

Rev. Kim K. Crawford Harvie  
 Arlington Street Church  
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### **Ecstatic Rumi**

This being human is a guest house.  
 Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,  
 some momentary awareness comes  
 as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!  
 Even if they are a crowd of sorrows,  
 who violently sweep your house  
 empty of its furniture,  
 still, treat each guest honorably.  
 He may be clearing you out  
 for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,  
 meet them at the door laughing  
 and invite them in.

Be grateful for whatever comes,  
 because each has been sent  
 as a guide from beyond.<sup>1</sup>

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Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī, the great Persian mystic and poet, died in 1273. In 1984, for the first time, Coleman Barks, the preeminent translator of Rumi's poetry, went to Konya, Turkey, to visit his shrine. Somehow, he says, "I ... 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 [— that it, the

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<sup>1</sup> Coleman Barks, trans., *The Essential Rumi*, p. 109

tomb of Rumi's soul companion — ] and then to Rumi's [tomb], the way you are supposed to. [On Rumi's tomb, it is written, "Do not look for him here, but rather in the hearts of those who love him."]

"Ambling back on the main street, I came upon a ... nut cart, lit with glorious lanterns and heaped with ... every kind of nut: ... perfect pyramids ... 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 [was] sitting in rows on sofas, watching the television.... 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, ... take as much as you want. It will go around."

Finding a missing passport at the I Found It Hotel and a nut communion to celebrate and give thanks sounds like a Rumi poem. He's vital and radiant, reverent and irreverent, stern and ecstatic, everyday and esoteric.

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Sit, be still, and listen,  
because you're drunk  
and we're at the edge of the roof.

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

If not, leave  
this gathering.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Coleman Barks, trans, *The Essential Rumi*, p. 193

Do not stay long with those who are not living in the heart.<sup>3</sup>

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Rumi was born in 1207 in what is now Afghanistan. When he was a child,<sup>4</sup> his family fled the Mongol invasion, traveling west for two years<sup>5</sup> and finally settling in Konya, Turkey. His father was a famous theologian, lawyer, and mystic — there's a combination! After his father's death, Rumi took over his *madrassa*, a center of great learning in the sciences and philosophy, teaching religious scholarship and serving the poor.

In the fall of 1244, Shams of Tabriz, a wandering dervish, arrived in Konya. He and Rumi became inseparable, spending months together in ecstatic, mystical conversation.

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The human intellect is a place where hesitation and uncertainty take root  
There is no way to overcome this hesitation ... except by falling in love.<sup>6</sup>

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The breeze at dawn  
has secrets to tell you.  
Don't go back to sleep.

You must ask  
for what you really want.  
Don't go back to sleep.

People are going back and forth  
over the threshold  
where the two worlds touch.

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<sup>3</sup> Coleman Barks, trans, *Rumi: The Big Red Book*, p. 234

<sup>4</sup> Sometime between 1215-1220 (ages eight and thirteen)

<sup>5</sup> more or less

<sup>6</sup> recited by Fatemeh Keshavarz to Krista Tippett, "The Ecstatic Faith of Rumi," *On Being*, 3/8/07

The door is round  
and open.  
Don't go back to sleep.

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Feeling neglected, Rumi's students became jealous. Shams disappeared as mysteriously as he had come. Rumi was utterly bereft.

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

Let the beauty we love be what we do.  
There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground.<sup>7</sup>

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Finally, word reached Rumi that Shams had surfaced in Damascus. He sent his son to bring back his friend.

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

When the soul lies down in that grass,  
the world is too full to talk about.  
Ideas, language, even the phrase *each other*  
doesn't make any sense.

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When Rumi and Shams met for the second time, they fell at each other's feet, and took up the mystical conversation where they had left off. Rumi spoke of

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<sup>7</sup> Coleman Barks, trans, *The Essential Rumi*, p. 36

the bird who sits in the cage, even though the cage door is open, and of “the longing ... to live in unlimited freedom and joy, to move inside beauty; [of] that most profound need of the human soul to flow with the namelessness that animates, luxuriates, burns, and transpires through form, enlivening [everything].”<sup>8</sup> Shams said that what we all pray to is the divine glory in each other.<sup>9</sup>

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Be foolishly in love,  
because love is all there is.<sup>10</sup>

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Yet again, the jealousies grew. One night, as Rumi and Shams were talking, Shams was called to the back door. He was never to be seen again. Rumor survives to this day that he was murdered by Rumi’s students, including one of Rumi’s sons.

Shams’ disappearance devastated Rumi; he had lost his soulmate. “In his grief, [he] began circling a pole in his garden and speaking the poetry that has come to be regarded as the most intimate record we have of the search for divine companionship. His turning [was] ... the origin of the moving of the ...dervishes. It is an emblem ... of [both] discipline and the abandon of surrender. It is a dance in concert with ... the spiraling form that is the source and essence of the cosmos. But it is good to remember that Rumi’s ecstasy began in grief.”<sup>11</sup>

One day, he realized

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

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I have lived on the lip

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<sup>8</sup> Coleman Barks, trans, *Rumi: The Big Red Book*, p. 8

<sup>9</sup> Coleman Barks, trans, *Rumi: The Big Red Book*, p. 4

<sup>10</sup> Coleman Barks, trans, *Rumi: The Big Red Book*, p. 311

<sup>11</sup> Coleman Barks, trans, *The Soul of Rumi*, p. 6

of insanity, wanting to know reasons,  
knocking on a door. It opens.  
I've been knocking from the inside!<sup>12</sup>

Friend, our closeness is this:  
anywhere you put your foot, feel me  
in the firmness under you.<sup>13</sup>

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From that moment on, Rumi believed that Shams was composing poems in him and through him. Writing in Persian, “the literary and spiritual language of a civilization that stretched from the Mediterranean Sea to India,”<sup>14</sup> his collected works, known as *The Big Red Book*, is also called *The Shams*. To this day, Rumi’s community — Sufis, the mystical tradition within Islam — weave poetry, music, and movement to open hearts and explore the mystery of being at one with G\*d.

Coleman Barks writes, “[Rumi] shows us our glory. He wants us to be more alive, to wake up.”<sup>15</sup> “[His] poems ... are no so much *about* anything as spoken from *within* something. Call it enlightenment, ecstatic love, spirit, soul, truth, the ocean of [divine luminous wisdom], or the covenant of [the original agreement with G\*d]. Names do not matter. Some resonance of ocean resides in everyone. Rumi’s poetry can be felt as a salt breeze, ... traveling inland.”<sup>16</sup>

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I belong to the beloved....

first, last, outer, inner, only that  
breath breathing human being.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Coleman Barks, trans, *The Essential Rumi*, p. 281

<sup>13</sup> Coleman Barks, trans, *The Essential Rumi*, p. 99

<sup>14</sup> Krista Tippett, “The Ecstatic Faith of Rumi,” *On Being*, 3/8/07

<sup>15</sup> Coleman Barks, trans, *Rumi: The Big Red Book*, p. 7

<sup>16</sup> The introduction to Rumi’s life is by Coleman Barks, *The Essential Rumi*. This quotation is on p. xxiv

<sup>17</sup> Coleman Barks, trans, *The Soul of Rumi*, p. 8

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Here is a directive from Rumi, offered at the opening at one of his books. Note that he refers to G\*d as “the Friend:”

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“Reading [this], 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... Here is the way to rest from difficulties ... [and] renew connection with your soul....”<sup>18</sup>

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Beloved spiritual companions,  
 I invite you to the experience of Rumi —  
 the longing,  
 the friendship,  
 the grief,  
 the ecstasy,  
 and union with the divine.

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Take January’s advice. Stack wood.  
 Weather inevitably turns cold,  
 and you make fires to stay healthy.  
 Study the grand metaphor of this yearly work.  
 Wood is a symbol for *absence*.  
 Fire for your love of G\*d.

We burn form to warm the soul.  
 Soul loves winter for that,  
 and accepts reluctantly

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<sup>18</sup> from the blessing before Book IV of the *Masnawi*. Please see Coleman Barks, *trans, The Essential Rumi*, p. xxii

the comfort of spring,  
with its elegant, proliferating gifts.

All part of the plan:  
fire becoming ash,  
becoming garden soil,  
becoming mint, willow, and tulip.  
Love looks like fire.  
Feed yourself into it.  
Be the fireplace and the wood.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> from “An Armor of Roses,” in Coleman Barks, trans, *Rumi: The Big Red Book*, p. 239