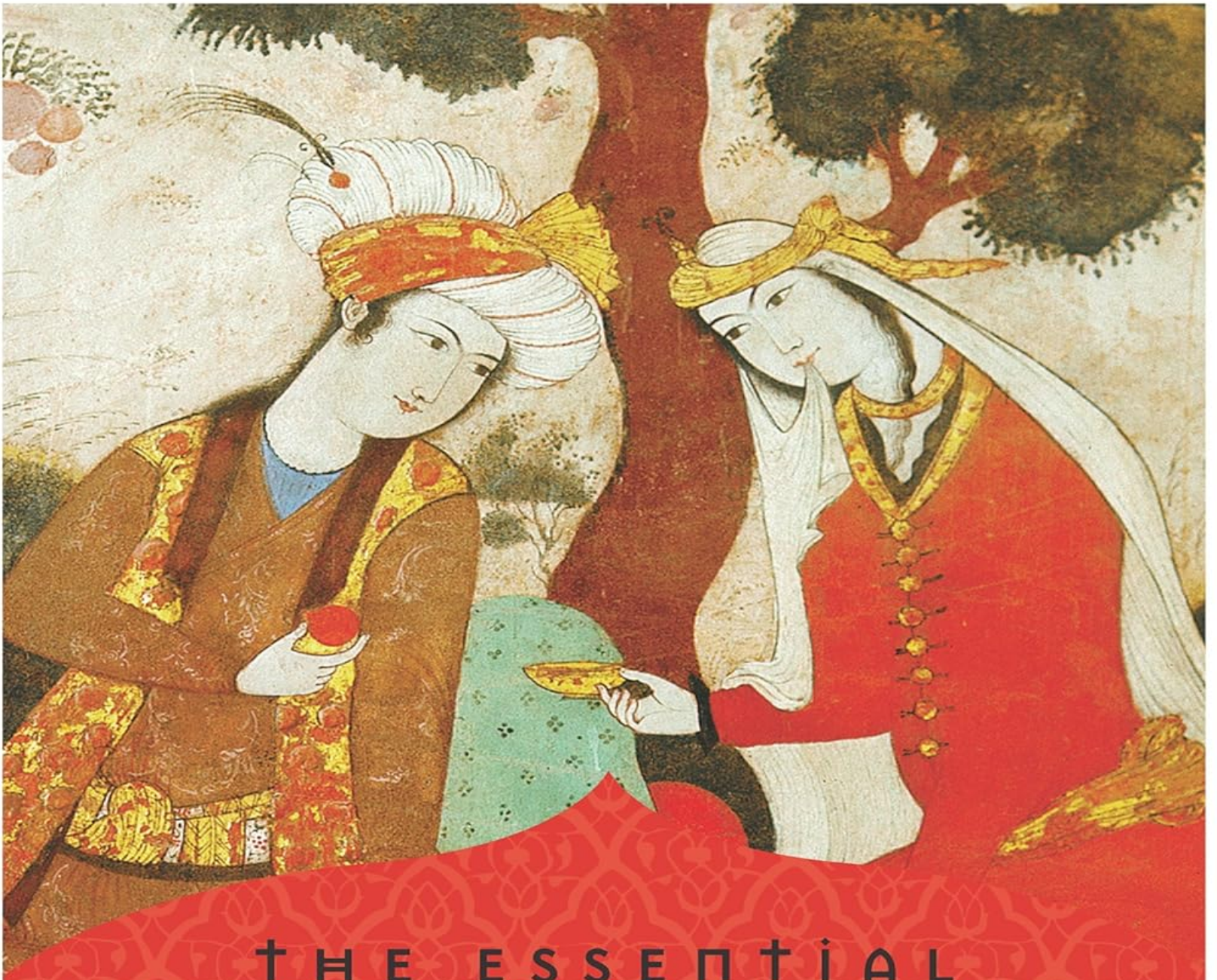

THE ESSENTIAL RUMI

Translations by

COLEMAN BARKS

NEW EXPANDED EDITION

The Essential Rumi

New Expanded Edition

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HarperCollins e-books

Dedication

for the compassionate heart within the mind, the light within the body,
for the sun. Shams of Tabriz, and Bawa Muhaiyaddeen

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Introduction to the New Edition

I am very grateful for the response this book has had since its publication in 1995 and for the opportunity to add a gift of eighty-one new, never-published-anywhere, poems to this re-issue of *The Essential Rumi.* I don't tire of working on Rumi's poetry. It keeps unfolding its wisdom as I grow more open to what is given.

We cannot say much about love at first sight. It happens, and we live in the wake of a new life. Dante and Beatrice. Rumi and Shams. It's a different level of soul-connecting, of course, but I have wondered why, on first looking into Arberry's Rumi, I felt such an opening of my heart, a sense of reckless longing, an expansion of my sense of what's possible in a poem, and in a life. Carl Jung would say that I encountered a form, or an expression, of my anima.

Twenty-eight years afterward I would claim that I felt the wild presence of Shams. Rumi acknowledges Shams as the source of the big red book of *ghazals* (odes) and *rubai* (quatrains) he calls *The Works of Shams of Tabriz.* Some refer to it simply as *The Shams.* Part of the love-mystery explored in Rumi's poetry is how presences flow together, evolve, and create in tandem. The heart is a river, and I felt the motion of it in their friendship. Rumi's ghazals intend to restore the conversation they engaged in. In their grief and joy the poems do that, even at this distance and even after having endured the indignity and betrayal of translation. Whatever the attraction was in 1976, it was not scholarly curiosity. His poems have never been for me, or for most readers, museum curios from the thirteenth century. They are food and drink, nourishment for the part that is hungry for what they give. Call it soul.

I used to be uncomfortable using words like *soul* and *heart*, and I still am. They seem imprecise, loaded with churchy schmaltz and ministerial ease, to say nothing of their dilution in popular culture. But now I feel like I can say so little about anything that I may as well flail about with stage

props. I even feel myself edging toward that dry modifier, *metaphysical. Bliss*, though, is still off-limits, as in *blissed out.*

But consider *emptiness.* Rumi loves the image of a cleared site, a scoured place where a village was before the flood erased all trace. An absence where everything becomes essential, each sound distinct and bare, and clear. Emptiness is what we hear in an old blues singer or a jazz soloist. Rumi calls it the grief that lovers feel. He suggests that word-men be quiet and listen for that. His poems help us feel what living in the ruins is like, in the blank state of knowing nothing, of loving one we do not know and have never met, yet who is deeply familiar. Heartbroken, wandering, wordless, lost, and ecstatic for no reason. It's the psychic space his poems inhabit.

Longing is a shape for this emptiness. In a ghazal by Jelaluddin Rumi love is nakedly exposed and restless like a mountain creek, like sunlight moving around a winter room. Emptiness is where his *sama* leads us, *sama* being the deep listening to poetry and its surround of music and movement. Within *sama* one remembers the dissolution of the ego and the non-attachment of the heart. Rumi explores many images for this place, presence, this unnameable state.

The empty heart as revealed in Rumi's odes is a composite experience of many valences—praise, complaint, majesty, stubbornness, generosity, splendor, bitterness, hesitation, and union. The poems were very new to me in 1976. They did not care about understanding, or memorializing, a moment. Mind and personality were barely there—vague, dissolving paradigms. The poems lived free of purpose, free of time and space in a kind of pure sailing.

In those first months of discovering Rumi I would go down after teaching to the Bluebird Restaurant in Athens, Georgia, and have tea. Sitting there in the late fall afternoon, working with Arberry's scholarly translations, was such a relief after making sense all day. This poetry could not possibly be explicated! I loved the unpredictable spontaneity, the push-pull of great tenderness and great loneliness, of living beyond psychology, of drifting at ease inside the unsayable. Sometimes the poems seemed to take place on the porch of a madhouse. They stepped out of the normal with an almost inhuman energy. Other times they felt exhausted.

No one can say what such friendship is. In the commingling I heard a voice saying something close to my own sense of failure, joy, grief, ecstasy.

Why is it so difficult to say the content of Rumi's ghazals? I feel happy inside them, continuous, whole, in the simplicity of just taking in sunlight, no pretext, no excuse, empty in the present moment.

The Hebrew word, *makom*, refers to the sacred as a location. One can live in the heart. Rumi's odes speak from there and invite us in as though to a galactic residence of inferiority. I felt drawn to the vast beauty of that.

Because of these troubles we are living in, I want to call attention again to Rumi's role as a bridge between religions and cultures. Everyone knows the story of how representatives from all faiths came to his funeral. His presence and his poetry was, and is, inclusive, allied with the impulse to praise and recognize every being and every moment as sacred. *Interfaith* hardly reaches the depth of his connecting. Rumi speaks from *the clear bead at the center*.

The religions of the world are luminous in their individuality, and they have valuable social and soulmaking functions. Surely someday we will quit killing each other over their different strategies. But let us be honest. I have no hope, nor do you, that the Middle East warring (or anywhere else) will stop in this lifetime or in our grandchildren's. No hope. But perhaps hope is overrated. Who needs it. Let us continue on with our battered guidon, which has no recognizable insignia. As Whitman advises us in the 1855 preface to *Leaves of Grass:*

> Argue not concerning God,… re-examine all you have been told at church or school or in any book, dismiss whatever insults your soul….

I say that the exclusivity of most of the organized religions *does* insult the soul. We must be open enough to assimilate the insights of indigenous cultures as well as those of the Abrahamic religions, to glory in the clarity of Rinzai and Bodhidharma as well as that of the dreamtime drawings. Joseph Campbell teaches us this. It feels mean-spirited and academic to dismiss as "syncretic" Rumi's healing universal tolerance. His place among world religions is as a dissolver of boundaries. He is the ocean that acknowledges oneness (the seawater) over the multiplicity of waves (our individual circumstances).

Mystical poetry *can* be a subject for study, but in its essential nature it is not something to locate or describe within a cultural context. It is a way to open the heart, as a Sufi master, or any enlightened being, is a door to the radiant depth of the self.

I obviously am not trying to place Rumi in his thirteenth century locus. That is fine work, and I am grateful for those who do it. My more grandiose project is to free his text into its essence.

I went to Konya for the first time in 1984. I went alone and somehow managed to lose my passport. I'm not sure how I checked into the Seljuk Hotel without it, but I did. It was early evening. I walked to Shams' tomb and then to Rumi's, the way you are supposed to. Ambling back on the main street, I came upon a visionary nutcart, lit with glorious lanterns and heaped with perfect pyramids of every kind of nut in elegant wooden compartments. I bought a quarter's worth, which turned out to be a newspaper cone full of pistachios. Wonderful, impossible abundance. As I walked into the hotel, a crowd of men were sitting in rows on sofas watching the television. There were no sets in the rooms then. One of them shouted *Bul Duc!* Then they all chimed in randomly, laughing, *bul duc, bul duc.* It means "I found it" in Turkish. Eureka. It was also the name of the hotel in Ankara that I had stayed in the previous night. They had found my passport at the I Found It Hotel. The appropriate ceremony occurred to me at once. Beginning at the front right, I went from row to row in the darkened hotel lobby bowing to each and holding out the newspaper spiral, Please. The light green nut, the pistache American. So in that spirit, this new *Essential.* Take as much as you want. It will go around.

Coleman Barks
December 17, 2003
Athens, Georgia

On Rumi

Persians and Afghanis call Rumi "Jelaluddin Balkhi." He was born September 30, 1207, in Balkh, Afghanistan, which was then part of the Persian empire. The name *Rumi* means "from Roman Anatolia." He was not known by that name, of course, until after his family, fleeing the threat of the invading Mongol armies, emigrated to Konya, Turkey, sometime between 1215 and 1220. His father, Bahauddin Walad, was a theologian and jurist and a mystic of uncertain lineage. Bahauddin Walad's *Maarif*, a collection of notes, diarylike remarks, sermons, and strange accounts of visionary experiences, has shocked most of the conventional scholars who have tried to understand them. He shows a startlingly sensual freedom in stating his union with God. Rumi was instructed in his father's secret inner life by a former student of his father, Burhanuddin Mahaqqiq. Burhan and Rumi also studied Sanai and Attar. At his father's death Rumi took over the position of sheikh in the dervish learning community in Konya. His life seems to have been a fairly normal one for a religious scholar—teaching, meditating, helping the poor—until in the late fall of 1244 when he met a stranger who put a question to him. That stranger was the wandering dervish, Shams of Tabriz, who had traveled throughout the Middle East searching and praying for someone who could "endure my company." A voice came, "What will you give in return?" "My head!" "The one you seek is Jelaluddin of Konya."

The question Shams spoke made the learned professor faint to the ground. We cannot be entirely certain of the question, but according to the most reliable account Shams asked who was greater, Muhammad or Bestami, for Bestami had said, "How great is my glory," whereas Muhammad had acknowledged in his prayer to God, "We do not know You as we should."

Rumi heard the depth out of which the question came and fell to the ground. He was finally able to answer that Muhammad was greater, because

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

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

On the night of December 5, 1248, as Rumi and Shams were talking, Shams was called to the back door. He went out, never to be seen again. Most likely, he was murdered with the connivance of Rumi's son, Allaedin; if so, Shams indeed gave his head for the privilege of mystical Friendship.

The mystery of the Friend's absence covered Rumi's world. He himself went out searching for Shams and journeyed again to Damascus. It was there that he realized,

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

The union became complete. There was full *fana*, annihilation in the Friend. Shams was writing the poems. Rumi called the huge collection of his odes and quatrains *The Works of Shams of Tabriz.*

After Shams's death and Rumi's merging with him, another companion was found, Saladin Zarkub, the goldsmith. Saladin became the Friend to

whom Rumi addressed his poems, not so fierily as to Shams, but with quiet tenderness. When Saladin died, Husam Chelebi, Rumi's scribe and favorite student, assumed this role. Rumi claimed that Husam was the source, the one who understood the vast, secret order of the *Mathnawi*, that great work that shifts so fantastically from theory to folklore to jokes to ecstatic poetry. For the last twelve years of his life, Rumi dictated the six volumes of this master-work to Husam. He died on December 17, 1273.

A Note on the Organization of This Book

The design of this book is meant to confuse scholars who would divide Rumi's poetry into the accepted categories: the quatrains *(rubaiyat)* and odes *(ghazals)* of the *Divan*, the six books of the *Mathnawi*, the discourses, the letters, and the almost unknown *Six Sermons.* The mind wants categories, but Rumi's creativity was a continuous fountaining from beyond forms and the mind, or as the sufis say, from a mind within the mind, the *qalb*, which is a great compassionate generosity.

The twenty-eight divisions here are faint and playful palimpsests spread over Rumi's imagination. Poems easily splash over, slide from one overlay to another. The unity behind, *La'illaha il'Allahu* ("there's no reality but God; there is only God"), is the one substance the other subheadings float within at various depths. If one actually selected an "essential" Rumi, it would be the *zikr*, the remembering that everything is God. Likewise, the titles of the poems are whimsical. Rumi's individual poems in Persian have no titles. His collection of quatrains and odes is called *The Works of Shams of Tabriz (Divani Shamsi Tabriz).* The six books of poetry he dictated to his scribe, Husam Chelebi, are simply titled *Spiritual Couplets (Mathnawi)*, or sometimes he refers to them as *The Book of Husam.* The wonderfully goofy title of the discourses, *In It What's in It (Fihi Ma Fihi)*, may mean "what's in the *Mathnawi* is in this too," or it may be the kind of hands-thrown-up gesture it sounds like.

All of which makes the point that these poems are not monumental in the Western sense of memorializing moments; they are not discrete entities but a fluid, continuously self-revising, self-interrupting *medium.* They are not so much *about* anything as spoken from *within* something. Call it enlightenment, ecstatic love, spirit, soul, truth, the ocean of ilm (divine luminous wisdom), or the covenant of *alast* (the original agreement with God). Names do not matter. Some resonance of ocean resides in everyone. Rumi's poetry can be felt as a salt breeze from that, traveling inland.

These poems were created, not in packets and batches of art, but as part of a constant, practical, and mysterious discourse Rumi was having with a dervish learning community. The focus changed from stern to ecstatic, from everyday to esoteric, as the needs of the group arose. Poetry and music and movement were parts of that communal and secretly individual work of opening hearts and exploring the mystery of union with the divine. The form of this collection means to honor the variety and simultaneity of that mystical union.

Most of the facts, dates, and chew-toys for the intellect are stashed in the Notes.

Rumi puts a prose prayer at the beginning of each book of the *Mathnawi.* Here's 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 grievers!

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.