

My Favorite Rumi

selected by Jason Espada

Preface

In the early 1980's, I had the incomparable good fortune of finding Rumi's poetry. Since that time, it's been a faithful companion; at times a stern teacher, and most often, just the right, delightful medicine. Like a letter from a dear friend, it has always been Rumi's poetry that reminds me the most of my true home.

These last couple of years I've had the thought of assembling my favorite Rumi to share with both fellow lovers of his poetry, and especially those who have never read or even heard of him. I've been able to make shorter collections of the poetry of Hafiz and Pablo Neruda, to share with others, but with Rumi it's been more of a challenge. For one thing, I have more of his poetry to choose from. But more than this, Rumi is the poet who is closest to my own heart, and so naturally I really want to get this right. At some point though, not being able to do something perfectly is no excuse for not acting. This is the best I can do right now, and so I send this out into the world with the wish that others receive at least some of the same joy, nourishment and inspiration I have over the years. Who knows? Dear reader, perhaps meeting Rumi's poetry, the door will open for you, and all the riches he encourages us to know will be yours.

It's with good reason that great works are always in season. I was reminded again today of just how troubled this world is, how dis-empowered. Rumi's works seem to be, once again, just exactly the right antidote: a true scale of values, food, and light for our times.

I've seen how it's out of overflowing fullness and satisfaction and gratitude that the wish to give to others comes about. And so, here at last, are my favorite works by Rumi. Share the joy.

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Jason Espada,

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Love Makes All the Difference: An Introduction to Rumi, by Jason Espada

To say that many of us don't see this world as it is, would be a huge understatement, I know, but we have to start somewhere. For a lot of people, human beings are little more than animals, and life is mostly about struggle - it's something to be gotten through, with only brief moments of light or happiness. Or else, there's a quality of 'nothing special' about it, with no feeling one way or another.

The tragedy of course is that our experience here doesn't have to be this way. There are a few other people who tell us that, far from being a burden, this life is something to be celebrated. There are people who say this world is Divine - that it can be an unending source of wonder and joy. What do you think?

Most people usually don't see it this way, and so they take advantage of each other, they prey on each other, or else they waste time, or feel bored, or dissatisfied. This is all so common.

In the greatest contrast to the way most people experience this world, there are those who have found a deep source of nourishment in this life, such that everything they say, and everything they do comes out of that joy. Such people throughout time have been called 'mystics'.

The 13th century Persian teacher and poet, Jelaluddin Rumi was one such person who was able to offer the world an inspiring vision, and also the guidance and encouragement to live from this realization. He tells us:

“Every object and being in the universe is
a jar overflowing with wisdom and beauty,
a drop of the Tigris that cannot be contained by any skin.
Every jarful spills and makes the earth more shining,
as though covered in satin...”

And he says:

“Make peace with the universe. Take joy in it.
It will turn to gold. Resurrection
will be now. Every moment,
a new beauty.”

And:

“Human beings are mines.
World-power means nothing. Only the unsayable,
jeweled inner life matters...”

And:

“A man sleeps heavily,
though something blazes in him like the sun,
like a magnificent fringe sewn up under the hem...”

The Life of Rumi

Jalal ad-Din ar-Rumi was born 1207, in what is now Afghanistan. As a child, Rumi's family traveled and settled in Turkey. Rumi succeeded his father as a Muslim teacher. Then, when he was 37 years old, Rumi met a mystic named Shams-I-Tabriz, and the two formed a deep spiritual relationship. Rumi's students, it's told, were jealous, and Shams disappeared, apparently killed out of jealousy.

Rumi grieved for his loss, having seen the Divine in Shams, or we can say having seen Shams as God, and as a doorway, to further understanding the mysteries of this life. In his grief, Rumi created the Turning Dance (called 'Whirling') that is still a part of the Sufi Tradition today. The turning represents the search for Truth, the Beloved, the Divine, or God.

The *Sufis* are the mystics of Islam. The Sufi Path is sometimes called 'The Path of Love', or 'The Way of Passion', as love is such a strong element in their search for Truth, in their way of life, and their teaching.

Although they have some elements in common with more Orthodox Muslim Traditions, the Sufis are also unique in some ways. They are not only looking for an intellectual understanding of the Divine - they aim for personal experience, and for union with this deep Truth, or with God.

Another feature that stands out is that the Sufi's love, for God, for the Divine, or for this life is often expressed in earthy, sensual language, like a lover speaking or writing to his beloved. And so their writing moves from the experiences of longing, to the joy at being touched, to those of fulfillment.

Rumi says:

“I want this music and this dawn
and the warmth of your cheek against mine”

And:

“Who is the luckiest in this whole orchestra? The reed.
Its mouth touches your lips to learn music.
All reeds, sugarcane especially, think only
of this chance. They sway in the canebreaks,
free in the many ways they dance.

Without you the instruments would die.
One sits close beside you. Another takes a long kiss.
The tambourine begs, *Touch my skin so I can be myself.*
Let me feel you enter each limb bone by bone,
so that what died last night can be whole today.

Why live some soberer way and feel you ebbing out?
I won't do it.
Either give me enough wine or leave me alone,
now that I know how it is
to be with you in constant conversation.”

And:

“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.”

In the translations that have reached the West, there are included many teaching stories that are meant to guide people to living more deeply. In addition to being beautifully expressed, there is a whole way of life described in these writings.

Rumi describes how we can grow and develop as individuals, how we can learn to see, and to live more authentic lives; how we can find fulfillment. He describes many of the processes and obstacles that are a part of life - often in a humorous way, but always with compassion and respect for his listeners.

A few quotes from Rumi:

Don't ask what love can make, or can do.
Look at the colors of the world!

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

Let the beauty you love be what you do.
There are a hundred ways to kneel and kiss the ground.

Be patient.

Respond to every call that excites your spirit

Let yourself be silently drawn by the stronger pull
of what you really love

When you do things from your soul, a river moves through you,
Freshness and a deep joy are the signs...

Introduction - From 'Open Secret'

Rumi's Life (1207-1273)

Jelaluddin Rumi was born in Balkh, in what is now Afghanistan, on September 30, 1207. When he was still a young man, though, his family fled under the threat of a Mongol invasion, and after much traveling, finally settled in Konya, Turkey. Rumi means "the Roman" that is, "from Roman Anatolia."

Rumi followed in the line of his father and his ancestors scholars, theologians, and jurists. Until the age of thirty-seven he seems to have been a conventional teacher under the royal patronage. In 1244 he met the wandering dervish, Shams of Tabriz. "What I had thought of before as God, I met today in a person." This recognition strengthened and galvanized his belief. His poetry filled with a longing to be the Friend, the close spiritual presence he first saw in Shams, later in Saladin Zarkub, the goldsmith, still later in his scribe, Husam. Rumi died December 17, 1273. During the last thirty years of his life he became a brilliant unfolding of that recognition, and a cause of its incandescence in others.

From 'This Longing'

The Ocean of the Mathnawi

The Mathnawi is Rumi's masterwork, and it is impossible to give much sense of it in a selection of excerpts. It runs to six volumes, over fifty-one thousand verses of poetry, couplets in twelve-beat lines, in which the hemistichs, or half-lines, also rhyme. I have not tried, of course, to duplicate the music of the Persian. These versions of the Mathnawi are set in the free verse of American poetry, one of the strongest and most spiritually open and questing traditions in Western writing. But the majestic intricacy of the original, its reef-like porousness, cannot be brought over in free verse. The Mathnawi is complex, mature work, like Shakespeare's tragedies and the late romances, which cannot, of course, be translated, and yet they must.

To use Rumi's own metaphor, the Mathnawi is an ocean, with myriad elements swimming and adrift and growing in it: folklore, the Qur'an, stories of saints and teachers, myth, the sayings of Muhammed, jokes from the street, actual interruptions, whispered asides to Husam. There is an enormous generosity and humor at play here, and at work. Fresh, wild moments within a profound peace. Drunken, lyric dissolvings within a starry clarity. Spontaneous pleasure within discipline.

The Mathnawi was spoken aloud and taken down by Rumi's beloved scribe, Husam Chelebi. The following story is told of how it began: The two were walking in the Meram vineyards outside Konya when Husam suggested that Mevlana begin a new work in a new form, something different from the odes and the quatrains, something in the mathnawi (couplets) tradition of Attar and Sanai and others. Rumi took a piece of paper from his turban and told Husam to read aloud what was on it. It was the opening of the Mathnawi, which Rumi had composed just that morning, the famous couplets spoken by the reed flute.

"There must be more," said Husam.

"If you will write for me, I will continue," replied Rumi. "From this moment, I am your servant."

Thus the long, twelve-year process began. Husam describes it.

"He never took a pen in his hand while composing the Mathnawi. He would recite wherever he was, in the medrese (the dervish college), at the Ilgin hot springs, in the Konya baths, in the vineyards. When he started, I would write, and I often found it hard to keep up. Sometimes he would recite night and day for several days. Other times, he would compose nothing for months. Once for a period of two years he spoke no poetry. As each volume was completed, I would read it back to him, so that he could revise it."

The form, then, is an inspired and intuitively moving tapestry, a format that can include anything it meets. A question from Husam, Arabic poetry; a surprise visitor, Quranic commentary, all get woven into One Vision, the pattern of which seems almost beyond human comprehension, as with the wonderful pun that Rumi uses to describe the daily motion of the sun as a

weaver's shuttle (maku). Ma-ku, in Persian, also means "Where are we?" so the weaving being done by the sun-shuttle back and forth, east to west, is also the repeated question, Where are We? with the implied pattern, and answer, not in sight. Not to the shuttle, anyway. Likewise, the Mattnawi's whole truth may not be accessible to a particular reader standing in its surf, but the beauty and mystery of its Presence can be sensed.

From 'The Essential Rumi'

Rumi puts a prose prayer at the beginning of each book of the Mathnawi. Here is the blessing he gives before Book IV.

Praise to Early- Waking Grievers

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

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

I was sleeping, and being comforted by a cool breeze, when suddenly a gray dove from a thicket sang and sobbed with longing, and reminded me of my own passion. I had been away from my own soul so long, so late-sleeping, but that dove's crying woke me and made me cry. Praise to all early-waking grievors!

Some go first, and others come long afterward. God blesses both and all in the line, and replaces what has been consumed, and provides for, those who work the soil of helpfulness, and blesses Muhammad and Jesus and every other messenger and prophet. Amen, and may the Lord of all created beings bless you.

From 'Rumi – Fragments, Ecstacies'

the flute weeps
to the pacing drum

the drunken camel
rises from its knees
and tugs at the rope of reason

the bird flutters
in the heart's cage
putting out his head
on this side and that

the flood fills
the ancient riverbed
and once again
the riverbanks are green

the falcon hears
the royal drum
and circles seeking
the wrist of the king

the musk deer
smells the lion
and her haunches are trembling

the madmen have seen
the moon in the window;
they are running to the roof
with ladders

somewhere tonight
a dervish cries

*“it was my soul
in the wine!
it was my soul!”*

that moon has come
that moon face of Joseph

if you haven't any eyes
go borrow them from someone

when you see that face
you'll no longer care for sightseeing

you more resemble Joseph
than all that is high or low

by God, when you see your beauty
you'll be the idol of yourself

don't run off chattering
from the silence

don't go haggling
there is no other market

here, one rose buys a garden
one penny buys a gold mine

for the sea is in love with the drop
the sun is in love with the candle

the Joseph of the heart
is in the pit of the body

and the bedouin buys him
for eighteen coins

a woman is God shining
through subtle veils

haughty spirit astride
the elegant mare
of her body

loving her
you love spirit
not a corpse

spirit is for lovers
the corpse is for necrophiles

heart's ease, laughter
meaningfulness, love...

Friend! you desire formless things
you are seeking the beloved
and don't even know.

within me is an ocean
where a thousand Rumis drown
with all their sorrow

worlds within worlds
dreamers concoct entire Baghdads
from their breasts

asleep or waking
where have you seen yourself
mirrored completely?

a dreamer wanders
from room to room
only to awaken
in another sort of room

another sort of dawn
comes white as camphor
to show you complete

and a cold wind

a breast-burnishing wind

what is this fragrance?
is it from heaven?
whose laughter is this?
is it Houris in paradise?

what wedding is this
with moon for a platter
and heaven for a veil?

what banquet is this
that the Sultan of Baghad
licks the platters
in our kitchen?

God alone knows!

but come! take a pick-axe
and break apart
your stony self

the heart's matrix
is gluttoned with rubies

springs of laughter
are buried in your breast

unstop the wine-jar,
batter down the door
to the treasury
of non-existence

the water in your jug
is brackish and low

smash the jug
and come to the river!

subtle degrees
of domination and servitude
are what you know as love

but love is different
it arrives complete
just there
like the moon in the window

like the sun
of neither east nor west
nor of anyplace

when that sun arrives
east and west arrive

desire only that
of which you have no hope
seek only that
of which you have no clue

love is the sea of not-being
and there intellect drowns

this is not the Oxus River
or some little creek
this is the shoreless sea;
here swimming ends
always in drowning

a journey to the sea
is horses and fodder and contrivance
but at land's end
the footsteps vanish

you lift up your robe
so as not to wet the hem;
come! drown in this sea
a thousand times

rock, plant, animal;
to each I have died
and become more,
when have I become less
by dying?

Now I am man.

when I die I will soar with angels
and when I die to the angels
what I shall become
you cannot imagine.

from dead stinking semen
love formed you

it was love that dragged you howling
from the bloodrinker's womb
to the nursemaid's breast
and from breastmilk
to roast meat and wine
and the nursemaid's beauty

it is love that drags
this embryo soul
out of the body
and into paradise

you embrace some form
saying, 'I am this.'

By God, you are not this
or that or the other

you are '*Unique One*'
'Heartravishing'

you are throne and palace and king
you are bird and snare and fowler

like water in jar and river
are in essence the same

you and spirit are the same

your every idol
prostrates
before you

your every thought-form
perishes
in your formlessness

No Longer Drunk, but the Wine Itself

the gnat
is in the wine jar
he is no longer drunk
he is wine itself

the ambergris
sits in the fire
turning to fragrance

the grain falls
under the millstone
and is lost
in the measure

the cat
is in the gunnysack
swinging high and low

the sugar sack is ripped
spilling sugar
everywhere

I am so ruined
with love
that beggar children
stone me in the alleys

I am so mad with love
that madmen say
'Be still!'

This village is so poor
even the taxman
doesn't come here

I am gone from your world
where swords clash
over bread

I steal pearls
from a Sultan
not cloth
from the tailor

I am melting
in meaningfulness
like sugar in water

love is the sea
where intellect drowns

Speak!
o soul of the soul of the soul
o face that renders
every created atom
articulate with love!

love says,
'I will deliver you this instant!'

I groped for excuses
but love came
excusing me

I don't feel strange anymore
with my heart here
my soul there

I discovered
He is heart and soul

It was He, not I,
knocking at the door
it was He within
I caress my own breast
for there He is hidden

no one else knows you;
since you are I,
I know you

forms become a trifle
when feeling and intuition
richly intensify

in the end
a man tires of everything
except heart's desiring
soul's journeying

sultan, saint, pickpocket;
love has everyone by the ear
dragging us to God
by secret ways

I never knew
that God, too, desires us

From 'The Soul of Rumi'

What was told, that

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 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.

What we hear in a friend's voice

If you are my soul's friend, what I say won't be just an assertion. You may hear me

at midnight, *Come out in the dark, and don't be afraid.*
 'Nearness' and 'kinship' are

assertions, but the sound of a voice is not. The delight a friend feels when he hears

a friend's voice brings all that matters. There are those who hear within a voice

the essence being said, and there are those who can't. When one who grew up speaking

Arabic says in Arabic, 'Arabic is my mother tongue,' you know it's true. Or

someone writes in beautiful calligraphy, 'I can read and write.' The accomplished

script *is* that. A sufi might say, 'Last night you saw me carrying my prayer rug

on my shoulder. I explained something then about clairvoyance. Let that guide you.' Your

dreaming soul says, 'Yes!' Such confirmation is like your lost camel. You

listen with interest when someone says he saw it, but you feel differently if it's there

in front of you. To a man dying of thirst you hand a cup of spring water. Will he demand

a certificate saying, 'This liquid is of the aqueous variety'?

Does an infant ask his mother

to validate the breast? When a true human being appears
in a community thirsty for

the taste of soul, they immediately hear in the voice
the meaning of *I am near*.

The City of Saba

There is a glut of wealth in the city of Saba. Everyone has more than enough. Even

the bath stokers wear gold belts. Huge grape clusters hang down on every street and

brush the faces of the citizens. No one has to do *anything*. You can balance

a basket on your head and walk through an orchard, and it will fill by itself with

overripe fruit dropping into it. Stray dogs stray in lanes full of thrown-out

scraps with barely a notice. The lean desert wolf gets indigestion from the rich

food. Everyone is fat and satiated with all the extra. There are no

robbers. There is no energy for crime, or for gratitude, and no one wonders about

the unseen world. The people of Saba feel bored with just the mention of prophecy.

They. have no desire of any kind. Maybe some idle curiosity about miracles, but that's

it. This overrichness is a subtle disease. Those who have it are blind

to what's wrong and deaf to anyone who points it out. The city of Saba cannot be

understood from within itself! But there is a cure, an individual medicine, not

a social remedy: sit quietly, and listen for a voice
within that will say, *Be*

more silent. As that happens, your soul starts to revive.
Give up talking and

your positions of power. Give up the excessive money.
Turn toward teachers and

prophets who don't live in Saba. They can help you
grow sweet again and fragrant

and wild and fresh and thankful for any small event.

Medicine

Thirteen prophets come as a group to the city of Saba,
which has been so blessed

with material wealth. 'Where is your gratitude for this?
The one who gives you

your head wants only *one bow*.' The Sabaens answer,
'There is no thanksgiving

in us; only weariness with receiving gifts. We're
tired of wonder, tired

of rest, tired of excitement. No more orchards, please,
no more beauty. The gift

of being does not delight us anymore.' 'But this is the
soul sickness we

cure," say the prophets. 'Your death-in-life makes sweet
things bitter and those

who poison you seem like noble friends. Your perception
is jaded. You hear

fresh phrasing that carries truth and you say, 'Cliches.
I've heard all that

before.' When we make you well, you'll hear new
implications in every old

story. Ordinary doctors check the heart by finding a pulse.
We listen without intermediary.

We see from the high belvedere of clairvoyance. Physicians
tend the health of animal

energies, whereas the ray of divine majesty moves through

us with right language and

action. We know what keeps you on the way and what
distracts. Physicians look

at urine samples. 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.'

A Necessary Autumn Inside Each

You and I have spoken all these words, but as for the way
we have to go, words

are no preparation. There is no getting ready, other than
grace. My faults

have stayed hidden. One might call that a preparation!
I have one small drop

of knowing in my soul. Let it dissolve in your ocean.
There are so many threats to it.

Inside each of us, there's continual autumn. Our leaves
fall and are blown out

over the water. A crow sits in the blackened limbs and talks
about what's gone. Then

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

and cypress. Joseph is back! And if you don't feel in
yourself the freshness of

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

There's a necessary dying, and then Jesus is breathing again.
Very little grows on jagged

rock. Be ground. Be crumbled, so wildflowers will come up
where you are. You've been

stony for too many years. Try something different. Surrender.

Paradox

Paradoxes: best wakefulness in sleep, wealth in having nothing, a pearl necklace

fastened around an iron collar. Fire contained in boiling water. Revenues growing from

funds flowing out. Giving is gainful employment. It brings in money. Taking time for

ritual prayer and meditation saves time. Sweet fruit hide in leaves. Dung becomes food

for the ground and generative power in trees. Nonexistence contains existence. Love

encloses beauty. Brown flint and gray steel have orange candlelight in them. Inside

fear, safety. In the black pupil of the eye, many brilliancies. Inside

the body-cow, a handsome prince.

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.

From 'The Essential Rumi'

No Room for Form

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, 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 finally 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 sort of gazing-house
that has opened in our town where people sit
quietly and pour out their glancing
like light, like answering?

The Pickaxe

Some commentary on *I was a hidden treasure,*
and *I desired to be known:* tear down

this house. A hundred thousand new houses
can be built from the transparent yellow carnelian

buried beneath it, and the only way to get to that
is to do the work of demolishing and then

digging under the foundations. With that value
in hand all the new construction will be done

without effort. And anyway, sooner or later this house
will fall on its own. The jewel treasure will be

uncovered, but it won't be yours then. The buried
wealth is your pay for doing the demolition,

the pick and shovel work. If you wait and just
let it happen, you'll bite your hand and say,

"I didn't do as I knew I should have." This
is a rented house. You don't own the deed.

You have a lease, and you've set up a little shop,
where you barely make a living sewing patches

on torn clothing. Yet only a few feet underneath
are two veins, pure red and bright gold carnelian.

Quick! Take the pickaxe and pry the foundation.
You've got to quit this seamstress work.

What does the patch-sewing *mean*, you ask. Eating
and drinking. The heavy cloak of the body

is always getting torn. You patch it with food,

and other restless ego-satisfactions. Rip up
one board from the shop floor and look into
the basement. You'll see two glints in the dirt.

New Moon, Hilal

You've heard about the qualities of Bilal.
Now hear about the thinness of Hilal,
which is more advanced than Bilal.

He denied his *nafs* more than some of you
who move backward, from being an illumined globe
toward becoming again an opaque stone.

Remember the story of the young guest
who came before a certain king. 'And how old are you,
my lad? Tell the truth now. Say it out.'

'Eighteen, well seventeen. Sixteen.
Actually, uh, fifteen.'

'Keep going! You'll end up
in your mother's womb.'

Or the man who went to borrow a horse.
'Take the gray.'

'No, not that one.'

'Why?'

'It goes in reverse. It backs up.'

'Then turn its tail toward your home.'

The beast you ride is your various appetites.
Change your wantings. When you prune
weak branches, the remaining fruit
get tastier. Lust can be redirected,
so that even when it takes you backward,
it goes toward shelter.

A strong intention can make 'two oceans wide'

be the size of a blanket, or 'seven hundred years'
the time it takes to walk to someone you love.

True seekers keep riding straight through,
whereas big, lazy, self-worshiping geese
unload their pack animals in a farmyard
and say, 'This is far enough.'

Do you know the story of the travelers
who came to a village in early Spring?
There's an abandoned house with an open door.

'Why don't we wait for this cold spell to pass,
this old woman's chill, they call it.
Let's put our baggage in here and rest.'

A deep voice from inside, 'No. Unload outside,
then enter. This is a meeting hall
of great dignity!'

There are such secret sanctuaries.

Although he worked in a stable as a groom,
Hilal was an enlightened master.

His employer did not understand Hilal's, state.
He knew up and down and north-south-east-west,
the evidence of the senses, but nothing else.

The color of the ground is in front of us,
but prophetic light is hidden.

One person sees a minaret, but not the bird
perched there. A second person sees the bird,
but not the hair it carries. A third
sees minaret, bird, and hair.

Until you can see the thread of the hair,
the knot of awareness will not be loosened.

The body is the minaret. Obedience,
the bird. Or three hundred birds, or two,
however you want it. The second person
sees the bird, and only the bird.

The hair is the secret
that belongs to the bird.

No nest built with such material
will go unused. A song-thread flows
continuously out of the bird.

Try to see this bird on its clay tower,
and also the hair floating in its beak.

Hilal becomes ill. Nine days he lies sick
in the stable. No one notices,
except the prophet Muhammad, peace
and blessing be upon him.
He comes to visit.

Hilal's employer is ecstatic.
With elaborate ceremony he emerges
from his upstairs room and kisses the ground
in front of the Prophet. 'In God's name,
please honor this house.'

'I'm not here to visit you.'

'Who then?'

'There is a new-moon new-man planted near here,
spending the lightness of his humility
like blossoms on the ground.
Where is Hilal?'

‘I haven't seen him for days .
He must be out with the mules and the horses.’

Muhammad runs to the stable. It's dark,
and the stench of manure is strong,
but all that vanishes when friendship enters.

Miracles don't cause faith, but rather
the scent of kindredness that unites people.

Miracles overwhelm unbelief.
Faith grows from friendship.

With the familiar fragrance, Hilal wakes up.
How could such a thing be in a stable?

Through the legs of the horses he sees
the robes of Muhammad! He comes crawling out
from the dark corner and lays his cheek
on Muhammad's feet. Muhammad puts his cheek
on Hilal's and kisses his head and face.

‘How hidden can one be!
Are you better? How are you?’

HOW!

A man sits and eats damp clay for moisture.
How is it with him when a flood of fresh
prophetic rainwater suddenly rides him along?

How is it when a blind, filthy dog wakes up,
and finds that he's a lion, and not
a lion such as could be killed,
but a spirit-lion who shatters sword
and javelin with just his presence?’

How would that feel? A man crawls for years
on his stomach with his eyes closed.

Then one moment he opens his eyes,
and he's in a garden. It's Spring.

How is it to be free of HOW,
loose in howlessness?

Howlers sit waiting around your table.
Throw them a bone!

This suggestion: wash before going to the watertank.
The waters there have grace enough to clean
and give you peace, but wash yourself
of *hows* before you go.

Wash off all wanderings-why
and workings-out-however.
Don't take those with you
to the big watertank.

Husam! Bats don't bother Husamuddin.
He's an expert on sunlight!
He's written about the new moon, Hilal.
Now he'll write about the full moon, the sheikh.
New moon and full moon are the same.

A new moon teaches gradualness
and deliberation and how one gives birth
to oneself slowly. Patience with small details
makes perfect a large work, like the universe.

What nine months of attention does for an embryo
forty early mornings will do
for your gradually growing wholeness.

The Granary Floor

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

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

Immediate intuition to them is the simplest act
 of consciousness, what to others would be epiphany.
 Much of our thought is of the past, or the future.

They're free of those. Before a mine is dug,
they judge coins. Before vineyards,
they know the excitements to come.
In July, they feel December.
In unbroken sunlight, they find shade. In fana,
the state where all objects dissolve,
they recognize objects. The open sky drinks
from their circling cup. The sun wears
the gold of their generosity.

When two of them meet, they are no longer two.
They are one and six hundred thousand.
The ocean waves are their closest likeness,
when wind makes, from unity, the numerous.
This happened to the sun, and it broke into rays
through the window, into bodies.
The disc of the sun does exist, but if you see
only the ray-bodies, you may have doubts.
The human-divine combination is a oneness.
Plurality, the apparent separation into rays.

Friend, we're traveling together.
Throw off your tiredness. Let me show you
one tiny spot of the beauty that cannot be spoken.
I'm like an ant that's gotten into the granary,
ludicrously happy, and trying to lug out
a grain that's way too big.

From 'Open Secret'

Bored onlookers, but with such Light in our eyes! As we read this book, the jewel-lights intensify."

* * *

Friend, our closeness is this:
Anywhere you put your foot, feel me
in the firmness underneath.

* * *

Someone who goes with half a loaf of bread
to a small place that fits like a nest around him,
someone who wants no more, who's not himself
longed for by anyone else,

He is a letter to everyone. You open it.
It says, Live.

* * *

The sufi opens his hands to the universe
and gives away each instant, free.
Unlike someone who begs on the street for money to survive,
a dervish begs to give you his life.

Who is luckiest in this whole orchestra? The reed.
Its mouth touches your lips to learn music.
All reeds, sugarcane especially, think only
of this chance. They sway in the canebrakes,
free in the many ways they dance.

Without you the instruments would die.
One sits close beside you. Another takes a long kiss.
The tambourine begs, *Touch my skin so I can be myself.*
Let me feel you enter each limb bone by bone,
that what died last night can be whole today.

Why live some soberer way and feel you ebbing out?
I won't do it.
Either give me enough wine or leave me alone,
now that I know how it is
to be with you in a constant conversation.

Fasting

There's hidden sweetness in the stomach's emptiness.
We are lutes, no more, no less. If the soundbox
is stuffed full of anything, no music.
If the brain and belly are burning clean
with fasting, every moment a new song comes out of the fire.
The fog clears, and new energy makes you
run up the steps in front of you.
Be emptier, and cry like reed instruments cry.
Emptier, and write secrets with the reed pen.
When you're full of food and drink, Satan sits
where your spirit should, and ugly metal statue
in place of the Kaaba. When you fast,
good habits gather like friends who want to help.
Fasting is Solomon's ring. Don't give it
to some illusion, and lose your power,
but even if you have, if you've lost all will and control,
they come back when you fast, like soldiers appearing
out of the ground, pennants flying above them.
A table descends to your tents,
Jesus' table.
Expect to see it, when you fast, this table
spread with other food, better than the broth of cabbages.

The Image of Your Body

You've made it out of the city,
that image of your body, trembling with traffic
and fear slips behind.

Your face arrives in the redbud trees, and the tulips.

You're still restless.

Climb up the ladder to the roof.

You're by yourself a lot,

become the one that when you walk in,
luck shifts to the one who needs it.

If you've not been fed, be bread.

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.

Sometimes I Forget Completely

Sometimes I forget completely
what companionship is.
Unconscious and insane, I spill sad
energy everywhere. My story
gets told in various ways: A romance,
a dirty joke, a war, a vacancy.

Divide up my forgetfulness to any number,
it will go around.
These dark suggestions that I follow,
are they part of some plan?
Friends, be careful. Don't come near me
out of curiosity, or sympathy.

An Empty Garlic

You miss the garden,
because you want a small fig from a random tree.
You don't meet the beautiful woman.
You're joking with an old crone.
It makes me want to cry how she detains you,
stinking-mouthed, with a hundred talons,
putting her head over the roofedge to call down,
tasteless fig, fold over fold, empty
as dry-rotten garlic.

She has you tight by the belt,
even though there's no flower and no milk
inside her body.
Death will open your eyes
to what her face is: Leather spine
of a black lizard. No more advice.

Let yourself be silently drawn
by the stronger pull of what you really love.

The Question

One dervish to another, *What was your vision of God's presence?*

I haven't seen anything.

But for the sake of conversation, I'll tell you a story.

God's presence is there in front of me, a fire on the left,
a lovely stream on the right.

One group walks toward the fire, *into* the fire, another
toward the sweet flowing water.

No one knows which are blessed and which not.

Whoever walks into the fire appears suddenly in the stream.

A head goes under on the water surface, that head
pokes out of the fire.

Most people guard against going into the fire,
and so end up in it.

Those who love the water of pleasure and make it their devotion
are cheated with this reversal.

The trickery goes further.

The voice of the fire tells the *truth*, saying *I am not fire*.

I am fountainhead. Come into me and don't mind the sparks.

If you are a friend of God, fire is your water.

You should wish to have a hundred thousand sets of mothwings,
so you could burn them away, one set a night.

The moth sees light and goes into fire. You should see fire
and go toward light. Fire is what of God is world-consuming.

Water, world-protecting.

Somehow each gives the appearance of the other. To these eyes
you have now

what looks like water burns. What looks like
fire is a great relief to be inside.

You've seen a magician make a bowl of rice
seem a dish full of tiny, live worms.

Before an assembly with one breath he made the floor swarm
with scorpions that weren't there.

How much more amazing God's tricks.

Generation after generation lies down, defeated, they think,

but they're like a woman underneath a man, circling him.
One molecule-mate-second thinking of God's reversal of comfort
and pain
is better than any attending ritual. That splinter
of intelligence is substance.
The fire and water themselves:
Accidental, done with mirrors.

The Phrasing Must Change

Learn about your inner self from those who know such things,
but don't repeat verbatim what they say.

Zuleika let everything be the name of Joseph, from celery seed
to aloes-wood. She loved him so much, she concealed his name
in many different 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.

Or if she said, *Look, the moon is up*, or *The willow has new leaves*,

or *The branches are trembling*, or The coriander seeds

have caught fire, or *The roses are opening*,

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 *It's almost daylight*,

or *These vegetables are perfect*, or *The 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. Sensual people use the holy names
often, but they don't work for them.

The miracle Jesus did by being the name of God,

Zuleika felt in the name of 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. As the saying goes, *The pot drips what is in it*.

The saffron spice of connecting, laughter.

The onion-smell of separation, crying.

Others have many things and people they love.

This is not the way of Friend and friend.

From 'Birdsong'

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.

* * *

Gamble everything for love,
if you're a true human being.

If not, leave
this gathering.

Half-heartedness doesn't reach
into majesty. You set out
to find God, but then you keep

stopping for long periods
at meanspirited roadhouses.

* * *

When you come back inside my chest,
no matter how far I've wandered off,
I look around and see the way.

At the end of my life, with just one breath
left, if you come then, I'll sit up and sing.

From 'Say I Am You'

Dear Soul

Dear soul, when the condition comes
that we call being a lover,
there's no patience, and no repenting.

Both become huge absurdities. See regret
as a worm and love as a dragon.

Shame, changeable weather. Love,
a quality which wants nothing.

For this kind of lover love
of anything or anyone is unreal.

Here, the source
and object are one.

Joseph

Joseph has come,
the handsome one of this age,
a victory banner floating over Spring flowers.

Those of you whose work it is
to wake the dead, get up!
This is a work day.

The lion that hunts lions charges into the meadow.
Yesterday and the day before are gone.

The beautiful coin of now
slaps down in your hand.

The streets and buildings of this city
are all saying, *The prince is coming!*

Start the drumbeat. Everything we've said
about the Friend is true. The beauty of that
peacefulness makes the whole world restless.

Spread your love-robe out to catch
what sifts down from the ninth level.

You strange, exiled bird with clipped wings,
now you have four full-feathered pinions.

Your heart closed up in a chest, open,
for the Friend is entering you.

You feet, it's time to dance!
Don't talk about the old man.

He's young again. And don't mention
the past. Do you understand?
The Beloved is *here!*

You mumble,
'But what excuse can I give the king?'
when the king is here making excuses to you!

You say, "How can I escape his hand?"
when that hand is trying to help you.

You saw a fire, and light came.
You saw blood, and wine
is being poured.

Don't run from your own tremendous good fortune.

Be silent and don't try
to add up what's been given.

An uncountable grace has come to you.

People say that human beings are microcosms and this outer universe a macrocosm, but for us the outer is a tiny wholeness and the inner life the vast reality.

From 'One-Handed Basket Weaving'

Snow and the Voice

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

From 'We Are Three'

Little by little, wean yourself.

This is the gist of what I have to say.

From an embryo, whose nourishment comes in the blood,
move to an infant drinking milk,
to a child on solid food,
to a searcher after wisdom,
to a hunter of more invisible game.

Think how it is to have a conversation with an embryo.
You might say, 'The world outside is vast and intricate.
There are wheatfields and mountain passes, and orchards in bloom.

At night there are millions of galaxies, and in sunlight
the beauty of friends dancing at a wedding.'

You ask the embryo why he, or she, stays cooped up
in the dark with eyes closed.

Listen to the answer.

*There is no 'other world'
I only know what I've experienced.
You must be hallucinating.*

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.

When you do things from your soul,
you feel a river moving in you, a joy.

When actions come from another section,
the feeling disappears.

Don't let others lead you. They may be blind,
or worse, vultures. Reach for the rope
of God. And what is that?

Putting aside self-will.

Because of willfulness people sit in jail.
From willfulness, the trapped birds' wings are tied.
From willfulness, the fish sizzles in the skillet.

The anger of police is willfulness. You've seen
a magistrate inflict visible punishment.
Now see the invisible.

If you could leave selfishness, you would see
how your soul has been tortured.

We are born and live inside black water in a well.
How could we know what an open field of sunlight is?

Don't insist on going where you think you want to go.
Ask the way to the Spring.

Your living pieces will form a harmony.

There is a moving palace that floats through the air,
with balconies and clear water running in every part of it,
infinity everywhere, yet contained under a single tent.

Someone who doesn't know the Tigris River exists
brings the Caliph who lives near the river
a jar of fresh water. The Caliph accepts, thanks him,
and gives in return a jar filled with gold coins.

‘Since this man has come through the desert,
. he should return by water.’ Taken out by another door,
the man steps into a waiting boat
and sees the wide freshwater of the Tigris.
He bows his head, ‘What wonderful kindness that he took my gift.’

Every object and being in the universe is
a jar overfilled with wisdom and beauty,
a drop of the Tigris that cannot be contained
by any skin. Every jarful spills and makes the earth
more shining, as though covered in satin.
If the man had seen even a tributary
of the great river, he wouldn't have brought
the innocence of his gift.

Those that stay and live by the Tigris
grow so ecstatic that they throw rocks at the jugs,
and the jugs become perfect!
They shatter.
The pieces dance, and water
Do you see?
Neither jar; nor water, nor stone, nothing.

You knock at the door of Reality.
You shake your thought-wings, loosen
your shoulders,
and open.

A man on his deathbed left instructions
 for dividing up his goods among his three sons.
 He had devoted his entire spirit to those sons.
 They stood like cypress trees around him,
 quiet and strong.
 He told the town judge, 'Whichever of my sons is *laziest*,
 give him *all* the inheritance.'

Then he died, and the judge turned to the three,
 'Each of you must give some account of your laziness,
 so I can understand just *how* you are lazy.'

Gnostics are experts in laziness. They rely on it,
 because they continuously see God working all around them.
 The harvest keeps coming in, yet they
 never even did the ploughing!

'Come on. Say something about the ways you are lazy.'

Every spoken word is a covering for the inner self.
 A little curtain-flick no wider than a slice
 of roast meat can reveal hundreds of exploding suns.
 Even if what is being said is trivial and wrong,
 the listener hears the source. One breeze comes
 from across a garden. Another from across the ash-heap.
 Think how different the voices of the fox
 and the lion, and what they tell you!

Hearing someone is lifting the lid off the cooking pot.
 You learn what's for supper. Though some people
 can know just by the smell, a sweet stew
 from a sour soup cooked with vinegar.

A man taps a clay pot before he buys it
 to know by the sound if it has a crack.

The eldest of the three brothers told the judge, 'I can know a man by his voice,
and if he won't speak,
I wait three days, and then I know him intuitively.'

The second brother, 'I know him when he speaks,
and if he won't talk, I strike up a conversation.'

'But what if he knows that trick?' asked the judge.

Which reminds me of the mother who tells her child,
'When you're walking through the graveyard at night
and you see a boogeyman, run *at* it,
and it will go away.'

'But what,' replies the child, 'if the boogeyman's
mother has told it to do the same thing?
Boogeymen have mothers too.'

The second brother had no answer.

The judge then asked the youngest brother,
'What if a man cannot be made to say anything?

How do you learn his hidden nature?'

'I sit in front of him in silence,
and set up a ladder made of patience,
and if in his presence a language from beyond joy
and beyond grief begins to pour from my chest,
I know that his soul is as deep and bright
and the star Canopus rising over Yemen.

And so when I start speaking a powerful right arm
of words sweeping down, I know *him* from what I say,
and how I say it, because there's a window open
between us, mixing the night air of our beings.'

The youngest was, obviously,
the laziness. He won.

A friend remarks to the Prophet, 'Why is it
I get screwed in business deals?
It's like a spell. I become distracted
by business talk and make wrong decisions.'

Muhammad replies, 'Stipulate with every transaction
that you need three days to make sure.'

Deliberation is one of the qualities of God.
Throw a dog a bit of something.
He sniffs to see if he wants it.

Be that careful.
Sniff with your wisdom-nose.
Get clear. Then decide.

The universe came into being gradually
over six days. God could have just commanded,
Be!

Little by little a person reaches forty and fifty and sixty,
and feels more complete. God could have thrown
full-blown prophets
flying through the cosmos in an instant.

Jesus said one word, and a dead man sat up,
but Creation usually unfolds,
like calm breakers.

Constant, slow movement teaches us to keep working
like a small creek that stays clear,
that doesn't stagnate, but finds a way
through numerous details, deliberately.

Deliberation is born of joy,
like a bird from an egg.

Birds don't resemble eggs!
Think how different the hatching out is.

A white-leathery snake egg, a sparrow's egg;
a quince seed, an apple seed: Very different things
look similar at one stage.

These leaves, our bodily personalities, seem identical,
but the globe of soul-fruit
we make,
each is elaborately
unique.

From 'This Longing'

You Are Not a Single YOU

You're a common rhyme-word now,
dependent on some other for your emotional force,
but real life will come.

As when a baby stops nursing and grows interested
in solid food. As when seeds break open in the ground
and act differently.

There is a hidden love-center
in human beings that you will discover and savor
and nourish yourself with. That will be your food.

There's a way of going that's like the stars.
No,
even freer than they are, completely unconditioned,
unlocated, unpathed. A journey without a sky!

You came from Non-existence into being.
How did that happen? Tell me about it!
You were a little drunk when you arrived,
so you can't remember exactly?
I'll give you
some secret hints. Let your mind go, and be mindful.
Close your ears, and listen.
But maybe I shouldn't tell,
if you're not ripe. You're still in early Spring.
July hasn't happened yet in you.

This world is a tree,
and we are green, half-ripe fruit on it.
We hold tight to the limbs, because we know
we're not ready to be taken into the palace.

When we mature and sweeten,
we'll feel ashamed

at having clung so clingingly.
 To hold fast
 is a sure sign of unripeness.
 To drink and enjoy
 blood is fine for an embryo.

More needs to be said on this, but the Holy Spirit
 will tell it to you when I'm not here.

You'll tell it
 to *yourself*. Not I, or some other 'I' You
 who are Me!

As when you fall asleep and go
 from the presence of your self to the Presence
 of your Self. You hear That One and you think,
 'Someone must have communicated telepathically
 in my sleep.'

You are not a single You,
 good Friend, you are a Sky and an Ocean,
 a tremendous YHUUUUUU, a nine hundred times huge
 drowning place for all your hundreds of you's.

What are these terms *wakefulness* and *sleep*?

Don't answer. Let God answer.

Don't speak, so the Speakers can.

Not a word, so Sun-Light can say
 what has never been in a book, or said.

Don't *try* to put it into words,
 and the Spirit will do that through you,
 in spite of you,
 beside you,
 among you.

Stop swimming so hard,
 and climb in the boat
 with Noah.

A Basket of Fresh Bread

The Prophet Muhammad said,

"There is no better companion
on this Way than what you do. Your actions will be
your best friend, or if you're cruel and selfish,
your actions will be a poisonous snake
that lives in your grave."

But tell me,
can you do the good work without a teacher?
Can you even know what it is without the presence
of a Master? Notice how the lowest livelihood
requires some instruction.

First comes knowledge,
then the doing of the job. And much later,
perhaps after you're dead, something grows
from what you've done.

Look for help and guidance
in whatever craft you're learning. Look for a generous
teacher, one who has absorbed the tradition he's in.

Look for pearls in oyster shells.
Learn technical skill from a craftsman.

Whenever you meet genuine spiritual teachers,
be gentle and polite and fair with them.
Ask them questions, and be eager
for answers. Never condescend.

If a master tanner wears an old, threadbare smock,
that doesn't diminish his mastery.

If a fine blacksmith works at the bellows
in a patched apron, it doesn't affect
how he bends the iron.

Strip away your pride,
and put on humble clothes.

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 sheikh.

The mystery of spiritual emptiness
may be living in a pilgrim's heart, and yet
the knowing of it may not be his.

Wait for the illuminating openness,
as though your chest were filling with Light,
as when God said,

Did we not expand you?
(Qur'an, XCIV,1)

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

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

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

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

And he is with you
(VII,4)

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

Knock on your inner door. No other.
 Sloshing kneedeep in fresh riverwater, yet
 you keep wanting a drink from other people's waterbags.

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

The horse is beneath the rider's thighs, and still
 he asks, Where is 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, he can't drink from the stream
 running so close by his face. He's like a pearl
 on the deep bottom, wondering, inside his shell,
"Where's the Ocean?"

His mental questionings
 form the barrier. His physical eyesight
 bandages his knowing. Self-consciousness
 plugs his ears.

Stay bewildered in God,
 and only that.

Those of you who are scattered,
 simplify your worrying lives. There is *one*
 righteousness: Water the fruit trees,
 and don't water the thorns. Be generous
 to what nurtures the Spirit and God's luminous
 reason-light. Don't honor what causes
 dysentery and knotted-up tumors.

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 carry easily.

From 'Like This'

I don't get tired of You. Don't grow weary
of being compassionate toward me!

All this thirst-equipment
must surely be *tired* of me,
the waterjar, the water-carrier.

I have a thirsty fish in me
that can never find enough
of what it's thirsty for!

Show me the way to the Ocean!
Break these half-measures,
these small containers.

All this fantasy
and grief.

Let my house be drowned in the wave
that rose last night out of the courtyard
hidden in the center of my chest.

Joseph fell like the moon into my well.
The harvest I expected was washed away.
But no matter.

A fire has risen above my tombstone hat.
I don't want learning, or dignity,
or respectability.

I want this music and this dawn
and the warmth of your cheek against mine.

The grief-armies assemble,
but I'm not going with them.

This is how it always is
when I finish a poem.

A Great Silence overcomes me,
and I wonder why I ever thought
to use language.

Give yourself a kiss.
If you live in China, don't look
somewhere else, in Tibet, or Mongolia.

If you want to hold the beautiful one,
hold yourself to yourself.

When you kiss the Beloved,
touch your own lips with your own fingers.

The beauty of every woman and every man
is your own beauty.

The confusion of your hair
obscures that sometimes.

An artist comes to paint you
and stands with his mouth open.

Your love reveals your beauty,
but *all* coverings would disappear
if only for a moment your holding-back
would sit before your generosity
and ask,
'Sir, who *are* you?

At that, Shams' life-changing face
gives you a wink.

I was dead, then alive.
Weeping, then laughing.

The power of Love came into me,
and I became fierce like a lion,
then tender like the evening star.

He said, 'You're not mad enough.
You don't belong in this house.'

I went wild and had to be tied up.
He said, 'Still not wild enough
to stay with us!'

I broke through another layer
into joyfulness.

He said, 'It's not enough.'
I died.

He said, 'You're a clever little man,
full of fantasy and doubting.'

I plucked out my feathers and became a fool.
He said, 'Now you're the candle
for this assembly.'

But I'm no candle. Look!
I'm scattered smoke.

He said, 'You are the Sheikh, the Guide.'
But I'm not a Teacher. I have no power.

He said, 'You already have wings.
I cannot give you wings.'

But I wanted *His* wings.
I felt like some flightless chicken.

Then New Events said to me,
'Don't move. A sublime generosity is coming toward you.'
And Old Love said, 'Stay with me.'

I said, 'I will.'

You are the fountain of the sun's light.
I am a willow shadow on the ground.
You make my raggedness silky.

The soul at dawn is like darkened water
that slowly begins to say *Thank you, thank you.*

Then at sunset, again, Venus gradually
changes into the moon and then the whole night sky.

This comes of smiling back
at Your smile.

The Chess Master says nothing,
other than moving the silent chess piece.

That I am part of the ploys
of this game makes me
amazingly happy.

If anyone asks you
 how the perfect satisfaction
 of all our sexual wanting
 will look, lift your face
 and say

Like this.

When someone mentions the gracefulness
 of the night sky, climb up on the roof
 and dance and say

Like this?

If anyone wants to know what 'spirit' is,
 or what 'God's fragrance' means,
 lean your head toward him or her.
 Keep your face there close.

Like this.

When someone quotes the old poetic image
 about clouds gradually uncovering the moon,
 slowly loosen knot by knot the strings
 of your robe.

Like this?

If anyone wonders how Jesus raised the dead,
 don't try to explain the miracle.
 Kiss me on the lips.

Like this. Like this.

When someone asks what it means
 to 'die for love,' point

here.

If someone asks how tall I am, frown
and measure with your fingers the space
between the creases on your forehead.

This tall.

The soul sometimes leaves the body, then returns.
When someone doesn't believe that,
walk back into my house.

Like this.

When lovers moan,
they're telling our story.

Like this.

I am a sky where spirits live.
Stare into this deepening blue,
while the breeze says a secret.

Like this.

When someone asks what there is to do,
light the candle in his hand.

Like this.

How did Joseph's scent come to Jacob?

Huuuu .

How did Jacob's sight return?

Huuuuuu.

A little wind cleans the eyes.

Like this.

When Shams comes back from Tabriz,
he'll put just his head around the edge
of the door to surprise us.

Like this.

An intellectual is all the time showing off.
Lovers dissolve and become bewildered.

Intellectuals try not to drown,
while the whole purpose of love
is drowning.

Intellectuals invent
ways to rest, and then lie down
in those beds.

Lovers feel ashamed
of comforting ideas.

You've seen a glob
of oil on water? That's how a lover
sits with intellectuals, there, but alone
in a circle of himself

Some intellectual tries to give sound advice to a lover.
All he hears back is, *I love you.*
I love you.

Love is musk. Don't deny it
when you smell the scent!

Love is a tree.
Lovers, the shade of the long branches.

To the intellectual mind, a child must learn
to grow up and be adult.
In the station of love,
you see old men getting younger and younger.

Shams chose to live low in the roots
for you. So now he soars in the air
as your sublimely articulating love!

At breakfast tea a beloved asked her lover,
 "Who do you love more, yourself or me?"

From my head to my foot, I have become you.
 Nothing remains of myself but my name.

You have your wish. Only you exist.
 I've disappeared like a drop of vinegar in an ocean of honey.

A stone, which has become a ruby
 is filled with the qualities of the sun.
 No stoniness remains in it.

If it loves itself, it is loving the sun.
 and if it loves the sun, it is loving itself.
 There's no difference between these two loves.

Before the stone becomes the ruby it is its own enemy.
 Not one but two exist. The stone is dark and blind to daylight.
 If it loves itself it is unfaithful. It intensely resists the sun.

If it says "I" it is all darkness.
 A Pharaoh claims divinity and is brought down.
 Hallaj says the same and is saved.
 One I is cursed, another is blessed.
 One I is a stone, another a crystal.
 One an enemy of the light, the other a reflector of it.
 In its inmost consciousness, not through any doctrine,
 it is one with the light.

Work on your stony qualities and become resplendent like the ruby.
 Practice self-denial and accept difficulty.
 Always see infinite life in letting the self die.
 Your stoniness will decrease, your ruby nature will grow.
 The signs of self-existence will leave your body
 and ecstasy will take you over.

Become an all-hearing ear and gain a ruby earring.
 Dig a well in the earth of this body,

or even before the well is dug
let God draw the water up.
Be always at work scraping the dirt from the well.

To everyone who suffers, endeavor always brings its fortune.
The prophet has said each prostration of prayer
is a knock at heaven's door.

When anyone continues to knock
felicity shows its smiling face.

translated by Kabir Helminsky

my dear friend
never lose hope
when the beloved
sends you away

if you're abandoned
if you're left hopeless
tomorrow for sure
you'll be called again

if the door is shut
right in your face
keep waiting with patience
don't leave right away

seeing your patience
your love will soon
summon you with grace
raise you like a champion

and if all the roads
end up in dead ends
you'll be shown the secret paths
no one will comprehend

the beloved i know
will give with no qualms
to a puny ant
the kingdom of Solomon

my heart has journeyed
many times around the world
but has never found
and will never find
such a beloved again

ah i better keep silence
i know this endless love
will surely arrive
for you and you and you

translated by Nader Khalili.