

THE  
WAY OF  
PASSION

*A Celebration  
of Rumi*



ANDREW HARVEY

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## Preface

“Love’s Glory,” Rumi wrote, “is not a small thing.” The lectures I gave in San Francisco at the California Institute of Integral Studies in April, May, and June 1993 were intended as a Sufi celebration in and for this time of Love’s Glory, and of the wonder of the supreme mystic poet and prophet that Rumi was and is. Each lecture was a dance, a dance of mirrors, in which essential spiritual themes returned to be reflected in different constellations and harmonies, a dance around Rumi and that mystery of Love he lived and expressed so completely. Before I left my home in Paris to give the lectures in San Francisco, I had a dream in which I found myself asking an old man, sitting in a sunlit empty mosque, “How should I talk of Rumi in modern America?” He smiled and said, “Be passionate and precise, drunken and perfectly sober.” I tried as hard as I knew how to honor his advice.

This book arises as its own dance out of the dance of those lectures. Naturally I have honed and shaped and added here and there, but I have fought hard to preserve the flow, the passion, the wildness, the sudden naked truth that happened last spring in Rumi’s Presence and, I believe, with his blessing. Each chapter mirrors the others but dances in its own way. Read slowly, dance wildly.

May the blessing and the Presence of the Eternal Beloved inspire always all who come to this book with Love.

## **Love's Apocalypse, Love's Glory**

One breath from the breath of the lover would be enough to  
burn away the world,

To scatter this insignificant universe like grains of sand.

The whole of the cosmos would become a Sea,

And sacred terror rubble this Sea to nothing.

No human being would remain, and no creature:

A smoke would come from heaven: there would be no more  
man or angel:

Out of this smoke, flame would suddenly flash-out across  
heaven.

That second, the sky would split apart and neither space nor  
existence remain.

Vast groans would rise up out of the breast of the universe,  
groans mingled with desolate moaning,

And fire eat up water, and water eat up fire:

The waves of the Sea of the Void would drown in their flood  
the horseman of day and night:

The sun itself fades, vanishes, before this flaming-out of the  
soul of man.

Do not ask anyone who is not intimate with the secrets

When the intimate of the secret himself cannot answer you.

Mars will lose its swagger, Jupiter burn the book of the  
world,

The moon will not hold its empire, its joy will be smirched  
with agony,

Mercury will shipwreck in mud, Saturn burn itself to death;

Venus, singer of heaven, play no longer her songs of joy.

The rainbow will flee, and the cup, and the wine,

There will be no more happiness or rapture, no more wound  
or cure,

Water will no longer dance with light, wind no longer sweep  
the ground,

Gardens no longer abandon themselves to laughter, April's  
clouds no longer scatter their dew.

There will be no more grief, no more consolation, no more  
“enemy” or “witness,”

No more flute or song, or lute or mode, no more high or low  
pitch.

Causes will faint away: the cupbearer will serve himself,

The soul will recite, “O my Lord most high”: the heart will  
cry it out, “My Lord knows best.”

Rise up! The painter of Eternity has set to work one more  
time

To trace miraculous figures on the crazy curtain of the world.

God has lit a fire to burn the heart of the universe,

The Sun of God has the East for a heart: the splendor of that  
East

Irradiates at all moments the son of Adam, Jesus, son of  
Mary.

## Chapter One

### *The Journey to Love*

WHEN THE GREAT Sufi mystic Master and poet, Jalal-ud-Din Rumi, died at sunset in Konya, southern Turkey, on December 17th, 1273, at the age of sixty-six, he had lived for almost thirty years in the radiance of enlightenment. He had composed 3,500 odes, 2,000 quatrains, a massive spiritual epic called the *Mathnawi*, and founded the Mevlevi order that, under his son Sultan Walad and his successors, was to spread the glory of his work and sacred vision throughout the whole vast extent of the Islamic world, from Tangiers to Cairo, Lahore, and Sarajevo, into the humblest, most remote villages of Afghanistan, Turkey, Iran, and India. Through all the centuries since his death and all the vicissitudes and tragedies of Moslem history, his odes have been chanted by crowds on pilgrimages and sung with the highest reverence in religious assemblies. Orientalists acknowledge Rumi as the greatest of all mystic poets, and Easterners worship his work as second in grandeur, depth, mystery, and holiness only to the *Koran*. Before World War II, there were almost 100,000 disciples of the Mevlevi order throughout the Balkans, Africa, and Asia. No other poet in history—not even Shakespeare or Dante—has had so exalted and comprehensive an impact on the civilization he adorned, and no other poet has aroused such ecstatic and intimate adoration.

But this vast influence is just a beginning of Rumi's gift to humankind. Not long before he left his body, Rumi wrote of his passion for his Master, Shams, and its significance:

Those tender words we said to one another  
Are stored in the secret heart of heaven.



One day, like the rain they will fall and spread  
And their mystery will grow green over the world.

That day has come and this greening of the world by the mystery of Rumi's love for Shams and its revelations is beginning. In the last thirty years news of Rumi's greatness has spread, not only through Islam, but through the rest of the world in scholarly works and translations, and in artistic representations of all kinds. Rumi is increasingly seen for what I believe he is—not only our supreme poet—but also an essential guide to the new mystical Renaissance that is struggling to be born against terrible odds in the rubble of our dying civilization. Rumi is a stern, gentle awakener and doctor of souls trying to help us recover the vision of the enlightened heart before it is too late and we destroy ourselves and our planet.

“My death is my wedding with eternity,” Rumi wrote. From that Light he lives in beyond space and time, he is radiating to a darkened world the fire of his infinite love and hope, urging us all onward, whatever our belief or unbelief, into the miracle of our real divine nature and the feast of the divine life on earth.

I am, as many of you know, a disciple of the Divine Mother who is working with all religions and all mystical traditions with simplicity and unconditional Love to transform humanity at this moment and to give humanity a chance in this time to find its spiritual truth again and transform the terrifying conditions that threaten us all. I am teaching Rumi because in my journey with, in, for, through, and by Mother Meera, by, through, with, and in the Divine Mother, I have found that my noblest guide and most precise inspiration has been Jalal-ud-Din Rumi. Rumi says, and it is something the Divine Mother is now saying to us all in the despair and confusion of this apocalyptic age:

“If you have lost heart in the path of love, flee to me without delay. I am a fortress invincible.”

Rumi also said:

“Love's creed is separate from all religions. The creed and denomination of lovers is God.”

He also said:

“My religion is to live through love.”

He also said:

“If you have not been a lover, count not your life as lived; On the day of reckoning, it will not be counted.”

He also said:

“Never be without love, or you will be dead. Die with love and remain alive.”

He also said:

“Wherever you are and in every circumstance, try always to be a lover and a passionate lover. Once you have possessed love, you will remain a lover in the tomb, on the day of resurrection, in paradise and forever.”

In Rumi we have, with Ramakrishna, Aurobindo, and Kabir, one of the very few universal beings that the world religions have produced who has possessed and lived Love in its splendor. He is someone whose realization was so complete, so multifaceted, so infinite in its depth and intensity that he goes beyond all religious denominations and definitions to show humankind the fullness of what a human being in love with and empowered by God can become.

André Malraux said that if the twenty-first century is to be, it will have to be religious. And Teilhard de Chardin, just before he died, said, “Humankind is being brought to a moment where it will have to decide between suicide and adoration.”

Rumi is one of the greatest mystic poets in the world. He is also, I believe, of all the great poets and religious masters that we have, the supreme master of adoration. So, at this time, when we need to be inspired to love the world that we are in the midst of destroying, when we have forgotten our divine identity and its ecstasies and responsibilities, a guide and witness like Rumi to the glory of God and the soul and to the necessity of a religion of love that transcends all dogmas to embrace the entire creation, is beyond price.

Rumi was a Sufi, and a Sufi is something that many commentators have tried to define, but cannot. Instead, I am going to tell you three Sufi stories and follow them with extracts from Rumi’s prose works and poems. Experience, feel, respond to, vibrate with what a Sufi is, the intensity, the absoluteness, the passion, the urgency, the wildness, the nakedness, the violent sweetness. You will hear the accents of a broken heart, you will hear cries for transformation, you will hear hunger for a world renewed by the Divine Light.

The first story is about a lion. There was a lion cub

frolicking in the long grass when suddenly he discovered that all the lions had left. He was a small cub who didn't know much and when a flock of sheep came along, he tagged after them. And the sheep brought him up and taught him to walk, talk, snore, and *baa* like them, to chat about real estate, and pour derisive scorn on all things holy, like all the best educated sheep.

One day, another lion happened to be striding through the mountains and saw this ludicrous sight: a lion cub walking, talking, *baaing*, sniveling like a sheep. With a great roar, the lion ran down the hillside, scattered the flock of sheep, grabbed the lion cub, dragged it to a pond, and forced it to look into the pond, saying, "Look, you are not a sheep, you are like me, you are a lion. You are a lion and you have the truth, the sincerity, the passion, and the majesty of a lion." Then the lion gave an immense, glorious roar. This terrified and excited the cub. The lion turned to the cub and said: "Now you roar." The cub's first attempts were pathetic rumblings, halfway between a *baa* and a shriek. But slowly, under the tutelage of the lion, the lion cub grew into claiming his lionhood and began over many years to learn how to roar.

Rumi is a lion of passion trying to teach a humanity of depressed sheep how to roar. To roar with freedom, with majesty, with divine tenderness, to roar with the full naked power of divine Love.

Now for the second Sufi story.

An emperor had a slave whom he loved immensely and he wanted to know if the slave really loved him. So, into a room heaped with treasures of all kinds, with jewels and deeds to vast estates, he summoned all of his slaves and said to them, "You are free. Whatever you want in this room, you can take." The slaves could hardly believe their luck. They ran about trying to cram as much of what was in the room into their pockets, and then scampered out of the room, yowling, hollering, and clapping their hands. But the slave whom the emperor loved did not move from where he was standing. When the room was empty, the slave walked quietly over to the emperor and stood by him, his eyes full of love. The emperor said to him, "What do you want?" And the slave said, "I want you. Just you." And the emperor said to the slave, "Because all you want is me, all that I possess is

yours.”

Rumi is the slave and hero of love who can help us, in 1993, at the end of our civilization, to find in our battered hearts the passion and faith to let all illusions go and reach for ultimate Reality. And Rumi is also the achieved mystic who tells us that if we do, then all of the glories and the powers of the Emperor of Reality will be ours. He wrote in the *Mathnawi*: “It is a burning of the heart that I want; it is this burning that is everything, more precious than the empire of the world, because it calls God secretly in the night.”

The last story is told all over the world by many different traditions. Here it is in the Sufi tradition. It is really the story of all our lives.

There was a man who lived in Istanbul, a poor man. One night he dreamed vividly of a very great treasure. In a courtyard, through a door, he saw a pile of blazing jewels heaped by the side of an old man with a beard. In the dream, a voice told him an address, 3 Stassanopoulis Street, Cairo. Because he had learned enough to trust his dream visions, he went on a long, arduous journey to 3 Stassanopoulis Street in Cairo. One day, many years later, he came to that doorway, entered through it into a courtyard full of light, saw the old man from his dream sitting on the bench, went up to him, and said, “I had a dream many years ago, and in the dream I saw you sitting exactly where you are sitting now, and I saw this great heap of treasure by you. I have come to tell you my dream and to claim my treasure.” The old man smiled, embraced him, and said, “How strange, I had a dream last night that under a bed in a poor house in Istanbul there was the greatest treasure I have ever seen.” At that moment, the poor man saw that what he had been looking for all those years was really under his own bed, in his own heart, at the core of his own life.

Aflaki, Rumi’s biographer, tells us that one day a man came to Rumi and said: “Please God that I could go to the other-world: I would at least be at peace there because the creator is there.” “What do you know about where He is?” answered Rumi. “Everything in this or that world is in you: whatever you desire, work for it by yourself, for you are the microcosm.”

Those three Sufi stories will give you a glimpse of what

Sufism and Rumi are about. Sufism is a religion of direct love, direct inner experience. It is the mystic core of Islam, but it transcends all dogma, all hierarchy, all intellectual concepts. It is a direct way to the Heart. In Rumi's poetry we have the most glorious explosion of Sufi passion, Sufi love, and Sufi knowledge that the world has been given. Because the Divine Mother is bringing down into the world a great Light of unconditional love, I have turned to Rumi to try to give to you what I have found in him, which is the inspiration to love this world unconditionally with passion and fearlessness. That fearless passion all of us need now more than ever in order to have the strength, vision, and radical confidence to endure this terrible time and to act on every front and in every dimension with enlightened love to save the planet. Rumi believed as he said in his *Discourses* that:

There is one thing in the world which must never be forgotten. If you were to forget everything else, but did not forget that, then there would be no cause to worry. Whereas if you performed and remembered and didn't forget every single thing, but forgot that one thing, then you would have done nothing whatsoever. It is just as if a king had sent you to the country to carry out a specific task. You go and perform a hundred other tasks, but if you did not perform that particular task, on account of which you had gone to the country, it is as though you had performed nothing at all. So man has come into this world for a particular task and that is his purpose. If he does not perform it, then he will have done nothing. If you say, "Even if I do not perform that task, yet so many tasks are performed by me," you were not created for those other tasks.

Rumi goes on:

It is as though you were to procure a sword of priceless Indian steel such as is to be found only in the treasures of kings and were to convert it into a butcher's knife, for cutting up putrid meat, saying "I am not letting this sword stand idle, look I am putting it to so many useful purposes." Or it is as though you were to take a golden bowl and cook turnips in it. Whereas for a single grain

of that gold you could procure a hundred pots. Or it is as though you were to take a dagger of the finest temper and make of it a nail for a broken gourd, saying, "I am making good use of it. I am hanging the gourd on it. I am not letting this dagger stand idle." How lamentable, how ridiculous that would be! When the gourd can be perfectly well served by means of a wooden or iron nail whose value is a mere farthing, how does it make sense to employ for the task a dagger valued at a hundred pounds? God most high has set an infinite price on you, for he says, in the *Koran*, "God has bought from the believers their selves and their possessions against the gift of Paradise."

The poet says,

You are more precious than both  
Heaven and Earth.

What can I say more? You know not your own worth.

Sell not yourself a little price

Being so precious in God's eyes.

Rumi is telling us that nothing is worth anything, except the uncovering and enacting of our divine Self. Everything else is evasion, frivolity, self-parody, self-destruction. To know and love our divine Selves is the only reason we are here.

The following ten poems come from a book of re-creations I did of Rumi, called *Love's Fire*:

What do you hope to find  
In the soul's streets  
In the bloody streets of the heart  
That have no news, even of yourself?

Ignorant men are the soul's enemy  
Shatter the jar of smug words  
Cling for life to those who know  
Prop a mirror in water, it rusts.

How long will we fill our pockets

Like children with dirt and stones?  
Let the world go. Holding it  
We never know ourselves, never are airborne.

I lost my world, my fame, my mind—  
The Sun appeared, and all the shadows ran.  
I ran after them, but vanished as I ran—  
Light ran after me and hunted me down.

Body of earth, don't talk of earth  
Tell the story of pure mirrors  
The Creator has given you this splendor—  
Why talk of anything else?

In love with him, my soul  
Lives the subtlest of passions  
Lives like a gypsy—  
Each day a different house  
Each night under the stars.

I was once like you, 'enlightened,' 'rational,'  
I too scoffed at lovers.  
Now I am drunk, crazed, thin with misery—  
No one's safe! Watch out!

Reason, leave now! You'll not find wisdom here!  
Were you thin as a hair, there'd be no room.  
The Sun is risen! In its vast dazzle  
Every lamp is drowned.

Desperation, let me always know  
How to welcome you—  
And put in your hands the torch  
To burn down the house.

You only need smell the wine  
For vision to flame from each void—  
Such flames from wine's aroma!

Imagine if you were the wine.

To all of those who find it hard to imagine this splendor of awakening, the glory of the wine, Rumi writes in a letter,

And if you don't believe these words, think for a moment, how could a drop of semen believe you if you told it that God has created a world outside its world of darkness. A world where there is a sky, a sun, moonlight, provinces, towns, villages, gardens; where there exist creatures like kings, rich men, people in good health, bad health, blind men. No imagination or intelligence could believe this story, that there exists outside this darkness and this food of blood another world and another kind of marvelous food. Although this drop ignored and denied such a possibility, it could not help arriving at it, for it was forced outside.

And Rumi adds,

One day, you will find yourself outside this world which is similar to the maternal womb. You will leave this earth to enter, while you are yet in the body, a vast expanse, knowing that the words, "God's earth is vast," designate this region from which the saints have come.

We are all, before we begin on the mystic path, like the drop of sperm in the darkness: refusing to believe in a world of "sky and sun" simply because all we know is darkness. But the world of Rumi, of Kabir, of Ramakrishna, of St. Francis—that "vast region from which the saints have come"—that and only that is worthy of being called the real world, the world of reality. For it is the world as seen by the eyes of awakened love, by the eyes of the heart purified, impassioned, and illumined by adoration. To be born into that real world while in a body is the goal of human incarnation.

Rumi's son, Sultan Walad, wrote:

A human being must be born twice. Once from his mother, and again from his own body and his own existence. The body is like an egg, and the essence of man must become a bird in that egg through the warmth



of love, and then he can escape from his body and fly in the eternal world of the soul beyond time and space.

To learn to fly in the eternal world beyond time and space and to act with the passion, joy, and wisdom of its love in this world is why we are here.

The man far from love's snare is a bird without wings. What does he know of the universe? For he knows nothing of those who know.

As long as Mary did not feel the pain of childbirth, she did not go toward the tree of blessing. "The pangs of childbirth drew her to the trunk of the palm tree." Pain took her to the tree, and the barren tree bore fruit. This body is like Mary, and each of us has a Jesus inside him. If the pain appears, our Jesus will be born. If no pain arrives, Jesus will return to Origin by the same secret way he came and we will be deprived of him and reap no joy.

Generations have passed and this is a new generation. The moon is the same, the water different. Justice is the same justice, learning the same learning, but people and nations have changed. Generation upon generation has passed, my friend, but these meanings are constant and everlasting. The water in the stream may have changed many times, but the reflection of the moon and the stars remains the same.

There are many ways to search but the object of the search is always the same. Don't you see that the roads to Mecca are all different, one coming from Byzantium, the other from Syria, others running through land or sea? The roads are different, the goal's one.... When people come there, all quarrels or differences or disputes that happened along the road are resolved. Those who shouted at each other along the road "you are wrong" or "you are an infidel" forget their differences when they come there because there, all hearts are in unison.

I have come to understand that every complete mystical life—which is really to say every complete human life—has

four essential stages. Like any schema, this one has limitations but it is helpful. Rumi lived through all four stages, but before we enter Rumi's life and attempt to follow him on his journey into love, I would like to go into these stages in some detail. Having some sense of what is at stake in the full journey into love and of what has inevitably to be given and endured helps us to appreciate the depth, courage, and urgency of the inspiration Rumi continues to send us.

The first stage is childhood where each of us has an experience of clear ecstasy, a sustained, often luminous, and sometimes directly disturbing experience of union with reality. I believe if we all rediscovered our childhood, we would be aware of moments of divine grace, moments when we were aware of being the substratum of the universe, and of the universe being a magical field for our delights and our energies.

But childhood is also the source of wounds, of humiliation, of abandonment, the source of the first terrors. And around those wounds, terrors, and abandonment, and around the conventions of the culture and the expectations of our parents and of our world, stage two arises.

Stage two can be thought of as the creation of the false self, the creation of the unreal self, the self that identifies itself with biography, with duties and conventions, with the desire to succeed, with the hunger to dominate experience and dominate the world. This false self is invariably erected around the wounds of childhood as a kind of scaffold to protect them, and is also a response to the conventions of the world, to the expectations of everyone around us. So it is a hybrid, rickety, jittery, unsatisfactory structure which ignorance of any alternative keeps us wanting to prolong. Most people, unfortunately, live their entire lives in stage two as victims of this creation of their own panic and of the communal hallucination that we call society. If you are very lucky or desperate, you will be driven in stage two to search, to quest, to long for something other than the anxiety, panic, despair, and unsatisfactory joys that seem to fulfill the life and expectations of the false self. The tragedy is if you think you are happy in stage two. The tragedy of our culture is that it is a stage-two culture designed to keep people trapped there and designed to keep them exactly at the pitch of panic and desperation at which they will go on fulfilling all the

false needs of the false self and dancing its death-dance of ignorance.

When you really see what our culture is, how unprecedented it is in its brutality, how unprecedented, too, in the brilliance of the weapons that it has placed in the hands of this brutality and its will to deny and destroy all possibilities of transcendence, then you realize how profound are the obstacles that prevent us from ever getting out of stage two. Nervous breakdowns, schizophrenia, outbursts of paranoia, drug addiction, and desperate love affairs are all symptoms of a hunger to escape stage two. All of these desperations and hungers are symptoms of an unacknowledged and hidden need to escape from the prison the modern world has become, this godless worldwide high-tech concentration camp of reason that we are in.

What happens, then, to take somebody from stage two into stage three? Often, a breakdown occurs. If you are lucky, that breakdown will happen early because the pain of childhood or the painful contrast between your inner self and the outer world will become so great that you'll be haunted by fears of suicide or driven really to look at all the facts of your life. The tragedy is when that does not happen, when people drift into middle age and suddenly have a midlife crisis in which they realize that they have done nothing in their lives, have written nothing meaningful, nor spoken one authentic word out of what they imagine to be their minds. This is terrifying but it is what this culture prepares for almost everybody: a good nervous breakdown when it is too late to be of use. So my best wish for you is to have your breakdown when young. It is best, I think, to squeeze it into the last days of your twenties and make it prolonged. So prolonged, in fact, that you will have to begin the search for another reality, seriously and passionately. And this will take you into stage three of this journey.

Sometimes stage three begins with a series of visions, or a series of dreams which you cannot deny because of their intensity and strangeness. It can also begin by an extraordinary meeting. If you are lucky, it is with somebody like Shams or Ramana Maharshi. This is a moment of terror, shock, and ecstasy, when you know, because another human being is incarnating it in front of you, that everything you have understood about the world, about identity, about the

nature of reality, is a stupid fiction of your false self. The world absolutely falls and fades away and you are shocked to the core of your being by a possibility so outrageous that no words have ever been able to describe it adequately. Even the greatest mystic poets fail to describe this possibility, which is nothing less than being a part of the Godhead itself radiating in experience. You see truth enacted in front of you in a human being who, through many signs and many powers, shows you that he or she is in a Reality which you did not even imagine. Then you enter the whirlwind of divine transformation. The agonies of the false self are small compared with the agonies of the spirit. The agonies of the false self are paltry, suburban melodramas; the agonies of the spirit are played out in the immense theater of the Divine and they mirror the struggle between good and evil in the universe, the struggle for the victory of Light in this dimension and in matter. So they have a terror, a range, a splendor, and a goal greater than anything that can be imagined until you are being whirled about in their fire.

What happens in stage three is that the false self is burnt alive. The false self is mocked, derided, lacerated, opened up by visionary ecstasy, by dreams, by unmistakable moments of shattering insight, by immense joy and immense griefs, by the sudden penetration into the heart of all the pains of the world and all the joys of the world, by becoming as you walk down the street the flower on the curb or the old woman in front of you, or the windshield of the passing car, without any mediation, without any veil. Stage three is also marked by the collapse of all the games that kept stage two going. If you are a writer, you probably fall silent. If you are an actor, you see the obscenity and the idiocy of what you are doing. If you are a professor, every dreary word which comes out of your mouth will literally look like a dead butterfly. The exposure is total. In this stage everything is taken away from the false self so that it dies. All its hiding places are unnervingly opened up and dissolved.

But while this savage and often hilarious destruction is going on, and simultaneously with it, the Divine Light comes up in the mind and knowledge is born of an unmistakable, irreducible identity with that Light that is bliss, peace, and awareness. This does not and cannot happen quickly. It happens in bursts, in swells, in trials, in spirals, and is often

accompanied by other forms of breakdown, temptation, or desolation, which the searcher has to experience for himself or herself within the terms of his or her own self which is being transformed, of his or her own personality. Very few people ever get to the end of stage three. This is because stage three requires—and the word is *requires*—total surrender to the higher Path. It requires total abandon to the Beloved. It requires total faith in the divine power of the divine Master, because nothing can get you through the ordeals of stage three but that faith. You are in a completely new field about which you know nothing. It is vaster, more immense, more majestic, more terrible than anything the ego-mind can even begin to imagine. In this field of total novelty—abrasive, wild, completely foreign—you have only one recourse and that is to grasp the hand of the divine Master for absolute dear life. Unless you are holding the hand of the Beloved in abandonment and humility, you can only fall over the cliff of the mind and be shattered on the rocks below. That shattering can take dramatic forms: it can be madness, it can be real schizophrenia, it can be extreme inflation of the self, because the experiences in stage three can lead you to imagine that you have completed the entire experience, and so can identify yourself with Christ and the Buddha. The West is now full of people identifying the spiritual experiences that happen in stage three with the completion of the Path, with enlightenment. This is nonsense; these experiences in the whirling fire of stage three are just the beginning.

Very few people get to the end of stage three because very few people are prepared to suffer enough. That is the truth. Who is prepared to give up everything for the Beloved? Who is prepared to give up every area of their life including the most secret, the most deliciously pornographic, the most elaborate, the most cherished, to the unspeakably searching eye of the Divine Light? Who is prepared to try and wed every moment of their daily life, every breath they take, every thought they have to the Light? Transformation is a huge task, hugely beautiful and hugely difficult.

Stage three ends—and the mystical traditions agree on this—with the direct vision of the divine nature of Reality and the divine nature of the Self. And this is a direct vision of the Divine Light, seen normally, ordinarily, permanently, as a

state of grace and nature. You know that you and the Light are one, and at any moment in which you focus or still yourself, the divine Light appears, literally. It is a white Light, it is colorless, manifesting everything. It is the Light of the Divine Mind. It is the Light of the Self, and at the end of stage three, that Light comes up forever. Nothing can ever eclipse it. This most extraordinary moment is not dramatic. It happens in a blink and suddenly you realize that you are not looking out, but looking in, and all the barriers between you and the world, you and the world and others, you and the world and others and the Light, are dissolved. This is an enlightenment experience. But it is not the end of the journey. I think it is important, at this moment in our culture, to make it clear that this illumination is not enlightenment. Stage three ends with this illumination, the coming up of the divine Light, and with it the coming up of the certainty of the divine world. But this is just the beginning of the most important stage of all. Stage four has its own subtle agonies, but fortunately at stage four something else has entered the picture and it can only be described as a massive sense of humor.

By stage four you know beyond any doubt that the person suffering is an illusion, that the false self is constantly tempting you to dance into new shapes. You know that. You can be trapped and caught and humiliated again and again by shadows and desires, but the game is so obvious, the illusion so transparent, that you start laughing even as you fall. There is a tremendous sense of humor that helps you through the various ordeals of stage four. Stage four is the integration of the divine Self with the human self, of the absolute with the relative, and that work of integration has to go down eventually into each cell of the body. So it is a work of bringing the entire human experience up to the level of the divine Light, of letting the Light come down and soak all the way through the body, heart, and mind and then letting the heart, mind, and body flower endlessly in that Light.

So the point of stage four is this huge work of integration which is generally the work of several lifetimes. We talk of the Buddha's enlightenment at thirty-six and people then imagine that the Buddha just walked around for fifty years giving extraordinary teachings. I do not believe that the enlightenment the Buddha knew at thirty-six was as complete

as the enlightenment he had right at the end of his life when he entered *parinirvana*. I believe that his enlightenment experience at Bodhgaya was integrated into every form of life as he went around, and that in him a massive polyphony of enlightenment grew and gathered strength. Right until the last moment, the Buddha was traveling in enlightenment fields. A Tibetan Master once said to me, “An enlightened Master can travel more in a minute than other people can travel in 144,000 lifetimes.” This is because the state of enlightenment is a state of infinite expansion, of infinite receptivity to the Light; the mind that is in the enlightenment field is exploding ceaselessly, endlessly opening up and up. The bird of gnosis, free from the prison of the false self, is free to fly on and on into the Light, into vision after vision, metamorphosis after metamorphosis.

Why I have gone into these stages in some detail is because Rumi lived them right to the end. He lived, I believe, everything you can live and was able, within the inevitable limitations of language—limitations he knew intimately—to express, with precision and glory, all the experiences of all the stages, and gesture, again and again, into the unknowable splendor beyond them. For the last thirty years of his life, Rumi lived as an enlightened being, a constantly self-transforming divinized Master. And the work he left has the sacred power to initiate directly that can only come from someone who has not only burnt away in the fire of divine Love but become that Fire.

Rumi wrote:

“At the time of Spring, all the earth’s secrets become manifest: when my spring comes my spiritual mysteries blossom forth.”

This is Rumi’s springtime. We are living in it—an age of apocalypse that is also an age of rebirth. And who could speak to us more inspiringly of ourselves than this poet who, more than any other, lived out apocalypse and rebirth in his own being? What the human race needs now is not more religions or dogmas, but witnesses to divine Reality and Glory, lovers of God and the world who can speak out of their love clearly and guide us into our own Fire. Rumi is a supreme witness of the Fire, and anyone who comes to his words with awe and an open longing heart will be drawn by them into the heart of Reality. As Rumi said:

If you are seeking, seek Us with joy for we live in the kingdom of joy.

Do not give your heart to anything else

But to the love of those who are clear joy.

Do not stray into the neighborhood of despair

For there are hopes: they are real, they exist

Do not go in the direction of darkness—

I tell you: suns exist.

Rumi was born into a distinguished family of jurists and religious scholars on September 30, 1207 in Balkh, a town in Khorassan (now Afghanistan). His father, Baha-ud-Din Walad, called by his contemporaries the “Sultan of scholars,” was a famous theologian, Sufi, and mystic whose courage, integrity, grandeur of heart, and passion for a directly spiritual rather than philosophical or dogmatic approach to God profoundly moved and inspired his son.

The epoch Rumi was born into was one of terrifying turmoil, not unlike our own. The Ottoman Empire was menaced from within and without: from within by religious decadence and rampant political corruption; from without, by the Christian Crusaders on the one hand and the savage Mongol armies of Genghis Khan on the other. This turmoil seared Rumi’s life with fear and chaos very early on. At the age of twelve, in 1219, he fled Balkh with his father, who was being attacked by religious enemies and foresaw the destruction of the city by the Mongols. Baha-ud-Din was right: a year later Balkh lay in ruins.

A decade of wandering over Asia Minor and Arabia followed. Rumi and his family went on a pilgrimage to Mecca and stopped on the way at Nishapur, where the young Jalal-ud-Din met the great Persian Sufi poet Attar, who predicted “this boy will open a gate in the heart of Love.” Rumi, in turn, never forgot his meeting with the author of “The Conference of the Birds” and used to say of him, “Attar has travelled through all the seven cities of Love, while I live still in the corner of a narrow street.” Later in his travels Rumi went with his father to Damascus, where he met the greatest Sufi metaphysician of the age, Ibn-Arabi. It is said that when Ibn-Arabi saw Rumi walking behind his father he exclaimed, “Glory be to God, an ocean is walking behind a lake.” At



eighteen, Rumi married Gauher-Khatoun, the daughter of a grandee of Samar kand, and quickly fathered two children with her—Sultan Walad and Ala-ud-Din Tchelebi. After stays in Laranda and Arzanjan in Armenia, Rumi's father was invited by the Sultan of Konya, Ala-ud-Din Kaykobad, to go and live there in 1229. A college was created in Konya especially for him, and Baha-ud-Din taught there until his death two years later in 1231. Rumi found himself his father's successor at the astonishingly precocious age of twenty-four.

His spiritual and intellectual education continued smoothly, as did his rise to preeminence over his contemporaries. Tirmidhi, a pupil of his father, came to teach Rumi for nine years the essentials of Sufi philosophy and sent him again on his travels to Aleppo and Damascus, where his already formidable skills in all the various disciplines—mathematics, physics, law, astronomy, Arabic and Persian language and grammar, prosody, Koranic commentary, jurisprudence—were honed and ripened. At thirty-one Rumi returned to Konya, a brilliantly articulate, accomplished, pious, ascetic young scholar with his famous father's spiritual blessings on his head. He quickly acquired a reputation and followers. By 1244, wrote his son Sultan Walad, Rumi had “ten thousand disciples.”

Everything could have conspired to keep Rumi content in this frozen, limited, but flattering role of his “false self”—the dominant example of his father, orthodox and intellectual for all his mysticism, the fear of instability that so unstable a childhood had undoubtedly bred, the rewards of easy adulation, unthreatened by radical inner hunger or external controversy. Rumi had studied Sufi philosophy, met some of the great mystic masters of his time, could lecture alluringly on the mystical path (as well as jurisprudence and Koranic studies), had accomplished several retreats, but by his later admission, he had made no fundamental spiritual breakthrough. He was in fact, at thirty-six, in the most dangerous part of stage two, the moment when he could have been so dazzled by his own gifts and fame that he would have been trapped for life by the glamour of his own reflection and by all the subtle forms of intellectual and spiritual pride that so astonishing an early success engendered. The spiritual greatness that was undoubtedly

latent in him—his father, Attar, and Ibn-Arabi had all recognized it—could well have been diverted or even perverted by his own brilliance and the seduction of celebrity. The ferocity and precision of Rumi’s later attacks on mental pride and the hunger of fame show how intimately he knew and understood the dangers of both.

But the great burning and shattering by Love that saved, destroyed, and transfigured Rumi was at hand. Sometime in early December 1244, Rumi met Shams-i-Tabriz, who was to change his life—and the spiritual history of the human race—by plunging Rumi into the fire of divine transformation and initiating him into the secrets of divine Love. “I was raw,” Rumi wrote later, “then I was burnt: then I was cooked.” Sultan Walad wrote in his *Walad-Nama* about his father: “His supreme guide on the mystical path was Shams-i-Tabriz. God consented that Shams should manifest himself to him particularly and that it should be for him alone.... Nobody else would have been worthy of such a vision.... He saw him, who cannot be seen, he heard what nobody had heard from anyone before.... He fell in love with him and was annihilated.”

Rumi wrote:

I have seen the noble king with a face of glory  
He who is the eye and the sun of heaven  
He who is the companion and healer of all beings  
He who is the soul and the universe that births souls  
He who bestows wisdom on wisdom, purity on purity  
He who is the prayer-mat of the soul of saints  
Each atom of my body cries out separately:  
“Glory be to God.”

Who was this mysterious, terrifying, majestic dervish in his sixties “wrapped in coarse black felt” that Rumi met that December in 1244 and came to love as the equal of Jesus and Mohammed, inseparable from God Himself? Who was Shams, whose name means “Sun,” who came from Tabriz in Iran, whose violent and vocal contempt for most of the famous living or dead Sufi masters had made him notorious all over Asia Minor, and whose presence and mystic power were so vast, so shattering, so resplendent that the greatest poet of

the world spent a lifetime dazedly lost for words trying to describe both him and them? And why did this aging, lonely, scornful man, the Sun of Tabriz, known as “Parindah” (the flier) because he had spent a lifetime traveling everywhere in search of truth, come on November 29, 1244 to Konya, staying in the *caravanserai* of the sugar merchants in a miserable room, giving himself up to extreme mortifications?

Aflaki tells us, “Shams prayed to God that it might be revealed to him who the most occult of the favorites of the divine Will was, so that he might go to him and learn still more of the mysteries of Divine Love. The son of Baha-ud-Din of Balkh was designated to him as the man most in favor with God. So Shams went to Konya.” Another chronicler, Daulat Shah, takes us deeper: “Shams-i-Tabriz was in search of a man. A man who could share his spiritual confidence. A man who could bear the brunt of his dynamic personality, a man who was capable of receiving and imbibing his emotional experience, a man whom he could shape, destroy, build, regenerate, and elevate. It was in search of such a man that he flitted from land to land like a bird. His master, Rukn-ud-Din Sanjabi, pointed him at last in the right direction and told him to go to Konya.”

But there is a vaster truth waiting to be found in an earlier story told about Shams by Aflaki. In this story, Aflaki shows us a Shams alone and anguished, but aware too that most people find his scalding presence unbearable, and aware that he has an immense power of vision to communicate. Shams begs God, “Give me one person who can bear me, one person who is brave, strong, clear, wild enough for me to shatter and remake in such a way that through him I can give everything that I have to give to the world.” “What will you give me in return?” God asks Shams, and Shams replies: “My life.”

This wonderful and terrible story of Aflaki’s brings us to the threshold of the mystery that was and is Shams. I have meditated on Shams’ and Rumi’s relationship for twenty years and I’d like to give you what I believe to have happened. It is an astonishing story if you think deeply about it. I believe Shams-i-Tabriz was a man who became divinized, who achieved total realization. When you attain that summit of realization you are beyond all normal forms of communication, all words, all concepts, all ideas are far beneath you, and what you then need is someone who can be

your mouthpiece. Someone who is still human, still evolving, still developing, who you can “destroy, burn, regenerate, and elevate” by degrees and stages into the immensity that you are. Someone who you can initiate into the fire of the revelation that you are, and so, through him or her, initiate the world. Christ, the Buddha, Socrates, Ramakrishna, all wrote nothing; but they all had disciples who they drew deeply into their inmost heart and illuminated and made able by an extraordinary alchemy of divine Love to communicate their message to the world in forms in which some saving flashes of its splendor could be reflected.

For Shams, Rumi was that disciple. Shams knew how essential his vision and realization were, not only to Islam but to the world and to the survival of the world. So he was prepared—had, in fact, to be prepared (knowing, as he must have known, how much depended on his fire being transmitted)—to pay the final price, as Christ too had been prepared. “What will you give me in return?” God asked Shams. And Shams answered, “My life.”

Shams’ bargain with God and his final sacrifice power all the events that follow his meeting with Rumi and are the Sun that irradiates not only all of Rumi’s poetry but the entire transmission through Rumi’s being, work, and sacred order to the world. Shams knew that when he came to Konya he was to meet in Rumi the man who could be the heart and the mouthpiece through which the revelation that he had been graced with could blaze out not only to Islam and his own epoch but to the whole world and for the rest of human history. He knew too that when he met Rumi he would have only a brief time left to live: he had offered God his life in return for the glory and wonder of giving everything God had given him to Rumi and through Rumi to all of humanity. God, he knew, would enforce the bargain, because its extreme devotion and passion were the very condition in which so transfiguring a gift could be given.

Rumi gave up everything for Shams, but Shams had already given up everything for Rumi, had already made the final sacrifice so that their supreme mystical love affair could be possible, so that the transmission of ecstasy and gnosis from his heart to Rumi’s heart could be as pure, lucid, and complete as possible, so the world, through the uncompromising incandescence of that transmission could be

given its deepest testimony of all of the divine power of Love, and so that we, now, facing the end—or the possibility of the end—of the planet could have his and Rumi’s love and its passionate ecstatic knowledge to turn to, to help save ourselves and the world. Rumi wrote:

From Tabriz has shone the face of Shams of Tabriz.  
Shams is the one through whom the Light enters the world.

Only now can we begin to see the prophetic depth of Shams’ realization and begin to comprehend the grandeur of what was at stake in his sacrifice and the transmission it made possible.

According to one of the versions of their meeting, Rumi in early December, 1244, was leaving his college situated in the coffee trader market, on his way to the bazaar riding a mule. His students were following him on foot. Suddenly Shams ran after him, grasped the mule’s bridle, and asked Rumi who was the greatest, Bayazid (a great Sufi mystic in the tradition of Al-Hallaj), or Mohammed? Maulana (Rumi) answered that it was a strange question, Mohammed being the seal of the prophets. “What is the meaning then of this,” answered Shams. “The Prophet said to God, ‘I have not known Thee as I should have,’ and Bayazid said, ‘Glory be to me. How high is my dignity.’ ” At this moment Rumi fainted. When he recovered, he took Shams by the hand and led him to the college on foot, where they kept to themselves in a cell for forty days.

There are two other versions and they each represent a facet of the devastating effect Shams had on Rumi, and had to have if he were to communicate his essence to him in time. One day Maulana was sitting at home surrounded by his students and his books when Shams-ud-Din entered, saluted him, and pointing to the books, asked, “What are these?” Rumi answered, “You cannot know.” He had hardly pronounced these words when fire fell on the books and they were burned. Rumi gasped, “What is that?” Shams answered, “You cannot know,” and left.

Another version of the meeting says that when Shams arrived in Konya, Rumi was sitting by a fountain and had deposited his books near him. Shams asked, “What are

these?” Maulana answered, “These are words. Why should you care about them?” Shams threw all the books into the water. Maulana exclaimed, “How dare you! In some of these books were important manuscripts by my father that cannot be found anywhere else.” Shams plunged his hand into the water and took the books out one by one, and none of them were wet. Rumi asked, “What is your secret?” Shams answered, “*dhawq* [desire for God] and *hal* [spiritual state]. Why should you care about these?” and they embraced and left, and went into seclusion.

I believe the first version is the real one because it is the most concrete. Everything is contained in it. It has a marvelous theatrical truth. Rumi is on his mule and he is being led by his students. He is the Prince on his horse in his ego's magnificence, learning, splendor, and power. And right in the middle of the market place of Konya, an old man wrapped in coarse black felt comes up to him and asks him a question which seems crazy, a question on which the whole of the rest of his life would depend. And when Rumi answers it conventionally, Shams replies in such a way that Rumi falls off his mule. He falls off the mule of his fame, his reputation, his glamour, his power. It is as if Shams takes the great sword of mystical passion and knowledge and cuts Rumi down. To Shams' question, “Who is greater, Mohammed or Bayazid?”, Rumi gave the conventional answer. What else could he do? Faced with this madman, in the middle of the bazaar, the leading young intellectual of Konya gives the accepted and conventional answer: “Obviously Mohammed is the greatest of the prophets. It is to him that the glory belongs.” Then Shams fixes him with his gaze and says, “But why did the Prophet say, ‘I have not known Thee as I should have,’ and why did Bayazid say, ‘Glory be to me. How high is my dignity.’ ” Rumi did not answer. He fainted. Actually he did not faint, he went into *samadhi*, he went into wordless ecstasy. He was given a vision of truth at that moment, of the truth that Bayazid knew of the unspeakably great dignity and glory of the soul. Everything that he thought, everything that he had been, everything he thought he understood was entirely and forever obliterated in that moment of shattering power and love that Shams gave him, which destroyed and remade him.

The image of the Beloved suddenly lifted its head from  
the heart

Like the moon from the horizon, like a flower from a  
branch—

All the world's images ran before his image, scraps of  
iron in a magnet's grip.

And Rumi got up and wordlessly went towards Shams and took him by the hand and held on to his hand despite the enmity and incomprehension of his whole world, and despite all the extreme suffering that fidelity to his master would bring him. He let Shams' hand lead him through all the horrors and ordeals of the false self's death-by-fire and through labyrinths of loss, mourning, desolation, and near madness, until the Fire of Love had done its work, Rumi was "cooked" and complete, and he and Shams were one in the eternal Light—one Love, one Fire, one Force, one Sun.

Let us meditate again on Sultan Walad's description of the meeting of Shams' triumph, this time in its complete form:

The seeker is the one who finds, for the beloved becomes the lover. My father's supreme guide on the mystical path was Shams-i-Tabriz. And God consented that Shams should manifest himself to him particularly and that it should be for him alone. Nobody else would have been worthy of such a vision. After such a long wait, Maulana saw Shams' face and the secrets became as clear to him as daylight. He saw Him who cannot be seen, he heard what nobody had ever heard from anyone before. He fell in love with him and was annihilated.

In those forty days that Shams and Rumi spent together, a massive transmission took place, a transmission from Shams' heart to Rumi's heart of the divine secrets of which Shams was master. But there are two essential stages that Rumi still had to go through. When you contemplate the next three years of Rumi's mystical education, it is almost impossible to imagine how he survived it, so great, so immense, and so painful is its intensity! But the terrifying speed, wildness, violence, and ferocity of Rumi's transformation were essential. Shams knew he had very little time and that Rumi

had to be utterly and completely remade for the revelation he was destined to transmit to be potent in him.

What happened was this: Rumi's disciples got jealous of the passion that sprang up between their revered, handsome, and proud young master and this wild dervish from nowhere that he took deep into his life and with whom he spent so much time. They became jealous, and mocked and hated Shams. They treated Shams so badly that he suddenly left for the first time. Rumi went out of his mind with grief because he knew by now just how great Shams was and that Shams' mind and heart contained the secrets of the universe. He had fallen irremediably and spiritually in love. So with that first separation, Rumi nearly lost his mind. He was so beside himself with grief that he used to go down to where the camels and the caravans came in and beg everyone who came to Konya, "Have you seen Shams? Have you seen Shams-i-Tabriz?" After months of agony, he heard that Shams was in Damascus and he sent his second son, Sultan Walad, to Damascus to bring Shams back.

Sultan Walad went to Damascus. He persuaded Shams to come back and himself escorted him to Konya, walking in front of Shams' horse for three months. Sultan Walad tells us that when Shams and Rumi met after that long agony of separation, they ran into each other's arms and "you could not tell the lover from the beloved."

Again Shams and Rumi went into the deepest mystical union. They went into long ecstatic communion, they danced, they sang, and they exchanged divine secrets, and the transmission continued with furious power. Again, the jealousy of the disciples grew, wilder and wilder, until the moment, that terrible moment in December 1247, when there was a knock at the door of Rumi's house. Shams got up calmly and said, "It is time. I am going. I am called to my death." And he went out into the night and was never seen again.

Why did Rumi have to undergo such complex and relentless agony? Rumi wrote himself:

The grapes of my body can only become wine  
After the winemaker tramples me.  
I surrender my spirit like grapes to his trampling  
So my inmost heart can blaze and dance with joy.



Although the grapes go on weeping blood and sobbing  
“I cannot bear any more anguish, any more cruelty”  
The trampler stuffs cotton in his ears: “I am not working  
in ignorance  
You can deny me if you want, you have every excuse,  
But it is I who am the Master of this Work.  
And when through my Passion you reach Perfection,  
You will never be done praising my name.”

Rumi had to be shattered by Love to become Love itself, emptied and broken to be filled and remade, burnt away for the Fire to come and live in him *as* him and use his being as Its mask in time. There was a divine purpose to each stage of Rumi’s suffering. The first separation from Shams, at a time when their ecstatic union seemed unbreakable, plunged Rumi into the most extreme imaginable longing for Shams, in which every cell of his heart, mind, and soul became a dark wound and womb of absence that yearned for the glory of Shams’ presence of Light. So when Shams returned, an even deeper, wilder, more total transmission of his Light-Being could be poured into a Rumi hollowed and seared clean by savage longing.

But even this was not the final stage of the “winemaker’s trampling.” One last stripping, one last death, one last baptism in dereliction was necessary before Rumi could achieve complete union with Shams and the eternal Beloved wearing Shams’ face and streaming through Shams’ eyes Its Light of revelation. There was a great danger that had still to be overcome—the danger that Shams, while he remained in the body, would be for Rumi a veil, even if a blazing and almost completely transparent one, between him and the Light itself. Shams’ love and the majesty of his realization had taken Rumi stage by stage, vision by vision, empowerment by empowerment, to the final threshold of enlightenment. Now all that remained between Rumi and the total divine vision, the Glory, was Shams himself, or rather Rumi’s holy passion for Shams. That final veil had to be burnt away. Shams himself had to disappear in the body, the physical presence of Shams had to be withdrawn from Rumi so that Shams in his essence could be reborn in final splendor in the heart of Rumi’s heart and Divine Love announce its

victory over space and time.

When Shams disappeared that last time, probably murdered and likely by Rumi's own eldest son, Rumi lost his mind again. He was inconsolable for months. Weeping, singing, and dancing in the streets, he went mad with grief. The last traces of his false self, of any self-concern, of any hunger for some unconscious corner of separation from Shams, were dissolved in the acid of atrocious pain. But then, very slowly, very subtly, the miracle became clear to him that Shams had only died to be reborn in the depth of his own being, and that the fire of his agony had finally fused him with his Beloved, beyond space and time, and transformed all of him into the glory of divine gold. With that ecstatic certainty, Rumi dissolved into the Deathless.

Sultan Walad reports his father saying at this time of Shams:

Although we are far from him in the flesh—without body or soul, we are both one and the same Light. You can see him, if you want, or you can see me. I am him, he is me, O seeker! Why do I say me or him when he is myself and I am he? All is him and I am contained in him.... As I am he, what am I looking for? I am him now and I am speaking of myself.

Let us now share a few of the extraordinary poems that came from that triumphant fusion, beyond space and time, that soul-lovemaking into final divine truth.

No poetry that the world has been given has this range of passion, agony, and radiance. Rumi lived the entire terrible and glorious story of the human journey into divine Being, and every word he gave us has the scar of the divine Fire on it. Every poem is that Fire speaking to us of Itself with the fiercest possible urgency, clarity, and wild vision.

Seizing my life in your hands, you thrashed me clean  
On the savage rocks of eternal mind.  
How its colors bled, until they grew white!  
You smile and sit back: I dry in your sun.

The Sea boils with passion for you  
The clouds pour pearls at your feet

A lightning from your love has pierced the earth  
This smoke curling to heaven is its child.

We were green: we ripened and grew golden.  
The Sea terrified us: we learned how to drown.  
Squat and earthbound, we unfolded huge wings.  
We started sober: are love's startled drunkards.

You hide me in your cloak of nothingness  
Reflect my ghost in your glass of being  
I am nothing, yet appear: transparent dream  
Where your eternity briefly trembles.

This love sacrifices all souls, however wise, however  
"awakened"  
Cuts off their heads without a sword, hangs them  
without a scaffold.

We are the guests of the one who devours his guests  
The friends of the one who slaughters his friends....  
Although by his gaze he brings death to so many lovers  
Let yourself be killed by him: is he not the water of life?  
Never, ever, grow bitter: he is the friend and kills gently.  
Keep your heart noble, for this most noble love  
Kills only kings near God and men free from passion.  
We are like the night, earth's shadow.  
He is the Sun: He splits open the night with a sword  
soaked in dawn....

The man to whom is unveiled the mystery of Love  
Exists no longer, but vanishes into love.  
Place before the Sun a burning candle  
And watch its brilliance disappear before that blaze,  
The candle exists no longer, it is transformed into Light,  
There are no more signs of it, it itself becomes sign....

You are my soul, my universe: what do I have to do with  
the soul and the universe?  
For me you are ever-flowing treasure: what do I have to

do with profit or loss?

One minute, I am the friend of the wine, another the friend of him who burns me.

I have come to this age of ruins, so what do I have to do with time's melodrama?

I am terrified by the whole world, I am sprung free of the whole world,

I am neither "hidden" nor "apparent." What do I have to do with existence or space?

I am drunk on union with you, I need and want and care about no one else.

Since I am your prey, what do I care about fate's bow and its arrows?

I live at the bottom of the stream, why would I go looking for water?

What could or would I say about this stream that flows and flows?

I have given up existence, why go on staggering under the burden of this mountain?

Since the wolf is my shepherd, why put up with the pretensions of the shepherd?

What abandon! What drunkenness! You hold the cup in your hand

Blessed is the place you are, and glorious to the eye of the heart.

Each atom, by your grace, is a universe, each drop of water a soul.

No one who has ever had a sign from you need worry again about "name" or "sign."

To find the place of splendor, at the bottom of the Sea of truths

You have to dive, dive head first: what do I have to do with feet that scurry?

With the sword of the One God you have hacked a Path for us:

You have stolen all my clothes: What will I give to the toll-man?

From your beauty ablaze like the sun, from the curls of

your hair,  
My heart has become ecstatic: O my soul, hand me this  
brimming cup,  
Do not weigh pain and misery, contemplate love,  
contemplate friendship:  
Do not mull over tyranny and neglect: think of all those  
who have their eyes fixed on you.  
Surname all grief 'grace': transmute pain and anguish  
into joy  
And ask from joy all happiness, all security, all peace.  
Demand that security, that peace, demand them,  
Choose the company of those withdrawn in love  
Listen to those who open a path to you: listen, and don't  
say a word.

Glorious is the moment we sit in the palace, you and I  
Two forms, two faces, but a single soul, you and I  
The flowers will blaze and bird cries shower us with  
immortality  
The moment we enter the garden, you and I  
All the stars of heaven will run out to gaze at us  
As we burn as the full moon itself, you and I  
The fire-winged birds of heaven will rage with envy  
In that place we laugh ecstatically, you and I  
What a miracle, you and I, entwined in the same nest  
While I am here in Konya, and you are in Khorassan  
What a miracle, you and I, one love, one lover, one Fire  
In this world and the next, in an ecstasy without end.

Let us look finally at perhaps the most beautiful of all  
poems that Rumi wrote to Shams:

Suddenly, in the sky at dawn, a moon appeared,  
Descended from the sky  
Turned its burning gaze on me,  
Like a hawk during the hunt seizing a bird,  
Grabbed me and flew with me high into heaven.

When I looked at myself, I could not see myself  
For in this moon, my body, by grace, had become soul.  
And when I traveled in this soul, I saw nothing but  
moon,  
Until the mystery of eternal theophany lay open to me.  
All the nine heavenly spheres were drowned in this  
moon.  
The skiff of my being drowned, dissolved, entirely, in  
that Sea.  
Then, that Sea broke up into waves, Intelligence danced  
back,  
And launched its song,  
And the Sea covered over with foam,  
And from each bubble of foam something sprang,  
clothed in form.  
Something sprang from each light-bubble, clothed in a  
body.  
Then each bubble of body-foam received a sign from the  
Sea,  
Melted immediately and followed the flow of its waves.  
Without the saving, redeeming help of my Lord,  
Shams-ul-Haqq of Tabriz,  
No one can contemplate the moon, no one can become  
the Sea.

The moon, the Light of gnosis, of direct ecstatic vision, descended at dawn like a hawk, seized Rumi, and flew with him into the highest reaches of consciousness. There Rumi became one with the soul and was initiated into its ultimate secret, for when he traveled in soul, beyond all concepts, beyond time and space, he saw nothing but moon, the Divine Light Itself. Everything—he, Shams, the entire creation, the soul—were all One. And so Rumi experienced, as he tells us, the mystery which can never be expressed but which can be lived, the mystery of the eternal theophany, the endless Fire-dance of God in and as creation.

Rumi saw and knew that everything that happens and all things that exist are nothing but the Divine blazing in its own Beauty and Love for Itself. And as he knew and saw this, his

own being dissolved in bliss into the Sea of Light. Annihilation prepared another even more profound revelation; Rumi then saw the Sea break up into waves and all creation arise magically from an ecstatic foaming of the divine Light-Sea. So the full vision of what the cosmos is, and of how, at all moments, all manifested and separate things are secretly one with their source of Light—and so with each other—was given to Rumi. Through the saving and redeeming grace of his divine Master, Shams-i-Tabriz, Rumi had become, at last, the eye of Love itself, looking out in Love, at Love growing, dancing, and flowing in the Light of Love in all things.

Love is an infinite Sea whose skies are a bubble of foam.  
Know that it is the waves of Love that turn the wheels of  
Heaven:

Without Love, nothing in the world would have life.

How is an inorganic thing transformed into a plant?

How are plants sacrificed to become rich with spirit?

How is spirit sacrificed to become Breath,

One scent of which is potent enough to make Mary  
pregnant?

Every single atom is drunk on this Perfection and runs  
towards It

And what does this running secretly say but “Glory be to  
God.”

## Chapter Two

### *The Price of Adoration*

AT THE CENTER of the Western mind, at this moment, the birth is taking place of an extraordinary new openness, an extraordinary new curiosity, a willingness to take the great mystics on their own terms, to see them as the true geniuses, the true heroes, and the real guides of mankind. This moment is also a sacred moment in the history of Rumi's mission to the human race, a moment of insemination, a moment when he and the Light that he is are entering the human consciousness to make it pregnant with love. It is extremely important that we all realize in exactly what moment we are listening to Rumi, at what time of history and with what responsibility.

Just recently, I opened the paper and saw that the United Nations had put out a report about the situation of the rainforest. The report mourns the fact that for over ten years the human race has had at its disposal information that reveals quite clearly the devastation being done to the forest and the consequences of that devastation. The horror goes on; this year an area greater than the size of Oklahoma will be destroyed. In thirty-six years there will be no rainforests at all. No one has any real idea what such an incalculable loss might mean, but the consequence of it can only be devastating and perhaps lethal. So I think that if you are really to listen to what is being attempted to be given to you, both through me and beyond me by Rumi, you must come to a savage moment of recognition and an extreme moment of understanding: you must see and know that the world, as we know it, is ending, that the whole of our civilization is crumbling around us, and that humanity has very little time



to make up its communal mind about whether it wants to survive or not. What more indications do we need of a massive and unprecedented crisis than the ones which have been given to us in the last seventy years? The creation of a bomb designed to destroy human beings in unprecedented numbers. The rape and exploitation of the environment even after the facts of that rape and exploitation have come through. The horrible rubbing of the psyche by a mass media pledged to triviality, obscenity, and pornography. The destruction is triple: it is going on in the natural world, in the emotional world, and in the spiritual world. All these worlds that make up our human identity are being threatened with annihilation and we are conspiring with that annihilation.

A deadly cocktail of apathy, fear, paralysis, and self-loathing drugs nearly all of us. How powerful this cocktail is, how easily it makes us ignore the facts, how easily it lulls us into a completely illusory sense of security, and how easily it gives us the sense that we understand and are doing something, when in fact what we need to understand is that we are in an unprecedented crisis, have very little time and are doing fantastically little about it, are in fact being suicidally passive. Why then teach Rumi? Why then listen to Rumi? The core of our problem as human beings is that we are in a massive psychic depression. This depression is everywhere and it eats away at every resolve we take, at every passion, and every attempt at health. It is a massive worldwide depression and its cause is a fundamental loss of our identity, our memory of our Divine origin. That depression is the cause of the killing all around us of all those sources of wisdom that give us the truth about our nature and our place in the world. It is not by chance that a civilization that has done what we have done to the earth has also tried to extinguish all the native voices, all the wise voices of the world, the voices of the Amerindians, the Aborigines, the great Tibetan Masters, all those voices that had kept alive in their wonder a sense of our Divine origin. What would a psychotic do but try and kill all of those people in the room that remind him or her of his true nature and his true origin? That is what we as a species are doing and that is what we have been doing quite systematically and with appalling brutality for many decades.

So I ask the question: Why listen to Rumi? I suggest that it

is to hear news about your real Self. I suggest that your heart is hungry to hear news about your true identity, about your Divine origin, about the splendor and glory of that origin, and about the splendor and glory of the world as revealed in the eye of the heart, in the sight of the true and awakened heart. And I suggest that behind that hunger is a desperate need to be filled with a food that our culture has been denying us and to come to spiritual recognition and understanding, at a moment where that recognition and that understanding are crucial for the survival of the world.

Crucial for the survival of the world: because the only way to cure this horrific psychic agony that is freezing, paralyzing, and destroying everyone in various ways on the earth is to awaken everyone, to give everyone this sense of what he or she really is, to bring back into the heart of the human race the glory of our Divine origin and the glory of the visionary truth that those who have lived in that origin, and who have become that origin, know to be real. And this is not a question of curiosity, a case of being delighted and enraptured by a great mystic or extraordinary poetry. It is a question of life and death, of survival. If we don't open to this testimony of our Divine origin and of the divinity of the earth, and of our secret interconnectedness with all things now, if we don't go on a journey to transform ourselves in the light of that knowledge, and if we don't succeed in transforming ourselves to an unprecedented extent to allow the Divine to act through us, there will be no human race, no habitable world. So on listening to Rumi and witnesses like him depends the future.

How long will you move backward? Come forward; do not stray in unbelief, come dancing to religion. Look, the elixir is hidden in the poison, come to the poison and come, return to the root of the root of your own self.

You may think that you are earthly beings but you have been kneaded from the substance of certainty. You are the guardians of God's Light, so come, return to the root of the root of your own self.

Once you have tied yourself to selflessness, you will be delivered from selfhood and released from the ties of a hundred snares. So come, return to the root of the root

of your own self.

You were born vice regent of the children of God but you have lowered your eyes to this sad world, alas, how can you be happy with these scraps? So come, return to the root of the root of your own self.

Though you are the talisman protecting the world's treasure, within yourself you are the mine. Open your hidden eyes and come, return to the root of the root of your own self.

You were born of the rays of God's majesty and have gained the good fortune of your auspicious star, so how long will you suffer at the hands of non-existent things? Come, return to the root of the root of your own self.

You are a ruby in the heart of granite, how long will you try to deceive us? We can see the truth in your eyes, so come, come, return to the root of the root of your own self ...

The King is here, Shams-i-Tabriz has placed before you the cup of eternity. Glory, glory be to God! What marvelous pure wine! So come, drink with me, drink now, return to the root of the root of your own self.

—Rumi, from the *Diwan*

These words spoken by Rumi in the middle of the thirteenth century were words that he knew would carry down the centuries and keep alive their eternally fresh message of our eternal identity, to be spoken at a time in history when they could be heard and in which their necessity was clearer than ever. Don't think it is in any way strange that these poets, and this man in particular, are coming back into our hearts now, because they are the supreme guides to the transformation by love which we must all go through now if we are to save the planet.

How will we save the planet? Only by awakening to who we are. And how will we act when we awaken to who we are? We shall act with Divine love, with Divine passion, with Divine power, with Divine truth, and that Action, because it will have upon it the seal of the Beloved, because it will be

springing out of the will of the Beloved, will give us the solutions that cannot be obtained in ordinary consciousness, that cannot be even understood, glimpsed, aimed at, or even sketched, while we remain in the prison house of the ego.

So this journey that gives Rumi the right to speak with that ecstasy, authenticity, and knowledge is not a journey taken by a mystic in the thirteenth century; it is the central human journey that we, now, at this particular terrifying historical moment, are called upon to take. We are all of us at this moment in history called upon to give up everything we think we are, everything we think we know, all our pitiful, small, vain games and identities, to take the journey in the presence of the Divine to the presence of the Divine so that the Divine can act through us, help us to help ourselves and save the planet.

You are the guardians of God's light ...

You are the talisman

You were born of the rays of God's majesty.

Rumi is an initiatory poet. He is initiating anyone who can hear to the deepest truth of their own being, he is hungry to fill you with *shakti*, the Divine force, the wildness and ecstasy and madness of the Divine passion. He can fling before us his rubies and pearls and diamonds, he can speak of the highest truth, he can fashion works of consummate, outrageous beauty, but nothing can happen if we are not receptive. Nothing can happen; the words cannot engender the Divine children that they are meant to if we do not allow ourselves, all of ourselves, to be a womb. Every cell in the body, mind, and heart must become a womb to receive the Divine Light of the truth so that the truth can start its wild sweet work of change. And every cell must be open now, this moment, for as Rumi says of his own poetry, "My poetry is like Egyptian bread. Night passes and you cannot eat it"—for come tomorrow, come the next moment, it will be stale. You have to enter into the nakedness of the instant where it is born and you have to meet it like a child runs to his mother with ecstasy. You have to meet it now, in the core of the moment, in the core of the transmission. Otherwise, nothing can happen.

My poetry is like Egyptian bread.  
Night passes and you cannot eat it.  
Eat it, eat it while it is fresh, before the dust settles.

Rumi knows how easily the dust settles. We hear these words, but we know that as soon as we go out into the darkness, grief, fear, and anxiety of our false selves and our world, the dust settles again. So it is even more important when the truths of the Divine Love are uttered to remain in a state of total receptivity so that we can be penetrated right to a core which can never, ever, close again, that we can be wounded by the Divine Beauty with such a deep gash that nothing can ever heal that gash except the hand of the Beloved.

This is what Rumi is saying: “Lay yourself on the slab of openness and wait for the knife of my beauty to gash you so deep with the Beloved’s radiance that you can never recover. Because if you recover, you are in danger. If you recover, you are part of the disaster that is destroying the world. If you recover, you, yourself, might as well be running into those rainforests and sawing them down.”

In every poem, every story, every line of every poem and story, Rumi is saying to us, tenderly or majestically, quietly or railingly or wittily: “Never, ever recover or even want to from the wound of Divine Love, of Divine Longing, so you will come to long with your whole being to participate now in the vast transformation that destiny is demanding of the human race.” Rumi is a madman, and he is trying to do nothing less than send the human race mad with Divine Love.

My poetry is like Egyptian bread.  
Night passes and you cannot eat it.  
Eat it while it is fresh, before the dust settles.  
Its place is in the tropics of awareness.  
It dies in this world because of the cold.

Rumi wants to destroy and annihilate the ego so that you can all be placed in the Divine Light and in the Divine experience, and he is saying, “Its place, the place of my work, is in the tropics, the tropics of awareness, the heat of love,

the heat of ecstasy, the heat of passion, somewhere wildly fertile and fecund, the depth of the heart, the open heart.” How will we understand a word of what this man is attempting to give to us if we do not, all of us, open the tropics of awareness within us? That is, open our entire being to everything that we have ever known of ecstasy and of joy. Coalesce, condense, transmute everything, every ecstasy that you have ever had, sexual, emotional, musical, looking at a sunset, looking at the sea. Condense them, meditate on them, draw them deep into your heart, and at that moment, when the heart is filled with bliss, then read Rumi’s poetry. Read it by the light of that bliss. And then his poetry will take us even further into that bliss, even deeper into that joy, even more insanely and purely into the heart of our own pure sanity.

Eat it while it is fresh, before the dust settles.

Its place is in the tropics of awareness.

It dies in this world because of the cold.

This world is cold, our hearts are cold, our minds are cold, and what Rumi is attempting to do, what he is doing in language, is bringing down the subtlety, the flash and the fire, the heat and the ecstasy of the Divine consciousness that surrounds us, that bubbles up underneath everything, but which the coldness of our ego, the coldness of our mind, the coldness of our heart, prevents us from reaching or tasting at every moment. So he is saying, “Don’t grow cold, you can’t hear me if you grow cold, I am trying to give you everything, I can give you everything, but you have to open, you have to become a womb.”

Poetry like Rumi’s demands of us what listening to Maria Callas, for example, demands. Rumi is absolutely awake, and awakening has a very fierce edge, the edge of the sword of discrimination, the sword of ecstasy; it has a fire in it, and you have to consent when you listen to and read Rumi to be sliced by that sword and invaded by that fire. You have to know where the sword is coming from, who is speaking to you, and you have to consent to the lovemaking with his spirit that his spirit is really demanding of you, just as Callas’ voice is really demanding that you listen because the truths that she is burning her voice away to tell are truths that can

suffering and working to give the human race. “All your trouble,” he is saying, “all your misfortunes and disappointments arise from that understanding.” He is saying, “If you want the transformation in God, surrender and you will be given all the information necessary and all the insights in their right time, but there can never be complete understanding. That desire to understand is the ego’s desire to control; to imperialize the highest kind of knowledge for its own ends. That desire to understand is the ego’s desperate attempt to pretend that it is doing the initiation, that it is initiating itself, and if it succeeds in making you believe that, you are trapped—far more trapped, in fact, thinking that you *know* than knowing that you don’t know.” Many seekers on the Path really think they know the Divine Truth and it is just this concept that traps them and stifles their growth. That is the danger of the Western mind approaching these truths. It is a danger we all go through and suffer from. Rumi is begging us not to pretend to understand.

I have been reading and re-reading the *Koran*. What has struck me most profoundly is how grand and majestic the Koranic view of God is. God is always transcending any concept that we can have of him, God always goes beyond anything that Mohammed can say of him, God is always talked about in terms of the most total respect, of the most total beauty and splendor. And this is behind the vision of the Divine Majesty and the Divine Glory that permeates and saturates Rumi’s poetry, as it permeates and saturates the glorious music that has come out of Islam, the vision of Ibn-Arabi, the genius of the architecture of Edirne, Granada, Agra, and Medina. This sense of the ineffable majesty, unknowable glory, infinite intensity, and splendor of the Divine blazes in every phrase of the *Koran*. And the word that the Sufis give to this infinite splendor, this glory, is a word that comes up thousands of times in Rumi’s poetry. It is the clue to his experience, to his abject and rapturous humility before the experience. It is the clue to his transmission to us, and the clue to the power of the transmission. The word is *Kibriya*. This word means Divine Glory, Divine Grandeur. As Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote: “God’s grandeur will flame out like shining from shook foil.” Rumi is not teaching you that you, too, can be God. Rumi is not saying that the final state can be attained without much difficulty. He is saying