The Essential Rumi Study Guide

The Essential Rumi by Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Balkhi-Rumi

BOOKRAGS

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Book 1, The Tavern : Chapter 1, Introduction & The Tavern through to Feeling Separation Summary

There are multiple introductions to this text. The first one of these is for the New Expanded Edition that was published in 1995. In it, the scholar Coleman Barks informs readers that he has been able to translate and to include an additional eighty-one poems. These are of course not new at all, but have never appeared before in English before the public. Coleman Barks is the author of the introduction. He is also famous for bringing Rumi's work into English at a high standard.

Coleman Barks gets quite personal during the introduction. He shares with readers the essentials of his own intimacy with Rumi's poetry. It began for him in 1976 and has continued. He explains to readers that his feelings about the messages within the poems have also changed a great deal. There are types of interpersonal union that he had only read about in Rumi without having directly perceived. Some of these, he has since experienced for himself. Part of it is transcendental; this, the scholar admits, does not always "come easily" nor all at once nor quickly. He tells readers that for him, it was only after twenty-eight years of working with the Sufi poet's works that he developed the belief that he perceived the man who was Rumi's first main companion in adulthood: Shams Tabriz, who will be introduced shortly.

Much later in the book, the editor expresses that this man Shams came to be what he felt was, at long last, truly united with him. No one can quite know what to say about this. One wonders if this is some mistake or not. Might he not have confounded some relationship with a living person for one with someone dead? Perhaps he has at last transcended that last remnant of separateness.

It must be understood that the work is focused on same gender relationships. For female readers this can produce a painful feeling of being left out, or the painless simplicity of difference. This should be viewed as meaningful, yet to somehow purely coincidental. Habits of one's own gender, culture, and time conspire in such matters. Rumi inherited the post of sheik. He was a religious leader and a scholar. His life reflected this.

It may seem ironic, but the arena of the author's works is the so-called inner life through extroverted relationship with another. This is everything about a person that can be so easily hidden with the use of silence or of withholding. The works are deeply emotional, and Coleman Barks shows how he has been transformed by reading the Moslem's poems. He shares that in the beginning he had been turned away from words like "heart

and soul", but that eventually the prolonged and recurrent intimacy that comes across in Rumi's writings influenced him in a beneficial way.

The second introduction provides a brief synopsis of the author's life. This short biography lets readers know a variety of elements that fed into the author's life. One of these is that Rumi heralded from Balkh, Afghanistan. His birth date is actually known: September 30, 1207, but the time is not given. He relocated to the location to which his name refers later in his life. His family relocated as a flight from danger. In this case, they left because they sensed with foreboding the reality of an upcoming Mongol invasion. His own father refused to teach him directly, but left numerous notes. This allowed a third party to teach Rumi using some of his father's information. Rumi's father had visions and kept records of his inner life.

There is something decidedly strange about the author's first man Friend. The man caused jealousy amongst the other men, especially the students who Rumi was supposed to serve with his leadership and teaching. The man went away twice, apparently to assuage the danger of the others' feelings. Rumi sent searchers and found him the first time. The next time, years later, Shams suddenly disappeared in the middle of a conversation. To this day, the suspicion is that he was murdered by others who were jealous of the time spent and intimate affection between Shams and Rumi.

The purposes of the author's work is manifold. Some of this shows in the multiple kinds of poems that he has created. In other respects it is the nature of his subject matter that indicates that there is more than one intention for these poems. Education is assuredly a major reason behind the creation of these works. Like a spoonful of sugar to help the medicine go down, the lessons imparted are so friendly and affectionate that one might easily take what is really being taught.

Summarizing large numbers of poems presents a challenge. The author's poems are not like chapters in a book that run together. They are not an overt progression of a subject. If readers never think at all about it, the effects of reading a lot of Rumi poetry will accumulate. There will be some kind of difference from those who only read one or two of the poems, even if they keep them and memorize them. For those who use the poems as a means to improving their mind or as a learning mechanism, such student readers will be most pleased.

Love, and the cultivation of it is unquestionably one of the central teachings of Rumi, the poet and spiritual leader of Konya. Readers can look forward to reading of a myriad of ways in which this can manifest itself throughout their lives. Despite the gargantuan cultural gulf, made only the greater due to the translocation through time, the author is able to reach every reader at least as well as a child's school teacher during a period of attendance. In some cases the bond will be far greater, in other cases it won't be.

The arrangement of the poetry is specifically "nontraditional". In this case, what is presented in this section of the summary are the first fifty to sixty pages of text. In the edition used to create this summary, this amounts to three distinct types of introduction followed by the following entitled chapters: 1) The Tavern: Whoever Brought Me Here

Will Have to Take me Home, 2) Bewilderment: I Have Five Things to Say, 3) Emptiness and Silence: The Night Air, 4) Spring Giddiness: Stand in the Wake of This Chattering and Grow Airy, 5) Feeling Separation: Don't Come Near Me.

These poems were inspired by his friendship. Rumi had three major friends who functioned in this manner. The first is Sham of Tabriz, also called Shams. There was an interim of many years when he made himself absent for the sake of Rumi's students. Rumi wrote a book of poetry that he claimed was written by the power of the unity of Shams and himself. Next, there was another important companion. This was Saladin of Zarkub, who was a goldsmith. This was the case until Saladin's death. Rumi loved him tenderly. Finally, Rumi's scribe and favorite student named Husam Chelebi was able to fill this role of "best same gender friend". Husam was the source as well as the scribe of the final six volumes of literary work produced by Rumi.

The poems of the tavern are light hearted. The first explains simply that whoever has brought Rumi to the tavern must double as the ride home. There are references to wine barrels but no drinking cups, and how drunkenness and the police share in a kind of reciprocal fear. Life, the poet and spiritual leader tells readers, is full of children, including those who have the appearance of being adults.

Book 1, The Tavern : Chapter 1, Introduction & The Tavern through to Feeling Separation Analysis

As if often the case with such works, scholars have collaborated to create the best way to present this material to others. Coleman Barks is the only one who has his name directly attached to one of the introductions. Readers are advised to check their versions.

Readers who are studying these poems can learn to look at them from the vantage point that their background and coursework best allows. The impact of the religious references will vary, depending upon the religious knowledge and practices of the readers. The poems are fortunately highly enjoyable even for people who are not particularly educated about religion or who are only educated in one religion. Those who have more knowledge and experience will simply find the poetry all the more effective because of it. Those who are dedicated and passionate within one religion and the full set of practices may be the most emotionally excited, shocked, or "weirded out" by some of the combinations that Rumi presents. Those coming from a worldly liberal view will be more apt to just find this charming.

Book 1, The Tavern : Chapter 2, Desire & New Silk

Book 1, The Tavern : Chapter 2, Desire & New Silk Summary

This summary chapter is named for the next five sections of poetry that have been given subheadings. These are entitled: Controlling the Desire-Body: How Did You Kill Your Rooster Husam?, Sohbet: Meetings on the Riverbank, Being a Lover: The Sunrise Ruby, The Pickaxe: Getting to the Treasure Beneath the Foundation, Art as Flirtation with Surrender: Wanting New Silk Harp Strings. This covers just over seventy pages in the edition used to write up this summary.

During the second poem in The Essential Rumi for this batch, there is the introduction of a man named Hallaj. It is in this poem that he introduces readers to an important idea. The whole matter has for an analogy, set theory. If you put water from a pond into a larger body of water it disappears. Rumi refers to Hallaj, saying "I am God", and this being true. Rumi means that when the individual ego disappears and dissipates into God, then this can be understood as being true. This is an inversion of megalomaniacal delusions wherein the ego of an individual thinks that there is no god but man, and in fact a given individual. The common term for this is a "god complex". This is now considered a serious mental illness. This is a particularly difficult notion for Christians as there is little in the exoteric practices to provide any helpful understanding of this. Exoteric means the open teachings and rites of a given church or religion. As in all other religions, the more attentive the students, the better they will learn. Still, Hinduism and Buddhist traditions, as well as Sikhs, all have a tradition about this. The Bhagavadgita introduced this very idea or attitude that Rumi shows through Hallaj.

The first of these is a complex story poem about men and sexual love. Driven by sexual attraction, an entire city is taken by siege. A man, sent to perform the take-over for his Caliph, a captain, falls in love with a beautiful, mysterious woman in the city instantly. Rumi warns people to not laugh at this, even though it is "love at first sight". The truth of this causes him to delay reunion with the Caliph, during which time he and she have a mutual and passionate sexual encounter. They have sexual relations before and again after the captain does battle: in this case with a lion. He wants her for himself, but compromises by having this brief affair and then bringing her to the Caliph as he had agreed. The Caliph is only more in love now that he has seen her in person. However, when he seeks sexual union with her he suddenly becomes impotent. The woman falls into "hysterics". He threatens her and insists that she tell him the whole truth. She does so. The Caliph sends her back to the captain, with the excuse that one of his other women is too jealous so that he cannot keep her.

This is just one case of how passionate the poetry is. There is a poem about abundance and resentment followed by embarrassment and release from shame. How deeply the

author shows that he understands and cares. . . A grown man dreamed that he found a place to defecate and did so, only to awake to the horribly embarrassing discovery that in his sleep he had regressed and behaved like a baby or an animal. The shame of this drives him off. Ultimately, his host and friend simply cleans it up and refuses to make it a point of further humiliation.

Later, during On Being a Lover, Rumi writes of a question and answer session between a man and a woman. She asks whether he loves himself clearly more than he loves her or not. He goes on to describe to her how he no longer even exists so such a comparison no longer even makes sense.

The poetry speaks from the heart of most intimate friendship. The intensity of the openness combined with the subjects covered. Shame, and humiliation, joy and pride, virility and types of manliness which run directly counter to sexual performance: these are all topics covered, or exposed and embraced by Rumi's poems of these sections. During this section, the author's third and final best friend, Husam, is referred to. The first poem from the second section is described below, in the analysis portion.

Again, the emotionally integrated richness of the imagery elevates these poems beyond what might otherwise feel like "the realm of mere ideas". They move like the fresh breezes or a pleasurable walk. Men and women will both like this. Of course, any men who have suffered from feeling emotionally stifled will especially appreciate this willingness of Rumi's to reconnect them with their strong emotional centers.

The Core of Masculinity is one of the poems presented under this summary chapter. It describes how there are certain times and ways where the mother's presumed gentleness is not what is best for the boy to become a man. The author explains his view on this using a few colorful metaphors.

Book 1, The Tavern : Chapter 2, Desire & New Silk Analysis

By the time this section begins, readers have begun to develop a sense for what the poems are like. They are clearly of multiple kinds. One type is the "short story". In these, the author gives a teaching by telling a story that is self-contained. These are often well under fifty lines long, but others, such as the first in this chapter, are over two hundred lines. There are other poems that do not have a tale built into them, at least, not in the same way.

The poetry in this section has more than one theme. The first is an explicit story about men and matters concerning sexual love and passion and ethics. It is also about the simplicity of beauty, or the love thereof. The editor has explained in a preamble that there is host of information about desires and wants known as "nafs". As such, it becomes clear that this poem, like the rest, can be read for what it is in itself and as a set of lessons. This is all about how three men fall rapidly in love with the same woman due to her physical beauty and attractiveness. This is how it appears on the surface.

Again, there is a precise spiritual matter here. The reason is that, for those who believe that the spiritual and physical are a constant union, then her fleshly beauty must indicate unmistakable spiritual beauty. Those who hold the view that the flesh does not accurately represent the spirit of an entity would not feel justified in drawing such a conclusion from a physical appearance. Rumi does not overtly state this during this poem, but he does later. He does quite clearly express some belief about a connection between the two in the poem. He writes that anytime a man and woman are together, particularly sexually, that some "third" is created, even when pregnancy does not follow. This union, he asserts, is always a spiritual fact as well as a fleshly one.

There is a man who decides to get a tattoo, but he faces a rather dreadful problem. His resolve is not strong enough. The pain of receiving the design, which is intended to bring him good fortune, is too much for him. Now he makes an awful mess of the whole matter. Rumi advises: if you start something like this, then stand the pain. Otherwise do not start it.

There is a great poem about the intimate friendship between a frog and a mouse. The two have very different requirements for happiness and to the proper environment in which their needs can be met. Even so, these two animals develop a powerful bond of friendship. Due to their shared affection, their wish for one another's company grows into a need.

Secret connections are one of the themes that this creates. He uses the metaphor of a string that is tied to one of mouse's ankles and also to one of the frog's. A pull on one creates something that the other one can feel.

Another powerful theme in this group is "the me and the you". A friend comes to the door and calls himself "me". He then goes away for a year. After the prolonged separation, he knocks again at the door. This time, however, when asked who he is, he replies, "You".

His friend welcomes him, not as another, but as himself having somehow returned. In fact, he welcomes the Friend with descriptions and explanations about how there is not room for two, but only for the one. This theme of unity reemerges and recurs throughout the book and is part of what makes it so profound. Even so, his friend describes as if he is recounting something, the experience of washing laundry together with himself. One of them wets the clothes, the other takes them out to dry. This may give the semblance that they are undercutting one another but that is a false perception. Every reader who knows that each is handling one end of the process will recognize this immediately.

Most of the poems continue to exhibit a light, free verse form. The pattern is not that of typical western rhyming verse but is more akin to good song lyrics, in that there is something qualitatively special about the sound of how the words have been arranged.

There is a noteworthy exception that is so named because each line is long and the entire piece is packed tightly together. The entire work can be fit onto one page.

Book 1, The Tavern : Chapter 3, Union through Rough Metaphor

Book 1, The Tavern : Chapter 3, Union through Rough Metaphor Summary

The number of poems in these sections range from as few as four to as many as ten. Each has the preamble supplied by the translator Coleman Barks. His short italicized notes at the beginning provide readers with a way, or an attitude towards interpreting what is going to follow. This covers the headings eleven through sixteen inclusive.

The majority of these poems, like the others, have short stanzas. The lines of these do not rhyme, but do have an intentional auditory quality. Complete understanding of the music of the words would require what Mr. Barks has done: extensive work with the poems in their original language and careful translations of these using the English language.

Most of the poems do not mention the name of his Friend directly. In some, a name comes up. For instance, in the poem Meadowsounds, in section eleven, Rumi devotes two lines to Shams. All he writes is that he won't talk about him, but the reference to it is there . . . just there, hanging in the air. God comes up frequently during these poems, sometimes as the overwhelming presence, or in comparison to the Friend. In other cases, God is referred to as a point of contrast to "the Friend". Later, he describes his relationship with Hallaj, which is relatively rough and disturbing. It is perhaps an oblique way of making clear that while Hallaj can be tender and loving, there is some kind of abusive edge, or something strange and unnerving. Why else would a man find that the good fortune of his coat is really a live bear? How else might Hallaj so intense teach that no one sensible would delude himself into believing that a coat would float to him down the river just because he has grown cold, but that a challenge with a bear will certainly warm him up? The next section emphasizes poems openly designed to be educational for whoever is reading them. There are references to many other religious figures. The form of one poem is built of three line stanzas, whereas on other pages there is a poem with three, four and five line stanzas.

The author writes of the destruction of lovers that is no real destruction at all in the poem entitled Rough Metaphors. In this poem he declares that a lover is apt to be openly the most irreverent. Every latitude of tolerance may be sought, all manner of liberties may be taken, although typically within sane limits. In the following stanza, Rumi asserts that there is no one more reverent than a lover, but the reverence is often harbored in or sheltered in secrecy. During this poem he writes of the deer dying in the lions paws, and of how a tablespoon of vinegar scattered across several pounds of sugar will dissipate the affect of the vinegar entirely. These are what the editor and author mean by "rough metaphor".

Readers do well to take note. They might try re-reading the poem, inserting the name of one of their own best friends. For women, it is recommended to use a female best friend, although there is no real mandate on the gender for best friendship.

In the middle of these is section fourteen. The Sufi leader educates readers in an Islamic religious practice with a poem entitled Cry Out in Your Weakness. This is what it appears to be. Just as a youth might cry out for help during a crisis, Rumi displays this to readers as a legitimate spiritual practice as well. For Islamic people this may be a well known religious practice. For Christians, especially Protestants, it may well be a new idea. Of course, people will usually recognize this from their own lives somehow, but it is quite an alternative to asking to be prayed for or praying for someone. Typically, if a young child cries out, an older child may be enough, but then again there is a good chance that an adult is needed because an older or only larger child is the problem.

Finally, there is a man who is introduced during these poems who will appear again later. His name is Ayaz. He is a courtier. He is a loyal, high quality fellow. In this story he comes at the end of a line. As has been known to be the case with youngest children, Ayaz reaps the benefits of being last. This is only because he is aware of what the others did, rather than it being because he does not know. The King asked his men to destroy a precious item. One refused. Instead of destruction, the King rewarded him with an increase in wealth. The men all watched each other. The King repeated this process with over thirty men. Then he came to Ayaz. Ayaz obeyed the King. There were gasps and there was horror, for Ayaz had destroyed something very precious. He valued it to, but he followed orders anyways. Ayaz is favored by the King. This will come up again later, much later in The Essential Rumi. There are so many roles for people to identify with and lessons to learn from this one poem. The richness of the author's work in this case is in its likeness to real life. In this sense, meaning that every situation has the complete complexity of context. Life is not two dimensional. While it may seem funny to refer to this in relation to a poem, which can be read or spoken and therefore does not have the same fullness as life, it remains true.

On a humbler note there is a quick poem about a lame goat. The lame goat is always at the back on the way to events. He [or she] is as much of a straggler as it seems, but this isn't an nonfunctional goat. Rumi wants readers to acknowledge the joy and wonder when, as it happens, every time the herd turns and heads home, that same lame goat is out front. Fear not, the message seems to be, even the lame goat has his specific joy and type of leadership. Don't be afraid, he advises readers, to lead the way home.

Book 1, The Tavern : Chapter 3, Union through Rough Metaphor Analysis

These poems are worthwhile for male and female readers. The way that the genders operate can be quite different though, and this shows during the poems in these sections. Rumi refers mainly to Shams and to God when he is directly speaking with or referring overtly to someone from his most personal perspective.

The editor has provided an excellent note to the readers. He gives a little more history on the translations of Rumi's poetry. It was in the 1920s that a scholar named Reynold Nicholson made important efforts to translate a portion of the author's poetry into English. Coleman Barks explains that Nicholson was well enough versed in Latin, and that he used this during his work with Rumi's poetry. This is the first location in the text where the mention of this man in the book is validated by a direct reference to what he did. This is yet another of those moments when readers need to realize how recent the importation of this Sufi poetry is.

The author is providing readers with greater insight into life. As has been the case so far, he is broaching a number of subjects. One of these is companionship. The method that Rumi uses is by now coming across as consistent. There is variation among the poems, but readers have begun to sense what is commonly known as "the writer's voice". A continuing truth is that Rumi has learned to express himself in a way that in the "far West" is described as "emotionally well integrated". The author's masculinity is not a cold reserve at all. Instead, all the passionate heart of man seems readily on display for readers. This creates a fantastic and pleasurable sense of easy intimacy with Rumi. Presumably this is why he writes this way, although in calling this intentional it is not to be confused with ulterior motives. There are no "ulterior motives" involved.

There has been a significant change. In this portion of the book, there is greater variation among the structures of the poems. Their length tends to be less than fifty lines. The translator and the printers clearly display this variance.

This recognition of human emotion comes across perhaps best in two radically distinct poems. One is about a woman and a man who, after years of being kept apart by a jealous wife, veritably pounce upon one another in sexual passion at the first opportunity of being alone together. Rumi points up the difference between the motivation of love and the motive of jealousy and fear. Later, Rumi writes about the sometimes roughness of men. He refers both to the facts and to the metaphors used in the poetry. Ultimately, for readers much of the power comes from the sense of intimacy which Rumi is able to communicate through his writings.

The reason that the title "rough metaphors" was selected for those poems beneath these headings is that the translators and editors observed that some of the information shared was in a form that might be outright offensive to large portions of any given population. As such, there are those who are subtle, refined, graceful, delicate, and quite possibly gentle. Such people might discover their sorrow or their own vindictive cruelty when confronted and offended in such a manner as offered by some of the poems of this section.

The editor has labeled some of the poetry as teaching stories. This is the case of the final batch of these rough metaphors. This definitely shows. Many times, Rumi brings up teaching points. At times the teachings are about emotions: there is a motivational difference between running for love and doing the same from fear and jealousy. He describes this difference as appearing in romantic behavior and in religion itself. He tells readers that those who have blind faith are the ones who are following the path through

fear and compulsion, not through their own wills. This same behavior has been called in the Bible, iniquity. Those who voluntarily choose are, Rumi explains, coming along out of love. These are still followers but they are not blind. The author even writes about two distinctive types of intelligence in this portion of the book. One is cultivated, and is that of book learning and schooling, he says. It includes methods of nurturing the memory and the knowledge of facts. Then he shares that there is another sort, which is pre-existing within a person. This kind will flow forth from someone under most any circumstances in which it can be reasonably applied.

There is another theme that begins to grow during these portions of the literature. This is what Rumi writes about as "the animal soul". Most of us know of this. This is the instinctive and sensual nature. This is what the Jungians call the wild woman in women, and for which there are a range of archetypes in men and in children too. The animal soul is often spoken of in contemporary society when people speak of a person being or simply feeling "animalistic". Native American religious traditions often revered the human's ability to hone in on the exact sort of "animal spirit" that was most in tune with their own individuality. In every case, it is also known that there is a danger to such a condition. Within those cultures who decided to "give up" this intimacy with the animal spirit, the reason given is typically that while such energies can be genuinely empowering, they can also cause trouble within the person and can adversely effect their behavior.

The animal soul is a great life preserver. However, if it grows too strong in a human, it unfortunately reduces him or her and tends to reflect some kind of developmental backslide or degradation. Insufficient of the animal soul (unless it is replaced by something just as healthy—hopefully the human or angelic or divine soul) then a person's life is in danger. In some ways the noticeable change in the vigor is based on something like this: when the animal soul is lacking or abused the result is often too akin to the pale houseplant that is under watered. There is a real frailty and unwellness there. Too much, and there becomes a wild woman or wild man who has turned into a being ill suited to human civilization and better fit for the wilderness. In proper balance, the animal soul supports and preserves the human. In modern language, now the higher mind simply needs to protect and nurture the animal soul of itself. One should treat one's baser nature with the kindness and respect with which one would treat a beloved animal pet. Know what it needs and be sure to do this, plus add in good doses of affection.

The next story is quite a bit different. This is about a camel and a mouse. A mouse finds and picks up the lead rope of a camel. The mouse gives it a tug. The camel makes the decision to play along with this. The two get to a body of water. The camel encourages the mouse to move forward, to move on. The mouse admits to being afraid and other relevant associated concerns. The camel steps forward and assured the mouse that the water is only up to it's knee. The mouse chooses honesty and again plays towards the truth rather than wishful thinking and makes the observation that water up to the knee of a camel is a hundred times over a mouse's head. Soon, the two are good enough friends that the mouse asks the camel for help. The camel agrees because they are really friends now. Now that this has been established, the author turns to the readers

and addresses them individually and as one body after the manner of teaching. He writes that people ought to rely upon prophets spiritually the way that mouse was able to depend upon that camel. Then suddenly Rumi admonishes everyone: your lust and your habits are the root source of both your anger and your arrogance. One must assume that he is telling each and everyone that this is the case. This reflects knowledge after a deep search of human nature. He ends this with a kind of swooping up by complimenting everyone and encouraging each to become one with an inner guide. Each should give his or her teachings and hope to access a more advanced sheikh "nearby", he advises. Don't underrate the power of love, he advises, in both its majesty and its helplessness.

Book 2, Solomon Poems : Chapter 1, Islam & Christianity in the Middle East

Book 2, Solomon Poems : Chapter 1, Islam & Christianity in the Middle East Summary

As suggested, these poems include ones that make overt references to the religions of Islam and to Christianity. These are those under headings 17-20 inclusive. These cover pages 186-224 in the edition used to write the summary. Due to the popularity of Rumi's work at this time, readers should be prepared to check their edition. It may not be the same as the one used to create the summary. If not, this is not terribly difficult to handle. The contents will be consistent, but readers need to be alert to the possibility that pagination will not be identical to what is given in the summary.

The first batch all include references to King Solomon, as per their label. In the beginning, the matter up for discussion is that of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. King Solomon has wooed her, but has asked that she abandon all of her worldly possessions in order to join him. Every woman who owns a home has things and perhaps a career that she likes can see that this is a very tall order. He is asking that she trust him enough to give up everything. She tries sending him gifts: every one is something that he does not need. He wants her to receive from him. He wants her to leave her past behind. The author hits readers with the remark: like a lover leaves a reputation.

During all these, Ayaz comes up. Now, by the end of the book, it turns out that Ayaz is a recurring character. This is just another one of those details that facilitates Rumi's education through intimacy. The sense of intimacy and the feeling of familiarity are growing towards comfort without having sunk into complacency.

Once again, the author blends daily life and attendant metaphors along with divine imagery. A perfect example of this is the poem Jesus on the Lean Donkey. He begins by explaining concisely that Jesus the Christ riding atop of a hearty but simple beast of burden is akin to the rational mind in its relationship to the animalistic nature of mankind. Rumi calls it the "animal soul". This leads into a story, that may be true or false, of how a man is healed by rough and thorough discipline. Readers will be immediately reminded of the rigors of military discipline as one man is taken under the wing of another. The wise man keeps silent, but feeds the poor man. Then he forces him to exercise vigorously. The other submits to the wise man and even accepts and endures the use of violent force against him by the wise one. The poor man vomits, from all of the exertions, only to discover when he does so that he has been healed.

The poet explains to readers through the characters that God is often at once active in our lives and silent. The wise man puts the poor man through the rigors and then listens when the other tells of his discovery that this has healed him. The wise one essentially

tells his healed, submissive Friend the equivalent of, "I knew that God wanted me to do this but that if I tried to explain it to you it would scare you so much that you would flee or would resist me. Now, since I kept silent, you are healed."

There is one poem that obviously contains a combination of lessons within it. One is about variations in response to the same conditions caused by intelligence. Another is simply about how to manage a crisis. The context is another of Rumi's short fiction story poems. The situation is that there are three fish, each of a discernible degree of intelligence, all faced with human fishermen and their net. The smartest one just leaves. This one admits to a matter of personal character, and interpersonal relations. He admits that he might have been coerced into making a worse choice in this case, had he talked this over with the others. He feared his own weakness. He was sure he was correct, but insecure about his ability and willingness to lead the other fish. The fish who's mental abilities were the next level down had a strong feeling in response to the fact that the smart fish had left. First he mourned for himself and for his lack of judgment to follow the smarter one. Then, he set about finding a solution for himself that would work. He came up with something, but there was a very close call. The other fish behaved the way that humans often imagine fish as acting. He jumped up and down in the water, restless and rather agitated. This is the fish that was caught. Even so, Rumi honors all involved somehow when he tells readers that this fish had a new thought, "learned his lesson" so to speak, while in the frying pan. Such an ending causes one to hope for reincarnation if only so that the fish can put his learning into effect, not that one would hope to torment the fish with another experience of like kind for any other reason.

Among the stories of King Solomon there is one about his crooked crown, in the context of coming immediately after a few poems that describe the Queen of Sheba and her main issues. His crown keeps sliding off of its proper place onto his forehead. This happens a few times and Solomon begins to desire a solution or more perfect knowledge of the actual problem.

Book 2, Solomon Poems : Chapter 1, Islam & Christianity in the Middle East Analysis

These poems are more devoted to the spiritual life. However, they do not focus upon an esoteric hereafter, but rather to the world today. Rumi blends incredible stories and images from Christianity and Islam into a multitude of stories and poems. When he does so, he brings up religious figures. This adds another dimension to how the poetry

is perceived and received. It is often comforting and fun to have familiar characters. Whether a Christian or a Muslim, Rumi is using well known people and perhaps introducing new ones as well. People do this whenever they introduce a friend to other people who they know.

Naturally, the use of religious icons furthers the purposes of the poetry. It could also be said to be fueling controversy. However, it seems that Rumi was a master of creating unity and of holding together otherwise disparate parts into a unified whole. He was

famous even during his lifetime for being able to create or to sustain peaceful conditions in an atmosphere of high tension between different religions. Finally, the author explains through the poems a little bit more about how the sociological order works in his location and time. A sheik has no choice but to be both a religious and political leader to his people. For some this is a great joy, to others one part of the work is a pleasure but another portion a dreadful burden. This is actually quite similar to at least part of the organization among the tribes of the Jews: teachers, religious leaders, and kings could all be anointed and some might be two or all three. This is what caused Pilate the Roman Regent to label the Christ as a King. Similarly, Rumi writes of a sheik named Kharraqani. He had a disapproving wife. A man who comes seeking the religious teacher is mildly horrified when he faces a reproachful woman when he wants the sheik. Eventually the man manages to find the leader. He is riding a lion in a forest while collecting firewood. The author sets quite a stage for the conclusion of these lessons when he explains to readers that all must understand that every sheik rides a lion, either ones you can see or ones you cannot.

Christianity was known to the Muslims and is part of the faith. Mohammad is said to have come "for the Arabs" after the same manner that Jesus the Christ was sent by God "to and for the Hebrews". Mohammad was an illiterate and God asked him to write or to recite an entire set of Holy Scriptures despite this. Synchronistically, this "divine book project" came together thanks to a team of mortals. Readers should know that this is the basis of Islam. Rumi wrote his poetry in the 1200s AD/CE and as such was aware of both. This being so, and the brotherhood between the two being supposed if not always amenably displayed, both figures emerge clearly during the poems of this portion of the book, The Essential Rumi.

The spiritual nature of the book increases during this section. It has always been there, but it is intensified simply through the increased use of references to religious personnel and spiritual imagery. This goes well, particularly as it is coated with the surrounding context of intimacy that Rumi has so effectively conveyed to the readers.

There are times during the book when a poem will shoot up that carries a teaching about how the human and the divine are connected. There is a comment in the note in the final section: #20 of Rumi's poetry made by Coleman Barks who, as it happens, resides in the state of Georgia. He relays a saying that he picked up from somewhere: that a cow could walk throughout the entire city of Baghdad and notice that there was some hay there. How this is interpreted may depend upon where one's own mind is. Does this show us how stupid cows are? Is this a consequence of being focused and of only noticing matters of personal interest and relevance? Could this be both, and perhaps have even more meanings? With that, a batch of poetry written in the Iraq of 780 years ago completes this portion of the text.

Book 2, Solomon Poems : Chapter 2, Beginning to the Turn

Book 2, Solomon Poems : Chapter 2, Beginning to the Turn Summary

These are the next several sections of poems in this great book. They are labeled, in the 2004 Newly Expanded Version as sections twenty-one through twenty-seven inclusive. Each, like all the ones before, has a short briefing provided prior to the group of poems under one heading. The first of these is about the Mathnawi. This the six volume set of poems that he wrote when his personal companion was actually one of his students and also his scribe. Cheleb may well have been one of the best students, although this is not abundantly clear. All of the poetry that refers to Husam Chelebi directly comes from the poet's later years.

There is the standard note from the translator Coleman Barks. It is here that he describes what he refers to as "secret practices". He writes of how one friend helps another to escape from prison. This is described in more detail later.

This collection of writings begins with multiple love stories. There is more than one occurrence of some type of triangulation in the books. This is a strength of Rumi's poetry. Both stories are about more than one man loving the same woman. The behavior of the woman is entirely different in the stories. In the first story the men may be more mature and they are not being controlled by older men. In the second story, the whole tale hinges upon the way that three sons react to what is forbidden to them. Some people simply abide by such restrictions, others develop temporary obsessions with them. Still others disobey in part or in full. In the first story a woman is taken from one man by another. One gave the order and the other carried it out. The man who carried out the order falls into the same condition and in the end the woman ends up with him. The man who intended to take her suddenly sees how the desire for this woman has led to what might be called "craziness" by some.

In the second story, there is some rumor of a dangerously powerful, cloistered Chinese princess. Three disobedient sons discover her face and all of them fall in love with her just from seeing her face and hearing the stories. The eldest decides to go after her; he is polite and all of the rest and ends up getting killed by the woman's father, a Chinese king. The second son also tries and is killed by his own father, also a king but not Chinese. The youngest son does not extend his disobedience beyond wanting the woman too. He is saved by his being timid or submissive to the older brothers. He ends up getting the princess, possibly due to ages or politics or because of his brother's combination of effort with demise. It's a little confusing even in the end. It might really just be that the men of the same generation, the fathers, had to arrange it. If that is so, then this is a simple education in how hierarchy is important in a man's life. Husam seems to have been spared from the terrible sufferings of the jealousy of the others. It is

not so much that this matter has been discussed at great length as it is that it has gone unmentioned.

Jealousy has obviously been a recurrent theme. This is probably because it is a real emotion that everyone faces sooner or later. One would tend to think that Rumi must have been affected if it seemed to be the case that his first and longest running best friend was murdered in the sanctity of their home estate. Surely, this must have been the case regardless of whether or not he spoke of it. There are several poems that include matters of jealousy. Perhaps female readers will be jealous due to not being the center of attention. Then again, women may well also feel relieved or "humanized" by the awareness that it isn't as if men don't suffer from it among themselves. Many might laugh here, and observe that jealousy is the root cause of the idiom "keeping up with the Joneses".

Rumi delights readers with the kind of poem in which he succeeds in telling an entire short story. There are cases where these are true and there are times when they are false. Many of them are about love relationships. Part of the glory of what Rumi is able to do through his poetry is to share in both the depth and the diversity of types of love relationships. He considers the intimate love of comrades and of the Friend. His poetry often refers to the love of God. He shows spiritual love working in relationship. The poet also writes about sexual and romantic love.

This first poem of the Beginning is about a set of love relationships. A King falls for a girl and decides to express this discretely by hiring her. She may have no idea, but she is happy to accept the job. She is forced to relocate in order to fill the position. She gets ill after she has arrived. Since the King is in love with her, this is a big deal to him. He sends for a doctor. This is a primary love relationship.

The doctor's arrival is cause for major change, because the King discovers immediately that he loves the physician. There are cultural assumptions about limitations of touch, but this is assumed to be interpreted by a heterosexual orientation. Nevertheless, the fact remains that his love is directed towards the other man.

The doctor attends to the young woman. It turns out that she is lovesick over a man who is not the king, even though she and the man she longs for are not together. There is no indication that she believes that she will ever be united with the man she is lovesick over. Rumi creates an incredible metaphor when he describes the young woman's condition as having an emotional thorn. One gets a thorn in the foot and one knows how to handle it, but the emotional equivalent of a heart-thorn, how to take care of that?

The doctor informs the King that he has to unite the young woman with the man, even if they have to use lures to get the man to her. He tells the King that is the only cure for her. The King, out of love, obliges them and abides by the doctor's orders. Instead of being rejected, it works. The man takes or receives her for a romantic partner. She is completely cured by this. Then the physician kills that man off by destroying his physical beauty and power and revealing that her love for him dies along with his power and beauty. Rumi tells readers that this shows that she never really loved him and that one

should always seek to love for more than just physical reasons. Rumi then ends the story by stating that the mystery of the doctor's killing the woman's lover off should never be questioned and needs no explanation. Readers should just assume that it was somehow the right thing to do.

The stories in this group are passionate and vivid. They are not the happiest of tales. Normally there is some tribulation, but then often enough some manner of solution.

Book 2, Solomon Poems : Chapter 2, Beginning to the Turn Analysis

This group of sections begins with a group from the Mathnawi. This is the name of the third set of six volumes that his close personal friend and scribe wrote down for him. Husam was the third and final of such intimate companions. Each was designed to help the author learn what Friend really means, how to be a friend, how to have one, and what this is as a spiritual practice.

The translator Coleman Barks gives a short, spirited introduction to this group of poems. He gives supporting folklore from the Taoist tradition. He tells of a trio of men who taught for free by laughing in public marketplaces. They practiced this method consistently. One of them died. Many people attended the funeral. The one who had died or his dearest colleagues had put firecrackers into his pockets. These went off as they were set off by the flames of the funeral pyre. The American scholar tells readers that this is an apt metaphor for those poems that follow.

Rumi delights readers with more story poems. They continue to cover love as one major topic. The sense of intense intimacy continues. Some of the poems are designed for education as well as for entertainment. In fact, the majority of them are.

The author addresses the matter of politics only obliquely. He does so, when he has some poems in which a loved one has been cast into prison. There is little description of why this might have occurred.

The book is designed so that it can be enjoyed by the lay reader or used by professional instructors of poetry and literature as a text book. In such cases, the additional notes can be especially helpful for readers wanting to learn their way around the culture or the author, or their professor for that matter.

The length of the poems has continued to be diverse through these sections of the text. They are, as most have been so far, quite pleasurable. Many have focused upon relationships, whether that be with God or with the Friend, or a friend, or some friends. One of the last of these occurs when a dear friend sends a present to someone in jail. The gift is not the means of escape for which the Friend is hoping, but he gives in and makes use of the prayer rug. Through doing so, he eventually discovers that this Friend has delivered something along the lines of what he had really hoped for: information that would truly lead to his escape. Sure enough, the Friend has provided the means;

he had discerned the true interior of the lock of the prison and had this woven discretely into the prayer rug where his friend, once he discovered the knowledge, put it to use and got away. This has many teachings, ranging from the obvious one that he should have known he could trust in his Friend as he had hoped, to the value of prayer.

The author was renowned during his lifetime for his attitude of religious tolerance and of openness. As there were crusades being fought during his lifetime, those who were more disturbed by this than willing to take sides found a great relief in Rumi. It was in part a consequence of this attitude that seemed to bring him into such popularity that many attended his funeral.

One of the delights of Rumi is that he is willing to deliver more than one kind of teaching.

Some of the lessons are explicit, which is good. Others are subtle, and dynamic. These can even run along the mind unconsciously or they can come to the surface under different circumstances.

Book 2, Solomon Poems : Chapter 3, New Section

Book 2, Solomon Poems : Chapter 3, New Section Summary

The translator has provided a debriefing that Rumi wrote for the benefit of the readers. He uses candles as an important symbol for how they function relative to the Sun. While it is true that in the night they are very helpful, in the bright light of day, their glow is greatly diminished. However, elsewhere in the book, Rumi has also noted that despite this change in the perceived radiance, if you put the cotton wool near to the candle, it will still be ignited. The change in the amount of brightness does not remove this direct effect. This is quite obvious, but is worth noting. He advises readers to figure out where they are at and to realize that they will not need a guide once they arrive at the destination of their inner world. This displays Rumi's ability to be straightforward yet again. Everyone can understand this symbolism of needing a map or directions or a live guide to help one to get somewhere.

After the author has prepared readers with this useful information, the work continues with the next sequence of poems. These are all from the section numbered 28 in the New Expanded Edition of the The Essential Rumi. These have been subdivided into two groups. Here is a partial listing of the titles of each poem as they appear in the book: From The Shams—A Given, a Mystic and a Drunk, Clouds, So Recklessly Exposed, These Exhaling Sounds, In Prison, A Ripe Fig, Daybreak, Start Your Lives Over, With You Here, Between, The Deepest Rest. These were all taken from the author's earlier works as is clearly signaled by the title. No one had any reason to know this at the beginning of the book, unless this is being used as a textbook for a course. By the end it has become fairly clear. The other bunch come from what the translator calls the Masnavi. Mr. Barks does not define their source beyond this.

Once again during this chapter there is a reference to a verbal practice that Sufi's use. It is the chant "Huuuu". It exists as part of a poem called Shuttles. Like so many other facets of religious life and practice, the author assembles parts together. In a way this can make the matter seem to lose its proper structure, as if religions are being chewed up, broken down, their old forms destroyed by this "inclusive" action that spans them. In another respect people may feel as though they are at a shop or an awareness that something new is being prepared for them.

The very first poem is about the story of Genesis. Although the second poem has no reference to a spiritual figure, the third one mentions Mohammad. This gives the reader some indication of the author's approach. These figures come up, not in association with punitive awe, but with a feeling that is closer to his reference to Shams or to Husam. The main difference is that readers suddenly experience great difference between themselves and Rumi's best friend because the readers so lack in knowledge.

Whereas, when Jesus and Mohammad are spoken of, readers are more in a position of finding out about someone they know in common with Rumi. This aids some semblance of intimacy.

The duration and structure of these poems are not uniform. There are those who are organized into couplets. Others have three to four line stanzas. There are also poems that have stanzas of varying lengths within one poem. A case in point of this is Town and Country, which has thirty-four stanzas. The shortest of these is but one line of verse, whereas the longest one is eleven lines long. As it happens, there is no readily apparent connection between the subject matter and the structure of the individual poem.

Book 2, Solomon Poems : Chapter 3, New Section Analysis

Analyzing poetry is quite different from doing the same thing with prose. Rumi's poetry is very clear in certain respects and yet elusive in other ways. This is evident in each and every section of his poetic works.

There is a poem which shows how this works in these late sections, of course. The example in this case is Rumi's "Town and Country". This is one of the kinds of his poems that has a built-in short story. A man visits his friend. The relationship begins because a countryside man just turns up and pitches his tent in a more urban area. He develops a friendship with a local shopkeeper. This progresses into a friendship that lasts for years.

The man from the countryside turns up seasonally. He invites the shopkeeper to visit him in the countryside on a vacation. The shopkeeper, who is not on vacation and is in the midst of his life, always says "no". Then, one day, after over eight years, he tries this. It leads to a minor disaster of a bad time. Everything goes wrong, ranging from the man in the countryside denying that he even recognizes the shopkeeper from the town to the man's family having a lousy so-called holiday trapped in an old shed getting rained on. Rumi never mentions that this is not dissimilar from what happened to the man and his tent when he first went to the city. He was never invited over nor in, but just remained as some country bumpkin with a tent in the road. Rumi does not address this aspect of the situation at all. What the poet explains to readers is that this was a mistake for the man from the town.

Rumi again turns back into the teacher. One should not do anything that takes one away from one's own center, he advises readers. Subtly, he is claiming that this is certainly why the shopkeeper had a tough time in the countryside.

Several poems later, he instructs readers on the limits of their experience as it relates to those of another. He tells that the "inklings" that one gets about how another feels are akin to what it is like for the deaf or hearing impaired to watch a conversation. They are

able to get more than nothing, especially if they are good at lip reading, but they miss a lot nonetheless.

The author makes a rapid critique of scriptural knowledge. He admits that these are good. He also makes the observation that many have been hung up on these. The people have done well to read them. Rumi tells readers that Holy Scriptures should help, and then you should just let them go so that they do not become a hindrance to you. This is the moderate view. It shows both the value of them, but really it is a complaint against rigid orthodoxy.

There is yet another poem, as the entire body of works approaches its end. It begins with reference to a man and to the jealousy of others in the group towards him. Those who are jealous are not so because they wish that they themselves were better, but because they think that Ayaz does not somehow deserve the high esteem in which he has been flagrantly placed: positioned like the tail of a cat that moves under a human's nose, impossible to miss, and done quite intentionally. There is a story within the poem, that is told by the man who favors Ayaz. The one doing the favoring is a King.

He sends individual courtiers out to run him an errand. Each does so. The amount of information that comes in as a result almost immediately causes the next man to be sent upon an almost identical errand in search of another answer. Each man comes back with information. Then the King explains everything to all of the men by telling them a story. Ayaz goes and fetches all of the information that they need. He does not make the King ask for each item of knowledge that he wants. Ayaz is able to both follow orders and to go beyond being a simple follower. He concludes by assuring the others that this is a free choice made by Ayaz. This will work best in men and women who have not been solely literally or figuratively beaten into frightened compliance against their wills. It works best with people who freely cooperate and are compliant through willingness rather than through mere or pure force.

Ayaz and his loyalty have come up more than once. Ayaz goes beyond what the King says, and gathers all information that is relevant to a given situation. This suggests that Ayaz is cooperating and feels appreciated. Limited compliance, when not caused by stupidity, is either lack of respect from authorities or else submission only through intimidation. Ayaz smashed the pearl at the King's request. These behaviors occur in wildly different places of the book. They serve as the testament to how Rumi improves the readers' sense of intimacy by bringing up the same characters repeatedly.

Part of Rumi's position as a sheik was that of a political leader and teacher. Slowly but surely, he gives glimmers of insight into how political management of a situation needs to influence events. He also exposes how much personal feelings have caused some political events to occur. This shows readers the reason behind a certain attitude. The idea is that people in high authority need to be more focused upon the common good and the needs of their people more than on their pure selfish motives. Political governance is not intended to be like a bad day on a battlefield in the military life, where the individual is meant to self-sacrifice their own life. However, it is intended to balance out and to correct for and to prevent events such as the city siege set off because a

man of power in one location wants a pretty woman who has been living somewhere else.

Characters

Shams

This was Rumi's first Friend. The impression readers have is that Rumi was quite a special fellow who had difficulty finding that "kindred spirit." One day, one actually appeared. His name was Shams. He and Rumi became very close. Rumi had a Friend and he was ecstatic and his love grew boundless. Most of the time that they were together was spent in conversation.

Shams went away. He was sought out and brought back. After he had been back for quite a while, he one day disappeared. Rumor has it that he had been murdered. To this day, this stands as an unconfirmed but suspected reality.

Rumi began writing poetry after his disappearance; therefore, Shams is viewed as the number one inspiration. Although Rumi wrote poems sequentially in time, and in relation to three major best living friends, Shams was the first. The Essential Rumi includes writing samples from times when each of the three main people were Rumi's closest Friend. However, the poetry has been arranged out of purely chronological order which has added to the frequency of Shams being referred to in poems later on in the book in addition to the beginning of the book.

Jesus the Christ

This is the famed Jesus of Nazareth, the Jewish King, Messiah (Prophet according to many of those who are presently Jews), and spiritual teacher. Due to his success and fame as a religious teacher and his influence in the Middle Eastern regions, the Arabians were aware of him and his work.

Jesus is used repeatedly during the course of the book. Rumi felt connected with him, and enjoyed using Jesus and moments of his life story as a point of reference in many of the poems. Jesus does not appear in every poem, nor does he appear in only one or two sections of The Essential Rumi.

Most readers have at least heard of Jesus the Christ of the Jews. Huge portions of the readers either do or have at least had it suggested to them that they become followers and devotees of Jesus the Christ as their spiritual guide and guardian. The extent of knowledge that any given reader has about the individual's earthly life is not clear. There has been a great deal written of his life and work prior to his resurrection. There is very little written work about his life after his resurrection. Finally, he is so much more talked about, prayed to and criticized or referred to during bouts of irritability that it is safe to think that while readers have probably at least heard of him, their levels of knowledge and intimacy with this divine incarnation is not presumed to be identical for every reader.

Mohammad

Like with Jesus the Christ of the Jews, the vast majority of readers of Rumi have at least heard of Mohammad. Due to the probability that readers are more familiar with Christianity, a little more information will be provided about Mohammad. Mohammad is the man who brought Islam to the world. He was sent by God to the Arabian people, once they were ready. They were not ready until a few centuries after Christ had done his pre-resurrection work among the Jews. Mohammad developed a reputation in his hometown of being wonderfully gentle and kind and really rather wise.

At some point he was stricken by what to his best interpretation was a strong recommendation made by God through a powerful angel. God, through this angel, told Mohammad that he needed to write a book, a holy book for God, to share with the Arabian people and others of the Earth.

This upset Mohammad because it was such a "tall order". The reason why is that he was illiterate. The angel assured him not to worry about such a detail. The angel explained that Mohammad could provide recitations. A book deal in fact came together the way many matters that are or seem "meant to be" do so. A team of people formed so well that it gave people the feeling of a pre-arranged event after the manner of so many other well organized circumstances and events.

The entire Holy Q'ran is the result of this very effort. The Q'ran and this miraculous message are the foundation of the Muslim faith. Islam is a giant religion on the global level even though it is the minority on North America.

Rumi was an Arabian and a Muslim. As such, Mohammad comes up repeatedly throughout the book as a beloved spiritual leader on the order of Jesus, who also comes up.

Mouse

This is a mouse who stars in one poem early in the book. He is used to describe a deeply important relationship between two very dissimilar entities. This is a main character in a poem entitled "The Long String".

The mouse lives near enough to a pond. Something happens to him because he goes there, near to the pond. Somehow, strange as it is, he and a frog overcome their usual boundaries. They do something else that humans have been known to do at times. They make friends outside of their own species.

Interspecies relationships have been known from the mists of time and uncertain beginnings. In this poem, it is simply that the entities who make friends are this mouse and a frog.

Their connectedness affects them both. Rumi describes a sort of invisible string that ties them together. The desire to be together pulls the mouse to the pond and draws the frog up to the surface and near enough to the edge to be able to relate with that mouse.

Frog

This is obviously an animal. This entity occurs in two poems during the first subdivision in the summary. The being lives necessarily and voluntarily in a pond.

From the shore, beyond where he can reach due to his own limitations, there are an array of other entities of diverse species. Among these, over time, it becomes clear that one wants to befriend this "self as individual frog". The short version is that it works. A creature from the surrounding area, a mouse, successfully befriends this particular frog.

The frog and his or her friendship with the mouse who comes near to the pond comes up in two poems in the first half of The Essential Rumi. One of these poems is "The Long String", whereas the other one occurs later in the poem entitled "The Force of Friendship".

Saladin Zarkub

Saladin Zarkub was the second eminent companion of Rumi's. He did not come into the author's life until the unexplained and permanent disappearance of Shams of Tibaz. Saladin's profession was that of a goldsmith.

This man is introduced at the beginning of the book when the translator explains a little bit about what happened in one of those incredibly brief descriptions of the author's life.

He is referred to in different poems much later in the book. Again, his role is that of the Friend. This is a decidedly spiritual position. It is the simple daily function of a best friend. Most readers will understand how to distinguish between having a feeling of affinity with another and working to relate well to someone with whom one does not necessarily feel any automatic affinity or affection for.

Husam Chelebi

This is the third and final main companion of Rumi's lifetime. This is the only one of the three that came from the pool of men that people expected him to get his main companions from. He was actually one of Rumi's students. As has been mentioned elsewhere, the author's main occupation was to fill a post as a religious leader. He had inherited this position as was the custom in his land and time.

Only after the deaths of the others, much later in life, did the author take one of his own students to be his prominent companion. The reasons for this are not clear.

Even so, Husam was also a scribe. As such, he was able to help Rumi a great deal when it came to writing down the poetry that emerged. Perhaps Rumi had not wanted a subdominant figure to be in this role. It is not certain. Husam is mentioned in several poems precisely because he was successful as a scribe, student, and intimate personal friend of Rumi's.

Moses

This is the world famous Jew who, among other feats, was the one who received the Ten Commandments—behavioral advice for the Israelites. He was said to have received this tidy formulation during an era when writing things such as "laws" was still a new and rather strange idea. This is now such standard practice that people right readily forget how true it is that there was a time when this was new.

This religious leader spent time meditating or seeking intimacy with God in high places, rather literally than strictly sociologically speaking.

Due to his fame, at least, so near to the Mediterranean Sea, he existed in the minds of the Arabian people such as Rumi. The author uses him and references to him similarly to the ways in which he uses other people. He appears here and there throughout the work in poems.

Objects/Places

Rumiappears in Throughout the book

This is the location and name of the author of the works. He is named in reference to his location.

The area of Turkey in which he lived was called Konya. It was part of the Byzantine Empire. It was part of the remains of the Eastern portion of the Roman Empire.

This is, as far as the reader can tell, the natural home of the Arabian people.

Much of the poetry was written in the geographical area for which he was named.

This occurs in the very beginning of the book.

Tavernappears in The first 60 pages of the book

The tavern is the setting for a number of events, and for many poems. In The Essential Rumi, there are so many works that take place in a tavern that an entire section of the book is named "the Tavern".

As such, the group of poems under this heading occur at the outset of the book.

Linenappears in During the section of poems in The Tavern

This comes up in reference to understanding circumstance. The linen itself is neutral, but there are two plans made for it, each by a separate individual.

Rumi's poem uses it to evoke the subjective response that occurs when suddenly the linen is used unexpectedly by someone. One's plan is fulfilled but the other's is not.

This occurs within the first one hundred pages of the book.

Dirty Laundryappears in In the section of poems in The Tavern

There is an intensely emotive poem about a man who soiled himself in his sleep. He is acutely ashamed and embarrassed.

The Friend, Rumi explains, slips in like an invisible Muhammad. Instead of worsening the shame, he helps the other man.

Later, after a brief escape, the man returns. He is deeply moved, because he finds his Friend washing the filthy blanket for him. The depth of love and release from shame this sets off in him is so intense and outrageous that the other man acts "a bit crazy" briefly, banging his head a few times against a wall so hard that he gives himself a bloody nose.

This is love.

Dragonappears in Section 14: The Howling Necessity: Crying Out in Your Weakne

This occurs in a poem that is in section fourteen of the edition used to create this summary. The section that a dragon is found in is located in what in this edition is called The Howling Necessity: Cry Out in Your Weakness. The poem is called Cry Out in Your Weakness.

The dragon comes up in reference first to a bear and then to a man. A dragon is about to kill and eat a bear. In this case, however, unlike on so many other occasions, a courageous man shows up and rescued the bear from the clutches of the dragon.

Bearappears in Section 14, The Howling Necessity: Crying Out in Your Weakne

This animal is under duress when it appears in the book. There is a real reason for this. It has had a confrontation with a dragon and its life is in very real peril. In this case, the bear, perhaps thanks to crying out, is rescued by a human man . . . by a courageous human man.

The poem is called Crying Out in Your Weakness, and it occurs in section fourteen: The Howling Necessity: Crying Out in Your Weakness

Three Fishappears in Section 18: The Three Fish: Gamble Everything for Love

These are three fish located in a lake. They are the centerpiece in one story, in one poem. One is stupid, one of is of average intelligence and the other one is exceptionally bright. They are confronted by human fishermen.

The smartest one escapes to the ocean. Do not be fooled: Rumi shows that this fish suffered and faced tribulations but made it. The one of average intelligence also managed to come up with a solution that really worked. This fish also suffered, and faced such a crisis that he nearly did not make it, but he did. The stupid fish ends up

getting caught, but instead of wasting the rest of its life, the fish comes up with something after it is too late to try it in this lifetime.

Courtiersappears in Section 28: A New Section: The Pistachio Passport

These are people who live and work surrounding their king or sheik in rather close proximity. By this it is meant that they know him personally. They report to him directly.

There are thirty of them in one poem, and their issue is that they are all jealous of the man called Ayaz because Ayaz is favored by the King. One of the ways that this shows is that he is wealthier than the others.

One main message of the story is that Ayaz is wealthier and favored because he does better work.

Mosulappears in Two Places at least in the second half of the book

This is a place. Where it is exactly is not explained in the book. This location still exists by this name in the present day. Historical records indicate that the city's location and name have not changed. However, the nation of which it is a part may have. It is presently part of northern Iraq.

Mosul is mentioned in two of Rumi's poems. In the first case, Mosul is involved in a love story. A man falls in love with a woman; he goes to Mosul and takes her from another man. Another man then tries to take her but he is overcome by strange sensations and chooses to return her to the one she had been taken from Mosul by. This was apparently the right man for her to be with.

Mosul comes up again much later, in a poem having another theme altogether. It is simply referred to by King Ayaz as a location where the study of magic might be engaged in. He mentions it in conjunction with Babylon where they also offer studies in these skills.

The Bible & The Q'ranappears in Various locations

The Bible is used as a reference in the book. The author does not ordinarily refer to it by name. Rumi does include poems that clearly refer to either the Old Testament or the Torah, and therefore to Judaic tradition. He does this more than once.

He refers to it in a generalized manner when he discusses "scriptures".

Those familiar with The Bible will recognize more of the references to it. Those who have no idea will not even notice.

The Q'ran is also used. As the Sufi religion, of which Rumi was, is a type of Islam, it should come as no surprise to readers that he refers to the Holy Scriptures of his religion more than once during the text. As in the previous case, those familiar with the text will be more adept at recognizing oblique references to it than others.

Themes

Unity and Separation

Every one of these poems is inspired by what Rumi refers to as the Friend with a capital F. The translators have made great efforts to preserve the essence and flavor of these poems. To do so has required at least some acculturation.

The Friend is somehow divine and yet just an intimate companion. The word "just" doesn't seem the word for it. There are three individuals, each of whom serves in this function during the course of these poems.

The poetry emerged the first time, after Shams went away for a while. This absence did not take place until after Rumi had spent a tremendous amount of one-on-time with him. During the vast majority of the time they spent together they conversed. Their togetherness fostered a strong sense of unity, of union and oneness. This nurtured a sense of wholeness. Rumi began writing poetry perhaps because he suddenly had a huge amount of time to fill when his best friend went away.

The sense of separation and the sense of union are what is explored through the entire set of poems. In this respect, they cover a vast range of the human experience. The intimacy the Sufi poet uses reaches readers as powerfully as a caring, meaningful physical gesture or the intimacy of sharing secrets within a very intimate relationship.

Ultimately, part of what is sought, as shown in some of the poems, is some kind of self-relating that is somehow simultaneously self existence and the Friend at the same time. This unity was first learned by being together, but it is hoped that sufficient transformation and unity with the other can cause the separation to collapse, so that even while apart the sense of union and of completeness remains.

This being so profound and yet mysteriously all encompassing, it serves as a model for relating to God as the most intimate Friend.

The Masculine

These poems were written by a man. Although there is material about women among them, readers must understand that the male subjective experience is the basis and the bias from which the poetry has been created.

However jealous it may make women readers, the intimate friends who inspired this man's writings were his best same gender friends. During the romancing years, this can be harder to take for women. Often in childhood, girls favor other girls and boys predominantly give their emotional love to other boys. This is not exclusively the case, but it is a normal state of affairs. The only difference is that for some people growing up and mating a lot or marrying does not change this. In other people it very much does.

The consolation to the jealous women about this is that it was well known that the men suffered substantial jealousy among themselves about obtaining and securing Rumi's attention and affection.

Through the poetry, Rumi shares intimate views of what the situation for men is really like. Since it is poetry, women readers are less liable to be disturbed by these windows into the male psyche. However, adults should be warned: there are sexually explicit poems in this book. The combination of range of experiences shared along with intensity and variety of feelings should make many a man feel that he is in safe territory.

It is highly likely that men will find these poems therapeutic, whereas women may well also find them inspiring and insightful. It is quite dissimilar of course to see masculinity from the perspective of being male than it is from the condition of being female. Men will recognize themselves in these poems, but there is more. They will also discover areas where they observe: "I am underdeveloped there", or "oh my god, how could he tell this?", or "astounding! How could he sense this so correctly about me?"

Receptiveness and Acceptance

There is a fabulous stanza in which Rumi discusses immediate or rapid marriage through a metaphor. He describes it as a simple case of what in the American vernacular is "knowing a good thing when you see it". He writes of a falcon, well suited to the royal household, just happening to land on your shoulder. This is intensely good fortune and one should definitely accept this great gift.

This is just one example of a poem in which the ability to receive graciously what life offers us grows in importance. This is one part of the theme. Being willing to become aware of what is available to us and to know what is not is very helpful. Whenever one's life has been flowing along smoothly and one is experiencing a "good patch" or phase of life, part of what is working is one's receptiveness to the circumstances.

Acceptance occurs in more than one way. There is the sort of acceptance that occurs easily and naturally when all is going along as smoothly as water moving through a stream. This is super important and wonderful.

There is another form of acceptance. This occurs when the conditions are not pleasant. Under certain conditions, people have to increase their tolerance for pain, and to be able to continue to accept the situation, especially if there is no escape from that pain. However, pain produces certain chemicals in the mind-body continuum, and these can bring a strange kind of comfort or psychological adjustment to circumstances. Whatever level the pain occurs on, be it emotional or physical, acceptance of life during such times of hardship can be more challenging. Escapism grows in appeal in cases like these. This being the case, acceptance is a greater challenge.

Style

Point of View

The author lived during the first half of the 1200s AD. He spent the majority of his life dwelling in a land called Konya. This location is part of what is now known as the nation of Turkey. During his era, the Byzantine Empire existed. Also, his name means "Roman of Antulla", which is a direct and overt reference to the Roman Empire. The Eastern portion of the Roman Empire had not yet become "a laughingstock", or anything of the sort.

There was intense religious conflict during the time of Rumi's life. In fact, this was the era of what the European Crusades. This suggests to readers why those writing from within that period of time and culture might have been definitely emotionally aroused by the author's extensive use of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim prophets. He also treated Hinduism and other religions with inclusive tolerance.

The author was a man of high social status in his community. He had inherited a position as local religious teacher and leader. During the introductions, the editor explained that the bulk of Rumi's life was "normal for what his role in society was", as he was a religious scholar. This has a specific type of effect upon the community, as does each social role.

Setting

There is more than one setting in this complex work of poetic verse. The editor has explained that these translated examples of Rumi poetry have come from three major periods of the author's life. Each of the three is intimately linked with who the author's best friend was at the time.

As these works were produced sequentially, the companion and the author's age are also associated. There is the general context within which these poems emerged and there are the settings of individual poems.

Many of the works have a unique setting. It is likely that in many cases, when the location is not specified within the poem, is rather local to Rumi's hom town and region of northern Turkey. There are numerous cases when there is a different setting for the poem.

Examples of this include the pond in the poem about the mouse and the frog. In another case, there is the estate of a king but the name of the land is not given. There is a story involving the King of Mosul, and the Q'aliph of a nearby territory.

Language and Meaning

The language has faced a special challenge in this case. The reason for this is of course that the works had to be translated into English. The translator of the poems assembled together as The Essential Rumi is Coleman Barks. The particular edition used to create this summary boldly declares to offer many poems that have never before been released in the English language.

If there is any one special quality to Rumi's poetry that makes it work today, it would have to be "freshness". These poems are eight hundred years old. Even so, they are much newer to the English speaking world, having only been available for a century or two. Despite this, readers will notice instantly that these poems feel lively. One hopes that it is not solely because the translator is currently alive, although it is good that he is, but that one's perception of the poems is that like fig trees, this year's crop is new and fresh. The poems seem as though they might have been written yesterday.

However, there are aspects to this where this is clearly not so. Rumi's reference are limited by the technology of his day. The prevalence of the donkey as a symbol for instance. It is doubtful that this is some marvelous metaphor. It is most likely true that the donkey was a necessary cultural mainstay. Just as so many people nowadays think of the house and the car, the poet and those of his world probably simply thought of the house and the donkey. For this reason, it comes up.

The author's literary voice, through that of the translator's, conveys intimacy more than anything else. The ability of the words, somehow, to do this so well causes the readership to be naturally charmed. The depth of feeling associated with the relationships that Rumi has is also readily and truthfully expressed through the poetry. This is part of what makes the entire experience so vibrant and delightful.

Structure

The structure of the edition used to write the book summary is distinctive. It is certainly not the same as the way that the author originally produced the poetry. The editor and translator Coleman Barks makes this quite clear.

The Essential Rumi is a compilation of poems from each main phase of the author's creative and productive periods of his life. They have been put together in a partially chronological order, following after the manner in which they were produced.

The book itself has grouped sets of poems together under headings. Each heading indicates a theme. There are twenty-eight of these. Among them, there are poems that directly refer to the specific man who was Rumi's best friend. The author did not question nor withhold his love from his closest friend. Each of the headings contains as few as ten poems or as many as thirty. The majority of them fall in between these endpoints. Extremes is not the right word due to it implying an emotional quality that is not there in the editor's choice of how many poems to fit under one thematic heading.

Quotes

"A perfect falcon, for no reason,
has landed on your shoulder,
and become yours," p. 154

"Make us afraid of how we were," p. 116

"I honor those who try
to rid themselves of any lying," p. 116

"You live where Shams lives,
because your heart-donkey was strong enough
to take you there," p. 102

"You are granite.
I am an empty wineglass," p. 102

"If you are a friend of God, fire is your water,
...but they are like a woman under a man, circling him, " p. 97

"A vagrant wanders empty ruins.
Suddenly he's wealthy," p. 41

"This argument continued...
A night full of talking that hurts...
Then we have work to do," p. 50

"You are yourself
the animal we hunt when you come with us on the hunt," p. 51

"...quick to find a joke
slow to be serious," p. 51

"Advice doesn't help lovers!" p. 102

"A dragon was pulling a bear into its mouth.
"A courageous man rescued the bear," p. 156

"A meeting with the Friend
Is the only real payment," p. 251

"Too often
We put saddle bags on Jesus and let the donkey
run loose in the pasture," p. 256

"Say I am
You," p. 276

Topics for Discussion

Describe the love shared between/among best friends. Define whether you choose same gender best friendship or chose your mate/spouse, or if you would select a different relationship to express the love of best friends. For example, there are many adolescent girls who are clear that their mother is the best friend. Show which type of best friend you mean, and then describe the love you share in fifty words.

Romantic love differs from the love of same gender, same age best friends. Agree or disagree. Defend your answer.

Choose a favorite poem from the book. Describe in five sentences why this is.

Approve or disapprove of the way that Rumi uses prominent figures from religion in these poems.

Give a few reasons why you like Rumi's poetry, unless you don't. If you don't, why not?

In section twenty-one there is the poem The King and The Handmaiden and The Doctor. In it, the woman ceases to love her lover as his power and beauty fade away because he is being steadily poisoned to death by the doctor.

Rumi claims that this proves that she never really loved him. Agree or disagree given your own feelings about two things: 1) all that is not physical in love between humans, and 2) the difference in how you feel about a beautiful rose blossom and one that, long past it, has turned to rot and decay and perhaps even fallen from the rosebush.

Agree or disagree with Rumi that: Once you have arrived, then you will no longer need a guide. When giving your answer consider the following: when you arrive in a new place but do not yet know your way around, isn't it helpful to have a guide? Perhaps this entirely depends upon whether you prefer to explore and discover, or if you just want the company or a guide or the fastest route to what you are seeking.