patient and repentent  
do not go together.

Love is a dragon.  
Being ashamed is a little worm.

One is a quality of God.  
The other, an emotion full of thinking.

Love is moonlight on your bedroom wall,  
the energy of a whirlpool.

When it's not there,  
a human being becomes a frantic  
fish at the bottom of the place  
where the whirlpool was,  
or just a blank barrier between sleepers.

(VI, 969-983)

## *Don't Postpone Your Yes!*

Muhammed is said to have said,  
"Whoever belongs to God, God belongs to."

Our weak, uneven breathings,  
these dissolving personalities,  
were breathed out by the eternal  
*Huuuuuuuuu*, that never changes!

A drop of water constantly fears  
that it may evaporate into air,  
or be absorbed by the ground.

It doesn't want to be used up  
in those ways, but when it lets go  
and falls into the ocean it came from,  
it finds protection from the other deaths.

Its droplet form is gone,  
but its watery essence has become  
vast and inviolable.

Listen to me, friends, because *you*  
are a drop, and you can honor yourselves  
in this way. What could be luckier

than to have the ocean come  
to court the drop?

For God's sake, don't postpone your *yes!*  
Give up and become the giver.

(IV, 2613-2622)

## *Singular & Plural*

As human beings have an intellect  
beyond the animals, so True Human Beings

have an intelligent soul  
beyond ordinary awareness,

and it is all one thing,  
their knowing and doing.

David didn't build the temple.  
His son Solomon did,  
but David built it too!

We speak of saints and prophets  
and awakened ones in the plural,  
but that's not the way it is.

Dogs and wolves are competitive and disparate,  
but the lions of God have one soul.

(IV, 406–415)



## *Dhu'l-Nun's Instructive Madness*

Some friends of Dhu'l-Nun, the Egyptian,  
went to see about him. They had heard  
that he had gone spectacularly insane,  
that he was a wildfire no one could contain,  
this man who had been such a source of wisdom.

They arrived at his house. He yelled, "Hey,  
you'd better watch out coming here.  
Who are you?"

"Don't you remember us?  
We're your friends! What secret  
are you hiding with this madness?"

Dhu'l-Nun began to rave a mixture  
of filthy language and gibberish.

He rushed out and grabbed up stones  
and threw them at the group. They ran.

"See!" he called. "You're not friends.  
A friend does not run away from pain  
inflicted by a friend.

There's a joy within suffering  
that is the kernel of friendship.

A friend is pure gold singing  
inside the refining fire.

He thrives on fights and misunderstandings,  
and even madness."

(II, 1386-1387,1430-1432,1447-1461)

## *Kings with their Wooden Sticks*

A group of kings were arguing  
with Muhammed.

“You are a king as we are,  
but you do not acknowledge our power.

Share your kingdom with us, as we divide  
the sovereignty of the world among ourselves.”

“God has given differently to you  
than he has to me.”

And with that a cloud came,  
and it rained down a terrible flood.

The kings threw their sceptres at the water,  
and those symbols of authority were swept away  
like bits of straw.

Then the Prophet threw his staff,  
and it stood up on the flood like a sentry,  
and the water subsided and became gentle.

The kings bowed and confessed their failings  
to the Prophet, all except for three of them,  
who thought that it was some occult trick.

Whenever you wonder how prophetic majesty  
differs from political kingship, remember  
these wooden sticks lost in the floodwater  
like so many forgotten potentates.

Then remember Muhammed’s calming presence,  
that’s still here.

(IV, 2779-2800)

## *Craftsmanship and Emptiness*

I've said before that every craftsman searches for what's not there to practice his craft.

A builder looks for the rotten hole where the roof caved in. A water-carrier picks the empty pot. A carpenter stops at the house with no door.

Workers rush toward some hint of emptiness, which they then start to fill. Their hope, though, is for emptiness, so don't think you must avoid it. It contains what you need!

Dear soul, if you were not friends with the vast nothing inside, why would you always be casting your net into it, and waiting so patiently?

This invisible ocean has given you such abundance, but still you call it "death," that which provides you sustenance and work.

God has allowed some magical reversal to occur, so that you see the scorpion pit as an object of desire, and all the beautiful expanse around it as dangerous and swarming with snakes.

This is how strange your fear of death and emptiness is, and how perverse the attachment to what you want.

Now that you've heard me on your misapprehensions, dear friend, listen to Attar's story on the same subject.

He strung the pearls of this about King Mahmud, how among the spoils of his Indian campaign there was a Hindu boy,

whom he adopted as a son. He educated and provided royally for the boy and later made him vice-regent, seated on a gold throne beside himself.

One day he found the young man weeping. "Why are you crying? You're the companion of an emperor! The entire nation is ranged out before you like stars that you can command!"

The young man replied, "I am remembering my mother and my father, and how they scared me as a child with threats of you! 'Uh-oh, he's headed for King Mahmud's court! Nothing could be more hellish!' Where are they now when they should see me sitting here?"

This incident is about your fear of changing. You are the Hindu boy. *Mahmud*, which means, *Praise to the End*, is the spirit's poverty, or emptiness.

The mother and father are your attachment to beliefs and bloodties and desires and comforting habits.

Don't listen to them!  
They seem to protect,  
but they imprison.

They are your worst enemies.  
They make you afraid  
of living in emptiness.

Some day you'll weep tears of delight in that court,  
remembering your mistaken parents!

Know that your body nurtures the spirit,  
helps it grow, and then gives it wrong advice.

The body becomes, eventually, like a vest  
of chainmail in peaceful years,  
too hot in summer and too cold in winter.

But the body's desires, in another way, are like  
an unpredictable associate, whom you must be  
patient with. And that companion is helpful,  
because patience expands your capacity  
to love and feel peace.

The patience of a rose close to a thorn  
keeps it fragrant. It's patience that gives milk  
to the male camel still nursing in its third year,  
and patience is what the prophets show to us.

The beauty of careful sewing on a shirt  
is the patience it contains.

Friendship and loyalty have patience  
as the strength of their connections.

Feeling lonely and ignoble indicates  
that you haven't been patient.

Be with those who mix with God  
as honey blends with milk, and say,

"Anything that comes and goes,  
rises and sets, is not  
what I love."

Live in the One who created the prophets,  
else you'll be like a caravan fire left  
to flare itself out alone beside the road.

(VI, 1369-1420)

## *The Granary Floor*

A sufi was wandering the world.  
One night he came as a guest to a community of sufis.  
He tied up his donkey in the stable  
and then was welcomed to the head of the dais.  
They went into deep meditation and mystical communion,  
he and these friends. For such people  
a person's presence is more to learn from  
than a book. A sufi's book is not composed  
with ink and alphabet. A scholar loves, and lives on,  
the marks of a pen. A sufi loves footprints!  
He sees those and stalks his game. At first, he *sees*  
the clues. After a time he can follow the scent.  
To go guided by fragrance is a hundred times better  
than following tracks. A person who is opening  
to the divine is like a door to a sufi.  
What might appear a worthless stone  
to others, to him's a pearl. You see your image  
clearly in a mirror. A sheikh sees more than that  
in a discarded brick. Sufi masters are those  
whose spirits existed before the world.  
Before the body, they lived many lifetimes.

Before seeds went into the ground, they harvested wheat.  
Before there was an ocean, they strung pearls.  
While the great meeting was going on about bringing  
human beings into existence, they stood up to their chins  
in wisdom water. When some of the angels opposed  
creation, the sufi sheikhs laughed and clapped  
among themselves. Before materiality, they knew  
what it was like to be trapped inside matter.  
Before there was a night sky, they saw Saturn.  
Before wheat grains, they tasted bread.  
With no mind, they thought.

Immediate intuition to them is the simplest act  
of consciousness, what to others would be epiphany.  
Much of our thought is of the past, or the future.  
They're free of those. Before a mine is dug,

they judge coins. Before vineyards,  
they know the excitements to come.

In July, they feel December.

In unbroken sunlight, they find shade. In *fana*,  
the state where all objects dissolve,  
they recognize objects. The open sky drinks  
from their circling cup. The sun wears  
the gold of their generosity.

When two of them meet, they are no longer two.  
They are one and six hundred thousand.

The ocean waves are their closest likeness,  
when wind makes from unity, the numerous.  
This happened to the sun, and it broke into rays  
through the window, into bodies.

The disc of the sun does exist, but if you see  
only the ray-bodies, you may have doubts.

The human-divine combination is a oneness.

Plurality, the apparent separation into rays.

Friend, we're traveling together.

Throw off your tiredness. Let me show you  
one tiny spot of the beauty that cannot be spoken.

I'm like an ant that's gotten into the granary,  
ludicrously happy, and trying to lug out  
a grain that's way too big.

(II, 156-193)

## *What Is a Lover?*

One who has no motive,  
as he gambles everything, doing what  
is not part of any religion.

No ordinary madness, this.  
If it came over a doctor, he would blur  
his medical books with tears.

All medicines are just images  
of the loving of the lover,  
whose face looks inward,  
with no kin but the one You.

The pointer of the prayer rug turns  
on its center, where you kneel.

Call out *Lord*, and hear  
within that, *Am I not . . . ?*

(VI, 1969-1987)



### *What is the Path?*

A self-sacrificing way,  
but also a warrior's way, and not  
for brittle, easily-broken, glass-bottle people.

The soul is tested here by sheer terror,  
as a sieve sifts and separates  
genuine from fake.

And this road is full of footprints!  
Companions have come before.  
They are your ladder.  
Use them!

Without them you won't have the spirit-quickness  
you need. Even a dumb donkey  
crossing a desert becomes nimblefooted  
with others of its kind.

Stay with a caravan. By yourself,  
you'll get a hundred times more tired,  
and fall behind.

(VI, 507-513)

## *After the Meditation*

Now I see something in my listeners  
that won't let me continue this way.

The ocean flows back in  
and puts up a foam barrier,  
and then withdraws.

After a while,  
it will come in again.

This audience wants to hear more  
about the visiting sufi and his friends  
in meditation. But be discerning.

Don't think of this as a normal character  
in an ordinary story.

The ecstatic meditation ended.  
Dishes of food were brought out.  
The sufi remembered his donkey  
that had carried him all day.

He called to the servant there, "Please,  
go to the stable and mix the barley generously  
with the straw for the animal. Please."

"Don't worry yourself with such matters.  
All things have been attended to."

"But I want to make sure that you wet the barley first.  
He's an old donkey, and his teeth are shakey."

"Why are you telling me this?  
I have given the appropriate orders."

"But did you remove the saddle gently,  
and put salve on the sore he has?"

"I have served thousands of guests  
with these difficulties, and all have gone away  
satisfied. Here, you are treated as family.  
Do not worry. Enjoy yourself."

“But did you warm his water  
just a little, and then add only a bit of straw  
to the barley?”

“Sir, I’m ashamed for you.”

“And please,  
sweep the stall clean of stones and dung,  
and scatter a little dry earth in it.”

“For God’s sake, sir,  
leave my business to *me!*”

“And did you currycomb his back?  
He loves that.”

“Sir! I am *personally*  
responsible for all these chores!”

The servant turned and left at a brisk pace . . .  
to join his friends in the street.

The sufi then lay down to sleep  
and had terrible dreams about his donkey,  
how it was being torn to pieces by a wolf,  
or falling helplessly into a ditch.

And his dreaming was right! His donkey  
was being totally neglected, weak and gasping,  
without food or water all the night long.  
The servant had done nothing he said he would.

There are such vicious and empty flatterers  
in your life. Do the careful,  
donkey-tending work.

Don’t trust that to anyone else.  
There are hypocrites who will praise you,  
but who do not care about the health  
of your heart-donkey.

Be concentrated and *leonine*  
in the hunt for what is your true nourishment.  
Don’t be distracted by blandishment-noises,  
of any sort.

(II, 194-223,260-263)

## *The Dog in the Doorway*

This is how it is when your animal-energies,  
the *nafs*, dominate your soul:

You have a piece of fine linen  
that you're going to make into a coat  
to give to a friend, but someone else uses it  
to make a pair of pants. The linen  
has no choice in the matter.  
It must submit. Or, it's like  
someone breaks in your house  
and goes to the garden and plants thornbushes.  
An ugly humiliation falls over the place.

Or, you've seen a nomad's dog  
lying at the tent entrance, with his head  
on the threshold and his eyes closed.

Children pull his tail and touch his face,  
but he doesn't move. He loves the children's  
attention and stays humble within it.

But if a stranger walks by, he'll spring up  
ferociously. Now, what if that dog's owner  
were not able to control it?

A poor dervish might appear: the dog storms out.  
The dervish says, "I take refuge with God  
when the dog of arrogance attacks,"  
and the owner has to say, "So do I!  
I'm helpless against this creature  
even in my own house!

Just as you can't come close,  
I can't go out!"

This is how animal-energy becomes monstrous  
and ruins your life's freshness and beauty.

Think of taking this dog  
out to hunt! You'd be the quarry.

(V, 2922-2928,2940-2943,2956-2962)

## Opening

Someone asked a preacher once,  
“If a bird lands on the city wall,  
which is more admirable, its head  
or its tail?”

He answered according to  
what the man was ready to hear.

“If it’s facing in,  
toward the community, the head, but if it’s turned  
toward the desert, even the bits of dust  
on its tail are better. Intention is everything.”

A lover may look murky with good and evil actions,  
but consider only his aspirations. A falcon  
may appear elegantly fierce, but watch  
when it sees a mouse. There are owls  
who desire more the forearm of the king.  
Don’t judge by any outward, hooded form.

Some human beings no bigger than a water trough  
scooped out of a log are greater glories  
than the universe full of stars.

*We have honored you,* says the *Qur’an*.  
A grieving human being heard that from God!

The beauty and elegance and clarity and love  
that we have deserve to be offered into  
regions higher than this visible one.

Are you friendly with pictures  
on the bath-house wall? No.  
You walk out of there and talk  
to a half-blind old woman.

What’s in her that’s not in the pictures?  
I’ll tell you. Discernment and soul.

In a *living* old blind woman  
there’s a mixing of body and spirit.

What is the soul? A joy  
when kindness comes, a weeping  
at injury, a growing consciousness.

The more awareness one has  
the closer to God he or she is.

There are definite levels of soul.  
The first is phenomenal, a play put on  
in the courtyard, mingling human and divine.

What happens in the inner essence  
of soul is the theatre of God!

Angels were considered entirely ethereal,  
until Adam. Then the angels seemed  
denser than that human being.

They bowed to it, all but Satan.  
He was like a broken hand that doesn't respond  
to the body's spirit. The spirit itself  
is not broken, just the dead limb,  
and it can be brought to life again.

There are more mysteries to be told,  
but who will hear?

Certain parrots eat a profound candy.  
Others close their eyes and turn away.

Soul-reality is not just metrical feet  
and clever rhyming. Someone who looks  
like a dervish may not be one.

There is a Seal on the mouth that unseals,  
locks long unopened that loosen  
with *We have opened you*.

"Show the way" in this world becomes  
"Show them the moon" in the other.

Both gates are opening now.  
The Seal is the opener of seals,  
as when you say of a master of some craft,  
"They broke the mould with you."

It's revelation within revelation within  
revelation, a generous giving of soul-growth.

In Baghdad, or Herat, or Rayy, it doesn't matter,  
the rosebranch blossoms the same rose many times.

The wine jars bubble the same wine all over town.  
Light in the west or from the east,  
it's the same sun.

(VI, 129-179)

## *Die Before You Die*

Love's sun is the face of the Friend.  
This other sunlight is covering that.

The day and the daily bread that comes  
are not to be worshipped for themselves.

Praise the great heart within those,  
and the loving ache in yourself  
that's part of that.

Be one of God's fish  
who receives what it needs  
directly from the ocean around it—  
food, shelter, sleep, medicine.

The lover is like a baby at its mother's breast,  
knowing nothing of the visible or invisible  
worlds. Everything is milk,  
though it couldn't define it intellectually.  
It can't talk!

This is the riddle  
that drives the spirit crazy:  
that the opener and that which is opened  
are the same!

That it's the ocean *inside* the fish  
bearing it along, not the riverwater.

The time-river spreads and disappears  
into the ocean with the fish.

A seed breaks open and dissolves  
in the ground. Only then  
does a new fig tree come into being.

That's the meaning  
of *Die before you die*.

(VI, 4044-4053)



## *Ayaz' Work Clothes*

Ayaz, the slave of God, said this to King Mahmud about the power of Bestami's surrender:

“One drop of that could absorb an ocean, as whole forests disappear in one spark, as some false ego-fantasy in a king destroys his entire army,  
as Muhammed's star rose and Zoroasterianism sank away.

But these images are makeshift and temporary. No *thing* can describe Bestami's particle of the divine. If I call it 'the sun,' I have purposes that must stay hidden from you, Mahmud, with your love of worldly kingdoms.

The foam blowing on the sand no longer understands the pull of the ocean.”

“Tell then,” said King Mahmud, “about your workshoes and the old sheepskin jacket that you show such reverence for.

Your faith and your slavery have blended into such a profound and mysterious beauty that you make us free people want to be slaves!”

Ayaz explained about the shoes: “Muhammed said, *Whoever knows himself, knows God.*

When I bow to those shoes and that jacket, I see what the world has given me, this body of worn and useful clothes.

Anything else I am is a gift from God. Those work clothes help me remember the nakedness that wears the body.”

(V, 3393-3402,3351-3355,2113-2115)

## *Whatever You See You Become*

Shiites in Aleppo  
gather at the city gate  
on a certain day to remember  
the Prophet's grandson, Husayn, and those  
who died at the battle of Karbala.  
The desert fills with mourning sounds.

A stranger, a poet, comes along.  
He knows nothing of this custom.

"Someone very important  
must have died!"

"Are you mad?"  
screams one of the crowd. "This is the day  
when we mourn for a single soul greater  
than whole generations!"

The poet replied, "So one of the royal human beings  
has escaped from prison! Why mourn? Husayn  
and his family have gone to Muhammed.

If you truly know that, why aren't you ecstatic?  
If you've seen the river nearby,  
don't be stingy with your water."

An ant drags its one grain fearfully, blind  
to the vastness of the threshing floor it walks on.  
The owner of the harvest looks down at the trembling ant.

"Hey, how about this grain over here, or this?  
Why are you so devoted to that particular one?"

This is how we are before we realize  
that we are not this body.

Look at Saturn, lame ant. Look at  
Solomon! You become what you behold.

A human being is essentially a spiritual eye.  
The skin and bones fall away.  
Whatever you really see, you are that.

(VI, 777-812)

## *Dervishes*

You've heard descriptions  
of the ocean of non-existence.

Try, continually, to give yourself  
into that ocean. Every workshop  
has its foundations set  
on that emptiness.

The Master of all masters  
works with nothing.

The more nothing comes into your work,  
the more God is there.

Dervishes gamble everything. They lose,  
and win the Other, the emptiness  
which animates this.

We've talked so much! Remember  
what we haven't said.

And keep working. Exert yourself  
toward the pull of God.

Laziness and disdain are not devotions.  
Your efforts will bring a result.

You'll watch the wings of divine attraction  
lift from the nest and come toward you!

As dawn lightens, blow out the candle.  
Dawn is in your eyes now.

(VI, 1466-1482)

## *Breadmaking*

There was a feast. The king  
was heartily in his cups.

He saw a learned scholar walking by.  
“Bring him in, and give him  
some of this fine wine.”

Servants rushed out and brought the man  
to the king’s table, but he was not  
receptive. “I had rather drink poison!  
I have never tasted wine and never will!  
Take it away from me!”

He kept on with these loud refusals,  
disturbing the atmosphere of the feast.

This is how it sometimes is  
at God’s table.

Someone who has *heard* about ecstatic love,  
but never tasted it, disrupts the banquet.

If there were a secret passage  
from his ear to his throat, everything  
in him would change. Initiation would occur.

As it is, he’s all fire and no light,  
all husk and no kernel.

The king gave orders. “Cupbearer,  
do what you must!”

This is how your invisible guide acts,  
the chess champion across from you  
that always wins. He cuffed  
the scholar’s head and said,  
“Taste!”

And, “Again!”

The cup was drained,  
and the intellectual started singing  
and telling ridiculous jokes.

He joined the garden, snapping his fingers  
and swaying. Soon, of course,  
he had to pee.

He went out, and there, near the latrine,  
was a beautiful woman, one of the king's harem.

His mouth hung open. He wanted her!  
Right then, he wanted her!  
And she was not unwilling.

They fell to, on the ground.  
You've seen a baker rolling dough.  
He kneads it gently at first,  
then more roughly.

He pounds it on the board.  
It softly groans under his palms.  
Now he spreads it out  
and rolls it flat.

Then he bunches it,  
and rolls it all the way out again,  
thin. Now he adds water,  
and mixes it well.

Now salt,  
and a little more salt.

Now he shapes it delicately  
to its final shape,  
then slides it into the oven,  
which is already hot.

You remember breadmaking!  
This is how your desire  
tangles with a desired one.

And it's not just a metaphor  
for a man and a woman making love.

Warriors in battle do like this too.  
A great mutual embrace is always happening  
between the eternal and what dies,

between essence and accident.

The sport has different rules  
in every case, but it's basically  
the same, and remember:

the way you make love is the way  
God will be with you.

So these two were lost in their sexual trance.  
They did not care anymore about feasting  
or wine. Their eyes were closed like  
perfectly matching calligraphy lines.

The king went looking for the scholar,  
and when he saw them there coupled, commented,

“Well, as it is said, ‘A good king  
must serve his subjects from his own table!’”

There is joy, a wine-like freedom  
that dissolves the mind and restores  
the spirit, and there's a manly fortitude  
like the king's, a reasonableness  
that accepts the bewildered lostness.

But meditate now on steadfastness  
and clarity, and let those be the wings  
that lift and soar through the celestial spheres.

(VI, 3914-3979)

“Snow and the Voice”(p. 16) – Rumi often mentions the reality of a helpful in-knowing. Sometimes he calls it “the voice,” sometimes a kind of “magnetism,” a being-drawn together that friends feel. The *abdals*, (“Work in the Invisible”) are another level of helpers. Rumi is always clear about the collaborative nature of any action. Many beings, visible and invisible, are involved in what we do, an entire community.

“This We Have Now”(p. 22) – All of Jelaluddin Rumi’s poetry comes from work within a community. In this particular segment the group has stayed up in an all-night vigil, so that the dawn itself becomes an image of the state of awareness they have reached, which is called splendor, and friendship, and “the truth that Hallaj spoke.” Al-Hallaj Mansour is the sufi mystic martyred in Baghdad in 922 for saying *An al-Haqq*, or “I am the truth,” or “I am God.” The ineffable inner majesty celebrated here (“What else could human beings want?”) is *prior* to the existence of the universe and, Rumi asserts in many places, the *seed* that it grew from.

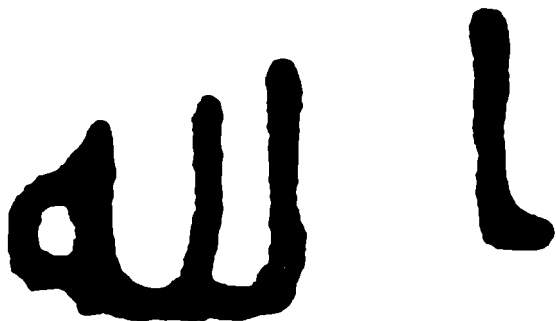
“Dhu’l-Nun’s Instructive Madness,”(p. 104) – Dhu’l-Nun (796-859) was an Egyptian sufi, a Nubian freedman, with a great knowledge of alchemy. He is thought to be a link to the spiritual sciences of ancient Egypt. A few books attributed to him, on magic and alchemy, survive, some poems and prayers, but very little has been translated into English. He teaches the *marifat*, knowledge of the attributes of Unity. “Those who know these things,” he says, “are not themselves, but insofar as they exist at all, they exist in God.” He considers the self the chief obstacle to spiritual growth, and he welcomes suffering as a means of self-discipline. “Sincerity in the search,” he says, “is God’s sword,” and solitude also helps, for “he who is alone sees nothing but God, and if he sees only God, only God’s will moves him.” He associates this knowing with ecstasy, with the bewilderment of discovery, and with *hubb*, the word he uses for a love of God, which includes, he says, love for humanity. Once he

was asked, “What is the end of a knower?”

“When he is as he was where he was before he was.”

Attar tells another story of Dhu'l-Nun. “At nightfall, he entered a ruined building where he found a jar of gold coins and jewels covered with a board on which was inscribed the name of God. His friends divided the gold and gems, but Dhu'l-Nun said, “Give me the board. My Beloved's name is on it.” All the next day he kissed the wooden board. That night he heard a voice in his dream saying, “Dhu'l-Nun! The others were satisfied with wealth, but you wanted only my name. Therefore, I have opened the gates of wisdom for you.”

In Arabic script<sup>1</sup> the supreme name of God, Allah, looks like this:



“Ayaz’ Work Clothes”(p. 120) – Ayaz, in folk tradition, was the favorite servant of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna (971-1030). In Rumi’s *Mathnawi* he appears as an example of a True Human Being: a master of surrender and a joyful slave of God. (See also the story of his crushing the king’s pearl in *Delicious Laughter*.)

<sup>1</sup> This is early cursive script from a letter sent by the Prophet Muhammed to the ruler of al-Hasa in the seventh century. It is reproduced in Y. H. Safadi’s *Islamic Calligraphy* (Boston: Shambhala, 1979).



## Afterword

One theme of this collection taken from Rumi's *Mathnawi*<sup>1</sup> is the nature of work, how it's a companionship rather than a competition.

I had a teacher (Bawa Muhaiyaddeen), who was definitely a one-handed basketmaker. Everything was free in Bawa's room, and he was always in deep partnership with emptiness. He sat on his bed and responded to questions. He cooked for whoever came, directing the operation from bed. He taught me how to chop onions, how to clean out a coconut and when to add those precious shreadings to the greens. He sang pure praise songs, spontaneously. He's not widely known. I'll repeat here a story he used to tell to give you the flavor.

### *The Art Contest*<sup>2</sup>

Once there was a King, who was interested in music and dancing and drama and higher education.

He told his minister, "I want to hear good music and see dancing and dramatic performances.

How can we arrange this?"

"May it please your Majesty, *all* the people in this country are accomplished musicians and actors and dancers, so that if we invite one group, we will offend another group. We must let it be known that there will be a competition six months from now and that the winners will get a prize from the King."

So a great stage was built in an open area of a thousand acres. The contest was announced, and everyone, down to the age of six months, started training themselves in music and acting.

The entire population stopped doing any other work! There was hardly any food. Everyone got sickly and tired.

<sup>1</sup> R. A. Nicholson, *The Mathnawi of Jalaluddin Rumi*, 8 vols. (London: Luzac & Co., 1925-40). Critical edition, translation, and commentary.

<sup>2</sup> Bawa Muhaiyaddeen, *Divine Luminous Wisdom* (Philadelphia: Fellowship Press, 1977), pp. 77-80.

Everyone's face lost its beautiful radiance,  
yet they kept on practicing for the prizes.

The day came.

The huge space was filled with artists.

There was a pavillion for the King and below it  
a smaller stage which would hold  
about twenty-five people, and all around that  
was the entire population of the country.

Children three years old, people on the verge  
of death, everyone was there.

The King asked the minister to blow the conch shell  
and tell the audience to stand to one side  
and the competitors on the other.

It was done, and there was no audience.

Everyone was a competitor!

The King turned to the teacher  
seated beside him, "What shall I do?"

"Let them all dance and sing and act at once,  
and then decide who's the best."

So they did, and the noise was horrendous.

You couldn't distinguish one voice from another.

It was like thousands of donkeys braying  
and foxes howling.

"Now I see!" said the King.

"What?" asked the teacher.

"*This* is the essence  
of what acting and music and dancing have become.  
How can I possibly judge it!"

"Tell the artist-competitors to judge themselves.  
Tell them to select the best actors and musicians  
and dancers and send them to the front."

And he did, and fighting broke out, and it did not end.

The stage became a battlefield.

Eventually, no one was left alive.

The teacher said, "The corpses of these  
who lost their wisdom  
are the only appropriate trophies.

The vultures are the winners!"

In that same way God made the world,  
and everyone came with a billion different costumes  
and hypnotic illusion-projections, and the event  
got so chaotic and degraded and violent  
with all the competing religions and the complicated  
philosophical systems and the art-status titles,  
and with everyone aggressively pushing to be impressive,  
and with no one there like the King  
as just an eager audience,  
so the prize couldn't be given.  
He kept it *in Himself*.

The Kingdom of God is what there is to win,  
and that's *within*. It's very rare  
that someone comes and just watches with the King  
and so receives the prize within  
the King.

There's the disaster of everyone working in competition. If I hadn't visited Bawa's room in Philadelphia several times a year for nine years, I don't think I would have much sense of who Rumi is. He encouraged me with the translation work. "It has to be done." In fact, in the synchronicity of such things, it was some early rephrasings of Rumi that brought me to Bawa in the first place, or almost the first place. I sent some tentative attempts to a friend (Milner Ball) who was teaching at Rutgers University, Camden branch. He read them, inexplicably, to his law class. A student<sup>3</sup> came up afterward, asked about the poems and started writing to me, long letters, about a Sri Lankan master who was living at the time in Philadelphia. Finally, on the way to poetry readings up East, I stopped in. The cooperation is complex, and it continues.

I love it when the presence of the scribe, Husam Chelebi, appears in the *Mathmawi*. Book IV opens with, "Husam,

<sup>3</sup> Anyone who wants information on the Bawa Fellowship, the publications or the meetings, should contact this man, now a very focused Philadelphia lawyer, Jonathan Granoff, also known as Ahamed Muhaiyaddeen. He will be happy to help. (124 Colwyn Lane, Bala Cynwyd, PA 19004; 215-664-996, FAX 215-664-2712.)

I feel your pull again, drawing this *Mathnawi* God knows where." Rumi referred to the entire *Mathnawi* as "The Book of Husam." The poetry is a collaboration. He needs Husam close by to allow the stories and commentary to flow. For twelve years they collected into six volumes.

Throughout, there are many passages about *working* with language:

"God has said,  
*The images that come with human language  
do not correspond to me,  
but those who love words  
must use them to come near.*"

In a groggy fumbling of images and sounds, language simultaneously hides and reveals the blazing inner presence. One metaphor that Rumi explores in this regard is that of words as a watery medium, something to heat up and bathe in. Stories and poems *carry messages* from the fire to your skin. We need that intermediary, he says, to keep from being burnt, and to stay clean. Word-work is warmed water, contact with the presence felt as a flowing-ness that cleans. "Enjoy this being washed with a secret we sometimes know, and then not."

Several bird poems here also involve work, the teaming up of king and falcon being a *working* twosome. Separated from the king, the falcon can't do the work he's been trained for. "With" is the key word. Rumi praises what's done in tandem. When the falcon is not *with* the king, he gets trapped and degraded. Then, something as close and practical as one's own right hand comes to assist, and a powerful new flow begins.

"You look down,  
and it's lucid dreaming.  
. . . You see in."

Rumi has also called the helping presence *Silence*, and the *Witness*, and *Grace*. Companionship work may be as simple as letting water move more freely in a clogged creek. One of its basic properties seems to be helplessness. A one-handed

man collects withes and begins, somehow, to weave. A chick inside an egg pierces the shell and stands precariously in the open. That pecking out is poetry, the experience of where two worlds not only touch, but braid and begin something new.

Authentic work is always a friendship. Studs Terkel interviewed Nick Lindsay, a carpenter-poet, who speaks very beautifully of driving nails:

“Every once in a while there’s stuff that comes in on you. All of a sudden something falls into place. Suppose you’re driving an eight-penny galvanized nail into this siding. Your whole universe is rolled onto the head of that nail. Each lick is sufficient to justify your life. You say, ‘Okay, I’m not trying to get this nail out of the way so I can get onto something more important. There’s nothing more important. It’s right there.’ And it goes – pow! It’s not getting that nail in that’s in your mind. It’s hitting it – hitting it square, hitting it straight. Getting it now. That one lick.

If you see a carpenter that’s alive to his work, you’ll notice that about the way he hits a nail. Although he may be working fast, each lick is like a separate person that he’s hitting with his hammer. It’s as though there’s a separate friend of his that one moment. And when he gets out of it, here comes another one. Unique, all by itself.”

(*Working*, p. 672)

This carpenter and Rumi would agree that work is a wholehearted attention to the moment and that being so completely present is love.

Coleman Barks

May 2, 1991