



HarperCollins e-books



Rumi:  
The Book of Love

**Coleman Barks**



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Rumi  
the **Book**  
of **Love**

Poems of Ecstasy and Longing



HarperCollins e-books

for Judith Orloff

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## Preface



I have sold too many books. Rumi translations have no business cresting in a wave of over half a million. It's like selling picnic tickets to an unmarked minefield. You wouldn't expect there to be a rush, but somehow there is. I may have left out something big and basic, like lowercase *islam* (submission). This love poetry is meant to obliterate you lovers. Rumi wants us to *surrender*. I bow to the grandeur of his full prostration. I never want to diminish that. This is not Norman Vincent Peale urging cheerfulness, conventional morality, and soft-focus, white-light feel-good, nor is this New Age tantric energy exchange. This is giving your life to the one within that you know as *Lord*, which is a totally private matter. No one except you can judge how that is going. But if you're not doing it, Rumi says, you are wasting your time here. Where's the solace of that statement? I once told a greeting card company that wanted to put Rumi verses on a card, "Rumi's poetry wants to dissolve the lovers. Annihilation is the point." There was a long silence on the other end. "Is there a holiday?"

Maybe we're ripe for Rumi's knowing, his way of love. I hope so. I take great delight in meeting bright twelve-year-olds who love certain Rumi poems, such as "The Guest House." They know the media and their community have lied to them about love, with all the fake love stories. They hear Rumi trying to tell them some truth about love, and they appreciate it. Maybe it's time to hear about going-in, about the joy of the witness in love, in meditation, in

dreams, time to meet the one who looks into the creek.

Maybe we long now for the silence he loves. Say we're tiny blind cavefish swimming a gorgeous dark. We love the mountain the cave is inside, and somehow we love the sun, even though we haven't seen it and maybe never will. *That's* the love these poems sing, so how come they're wildly popular? I don't know.

In Marina del Rey, a posh southern California beach community, there's a side of a building painted shades of blue, on the left where Washington meets the beach. It has a Rumi quote high up in the right-hand corner. The ground floors of the beachside condos are garages stacked with Corvettes and Lexi and Jaguars, mostly shiny black, Bentleys, old BMW convertibles, fancy Lincoln off-road vehicles, and custom cars with no brand name. Upstairs among the Chinese objets and the Edwardian sideboards and the Motherwells, more often than not you will find on the thick glass, stylishly low, bedside table a well-read copy of *The Essential Rumi*.

A creative writing teacher on the prime-time show *Judging Amy* holds up two books, *The Great Gatsby* and *The Essential Rumi*, "Read these and learn how to write." Alec Baldwin has the book briefly in his hand in a movie whose title I can't recall. That book has achieved the cultural status of an empty Diet Coke can! It's everywhere. It's recommended summer reading in a two-page newsletter put out by a women's clothing store, Kathleen Sommers of San Antonio.

Philip Glass goes on world tour with *Monsters of Grace*, a choral piece using Rumi's words. Donna Karan reads Rumi on the fashion runway showing her new line. Madonna and Demi Moore read his poems on a Deepak CD. What to make of Rumi-mania? *This too shall pass*? Of course it will. For the first twenty years of the last century, I have heard, the most read book of poetry was Fitzgerald's *Rubaiyat of*

*Omar Khayyam*, far and away. No one reads that much now but graduate students.

I remember standing in the Intimate Bookstore in Chapel Hill in the late 1950s reading Walter Bennett's *This Is My Beloved*, a gift book of love poetry that every now and then mentions pubic hair, as I recall. There were other lightweights in the same area. I thought of them as books people bought and gave each other but never actually read. The packaging implied something sweet and romantic inside. There were Japanese haiku collections and very skinny pastel Emily Dickinsons on that shelf too, which is a violation of the Truth in Labeling Act. She and Basho are not easy company. Rod McKuen was nearby. The poetry community, with good reason, sees popularity as suspect. Billy Collins is having to fight that, a little. Maya Angelou has signed on with Hallmark.

But *Idylls of the King* my foot, I am more serious about living, and was even in the 1950s. I never bought books from the candy shelf. I gave my sexy Russian-Jewish college sweetheart a big collection of e. e. cummings. In the *slipshod mucus etcetera*, we were undergraduates who started a magazine whose first issue got banned by the Honor Council, and I had published a very strange Wolfean short story in the *Carolina Quarterly*. In my button-down I was deep into Colin Wilson and the mystics mentioned in *The Outsider*. Hesse, Boehme, Eckhart. I had Evelyn Underhill's *Mysticism* by my garret bed, and I told people I wanted to teach a course in mysticism. There were no mysticism courses at any college I ever went to, Berkeley and North Carolina.

Let's say there are two shelves, one with the true mystics and at the front of the store, the fad love-books. I want this on the former, please. Jelaluddin Rumi and Shamsi Tabriz are real. They gave the human condition one of the best shots it's been given. Rumi's poetry records that

Friendship, and that accounts for its wide appeal. Forget the movie stars. I met a guy behind the counter at West Building Supply in Athens, Georgia, who asked deep questions about the *Delicious Laughter* collection. "What's this with Eyes Shut Facing Eyes Wide Open?" Sit down with him. It may be this book will make it to the front of the store for Valentine's, but it's too rebellious to be there. It will not really behave itself anywhere in the store, not on the Islamic shelf, not in the poetry section, although maybe with the cookbooks. It likes cookbooks.

Alice Munro has a collection of stories called *Hateship, Friendship, Courtship, Loveship, Marriage*. I've not read it, but I might. I like to watch the changing moods and nuances of falling in and out of love, and so does Rumi. He's not some mystic snob. He sees the beauty and importance of anything human beings do, no matter how scandalous or violent. The slipping and sliding around sex, the posturing of combatants prior to combat. But he always uses human incident as a lens to look into soul growth. The idea of *commitment*, that staple of psychology, doesn't come up, nor any *fear of intimacy* scolding, no *shoulds* and *oughts*.

It doesn't matter that you've broken your vow  
a thousand times. Still come,  
and yet again, come.

Rumi was an enlightened lover, a true human being, realized, whatever you want to call those who get to be deeply themselves. I had a dream once where I felt the grace of a continuing connection with my teacher, Bawa Muhaiyaddeen, who told me to do this Rumi work. Bawa was also a true human being. The transmission from him in me was, in the dream, visible in my eyes and also apparent in the currency, the popularity, of Rumi's poetry. My advice with this book, then, is to try, as he says, to listen for the



*presences inside poems*. Connect there with an open heart, and follow the oceanfrog if he starts for home.<sup>1</sup>

I have been lucky (I guess) not to have to write for a living. I taught school, and now the retirement and the social security are enough. That's not to say I don't cash the Rumi royalty checks and go on NPR to talk about poetry. I do. But the fame and fortune numbers don't motivate me. I wait for the next poem. That keeps me going, what Robert Bly calls the honey of words. The taste and the taste again. Though that sounds a little too pure. I want recognition and reward as much as anyone.

And to be absolutely clear, neither this book nor its title was my idea. My editors at Harper San Francisco, and my agent, suggested the project. But as I've gotten into putting it together, I have made the book mine, perhaps to their chagrin. I'm not positive, but I'll bet they expected more of a lean toward flowers than toward annihilation. There are flowers here certainly. The sweetness in much of Rumi is undeniable. Anyway, your editorial instincts were right, and I'm very grateful, Steve, Kris, John, Eric, Kathi, Reid.

I once calculated that Rumi books sell at least a hundred a day right through weekends and holidays, while my own writing goes at about twelve copies a month, worldwide. Those numbers keep me humble. I am just about the humblest person one could ever meet. And I do look at the dotcom numbers. Maybe it's true to say that this writing is for fortune and fame *as well as* the pouring forth of vision and revision. Oh, what is so tiresome and fatuous as a mystic poet talking sales and mixed motivation? I do not know. Where is Jim Dickey when we need him. But listen. I have thought of a wisdom.

THIS IS THE MATERIAL PLANE  
AND EVERY OUTWARD THING WE DO IS INNER WORK

Sew that on a sampler and hang it in the kitchen. Or,

THIS IS THE MATERIAL PLANE  
AND IT COULD USE A GOOD SANDING

Poetry and music are two great mysteries of human consciousness. Rumi lets them pour through as a beauty we are, and a kind of a home too.

COLEMAN BARKS  
*Athens, GA*  
*July 18, 2002*



## Introduction:

# *The Magnificent Regions of the Heart*



In certain places and times the current of mystical awareness runs deep and strong, more so than in others. Among the Greeks in the sixth century B.C. and also in India and China during that century. Jesus and the desert fathers. The Hassidic masters in Poland and Russia in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the Zen masters in Japan during the same period were also part of an inexplicable flooding.

In the Persian empire from the eleventh to the fourteenth century a brilliant flowering of awareness came among the Sufis, and especially the poets. Jelaluddin Rumi (1207–1273) was one of those conductors of knowing and being. Sufis call Rumi the *Qutb*, the pole, of love. Gilani (d. 1166) was the pole of power and Ibn Arabi (1165–1249), of knowledge. Through Rumi comes a transmission of the divine to this planet in the regions of love. His poetry is a record of his enduring the experience of living at the core. In each human being there is a meeting with the divine. That intersection is the heart.

Sometimes we sense that love is our expertise, despite the obviously murderous bent of these days and hours. Still, we do love in many different ways. Let me count them. There are as many ways of loving as there are people, and that wildflower variety is the great beauty of

this dimension of existence. I had a dream once where I saw a blue tinge to everything, and I knew, I felt, how the blueness was love. We couldn't see it with ordinary vision, but for dream-seeing it was there, drenching the planet, which does appear blue, as we know, from space.

At poetry readings I have said about Rumi's poetry, "Folks, this is not country music." It gets a laugh. Rumi says, Fall in love in such a way that it frees you from any connecting. That's very different from the lonely wail of: She left me, he left me; she came back; she left again. Some of his lines have been put in songs. There is a grief of separation in them, but the words come from a different region than popular lyrics. I'm not saying there's not wisdom in country songs. There is plenty. The love that Rumi and Shams move into, though, includes those dimensions and moves through them to what Sufis call the *qalb*. I have no synonym for that, and perhaps not much experience of it, though I met one who lives there, Bawa Muhaiyaddeen. I am no great sheikhs of a lover myself. I get mean and jealous, distracted and forgetful. It's Rumi's and Bawa's station I try to speak of, not mine. At the end of his life Ouspensky told J. G. Bennett in a letter that nothing could be found by intellectual processes, and that "there is only one hope: that we should find a way to work with the higher emotional centre." That is the work that Rumi's poetry is about.

Sufis say the heart is "the comprehensive human reality,"<sup>2</sup> and that the way of love is a path of annihilation, of the beatitude of "as though it had never been." Our original state is nonbeing, nonexistence, and we spend much of our lives trying to break free of matter, free of mind and desire, back into the deep region of being and nonbeing we are at the core. The refreshment of dreamless sleep when we are,

but are not conscious, is a taste of it. We are here, then, but with no awareness of being here.

The absolute ipseity, suchness, the human reality and not the melodrama, that region of being, is described in the Heart Sutra, the central text of Zen, as having "no eyes, no ears, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind, and no consciousness."<sup>3</sup> To get there you must die before you die. Buddha's Heart Sutra draws one along to the understanding that in that dissolving nothing exists by itself. Everything interpenetrates in the ecstatic core where heart-vision begins.

A bowl falls from the roof. This is not theoretical. It is the practical and experiential love that annihilates, and the most ineffable of experiences, if there can be degrees of unsayableness. All of Rumi's poems may be heard as love poems. They attend the soul's flowering from grief, and from every emotion that streams through the guest house of consciousness.

The love way is not religious. It is rather the origin and the longing inside religiousness. Footprints disappear at the ocean's edge. When we bow to each other, feet become head in a circle. No one could tell with Rumi and Shams who was teacher and who the student. Lover, beloved, and love became one thing with them. Images of transparency and particles, light upon light, the candle at noon, occur, images of breath merging with sky. We are sleeping and wake inside another sleep; we wake again, and on . . . as veils, the mist of language, the apparent limits, burn off. Each region of love leads to the unfolding. There may seem to be a kind of progress to this book, from spontaneous wandering to the lord of the heart, but it might just as easily be reversed, or put in any number of sequences. The heart with its many regions moves more

like interpenetrating spheres, concurrent universes, than a linear path. Areas of energy in the poetry merge with one another as layers of ocean, or as the mysterious workings of soil in a field, or the draining slant of a mountainside.

Rumi's impulse feels earthward in its transformation, going down instead of up in the way one might aspire to the angelic. There is no down or up in love, but if one had to say whether Rumi's poetry goes more with the pure transcendents or more with the grief-gardeners, one would say he's a ground-hugger and not so much a high-flyer, more *jamal* (feminine, receptive) than *jalal* (masculine, commanding). But as Rumi himself says hundreds of times, there is little one can *say* about love. It has to be lived, and it's always in motion.

When Rainer Maria Rilke, the great mystical poet of the twentieth century, saw the Mevlevi dervishes in Cairo in 1910, he said, "With Rumi the scale is shifted, for this is the mystery of the deeply kneeling man. In following the peculiar weight and strength in his knees, he belongs to that world in which height is depth. This is the night of radiant depth unfolded." He was referring to the night of December 17, when Rumi died in 1273. It is celebrated as his union with the divine.

## A Brief Account of Rumi's Life



Rumi was born in Balkh, a small town west of Mazar-i-Sharif in Afghanistan on September 30, 1207. Fleeing the approach of Genghis Khan's Mongol armies, the family moved several times, to Waksh in what is now Tajikistan, to Samarkand, to Damascus, finally settling in Konya on the high plain of central Anatolia. Rumi's father, Bahauddin, was a highly original mystic who kept his intimations of, and promptings from, the divine in diary form. The *Ma'arif* was one of Rumi's most treasured texts after Bahauddin's death. He studied it with his father's former student, Burhanuddin Mahaqqiq. They also read Sanai and Attar together, and Burhan led the young Rumi on several consecutive *chillas*, forty-day fasting retreats. Burhan was himself an eccentric hermit majestically unconcerned with beliefs and lineages. He seems to have prepared Jelaluddin well for the galvanizing event of the young mystic's life, his meeting with Shamsi Tabriz.

In late October of 1244 Rumi was thirty-seven. Shams was twenty, maybe thirty, years older. Their meeting and subsequent *sobbet* (mystical conversation) generated fresh stories and ecstatic icons for the world of mystical awareness and love. Their Friendship is one of the great mysteries. Rumi's poetry is heard as continuing resonance from That. Their separation on the physical plane occurred four years later on December 5, 1248. There is disagreement

now as to how Shams disappeared. Franklin Lewis claims that the rumor Shams was murdered by jealous disciples of Rumi "arrives late, circulates in oral context, and is almost certainly groundless."<sup>4</sup> What we know for sure is what we have, the poems so filled with grief and ecstatic sentience. All the biographical scenarios, whichever one chooses, are without sufficient evidence to be authoritative. No matter. We can let that detective story rest awhile. We have the *Shams*, the *Masnavi*, the letters, Discourses, sermons, the *Rubaiyat*, a generous plenty!

After Shams's death or disappearance, Rumi lived twenty-six years tending soul growth in the dervish community around him and leaving us a prodigious legacy. He spoke the poetry spontaneously. It was taken down by scribes, and he revised it later in manuscript. Rumi was married twice; his first wife, Gowhar Khatun, died young. She bore two children, Sultan Velad and Allaedin. Rumi had two children also with his second wife, Kira Khatun: Mozaffer, a son, and Maleke, a daughter.

The central enigma of Rumi's life, of course, is Shams Tabriz, the electrifying, eccentric wanderer with the charisma of a desert wind, who knelt and prayed for a companion on his own level of attainment. A voice came, *What will you give?* "My head." *Jelaluddin of Konya is your Friend*. He said later that he came to Rumi when Rumi was ready to receive his secret. But it was observed of Rumi and Shams that one could not tell who was the teacher and who the disciple.

Thoreau went to the woods to simplify and find what was most deeply his. "I did not want to live what was not life. Living is so dear." Some sentences sear the soul free of communal and personal habits, the situation we're born within. When Shams pushes Rumi's books into the fountain



at their first meeting, including his father Bahauddin's soul notes, he says, "Now you must live what you've been reading and talking about."

Rumi relinquishes his books, and he and Shams go into retreat. Rumi asks for burning. Shams says, I am fire. It is that which refines the poems to their daring intensity and courage, to their setting out into unknown regions, these heart-quadrants that are so subtle and multivalent.

Why should I seek more?

I am the same as he.

His essence speaks through me.

I have been looking for myself.

After this soul-merging with Shams, Rumi found another living friend with whom to do the heart-opening work, Saladin Zarkub the goldsmith. Saladin was an old man (the poems become more quiet and tender), and after Saladin's death, Husam Chelebi, Rumi's scribe, became the friend of his heart. They produced the six books of the *Masnavi*. Rumi died as the sky turned deep red at sunset on December 17, 1273. There were minor tremors, like stomach grumblings. "Patience, old earth!" Rumi called out. "You'll have your sweet morsel soon!"



# 1. Spontaneous Wandering



I take down my King James to look up the passage about love (charity) in 1 Corinthians 13. There is a tiny red ant living in Corinth. It walks to the top and along the gold edges. Spontaneous wandering is a favorite region of the heart. It may look like mindless drift, but it isn't. More the good Don and Sancho out for their inspired adventures, quixotic and panzaic.<sup>5</sup> The ant is my teacher.

We see through a glass darkly, then face-to-face. A more polished mirror shows us who we truly are. The wandering of Rumi's poetry is a model for the soul's lovely motions. When thirst begins to look for water, water has already started out with a canteen, looking for thirst. Love feels like sliding along the eddies and currents of the tao.

Pir Vilayat Khan<sup>6</sup> recently commented to me, "Your first Rumi volumes seemed very sexual." He's right. There is too much of that energy in the first work with Rumi I did, especially in some of the quatrains. I was very wet with such water at the time myself. I was thirty-nine. Now I'm sixty-five. Things change; nothing wrong with that. What's truly alive is always changing.

Gay lovers hear Rumi's poetry as gay. I don't agree, though I'm certainly guilty of previously loading Rumi's poetry with erotic fruit. I don't do that now. Rumi is way happier than sex and orgasms, his wandering more conscious and free. See "Imra'u 'l-Qays" in the next section. Rumi and Shams wander in that country.

Perhaps the purest wanderer of our time is Nanao, like Basho in his. Gary Snyder says about him,

This subtropical East China Sea carpenter and spear fisherman finds himself equally at home in the desert. So much so that on one occasion when an eminent traditional Buddhist priest boasted of his lineage, Nanao responded, "I need no lineage. I am desert rat." But for all his independence Nanao Sakaki carries the karma of Chungtzu, En-no-gyoja, Saigyō, Ikkyū, Basho, and Issa in his bindle. His work or play in the world is to pull out nails, free seized nuts, break loose the rusted, open up the shutters. You can put these poems in your shoes and walk a thousand miles.

### GO WITH MUDDY FEET

When you hear dirty story  
wash your ears.

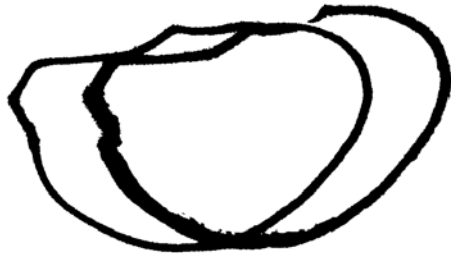
When you see ugly stuff  
wash your eyes.

When you get bad thoughts  
wash your mind.

and

Keep your feet muddy.<sup>7</sup>

—Nanao Sakaki





Excuse my wandering.

How can one be orderly with this?  
It's like counting leaves in a garden,

along with the song notes of partridges,  
and crows. Sometimes organization  
and computation become absurd.



### FIVE THINGS

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,<sup>8</sup>  
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 the lover 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*<sup>9</sup> of slavery and mastery  
dancing together. This is not-being.

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

## 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.<sup>10</sup>

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 on 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.

## COOKED HEADS

I have been given a glass  
that has the fountain of the sun inside,

a Friend in both worlds, like the fragrance  
of amber inside the fragrance of musk.

My soul-parrot gets excited with sweetness.  
Wingbeats, a door opening in the sun.

You've seen the market where they sell  
cooked heads: that's what this is,

a way of seeing beyond inner and outer.<sup>11</sup>  
A donkey wanders the sign of Taurus.

Heroes do not stay lined up in ranks  
for very long. I set out for Tabriz,

even though my boat is anchored here.

## WHERE YOU LOVE FROM

Look inside and find where a person  
loves from. That's the reality,  
not what they say.

Hypocrites



give attention to form, the right  
and wrong ways of professing belief.  
Grow instead in universal light.

When that revealed itself, God gave it  
a thousand different names, the least  
of those sweet-breathing names being,  
*the one who is not in need of anyone.*



You've so distracted me,  
your absence fans my love.  
Don't ask how.

Then you come near.  
"Do not . . ." I say, and  
"Do not . . .," you answer.

Don't ask why  
this delights me.



In your light I learn how to love.  
In your beauty, how to make poems.

You dance inside my chest  
where no one sees you,

but sometimes I do,  
and that sight becomes this art.



Drumsound rises on the air,  
its throb, my heart.

A voice inside the beat says,  
"I know you're tired,  
but come, this is the way."



Are you jealous of the ocean's generosity?  
Why would you refuse to give  
this love to anyone?

Fish don't hold the sacred liquid in cups!  
They swim the huge fluid freedom.

## THERE'S NOTHING AHEAD

Lovers think they're looking for each other,  
but there's only one search: wandering  
this world is wandering that,  
both inside one  
transparent sky. In here there is  
no dogma and no heresy.

The miracle of Jesus is himself, not what he said  
or did about the future. Forget the future.  
I'd worship someone who could do that.

On the way you may want to look back, or not.  
But if you can say, *There's nothing ahead,*  
there will be nothing there.

Stretch your arms  
and take hold the cloth of your clothes  
with both hands. The cure for pain is in the pain.  
Good and bad are mixed. If you don't have both,  
you don't belong with us.

When one of us gets lost,  
is not here, he must be inside us. There's no  
place like that anywhere in the world.



## 2. Sohbet: *Who You Talking To?*



For Rumi the appearance of formal beauty comes as a *natural* response to being spoken to. The rose opens because it has heard something. The cypress grows strong and straight because a love-secret is being whispered. Elegance in language arrives in *response*. Before creation there was a question, "Am I not your lord?"<sup>12</sup> The simultaneous *YES!* that came is why we are here at all in the midst of three hundred billion galaxies.

I have a friend who, when she wants to know who I am seeing, who I am in love with, asks, *Who you talking to?* The exchange of deep friendship makes a fine entrance into love and trust, into the mysterious *action* that moves through the eyes, the voice, the heart.

Rumi wonders, *Can you see these escapees, the ones who have gotten free of their personalities and into the truer self?* He celebrates the freedom of those escapees, how their friendship dissolves into *everything*: what anybody says, whatever happens.

Emily Dickinson says, *I dwell in possibility, a fairer house than prose.* That region where her poetry grew is *sohbet*.

I dwell in possibility,  
A fairer house than prose,  
More numerous of windows,  
Superior for doors.

Of chambers as the cedars,  
Impregnable of eye.  
And for an everlasting roof  
The gambrels of the sky.

Of visitors, the fairest.  
For occupation, this:  
The spreading wide my narrow hands  
To gather paradise.<sup>13</sup>

She's describing the opening air around Rumi and Shams, their retreat house full of sky and breath, and laughter with the *fairest visitors*. Love with no object, conversation with no subject, seeing with no image, light on light, pure possibility.

Rumi's love poems are not in the realm we're more familiar with, the earthy and sexual transcendence celebrated in the poetry of Keats and Whitman, Rexroth, Kinnell, Bly, Creeley, Jack Gilbert. Rumi's love is beyond the sexual pathway and, for that reason, maybe not so beautiful, to us. Rumi is less tranced and less sensual than, say, these lines from Rexroth's late afternoon love poem, "When We with Sappho":

Stop reading. Lean back. Give me your mouth.  
Your grace is as beautiful as a sleep.

You move against me like a wave  
That moves in sleep.  
Your body spreads across my brain  
Like a bird-filled summer;  
Not like a body, not like a separate thing,  
But like a nimbus that hovers  
Over every other thing in all the world.<sup>14</sup>

Sufis say there are three ways of being with the mystery: prayer, then a step up from that, meditation, and a step up from that, conversation, the mystical exchange they call *sobbet*.



## RESPONSE TO YOUR QUESTION

Why ask about behavior when you are soul-essence,  
and a way of seeing into presence!

Plus you're with us!

How could you worry?

You may as well free a few words from  
your vocabulary.

*Why* and *how* and *impossible*. Open  
the mouth-cage  
and let those fly away.

We were all born by  
accident, but still this wandering caravan  
will make camp in perfection.

Forget the nonsense categories of *there* and *here*,  
race, nation, religion,

starting point and destination.

You are soul, and you *are* love,  
not a sprite or an angel or a human being!

You're a

*Godman-womanGod-manGod-Godwoman!*

No more questions now  
as to what it is we're *doing* here.



If you want what visible reality can give,  
you're an employee.

If you want the unseen world,  
you're not living your truth.

Both wishes are foolish,  
but you'll be forgiven for forgetting  
that what you really want is  
love's confusing joy.

## SPECIAL PLATES

Notice how each particle moves.  
Notice how everyone has just arrived here  
from a journey. Notice how each wants  
a different food. Notice how  
the stars vanish as the sun comes up,  
and how all streams stream toward the ocean.

Look at the chefs preparing special plates  
for everyone according to what they need.  
Look at this cup that can hold the ocean.  
Look at those who see the face. Look  
through Shams's eyes into water  
that is entirely jewels.

## YOU ARE NOT YOUR EYES

Those who have reached their arms  
into emptiness are no longer concerned  
with lies and truth, with mind and soul,  
  
or which side of the bed they rose from.  
If you are still struggling to understand,  
you are not there. You offer your soul  
  
to one who says, "Take it to the other  
side." You're on neither side, yet  
those who love you see you on one side  
  
or the other. You say *Illa*, "only God,"  
then your hungry eyes see you're in  
"nothing," *La*.<sup>15</sup> You're an artist  
  
who paints both with existence and non.  
Shams could help you see who you are,  
but remember, *You are not your eyes*.



## WHAT WAS SAID TO THE ROSE

What was said to the rose that made it open  
was said to me here in my chest.

What was told the cypress that made it strong  
and straight, what was whispered the jasmine

so it is what it is, whatever made sugarcane  
sweet; whatever was said to the inhabitants

of the town of Chigil in Turkestan that makes  
them so handsome, whatever lets the pomegranate

flower blush like a human face, that is being  
said to me now. I blush. Whatever put eloquence

in language, that's happening here. The great  
warehouse doors open; I fill with gratitude,

chewing a piece of sugarcane, in love with  
the one to whom every *that* belongs!

## THE MUSIC

For sixty years I have been forgetful,  
every moment, but not for a second  
has this flowing toward me slowed or stopped.  
I deserve nothing. Today I recognize  
that I am the guest the mystics talk about.  
I play this living music for my host.  
Everything today is for the host.

## IMRA'U 'L-QAYS

Imra'u 'l-Qays,<sup>16</sup> king of the Arabs,  
was very handsome and a poet full of love songs.

Women loved him desperately. Everyone loved him,  
but there came one night an experience  
that changed him completely.

He left his kingdom and his family.  
He put on dervish robes and wandered  
from one weather, one landscape, to another.

Love dissolved his king-self and led him to Tabuk,  
where he worked for a time making bricks.

Someone told the king of Tabuk about Imra'u 'l-Qays,  
and that king came to visit him at night.

"King of the Arabs, handsome Joseph of this age,  
ruler of two empires, one composed of territories,  
and the other of the beauty of women,

if you would consent to stay with me,  
I would be honored. You abandon kingdoms,  
because you want more than kingdoms."

The king of Tabuk went on like this, praising  
Imra'u 'l-Qays and talking theology and philosophy.

Imra'u 'l-Qays kept silent.  
Then suddenly he leaned and whispered something  
in the second king's ear, and that second  
king became a wild wanderer too.

They walked out of town hand in hand,  
no royal belts, no thrones.

This is what love does and continues to do.  
It tastes like honey to adults and milk to children.

Love is the last thirty-pound bale.  
When you load it on, the boat tips over.

So they wandered around China like birds  
pecking at bits of grain. They rarely spoke  
because of the dangerous seriousness  
of the secret they knew.

That love-secret spoken pleasantly, or irritation,  
severs a hundred thousand heads in one swing.

A love-lion grazes in the soul's pasture,  
while the scimitar of this secret approaches.  
It's a killing better than any living.

All that world-power wants, really,  
is this weakness.

So these kings talk in low tones,  
and carefully. Only God knows what they say.

They use unsayable words. Bird language.  
But some people have imitated them, learned  
a few birdcalls, and gotten prestigious.

### 3. *The Superabundance of Ordinary Being*



Love is not love that doesn't love the details of the beloved, the minute particulars. Judith and I were in Pammukkalle, Turkey, an ancient Roman bath with a museum, and around the side, attached to it, is a shed called the Museum of Small Findings. Shards of pottery, coins, fingers and toes of statuary, just as the sign says. The guard at the door, the host, is a smiling, genial man about four-feet two-inches tall, no taller, and no pun intended. Wherever we go now we do *small findings*, to make sure nothing goes unnoticed, or gets left behind.

Love is the connection with spirit, and one way it flows is through form. That's the state of rapture Rumi praises, the joy of being inside an intersection with the divine, which is what this world is.

"Truly being here is glorious," says Rilke in the *Seventh Duino Elegy*, and in the *Ninth*,

Isn't it the secret intent  
of this taciturn earth, when it forces lovers together,  
that inside their boundless emotion all things may  
shudder with joy?

This resonant trembling of the earth with lovers, is the *superabundance of being*, a phrase from Rilke in Stephen Mitchell's translation.<sup>17</sup>

Rumi walks the granary amazed like an ant, small findings the given.

## ZULEIKHA

Zuleikha<sup>18</sup> let everything be the name of Joseph, from celery seed to aloes wood. She loved him so much she concealed his name in many phrases, the inner meanings known only to her.

When she said,

*The wax is softening near the fire, she meant,  
My love is wanting me.*

If she said, *Look, the moon is up,*  
or *The willow has new leaves,* or *The coriander seeds  
have caught fire,* or *The king is in a good mood today,*  
or *Isn't that lucky,* or *The furniture needs dusting,* or  
*The water carrier is here,* or *This bread needs more salt,*  
or *The clouds seem to be moving against the wind,*  
or *My head hurts,* or *My headache's better,*  
anything she praises it's Joseph's touch she means.  
Any complaint, it's his being away.

When she's hungry, it's for him. Thirsty, his name is a sherbet. Cold, he's a fur. This is what the Friend can do when one is in such love.

The miracle Jesus did by being the name of God,  
Zuleikha felt in the name Joseph.

When one is united to the core of another,  
to speak of that is to breathe the name *Hu*,  
empty of self and filled with love.

## PUT THIS DESIGN IN YOUR CARPET

Spiritual experience is a modest woman  
who looks lovingly at one man.

It's a great river where ducks live  
happily, and crows drown. The visible

bowl of form contains food that is both  
nourishing and a source of heartburn.

There is an unseen presence we honor  
that gives the gifts.

You're water. We're the millstone.  
You're wind. We're dust blown up into shapes.

You're spirit. We're the opening and closing  
of our hands. You're the clarity.

We're this language that tries to say it.  
You're joy. We're all the different kinds

of laughing. Any movement or sound  
is a profession of faith, as the millstone

grinding is explaining how it believes  
in the river! No metaphor can say this,

but I can't stop pointing to the beauty.  
Every moment and place says,

"Put this design in your carpet!"

## THE ROAD HOME

An ant hurries along a threshing floor  
with its wheat grain, moving between huge stacks  
of wheat, not knowing the abundance  
all around. It thinks its one grain  
is all there is to love.

So we choose a tiny seed to be devoted to.  
This body, one path or one teacher.  
Look wider and farther.

The essence of every human being can see,  
and what that essence-eye takes in,  
the being becomes. Saturn. Solomon!

The ocean pours through a jar,  
and you might say it swims inside  
the fish! This mystery gives peace to  
your longing and makes the road home home.

## THIS IS ENOUGH

Aphrodite singing *gbazals*. A sky with  
gold streaks across. A stick

that finds water in stone. Jesus  
sitting quietly near the animals.

Night so peaceful. *This is enough*  
was always true. We just haven't

seen it. The hoopoe already wears  
a tufted crown. Each ant is given

its elegant belt at birth. This love  
we feel pours through us like a giveaway

song. The source of *now* is here!

## UZAYR

Which reminds me of the sons of Uzayr,  
who are out looking for their father.

They have grown old, and their father  
has miraculously grown young!

They meet him and ask, "Pardon us, sir,  
but have you seen Uzayr? We hear

that he's supposed to be coming along  
this road today." "Yes," says Uzayr,



"he's right behind me." One of his sons  
replies, "That's good news." The other

falls on the ground. He has recognized  
his father. "What do you mean news?"

We're already inside the sweetness  
of his presence." To the mind

there is such a thing as news, whereas  
to 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.



Out of nowhere a horse

brought us here where we taste love  
until we don't exist again. This taste  
is the wine we always mention.

## AMAZED MOUTH

The soul: a wide listening sky  
with thousands of candles.

When anything is sold, soul gets given  
in the cash: people waiting at a door,

a ladder leaning on a roof, someone  
climbing down. The market square bright

with understanding. Listening  
opens its amazed mouth.



Birdsong, wind,  
the water's face.

Each flower, remembering the smell:  
I know you're close by.

## BEGIN

This is now. Now is. Don't postpone  
till then. Spend the spark of iron

on stone. Sit at the head of the table.  
Dip your spoon in the bowl. Seat yourself

next to your joy and have your awakened soul  
pour wine. Branches in the spring wind,

easy dance of jasmine and cypress. Cloth  
for green robes has been cut from pure

absence. You're the tailor, settled  
among his shop goods, quietly sewing.

## 4. Sudden Wholeness



In this love kingdom there's a windy blowing open of windows. Spring! Sounds of talking sprout. There's a picnic by the river. Identity is music, and poems are rough notations of the melodies.

This station gives the lover glimpses of a spirit-wholeness running through the apparent chaos, a rightness that weaves a pattern the lover sees in the dissonant and daily.

Here is the auspicious beginning. Kindness stands in the door. You walk out together like the Zen master Basho moving around Kyoto, pining for Kyoto. The phenomenal and the numinous grow identical. The world you see, together with the poem, both are intensely alive inside each other with revelation and suchness. That's the feeling in this region: continuous seasonal epiphany, grief, elation, whimsy.

Samurai talk —  
tang  
of horse radish.

You, the butterfly —  
I, Chuang Tzu's  
dreaming heart.

Even in Kyoto —  
hearing the cuckoo's cry —  
I long for Kyoto.<sup>19</sup>

## THIS 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?

## THE MUSIC WE ARE

Did you hear that winter's over?  
The basil and the carnations

cannot control their laughter.  
The nightingale, back from his wandering,

has been made singing master over  
all the birds. The trees reach out

their congratulations. The soul  
goes dancing through the king's doorway.

Anemones blush because they have seen  
the rose naked. Spring, the only fair

judge, walks in the courtroom, and  
several December thieves steal away.

Last year's miracles will soon be  
forgotten. New creatures whirl in

from nonexistence, galaxies scattered  
around their feet. Have you met them?

Do you hear the bud of Jesus crooning  
in the cradle? A single narcissus

flower has been appointed Inspector  
of Kingdoms. A feast is set. Listen.

The wind is pouring wine! Love  
used to hide inside images. No more!

The orchard hangs out its lanterns.  
The dead come stumbling by in shrouds.

Nothing can stay bound or be imprisoned.  
You say, "End this poem here and

wait for what's next." I will. Poems  
are rough notations for the music we are.

## WALNUTS

Philosophers have said that we love music  
because it resembles the sphere-sounds

of union. We've been part of a harmony  
before, so these moments of treble and bass

keep our remembering fresh. But how  
does this happen within these dense bodies

full of forgetfulness and doubt and  
grieving? It's like water passing through us.

It becomes acidic and bitter, but still as  
urine it retains watery qualities.

It will put out a fire! So there is this music  
flowing through our bodies that can dowse

restlessness. Hearing the sound, we gather  
strength. Love kindles with melody. Music

feeds a lover composure, and provides form  
for the imagination. Music breathes

on personal fire and makes it keener.

The waterhole is deep. A thirsty man climbs

a walnut tree growing next to the pool  
and drops walnuts one by one into

the beautiful place. He listens carefully  
to the sound as they hit and watches

the bubbles. A more rational man gives advice,  
"You'll regret doing this. You're so far

from the water that by the time you get down  
to gather walnuts, the water will have

carried them away." He replies, "I'm not  
here for walnuts, I want the music

they make when they hit."



You that come to birth and bring the mysteries,  
your voice-thunder makes us very happy.

Roar, lion of the heart,  
and tear me open!

#### NO BETTER GIFT

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.



This moment this love comes to rest in me,  
many beings in one being.  
In one wheat grain a thousand sheaf stacks.  
Inside the needle's eye, a turning night of stars.



The clear bead at the center changes everything.  
There are no edges to my loving now.

You've heard it said there's a window  
that opens from one mind to another,

but if there's no wall, there's no need  
for fitting the window, or the latch.



A thousand half-loves  
must be forsaken to take  
one whole heart home.

## PATTERN

When love itself comes to kiss you,  
don't hold back! When the king goes hunting,



the forest smiles. Now the king has become  
the place and all the players, prey,

bystander, bow, arrow, hand and release.  
How does *that* feel? Last night's dream

enters these open eyes. We sometimes make  
spiderwebs of smoke and saliva, fragile

thought-packets. Leave thinking to the one  
who gave intelligence. Stop weaving,

and watch how the pattern improves.

## AUCTION

As elephants remember India  
perfectly, as mind dissolves,  
as song begins, as the glass  
fills, wind rising, a roomful  
of conversation, a sanctuary  
of prostration, a bird lights  
on my hand in this day born  
of friends, an ocean covering  
everything, all roads opening,  
a person changing to kindness,  
no one reasonable, religious  
jargon forgotten, and Saladin  
there raising his hand to bid  
on the bedraggled boy Joseph!

## 5. *Escaping into Silence*



Close the language-door (the mouth). Open the love-window (the eyes). The moon (the reflected light of the divine) won't use the door, only the window. Moving into silence with a friend, and with what comes through the eyes and both presences then, we may become those escapees Rumi calls *those who associate in the heart*.

Rumi celebrates this wild freedom, and as he does, he may seem to be subverting scripture with his advocacy of the nonverbal, but he's actually trying to make the revelation that comes in language more experiential. I recommend we all try a day of silence with someone. Just one day!



## QUIETNESS

Inside this new love, die.  
Your way begins on the other side.  
Become the sky.  
Take an ax to the prison wall.  
Escape. Walk out  
like someone suddenly born into color.  
Do it now.  
You're covered with thick cloud.  
Slide out the side. Die,  
and be quiet. Quietness is the surest  
sign that you've died.  
Your old life was a frantic running  
from silence.

The speechless full moon comes out now.

## SOME KISS WE WANT

There is some kiss we want  
with our whole lives, the touch  
  
of spirit on the body. Seawater  
begs the pearl to break its shell.  
  
And the lily, how passionately  
it needs some wild darling!

At night, I open the window and ask  
the moon to come and press its  
face against mine.

Breathe into me. Close  
the language-door and open the love-window.  
The moon won't use the door,  
only the window.

### THE WATERWHEEL

Stay together, friends.  
Don't scatter and sleep.

Our friendship is made  
of being awake.

The waterwheel accepts water  
and turns and gives it away,  
weeping.

That way it stays in the garden,  
whereas another roundness rolls  
through a dry riverbed looking  
for what it thinks it wants.

Stay here, quivering with each moment  
like a drop of mercury.



## BLESSING THE MARRIAGE

This marriage be wine with halvah,  
honey dissolving in milk.

This marriage be the leaves and fruit  
of a date tree. This marriage

be women laughing together for days  
on end. This marriage, a sign

for us to study. This marriage,  
beauty. This marriage, a moon

in a light blue sky. This marriage,  
this silence, fully mixed with spirit.

## TWO DAYS OF SILENCE

After days of feasting, fast.  
After days of sleeping, stay awake  
one night. After these times of bitter  
storytelling, joking, and serious  
considerations, we should give ourselves  
two days between layers of baklava  
in the quiet seclusion where soul sweetens  
and thrives more than with language.



I hear nothing in my ear but your voice.  
Heart has plundered mind of its eloquence.

Love writes a transparent calligraphy, so on  
the empty page my soul can read and recollect.



Which is worth more, a crowd of thousands,  
or your own genuine solitude?  
Freedom, or power over an entire nation?

A little while alone in your room  
will prove more valuable than anything else  
that could ever be given you.

## PASSAGE INTO SILENCE

The essence of darkness is light,  
as oil is the essence of this light.

You are the origin of all jasmine, narcissi,  
and irises to come.

You are sunlight moving  
through the houses, David's hand  
molding smooth chainmail,

September moon  
over the unharvested crop. You *set*  
the grain in the husk.

A rose torn open, my head  
not worrying about debt, you,

soul and body  
mortared together in bed,

you saying,  
*you are, you are,*

then stopping to twist the strings  
to sweeten the voice.

When I give this body  
to the ground, you will find  
another way.

These words are an alternate  
existence. Hear the passage into  
silence and be that.

## 6. A New Life



As one becomes a lover, duties change to inspirations. Practices become dance, poetry, creek music moving along. Impossible natural images of transformation appear: candle becomes moth; a dry, broken stick breaks into bud. A chick-pea becomes its cook (not so impossible, the natural tasting!). Something enters that spontaneously enjoys itself. Finding a purpose for acting is no longer the problem. The soul is here for its own joy. Eyes are meant to see things. It's by some grand shift of energy that we know love.

We have this great love-ache for the ocean and the seabirds sewing the hem of her robe. That is the subject here. We long for beauty, even as we swim within it. Abdul Qadir Gilani describes this region of the heart as a *baby*. Bawa Muhaiyaddeen also speaks of it this way. Someone asked Bawa once what it felt like to be him. He answered by closing his eyes and making little kissing noises like a baby nursing. In this new life a baby is born in the heart. Purity comes and a playfulness, an ease, a peace. Gilani says this new heart-baby sometimes talks to the soul *in dreams*.<sup>20</sup> Bawa says that this baby knows the language of God. It understands every voice that floats on the wind because it is in unity and compassion.<sup>21</sup> This baby has none of the exclusivity of loving, the limits we learn and later, hopefully, unlearn from our families (the blood ties), our culture, religion, tribe, and nation. Bawa says human-

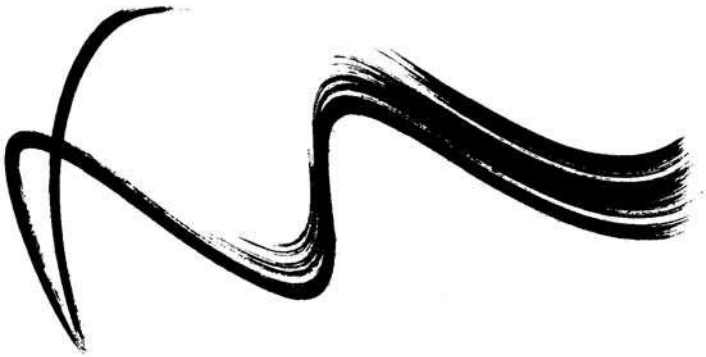


ity is "God's funny family." That's how the baby sees.

I saw this baby come into my father's eyes in the last weeks of his life in 1971. Everyone felt it. My mother died (she was sixty-four, lung cancer) on May 8, 1971. My dad died of a stroke on July 2, 1971, at seventy-two. In the time between (fifty-five days), Dad lost all judgmental tendencies. He met everyone with unconditional love. He would go out on any excuse to walk around and talk with strangers. He had unlimited time and attention and helpfulness for everyone. So beautiful. I see that opening in John Seawright's mother and father too. To hear Rev. Ryan Seawright pray outdoors in the wind at a June wedding, as I did recently, is about as much as a heart can stand. Bawa used to go out *rounding*, which meant riding in the passenger's seat of a car driving very slow and waving to people walking on the sidewalk. Sometimes I'd go along. When pedestrians would see his face, it was like they were struck full-power with one of those old searchlights from Second World War airfields. Then they'd recover and wave so tenderly, as to a baby.

The connecting extends to all living beings. My friend Stephan Schwartz tells of an old farmhand who could stand at the edge of a field and speak in a soft voice to a particular cow a couple of hundred yards away, "Number forty-seven." That cow, who needed attention from a vet, would detach from the herd and walk over. Pleasant (the man's name) would talk to the cow, looking in her face, about what needed to be done, how it would hurt but that it was for the best. The cow would then patiently endure what needed to be done, and he'd say, "That's good. Go on back now." Then he'd call another one, "Number twenty-four." Stephan swears that he was present many times when this happened.

Bawa went into the jungles of Sri Lanka for fifty years to watch the animals and learn about God. When your heart dissolves in this love, books are beside the point. We learn from the taste of life events. Jelaluddin Chelebi once asked me what religion I was. I threw up my hands in the *who knows* gesture. "Good," he said. "Love is the religion, and the universe is the book."



## ESCAPING TO THE FOREST

Some souls have gotten free of their bodies.  
Do you see them? Open your eyes for those  
who escape to meet with other escapees,

whose hearts associate in a way they have  
of leaving their false selves  
to live in a truer self.

I don't mind if my companions  
wander away for a while.

They will come back like a smiling drunk.  
The thirsty ones die of their thirst.

The nightingale sometimes flies from a garden  
to sing in the forest.



Love comes sailing through and I scream.

Love sits beside me like a private supply of itself.

Love puts away the instruments  
and takes off the silk robes. Our nakedness  
together changes me completely.

## ANY CHANCE MEETING

In every gathering, in any chance meeting  
on the street, there is a shine, an elegance

rising up. Today I recognized that that  
jewel-like beauty is the presence, our loving

confusion, the glow in which watery clay gets  
brighter than fire, the one we call the Friend.

## NASUH'S CHANGING

At that moment his spirit grows wings and lifts.  
His ego falls like a battered wall.  
He unites with God, alive,  
but emptied of Nasuh.

His ship sinks and in its place move the ocean waves.  
His body's disgrace, like a falcon's loosened  
binding, slips from the falcon's foot.

His stones drink in water. His field shines like satin  
with gold threads in it. Someone dead a hundred  
years steps out strong and handsome.  
A broken stick breaks into bud.<sup>22</sup>



If you love love,  
look for yourself.



What I say makes me drunk.

Nightingale, iris, parrot, jasmine,

I speak those languages, along with  
the idiom of my longing for Shamsi Tabriz.

## THE CIRCLE

Is there anything better than selling figs  
to the fig seller?

That's how this is.

Making a profit is not why we're here,  
nor pleasure, nor even joy.

When someone  
is a goldsmith, wherever he goes, he asks  
for the goldsmith.

The clouds build with  
what we share.

Wheat stays wheat right  
through the threshing.

How just do you  
feel when you load a lame donkey?  
The world has some share in this cup.  
That's how it turns green.

Let the lean  
and wounded be revived in your garden.

How would the soul feel in the beloved's  
river?

Fish washed free and clean of fear.  
You drive us away, but we return like pet  
pigeons.

Ten nights becoming dawn flow  
in us as a new kind of waking.

Shahabuddin

Osmond joins the circle! We will say  
the poem again so he can play.

There is

no end to anything round.



## 7. Grief



The deeper the grief, the more radiant the love. We miss our friend. Lovers' tears are the true wealth. My friend John Seawright used to say that the real tragedy is when you don't feel much of anything when someone dies. That lack of grieving, *the feel of not to feel it*,<sup>23</sup> is not heard much in Rumi.

I recently saw *Fierce Grace*, about Ram Dass's life and particularly the stroke. The movie focuses on the use of the starkest tragedies, not just his, to open the heart and help us find the vital core of consciousness, the soul. My favorite part is Ram Dass near the end saying *yummyyummyyummy* when he hears a young woman tell her dream of her lover who has been murdered in Colombia. Several months after her lover's death she has the first dream in which he has appeared. She yells at him, "Where have you been!" He says, *Listen. The love we had was wonderful, but that is small peanuts to what's ahead for you, and when that love comes, I'll be part of it.*

Ram Dass ecstatically tastes the *truth* of what the dead lover says. No sticky possessiveness, no hanging on to the past. Grief opens us to more love, and the new love builds with the former, and there's miraculous expansion. It's a rare movie that gives off the fragrance of enlightened love. This one does.

## THE DEATH OF SALADIN

You left ground and sky weeping,<sup>24</sup>  
mind and soul full of grief.

No one can take your place in existence  
or in absence. Both mourn,  
the angels, the prophets, and this sadness  
I feel has taken from me the taste of language,

so that I can't say the flavor  
of my being apart. The roof  
of the kingdom within has collapsed!

When I say the word *you*, I mean  
a hundred universes.

Pouring grief of water, or secret dripping  
in the heart, eyes in the head or eyes  
of the soul, I saw yesterday  
that all these flow out to find you  
when you're not here.

That bright fire bird Saladin  
went like an arrow, and now the bow  
trembles and sobs.

If you know how to weep for human beings,  
weep for Saladin.



## BIRDWINGS

Your grief for what you've lost lifts a mirror  
up to where you're bravely working.

Expecting the worst, you look, and instead,  
here's the joyful face you've been wanting to see.

Your hand opens and closes and opens and closes.  
If it were always a fist or always stretched open,  
you would be paralyzed.

Your deepest presence is in every small  
contracting and expanding,

the two as beautifully balanced and coordinated  
as birdwings.

## THE SILENT ARTICULATION OF A FACE

Love comes with a knife, not some  
shy question, and not with fears  
for its reputation! I say  
these things disinterestedly. Accept them  
in kind. Love is a madman,

working his wild schemes, tearing off his clothes,  
running through the mountains, drinking poison,  
and now quietly choosing annihilation.

A tiny spider tries to wrap an enormous wasp.  
Think of the spiderweb woven across the cave  
where Muhammad slept! There are love stories,  
and there is obliteration into love.

You've been walking the ocean's edge,  
holding up your robes to keep them dry.

You must dive naked under and deeper under,  
a thousand times deeper! Love flows down.

The ground submits to the sky and suffers  
what comes. Tell me, is the earth worse  
for giving in like that?

Don't put blankets over the drum!  
Open completely. Let your spirit-ear  
listen to the green dome's passionate murmur.

Let the cords of your robe be untied.  
Shiver in this new love beyond all  
above and below. The sun rises, but which way  
does night go? I have no more words.

Let soul speak with the silent  
articulation of a face.

## THE ALLURE OF LOVE

Someone who does not run  
toward the allure of love walks  
a road where nothing lives.

But this dove here senses  
the love-hawk floating above  
and waits and will not be driven  
or scared to safety.

## SKY-CIRCLES

The way of love is not  
a subtle argument.

The door there  
is devastation.

Birds make great sky-circles  
of their freedom.

How do they learn that?  
They fall, and falling,  
they're given wings.



## I THROW IT ALL AWAY

You play with the great globe of union,  
you that see everyone so clearly  
and cannot be seen. Even universal

intelligence gets blurry when it thinks  
you may leave. You came here alone,  
but you create hundreds of new worlds.

Spring is a peacock flirting with  
revelation. The rose gardens flame.  
Ocean enters the boat. I throw  
it all away, except this love for Shams.

## YOUR FACE

You may be planning departure, as a human soul  
leaves the world taking almost all its sweetness  
with it. You saddle your horse.

You must be going. Remember you have friends  
here as faithful as grass and sky.

Have I failed you? Possibly you're  
angry. But remember our nights of conversation,  
the well work, yellow roses by ocean,

the longing, the archangel Gabriel  
saying *So be it*. Shamsi Tabriz, your face,  
is what every religion tries to remember.



I've broken through to longing now,  
filled with a grief I have felt before,  
but never like this.



The center leads to love.  
Soul opens the creation core.

Hold on to your particular pain.  
That too can take you to God.



My work is to carry this love  
as comfort for those who long for you,  
to go everywhere you've walked  
and gaze at the pressed-down dirt.



Pale sunlight,  
pale the wall.

Love moves away.  
The light changes.

I need more grace  
than I thought.

## THE PURPOSE OF EMOTION

A certain Sufi tore his robe in grief,  
and the tearing brought such relief he gave the robe  
the name *faraji*, which means *ripped open*,

*or happiness, or one who brings the joy  
of being opened.* It comes from the stem *faraj*,  
which also refers to the genitals, male and female.

His teacher understood the purity of the action,  
while others just saw the ragged appearance.

If you want peace and purity, tear away  
the coverings! This is the purpose of emotion,  
to let a streaming beauty flow through you.

Call it *spirit, elixir, or the original agreement*  
between yourself and God. Opening into that  
gives peace, a song of being empty, pure silence.



The ground's generosity takes in our compost  
and grows beauty. Try to be more  
like the ground.

Give back better, as rough clods return  
an ear of corn, a tassel, a barley  
awn, this sleek handful of oats.

## 8. Tavern Madness



There is an overwhelming contact with the divine called drunkenness. The tavern is a place of shared mystical *experience* as opposed to the church with its tradition of *received*, and sometimes unquestioned, belief (though churches can sometimes turn into taverns). The tavern is an excited region where one is out of one's mind, with others. The wine there is not an Australian merlot, but the shared sense of presence flowing through. The top of one's head blows. Majnun, the mad lover, sees Layla's dog and faints.

The tavern is no place one can live. Go to night prayers, then home. It is a state of stunned surrender that will eventually be left behind for the clarity of dawn. The tavern mystic must go "beyond the drunkenness of God's overwhelming and come to the clarity of sobriety, where contemplation is restored."<sup>25</sup> In the tavern one is absent and present at the same time. Junnaiyd says there is a sobriety that contains all drunkenness, but there is no drunkenness that contains all sobriety. In this region there's flailing about, sudden insight, physical danger, and miscommunication. Move, make a mistake. *Checkmate*. And the veils become fascinating here with their woven designs, the tapestries depicting long passionate stories about the hurt of separation, the consuming intensity of desire, love in the Western world.

Thich Nhat Hanh tells a wonderful story in his com-

mentaries on the Buddha's Heart Sutra about how the opposites of good and evil only *seem* to oppose each other. He shows how they are actually great buddies who meet in the heart's tavern.

One day Buddha was in his cave, and Ananda, Buddha's assistant, was standing near the entrance. Suddenly he saw Mara, the evil one, coming. Mara walked straight to Ananda and told him to announce his visit to Buddha.

Ananda said, "Why have you come here? You were defeated by Buddha under the Bodhi tree. Go away! You are his enemy!"

Mara began to laugh. "Did you say that your teacher has told you that he has enemies?" That made Ananda very embarrassed. He went in to announce Mara to Buddha.

"Is it true? Is he really here?" Buddha went out in person to greet Mara. He bowed and took his hands in the warmest way. "How have you been? Is everything all right?"

After they sat down to tea, Mara said, "Things are not going well at all. I am tired of being a Mara. You have to talk in riddles, and if you do anything, you have to be tricky and look evil. I'm tired of all that. But the worst part is my disciples. Now they are talking about social justice, peace, equality, liberation, nonduality, nonviolence, all that. It would be better if I hand them all over to you. I want to be something else."

Buddha listened with compassion. "Do you think it's fun being a Buddha? My disciples put words in my mouth that I never said. They build garish temples. They package my teachings as items for commerce. Mara, you don't really want to be a Buddha!"<sup>26</sup>

Ananda continued to be puzzled and amazed by their conversation. The beautiful wholeness of it cannot be accepted by the mind.





I am a glass of wine with dark sediment.

I pour it all in the river.

Love says to me, "Good, but you don't see  
*your own* beauty. I am the wind

that mixes in your fire, who stirs  
and brightens, then makes you gutter out."

## SMOKE

Don't listen to anything I say.

I must enter the center of the fire.

Fire is my child, but I must  
be consumed and become fire.

Why is there crackling and smoke?  
Because the firewood and the flames  
are still talking about each other.

"You are too dense. Go away!"

"You are too wavering.  
I have solid form."

In the blackness those friends keep arguing.  
Like a wanderer with no face.  
Like the most powerful bird in existence  
sitting on its perch, refusing to move.

## I'M NOT SAYING THIS RIGHT

You bind me, and I tear away in a rage  
to open out into air, a round  
brightness, a candlepoint,  
all reason, all love.

This confusing joy, your doing,  
this hangover, your tender thorn.

You turn to look, I turn.  
I'm not saying this right.

I am a jailed crazy who ties up spirit-women.  
I am Solomon.

What goes comes back. Come back.  
We never left each other.

A disbeliever hides disbelief,  
but I will say his secret.

More and more awake, getting up at night,  
spinning and falling in love with Shams.

## WHO SAYS WORDS WITH MY MOUTH?

Who looks out with my eyes? What is  
the soul? I cannot stop asking.

If I could taste one sip of an answer,  
I could break out of this prison for drunks.

I didn't come here of my own accord,  
and I can't leave that way.

Whoever brought me here will have to take me home.

This poetry. I never know what I'm going to say.  
I don't plan it.  
When I'm outside the saying of it,  
I get very quiet and rarely speak at all.



We have a huge barrel of wine, but no cups.  
That's fine with us. Every morning  
we glow and in the evening we glow again.

They say there's no future for us. They're right.  
Which is fine with us.



Real value comes with madness,  
*matzoob*<sup>27</sup> below, scientist above.

Whoever finds love  
beneath hurt and grief

disappears into emptiness  
with a thousand new disguises.

## A CAP TO WEAR IN BOTH WORLDS

There is a passion in me that doesn't  
long for anything from another human being.

I was given something else, a cap to wear  
in both worlds. It fell off. No matter.

One morning I went to a place beyond dawn.  
A source of sweetness that flows  
and is never less. I have been shown  
a beauty that would confuse both worlds,

but I won't cause that uproar. I am  
nothing but a head set on the ground  
as a gift for Shams.



Midnight, but your forehead  
shines with dawn. You dance as

you come to me and curl by curl  
undo the dark. Let jealousy end.



There's a strange frenzy in my head,  
of birds flying,  
each particle circulating on its own.  
Is the one I love everywhere?

## FRINGE

You wreck my shop and my house and now my heart,  
but how can I run from what gives me life?

I'm weary of personal worrying, in love  
with the art of madness! Tear open my shame

and show the mystery. How much longer  
do I have to fret with self-restraint and fear?

Friends, this is how it is: we are fringe  
sewn inside the lining of a robe. Soon

we'll be loosened, the binding threads torn  
out. The beloved is a lion. We're

the lame deer in his paws. Consider  
what choices we have!



Drunks fear the police,  
but the police are drunk too.

People in this town, we love them  
both like different chess pieces.

## THE ACHE AND CONFUSION

Near the end you saw rose and thorn together,  
evening and morning light commingling.

You have broken many shapes and stirred  
their colors into the mud.

Now you sit in a garden not doing a thing,  
smiling. You have felt the ache

and confusion of a hangover, yet  
you take again the wine that's handed you.



Let the lover be disgraceful, crazy,  
absentminded. Someone sober  
will worry about things going badly.  
Let the lover be.

## WONDER WITHOUT WILLPOWER

Love's way becomes a pen sometimes  
writing g-sounds like *gold* or r-sounds

like *tomorrow* in different calligraphy  
styles sliding by, darkening the paper.

Now it's held upside down, now beside  
the head, now down and on to something

else, figuring. One sentence saves  
an illustrious man from disaster, but

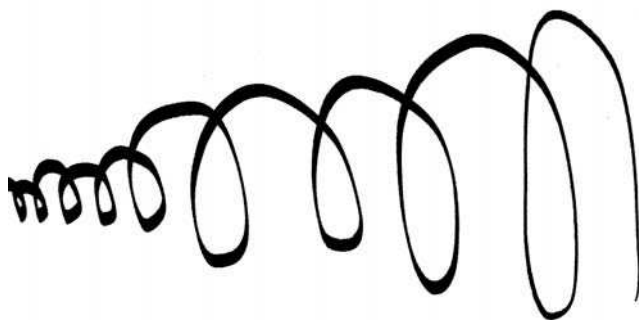
fame does not matter to the split tongue  
of a pen. Hippocrates knows how the cure

must go. His pen does not. This one  
I am calling *pen*, or sometimes *flag*,

has no mind. You, the pen, are most sanely  
insane. You cannot be spoken of rationally.

Opposites are drawn into your presence but  
not to be resolved. You are not whole

or ever complete. You are the wonder  
without willpower going where you want.



## 9. Absence



Love as a way into God is wild and bewildering. Union! Absence! What do these words mean? Attar says if you want to learn the secrets of love that your soul can know, "You will sacrifice everything. You will lose what you have considered valuable, but eventually you'll hear the voice you've most wanted to hear saying, *Yes. Come in.*"

Another Sufi, Junnaiyd, recommends that we JUMP! "Plunge headfirst into the ocean of your loving. Then look around patiently for the pearl that is yours."<sup>28</sup> This heart-region is a vast emptiness. Nevit Ergin calls it *absence*. Rumi explores the images of a desert night, an empty pot, a house with a broken door, the weaning of a child, the flute before breath comes through. When his friend Saladin dies, Rumi says, *The roof of the kingdom within has collapsed, and I can no longer taste the flavor of my being apart.*

Lee Marvin in *Paint Your Wagon*: "I'm an ex-citizen of nowhere, and sometimes I get homesick." At the end of our loving is a depth of absence that's tremendously familiar. A high desert plain. But really there is no end to love's unfolding, and no one can tell you how yours should or will go. The troubadours and *Romeo and Juliet*, *Anthony and Cleopatra*, *Anna Karenina*, *Jude the Obscure*, Lorca's love poems, Millay's, they all have wisdom for the various stages of love's progress. Rumi, Hafez, and Emily Dickinson have ideas and images for the annihilation of absence.



The Infinite a sudden Guest  
Has been assumed to be  
But how can that stupendous come  
Which never went away?<sup>29</sup>

Some people entertain this guest in specific physical form for a certain amount of time. Be grateful for such a chance, but remember, everyone has in them the great love that Rumi's poetry comes out of. It is the given that never goes away.

You are an ocean in a drop of dew,  
all the universes in a thin sack

of blood! What are these pleasures  
then, these joys, these *worlds*,

that you keep reaching for, hoping  
they will make you more *alive*?<sup>30</sup>



## LIKE LIGHT OVER THIS PLAIN

A moth flying into the flame says  
with its wingfire, *Try this.*

The wick with its knotted neck broken  
tells you the same. A candle as it diminishes  
explains, *Gathering more and more is not the way. Burn,  
become light and beat and help. Melt.*

The ocean sits in the sand letting its lap fill  
with pearls and shells, then empty.  
A bittersalt taste hums, *This.*

The phoenix gives up on good-and-bad, flies  
to rest on Mount Qaf, no more burning and rising  
from ash. It sends out one message.

The rose purifies its face, drops the soft petals,  
shows its thorn, and points.

Wine abandons thousands of famous names,  
the vintage years and delightful bouquets,  
to run wild and anonymous through your brain.

The flute closes its eyes and gives its lips  
to Hamza's emptiness.

Everything begs with the silent rocks for you  
to be flung out like light over this plain,  
the presence of Shams.

## CANDLELIGHT BECOMES MOTH

Inside a lover's heart there's another world,  
and yet another.

Inside the Friend of this community  
of lovers, an ear that interprets mystery,  
a vein of silver in the ground, and another sky!

Intellect and compassion are ladders we climb,  
and there are other ladders as we walk  
the night hearing a voice that talks of forgiveness.

Inside Shams's universe candlelight itself  
becomes a moth to die in his candle.

## THE BASKET OF FRESH BREAD

If you want to learn theory,  
talk with theoreticians. That way is oral.

When you learn a craft, *practice* it.  
That learning comes through the hands.

If you want dervishhood, spiritual poverty  
and emptiness, you must be friends with a teacher.

Talking about it, reading books, and doing practices  
don't help. Soul receives from soul that knowing.

The mystery of absence  
may be living in your pilgrim heart,  
and yet the knowing of it may not yet be yours.

Wait for the illuminated openness,  
as though your chest were filling with light,  
as when God said,

*Did we not expand you? (Qur'an 57:4)*

Don't look for it outside yourself.  
You are the source of milk. Don't milk others!

There is a fountain inside you.  
Don't walk around with an empty bucket.

You have a channel into the ocean,  
yet you ask for water from a little pool.

Beg for the love expansion. Meditate only  
on THAT. The Qur'an says,

*And he is with you. (57:4)*

There is a basket of fresh bread on your head,  
yet you go door to door asking for crusts.

Knock on the inner door, no other.  
Sloshing knee-deep in fresh riverwater,  
yet you keep asking for other people's waterbags.

Water is everywhere around you, but you see  
only barriers that keep you from water.

The horse is beneath the rider's thighs,  
and still you ask, "Where's my horse?"

*Right there,*

*under you!*

Yes, this is a horse, but where's the horse?

*Can't you see?*

"Yes I can see, but whoever *saw*  
such a horse?"

Mad with thirst, you can't drink from the stream  
running close by your face. You are like a pearl  
on the deep bottom wondering inside the shell,  
*Where's the ocean?*

Those mental questionings  
form the barrier.

Stay bewildered inside God,  
and only that.



**When you are with everyone but me,**

you're with no one.

When you are with no one but me,

you're with everyone.

Instead of being so bound up *with* everyone,

*be* everyone.

When you become that many, you're nothing.

Empty.

## THIS TORTURE

Why should we tell you our love stories  
when you spill them together like blood in the dirt?

Love is a pearl lost on the ocean floor,  
or a fire we can't see,

but how does saying that  
push us through the top of the head into  
the light above the head?

Love is not  
an iron pot, so this boiling energy  
won't help.

Soul, heart, self.

Beyond and within those  
is one saying,

*How long before*

*I'm free of this torture!*



## 10. *Animal Energies*



Any love: earth-love, spirit, the way of a man with a maid, the way of a dog with almost anybody, the way of a hawk with the wind, of a swan with a pond, of grandparents with grandchildren, of an ant with a grain of corn, of a lion with a gazelle, all the natural drawings-together lead eventually to annihilation. This is the mystery of the animal energies. Rumi says, astonishingly, "God lives between a human being and the object of his desire" (Discourse No. 44). This is radical theology to this day, when major crises have roots in sexual repression—the Catholic pedophile priestly boys; the Muslim enraged-at-women, dismayed-by-Western-ease-with-impurity vandals. We Americans have our own deadly-to-life versions of denying the horny animal energies. We lie a lot. We avoid the intimacy of truth. We make nice, blind to our own rage. When we start bombing, we overdo it and never consider the tremendous collateral damage as another form of terrorism. Very different, but still a terror.

I like to think of the first mystical poem as that figure incised, and painted, into the farthest wall of the cave called Les Trois Freres in southern France. The Animal. Joseph Campbell called him "god of the cave." He does the dance of human and animal at once, owl, lion, horse, stag, man. He incorporates them all visually and looks out at you with your own menagerie, who have gone *inward* far

enough to meet his gaze. Animals can live inside the landscape without our noisy self-consciousness. When we turn and go with them as Whitman did, we enter a silence and a transcendence. We perceive through their eyes with their energies. This is a metaphor, a tremendously important one, as well as an experience.

Hazrat Inayat Khan says that seekers should "accomplish their desires that they may thus be able to rise above them to the eternal goal."<sup>31</sup> At the core of each person's nature are unique seeds of desiring, which flourish through the development of personality, not through any suppression of it. We are not to become pale renunciate ciphers with no wantings. The animals of desiring, the rooster of lust, the duck of urgency, the horse of passion, the peacock of wanting recognition, the crow of acquiring things, the lion of majesty, the zebra of absence (I made that one up), these are not to be thwarted but lived, transmuted, and incorporated. This is the art of forming a personality. Only when we live the animal powers do we learn that *those* satisfactions are not what we truly wanted. There's more, and we are here to follow the mysteries of longing beyond where they lead. The purpose of desire is to *perfect* the longings, for at the core of longing is the Friend, Christ, Krishna, the emptiness, wherever it was that Igjargajuk, the Eskimo shaman, was when he came back from forty nights on the ice floes with one sentence, "There is nothing to fear in the universe." The great love at the center of longing has no fear in it.

There is a witness who watches the obstreperous play of flame and eros and says, *This is the dance of existence*. A great mutual embrace is always happening between the eternal and what dies, between essence and accident. We are all writing the book of love. Everything goes in. All the



particles of the world are in love and looking for lovers. Pieces of straw tremble in the presence of amber. Isn't that the deal? We're here to love each other, to deepen and unfold that capacity, to open the heart. And that means living in the witness, I'm beginning to see.

Hearing Rumi's poetry helps. He would say, though, that poetry can be dangerous, especially beautiful poetry, because it gives the illusion of having had the experience without actually going through it. He would periodically swear off the stuff. No more God poems, I want the presence. No more love poems, I want to *be* love.

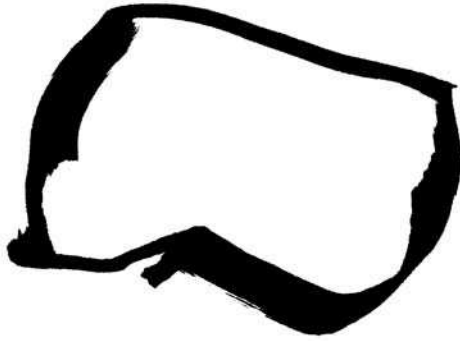
This region of animal energies is where sexuality enters love's book most obviously, although eros, as Freud showed, is a powerful ingredient in many motions that draw us. Sex is as basic and nourishing to human beings as baking bread. Rumi implies as much in the heroic simile of the breadmaking poem. Lovemaking is going on everywhere among the forms, and in a startling variation of the golden rule he says, *Remember, the way you make love is the way God will be with you.*

Once in an informal moment (there were many) talking to a young couple about their love life, my teacher spoke to the young man, "You have seen the bull, how he goes and licks the cow before he mounts her. This is good. We can learn much from the animals." With me he counseled not cunnilingus so much as restraint. It always tickled him that my name was Barks. "The dog of desire," he would begin, "we can learn from that one, but we must not let him lead us all over town, pulling to sniff a piece of garbage, to a place where another dog has urinated, then to roll on a dead fish. He will drag us around like this if we let him; he will take over our lives. We must discipline this dog and sometimes tie him up in the backyard and give him only

scraps." He had my number. *Do not neglect the licking*, though, is still my bullish theme.

Interesting in this regard are the names that Bawa Muhaiyaddeen had for three illusion-making capacities of human sexuality: *Suran*, the enjoyment of the images that come to one's mind at the moment of orgasm. *Singhan*, the arrogance experienced in that same moment, associated with *karma* and with the qualities of the lion. *Taraban*, the pathway of attraction that leads to the sexual act; it is associated with the birth canal or vagina. The three powers are thought of as sons of Maya. It is fascinating that there are these ancient Tamil words for mental processes we have barely noticed in the West, the first two, at least.

Note. The reference above to "priesty boys" and "Muslim vandals" is very un-Bawa. Snide, divisive, pleased-with-its-clever-self remarks will probably not help bring us into one loving family.





Think that you're gliding out from the face of a cliff  
like an eagle. Think you're walking  
like a tiger walks by himself in the forest.

You're most handsome when you're after food.

### THE PUBLIC BATH

Imagine the phenomenal world as a furnace  
heating water for the public bath.

Some people carry baskets of dung  
to keep the furnace going. Call them  
materialists, energetic, fire-stoking citizens.

One of those brags how he's collected  
and carried twenty dung baskets today,  
while his friend has brought six!

They think the counting up at nightfall  
is where truth lies. They love the smoke smell  
of dried dung, and how it blazes up like gold!

If you give them musk or any fragrance  
of soul intelligence, they find it unpleasant  
and turn away. Others sit in the hot bathwater  
and get clean. They use the world differently.

They love the feel of purity, and they have  
dust marks on their foreheads from bowing down.

They are separated by a wall from those  
who feed the fires, busy in the boiler room  
belittling each other. Sometimes, though,  
one of those leaves the furnace,  
takes off the burnt smelling rags,  
and sits in the cleansing water.

The mystery is how the obsessions  
of furnace stokers keep the bathwater  
of the others simmering perfectly.

They seem opposed, but they're necessary  
to each other's work: the proud piling up  
of fire worship, the humble disrobing  
and emptying out of purification.

As the sun dries wet dung to make it  
ready to heat water, so dazzling  
sparks fly from the burning filth.

### MASHALLAH

There's someone swaying by your side,  
lips that say *Mashallah, Mashallah.*

Wonderful. God inside attraction.  
A spring no one knew of wells up  
on the valley floor.

Lights inside a tent lovers move toward.  
The refuse of Damascus gets turned over  
in the sun. Be like that yourself.

Say *mercy, mercy* to the one who guides  
your soul, who keeps time.

Move, make a mistake, look  
up. *Checkmate.*



## SPIRIT AND BODY

Don't feed both sides of yourself equally.  
The spirit and the body carry different loads  
and require different attentions.

Too often  
we put saddlebags on Jesus and let the donkey  
run loose in the pasture.

Don't make the body do  
what the spirit does best, and don't put a big load  
on the spirit that the body could easily carry.

## BREADMAKING

There was a feast. The king was 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! Take it away!"  
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.

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 and 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 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.







The Captain thinks the soil looks fertile,  
so he sows his seed. Sleeping,  
he makes love to a dream image of the girl,  
and his semen spurts out.

He wakes up,  
"I am in love."

His infatuation is a blackwater wave  
carrying him away.  
Something makes a phantom  
appear in the darkness of a well,  
and the phantom itself becomes strong enough  
to throw *actual* lions  
into the hole.

The Captain does not take the girl  
straight to the Caliph. Instead, he camps  
in a secluded meadow. Blazing,  
he can't tell ground from sky! His reason is lost  
in a drumming sound,

worthless radish and son of a  
radish,

this cultivator tears off the woman's pants  
and lies down between her legs,  
his penis moving straight  
to the mark.

Just then, there's a rising cry of soldiers  
outside the tent.

A black lion from a nearby swamp  
has gotten in among the horses.

The Captain leaps up with bare bottom  
shining, scimitar in hand.

The lion is jumping twenty feet  
in the air, tents billowing  
like an ocean. The Captain splits the lion's head  
with one blow.

Now he's running back to the woman.  
When he stretches out the beauty  
again, his penis

goes even more erect.

The engagement,  
the coming together, is as with the lion.

His penis stays erect all  
through and does not scatter semen feebly.

The beautiful one is amazed

at his virility. With great energy she joins  
with his energy. Their two spirits  
go out from them as one.

Whenever two are linked  
in this way,  
another comes from the unseen. It may be through birth,  
if nothing prevents conception,  
but a third does come when  
two unite in love, or in hate.

The intense qualities  
of such joining have consequences. Such  
association bears progeny.

There are children to consider!  
Children born of your sexual energy shared  
with another are entities in the invisible world. They have  
form and speech.

They are crying to you now.  
*You have forgotten us. Come back!*  
Be aware of this.

A man and woman together always have a spirit-result.  
The Captain was not so aware.

He fell and stuck like a gnat  
in a pot of buttermilk, totally absorbed in his love affair.

Then just as suddenly, he's uninterested.  
"Don't say a word of this to the Caliph." He takes the girl  
and presents her.

The Caliph is smitten.  
She's a hundred times more beautiful  
than he imagined! He also has the idea of entering her  
beauty and comes to do his wanting.

Memory raises his penis, straining in thought toward  
the pushing down and lifting up  
that makes it grow large with delight.

As he lies down  
with her, though, there comes a tiny sound  
like a mouse might make,  
a suggestion from God that he lay off these voluptuous  
doings. The penis droops

and desire slips away.



The girl remembers the Captain running out to kill the lion  
with his member  
standing straight up, then the running back.

Long and loud

her laughter. Anything she thinks of  
only increases it like the laughing of those who eat hashish.  
Everything is funny.

When she gets hold of herself,  
the girl tells all,  
the Captain's running about the camp hard as a rhino's horn,  
then the Caliph's member shrinking  
for one mouse-whisper.

The Caliph comes back  
to his clarity,

"In the pride of my power I took this woman  
from another, so of course someone came to knock  
on *my* door.

The adulterer pimps for his own wife. When you cause  
injury to someone, you draw the same injury  
to yourself.

This lusting repetition must stop somewhere.  
Here, in an act of mercy. I'll send you back  
to the Captain.  
May you both enjoy the pleasure."

This is the virility  
of a prophet. The Caliph was sexually impotent,  
but his manliness was powerful.

The kernel of true manhood is  
the ability to abandon sensual indulgence.

The intensity  
of the Captain's libido is less than a husk compared  
to the Caliph's nobility in ending the cycle  
of sowing lust and reaping secrecy and meanness.

## TWO WAYS OF RUNNING

A certain man had a jealous wife and a very  
appealing maidservant.

The wife was careful not to leave  
them alone, ever.

For six years they were never left  
in a room together.

But then, one day at the public bath  
the wife remembered she'd left  
her silver basin at home.

"Please, go get the basin,"  
she told her maid. The girl jumped to the task knowing she  
would finally get to be alone with the master.

She ran joyfully. She flew. Desire took them both  
so quickly they didn't latch the door.

With great speed  
they joined. When bodies blend in copulation,  
spirits also merge.

Meanwhile, the wife back  
at the bathhouse is washing her hair.

"What have I done!  
I've set cotton wool on fire! I've put the ram in  
with the ewe!"

She washed the clay soap off and ran, fixing  
her chador about her as she went.

The maid ran for love.  
The wife ran out of jealousy and fear.

There is a great difference.

A mystic lover flies moment to moment. The fearful  
ascetic drags along month to month.

The length of a *day*  
for a lover may be fifty thousand years!  
There's no way to understand this  
with your mind. You must burst open!

Love is a quality  
of God. Fear is an attribute of those who *think*  
they serve God,  
but actually they're preoccupied with penis  
and vagina.

Rule-keepers run on foot along the surface.  
Lovers move like lightning and wind.

No contest.  
Theologians mumble, rumble-dumble, necessity and free  
will, while lover and beloved  
pull themselves into each other.

The worried wife  
reaches the door and opens it.

The maid is  
disheveled, flushed, unable to speak.

The husband begins his five-times  
prayer. As though experimenting  
with clothes, he holds up some flaps and edges. She sees  
his testicles and penis so wet,  
semen still dribbling out,  
spurts of jism and vaginal juices

drenching the thighs  
of the maid.  
The wife slaps him  
on the side of the head,  
"Is this the way a man prays,  
with his balls? Does your penis  
long for union like this?  
Is that why her legs are so covered  
with this stuff?"  
These are good questions.  
People who repress desires  
often turn, suddenly,  
into hypocrites.



## 11. Love's Secret



Rumi makes preposterous claims. One of the most startling is, "Our loving is the way God's secret gets told!"<sup>32</sup> Love is an *open secret*, the most obvious thing in the world and the most hidden, with no *why* to how it keeps its mystery. Sufis say the genesis of lovers meeting is God's sweetest secret.

A saying of Muhammad is, *Human awareness is my secret and I am its secret. The inner knowledge of spirit-essence is the secret within the secret. I have placed this knowing within the heart of my true servant, and no one can know his state but I.* The knowing of essence is love's secret.

There is a truth that comes with following the energies, and there is a love, a truth-knowing essence, in the innermost heart. Rumi tries to lead us into this region that never fades and has no limits, that comes when we recognize that everyone is as precious as our own children and grandchildren. Bawa was clear with me that I needed to move beyond *blood ties*. Having children opened my heart, but he saw that I need to include *everyone* in my family. He so beautifully saw every human being he came in contact with as kin. *My love you, my children, grandchildren, brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, uncles, aunts, great-grandchildren.* Every discourse began and ended with a declaration of the family connection.

Some may dismiss this as one-world, peacenik sentimentality. I'm not advocating we disband the armies yet, or



even the churches, though that's tempting to say. It's good to have sanctuaries and singing and silence and Wednesday night prayer. We need more sacred space outdoors, though, fewer enclosed places, and please let's quit killing each other over books! Let's move on to killing each other over bluegrass and salad oil and circumcision and predestination and foreplay and whose uncle is the right line, where the prepositions go, and what happens after we die. Those are worth fighting for. The book thing is just getting *really* old.

Bawa Muhaiyaddeen says,

Do not ever fight or argue, because for God there are no fights and no arguments. For that One everything is love; everything is in the form of love, compassion, and truth. May God provide you with the blessings and grace to live in that state.



## CLOSE TO BEING TRUE

How can we know the divine qualities  
from within? If we know only  
through metaphors, it's like when

children ask what sex  
feels like and you answer, "Like candy,  
so sweet." The suchness of sex

comes with being inside the pleasure.  
Whatever you say about mysteries,  
*I know* or *I don't know*, both are close

to being true. Neither is quite a lie.

## WHAT HURTS THE SOUL?

We tremble, thinking we're about to dissolve  
into nonexistence, but nonexistence  
fears even more that it might be given human form!

Loving God is the only pleasure. Other delights  
turn bitter. What hurts the soul?

To live without tasting the water of its own essence.  
People focus on death and this material earth.  
They have doubts about soul water.

Those doubts can be reduced! Use night  
to wake your clarity. Darkness and the living water  
are lovers. Let them stay up together.

When merchants eat their big meals  
and sleep their dead sleep,  
we night-thieves go to work.



Love is the way messengers  
from the mystery tell us things.

Love is the mother. We are her children.  
She shines inside us, visible-invisible,

as we lose trust or feel it start to grow again.

## HIDDEN INSIDE

Hiding is the hidden purpose  
of creation. Bury your seed

and wait. After you die, all  
the thoughts you had will

throng around like children.  
The heart is the secret inside

the secret. Call the secret  
*language* and never be sure

what you conceal. It's unsure  
people who get the blessing.



Climbing jasmine, opening rose,  
nightingale song, these are

inside the chill November  
wind. They are its secret.

How did you discover mine?  
*Your laugh.* Only the soul

knows what love is. This  
moment in time and space is

an eggshell with an embryo  
crumpled inside, soaked in

spirit-yolk, under the wing  
of grace, until it breaks free

of mind to become the song  
of birds and their breathing.



If everyone could see what love is,  
each would set up a tentpole in the ocean.

The world's population pitched and living  
easily within the sea! What if inside

every lover's tear you saw the face  
of the Friend: Muhammad, Jesus, Buddha,

the impossible-possible philosopher,  
the glass diamond one, Shams Tabriz?

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They try to say what you are, spiritual or sexual?  
They wonder about Solomon and all his wives.

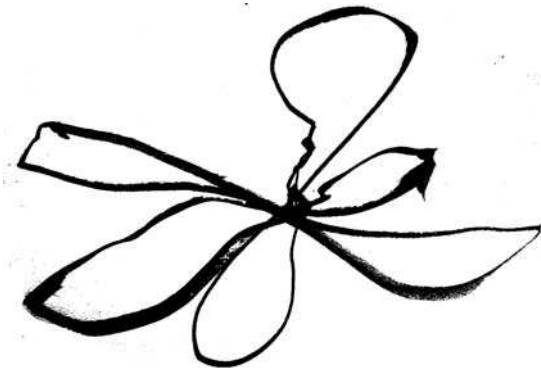
In the body of the world, they say, there is a soul  
and you are that.

But we have ways within each other  
that will never be said by anyone.



Come to the orchard in spring.  
There is light and wine and sweethearts  
in the pomegranate flowers.

If you do not come, these do not matter.  
If you do come, these do not matter.



## 12. *Love's Discipline*



Rumi says an ecstatic human being is a polished mirror that cannot help reflecting. What we love, we are. As the heart comes cleaner, we see the kingdom *as it is*. We become reflected light. The polishing may be related to practices, a devotion we do every day that is an emptying out. Or it may be that when we live in the soul, everything can be used for clarity. Muhammad once said, "People who insult me are only polishing the mirror." I can't say precisely what *polishing the mirror of the heart* means, but I feel it happening slowly, and it does seem to be related to discipline, by which I mean intentionally giving time to what Rumi calls *the jeweled inner life*, which could be just the witness watching the mind.

In another passage Rumi says the polishing is done by the intensity of our longings. It is so difficult to remember who we are and to act from there. Various remembrance habits are helpful. *Zikr*, five-times prayer, a walk at sunset, twenty minutes of meditation. Stonework, singing, poetry. Find practices that are specifically *yours*. There comes then a creativeness at the end of the polishing that Rumi calls "looking into the creek." It's as though seeing becomes lucid dreaming. We watch the play of soul creatures. The gates of light swing open. We look in.

## WHO MAKES THESE CHANGES?

Who makes these changes?  
I shoot an arrow right.  
It lands left.

I ride after a deer and find myself  
chased by a hog.

I plot to get what I want  
and end up in prison.

I dig pits to trap others  
and fall in.

I should be suspicious  
of what I want.

## DROWNING

What can I say to someone so curled up  
with wanting, so constricted  
in his love? Break your pitcher

against a rock. We don't need any longer  
to haul pieces of the ocean around.

We must drown, away from heroism,  
and descriptions of heroism.

Like a pure spirit lying down, pulling  
its body over it, like a bride her husband  
for a cover to keep her warm.

## THE DOG PROBLEM

Now, what if a 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 dog's 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.

## ZIKR

A naked man jumps in the river, hornets swarming  
above him. The water is the *zikr*,  
remembering, *There is no reality but God.*  
*There is only God.*

The hornets are his sexual memories, this woman,  
that, or if a woman, this man, that.  
The head comes up. They sting.



Breathe water. Become river head to foot.  
Hornets leave you alone then.

Even if you're far from the river,  
they pay no attention.

No one looks for stars when the sun's out.  
A person blended into God does not disappear.  
He or she is just completely soaked  
in God's qualities. Do you need a quote  
from the Qur'an?

*All shall be brought into our presence.*

Join those travelers. The lamps we burn go out,  
some quickly. Some last till daybreak.  
Some are dim, some intense, all are fed  
with fuel. If a light goes out in one house,  
that doesn't affect the next house.

This is the story of the animal soul,  
not the divine soul. The sun shines on every house.  
When it goes down, all houses get dark.

Light is the image of your teacher. Your enemies  
love the dark. A spider weaves a web  
over a light, out of herself makes a veil.

Don't try to control a wild horse by grabbing its leg.  
Take hold the neck. Use a bridle. Be sensible.  
Then ride! There is a need for self-denial.

Don't be contemptuous of old obediences. They help.

## THE CORE OF MASCULINITY

The core of masculinity does not derive  
from being male, nor friendliness  
from those who console.

Your old grandmother says, "Maybe you shouldn't  
go to school. You look a little pale."

Run when you hear that.  
A father's stern slaps are better.

Your bodily soul wants comforting.  
The severe father wants spiritual clarity.

He scolds but eventually  
leads you into the open.

Pray for a tough instructor  
to hear and act and stay within you.

We have been busy accumulating solace.  
Make us afraid of how we were.

## CLEAR BEING

I honor those who try  
to rid themselves of lying,  
who empty the self  
and have only clear being there.

## THE SOUL'S FRIEND

Listen to your essential self, the Friend.  
When you feel longing, be patient,  
and also prudent, moderate with eating and drinking.

Be like a mountain in the wind.  
Do you notice how it moves? There are sweet  
illusions that arrive to lure you away.

Make some excuse to them, "I have indigestion,"  
or "I need to meet my cousin."

You fish, the baited hook may be fifty  
or even sixty gold pieces, but is it really  
worth your freedom in the ocean?

When traveling, stay close to your bag.  
I am the bag that holds what you love.  
You can be separated from me!

Live carefully in the joy of this friendship.  
Don't think, *But those others love me so.*

Some invitations sound like the fowler's whistle  
to the quail, friendly, but not quite  
how you remember the call of your soul's Friend.

## LONGING

Longing is the core of mystery.  
Longing itself brings the cure.  
The only rule is, *Suffer the pain.*

Your desire must be disciplined,  
and what you want to happen  
in time, sacrificed.



The morning wind spreads its fresh smell.  
We must get up to take that in,  
that wind that lets us live.  
Breathe, before it's gone.

## WHAT DRAWS YOU?

There are two types on the path, those  
who come against their will, the blindly religious,  
and those who obey out of love.

The former have ulterior motives.  
They want the midwife near because she gives them milk.  
The others love the beauty of the nurse.

The former memorize the prooftexts of conformity  
and repeat them. The latter disappear  
into whatever draws them to God.

Both are drawn from the source.  
Any motion is from the mover.  
Any love from the beloved.

## FEAR

Everyone can see how they have polished the mirror  
of the self, which is done with the longings  
we're given.

Not everyone wants to be king!  
There are different roles and many choices  
within each.

Troubles come. One person packs up  
and leaves. Another stays and deepens in a love  
for being human.

In battle, one runs fearing  
for his life. Another, just as scared, turns  
and fights more fiercely.

## A TEACHER'S PAY

God has said *Be moderate* with eating and drinking,  
but never, *Be satisfied* when taking in light.

God offers a teacher the treasures of the world,  
and the teacher responds, "To be in love with God

and expect to be paid for it!" A servant wants  
to be rewarded for what he does. A lover wants

only to be in love's presence, that ocean  
whose depth will never be known.

## LOOKING INTO THE CREEK

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

When desire weeds grow thick,  
intelligence can't flow,  
and soul creatures stay hidden.  
But sometimes the reasonable clarity  
runs so strong  
it sweeps the clogged stream open.

No longer weeping  
and frustrated, your being grows as powerful  
as your wantings were before,  
more so. Laughing  
and satisfied, the masterful flow lets  
creatures of the soul appear.

You look down,  
and it's lucid dreaming.  
The gates made of light  
swing open.  
You see in.

## THE POLISHER

As everything changes overnight, I praise  
the breaking of promises.

Whatever love wants,  
it gets, not next year, *now!*

I swear by the one who never says *tomorrow*,  
as the circle of the moon refuses to sell  
installments of light. It gives all it has.

How do fables conclude, and who will explain them?  
Every story is us. That's who we are,  
from beginning to no-matter-how it ends.

Should I use the pronoun *we*? The Friend  
walks by, and bricks in the wall feel  
conscious. Infertile women give birth.  
So beauty embodies itself.

Those who know the taste of a meal  
are those who sit at the table and eat.

Lover and Friend are one being,  
and separate beings too,

as the polisher melts  
in the mirror's face.

## 13. *Shift from Romance to Friendship*



The story of the king, the handmaiden, and the doctor is of the movement from the erotic love of romance to the love of a meeting with the Friend, which is the mystery of this region. Rumi says that however we try to *explain* this new place, the explanation sounds embarrassing.

Some commentary clarifies, but with love  
silence is clearer. A pen goes

scribbling along, but when it tries to write  
*love*, it breaks! If you want to expound

on love, take your intellect out  
and let it lie down in the mud.

As Shakespeare changed the verb *to be* forever, Rumi changed the noun *friend*, *dost* in Farsi. A meeting takes place that translates inner life into outer and outer to inner. The *sobbet* of Friendship is "the way messengers from the mystery talk to us." Call it Holy Spirit, Khidr, Buddha-mind, Friend, Beloved, or Lord, there's a shift from the romantic ache, which is a love dis-ease, to an encounter with "a person like the dawn," whose face loosens the knot of intellectual discourse. This Friendship breaks through the stalled-limbo of desire to become a reckoning (the astrolabe image) "that sights into the mysteries of God." Love changes from the exciting synapse of relationship to a condition of being, *the truest health*.



## BURNT KABOB

Last year, I admired the wines. This,  
I'm wandering inside the red world.

Last year, I gazed at the fire,  
This year I'm burnt kabob.

Thirst drove me down to the water  
where I drank the moon's reflection.

Now I am a lion staring up, totally  
lost in love with the thing itself.

Don't ask questions about  
longing. Look in my face.

Soul drunk, body ruined, these two  
sit helpless in a wrecked wagon.  
Neither knows how to fix it.

And my heart, I'd say it was more  
like a donkey sunk in a mudhole,  
struggling and miring deeper.

But listen to me: for one moment,  
quit being sad. Hear blessings  
dropping their blossoms  
around you. God.

## SITTING IN THE ORCHARD

A man sits in an orchard, fruit trees full  
and the vines plump. He has his head  
on his knee; his eyes are closed.

His friend says, "Why stay sunk in mystical  
meditation when the world is like this?  
Such visible grace."

He replies, "This outer is an elaboration  
of the inner. I prefer the origin."

Natural beauty is a tree limb reflected  
in the water of a creek, quivering there, not  
there. The growing that moves in the soul

is more real than tree limbs and reflections.  
We laugh and feel happy or sad over all this.

Try instead to get a scent  
of the true orchard. Taste the vineyard  
within the vineyard.

## THE PRINCE OF KABUL

Here is a story of a young prince who suddenly sees  
that the ambitious world is a big game  
of king of the mountain, a boy scrambling up

a pile of sand to call out, "I am king."

Then another throws him off to make his momentary claim, then another and so on.

World complications can sometimes become very simple very quickly, and age has no bearing on this realization.

Neither are words necessary to see into mystery. Just be and it is. A king dreams his young son has died. He falls

into such grief in the dream that the world darkens, and his body grows inert. Suddenly he wakes into a joy he's never felt.

His son is alive! He thinks to himself, *Such sorrow causes such joy.* It is a kind of joke on human beings that we are pulled

between these two states as though with ropes on the sides of a collar. Dream interpreters say laughter in a dream foretells weeping

and regret; tears, some new delight. Now the king has another thought, *What occurs in dream can actually happen any second!*

If my son dies, I will need a keepsake. When a candle goes out, you need another lit candle. My son must give us offspring.

He's of marriageable age. I'll find  
him a bride. This is flawless reasoning,  
dear reader. Open any medical text and look

at the table of contents: tumors, rashes,  
fevers, there are a thousand ways to die!  
Every step takes you into a scorpion pit.

He found a wife for the prince, not from  
royal blood or from wealth, but from a poor,  
honest worker's family, with the greater riches

of an open heart. A beautiful young woman  
clear as the morning sun. The women  
in the court object vigorously, but the king

has decided. He knows the value of inner wealth  
as opposed to the other: a long curving  
file of moving camels, as against bits of hair

and dung. If you own the caravan, why bother  
with refuse left behind? In a quirk of destiny,  
as the marriage approaches, the old woman

of Kabul falls in love with the handsome,  
generous-spirited prince. She enchants him  
with Babylonian magic, so that he leaves

his bride at the wedding, and for a year  
he kisses the sole of her Kabulian shoe.  
Everyone weeps for him, while he laughs

in his ignorance. His father the king prays  
constantly, *Lord! Lord!*, and because of that  
surrendered calling out, a master comes

from the road to save the prince. "Go to  
the graveyard before dawn," says the master.  
"Find the bleached-white tomb beside

the wall. Dig there in the direction  
your prayer rug points. You'll discover  
how God works." This story is long,

and you're tired. I'll get to the point.  
The prince does as the master says and wakes.  
He runs to his father carrying a sword

and a shroud, the signs his digging brought,  
showing that he recognizes his mistake  
and that he is ready for whatever

the consequences are. The king orders  
that the entire city be decorated  
to celebrate the new marriage. Such

an extravagant feast is prepared that sherbets  
are set out for the street dogs! The prince  
is so astonished by how the old woman

enthralled him, and by the return of his wisdom,  
that he falls down in a swoon for three  
days. Little by little with rosewater remedies

he wakes again. A year passes in this new life.  
Then the king begins to joke with his son,  
"Do you remember that old friend of yours,

how it was in her bed?" "Don't mention it!"  
screams the son. "That was delusion.  
I have found my real bride now." This prince

is the soul of humanity, your essence.  
The old woman of Kabul is the color and perfume  
of the sensory world. Release from the spell

comes when you say, *I take refuge with the lord  
of daybreak*. The woman has great power.  
She can tie knots in your chest that only

God's breathing loosens. Don't take her appeal  
lightly. The prince was in her net for one  
year. You might stay there sixty. You say

you grow restless when you don't drink the dark  
world-drink, but if you could see a living one  
for one moment, you would draw out that thorn

from your foot and walk with no limp. Let  
the lamp of the Friend's face show you where  
to go. Selflessness is your true self, sword

and shroud. Whereas this is how  
most people live: sleeping on the bank  
of a freshwater stream, lips dry with thirst.

In the dream you're running toward a mirage.  
As you run, you're proud of being the one  
who sees the oasis. You brag to your friends,

"I have the heart-vision. Follow me  
to the water!" This love of spying far-off  
satisfactions, this traveling, keeps you

from tasting the real water of where you are,  
and who. Nearer than the big vein on your neck,  
with waves lapping against you: *here, here.*

The way is who and where you already are,  
sleeping in your very being: that which sleeps  
and wakes and sleeps and dreams the sweet water

is the taste of God. Maybe another traveler  
will come to help you see the stream,  
like the man who laughs during a long drought

when everyone else is weeping. The crops  
have dried up. The vineyard leaves are black.  
People are gasping and dying like fish

thrown up on shore, but one man is always  
smiling. A group comes to ask, "Have you no  
compassion for this suffering?" He answers,

"To your eyes this is a drought. To me,  
it's 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 river water."

When you think your father is guilty  
of an injustice, his face looks cruel.  
Joseph, to the envious brothers, seems

dangerous. When you make peace  
with your father, he will *look* peaceful.  
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, 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, the pouring noise of many springs  
in your ears. The tree limbs will move

like people dancing who suddenly know  
the mystical life. The leaves snap  
their fingers like they're hearing music.





They are! A sliver of mirror shines out  
from under a felt covering. Think how  
it will be when the whole thing is open

to the air and sunlight! There are  
mysteries I'm not telling you.

## THE WRIST

Who are you? The inner vision of consciousness?  
The heart? A sacred half-light, are you that?

Do you grow gatherings? Are you a friend  
of the sun, who comes and goes so quickly?

Do not forget your vertical passage,  
the night of power,<sup>33</sup>  
and don't hide from the one  
for whom all our secrets are down in the pillow under  
his head, doctor of lovers, soul for  
this thick world,  
the one who spirals iron  
like dough and makes the body lightedness.

No belief is necessary to enter this tent  
where one love story changes to another.

I remember that with these words brought here  
by a falcon from the wrist of Shams.



If the beloved is everywhere,  
the lover is a veil,

but when living itself  
becomes the Friend,  
lovers disappear.

## THE KING, THE HANDMAIDEN, AND THE DOCTOR

Do you know why your soul-mirror  
does not reflect as clearly as it might?

Because rust has begun to cover it.  
It needs to be cleaned.

Here's a story about the inner state  
that's meant by *soul-mirror*.

In the old days there was a king  
who was powerful in both kingdoms, the visible  
as well as the spirit world.

One day as he was riding  
on the hunt, he saw a girl and was greatly taken  
with her beauty. As was the custom, he paid her family  
handsomely and asked that she come to be a servant  
at the palace. He was in love with her.

The feelings  
trembled and flapped in his chest like a bird  
newly put in a cage.

But as soon as she arrived, she fell ill.

He brought doctors together. "You have both our lives in your hands. Her life is my life. Whoever heals her will receive the finest treasure I have, the coral inlaid with pearls, anything!"

So the doctors began, but no matter what they did, the girl got worse.

The king saw that his doctors were helpless. He ran barefooted to the mosque. He knelt on the prayer rug and soaked the point of it with his tears.

He dissolved to an annihilated state. He cried out loud for help, and the ocean of grace surged over him. He slept on the prayer rug in the midst of his weeping.

In his dream an old man appeared. "Good king, tomorrow a stranger will come. He is the physician you can trust. Listen to him."

As dawn rose, the king was sitting up in the belvedere on his roof. He saw someone coming, a person like the dawn.

He ran to meet this guest. Like two swimmers who love the water, their souls knit together without being sewn, no seam. The king said, "You are my beloved,

not the girl!" He opened his arms and held the saintly doctor to him. He kissed his hand and his forehead and asked how his journey had been. He led him to the head table.

"At last, I have found what patience can bring, this one whose face answers any question, who simply by looking can loosen the knot of intellectual discussion."

They talked and ate a spirit-meal. Then the king  
took the doctor to where the girl lay.

The secret  
of her pain was opened to him, but he didn't tell  
the king. It was love, of course.

Love is the astrolabe  
that sights into the mysteries of God. Earth-love,  
spirit-love, any love looks into that yonder,  
but whatever I try to say *explaining* love  
is embarrassing!

A pen went scribbling along.  
When it tried to write *love*, it broke.

If you want to  
expound on love, take your intellect out and let it  
lie down in the mud. It's no help.

Nothing is so strange  
in this world as the sun. The sun of the soul  
even more so. You want proof that it exists,  
so you stay up all night *talking* about it.

Finally you sleep  
as the sun comes up. Look at it!

Word of that sun,  
Shams, came, and everything hid. Husam touches my arm.  
He wants me to say more about Shams.

Not now, Husam.  
I don't know how to make words make sense, or praise.  
In the Friend-place nothing true can be said.  
Let me just be here.

But Husam begs, "Feed me. Hurry!  
Time is a sharp downstroke. A Sufi is supposed  
to be a child of the moment! Don't say *tomorrow* or *later*."  
I reply,

"It's better that the way of the Friend  
be concealed in a story. Let the mystery come through  
what people say around the lovers, not from what  
lovers say to each other."

"No! I want this as naked  
and true as it can be. I don't wear a shirt  
when I lie down with my beloved."

"Husam! If the Friend  
came to you naked, your chest could not stand it.  
Ask for what you want, but within some limits!"  
This has no end.

Go back to the beginning,  
the end of the story of the king and the lovesick  
maiden and the holy doctor, who said,

"Leave me alone  
with the girl." He quietly began, "Where are you from?  
Who are your relatives? Who else are you close to  
in that region?"

He held her hand to feel the pulse.  
She told many stories mentioning many names.  
He would say the names again to test the response  
of her pulse.

Finally he asked, "When you visit  
other towns, where are you most likely to go?"  
She mentioned one town and another, where she bought  
bread and where salt,

until he happened to say *Samarkand!*  
The dear city sweet as candy. She blushed. Her breath  
caught. Oh, she loves a goldsmith in Samarkand!  
She misses him so.

"Where exactly does he live?"  
"At the head of the bridge on Ghatafar Street."  
"Now I can heal you."

The doctor went to the king and told him only part of the story. "On some pretext we must bring a certain goldsmith from Samarkand."

The king's messengers went and easily persuaded the man to leave his town for a while. He arrived, and the doctor said,

"Marry the girl to this man and she will be completely cured." It was done, and for six months those two loved and made love and completely satisfied themselves with each other. The girl was restored to perfect health.

Then the physician gave the goldsmith a potion, so that he began to sicken. His handsomeness faded. He became sunken-cheeked and jaundiced and ugly.

The girl stopped loving him. Any love based on physical beauty is not the deepest love. Choose to love what does not die. The generous one is not hard to find.

But what about the doctor's poisoning the poor goldsmith! It was not done for his friend the king's sake.

The reason is a mystery, like Khidr's cutting the boy's throat. When someone is killed by a doctor like this one, it's a blessing, even though it might not seem so.

Such a doctor is part of a larger generosity. Don't judge his actions. You are not living so completely within the truth as he is.



Reason has no way to say  
its love. Only love opens  
that secret.

If you want  
to be more alive, love  
is the truest health.



## 14. Union



The intensest, the most poignant cry comes from one who has known the union and lost it. Rumi says, *Give me his longing!*

I have seen one living in the state of union, at least one. They may exist in various guises all around us. Bawa Muhaiyaddeen<sup>34</sup> was totally present in each moment and so attentive to every detail, the tiniest bit of outer onion-skin left on a chopped bit, and also he felt with each breath the divine presence flowing through him. It was exhilarating to be there where he sat on his bed in Philadelphia, like breathing the ozone near a waterfall. He answered questions and listened to stories of what happened to people during their days. He laughed and tended business matters. He supervised the cooking of lunch, did the measuring and pouring in of spices.

Rumi says *lovers* are those who may seem to be judiciously considering very troubling matters, the world situation, relationship difficulties, "but really they're leaning back riding in a wagon on the Bukhara road, soul beauty their only expertise." That's the way it felt in Bawa's room. He was the most loving person I've ever met, and he had much to say about the innermost heart, the *qalb*. He lived there. He called it a house with ninety-nine windows (the qualities of God), a sanctuary, a flowering plenitude, a benevolence, a piece of flesh that does not die, the *kaaba* of



the true pilgrimage, and source of the light that is the *ruh*, the soul. He also held that human beings cannot, and must not, judge one another's innermost heart. Only divine wisdom can do that.

The heart cannot be talked about. We must experience its depths in that mysterious osmosis of presence with presence. Hazrat Inayat Khan says that our purpose here is to make God a reality, a daunting and a potentially unbalancing task. One can get too full in the ecstatic state. Rumi warns that the roof is a dangerous place to drink wine. We can die *trying* to make God a reality. If we don't fall from the roof, we wake with a hangover that weakens consciousness. Hangover remorse can be helpful then. The work of balancing love (enthusiasm) and discipline (practical helpfulness) is beautifully addressed in the first poem of this section, the drink of water that is "The Sunrise Ruby."

## THE SUNRISE RUBY

In the early morning hour,  
just before dawn, lover and beloved wake  
to 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."

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.

## THE GENERATIONS I PRAISE

Yesterday the beauty of early dawn  
came over me, and I wondered who  
  
my heart would reach toward. Then  
this morning again and you. Who  
  
am I? Wind and fire and watery  
ground move me mightily because  
  
they're pregnant with love, love  
pregnant with God. These are the  
  
early morning generations I praise.

## ONE SWAYING BEING

Love is not condescension, never  
that, nor books, nor any marking  
  
on paper, nor what people say of  
each other. Love is a tree with  
  
branches reaching into eternity  
and roots set deep in eternity,  
  
and no trunk! Have you seen it?  
The mind cannot. Your desiring  
  
cannot. The longing you feel for  
this love comes from inside you.

When you become the Friend, your  
longing will be as the man in

the ocean who holds to a piece of  
wood. Eventually, wood, man, and

ocean become one swaying being,  
Shams Tabriz, the secret of God.



Held like this, to draw in milk,  
no will, tasting clouds of milk,  
never so content.

#### HANGOVER REMORSE

Muhammad said, "Three kinds of people  
are particularly pathetic. The powerful man  
out of power, the rich man with no money,  
and the learned man laughed at."

Yet these are those who badly want change!  
Some dogs sit satisfied in their kennels.  
But one who last year drank ecstatic union,  
the pre-eternity agreement, who this year  
has a hangover from bad-desire wine,  
the way he cries out for the majesty  
he's lost,

give me *that* longing!

## SOUL, HEART, AND BODY ONE MORNING

There's a morning where presence comes over you,  
and you sing like a rooster in your earth-colored shape.

Your heart hears and, no longer frantic, begins  
to dance. At that moment soul  
reaches total emptiness. Your heart becomes Mary,

miraculously pregnant, and body, like a two-day-old  
Jesus says wisdom words. Now the heart  
turns to light, and the body picks up the tempo.

Where Shamsi Tabriz walks, the footprints  
are musical notes and holes you fall through into space.



Today, like every other day, we wake up empty  
and frightened. Don't open the door to the study  
and begin reading. Take down a musical instrument.

Let the beauty we love be what we do.  
There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground.



Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing  
there is a field. I'll meet you there.

When the soul lies down in that grass,  
the world is too full to talk about.

Ideas, language, even the phrase *each other*,  
doesn't make any sense.

## 15. *Die Before You Die*



Death is key to this drastic change described in the last section. When we know in some deeply certain way that we are going to die, we move toward surrender more quickly. It is life's huge riddle, that we must die before we die, this dissolving into the heart. We shall certainly be changed in death, if not before.



*Judge a moth by the beauty of its candle.*

Shams is invisible because he is inside sight.  
He is the intelligent essence  
of what is everywhere at once, seeing.

### HUSAM

There is a way of passing away from the personal,  
a dying that makes one plural.

A gnat lights in buttermilk to become nourishment  
for many. Your soul is like that, Husam.<sup>35</sup>

Hundreds of thousands of impressions  
from the invisible are wanting to come through you!

I get dizzy with the abundance. When life  
is this dear, it means the source is pulling us.

Freshness comes from there. We're given the gift  
of continuously dying and being resurrected.

The body's death now to me is like going to sleep.  
No fear of drowning. I'm in another water.

Stones don't dissolve in rain. This is the end  
of the Fifth Book of the *Masnavi*.

With constellations in the night sky, some look up  
and point. Others can be guided by the arrangements:

the Sagittarian bow piercing enemies, the Water Jar  
soaking fruit trees, the Bull plowing its truth,

the Lion tearing darkness open to red satin. Use  
these words to change. Be kind and honest,

and harmful poisons will turn sweet inside you.



Lovers are alive to the extent  
they can die. A great soul approaches

Shams. *What are you doing here?*

Answer: *What is there to do?*

## THAT QUICK

A lover looks at creekwater and wants to be  
that quick to fall, to kneel, then all  
the way down in full prostration.

A lover wants to die of his love  
like a man with dropsy  
who knows that water will kill him,  
but he can't deny his thirst.

A lover loves death. Spill your jug  
in the river! Your shame and fear  
are like felt layers covering coldness.

Throw them off, and rush naked  
into the joy of death.

## EMPTY BOAT

Some huge work goes on growing.  
How could one person's words matter?

Where you walk heads pop from the ground.  
What is one seed head compared to you?

On my death day I'll know the answer.  
I have cleared this house, so that your work  
can, when it comes, fill every room.

I slide like an empty boat  
pulled over the water.





In the slaughterhouse of love they kill only  
the best, none of the weak or deformed.  
Don't run away from this dying.  
Whoever's not killed for love is dead meat.

### I TRUST YOU

The soul is a newly skinned hide, bloody  
and gross. Work on it with manual discipline,  
and the bitter tanning acid of grief.

You'll become lovely and very strong.  
If you can't do this work yourself, don't worry.  
You don't have to make a decision, one way or another.

The Friend, who knows a lot more than you do,  
will bring difficulties and grief and sickness,  
as medicine, as happiness, as the moment

when you're beaten, when you hear *Checkmate*,  
and can finally say with Hallaj's voice,  
*I trust you to kill me.*

## IMADU'L-MULK

Remember the story of the king who is so enraged with his close friend that he's about to kill him!

A privileged intercessor, Imadu'l-Mulk, steps in and saves the man, but then the king's close friend,

who has just been saved, turns away and will not thank the intercessor. A teacher comes and asks, "Why

do you act so strangely?" He answers, "I was in the state Muhammad describes as *No other has been*

*this way with God, this near*. If the king wishes to cut my head off, he may furnish me a new one,

or not. Pitchblack night in his presence is worth a hundred festival days without him. Inside

the presence there's no religion, no grace, no unfaithfulness, no punishment, and no language can say

anything about it, except that it is *bidden, bidden*.



You have said what you are.

I am what I am.

Your actions in my head,  
my head here in my hands  
with something circling inside.

I have no name  
for what circles  
so perfectly.



Some nights stay up till dawn,  
as the moon sometimes does for the sun.  
Be a full bucket pulled up the dark way  
of a well, then lifted out into light.



## 16. Harsh Evidence



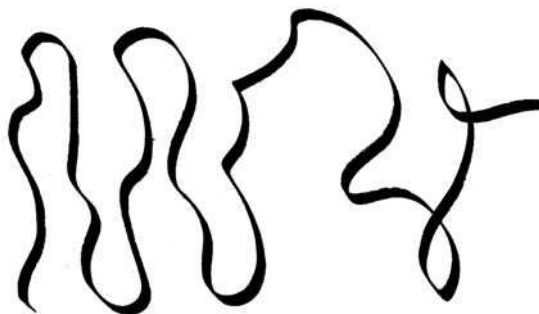
For Kharraqani and his wife love is conflict, *necessary opposition*. Two armies set the battle lines, a black flag here, a white flag there, then something happens between them. The Red Sea roars over both. Kharraqani's bossy wife is right for him. The heat of their being together gets a spring unfrozen and flowing again.

In this region love is a courtroom where harsh evidence *must* be brought in. Faithfulness must turn to betrayal and betrayal into trust before any human being can become part of the truth. Surely love is a big part of the truth we're here to live.

There's an ordeal, some anguish and suffering, essential to a soul's growing into deeper love. Life must be lived. One definition of Sufism is *joy at sudden disappointment*. The Sufis know that precisely the right disaster comes at the right moment to break us open to the helplessness that an opening of the heart requires. This is harsh truth, but the truth. Love grows near truthfulness, and fades when words are tinged with lying. Love grows from the ruins of personality. There are heart-regions that one does not enter willingly, or knowingly, and that one actively tries to avoid reentering. I don't use it much, and know very little about it, but the word *karma* may belong here, along with Auden's stanza,

O stand, stand at the window  
As the tears scald and start,  
You shall love your crooked neighbor  
With your crooked heart.<sup>36</sup>

W. H. Auden is one of the best-loved poets in English for the very reason that he brings in the acerbic, the faithless, and the shadow within the deeply felt joy of his loving. There's an impending danger. To leave that dimension out of love poems is not to tell the full truth. Auden is gay, too, in all senses, which adds more depths to his cultural work.



## KHARRAQANI'S MARRIAGE

The young seeker wonders, *How could a teacher  
lie with that woman!* Can a guide agree  
with a thief?

Suddenly Sheikh Kharraqani<sup>37</sup> appears, riding a lion,  
firewood stacked behind him. His whip,  
a live serpent. Every master rides a fierce lion,  
whether you see it or not. Know this  
with your other eyes: There are thousands of lions

under your teacher's thighs and all of them  
stacked with wood!

Kharraqani knew the problem and immediately  
began to answer, "Well, it's not out of desire  
that I put up with her! Don't think that.  
It's not her perfume or bright-colored clothes.

Enduring her public disdain has made me strong  
and patient. She is my practice.

Nothing can be clear without a polar opposite  
present. Two banners, one black, one white,  
and between them something gets settled.  
Between Pharaoh and Moses,  
the Red Sea."



## HARSH EVIDENCE

What sort of person says that he or she wants  
to be polished and pure, then complains  
about being handled roughly?

Love is a lawsuit where harsh evidence  
must be brought in. To settle the case,  
the judge must see evidence.

You've heard that every buried treasure  
has a snake guarding it.  
Kiss the snake to discover the treasure!

Don't run from those who scold,  
and don't turn away from cleansing conflict,  
or you will remain weak.

## THE STUPID THINGS I'VE DONE

Let your sunlight shine on this piece of dung,  
and dry it out, so I can be used  
for fuel to warm a bathhouse.

Look on the terrible things I've done,  
and cause herbs and eglantine to grow out of them.

The sun does this with the ground.  
Think what glories God can make  
from the fertilizer of sinning!

## CANDLE AT NOON

A man is wandering the marketplace at noon  
with a candle in his hand, totally ecstatic.

"Hey," calls a shopkeeper, "is this a joke?  
Who are you looking for?"

"Someone breathing *Huuu*, the divine breath."  
"Well, there are plenty to choose from."

"But I want one who can be in anger and desire  
and still be a true human being in the same moment."

## DERVISHES

When school and mosque and minaret  
get torn down, then dervishes can begin  
their community. Not until faithfulness

turns to betrayal and betrayal into trust  
can any human being become  
part of the truth.

## DOVES

People want you to be happy.  
Don't keep serving them your pain!



If you could untie your wings  
and free your soul of jealousy,

you and everyone around you  
would fly up like doves.

## WHEN WORDS ARE TINGED WITH LYING

Muhammad gave this indication of how to know  
what's real. "When you feel

a peaceful joy, you're near the truth.  
Unquiet and off center, jealous or greedy,

then what you do seems pretentious  
and those around you insincere.

Speak the clearest truth you know,  
and let the uneasiness heal."

When words are tinged with lying,  
they're like water dripping into an oil lamp.  
The wick won't light, and the pleasure  
of your love room will diminish.

## THERE YOU ARE

You're inside every kindness. When a sick person feels better, you're that,

and the onset of disease too. You're sudden, terrible screaming. Some problems require

we go for help. When we knock on a stranger's door, you sent us. Nobody answers. It's

you! When work feels necessary, you are the way workers move in rhythm.

You are what is: the field, the players, the ball, those watching. Someone claims to

have evidence that you do not exist.

You're the one who brings the evidence in,

and the evidence itself. You are inside the soul's great fear, every natural

pleasure, every vicious cruelty. Someone loves something, someone else hates

the same. There you are. Whatever anyone wants or not: political power, injustice,

material possessions, those are your script, the handwriting we study. Body, soul,

shadow. Whether reckless or careful,  
you are what we do. It's absurd to ask

your pardon. You're inside repentance,  
and sin! The wonder of various jewels,

agate, emerald. How we are during a day,  
then at night, you are those moods and

the pure compassion we feel for each  
other. Every encampment has a tent

where the leader is, and also the wide  
truth of your imperial tent overall.



A night full of talking that hurts,  
my worst held-back secrets: everything  
has to do with loving and not loving.

This night will pass.  
Then we have work to do.



There's a shredding that's really a healing,  
that makes you *more* alive!

A lion holds you in his arms.  
Fingers rake the fretbridge for music.



Dance, when you're broken open.  
Dance, if you've torn the bandage off.  
Dance in the middle of the fighting.  
Dance in your blood.  
Dance, when you're perfectly free.



All I know of spirit  
is this love.

## YOUR DEFECTS

An empty mirror and your worst destructive habits,  
when they are held up to each other,  
that's when the real making begins.  
That's what art and crafting are.

A tailor needs a torn garment to practice his expertise.  
The trunks of trees must be cut and cut again  
so they can be used for fine carpentry.

Your doctor must have a broken leg to doctor.  
Your defects are the ways that glory gets manifested.

## 17. *Meditation Pavane*



This was my dream of August 10, 2001. I am a book in three parts. The first and last have generic, ineffable designations, *the beginning-less beginning* and *the endless end*. The middle part where (who) I am has an odd name that I see spelled out in capitals, MEDITATION PAVANE. Awake, I record the dream and think I have seen the word *pavane* before, though I don't know what it means, some kind of music? I look it up in the dictionary. "A grave and stately dance performed by couples in elaborate clothing, of Spanish and Italian origin, 15–16th century." A Mediterranean courtship dance, with a circle of elders observing. The word derives from a colloquial name for Padua and is related by folk etymology to the French *pavaner*, meaning to strut like a peacock. So a *meditation pavane* mixes the internal quiet of meditation with the social display of courtship.

There is a rare English word *pavonine*, meaning peacock-like or having the iridescence of their slender necks and the wide-open eyes on the tail feathers. Street pigeons sometimes have pavonine rings around their necks. I go to the Internet to search for *pavane*. The third item down has two familiar names, Barry and Shelley Phillips, friends of a friend, whom I will soon meet and do a bookstore Rumi reading with in Santa Cruz (October 2001). They are musicians specializing in Appalachian, Shaker, and Celtic

melodies. Shelley has a CD called *Pavane*. Gourd Music is their label! I have published a volume of my own poetry, *Gourd Seed* (1993). I used to grow gourds.

The connections are clear. I call them to arrange some sound-studio time during my visit to Santa Cruz. That session turns into a CD, which we call *What Was Said to the Rose*, and also a concert in Santa Cruz (April 2002). The dance of courtship energies moving with the inner motions of meditation, let's say that mystery is the station of love explored in this section. The close-in irritation and excitement of the erotic, stepping with the cleansing of going-in.

The way we are led by dreams has been extremely important in my life. I have told the story elsewhere, several times, how I met my teacher in a dream on May 2, 1977. I'll tell it again: In my dream I am sleeping on the bluff above the Tennessee River five miles north of Chattanooga where I grew up. I wake up inside the dream, though still asleep. A ball of light rises off Williams Island and comes over me. It clarifies from the inside out and reveals a man sitting cross-legged with a white shawl over his head, which is bowed. He lifts his head and opens his eyes. "I love you," he says. "I love you too," I answer. The landscape, my first deep love, the curve of that river and the island, feels soaked with love, which is also just the ordinary dew forming in the night. I feel the *process* of the dew as a mixing of love with world-matter. That was the dream, and the only credential I have for working with Rumi's poetry. When I met the teacher in the dream, Bawa Muhaiyaddeen, a year and a half later in September of 1978, he told me to continue the work on Rumi. "It has to be done." Bawa died on December 8, 1986. I used to visit the Fellowship in Philadelphia several times a year for three or four days, over those nine years. He never asked for

money in exchange for the wisdom he gave so generously. The curry was free too. Food truly does taste better when it's made by an enlightened being.

So let's have tea and look out at the cold sea. If you want one of these CDs that Barry and Shelley Phillips and I made (Irish, Appalachian, Shaker, and improvised music: cello, English horn, Irish harp, flute, with myself speaking Rumi poems, most of which are included in this volume), I'll send you one *free*. Call 800-682-8637. Leave your name and address.



## RULES ABOUT RESTRAINT

There is nourishment like bread  
that feeds one part of your life

and nourishment like light for another.  
There are many rules about restraint

with the former, but only one rule  
for the latter, *Never be satisfied.*

Eat and drink the soul substance,  
as a wick does with the oil it soaks

in. Give light to the company.

## THE COMPANY OF LOVERS

The rule that covers everything is:  
*How you are with others, expect that back.*

If you want to know God, enjoy the company  
of lovers. If you want to be thought a great

person, learn some subtle point and say it  
with many variations as the answer

to every question. If you want to  
live your soul, find a friend  
like Shams and stay near.



## THE LOOK THAT OPENS

We wait for inspiration and ask no fee,  
the feel of sacred ambiance being enough.

So bring your malaise, your dullness,  
your callous ingratitude.

As we meet you, the coming together itself  
will be medicine. We are the cure,  
the look that opens your looking.

## STRAW AND GRASSES

*There is no reality but God*, says  
the completely surrendered teacher,  
who is an ocean for all beings.

The levels of creation are straws  
in that ocean. The movement comes  
from agitation in the water.  
When the ocean wants the dry stems calm,  
it sends them close to shore.

When it wants them back in the deep  
surge, it does with them  
as the wind does with grasses.

This never ends.



Friend, our closeness is this:  
anywhere you put your foot, feel me  
in the firmness under you.

How is it with this love,  
I see your world and not you?



## 18. Love Dogs



The Sufis feel that dogs are our teachers with their faithfulness, their humility, and their bounding, unqualified welcome when we come home. The wordless intimacy of how we are with those beings teaches us to give ourselves wholeheartedly.

There's a *Saturday Night Live* sketch with John Lithgow as a Catholic priest hearing confession from actual dogs. A voice off-camera speaks for the dogs, "Father, I have barked at cats late at night. I have turned over a garbage can and eaten chicken bones." But Lithgow's face is so close to their faces and his intoning such, that the dogs begin to bark with the fun of it. It's hilarious, us forgiving them.

### THE OCEAN SURGE

I want to be in such passionate adoration  
that my tent gets pitched against the sky!

Let the beloved come and sit  
like a guard dog in front of the tent.

When the ocean surges, don't let me  
just hear it. Let it splash inside my chest!

## LOVE DOGS

One night a man was crying *Allab! Allab!*  
His lips grew sweet with praising,  
until a cynic said, "So!  
I have heard you calling out, but have you ever  
gotten any response?"

The man had no answer to that.  
He quit praying and fell into a confused sleep.

He dreamed he saw Khidr,<sup>38</sup> the guide of souls,  
in a thick, green foliage.

"Why did you stop praising?" "Because  
I've never heard anything back."

"This longing you express  
is the return message."

The grief you cry out from  
draws you toward union.

Your pure sadness  
that wants help  
is the secret cup.

Listen to the moan of a dog for its master.  
That whining is the connection.

There are love dogs  
no one knows the names of.

Give your life  
to be one of them.



Inside water, a waterwheel turns.  
A star circulates with the moon.

We live in this night ocean wondering,  
*What are these lights?*



No better love than love with no object,  
no more satisfying work than work with no purpose.

If you could give up tricks and cleverness,  
that would be the cleverest trick!

### A GREAT WAGON

When I see your face, the stones start spinning!  
You appear; all studying wanders.  
I lose my place.

Water turns pearly.  
Fire dies down and doesn't destroy.

In your presence I don't want what I thought  
I wanted, those three little hanging lamps.

Inside your face the ancient manuscripts  
seem like rusty mirrors.

You breathe, new shapes appear,  
and the music of a desire as widespread  
as spring begins to move  
like a great wagon.

Drive slowly. Some of us  
walking alongside are lame.

## BLASPHEMY AND THE CORE

My soul keeps whispering, "Quickly,  
be a wandering dervish, a salamander

sitting in its homefire. Walk about  
watching the burning turn to roses.

As this love-secret we are both  
blasphemy and the core of Islam.

Don't wait! The open plain is better  
than any closing door. Ravens love

ruins and cemetery trees. They  
can't help but fly there. For us

this day is friends sitting together  
with silence shining in our faces."



You're song,  
a wished-for song.

Go through the ear to the center  
where sky is, where wind,  
where silent knowing.

Put seeds and cover them.  
Blades will sprout  
where you do your work.



Keep walking, though there's no place to get to.  
Don't try to see through the distances.  
That's not for human beings. Move within,  
but don't move the way fear makes you move.

## 19. One Stroke Down



We sense an impending danger in ecstatic love, that the experience will change us radically. And it's true. The love-thief steals the keys to our favorite rooms, steals our half-loves. Ayaz crushes the pearl. There is a destructive downstroke when soul-love enters. The physical pearl and its value disintegrate to powder in the presence of the king. Tremendous courage and abandon come with Ayaz's act. The courtiers feel it and prostrate themselves, hoping for grace.

The progress in a story of Rumi's is toward a moment when consciousness breaks open and the Friendship is felt *here* and *now*. The ocean of wisdom becomes *this* weather we walk. Something like a jump occurs (though it may not be anything we *do*), and life is wildly different. You're naked and cold. Hallaj<sup>39</sup> says to dive in the river and get the fur coat that is floating by. You plunge in, and it's a live bear! There's the moment, a gamble one doesn't know or care how it will turn out. This bear is going to wear you home.





Lightning, your presence  
from ground to sky.  
No one knows what becomes of me,  
when you take me so quickly.



I can break off from anyone,  
except the presence within.

Anyone can bring gifts.  
Give me someone who takes away.



The Friend comes into my body  
looking for the center, unable  
to find it, draws a blade,  
strikes anywhere.

## WOODEN CAGES

I may be clapping my hands,  
but I don't belong to a crowd of clappers.

Neither this nor that, I'm not part  
of a group that loves flute music  
or one that loves gambling or drinking wine.  
Those who live in time, descended  
from Adam, made of earth and water,  
I'm not part of that.

Don't listen to what I say,  
as though these words came from an inside  
and went to an outside.

Your faces are very beautiful,  
but they are wooden cages.

You had better run from me.  
My words are fire.

I have nothing to do with being famous,  
or making grand judgments, or feeling  
full of shame. I borrow nothing.  
I don't want anything from anybody.

I flow through human beings.  
Love is my only companion.

## MORE RANGE

We're friends with one who kills us,  
who gives us to the ocean waves.

We love this death. Only ignorance  
says, *Put it off awhile, day after*

*tomorrow*. Don't avoid the knife.  
This friend only seems fierce, bringing

your soul more range, perching your  
falcon on a cliff of the wind. Jesus

on his cross, Hallaj on his. Those  
absurd executions hold a secret.

Cautious cynics claim they *know* what  
they're doing every moment and why.

Submit to love without thinking, as  
the sun rose this morning recklessly

extinguishing our star-candle minds.

## AYAZ AND THE KING'S PEARL

One day the king assembled his courtiers,  
He handed the minister a glowing pearl.

"What would you say this is worth?"

"More gold

than a hundred donkeys could carry."

"Break it!"

"Sir, how could I waste your resources like that?"

The king presented him with a robe of honor and took back the pearl.

Then he put the pearl in his chamberlain's hand. "What would it sell for?"  
"Half a kingdom, God preserve it!"

"Break it!"

"My hand could not move to do such a thing."

The king presented him with a robe of honor and an increase in his salary. So it went with each of the sixty courtiers. One by one they imitated the minister and the chamberlain and received their reward of new wealth.

The pearl was given to Ayaz. "Can you say how splendid this is?"

"It's more than I can say."

"Then break it, this second, into tiny pieces."

Ayaz had had a dream about this, and he had hidden two stones in his sleeve. He crushed the pearl to powder between them.

As Joseph at the bottom of the well listened to the end of his story, so such listeners understand success and failure as one thing.

Don't worry about forms. If someone wants your horse, let him have it. Horses are for hurrying ahead of others.

The court assembly  
screamed at the recklessness of Ayaz. "How could you  
do that?"

"What the king says is worth more than  
any pearl. I honor the king, not some colored stone."

The courtiers immediately fell on their knees and put  
their foreheads on the ground. Their sighs went up  
like smoke asking forgiveness. The king gestured  
to his executioner as though to say, "Take out  
this trash."

Ayaz sprang forward, "Your mercy  
makes them bow like this. Give them their lives!  
Raise their faces into yours. Let them wash  
in your cool washing place."

Ayaz in his speech  
to the king gets to this point and then the pen  
breaks.

"You picked me to crush the pearl.  
Don't punish the others for my drunken obedience.  
Punish them when I'm sober because I'll never be  
sober again!

Whoever bows down like they are bowing  
will not rise up in his old self. Like a gnat  
in buttermilk, they have become your buttermilk.  
The mountains are trembling. The map and compass  
are the lines in your palm."

Husam, a hundred  
thousand impressions from spirit are wanting to come  
through here.

I feel stunned in this abundance,  
crushed and dead.

## HALLAJ

Hallaj said what he said and went to the origin  
through the hole in the scaffold.

I cut a cap's worth of cloth from his robe,  
and it swamped over me head to foot.

Years ago I broke a branch of roses  
from the top of his wall. A thorn from that  
is still in my palm, working deeper.

From Hallaj, I learned to hunt lions,  
but I became something hungrier than a lion.

I was a frisky colt. He broke me  
with a quiet hand on the side of my head.

A person comes to him naked. It's cold.  
There's a fur coat floating in the river.

"Jump in and get it," he says.  
You dive in. You reach for the coat.  
It reaches for you.

It's a live bear that has fallen in upstream,  
drifting with the current.

"How long does it take!" Hallaj yells from the bank.  
"Don't wait," you answer. "This coat  
has decided to wear me home!"

A little part of a story, a hint.  
Do you need long sermons on Hallaj?

## 20. *Love's Excess*



Someone asked once, "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 of the Masnavi

I, you, he, she, we,  
in the garden of mystic lovers,

these are not true  
distinctions.

SHAMS TABRIZ

The extravagant perspective of Rumi's life and work is that there is a core of understanding and that that core is love, the heart. Saint Augustine talks about "the supersensual eye of the soul." The eighteenth-century mystic Emanuel Swedenborg says there is a light that illuminates the mind that is different from sunlight, and that is what the word *enlightenment* refers to. Those who experience these other sights and other hearings are often in a state of untranslatable joy that almost dissolves them with its delight.

It would be strange if poetry written from such knowing were not excessive. Being *in the spirit* is not a casual thing. *Each ant is given its elegant belt at birth. This love we feel pours through us like giveaway song.*

It's not true, though, to say that Rumi's poetry always comes from a trance state. An enlightened being is most often very focused, present in the moment, and fiercely practical, even when saying the most mystical things. "You have to understand the form of the body in order to understand the meaning of the light form within it."<sup>40</sup>

And Rumi's knowing, like his father Bahauddin's,<sup>41</sup> has many valences, which certainly includes the *bulul*, or mystical trance.



## THE SOURCE OF JOY

No one knows what makes the soul wake up  
so happy! Maybe a dawn breeze  
has blown the veil from the face of God.

A thousand new moons appear. Roses  
open laughing. Hearts become perfect  
rubies like those from Badakshan.

The body turns entirely spirit.  
Leaves become branches in this wind.

Why is it now so easy to surrender,  
even for those already surrendered?

There's no answer to any of this.  
No one knows the source of joy.

A poet breathes into a reed flute,  
and the tip of every hair makes music.

Shams sails down clods of dirt  
from the roof, and we take jobs  
as doorkeepers for him.

## ROSES UNDERFOOT

The sound of salaams rising as waves  
diminish down in prayer,  
hoping for some trace of the one  
whose trace does not appear.

If anyone asks you to say who you are,  
say without hesitation, *soul*  
*within soul within soul.*

There's a pearl diver who does not know  
how to swim! No matter.  
Pearls are handed him on the beach.

We lovers laugh to hear, "This should be  
more that and that more this,"  
coming from people sitting in a wagon  
tilted in a ditch.

Going in search of the heart, I found  
a huge rose, and roses under all our feet!

How to say this to someone who denies it?  
The robe we wear is the sky's cloth.

Everything is soul and flowering.

## POETRY

I open and fill with love  
and what is not love evaporates.

All the learning in books stays put  
on the shelf. Poetry, the dear

words and images of song, comes down  
over me like mountain water.

## 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!"

This fainting is because lovers want so *much*.  
A chicken invites a camel into her henhouse,  
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  
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.

### EASTERN MYSTERY

I ask for the laughing, unconventional ones,  
even them, to be broken,  
for blood and sky to become one thing,  
for revelation as startling as an ocean  
that is neither wet nor dry.

I ask that lovers no longer be shy or concerned  
with right and wrong, with reputation  
or recognition. I have seen  
the universal intelligence offer its neck  
to the blade. I have asked why  
and been told,

*Look around this gathering  
and find those who resemble Shams,  
who made Tabriz a source  
of Eastern mystery like China.*

## NO FLAG

I used to want buyers for my words.  
Now I wish someone would buy me away from words.

I've made a lot of charmingly profound images,  
scenes with Abraham and his father Azar,  
who was famous for icons.

I'm so tired of what I've been doing.  
Then one image without form came,  
and I quit.

Look for someone else to tend the shop.  
I'm out of the image-making business.

Finally I know the freedom  
of madness.

A random image arrives. I scream,  
"Get out!" It disintegrates.

Only love.  
Only the holder the flag fits into,  
no flag.


## 21. *Love's Bewilderment*



Love loves flowing, a beyond-containment of blood and semen, wine and riverwater, amniotic fluid and the round bead of dew forming.

Flowering. Love cannot be held long within categories, likewise the poetry celebrating love. You might say that love loves confusion and not be far wrong. Love is metamorphosis, rapid and radical, agile, full of vigor and levity.

Love is the continuous alchemy of regions overlapping: animal, angelic, human, and the luminosity of the true human beings, their compassion and their cooking. None of this is sayable. It can only be lived. Rumi says, *Stay bewildered in God, and only that*. But the mind keeps questioning, turning away, *I don't think so*. There is strong resistance and fear and academic distancing in the rational precincts, which tend to mistrust any boundary-dissolving, beauty-relishing, ecstatic honesty.



God only knows, I don't,  
what keeps me laughing.

The stem of a flower  
moves when the air moves.



I reach for a piece of wood. It turns into a lute.  
I do some meanness. It turns out helpful.  
I say one must not travel during the holy month.  
Then I start out, and wonderful things happen.



In complete control, pretending control,  
with dignified authority, we are charlatans.  
Or maybe just a goat's-hair brush in a painter's hand.  
We have no idea what we are.

## MOSES AND THE SHEPHERD

Moses heard a shepherd on the road praying,  
"God,  
where are you? I want to help you, to fix your shoes  
and comb your hair. I want to wash your clothes  
and pick the lice off. I want to bring you milk  
and kiss your little hands and feet when it's time  
for you to go to bed. I want to sweep your room  
and keep it neat. God, my sheep and goats are yours.  
All I can say remembering you is *aaayyyyyy*  
and *aaabbbbbbbbbbbb*."

Moses could stand it no longer.

"Who are you talking to?"

"The one who made us and made  
the earth and made the sky."

"Don't talk about shoes  
and socks with God! And what's this with *your little  
hands*? Such blasphemous familiarity sounds like  
you're chatting with your uncles. Only something  
that grows needs milk. Only someone with feet  
needs shoes. Not God!"

The shepherd repented  
and tore his clothes and wandered out into  
the desert. A sudden revelation came then to Moses:

*You have separated me from one of my own.  
Did you come as a prophet to unite or to sever?  
I have given each being a separate and unique way  
of seeing and knowing and saying that knowledge.*



*What seems wrong to you is right for him.  
What is poison to one is honey to someone else.  
Purity and impurity, sloth and diligence in worship,  
these mean nothing to me. I am apart from all that.*

*Ways of worshipping are not to be ranked as better  
or worse. Hindus do Hindu things. The Dravidian  
Muslims in India do what they do. It's all praise,  
and it's all right. I am not glorified in acts*

*of worship. It's the worshipers! I don't hear  
the words they say. I look inside at the humility.  
That broken-open lowliness is the reality. Forget  
phraseology! I want burning, burning. Be friends*

*with your burning. Those who pay attention to ways  
of behaving and speaking are one sort. Lovers who  
burn are another. Don't impose a property tax  
on a burned-out village. Don't scold the lover.*

The "wrong" way he talks is better than a hundred  
"right" ways of others.

Inside the Kaaba  
it doesn't matter which way you point  
your prayer rug!

The ocean diver doesn't need snowshoes!  
The love-religion has no code or doctrine.

Only God.

So the ruby has nothing engraved on it!  
It doesn't need markings.

God began speaking  
deeper mysteries to Moses, vision and words,  
which cannot be recorded here. Moses left himself  
and came back. He went to eternity and came  
back here. Many times this happened.

It's foolish of me  
to try and say this. If I did say it,  
it would uproot human intelligence.

Moses ran after the shepherd, following the bewildered  
footprints,

in one place moving like a castle  
across a chessboard. In another, sideways,  
like a bishop.

Now surging like a wave cresting,  
now sliding down like a fish,  
with always his feet  
making geomancy symbols in the sand,  
recording his  
wandering state.

Moses finally caught up with him.  
"I was wrong. God has revealed to me that there are  
no rules for worship. Say whatever and however  
your loving tells you to.

Your sweetest blasphemy  
is the truest devotion. Through you a whole world  
is freed.

Loosen your tongue and don't worry  
what comes out. It's all the light of the spirit."



## MORNING WIND

Wine so bitter all bitterness sweetens,  
a beautiful face growing old.

The taste of  
Khidr's spring, words that plant olive trees.  
A man like the dawn  
with a small suggestion,  
*You should visit a few times.*

A prayer  
at the graveside that resurrects the dead,  
silence telling half a secret, unspoken wish.  
Morning wind,  
we'll stay quiet. Whatever  
you have understood of us, go and tell that  
to the living,  
what we've been hiding from them.

## THE OCEAN'S MOTION

Love is an ocean. This wide sky,  
a bit of foam on that.

Restless as Zuleikha  
in her desire for Joseph,  
sky-changes move across  
day and night. If there were no love,  
everything would freeze and be  
still. Instead,  
inorganic grains are entering  
plants. Plants enter animals;

animals enter  
spirit, and spirit sacrifices itself  
for one breath  
of that which made Mary with child. Each  
sapling lifts, and the universe  
winds like a locust swarm its wingrush  
toward perfection,  
each particle purified  
in a song of praise for motion.

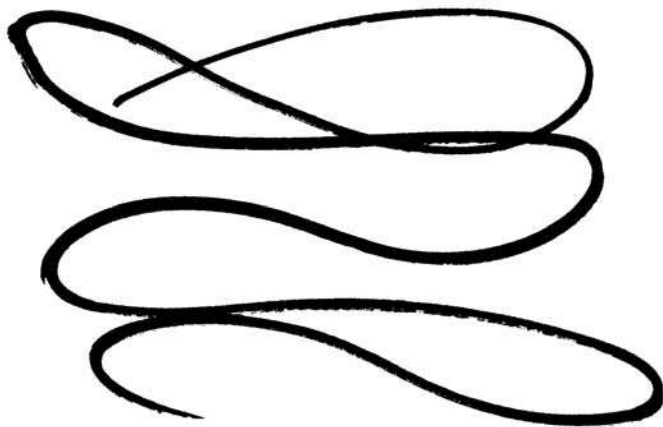
## IGNORANCE

I didn't know love would make me this  
crazy, with my eyes  
like the river Ceyhun  
carrying me in its rapids  
out to sea,  
where every bit  
of shattered boat  
sinks to the bottom.

An alligator lifts its head and swallows  
the ocean, then the ocean  
floor becomes  
a desert covering  
the alligator in  
sand drifts.  
Changes *do*  
happen. I do not know *how*,  
or *what remains* of what

has disappeared  
into the absolute.

I hear so many stories  
and explanations, but I keep quiet,  
because I don't know anything,  
and because something I swallowed  
in the ocean  
has made me completely content  
with ignorance.



## 22. *Lord of the Heart*

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Love is our aloneness with the lord of such beauty and depth that we're not lonely. The empty space of the guest house, not the guests moving through, the host and theater where mind and desire play out their myriad motions. As say *Shakespeare* is the great globe itself, not the players, nor the drowned book, not the jealous lover or the eloquently introspective athlete or the rugged king, who calls himself "old and foolish," rather the space those inhabit and the source. This love-region called *lord* is not imagination. This emptiness so dazzlingly full of emanation is what gnostics call the *pleroma*. Niffari calls it *Ignorance*. Someone else, *the cloud of unknowing*.

Words do not approach it hence the edge of self-satire that word-mystics barely keep in check. This is the one we know early on in life and come back to late. Riverlord, director of dreams, the company that most nourishes our soul, this is the great love we're given and feel bearing us along.

It's not fair to speak as though this were everyone's experience, because it isn't, and I do honor the pained vision, the bitter childhoods, the broken trust. Rumi focuses not so much on the nobility of suffering or its heartbreaking howl as on the ultimate expansion into mystery that this poetry tries to say. It began with the Friendship with Shams Tabriz. It is still unfolding, and as many of the poems imply, the unfolding is intimately woven in with seeing. John Ruskin says,

The greatest thing a human soul ever does in this world is to see something and tell what he saw in a plain way. To see clearly is poetry, prophecy, and religion all in one.<sup>42</sup>

Bawa says something very similar.

Everything you see tells the story of God. Look at it. God is out spread, filling the entire universe. So look. You exist in a form. God is without form. You are the visible example, the sun. God is the light within the sun.<sup>43</sup>



I am so small I can barely be seen.  
How can this great love be inside me?

*Look at your eyes. They are small,  
but they see enormous things.*



## EYES

What is it that *sees* when vision is clear?  
The core that has no story, has that ever *seen* anything?

Surely vision has loyalties.  
Someone buying eye medicine does not see well,  
but well enough, at least, to choose the cure.

Beyond day and night one watches  
as your eyes close and open and close, as night  
turning day turns night, as eyes  
like particles float  
in the light that is your face,  
that is the sun.

Without you our eyes might be a danger  
to the soul, but *with* you they become the same  
as the soul. When that happens,  
the heart is seeing!

You can *say* that the eyes see God, but it is God  
who sees, as in the Qur'an when the desert mountain  
looks at God, and eyes appear on every stone.



I am filled with you.  
Skin, blood, bone, brain, and soul.  
There's no room for lack of trust, or trust.  
Nothing in this existence but that existence.



When you feel your lips becoming infinite  
and sweet, like a moon in a sky,  
when you feel that spaciousness inside,  
Shams of Tabriz will be there too.

## THE GRANARY

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 masters 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,  
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 objects  
dissolve, they recognize things and comment

rationally. 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 combinations are 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 can't 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.



## THE GAZING-HOUSE

On the night when you cross the street  
from your shop and your house to the cemetery,

you'll hear me hailing you from inside  
the open grave, and you'll realize  
how we've always been together.

I am the clear consciousness core  
of your being, the same in ecstasy  
as in self-hating fatigue.

That night, when you escape the fear of snakebite  
and all irritation with the ants, you'll hear  
my familiar voice, see the candle being lit,  
smell the incense and the surprise meal fixed  
by the lover inside all your other lovers.

This heart tumult is my signal to you igniting  
in the tomb, so don't fuss with the shroud  
and the graveyard road dust. Those get ripped  
open and washed away in the music of our meeting.

And don't look for me in a human shape!  
I am inside your looking. No room for form  
with love this strong.

Beat the drum and let  
the poets speak. This is a day of purification  
for those who are already mature and initiated  
into what love is.

No need to wait until we die!  
There's more to want here than money and being  
famous and bites of roasted meat.

Now, what  
shall we call this new kind of gazing-house  
that has opened in our town where people  
sit quietly and pour out their glancing  
like light, like answering?

## THE GUEST HOUSE

This being human is a guest house.  
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,  
some momentary awareness comes  
as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!  
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,  
who violently sweep your house  
empty of its furniture, still,  
treat each guest honorably.  
He may be clearing you out  
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,  
meet them at the door laughing  
and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,  
because each has been sent  
as a guide from beyond.



Always check your inner state  
with the lord of your heart.

Copper doesn't know it's copper,  
until it's changing to gold.

Your loving doesn't know majesty,  
until it knows its helplessness.



## THE ONE THING YOU MUST DO

There is one thing in this world you must never forget to do. If you forget everything else and not this, there's nothing to worry about, but if you remember everything else and forget this, then you will have done nothing in your life.

It's as if a king has sent you to some country to do a task, and you perform a hundred other services, but not the one he sent you to do. So human beings come to this world to do *particular* work. That work is the purpose, and each is specific to the person. If you don't do it, it's as though a priceless Indian sword were used to slice rotten meat. It's a golden bowl being used to cook turnips, when one filing from the bowl could buy a hundred suitable pots. It's like a knife of the finest tempering nailed into a wall to hang things on.

You say, "But look, I'm using it. It's not lying idle." Do you hear how ridiculous that sounds? For a penny an iron nail could be bought. You say, "But I spend my energies on lofty projects. I study philosophy and jurisprudence, logic, astronomy, and medicine." But consider why you do those things. They are all branches of yourself and your impressiveness.

Remember the deep root of your being, the presence of your lord. Give yourself to the one who already owns your breath and your moments. If you don't, you'll be like the man who takes a ceremonial dagger and hammers it into a post for a peg to hold his dipper gourd. You'll be wasting valuable keenness and forgetting your dignity and purpose.

## 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 a 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, in 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 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.



## A Note on Translation



I wonder, wonder, whom de doo doo—who  
BOOM,  
who wrote the book of love.

The Monotones out of New Jersey asked that musical question in 1957, and my name may be on the cover of this one, but I am not the one they're looking for. Jelaluddin Rumi wrote the book of love. What he loves is the source of any truth and beauty coming through here. The distortions are mine.

You can never be sure, though, what is, and is not, transmitted in collaborative translation, or any translation, version, imitation, whatever you choose to call the bringing-over from one language and time into another. It's always a failure of one magnitude or another. Think of translating *Hamlet* into Chinese, or Faulkner into Farsi, Poe into Polish. It can't be done, but the attempt must be made. The same with Rumi into American.

I'll try to describe what I do. I look at one text in English and write another. For example, I did a collection of poems by a fourteenth-century Kashmiri woman named Lalla, or Laleshwari. The Naked Song poems came down in oral tradition for four hundred years before they were written down at all, some in Sanskrit, some in Kashmiri, some in both. Hundreds of lines from her poems are still actively a part of Kashmiri conversation. I don't read Kashmiri or Sanskrit, but Sir George Grierson and Lionel Barnett of the Royal Asiatic Society did read those languages. They published a book in 1920, *Lalla-Vakyana, The Wise Sayings of Lal Ded, A Mystic Poetess of Ancient Kashmir*. I looked at their book and the others listed in the back of mine to produce the text. I hope the words in it are some kin to Lalla's daring, darling, wandering songs. It's a process of attunement for me. There are many mystics that I

cannot make versions of, because I don't feel connected enough to their words. Lionel and Sir George were not trying for that kind of closeness. On the contrary, they cultivated scholarly distance. Detachment was valued, and I am very grateful for their diligence and for the lifelong British stamina and scholarly passion of Reynold Nicholson and A. J. Arberry, the Cambridge Islamicists who brought Rumi to the West with their translations from the 1920s through the 1950s. My friend John Moyne has also sent me texts to work with over the years, and Nevit Ergin is another treasure. He has worked since the late 1950s to bring the entire *Shams* (Rumi's large collection of *ghazals* and quatrains, the *Divani Shamsi Tabriz*) out of Golpinarli's Turkish into English. (Nevit Ergin's translations are available from Words Distribution, 7900 Edgewater Drive, Oakland, CA 94621. Also from maypopbooks.com and 800-682-8637.) Now the work of bringing the complete text from Farsi to English must be done.

With Rumi I try to enter the ecstatic consciousness, the love that is the subject that generates the poetry. I move with the images and try to absorb the soul-growth truth being transmitted. When it feels like a connection has occurred, the words come quickly, and at the end I feel my head bowing in gratitude. It has been an almost daily practice for twenty-seven years.

Rumi's poetry was a continuous spontaneous outpouring. The poems have no titles in Persian. They are seamless, whereas I have given most of these titles. In English we feel the title is an organic part of the poem, but it may contribute here to a false feeling of a stop-start process. There are no full stops. Rumi's poetry should be felt as a whole like Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* or Wallace Stevens's *Harmonium*. Also, in this collection I often take what I hear as the tastiest lines from a poem without giving the context. That can be found in the earlier volumes, *The Essential Rumi* and *The Soul of Rumi*. The wider truth is that Rumi's poems all grow together in a field called the *qalb*, or the innermost heart.

This volume is an attempt to present poems in a handier, more visually spacious form than I did in the previous volumes. It is a book designed specifically for those whom Rumi calls lovers, who are often on the move and need a travel size. There are new poems here, fifteen of them, but this is mostly a recollecting, a revising and relining in some instances, of poems published in the other Harper San Francisco volumes.

# Notes



## PREFACE

1. Oceanfrog: Bawa Muhaiyaddeen told this version of a Sufi story. An oceanfrog comes to visit a ditchfrog, who is very proud of where he lives, a section of ditch two feet deep, four feet long, and three feet across. He jumps around demonstrating the elegant spaciousness of his place. "How do you like this?" "Very fine," says the oceanfrog. "What's it like where you live?" asks the ditchfrog; he has never seen or heard of the ocean. "I can't really describe how it is where I live. Someday I'll take you there." I had asked Bawa what the difference was between my consciousness and his. "Someone who lives in the confines of mind and desire is like the ditchfrog. The oceanfrog swims the ocean of grace. It is good for them to visit each other."

## INTRODUCTION

2. The heart as "the comprehensive human reality": quoted from Hasan Shushud's *Masters of Wisdom of Central Asia*, trans. from the Turkish by Muhtar Holland (Coombe Springs Press, 1983), p. 143.

3. Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Heart of Understanding: Commentaries on the Heart Sutra* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1988), p. 41.

## A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF RUMI'S LIFE

4. Franklin D. Lewis, *Rumi: Past and Present, East and West* (Oxford, England: One World Publishers, 2000), p. 193.

## CHAPTER 1. SPONTANEOUS WANDERING

### *Introductory Note*

5. Panzaic: a made-up adjective for Sancho Panza, who rode a different journey than Quixote. He deserves his own quixotic word. No gaunt, bookish savior of damsels, the panzaic rider smells of donkey

and spilled beer. He's commonsensical, ambitious for himself and family, earthy, and very loyal in his friendship.

6. Pir Vilayat Khan: the son and designated successor of Hazrat Inayat Khan, educated at the Sorbonne and Oxford. During the Second World War he served as a pilot in the British Royal Navy. After the war Pir Vilayat continued his spiritual training by studying with masters of many different traditions throughout India and the Middle East. He is a Pir in the lineage of the Chisti Sufi order. While honoring the initiatic tradition, Pir Vilayat is continually pioneering updated practices in the evolution of consciousness.

7. pp. xi–xii, 76, Nanao Sakaki, *Break the Mirror*, Blackberry Books, 1996. Originally published by North Point Press, 1987. See also *Let's Eat Stars* and *Nanao or Never* from Blackberry Books, 617 E. Neck Rd., Nobleboro, ME 04555 or [www.blackberrybooksinc.com](http://www.blackberrybooksinc.com).

### *Five Things*

8. Rabia (d. 801): the woman mystic from Basra who said that a love for God should not come out of fear or hope but in response to the beauty in the heart. She once sat indoors with her eyes closed on a lovely spring morning to teach that external magnificence is only a reflection of inner kindness and generosity, and that is divine grace.

9. *Sema*: the deep listening of the ecstatic turning.

### *The Many Wines*

10. Majnun is the lover who loses his reason in the overwhelming experience of love for Layla—a good start. In the fourth grade I wrote such an extravagantly mushy valentine to Sandra Martin that it caused our parents to talk seriously on the phone for a long time. That was the 1940s. I wonder what I wrote.

### *Cooked Heads*

11. A *cooked head* has gone beyond mind and desire, beyond inner and outer, freed of time and space yet still *here*, and on the road to Tabriz as well.

## CHAPTER 2. SOHBET

### *Introductory Note*

12. Am I not your lord?: The original agreement between the divine and the human is called *Alast*. It's a short conversation. God asks

in Arabic, *Alastu bi-rabbikum*, "Am I not your Lord?" Rumi hears this question addressed to the not-yet-created humanity as a music that starts human consciousness dancing the instant, simultaneous, reply of manifest being, YES!

13. The Emily Dickinson quote is from R. W. Franklin's edition of *The Poems of Emily Dickinson* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 1998), no. 466.

14. Kenneth Rexroth, *Sacramental Acts*, ed. Sam Hamill and Elaine Laura Kleiner (Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon, 1997), p. 25.

### *You Are Not Your Eyes*

15. *Illa* and *La* are parts of the *zīkr*, the vocal or silent remembering, "There is no reality but God; there is only God." *La'illaba il'Allabu* is said to have three parts. The first part, *La'illaba*, is the denial, the abandonment of everything. The second part, *il'Allab*, the intrusion, the explosion into the individual of divine presence. *Hu*, the third part, is the out-breathing of that presence. Another way of saying what *zīkr* is, is that *La'illaba* is the manifestation of creation and *il'Allabu*, the essence, that which created the cosmos. So the saying of it merges the two with in-breath and out-breath.

### *Imra'u 'l-Qays*

16. Imra'u 'l-Qays (d. ca. A.D. 540) is considered the best pre-Islamic poet in Arabic. He is credited with being the first in that tradition to catch the reader's attention by referring at the beginning of a poem to a lost love.

## CHAPTER 3. THE SUPERABUNDANCE OF ORDINARY BEING

### *Introductory Note*

17. Rainer Maria Rilke, *Ahead of All Parting*, trans. Stephen Mitchell (New York: Random House, 1995), p. 387.

### *Zuleikha*

18. Zuleikha was the wife of Potiphar the Egyptian. For Rumi she is a type of the lover, like Majnun, so lost in her love for the handsome Joseph that she hears every phrase and every natural sound, the wind, the fire's crackling, birdcalls, as messages from Joseph.

## CHAPTER 4. SUDDEN WHOLENESS

### *Introductory Note*

19. The first two haiku are from Basho, *On Love and Barley, Haiku of Basho*, trans. Lucien Stryk (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), pp. 72, 43. The last is from Robert Hass's *Essential Haiku* (Hopewell, NJ: Ecco, 1994), p. 11.

## CHAPTER 6. A NEW LIFE

### *Introductory Note*

20. In dreams: I came across this Gilani reference in Andrew Harvey's *Perfume of the Desert* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 1999), p. 55.

21. Bawa Muhaiyaddeen, *The Book of God's Love* (Philadelphia: Fellowship Press, 1981), p. 84.

### *Nasub's Changing*

22. For the full story of Nasuh see *The Essential Rumi*, pp. 161–65.

## CHAPTER 7. GRIEF

### *Introductory Note*

23. "The feel of not to feel it" is from Keats's sonnet "In drear-nighted December . . ."

### *The Death of Saladin*

24. Saladin: Saladin Zarkub, a goldsmith in Konya. There are hagiographic miniatures that show Rumi leading Saladin out of his goldsmith's shop and into the street to begin the *sema*. Rumi heard an essential music in the goldsmith's hammering and began to turn in the ecstasy of his listening. Saladin had come to Konya in 1235, already a student, like Rumi, of Burhan Maqaqqiq. When Shams arrived in 1244, the two would meet in Saladin's shop or in his home. After Shams's disappearance, Saladin became the friend that Rumi loved as a reminder of the deep presence. In 1248 when Saladin died, Rumi led a mystical dance with flute and drum through the streets of Konya to celebrate Saladin's *urs*, the soul union of a great being with the divine. The friendship of Saladin and Rumi was further strengthened by the marriage of Rumi's oldest son, Sultan Velad, to Saladin's daughter Fateme Khatun.

## CHAPTER 8. TAVERN MADNESS

### *Introductory Note*

25. The Junnaiyd quotation is from Andrew Harvey's *Perfume of the Desert* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 1999), p. 146.

26. The story of Buddha and Mara is from Thich Nhat Hanh's *The Heart of Understanding: Commentaries on the Heart Sutra* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1988), pp. 42–45.

27. Matzoobs are crazy wisdom people, as irrational as a tiny mantis in our front yard, or Tibet, or a quantum leap through a black hole, or love, or an aneurysm in the brain, or dreams of the dead fixing food. Matzoobs know the mad health of Macchu Picchu and the statuette of a ram caught in a golden thicket that archeologists found in the graves of Ur.

## CHAPTER 9. ABSENCE

### *Introductory Note*

28. Junnaiyd (d. 910) played a key role in establishing the "sober" school of Sufism.

29. *The Poems of Emily Dickinson* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 1998), p. 517, no. 1344.

30. I reworked this quatrain from a version quoted in Andrew Harvey's *Perfume of the Desert*, p. xiii.

## CHAPTER 10. ANIMAL ENERGIES

### *Introductory Note*

31. Hazrat Inayat Khan, founder of the Sufi Order International, came to the West in 1910 as representative of the highest musical traditions of India. He brought a message of love, harmony, and beauty that was the essence of Sufi teaching and a revolutionary approach to harmonizing Western and Eastern spirituality. He says, "The work of the inner life is to make God a reality, so that He is no more an imagination; that this relationship that man has with God may seem to him more real than any other relationship in this world; and when this happens, then all relationships, however near and dear, become less binding. But at the same time, a person does not become cold; he becomes more loving." From *The Inner Life, The Sufi Message of Hazrat Inayat Khan*, vol. 1 (The Hague: East-West Publications, 1989).

## CHAPTER 11. LOVE'S SECRET

### *Introductory Note*

32. *The Glance* (New York: Viking, 1999), p. 34.

## CHAPTER 13. SHIFT FROM ROMANCE TO FRIENDSHIP

### *The Wrist*

33. Muhammad's Night of Power, the night on which the Qur'an came through him, is traditionally celebrated on the twenty-seventh night of Ramadan.

## CHAPTER 14. UNION

### *Introductory Note*

34. Bawa Muhaiyaddeen: I had thought to put here a brief biography, but I can't do it. As he taught so beautifully, a human being is too vast to be put in words. Bawa always turned away questions about his personal life. I am not the one to try to say who the being was who came to me in a dream in a ball of light on May 2, 1977. I am grateful beyond words for the heart-opening work he did and that continues with me.

## CHAPTER 15. DIE BEFORE YOU DIE

### *Husam*

35. Husam: Husam Chelebi, Rumi's scribe, and one of Shams's students. One day Rumi and Husam were walking in the gardens of Meram. Husam suggested that Rumi begin a poem in the *masnavi* form (rhyming couplets), whereupon Rumi pulled from his turban the first eighteen lines of what was to become the opening of Book I of his masterpiece, the *Masnavi*, the famous "Reed Flute's Song" section. During the next twelve years the mysterious collaboration continued. Rumi sometimes refers to the *Masnavi* as "The Book of Husam," and he often says that he is the empty flute, Husam the breath that makes the *Masnavi* music.



## CHAPTER 16. HARSH EVIDENCE

### *Introductory Note*

36. W. H. Auden: The Auden stanza may be found in his *Collected* (Vintage), but more appropriately for the theme here, look for it in *Tell Me the Truth About Love, Ten Poems by W. H. Auden* (Random House), compiled in 1994 by Edward Mendelson, executor of Auden's estate. Here are the final three stanzas of "As I Walked Out One Evening."

"O look, look in the mirror,  
O look in your distress;  
Life remains a blessing  
although you cannot bless.

"O stand, stand at the window  
As the tears scald and start;  
You shall love your crooked neighbour  
With your crooked heart."

It was late, late in the evening,  
The lovers they were gone;  
The clocks had ceased their chiming,  
And the deep river ran on.

### *Kharrāqani's Marriage*

37. Kharrāqani (d. 1034) is one of those Sufis who have no visible teacher. "I am amazed at those who declare that they require this or that master. You are well aware that I have never been taught by any man. God was my guide, though I have the greatest respect for all the masters." Others in this "line" are Attar of Nishapur, who was guided by the being of light of Hallaj Mansour, and Ibn Arabi, who was a disciple of Khidr, the invisible master of those who are masterless! Khidr's "guidance" does not consist in leading all uniformly to the same goal. Khidr helps one attain to the Khidr of one's individual being, the spring of life, the esoteric truth that frees one from literal religion. Kharrāqani says, "Each person is oriented toward a quest for his personal invisible guide, or he entrusts himself to the collective, magisterial authority as the intermediary between himself and revelation."

## CHAPTER 18. LOVE DOGS

### *Love Dogs*

38. Khidr; another name for a mysterious, but nonetheless real, function. This one has to do with how we are guided in our inner lives by one beyond our knowing. Khidr in the Islamic world is felt to be a being that exists on the edge between the seen and unseen. When Moses vows to find the place "where the two seas meet," he encounters Khidr. There have been other sightings.

He is associated with the color green. Although not mentioned by name in the *Qur'an*, he is assumed to be the one that Moses meets and wishes to travel with and learn from, who does such violent and inexplicable things that Moses cannot bear to be with him. In the famous story (*Qur'an* 18:60–83) Moses and Khidr must part, after Khidr explains the reasons for what he has done, because Moses does not have patience enough to endure the truth of Khidr's harsh obedience.

Khidr seems especially connected with solitaries and those without visible teachers. Ibrahim, who gave up his kingdom for the kingdom within, says, "I lived four years in the wilderness. Khidr the Green Ancient was my companion. He taught me the Name of God."

## CHAPTER 19. ONE STROKE DOWN

### *Introductory Note*

39. Al-Hallaj Mansour was martyred in Baghdad in 922 for saying, *Ana'l Haqq*, or *I am the truth. I am God*.

## CHAPTER 20. LOVE'S EXCESS

### *Introductory Note*

40. Bawa Muhaiyaddeen, *A Mystical Journey* (Philadelphia: Fellowship Press, 1990), p. 92.

41. In Discourse No. 10 Rumi tells a story of his father, Bahauddin. A government official comes to ask advice. Bahauddin says the official shouldn't have taken the chance. "I am subject to various states," he explains. "In one I can speak and in another I do not speak. In one state I can listen to the stories of other lives and respond to them. In another I withdraw to my room and see no one. In yet another I am utterly distraught, absorbed in God, unable to communicate at all. It's too risky for you to have come here on the chance I might be able to have conversation." In his surrender, these regions flow over him like weather.

He's not in control of them. He's on retreat with his outrageous soul.  
This is the fluidity and freedom of love's excess.

## CHAPTER 22. LORD OF THE HEART

### *Introductory Note*

42. This Ruskin quote is from *Modern Painters*, vol.3, pt. 4, ch. 16.

43. *Questions of Life—Answers of Wisdom*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Fellowship Press, 2001), pp. 40–41.

### A NOTE ON TRANSLATION

The Monotones from Newark, New Jersey—lead singer Charles Patrick, with Warren Davis, George Malone, Warren and John Ryanes, and John Smith—are the quintessential one-hit wonders of the 1950s. These five young men hit upon the words and music of “The Book of Love,” and while they were rehearsing, some children outside were throwing a ball against the wall. At a key point the ball hit the window, not breaking it but making a loud BOOM, right at the point where that now appears in the song. Everyone agreed it should be incorporated.

Well I wonder, wonder whom, de doo doo, who  
BOOM (the children's ball)  
who wrote the book of love . . .

I like the grammatical wavering between *whom* and the more natural *who*. Sufis hear that sound as the breathing creative vibration, HUUUUUU. Boom.





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## **About the Author**

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Adobe Acrobat eBook Reader October 2007

ISBN 978-0-06-157916-5

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



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